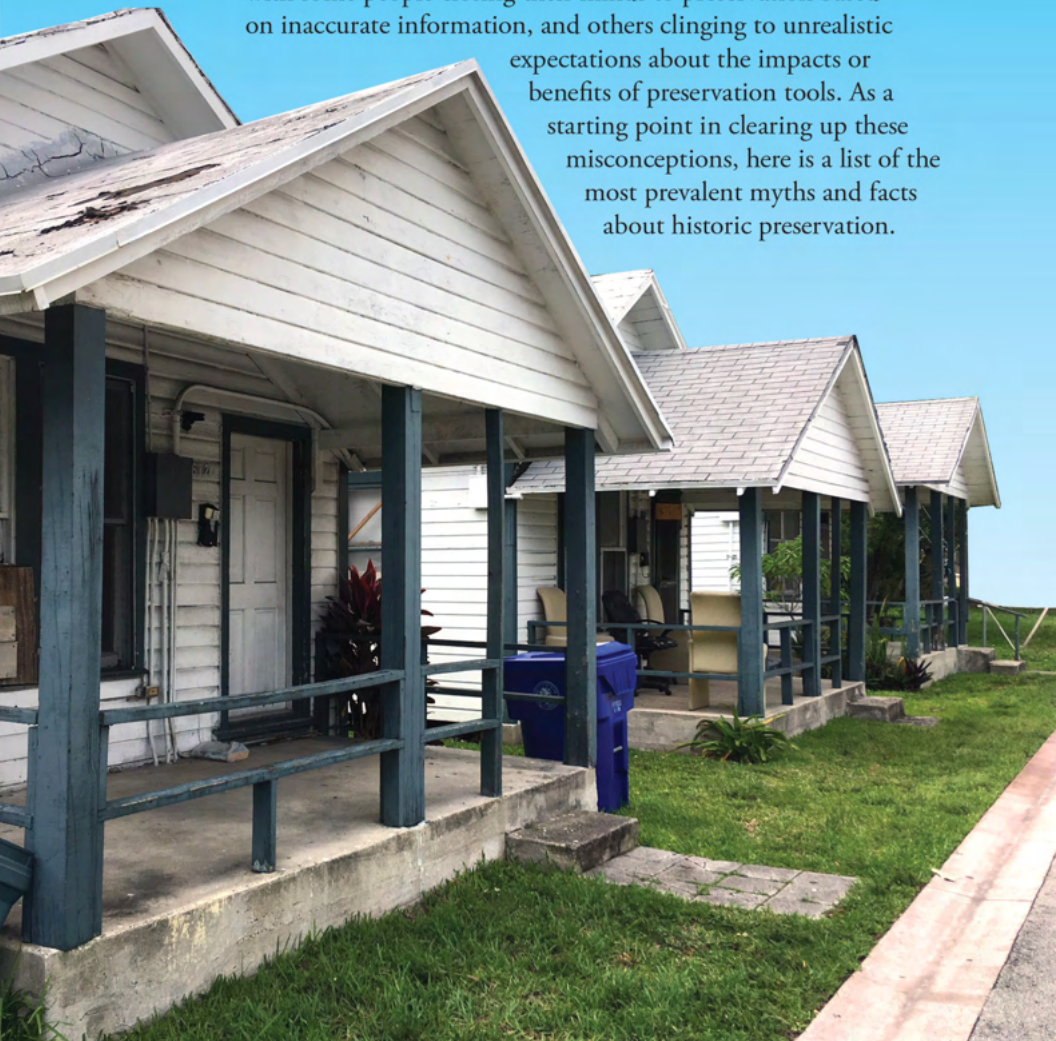




Top Eleven Facts About Historic Preservation and Designation of Historic Buildings

In urban Miami, historic preservation allows us to retain the best of shared heritage to preserve sites of unique quality and beauty, revitalize neighborhoods, maintain affordability, spur economic revitalization, and, quite simply, create better communities.

There are many misconceptions about historic preservation – with some people closing their minds to preservation based on inaccurate information, and others clinging to unrealistic expectations about the impacts or benefits of preservation tools. As a starting point in clearing up these misconceptions, here is a list of the most prevalent myths and facts about historic preservation.



Myth #1: “If my property is designated as a historic site, I won’t be able to change it in any way, and I don’t want my property to become like a museum.”

Fact: Owners of designated historic structures may make very significant changes to their structures. Historic preservation laws, at their essence, are not meant to prevent change, but, rather, to manage change. City of Miami Historic Preservation Staff will assist.

The Standards don’t require that every element of a historic site remain intact: you need not keep every doorknob! However, the most significant, or “character-defining”, historic elements of a property should be retained. **New additions to the historic property are allowed**, but should be compatible with the site’s historic architecture. The Standards urge the repair of deteriorated historic features, but do allow for replacement where the severity of deterioration leaves no other option.

Myth #2: “If my property or my neighbor’s property is designated as a historic site, I will have to make immediate repairs to my house.”

Fact: Owners of designated historic structures only need to make repairs that code enforcement requires. There is no additional burden to perform other work upon designation.

Myth #3: “Historic designation will reduce my property values.”

Fact: Study after study across the nation has conclusively demonstrated that historic designation and the creation of historic districts actually increase property values. Why? In part, historic designation gives a neighborhood or an individual historic site a caché that sets it apart from ordinary properties. Many buyers seek out the unique qualities and ambiance of a historic property. Historic district designation gives potential homebuyers two rare and economically valuable assurances: that the very qualities that attracted them to their neighborhood will actually endure over time, and that they can safely reinvest in sensitive improvements to their home without fear that their neighbor will undermine this investment with a new “monster home” or inappropriate new development.

Myth #4: “If a property gets designated as a historic structure, it’s protected forever and can never be demolished.”

Fact: Designation prohibits demolition of historic properties, but there is an exception for cases of demonstrated economic hardship. Even listing in the National Register of Historic Places, which sounds more elevated than “mere” local listing, does not provide for more iron-clad protection.





Myth #5: “Preservation is only for the rich and elite, and for high-style buildings.”

Fact: Historic preservation isn’t just about house museums anymore. Today’s preservation movement is increasingly diverse and considers buildings in areas of economically and ethnically varied populations. Preservation today also focuses not just on grandiose architectural landmarks, but on more modest sites of social and cultural significance. Coconut Grove historic structures with a variety of design include the Mariah Brown House, the Coconut Grove Playhouse and the Barnacle.

Myth #6: “Historic preservation is bad for business.”

Fact: Historic preservation is at the very heart of our nation’s most vibrant economic development and business attraction programs. From Southern California examples such as Old Pasadena or San Diego’s Gaslamp Quarter, to traditional, historic southern cities such as Charleston or Savannah, to the recent boom in “heritage tourism,” today’s economic development strategies no longer see preservation and business development as competing values. The National Main

Street Center, a program that uses historic preservation to revitalize town centers and neighborhood commercial districts, has actually tracked economic results in 1,700 Main Street communities nationally. These preservation-based programs have created over 231,000 new jobs and resulted in over \$17 billion in reinvestment to date, with every dollar spent on a Main Street program yielding \$40 in economic reinvestment.

Myth #7: Preservation is more expensive than new construction

Fact: This is certainly true at times, but, in fact, historic preservation is typically more cost effective than new construction. Why? Historic buildings certainly do sometimes need upgrades, but these are usually less expensive than the costs of building all-new foundations, structural systems, roofs and building finishes.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation reports that in Chicago, where the public school system is now spending \$2.5 billion to upgrade facilities, bare-bones new construction is costing \$155 per square foot -- but renovation is costing just \$130.

Myth #8: If I buy a historic property, there's lots of government money available to help me fix it up

Fact: While it doesn't necessarily cost more to renovate a historic structure than to build anew, few large government or foundation grants are available to owners of historic properties, and even those few typically limit eligibility to government agencies or non-profits. Dade Heritage Trust is looking to assist historic homeowners with repairs.

What is available tends to be tax incentives for private owners of historic buildings. Owners of sites listed in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places may take advantage of a Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit that provides a 20% tax offset for the cost of rehabilitation. National Register properties are also eligible to benefit from "conservation easements" – binding legal agreements with preservation organizations such as Dade Heritage Trust that can allow owners to claim a charitable deduction on their Federal income taxes. In Miami-Dade County, historic property owners can also claim ad valorem tax relief, which is a freeze on property tax, should the property be restored and rehabilitated.

Myth #9: Old buildings are less safe

Fact: Although historic structures do sometimes require structural retrofits or the addition of fire sprinklers to enhance their safety, historic buildings typically perform better than newer construction in earthquakes and other natural disasters. What determines the safety of buildings is the quality of construction, not age, and, in many ways, "they just don't build 'em like they used to."

Myth #10: Preservation is an un-American violation of property rights

Fact: Historic preservation laws no more infringe on property rights than do many other laws and private rules that Americans have long accepted. Though everyone likes to believe "my home is my castle and I can do whatever I want," this statement simply doesn't reflect reality. Zoning laws prevent you from replacing your single-family home with an apartment building or a five-story vertical mansion. We should all be happy that such laws prevent our neighbor from putting a landfill or a skyscraper behind our back fence.

If you live in a condominium your property rights are limited by Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions (CC & Rs), documents that can legally prevent you from owning a pet, washing a car in your driveway, or having a basketball hoop over the garage. CC & R's restrictions are far more onerous than historic preservation laws, yet are commonly accepted even by vocal property rights advocates.

Myth #11: Preservationists are always fighting new development and only care about the past

Fact: Historic preservationists do care deeply about the past -- generally not just to wallow sentimentally in a bygone era, but as a way of anchoring ourselves as we move forward confidently into the future. Historic preservation is not about stopping change and is certainly not about squeezing out creative and exciting new architecture and development. Preservation allows us to retain the best of shared heritage to preserve sites of unique quality and beauty, revitalize neighborhoods, spur economic revitalization, and, quite simply, create better communities.

