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East Providence collaboratively protects its historic resources - by Patrick Hanner

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The city of East Providence recognizes that its historic resources are a key part of its character. East Providence has made significant gains in protecting these resources as a result of collaborative efforts with state agencies, nonprofits, local organizations and city commissions. As an example, the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) has been a long-term partner of the city, providing small grants over the last 15 years that have enabled a variety of preservation projects. These include the nomination of the Phillipsdale neighborhood to the National Register of Historic Places, a city-wide reconnaissance study of historic structures and architecture, a condition assessment of the Odd Fellows Hall, National Register nomination of the Elm Tree and Roseland Park Plats, GIS mapping of early European settlements, adjustment of the Rumford National Register District boundaries, a comprehensive survey of the city's current and former public school buildings, and a citywide interpretive signage plan. In addition, RI Commerce has recently provided funding for a city-wide interpretive signage plan to provide eight historic sites with interpretive signage panels along with a master panel to be placed at city hall. The city has also formed partnerships with local nonprofits and organizations such as the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, East Providence Chamber of Commerce, East Providence Historical Society and the city's Historic District Commission. The Historical Society has long advocated for the protection of local resources and has increased awareness by organizing community events such as Watchemoket Sq. Day, hosting guest speakers and providing technical assistance.

East Providence is fortunate to have a wealth of historic resources in almost every section of the city including Rumford, Phillipsdale, Kent Heights, Watchemoket and Riverside, that all contribute their own sense of place and character. All of our partners realize that historic preservation is an important component of a strong, resilient local economy. As we have seen in past recessions, many areas of the country, experienced high unemployment rates, stagnant wages, tighter lending requirements for home mortgages, and a significant drop in home values. While historic preservation alone does not shield a community from a recession, it is one of the many tools available to increase the marketability and appeal of its residential neighborhoods and commercial corridors to lessen these impacts.

The city has seen several recent success stories such as the renovation of the former Union Primary School into residential units, repurposing of the once underutilized Phillipsdale Mill, restoration of the city's John Hunt House Museum, and the repurposing of the Rumford Chemical Works site into the Rumford Center development.

Where historic structures have been lost in the city's "main street" areas, new land use regulations have enabled infill development that is appropriately scaled.

East Providence is committed to continue to preserve its history by nominating areas of the city to the National Register of Historic Places, hosting public workshops, increasing awareness, promoting appropriate redevelopment of historic structures, and perhaps most importantly, to continue to maintain our successful relationship with our partners.

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