

## FAQs on Demolition Review & Designation in Denver

### **How does Denver's preservation ordinance compare to preservation ordinances in other cities?**

Denver's preservation ordinance has served as a model for other communities and reflects best practices in a variety of ways, including the careful use of designation criteria, clear design guidelines and compatibility with national standards set for by the National Parks Service and the Secretary of Interior Standards. Denver's ordinance differs from other communities, and from the National Register of Historic Places, by requiring that a property meet designation criteria in two out of three categories, rather than in only one category, which is the norm. This means that Denver's landmarks and historic districts are of high quality. In a survey of twenty cities of like-size, nineteen consider applications brought forward by someone other than the property owner, with ultimate designation authority residing with elected officials.

### **Do other cities conduct demolition review?**

Yes. It is quite common for cities to conduct historic reviews prior to issuing demolition permits. In a study published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation demolition review processes in Chicago, Boston, Gainesville, and Santa Monica were detailed. Many of these cities included specific demolition delays for potentially historic structures, ranging from 90-days to six months. In 2007 Historic Denver conducted a survey of 20 like-size cities, including Austin, TX, Phoenix, AZ and Minneapolis, MN. All twenty cities provide some form of demolition prohibition, with delay periods ranging from 90 days to 18 months. 19 of these cities consider designation applications initiated by someone other than the property owner, and 17 of the cities initiate designations from within the administration. In Colorado there are 39 local governments with certified preservation ordinances. Of these communities 20 have ordinances very similar to the Denver, and these communities tend to be the larger and more populous, including Boulder, Fort Collins, and Pueblo.

### **How many demolition permits are there each year? What percent gets posted as potentially historic?**

Since the adoption of the demolition review provisions city staff has evaluated 2,010 demolition permits and 185 certificates of non-historic applications. Of this total just under 1% have been found to potentially meet the criteria for landmark designation and resulted in a 21-day public posting. Of the 21 postings, 5 have resulted in designation applications. None of these properties have been designated, although in a couple cases the negotiations between the concerned parties and the property owners resulted in an outcome that saved the structure from demolition, generated a design charrette or at least allowed for property documentation prior to demolition. In 2011 staff reviewed 255 properties and posted 4. In 2012 staff has reviewed 213 year-to-date, posting 5 (several of which were on the same parcel).

### **What positive outcomes have resulted from Denver's demolition review process?**

The demolition ordinance was created to address the overnight loss of significant structures, and an important goal of the demolition review process is simply to provide notification to the public about plans for a potentially historic structure and to allow time for a discussion of alternatives. The delay period created by Denver's ordinance provides the opportunity for the city, owners, neighbors and community members to weigh the merits of the property and discuss possible preservation solutions, such as incorporation into a new development, rehabilitation, or sale to a preservation-minded buyer. Since the passage of the demolition review tool several properties have benefitted

from this type of discussion. While more difficult to quantify, the existence of the ordinance certainly communicates the city's value of historic resources and encourage owners to consider reuse before demolition.

### **What is the economic impact of historic preservation?**

Denver has become a national model of how historic preservation can be a powerful economic development tool, as it not only generated reinvestment in LoDo and Downtown but also in our core urban neighborhoods. In 2008 the newest edition of *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader's Guide*, demonstrates that:

- Preservation creates jobs
- Preservation is a counter-cyclical activity that can help stabilize a slumping economy
- Preservation is a locally based activity that generates local economic results
- Preservation spurs private investment

Additionally, a statewide study on the impact of preservation, updated in 2011, documented more than \$2.5 billion in direct and indirect impact over the last 20 years, including the creation of 34,400 preservation-related jobs and \$843 million in household income. This same study considered the issue of property values in locally designated historic districts, including three in Denver, Wyman, Witter-Cofield and Quality Hill. This study reflects similar national findings that “historic designation does not decrease property values.”

### **Are all designated properties protected from demolition?**

No. Locally designated landmarks and contributing structures in historic districts have protection, but buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places or State Register of Historic Places have no protection. Therefore an important function of demolition review is to identify such resources before demolition occurs so that alternatives can be discussed. The most famous case of the demolition of a building listed on the National Register of Historic Places was the demolition of the elegant Central Bank Building in downtown, which was razed by out-of-state developers in the mid-1990s. The lot languished as a vacant parcel for nearly twenty years before a hotel was finally built. The demolition review period helps ensure that this type of speculative demolition of an important and reusable resource does not occur.