

# Region 5 Spearheads Sustainable Preservation

**Green Historic Building Preservation Initiative**  
Ill., Ind., Mich., Minn., Ohio, Wis.

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## For more information

For questions, comments or more information about Region 5's Green Historic Building Preservation Initiative, contact:

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 5 is playing a leadership role in advancing the goal of sustainable preservation of older buildings. Region 5's preservation expert has collaborated with other agencies and private organizations to highlight the benefits of greening existing buildings as opposed to demolition and new construction.



The Region's efforts intensified in preparation for a symposium it hosted in Indianapolis on Jan. 21, 2010, titled *Green Historic Preservation: What Works, What Doesn't, and What Should Change*. At this symposium more than 200 preservation professionals discussed the topic and also posed the question: "What should EPA's role be in preservation endeavors?"

Many of the stakeholder groups that work in this public policy arena have been isolated from each other in organizational silos. These groups include government agencies at all levels, attorneys, finance professionals, preservationists, architects, contractors and public health specialists. Unfortunately, these silos tend to dilute the singular importance of older buildings in the national conversation on sustainability. All of these practitioners were represented at the January symposium and were encouraged to air their concerns and discuss and trade ideas with colleagues.



*EPA is bringing together stakeholder groups to develop and publicize green historic building principles that will help in the restoration of structures such as this beauty, an 1870s Victorian home.*

## Seven key issues and goals

The symposium centered around seven key issues:

- 1) Correcting and improving tax and other financial incentives.
- 2) Ensuring historic preservation guidelines properly account for sustainability.
- 3) Determining how to fit high performance systems in older buildings without adversely affecting their character.
- 4) Influencing rating systems such as LEED to award more points to reuse.
- 5) Addressing the issue of window repair versus replacement.
- 6) Improving education on overall green and sustainable issues including building technology.
- 7) Measuring and communicating the inherent green value of older buildings versus new buildings.

The participants sorted out these issues in various formats that included lectures, panel discussions and a charrette that tasked them to find barriers and solutions regarding each issue as they were examining the redevelopment of three different types of older buildings. At the conclusion of the event participants were asked to provide EPA with their insights in writing of *what works*, *what doesn't* and *what should change* in the field of Green Building Historic Preservation.

When asked about EPA's role in this area, comments fell into five categories: 1) Demonstrate leadership in shifting the paradigm; 2) Educate and increase awareness and serve as an information resource; 3) Increase financial incentives; 4) Build and foster collaborations and partnerships; and 5) Align policies with Green Historic Preservation priorities.

## Action steps

In reviewing the individual suggestions and based on a consensus among governmental and private organizations in the field, EPA came up with seven action steps for itself:

- Add an *older homes* page to EPA's Energy Star Website.
- Communicate the new lead Renovation, Repair and Painting rule and advocate making environments lead-safe as well as lead-free. Consider promoting the removal of lead from windows instead of simply defaulting to replacing windows.
- Research issues such as life-cycle assessments on materials used in buildings.

*An EPA symposium studied the conversion of this 1930s factory into apartments and came up with several action steps to pursue.*



- Highlight federal and other successful green renovation projects.
- Encourage LEED and other rating standards to award more points to reuse.
- Hold similar symposiums in other parts of the country.
- Support training of craftsmen in preservation projects, another type of green job.

To work on this project a national *Green Preservation Implementation Team* has been formed and divided into subcommittees based on the seven action steps. This team includes besides EPA Headquarters and regional staff, the U.S. Green Building Council, General Services Administration, Advisory Council for Historic Preservation, National Park Service, state preservation agencies, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and several architectural firms. All of the participants are developing action plans to help achieve the seven common goals.

## Visible results

Results from these early discussions are already visible. The Secretary of Interior's *Standards for Rehabilitation for Historic Buildings* are being reviewed to possibly include sustainable guidelines. This document sets the standards under the laws governing the treatment of historic buildings. The National Park Service, which administers the guidelines, has convened a small group of professionals from around the country – including the R5 preservation expert – to work on the proposed revisions.

Other results to report include an effort highlighting older homes on the *Energy Star* Website; formulating recommendations to submit to LEED to award more points to older buildings; and developing research project work plans to study life-cycle analysis of building materials.