

SITKA HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN



Sitka Historic Preservation Commission
City and Borough of Sitka
Sitka, Alaska

Date 2025

A Guide for Historical & Cultural Resource Identification, Preservation, and Advocacy

Sitka Historic Preservation Plan

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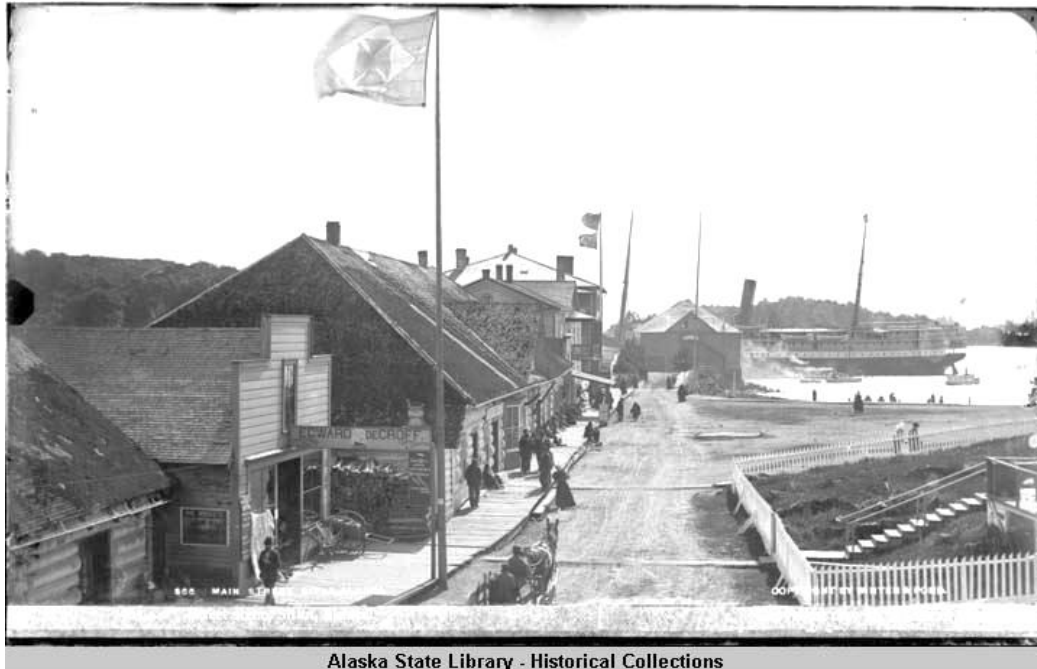
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Alaska State Library - Historical Collections

Figure 2.

List of Abbreviations

AHRS	Alaska Heritage Resources Survey	NPS	National Park Service
ANB and ANS	Alaska Native Brotherhood and Alaska Native Sisterhood	National Register	National Register of Historic Places
CBS	City and Borough of Sitka	National Trust,	National Trust for Historic Preservation
CLG	Certified Local Government	NTHP	
HABS	Historic American Building Survey	OHA	Office of History and Archaeology (State of Alaska)
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act	SHPC	Sitka Historic Preservation Commission
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act	SHPO	Alaska State Historic Preservation Office(r)
		STA	Sitka Tribe of Alaska

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Historic Preservation Plan is a joint effort between the Sitka Tribe of Alaska and the City and Borough of Sitka and initiated by the Historic Preservation Commission. The plan aims to define what historic and cultural resources we, as a community, most value and want to protect for the future.

The plan includes a synopsis of historic preservation programs in the United States and Alaska, followed by the history of Sitka's preservation program and how it works now. The plan also contains a list of Historic Contexts for Sitka, each with a geographic area, a time, and a theme. Such attributes can be used to group historic resources together for evaluation. A list of properties on the National Register and a description of the current inventory follows. The plan provides a description of historic preservation successes and needs, ending with a list of goals and actions for Sitka's historic preservation program.

INTRODUCTION

Sitka's history is rich and diverse: we live in the heart of Lingít Aaní, or Tlingit Land. Sheet'ká, or Sitka, has been a center of Tlingit civilization for thousands of years. Sitka was a popular port for the maritime fur trade in the late 1700s, and the site of a small, diverse, Russian colonial administrative outpost from 1804 to 1867. Sitka radically changed in 1867, becoming headquarters for the military administration of Alaska. From 1884 to 1906 Sitka was Alaska's civilian capital, a majority Native community—though Native Sitkans were not citizens—with an economy based on trade, tourism, government, education and mining. From 1906 until World War II, Sitka was a fishing village.

World War II brought thousands of military personnel and civilian contractors to build and man a naval air station and army defenses. Post-war, another transformation came in the creation of Mt. Edgumbe on Japonski, Alice and Charcoal Islands, with hundreds employed at the BIA hospital and school. From 1959 to 1993 Sitka was a mill town. Today, fishing, tourism, education, and health care continue to define our economy. Our strong connection to nature—especially through fishing and the gathering of local foods—and existing Tlingit heritage have been part of Sitka's history from ancient times to the present. All economic and cultural legacies have left traces and signs on our landscape.

Historic preservation in Sitka is a partnership between the City and Borough of Sitka and the Sitka Tribe of Alaska, in a government-to-government relationship, reflecting Sitka's citizens today and recognizing the vast scope of Sitka's Indigenous heritage. The Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) is the federally recognized tribal government for more than 4,000 Alaska Native and Native American citizens of Sheet'ká or Sitka.

Why engage in historic preservation?

Historic preservation—also referred to in this document as “preservation”—is the preservation and protection of structures, sites, and landscapes that have historical or cultural significance. Historic preservation planning is the process of compiling a list of historic and cultural resources to document the status of those resources, as well as challenges and opportunities for their preservation, to make clear and achievable goals for what resources we value and want to save as our community grows and changes.

Historic preservation's main benefit lies in its ability to connect us—especially our children—to our culture, heritage, and history through the authentic places where our history happened. Preservation supports our identity. It is a source of knowledge of the past and provides a way to listen to the voices of our community today. Historic preservation helps make Sitka a good place to live.

Historic preservation also has significant economic benefits: it is cheaper than building new structures, it generates heritage tourism, and it revitalizes towns and neighborhoods. It can also be more

environmentally sustainable.

While historic preservation usually centers the saving of buildings, it is expanding in scope to include traditional cultural properties, as well as the meaning behind particular structures, rather than only the structures, themselves. Today, preservation may span extensive replacement of a building, or even a natural feature. It also now includes more sites significant to groups and communities who have been under-represented in historic preservation in the past.

Sitka has had a formal historic preservation program since the early 1990s, with the government-to-government relationship between STA and CBS at its core. CBS became a Certified Local Government (CLG) in 1994, making the City eligible to receive federal preservation grants. The presence of a historic preservation commission is required to maintain CLG status. The Sitka Historic Preservation Commission (SHPC) is supported by the CBS Planning and Community Development Department. SHPC has both a Native at-large seat and an STA Tribal Council representative. The commission reviews local projects that may have an impact on historic resources. It is responsible for educating the community about preservation and for surveying and preserving historic and cultural resources.

The adoption and maintenance of a historic preservation plan is another CLG status requirement. This preservation plan is an update to the plan written in 1994 (see Appendix A). This plan update started in 2009, when a CLG grant was received for that purpose. The 2009 draft was not completed before the grant ended. In January 2025, the plan was edited and updated, and historic contexts added. In April, a meeting was held for public review, and comments and priorities from that meeting are reflected in this plan. In summer 2025, the goals and actions in this plan were reviewed by Sitka Tribe of Alaska.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAMS IN THE UNITED STATES

National-Level Historic Preservation Programs and Definitions

Historic Preservation is the preservation and protection of structures, sites, and landscapes of historical significance. Those might be called historic properties, historic resources, or cultural resources, and can include structures, objects, buildings, districts, sites, landscapes, and archaeological sites that are significant in local, state, national, or Indigenous history. Significance may be derived from aspects of history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, culture, or heritage.

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) is the foundation of historic preservation in the United States. The NHPA includes guidelines for historic preservation, as well as a structure for states and local governments to monitor and encourage historic preservation.

It is a common misconception that federal law restricts what a private property owner can do, but it **does not** unless there are federal funds or resources involved. Because historic preservation on private property in the United States is voluntary, local historic preservation commissions have an important role in educating the public about the value and importance of preservation.

The State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) is a federal appointment in each state responsible for implementation of the National Historic Preservation Act. SHPO can also stand for the State Historic Preservation Office.

Section 106 of the NHPA requires federal undertakings (as well as projects receiving federal funding) be reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Officer for their impact on historic resources. If a project has a negative impact and can't be modified to avoid that impact, mitigation is required.

The **National Historic Landmark** status for sites of national significance and the **National Register of Historic Places**, a list of sites of historical significance, are managed by the National Park Service.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, revised in 1995 and also managed by the National Park Service, includes four treatments for historic properties: preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction. Most commonly, historic preservation concerns buildings, structures, and landscapes. The most common approach to historic preservation is adaptive reuse, or the rehabilitation standard, in which a historic structure is brought into a new use that is compatible with its historic character. **Standards for Rehabilitation** is included in this plan as Appendix B.

The Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications Standards in Archaeology and Historic Preservation are for federal contractors in history, historic architecture, archaeology, and architectural history.

A **Certified Local Government (CLG)** is a local government certified to participate in federal historic preservation funding and programs. Requirements include having a historic preservation commission, a historic preservation plan, and local review process for projects that may have an impact on historic resources. In 1994, the City and Borough of Sitka became a Certified Local Government.

The **Historic Preservation Fund** provides federal funding for implementing the NHPA. **CLG Grants** are federal Historic Preservation Fund grants that can go only to Certified Local Governments.

The National Park Service also has deep technical resources available to the public for historic preservation. Those resources include information on how to evaluate and plan preservation, as well as detailed studies regarding the best ways to clean or preserve various materials.

The **Save America's Treasures (SAT)** program provides historic preservation funding and is administered by the National Park Service. Funding can be accessed by properties with National Historic Landmark status. Three SAT grants have been awarded in Sitka: Allen Memorial Building and Whitmore Hall within the Sheldon Jackson School National Historic Landmark, and the Japonski Island Boathouse on the Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Coastal Defenses National Historic Landmark.

The **National Trust for Historic Preservation** offers technical assistance, small grants, and advocacy. Begun in 1949, the National Trust became an independent nonprofit in 1996. Each year, it publishes a list of America's 11 Most Endangered Properties "to raise awareness about the threats facing some of the nation's greatest treasures." The Richard H. Memorial Building (Allen Hall) on the Sheldon Jackson Campus was included on the list in 1999; the Sitka Tlingit Clan Houses were on this list in 2024.

The **Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS)**, which began in 1933, documents historic structures in detail. Drawings are archived at the Library of Congress. Many Sitka buildings are included in the survey. HABS drawings of St. Michael's Cathedral made it possible to rebuild the structure after it burned in 1966.

Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives include a 20% tax credit for the costs of rehabilitation of commercial buildings that are listed on the National Register and that are rehabilitated according to the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. Other incentives include a 10% credit for substantial rehabilitation of non-historic buildings placed in service before 1936, and a tax credit for donating a historic preservation easement.

Alaska Historic Preservation Programs and Definitions

Alaska's **Office of History and Archaeology (OHA)**, part of the State Division of Parks within the Department of Natural Resources, provides technical resources for historic preservation. OHA also reviews projects to determine impact to historic resources, per state and federal law. OHA administers the federal Historic Preservation Fund grants. They also create and regularly update the **State Historic Preservation Plan**. The current plan is titled *Saving Our Past: For A Resilient Future* (2025-2034).

OHA maintains the **Alaska Heritage Resource Survey** database, or **AHRS**, which assigns a number to every historic or potentially significant cultural site in Alaska. Because some of those sites are sensitive, the survey is not publicly accessible.

The **Alaska Historical Commission** is the citizen review board for state history policy and recommends National Register nominations and Historic Preservation Fund grant awards.

Preservation Alaska, formerly the Alaska Association for Historic Preservation, is a non-profit that advocates for and awards small grants for Alaska preservation projects. They publish an annual list of **Ten Most Endangered Historic Properties** in Alaska. This list has included many Sitka properties, including the Sheldon Jackson Campus and the St. Peter's See House, and in 2024, the Sitka Clan Houses.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN SITKA

Sitka's Historic Preservation Program: How It Started and What It Does

Sitkans have long recognized the value of historic preservation: the community of Sitka came together to rebuild St. Michael's Orthodox Cathedral after the original 1848 structure burned to the ground in 1966, and Sitkans have been preserving buildings such as private homes for many years.

Sitka's formal historic preservation program began in the early 1990s, when Sitka received Certified Local Government status as part of the project to rehabilitate the old Post Office and Court House (1938) as Sitka's municipal offices.

In 1986, the USPS moved the Post Office from the historic downtown Post Office and Court House to a new facility on Sawmill Creek Road. By law, the building was first offered to other federal and then to state entities, which declined to take it. A group of Sitkans led the effort to save the building and convert it into Sitka's city offices. The Assembly, with leadership from the City Administrator, chartered the Sitka Historic Trust Board. The Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer authorized federal funding through the Alaska Office of History and Archaeology for a historic building survey, with the condition that the City and Borough of Sitka would then apply to become a Certified Local Government.

In 1992, Sitka's City and Borough Assembly adopted a **Historic Preservation Ordinance**, with minor revisions in 1993 (92-1075 and 93-1105, included in Appendix D), establishing and defining the scope of Sitka's historic preservation program. This included the establishment of the **Sitka Historic Preservation Commission (SHPC)** in 1993. This ordinance and related revisions helped Sitka to meet the requirements to become a Certified Local Government.

The initial historic building survey of the old Post Office identified its architectural and social significance, then a CLG grant funded a structural survey and architectural conceptual plan for reuse. In January 1993, the Assembly approved converting the Post Office and Court House into a new city hall.

The Historic Trust Board, which became the first Sitka Historic Preservation Commission, included a member of the Sitka Tribe of Alaska Tribal Council. The City of Kodiak, already a CLG, advised the board to start with a resolution of support from Sitka's Tribal government. The ordinance establishing the commission designates a seat for the Sitka Historical Society, one for a representative of STA, and one Native at-large. It also states that the HPC will coordinate with STA and defer to it in matters concerning Alaska Natives.

Recognizing the long and continuing history of occupation of Sheet'ká by the Tlingit people, Sitka's CLG program is founded on a government-to-government relationship between the City and Borough of Sitka and Sitka Tribe of Alaska. Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) is the federally recognized tribal government for more

than 4,000 Alaska Native and Native American citizens of Sheet'ká or Sitka. This was possibly the first time such a relationship was formally recognized in Sitka.

Duties of the Sitka Historic Preservation Commission

Sitka's Historic Preservation Ordinance 92-1075 established the Sitka Historic Preservation Commission in Sitka's General Code. Per that ordinance, the Commission shall:

- Prepare and maintain an inventory of buildings and sites of historical, cultural, architectural, geographical and archaeological significance located in the City and Borough of Sitka
- Develop a preservation plan, providing for identification, protection and interpretation of this area's significant cultural resources
- Review and develop nominations to the National Register of Historic Places
- Review and make recommendations about local projects that might affect properties identified in the historic preservation plan
- Work toward the continuing education of citizens regarding historic preservation of the community's history
- Support the enforcement of the Alaska Historic Preservation Act
- Act in an advisory role to the Sitka Historical Society, the City and Borough of Sitka Planning Commission, and the Alaska Historic Sites Committee on all matters concerning historical districts in historic, prehistoric and archaeological preservation in the City and Borough of Sitka
- Coordinate with the Sitka Tribe of Alaska in historical matters involving Alaska Natives with the understanding that the Commission shall defer to the Tribe in matters concerning Alaska Natives in Sitka

The SHPC is an advisory board to the Sitka City and Borough Assembly through the Planning and Community Development Department. It has no independent authority. A non-voting Assembly liaison attends meetings in addition to the seven voting members. The Sitka Historic Preservation Commission meets monthly. A list of past members is included as Appendix C.

To meet the requirement to maintain a system to survey and inventory Sitka's historic properties, the SHPC commissioned the ***Inventory of Historic Sites and Structures, City and Borough of Sitka***. More information on the inventory is provided under the section on Sitka's historic and cultural resources.

In 2008, the CBS Assembly designated the Historic Preservation Commission to recommend names for new streets. The names would then be approved by the Assembly (Ordinance 2008-10, updating Sitka General Code 21.40.100).

The Historic Preservation Commission's largest responsibility is their review of projects that could affect historic or cultural resources. SHPC has also designed guidelines for that review with CBS Planning Department staff. Guidelines include the designation of areas in Sitka, including downtown, where review of building permits by the SHPC is mandatory when a project proposes changes to a building's exterior. Getting the review established as a consistent requirement for construction permitting is a major achievement that took years of effort.

These reviews, even though the commission's decision is only a recommendation, have not always been smooth. Overall, however, property owners and developers understand the importance of protecting historic resources and many are interested in the history of their property.

SHPC also reviews state and federal projects per Section 106, reviews applications for Historic Preservation Fund grants, and advises members of the public looking for information on how to preserve their properties.

The commission also applied for and received a CLG grant for a survey of downtown for the purposes of creating a historic district, and has sent CBS staff and commission members to historic preservation trainings.

In 1995, the Sitka Tribe of Alaska completed the **Sitka Tribe of Alaska Historic Preservation Plan**. STA has started a nomination for the Sitka Indian Village to be designated as a National Historic District and has also worked with state and federal entities to document traditional places—including their names and significances—and has overseen historic building reports and archaeological investigations in Sitka and throughout the City and Borough.

Sitka Comprehensive Plan 2030: Historical, Cultural, and Arts Resources Action

More evidence of public support for preservation can be observed in the preservation Action Items in the 2018 update of Sitka's Comprehensive Plan. In 2018, the City and Borough of Sitka's Planning and Community Development Department, along with the Planning Commission, concluded a two-year public process of updating and revising the comprehensive and land use plans for the municipality. The *Sitka Comprehensive Plan 2030* lists a number of historic preservation action items in the Historical, Cultural, and Arts Resources Section, that are relevant to this Historic Preservation Plan:

Action HCA 1.1a: Develop, adopt, and implement a Sitka Historic Preservation Plan.

Action HCA 1.1b: Facilitate and support CLG grants to obtain National Register Historic District Status for eligible districts.

Action HCA 1.1c: Coordinate and collaborate with interested parties to compile cemetery information.

Action HCA 1.1h: Create a memorial and naming policy to integrate place names that are representative of Sitka's diverse history into community facilities, services, places, and streets.

Action HCA 1.1i: Develop a Master Plan for Katlian/Kaagwaantaan area in area in collaboration with Sitka Tribe of Alaska, Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, property owners, and other interested parties.

Action HCA 2.1: Advertise historic preservation opportunities, tax incentives, and grants available to rehabilitate historic properties and sites within districts.

Action HCA 4.1a: Market and promote use of Harrigan Centennial Hall and Sitka History Museum.

Action HCA 4.1c: Create a historical zoning district or overlay for Sheldon Jackson Campus allowing for broader range of uses. Cross reference with LU 3.2.

Action HCA 5.1c: Encourage the display of interpretive signs for historic structures through zoning code provisions and other appropriate means.

State and Federal Partners for Preservation in Sitka

The National Forest Service, National Park Service (NPS), and the State of Alaska manage some lands within the City and Borough of Sitka. These entities employ archaeologists and historians, and partner with CBS and STA to document and safeguard historical and cultural resources.

The National Park Service administers the Sitka National Historical Park. The NPS acquired the Russian Bishop's House (1843) in 1973 and undertook the massive effort to save and preserve it.

The majority of lands within the City and Borough of Sitka are part of the Tongass National Forest. The National Forest Service is responsible for protecting historical and cultural resources within the Tongass.

The State of Alaska has jurisdiction over all tidelands in the City Borough not owned by CBS, federal government or private entities. The State of Alaska also administers sites including Fort Rousseau State Historical Park, the Old Sitka State Historic Site, Magoun Islands State Marine Park, and Noow Tlein/Castle Hill.



Alaska State Library - Historical Collections

Figure 3.

SITKA'S HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Identification and Documentation: Inventories and Historic Contexts

The mandate of the Historic Preservation Commission includes identifying and documenting the historic and cultural resources within the City and Borough of Sitka. Historic properties are districts, sites, buildings, structures, landscapes, or objects which are eligible for, or already listed in, the National Register of Historic Places.

To be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, a property has to be **old** (normally 50 years or older), it has to have **historical or cultural significance**, and it has to have **integrity**, so that enough of the property is still there to represent what is significant about it. Property types are buildings, structures, objects, sites, districts, and cultural landscapes. Any of these property types can be traditional cultural places, which might include a building or a natural feature or place that is defined by longstanding, continuing, culturally significant use.

Areas of significance can be local, state, or national, and can include association with a person or historical events; construction or design; or potential to yield information. Sitka has many places on the National Register, including properties with **National Historic Landmark** status—properties with significance to our nation's history. *See pages 19 and 20 for the complete list.*

The significance or importance of an individual property can only be evaluated and explained within its **historic context**, defined by the NPS as a theme, date range, geographic area, and everything that can be known about it. A historic context groups properties so that they can be evaluated together. Within each historic context are property types, which further help define and evaluate a resource in context. Just one historic context can be a massive document, so the following historic contexts for Sitka are inevitably a sketch. Themes necessarily overlap, and one property might fit into two or more contexts. For example, a building might fit the contexts of “Residential Buildings and Government,” as well as “Schools and Religion.” Ultimately, all of Sitka's historic contexts, when taken together, will provide a comprehensive picture of human use of this area.

In the late 1990s, the SHPC commissioned Vanguard Research to create an inventory of historic resources in Sitka, ***Inventory of Historic Sites and Structures, City and Borough of Sitka (1997)***. Part I of the plan is an overview and bibliography (Appendix J). Part II contains the list of 748 sites in the State of Alaska's AHRS database, and 352 sites not in the AHRS database. Because Part II includes sensitive archaeological and burial sites, it is not available to the public.

Sitka's inventory of historic sites and structure should be updated. When originally completed, the default year of construction for being old enough for eligibility on the National Register was 1947. In 2025, that date is 1975. This means there are likely several sites that can now be added to the inventory, as they are now eligible for listing on the National Register.

The State of Alaska's database, the AHRS, is constantly being updated. Some of the AHRS sites are buildings that no longer exist. **The AHRS sites should be updated in Sitka's inventory, and, in turn, the sites in the Sitka inventory not yet listed within the AHRS should be added to the AHRS.**



Figure 4.

The other challenge is the use and control of this list: it is not a public document but must be available to certain Planning Department staff so that projects can be planned to mitigate and avoid adverse impact on these sites. Sitka's culture bearers and clan leaders contributed information to Sitka's inventory and to the AHRS: they own that information and need to have control of it.

Another list that *is* publicly available contains the properties in Sitka that are already listed on the National

Register of Historic Places (included on pages 19 and 20), and the list of Sitka's cemeteries (Appendix K).

Tending cemeteries is a sign of respect for living heritage. Sitka's cemeteries are a central part of our heritage, culture, and identity, as they serve as the resting place of the ancestors of today's Sitkans. A great deal of work has been completed in recent decades to identify burial grounds, to bring attention to cemeteries, and to clean up and restore memorials. More remains to be done to protect these places by—among other efforts—rezoning them as cemeteries. Presently, most are within residential or public zoning districts.

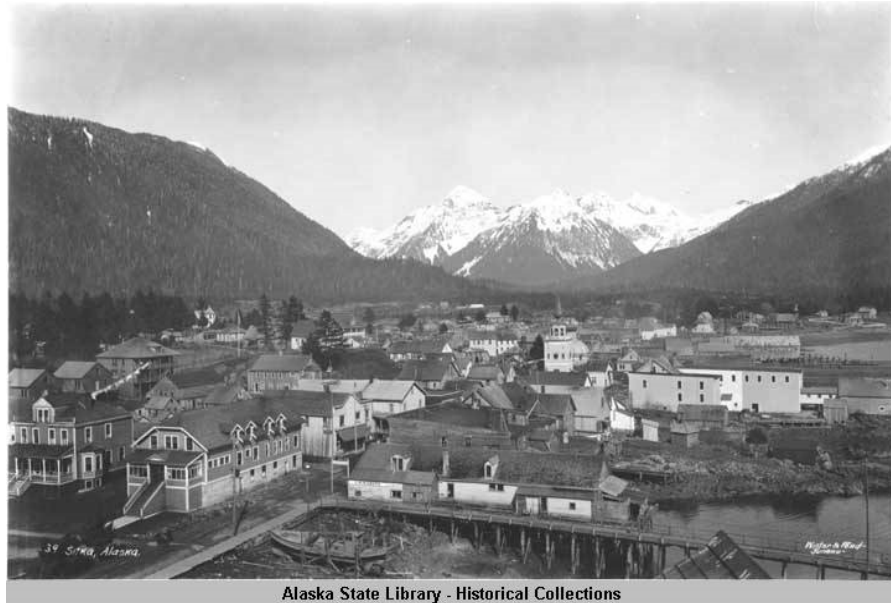


Figure 5.

HISTORIC CONTEXTS FOR SITKA

Note: In the following list of Historic Contexts, "Sitka Borough" is the entire City and Borough of Sitka. "Sitka Town" includes Japonski Island and the entire Sitka road system.

Sitka Borough, Indigenous, 10,000 Years BP to Present

This theme is for Indigenous sites. Periods within this theme include **10,000 Years Before Present (BP) to 300 Years BP**. At least 10,000 years ago, and possibly before, southeastern Alaska had ice-free areas that were used by people. Because of the weight of glaciers during the Ice Age and the rebound effect as they retreated (which is still occurring), these sites might be currently under water or at elevation, depending on exactly where they are. Tlingit and other Northwest Coast cultures were in their distinctive form at approximately 5,000 years BP.

1725 to 1867: Starting about 300 years ago, European influences began to come into this area. This included great quantities of trade goods, the wealth generated through leveraging those goods in trade to the interior and throughout the region, and, the impact of smallpox epidemics which devastated the Indigenous population.

1867 to present: Distinctive Tlingit sites continue to be created and used.

Property types include temporary or seasonal camps, burials, battlegrounds, forts, sites of resource use and cultivation, permanent settlements, petroglyphs and petrographs and other markers, trails, canoe haul-outs, and sites of work such as canoe building or toolmaking.

Examples of sites and properties include canoe haul-outs, garden sites, fish traps, clam gardens, and sites in Sitka town predating 1867, such as Noow Tlein/Castle Hill.

Sitka Borough, Colonial, 1725 to 1867

This theme is for the physical traces of the various European, U.S., and Asian seafarers who came to this area in this period. Their intentions were to claim land, to trade, or to harvest resources themselves. In 1799 Russians negotiated for a permanent hunting camp at Gajaa Heen/Starrigavan for hundreds of Native hunters and workers from the Aleutians, Kodiak Island, and the Western Gulf of Alaska. That camp was burned out in 1802, but after the Battle of 1804, Russians again built a permanent settlement on the current site of Downtown Sitka. Tlingit clans controlled their lands and resources and constrained Russian activities, but were decimated by smallpox epidemics, most severely in 1836-37.

Within this theme are **Russian Settlements 1799-1867**, including at Downtown Sitka.

Property types include buildings and other structures, which can be further broken down as defensive, commercial, administrative, religious, housing, or as part of resource extraction. This could include battlegrounds, temporary camps, sites of trade, sites of resource extraction (fishing, logging, mining), sites of industry (shipbuilding), burial grounds, and sites for public recreation.

Examples of properties and sites include Old Sitka National Historic Landmark (traces of the Russian settlement and battlefield), the Russian Bishop's House, and the wreck site of the Russian ship *Neva*.

Sitka Town, Indigenous, 1867 to 1977

When Alaska became part of the United States, Indigenous people were excluded from citizenship and had their lands and other property appropriated by the government and white civilians. This theme is for the distinctive and evolving Indigenous culture, as it blended with American culture in this era, and as Native leaders worked to get back land rights against racial bias to be fully included in Sitka's economy and culture.

Property types include buildings and other structures, which can be further broken down as commercial, clan houses, other residential buildings, districts, community organizations, resource extraction, sites of industry such as boatbuilding, and burial grounds.

Examples of properties include the Sitka Indian Village, individual clan houses, the Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall National Historic Landmark, the Cottage Community at entrance to Sitka National Historical Park, Andrew Hope boat shop, and the ANB Cemetery off Indian River Road.

Sitka Borough Outside Sitka Town, Settlement and Industry, 1867-Present

Starting in 1867 following the U.S. purchase of Alaska, Americans came to this area to exploit natural resources such as timber, fish, and gold and other minerals. Americans also came throughout this time wanting simply to live away from settlements.

Property types include districts—such as canneries and mining towns—and structures, which can be broken down into industrial, residential, commercial, energy generation, social, religious, and administrative. Other property types are transportation-related, including docks, roads, trails and railroads; mining tunnels, shafts and adits; equipment such as boilers, generators, stamp mills, dams, power lines, fuel tanks and railroad cars; and agriculture sites such as livestock, fur farm, and garden sites.

Examples of properties are the remains of the community of Chichagof on west Chichagof Island, mines and corduroy road at the head of Silver Bay, fur farms on the islands south of Sitka, and Sitkoh Bay cannery.

Sitka Town, Commercial and Industrial, 1867-Present

When Alaska became part of the United States, the U.S military worked quickly to establish its authority over Alaska's Native people. During this period and especially in its first decade as a U.S. territory, Alaska's economy was very poor and most trade was illicit. White settlement was slow, driven by entrepreneurs, as well as by prospectors looking for fish, lumber, and gold and other minerals. Sitka's economy was based on government, mining, and tourism until the 1910s, when commercial fishing became its most important economic driver.

Commercial and industrial properties in Sitka can be divided into **1867-1939** and **1939 to present**. Other themes within this context might be Filipino, Chinese, Tlingit, or other under-represented ethnicities among business owners, or types of businesses, such as bars or dry-goods stores.

Property types include buildings and other structures, which can be further broken down as retail establishments, warehouses and storage facilities, manufacturing including breweries, agriculture sites, and seafood processing. Other property types are transportation related, such as commercial docks, ships and shipwrecks, or equipment such as retorts.

Examples of properties are the Columbia Bar, the Pyramid Cannery (the Quay), and the Sitka Hotel.

Sitka Town, Social, Cultural, and Religion, 1867-Present

Sitkans have always expressed solidarity and identity through the formation of churches, social clubs, and cultural institutions. The nature of such buildings tells us about those aspirations, identities, and origins.

Property types are primarily buildings, which can be broken down into houses of worship and associated structures such as clergy housing; social halls and religious schools; and social clubs.

Examples of properties in Sitka include St. Peter's Episcopal Church and the Moose Lodge.

Sitka Town, Education and Recreation, 1867-Present

Education and public recreation are an essential part of any community's aspirations and identity. Property types consist of structures, including buildings for teaching; housing for teachers, students and other staff; and structures for running the school, such as a power house or offices. Other property types are playgrounds, parks, sports fields, recreational trails, or other landscaping.

Examples in Sitka are the Sheldon Jackson School National Historic Landmark, Xóots Elementary School, and Crescent Park.

Sitka Borough, Military, 1867-Present

Sitka has had military installations since 1867, with housing for Army personnel and later for Marines. World War II saw a transformation of Sitka with the construction of a Naval Operating Base for seaplanes and associated harbor defenses on Japonski, Alice, and Charcoal Islands and throughout Sitka Sound.

Within this context is **City of Sitka, WWII Military, 1937-1945**.

Property types include structures, including housing, group housing (barracks), defensive structures, docks, roads, communications and energy infrastructure, and maintenance and industrial infrastructure.

Examples of such properties include the Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Coast Defenses National Historic Landmark, the radar site on Harbor Mountain, Fort Babcock on Kruzof Island, the gun emplacement above Katlian Street, and the searchlight installation on Kayak Island.

Sitka Borough, Government, 1867-Present

Alaska was administrated by the federal government from 1867 until it received statehood in 1959. Since that time, the federal government has maintained a footprint in Sitka. This theme is for properties built by or associated with federal, state, and local government.

Property types include structures for housing, administration, maintenance and repair; public facilities such as court houses, post offices, public-use recreational cabins, woodsheds and latrines, trails, bridges, and docks; and equipment and sites such as generators, power lines, and docks.

Examples of properties include the U.S. Post Office and Court House, A-frame Forest Service Cabins, the seaplane turnaround at Katlian and Halibut Point Road, and the Biorka Island FAA installation.

Japonski, Alice and Charcoal Islands, “Mt. Edgumbe” 1945-1972

Note: these islands are originally Native-owned before being taken by the U.S. government, so this place also falls under the Sitka Borough, Indigenous, 10,000 Years BP to Present Historic Context.

This Historic Context is part of Sitka Borough, Government 1867-Present. The federal facilities on Japonski, Alice and Charcoal Islands were turned over to the Bureau of Indian Affairs Alaska Native Service in 1946. From then until the early 1980s, the federal government controlled all property on “The Island,” and until 1972 the only link to Sitka was by Shore Boat, the federally-operated ferry across Sitka Channel.

Because most of the infrastructure was already there, built by the military, there is substantial overlap with WWII military theme.

Property types include structures, for housing, health care, maintenance, power generation, recreation, education and offices; roads, docks, trails, communications infrastructure and bridges.

Examples include Mt. Edgumbe Hospital, Mt. Edgumbe High School, and homes built by Mt. Edgumbe High School.

Sitka Town, Transportation, Utilities and Communication, 1867-Present

As Sitka grew after 1867, citizens came together to build or lobby for infrastructure, including both private and public projects such as the Sitka Power Company’s electricity generation plant at Silver Bay, a dam at Cascade Creek, a water tank on Harbor Mountain Road, and roads that connect our built environment.

Property types include structures such as power houses, equipment sheds, and dams; roads, docks, trails, bridges, flumes and transmission lines; and equipment such as boilers and transmission towers.

Examples of these properties in Sitka include the Cable House (Raven Radio building), the John W. O’Connell Memorial Bridge, and the wood-stave water pipe below Blue Lake.

Sitka Town, Residential, 1867-Present

Residential buildings define a town’s character. Sitka’s housing reflects its demographic and economic history, and can be broken down by time period, such as **1867-1906**, when the capital moved to Juneau; **1906-1939** when Sitka was primarily a fishing village; and **1939-present**, which included multiple housing booms: WWII buildup, the construction of the pulp mill in 1959, and the doubling of Sitka’s population in the 1970s with growth in Forest Service, SEARHC, UAS, and fisheries employment, as well as the arrival of USCG Air Station Sitka.

Property type is primarily buildings, including houses, apartment buildings, and associated structures.

Residential buildings can be further broken down by architectural style, including Gothic, Neoclassical, Modern, A-Frame, Split-Entry (1970s and 1980s boxy 2-story houses with an entry between the floors), or Shingle-style. They can also be broken down into architect-designed or vernacular/builder's style, and into construction types such as balloon-frame, timber-frame, log, and concrete.

Sitka properties include the May Mills House and the Abner Murray Apartments on Seward Street, the Cathedral Arms building, and the Cozy Homes, the identical one-story homes in the Brady Street and Lakeview Drive neighborhoods.

Sitka Town, Cemeteries and Burials, 1867-Present

Sitka's history as a community and respect for those who went before is seen in the cemeteries. A list of cemeteries is included as Appendix K.

SITKA PROPERTIES ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

The National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places is part of a nationwide program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources of local, state, and national significance.

Property Name	Date Added	Built	Significance
American Flag Raising Site; Castle Hill/Noow Tlein*	1966		Transfer Russia claims to U.S. 1867
Russian Bishop's House*	1966	1841-43	Oldest surviving Russian colonial building, Russian Orthodox Church
St. Michael the Archangel Cathedral*	1966	1848, 1978	First Orthodox cathedral in New World
Old Sitka*	1966	1799	First non-Native settlement on Baranof Island
Sitka National Historical Park	1966	1890	Battle site, Indigenous monuments
Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall*	1972	1914	Original Chapter of the Alaska Native Brotherhood
Sheldon Jackson Museum	1972		
W. P. Mills House	1977	1916	Architecture and construction
Emmons House	1977	1895	Association with ethnographer George Thornton Emmons
St. Peter's by the Sea Church	1978	1899	Architecture, first Episcopal church in Sitka
St. Peter's See House	1978	1905	Gothic Revival architecture
May Mills House	1978	1911-13	Colonial Revival architecture
Sitka Pioneer's Home	1979	1935, 1956	First facility designed for care of elderly Sitkans

Cable House and Radio Station	1979	1904	Part of communications network linking Alaska to lower states
USCG&GS Seismological & Geomagnetic House; "White House"	1986	1916	Gambrel roof cottage architecture, science and government
Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses*	1986	1939-1945	Military defense WWII
Russian American Building 29/Tilson Building*	1987	1840s-50s?	One of two surviving Russian colonial structures, commercial structures
Hanlon-Osbakken House	1992	1892	Queen Anne architecture
Abner Murray Apartments and Cottages	1992	1921-22	Commercial rental properties
Sitka U.S. Post Office and Court House	1997	1938	Art Moderne architecture, government
Sheldon Jackson School*	2001	1911	Association with the Alaska Native Brotherhood Founders, architecture
Sitka National Cemetery	2012	1867-68	Association with U.S. Military presence in Alaska
Sitka Woman's Club Building	2024	1897	Social organizations

*denotes property is a National Historic Landmark

HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN PRACTICE

The most visible aspect of Sitka's historic preservation over the past few decades is in the rehabilitation of historic buildings. Preservation starts with a structural survey and planning, so that historic integrity is maintained even as the building is rehabilitated.

Planning work in Sitka includes a 2004 preservation plan for the entire Sheldon Jackson School National Historic Landmark and the 1995 *Sitka Tribe of Alaska Historic Preservation Plan*. The STA plan is included as Appendix L.

Examples of private organizations rehabilitating buildings include the Allen Memorial Preservation Project, formed in the mid-1990s to save Allen Auditorium on the Sheldon Jackson School National Historic Landmark. In 2011, the Sitka Fine Arts Camp took on preservation of the historic campus. The Sitka Sound Science Center has restored the Sage Building, and the congregation of St. Peter's Episcopal Church has worked to restore the church building as well as the See House, the Bishop's residence behind it. The Sitka Maritime Heritage Society is actively restoring the Japonski Island Boathouse, a WWII boat shop on the Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Coastal Defenses National Historic Landmark. Individuals and businesses have restored the Bredvig Building and the Abner Murray Apartments on Seward Street. Local nonprofit Katlian Collective has undertaken a project to preserve and rebuild clan houses within the Sitka Indian Village.

An important source of funding for local historic preservation by nonprofits has been federal **Historic Preservation Fund grants**. These are matching grants administered by the Alaska Office of History and Archaeology. Over the years, those Historic Preservation Fund grants have brought around a half million dollars to Sitka. Because they require matching, they leverage local resources, including donated labor,

equipment, and materials. A list of these grants is included as Appendix E.

Another opportunity for preservation practices occurs when state or federal projects are determined to have an adverse impact on historic properties, per Section 106. The mandatory mitigation must promote historic preservation or interpretation. In Sitka, one example was a report on the Army facilities on Alice and Charcoal Islands, and mitigation for airport expansion.

Historic preservation in the United States began in the 20th century with the protection of historically significant buildings. Sometimes this means preserving a building exactly as it was at one point in time, but most often, this means employing adaptive reuse, or keeping a building in use by modifying and updating it for a new use while preserving its character-defining features, which are the qualities that make it worth saving.

Preservation of buildings is environmentally sustainable: it keeps old buildings out of the landfill and saves the costs of new construction. **Further, the survival and preservation of distinctive and historic buildings and landscapes is the foundation of Sitka's visitor industry,** contributing to the local economy through tourism while supporting community pride.

Historic preservation can increase property values, which has the potential to exclude people from property ownership; preservation can also be a tool for rehabilitating properties to increase the availability of affordable housing.

A 2011 [report for the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation on the economic impacts of historic preservation](#) found that historic preservation conserves resources by using existing public infrastructure, that renovation costs are roughly the same as new construction, and that adaptive reuse creates jobs, revitalizes downtowns, attracts investment and visitors, and increases property values.

Another important element of local preservation is to list places on the National Register of Historic Places. This requires a formal nomination, which is reviewed at local, state, and federal levels. In 2024, the Sitka Woman's Club Building on Harbor Drive became the most recent addition to the list. To be listed at the National Historic Landmark level, a site has to hold significance to the nation's history. In 2001, the Sheldon Jackson School National Historic Landmark. No National Historic Landmarks in Sitka have been listed since 2001. Listing on the National Register is a requirement for most historic preservation grants. It also opens up opportunities for tax credits and other incentives.

PRESERVATION NEEDS IN SITKA

While many historic buildings have been restored in Sitka, others need attention. Buildings in need of attention include St. Michael's Russian Orthodox Cathedral, a National Historic Landmark, the White House on Seward Street, which is on the National Register, and clan houses within the Sitka Indian Village. There is a need for financial resources and even legal and political assistance for historic preservation, and many properties and districts could benefit from recognition through nomination to the National Register.

Not everyone in Sitka is aware of the value of historic preservation or knows about the history behind our visible heritage, and there is a need to return historic information to its proper owners. The 1997 Sitka Inventory of Historic Sites and Structures needs updating, but this is not a public document. The Sitka inventory and the AHRS contain information that is the property of clans, and both lists need to be returned to them. Further, there is a need for a public register for historic places to which citizens can

contribute.

New construction is not always compatible or sympathetic to the character of historic neighborhoods. The recent increase in visitor numbers could lead to redevelopment pressure on downtown, but we can protect the historic character of a district—such as Lincoln Street or the Sitka Indian Village—by ordinance. There could also be educational efforts to teach how to voluntarily design a new building that preserves the historic character of an area.

While the process for reviewing building permits for their impact on historic resources is excellent, there is a need for resources that can communicate technical information to property owners regarding preservation and history. There is also a need for information regarding what to do if cultural resources are encountered by a member of the public.



Figure 6.

GOALS & ACTIONS

The following Goals and Actions are the priorities for action by the Historic Preservation Commission in the coming years. They come from the duties of the Sitka Historic Preservation Commission as set out in Sitka General Code (see page 11) and the Goals in the original Sitka Historic Preservation Plan (1994), included as Appendix A. Actions may be supported by applying for CLG grants.

On April 1, 2025, attendees at a public meeting ranked the Actions and contributed comments. Actions were arranged according to public priority. The plan was then reviewed by the Sitka Tribe of Alaska. The Plan and the Goals and Actions were then edited and approved by the Sitka Historic Preservation Commission at its meeting on August 13, 2025.

Goal One

DEVELOP NEW PARTNERSHIPS AND RAISE AWARENESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCES REPRESENTING THE HISTORY OF UNDER-REPRESENTED COMMUNITIES, ESPECIALLY TLINGIT HISTORY.

Sitka's people and history are diverse and deep. The Tlingit people have been here since Time Immemorial, and are still here, but this long history and presence is not as obvious to an observer as the history of Russians or Euro-Americans. The SHPC will work to be more representative of all of Sitka's communities and build its capacity in collaborating with the Sitka Tribe of Alaska, CBS Planning Commission, Sitka Historical Society, and ethnic and heritage communities.

Action 1

Work with STA to get more Tlingit names onto Sitka places. Educate the public about the significance of the names.

Action 2

Invite appropriate ethnic, cultural, and other groups and societies to contribute to SHPC meetings. Reach out to Sitka's under-represented communities to fill seats on the SHPC.

Action 3

Strengthen the formal relationship between the Sitka Historic Preservation Commission and the Cultural Resources Department and Committee of the Sitka Tribe of Alaska to allow for regular consultation.

Goal Two

IDENTIFY, PRESERVE, PROTECT, AND ENHANCE THE HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES IN THE CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA.

To protect Sitka's resources, the SHPC must know what those resources are, what the preservation needs are, and must be ready to set priorities. One part of this is to update the Sitka Inventory of Historic Sites, but this inventory is not a public document. The other component is to create criteria and to compile a local register that only includes non-sensitive sites.

Action 1

Develop, with participation from the public, stakeholders, and STA, a list of priorities for places in Sitka that need documentation, preservation, or to be listed on the National Register, with special attention to sites important to Indigenous history, such as Sitka clan houses.

Action 2

Encourage historic structure surveys and other documentation relating to historic preservation, interpretation, stabilization, and stewardship for historic and cultural resources. Encourage nominations to the National Register by the public by publicizing the benefits of NRHP listings and connecting owners with technical and financial support, such as historic preservation grants and tax credits. Provide guidelines for what to do if a member of public encounters cultural materials or human remains. This could be done by adding a page to the City's website with this information.

Action 3

Obtain a CLG grant to contract an update to Sitka's Inventory of Historic Sites and Structures. The contractor would work with STA and federal and state agencies and the public to develop criteria for adding properties to the Inventory, and to add sites not currently listed. This would include reconciling the list of AHRS sites in the existing inventory to current AHRS listings, striking sites that no longer exist, and adding the additional sites to the AHRS. Information related to clans should be identified and returned to those clans.

Action 4

Develop a version of the inventory that can be shared with the public, as a register of historic sites in Sitka. Develop criteria and work with stakeholders, STA, and the public to add sites.

Action 5

To create a sustainable tourist destination, communities cannot allow new development to shape community character. Develop voluntary design guidelines for new construction in historic neighborhoods and districts that will retain existing character.

Action 6

Use ordinances to protect places we value, such as Lincoln Street or Katlian Street, that are under redevelopment pressure. Ordinances might restrict construction to protect the historic character of such districts. Create a historic district and require preservation of the historic character by developing an ordinance to be enacted by the Assembly.

Action 7

Rezone Sitka's cemeteries as Cemetery Zone.

Goal Three

IMPROVE CITY PROCESSES TO INCLUDE CONSIDERATION OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN PLANNING.

To assist the municipality with thoughtful growth and development, the SHPC has established a framework for decision-making that preserves the community's historic character. This framework should consider the diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural values and history of the community when planning all CBS projects, as well as when reviewing projects requiring CBS approvals. Staff and commissioners must have a clear understanding of historic background and context. Providing adequate training will empower staff to successfully carry out the goals outlined in this plan. Further, staff will work with OHA/SHPO to ensure awareness of funding and training opportunities.

Action 1

Update, if needed, Sitka's street naming policy, and hone a procedure for using Native language names.

Action 2

Conduct a periodic review of all policies, programs, and documents in relation to historic preservation to maintain standards of operation.

Action 3

Improve the review process for projects that might have an impact on historic resources by providing information to the public about the review processes for building permits, what places and projects require review, and criteria and how to apply; creating a GIS overlay of AHRS and Sitka Inventory sites onto GIS map of Sitka and maintain restricted access so that this map and the Sitka Inventory are restricted to personnel who need it; developing or refining, if needed, procedures, including what to do in case of encountering historic or cultural resources or human remains, and including in such procedures the notifying of STA and the awareness and communication of places and situations where such encounters are more likely; and creating a policy that addresses collaboration with STA to protect historic cultural sites.

Action 4

Develop a packet or kit for new members of the Sitka Historic Preservation Commission that includes training in the law, goals, and methods of historic preservation.

Action 5

Obtain CLG grants for staff and commission trainings in historic preservation, leadership, the Section 106 process, other legal responsibilities, and how to identify and protect sites.

Action 6

Sponsor, or encourage CBS staff and SHPC members to participate in, cultural programs to raise awareness of Sitka's many cultural and ethnic communities and their histories.

Goal Four

EDUCATE AND ENGAGE THE PUBLIC AND STUDENTS IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION.

Historic preservation helps maintain the beauty, vibrancy, and livability of communities; it connects people to the past and to one another; and it fosters a sense of belonging and community pride. Restoring buildings is usually more environmentally friendly and more cost-effective than building new ones.

The SHPC can help educate the public about the benefits of historic preservation, how to do it, and can connect the public to technical and monetary resources such as grants and tax incentives.

Historic preservation provides a wealth of educational opportunities across the disciplines of history, math, sociology, environmental studies, urban planning, economics, building crafts, and more. Students, teachers, and community partners gain a deeper understanding of the importance of conserving and protecting our historical heritage. Hands-on, practical skills reinforce academic education.

Action 1

Promote and share information about Sitka's historic resources, with links to history and history education resources, on the CBS website or the Sitka Historical Society website for use by students and the public. Encourage schools, museums, and history organizations to teach the community's history through the power of place, and by using historic sites in educational programs. Education programs can include workshops for teachers on how heritage education that utilizes local resources enriches the learning process. Further implementation of this goal can include working with cultural directors within the school district and encouraging classes for tour operators.

Action 2

Work with community groups to celebrate historic sites and historic preservation in Sitka through special events at holiday, and through awards or recognition for historic preservation programming or projects. Work with other local entities, such as the Sitka Historical Society and the Sitka Tribe of Alaska, to foster community awareness of historic preservation efforts.

Goal Five

PROMOTE HERITAGE TOURISM.

Heritage tourism is an economically beneficial aspect of historic preservation. Heritage travelers tend to spend more, participate in more activities, and stay longer than other tourists. An authentic experience of the people and history of a place creates lasting memories.

Action 1

Encourage promotion of historic and cultural resources to visitors, such as walking tours and maps that showcase Sitka's historic resources. Award or recognize successful programs or promotions.

Action 2

Share information on the CBS website, or in partnership with Visit Sitka, about Sitka's historic and cultural resources, the benefits of preservation for the visitor industry, the connection between sustainable heritage tourism and the maintenance of an area's authentic, historic character, and how the values of authenticity and engaging in a place's history are part of tourism best practice.



Figure 7.

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