



Preservation  
League  
of  
New York  
State

# Guidelines for Local Advocacy Efforts

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## **Do Your Homework**

### **1. Assess the threatened site**

- a. What makes the existing building or place significant? (Architectural significance; Historical associations; Contributing site to overall character of area (i.e., pedestrian scale); Important context for other buildings of greater importance.)
- b. Has the structure or site been listed as a local landmark or is it located in a locally-designated historic district?
- c. Has the structure or site been listed on the State or National Registers of Historic Places? (If not, has it been deemed eligible or denied eligibility for listing?) If located within a National Register district, was the structure identified as a contributing or non-contributing resource? (Staff at the Field Services Bureau of the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), a division of the State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), can assist in answering these questions. For the name of your regional staff contacts for National Register, Technical and Grants or Archaeology units, call 518-237-8643, visit [www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo/state/map.htm](http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo/state/map.htm), or go to the "Territory Maps" link at [www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo](http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo).)
- d. What is the current zoning for the site?
- e. Who owns the property?

### **2. Define the threat**

- a. How has the current situation come about? (impending or recent sale, string of ownership, vacancy, neglected condition of building, cost estimates for repairs, etc.)

- b. What is the threat? (continuing owner negligence, plans for demolition, plans for alteration beyond recognition, plans for inappropriate construction on the site or nearby)
- c. How imminent is the threat?

### **3. What is the framework for decision-making, who are the decision-makers and what are the opportunities to participate?**

- a. What is the legal framework for decision-making? Where are the opportunities to intervene or voice an opinion?

Landmark status: If any public funds are to be used, some type of review process may be required. (The local Code Enforcement Officer/Building Inspector is a good place to make this inquiry.) If the site is listed or eligible for listing on the State and National Registers, is there any public funding being used for demolition or new development? If so, the site may be subject to SHPO review. If not, and this is a private undertaking, the NR status may still warrant additional local review.

Is there a local preservation ordinance and historic preservation commission?

Demolition: What are the procedural steps for approval of demolition and who makes the decision? (building code inspector, fire chief)

Are there any special circumstances that will need consideration before demolition can occur such as asbestos removal?

Planned construction: What are the procedural steps for approval of renovation and/or new construction? Is the planned development already

(Continued)

allowed by current zoning? Are any state or federal permits required for the project? Is this an “as of right” development or does the developer need a variance, special use permit, or site plan review?

**Intervention:** Which, if any, of these steps allow for public comment at municipal board meetings or public hearings or written comment during a certain period of time after an application has been submitted? Is any special review required such as an Environmental Impact Statement?

- b. What is the current stage—what decisions have already been made? What is the timing of other anticipated appearances before municipal boards and agencies?
- c. Who are the players and stakeholders? What, if any, are the circumstances which allow or restrain their intervention in the issue?  
(Owner and/or developer, municipal boards, neighborhood associations, Common Council members, other businesses or property owners)
- d. What is the political climate around this issue? Are local or state government officials aware of the issue? What does the public know?
- b. Are there professionals you might need to ask for assistance and what might be the associated costs?  
(Engineers, attorneys, designers)
- 3. Who are potential allies and mentors? What other groups have fought similar battles or may have to fight similar battles in other neighborhoods? Is there a local ad-hoc group of citizens, or an established organization who can help with the work needed to preserve the site?
- 4. Who are the decision-makers who should be informed of the issues and your preservation priorities? Develop a broad but relevant list of players and allies, and determine the sequence in which individuals or groups should be contacted (for instance, those involved in making or influencing earlier decisions in the process).
- 5. Who are press contacts for newspapers, newsletters and television and radio stations; what are the routines and deadlines for notification of events or potential stories (e-mail, fax, filling out form on a website)?
- 6. Research similar cases in similar neighborhoods and communities in order to learn about applicable success stories or failures. This will inform your discussions with decision-makers and help you develop alternatives.

### **Gather your resources and develop your tools**

- 1. Develop a clear goal and mission statement.
- 2. What expertise do you need?
  - a. Are there residents who are knowledgeable about local and state decision-making procedures?
- 1. Develop written pieces which can serve as the basis for information sheets, press releases, talking points and model letters.
- 2. Consider the use of drawings or enhanced digital images and maps to demonstrate the appearance of an improved, preserved site or the impacts of the proposed development. Find a local professional who can help produce the images.

**(Communicate)**

3. Consider the use of Internet resources such as Yahoo discussion lists which are easy to establish and can be used to update a large group of people easily. Moderate the messages so that you have control over off-topic or inappropriate messages.  
Remember that people on both sides of the issue may be members of the Yahoo list  
Remember that the Internet is great but has restrictions, and that you will need to communicate with flyers and phone calls in order to create a diverse advocacy group and to reinforce Internet messages.
4. Begin a constructive dialogue as early as possible, and schedule meetings with municipal staff, elected officials and board or agency chairpersons. If possible, keep the representatives of advocacy group to a consistent group in order to stay on message and provide consistency when assessing responses at each meeting.
5. Has there been any media coverage of this issue? Would a letter writing campaign help your group raise public awareness and interest in preserving the site?
6. Conduct outreach to other groups—speaking at meetings is critical, place items in newsletters.
7. If you are building a new organization, try to make an effort to make some one-on-one contact with each member at beginning and determine their interests and skills.
8. After advocacy group meetings, keep group informed about meeting content afterwards with notes, minutes. Update the group on other activities such as politician meetings.

**Be professional**

1. When asking for a meeting, first write business-like letters (or e-mails) to introduce the issue and your group, then follow up with a call.
2. Organize group and public meetings with a printed agenda, sign in sheet, note takers, etc.
3. Develop good quality materials and visual aids (Powerpoint presentation was a winner)
4. Choose spokespeople who can remain professional, on topic and approachable
5. Ask those speaking on your behalf to avoid confrontational dialogue and listen to the “other side;” stick to issue(s) at hand; don’t dilute message
6. Stay balanced (as long as possible) and realistic.
7. We are a very informal society these days in dress and e-mail messages. Consider appropriate dress clothing for meetings (not formal, but simple business clothes, no jeans)

**Work as a partner towards a solution**

1. Acknowledge positive actions of “other” side
2. Offer any skills your group may be able to provide: engineering survey, grant-writing.
3. Use case studies and information from other organizations to develop solutions.
4. What are the short and long-term goals for saving and reusing the historic resource?
5. Consider alternatives; be prepared to compromise.

**There will be challenges besides the proposed changes to the site**

1. Apathy of local residents; resignation in the face of “political machine”
2. Risk of intruding on political territory of other organizations with potential or

**(Challenges)**

- perceived impact of actions endangering other groups’ status or relationships with decision makers.
- 3. Controlling or mopping up after “loose canons” who speak or act on behalf of the group without approval.
- 4. Building organization capacity at the same time as addressing an issue. You may have to accommodate differences of opinion about priorities and direction within group. Revisit your goal and mission statement.
- 5. Maintaining a volunteer organization – most people have other responsibilities. From passionate to passive, people have different amounts of time to give and you should try to allow for varying levels of participation. Respect each level of work; think about talents when recruiting; deal diplomatically with dropouts.
- 6. Overcoming misinformation, bad press or lack of publicity.
- 7. Burnout with long-running issue or lack of progress.

**Having fun is OK!**

- 1. Clever, not derogatory, slogans will help flyers and posters to get noticed—keep it constructive.
- 2. Bumper stickers, buttons and t-shirts are relatively inexpensive to produce.
- 3. Capitalize on any historical associations, products, or building names in developing logos or other advertising campaigns.

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**Advocacy Resources:**

**Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation** has a good section on **advocacy**: [www.cttrust.org](http://www.cttrust.org). Go to the “Preservation Help” section.

The **Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR)** is a nonprofit organization providing research, analysis, and innovative policy solutions for building healthy communities and strong local

economies. ILSR’s **New Rules Project** ([www.newrules.org](http://www.newrules.org)), publishes a quarterly journal, *The New Rules*; several electronic bulletins on specific issues; and books, including *The Home Town Advantage: How to Defend Your Main Street Against Chain Stores and Why It Matters*. They also maintain a web-based clearinghouse of model public policies at: <http://home-town-advantage.c.tep1.com/maabFvOaa2calb1uAVGb/>.

Another good source of news on local efforts to keep megastores at bay is the NewsFlash! section of the **Sprawl-Busters** web site: [www.sprawl-busters.com](http://www.sprawl-busters.com). Additional links and organizations are listed at the end of each story.

The **National Park Service** website has an extensive list of resources including a section on “Caring for your historic building,” briefs on preservation issues, technical information and publications. See: [www.cr.nps.gov/architecture.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/architecture.htm); [www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/index.htm](http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/index.htm); or [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

There is also a section devoted to the **National Register of Historic Places** and issues regarding landmark and historic district designations: [www.cr.nps.gov/nr/](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/).

To learn about some generally accepted practices for preservation work, read the **Secretary of Interior’s Standards**. [www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/arch\\_stnds\\_0.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/arch_stnds_0.htm).

The **National Trust for Historic Preservation** website ([www.nthp.org](http://www.nthp.org)) has a number of sections devoted to particular preservation issues.

**Information on all New York State Historic Preservation Office** programs, funding, Federal tax credit projects, environmental review, etc., is available at: [www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo](http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo); 518-237-8643; or Field Services Bureau, NYS OPRHP, Peebles Island, Box 189, Waterford, NY 12188. For information about grants and availability of applications, visit [www.nysparks.state.ny.us/grants/](http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/grants/).