

Community Revitalization Tools

Preservation Development Initiative: Duluth

The Program

The Preservation Development Initiative (PDI) is a pilot project of the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP). PDI provided technical assistance and financial support to eight targeted U.S. cities to help demonstrate the importance of including preservation as a core component of neighborhood revitalization. PDI is funded entirely by the John L. and James S. Knight Foundation and is administered by the NTHP Community Revitalization Department.



In each program city, PDI representatives first conducted a thorough assessment of local preservation challenges and opportunities. Staff compiled its results in an Assessment Report presented to the City, local partners and other entities. PDI then worked closely with these stakeholders to shape a strategy that would leverage the community's physical, cultural and economic assets, and fully integrate preservation as an effective approach in rejuvenating older residential and commercial properties. Over a three-year period, PDI has invested more than \$1.1 million in direct assistance and preservation-related resources in the eight demonstration sites.

In Duluth, PDI focused strategies on downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods: recommending infill construction, infrastructure improvements, and building and code ordinance revisions that facilitate adaptive reuse of historic structures; developing additional Historic Districts that would allow property owners to qualify for additional federal and state rehabilitation tax credits, and promoting a preservation ethic by strengthening the capacity of state and local organizations. PDI also provided a \$100,000 seed grant for the Preservation Loan Fund, a residential revolving loan fund managed by the Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) of Duluth.

The City

Duluth is a city of approximately 85,000 located on the shores of Lake Superior and with an abundance of turn-of-the-20th-century architecture. The city's recreational attractions and diverse historic resources provided an incredible opportunity to launch an asset-based redevelopment initiative. Through PDI, Duluth financed a preservation development strategy based on using the cultural and historic fabric of the City to define its unique marketing niche. Duluth's three-year preservation development agenda was driven by a local Steering Committee that reviewed the Assessment Report, set priorities, programmed PDI funds and monitored implementation.

Preservation Accomplishments

PDI technical and financial assistance supported a number of preservation-based activities in Duluth. Three of those projects are highlighted below:

- The Midwest Preservation Institute used PDI funding to conduct two days of **hands-on training** for building professionals, educating over forty local contractors, realtors, preservationists, trades people, architects, and homeowners on several key technical historic restoration issues. These included evaluating and preserving masonry, protecting against water damage and other



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types of decay, and repairing and stabilizing historic wood construction. Training session partners included Local Initiative Support Corporation-Duluth, Neighborhood Housing Services, the City of Duluth and Women in Construction Company, LLC, a Duluth company that trains and employs women in the building trades industry.

- **User-Friendly Design Guidelines** were developed by PDI consultants to guide homeowners in the repair and restoration of historic homes. As Duluth has no local or National Register (NR) Districts in residential areas, there were no existing guidelines or review processes for work on historic housing. The new guidelines, including examples of local architectural styles and characteristics, will be used by NHS' Preservation Loan Fund and by the Duluth Historic Preservation Commission for locally landmarked and NR designated properties.
- PDI representatives created an **Assessment Report for the Duluth Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC)** that evaluated the performance of the Commission and suggested ways to strengthen its organizational capacity, improve its effectiveness and more effectively partner with Duluth Preservation Alliance (DPA), the local nonprofit preservation association. This included developing a model annual work plan for HPC, recommending new commission appointees and organizing a new hire training program, *the Preservation Commissioners' Toolkit*. The Toolkit provides resources and recommendations for training HPC's commissioners for their unique roles and responsibilities. The findings were presented to HPC, DPA, the City Administration, City Council and the general public.

One of the greatest strengths of the Duluth PDI program was its Steering Committee, including City and state government agencies, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, local preservation organizations and merchant associations. The involvement of a diverse array of stakeholders, and the collaborative partnerships they formed ensured that PDI's goal of inserting preservation into the public discourse on Duluth's economic development plans would be widely supported.

As a result, perhaps the greatest impact of the Duluth PDI program is a burgeoning preservation ethic. For example, the historic Sacred Heart Convent, identified during a PDI-sponsored tax credit training project in August 2004, has since been converted into 11 units of low-income housing and treatment facilities for women and children with substance abuse problems. The project, now called Alicia's Place, is one of only four tax credit projects ever completed in Duluth. It surely won't be the last: the redevelopment of the Clyde Iron Works, a historic industrial building also identified in a PDI tax credit workshop, is being reborn as a market, brewery and public sports center. A National Register Multiple Property designation for Duluth's downtown commercial district was also completed under the auspices of PDI. Officially listed on May 31, 2006, it is only the second NR District ever completed in the city. All of the contributing properties within the District are now eligible for the federal rehab tax credit.



Though the full impact of this awareness may not be realized for several years, the perception of preservation as being primarily an impediment to economic growth has been diminished by a greater recognition of its potential as catalyst for development in Duluth's future.

For more information about PDI, visit www.PreservationNation.org.