

**NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
PRESERVATION LEADERSHIP TRAINING
SARATOGA SPRINGS, NY**

TEAM TOPIC

During the mid to late nineteenth century, Saratoga Springs grew into one of America's premier spas and resort destinations. Substantial "cottages" were built by the wealthy, and hotels, parks, race courses and shops were developed along the city's wide boulevards. Vacationers flocked to the community to take advantage of the "waters" and the natural beauty of the area, the horse track, and the gambling casinos.

Along Saratoga Springs West Side, the city also flourished. Tradesmen, shopkeepers, hotel workers, teamsters, warehousemen and servants came to the area to support the tourist trade, and settled in neighborhoods along Van Dam, Waterbury, Walton and Marvin Streets. They built single family detached wooden frame houses on narrow rectangular lots and often added workshops or barns in the rear. The lots were arranged in a tight urban pattern, and followed a scheme of development laid out by Henry Walton as early as 1813.

Today, much of the city's West Side looks as it did in Saratoga's heyday. While the city has already designated eighty-five percent of its downtown and a large part of the remaining grand houses, estates and hotels as part of the East Side, Broadway, Union Avenue, Franklin Square and Congress Park/Canfield Casino/Circular Street Historic Districts, the city has recently focused on trying to preserve the historic fabric of its West Side. Recognizing the importance of also being able to tell the story of the workers and those who provided the services to the wealthy of Saratoga, the Saratoga Springs City Planning Office and the Saratoga Preservation Foundation began working on the local designation of the West Side historic district in 1986. In preparation for proposing the designation, the City Planning Office conducted a survey of all structures within the proposed district boundaries. The West Side Intensive Level Survey was completed in April 1992 and found that there were a total of 440 historic structures located in the proposed district. The Survey also made several recommendations as to what standards should be followed by the Design Review Commission in reviewing projects proposed in the district.

By March 1993, the City Planning Office was prepared to designate the local district, and sponsored two public information meetings for the residents of the West Side. A total of 160 people attended both meetings. The purpose of the meetings was to educate the public about local historic district zoning as well as the National Register of Historic Places. Under Saratoga's zoning ordinance, an area has to be eligible for the National Register before the city can rezone it as a local historic district. Members and staff of the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the Saratoga Springs Preservation Foundation, and the city's Design Review Commission were on hand to answer questions for the 160 people attending the meetings.

Unfortunately, the meetings angered rather than educated many of West Side's residents. At one of the public meetings, an informal vote was taken among the residents. Two-thirds of the residents favored the National Register nomination of the district, but only one-third of the residents favored local designation of the district. A very few vocal and influential West Side residents felt that the economic restrictions put on homeowners would be overwhelming. They also argued that their rights as private property owners would be violated if the local historic district were passed. Opposition to the local designation of the West Side was so strong that the chairman of the Design Review Commission decided to drop the local nomination before it was even brought to vote before the City Council.

On February 4, 1994, the NY SHPO added the West Side to the state register and recommended that the area be added as an amendment to the already existing National Register Franklin Square District and a portion has been added to the Broadway District.

TEAM PROJECTS

The team projects focus on the issues surrounding the designation of the West Side Historic District.

Team #1

Property Rights: Addressing Concerns about the Designation

At the two public information meetings, several residents of the West Side voiced concerns about the impact of local designation on their private property rights. What are the concerns of the "private property rights" advocates? How can they be addressed by those seeking to designate the district? What are the benefits of designation? Are there any negative impacts which can result from designation? Develop a list of concerns and a strategy to address the issues raised by private property rights advocates.

Team #2

The Historic Significance of the West Side District

The nineteenth century development of the West Side has its roots in the division of property among some of Saratoga Springs' earliest families. Relate the planning and subdivision that created the West Side in the nineteenth century to the neighborhood's social and architectural history. Discuss the architectural and social changes the West Side has undergone during last 100 years, and analyze how the area continues to be an integral part of the city's historic fabric.

Team #3

Public Education: Spreading the Word

Properly educating the public is a critical part of establishing a local historic district. Consider your audiences (community residents, voters, the media, city officials and other interested parties) and develop a PR plan to educate the public about the proposed historic district.

Team #4

Design Review Guidelines for the West Side District

Assume that the West Side Historic District has been created. Study the guidelines for design review developed for other historic districts in Saratoga Springs, and determine whether these guidelines would be appropriate for use in the West Side Historic District. Compare and contrast your findings with the recommendations set forth in the West Side Intensive Level Survey. How can your recommendations be best communicated to the property owners in the district?

Team #5

At Home on the West Side: Economic Impact of the Designation on the Property Owner

Evaluate the impact of the designation on the homeowner. What state and local programs are available to support the property owner? Do you think that designation will have a negative impact on property values in the district? What programs should be put into place to assist and act as an incentive to the property owner to preserve his property?