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St. Cloud Heritage Preservation Community Education and Marketing Plan

**Presented to the St. Cloud Heritage Preservation Commission and
City of St. Cloud Planning and Zoning Department
By
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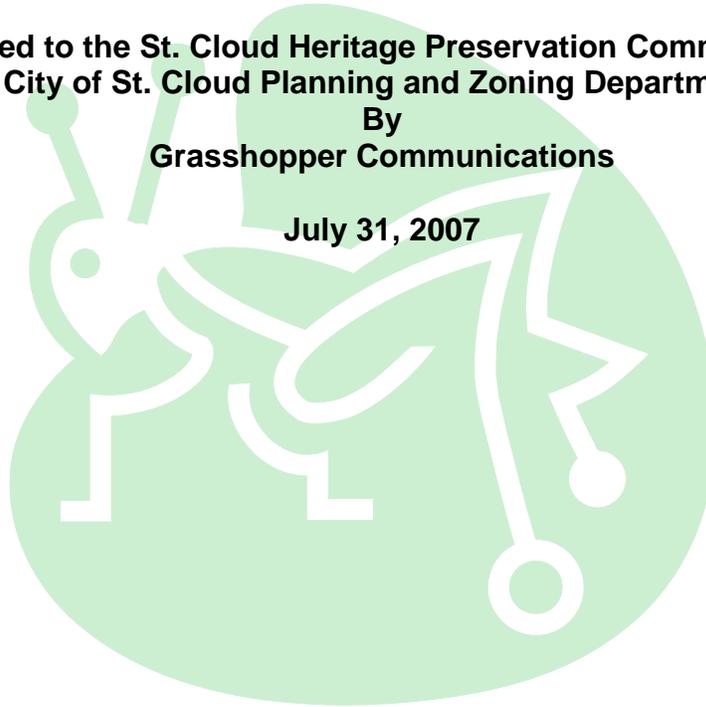




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I. Introduction

The St. Cloud Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) is a quasi-judicial city board established by City Council in 1990. The Heritage Preservation Commission's mission is to recognize and protect buildings and sites that reflect significant elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political, visual, or architectural history. Today, the HPC is entrusted with preserving the architectural integrity of St. Cloud's four historic districts.

Although the HPC oversees preserving St. Cloud's architectural heritage, few citizens of St. Cloud recognize or understand the vital benefit the Heritage Preservation Commission provides for St. Cloud's urban landscape. The City of St. Cloud and the HPC have a great opportunity to educate the public about the Commission and establish it as the guardian of St. Cloud's community history, as symbolized by its built environment.

The purpose of this Community Education and Marketing Plan is to outline a strategic approach to develop a distinct public identity for the Heritage Preservation Commission and provide ways for the HPC to effectively communicate with St. Cloud's many stakeholders. This plan highlights three primary marketing objectives and identifies four marketing strategies to meet those objectives. Under each strategy we have outlined a series of tactics to fulfill those strategies.

II. Situation Analysis

The City of St. Cloud established the Heritage Preservation Commission in 1990 to safeguard St. Cloud's architectural heritage. Since that time, the City has designated four local historic districts: Southside Neighborhood Historic District (1998, expanded 2002 and 2006), Pantown Historic District (2001), St. Cloud Commercial Historic District (2002), and the Barden Park Historic District (2003). The HPC has jurisdiction over exterior building alterations in these districts.

The St. Cloud Heritage Preservation Commission is in the unique position of being the only historical organization devoted to saving the heritage of the City of St. Cloud as defined by the city boundaries. Other organizations, including the Stearns History Museum, incorporate St. Cloud in their scope but focus on a broader geographic region. Additionally, neighborhood organizations within St. Cloud, such as the St. Cloud Historic and Neighborhood Preservation Association (SCHNPA), protect the history of the neighborhoods. Only the St. Cloud Heritage Preservation Commission preserves the history for the entire city. This gives the HPC the opportunity to not only preserve St. Cloud's built environment, but also to play a vital role in preserving the urban history that the buildings represent.

Based on the Phase I Analysis of existing materials, key person interviews and staff consultation, it became clear that the HPC faces three challenges regarding its image with the public:

- Overall lack of information about the benefits of historic preservation in general and the HPC in particular
- Over-emphasis on preserving the architecture of the buildings rather than the history they represent
- Residual negative perception of the HPC from the St. John Cantius designation attempt.



During the key person interviews, we discovered that the general public is frequently unaware of the HPC, its programs or its processes. Although St. Cloud residents may be cognizant of historic districts, most have no knowledge of the organization that oversees the districts. Frequently, even property owners in historic districts are unaware of the HPC or the design review steps necessary to renovate their buildings.

Part of the reason that the general public lacks awareness of the HPC and its mission is the fact that the HPC is focused almost exclusively on architectural preservation. Indeed, the Heritage Preservation Commission's mission calls for it to "recognize and protect buildings and sites that reflect significant elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political, visual, or architectural history." As the mission implies, however, the buildings are symbols of the many historical aspects of the community of St. Cloud. Each building tells a story of a person, an event, or a historical era that contribute to a common identity for the citizens of St. Cloud. Because the HPC interacts only with citizens who own or work on historic property, they miss an opportunity to make people care about historic preservation by helping them care about the history behind the buildings.

Finally, the citizens of St. Cloud have mixed perceptions about the HPC. Groups that have actually had interaction with the HPC, including architects and commercial property owners, had a favorable perception of the Commission. However, groups that only dealt peripherally with the Commission, including the Central Minnesota Builders Association and certain neighborhood associations, were negatively influenced by rumors and innuendo and consequently had a poor opinion of the HPC.

The St. John Cantius designation attempt dramatically impacted the Heritage Preservation Commission's public image. Members of the neighborhood associations who had no previous opinion about the HPC were negatively influenced by the controversy and the public hearings. City Council's failure to support the HPC in establishing the historic district further undermined the Heritage Preservation Commission's community standing. The most prevalent criticism of the HPC was that the Commission didn't have any proof to support its claims of long-term economic benefits. This led opponents of the St. John Cantius designation to accuse the HPC of being "all regulation and no benefit."

The current situation provides the St. Cloud HPC with an excellent opportunity to educate the public about the benefits of historic preservation and to re-define its role in preservation in St. Cloud. This Community Education and Marketing Plan will recommend that the HPC re-establish itself as an organization that preserves historic *communities*, not just old buildings. Buildings are symbols of the city's history, and it is the stories behind the buildings that evoke interest and emotion from the general public. In order to counter the perception that the HPC is "all regulation and no benefit," the Commission must clearly communicate the benefits of saving the old buildings *and* the history they represent. By promoting community history in conjunction with preserving the built environment, the HPC is able to offer a significant benefit to the citizens of St. Cloud without implementing costly and impractical city programs.

III. Marketing Objectives

Based on the Phase I Analysis of the Heritage Preservation Commission's existing materials, key person interviews, discussion with staff and the situation analysis, three primary marketing objectives became clear. They are:



- Raise community awareness of the Heritage Preservation Commission, its purpose and its process
- Educate the general public about the benefits of historic preservation in St. Cloud
- Establish the HPC as a vital resource for community preservation and identity

IV. Target Audiences

The HPC has several target audiences. Some of these audiences have no experience with the HPC and several have some interaction with the HPC but would benefit from ongoing communication efforts.

- General Public
- St. Cloud Area Association of Realtors
- Historic Property Owners
- Central Minnesota Builders Association
- City Council
- Media

V. Strategies and Tactics

The following strategies and tactics are recommended as the most effective ways to achieve the stated marketing objectives.

- Strategy: Create a recognizable brand identity for the HPC

A recognizable brand identity will give credit to the HPC for the information it already makes available to the public, and will enhance the HPC's image and reinforce the organization's identity.

- Tactics:
 - Design an identity package for the HPC. Package will include a new logo, letterhead stationery, and website banner
 - Graphic design will build on pre-existing identities associated with the City of St. Cloud, including the Granite City, the Mississippi River, and the historic districts themselves
 - HPC will use the new logo and graphic identity in all printed materials
 - The City of St. Cloud could provide name tags with new logo for HPC commissioners to wear during HPC meetings and official events to reinforce the HPC identity
 - Planning Department will revise all HPC publications, such as district maps, guidelines and fact sheets to reflect the new identity



- HPC will launch the new identity at an event following an HPC meeting. Invite realtors, property owners, the media, CMBA representatives, City Council members and key opinion leaders. Have a reception in the Council chambers with refreshments. Prominently display the new logo on the screen in the chambers and on tent cards. Possibly pass out swag such as mugs or key chains with the new logo on it
- Strategy: Position the HPC as the guardian and repository for neighborhood-based history

By positioning the HPC as the primary guardian for neighborhood-based history, the Commission's efforts on behalf of historic preservation will be better received by the community. The HPC is the primary resource for the history of specific properties and neighborhoods in the core of St. Cloud. Promoting history in conjunction with saving the buildings provides a benefit to the citizens of St. Cloud and shifts the focus away from the regulatory aspects of the HPC by emphasizing the shared community experience symbolized by the buildings.

- Tactics:

- HPC will co-sponsor a community history day in each of the core neighborhoods, in conjunction with the Healthy Neighborhoods Partnership. The HPC will:
 - Publicize the event as a community celebration
 - Organize a picnic or pot luck at a park or community gathering place such as a church or recreation center within each neighborhood to share with neighbors
 - Create a "how-to" sheet to teach historic homeowners how to research their homes
 - Encourage residents in the neighborhood to bring the history of their home to the event
 - Have banners at the event with the new HPC logo
 - Work with local restaurants and spas to donate gift certificates as prizes for people who have the most thorough history
 - Structure as an annual event
- Co-sponsor annual neighborhood house tours
 - Although Southside already organizes a tour, HPC can provide volunteer tour guides and logistical support
 - Organize tours of Pantown, Barden Park and the Commercial Historic District



- Offer sponsorship opportunities to St. Cloud businesses interested in reaching a real estate market, such as Wells Fargo, Qwest, or other businesses
- When HPC sponsors tours jointly with a neighborhood association, have HPC logo listed on all marketing materials
- Insert a “Preservation Update” column in the Stearns History Museum’s member newsletter once a quarter
 - Feature new logo at the top of each column
 - Give a preservation update to museum members and keep them apprised of renovations and restorations that have been approved by the Commission
 - This allows the HPC to reach a broad audience of citizens predisposed to having an interest in local history
- Modify the Century Homes Recognition program
 - Remove all costs to homeowners for plaques by finding businesses that will sponsor the costs
 - Allow homeowners to apply for the Century Homes designation twice a year to increase applications and media opportunities
 - Send a press release to all local media highlighting Century Homes
- Media Relations
 - Establish ongoing relationship with *St. Cloud Times* reporters
 - Coordinate with Bill Morgan to provide monthly feature story to *St. Cloud Times* under the auspices of Bill’s role as a member of the HPC
 - Have HPC commissioners and staff write in to the “Our Turn” feature in the *St. Cloud Times* to maintain coverage and awareness
 - Investigate publication opportunities with local and regional magazines
 - Create talking points about historic preservation for HPC commissioners to use when talking to the media
- Strategy: Improve communications between the HPC and its constituencies
 - Tactics:
 - Identify all potential audiences



- Refer to key person interviews to determine primary stakeholders
- Create list of potential audiences and their concerns
- Work with realtors to more effectively communicate with historic home owners
 - Continue work with the St. Cloud Area Association of Realtors to offer continuing education classes
 - Provide a historic district information packet to realtors so that they can convey to potential home buyers the benefits of owning a historic home
 - Create an information packet for homeowners that realtors can give to them at closing, which would include a detailed explanation of the benefits of owning a historic home and the homeowner's responsibilities
 - Find funding sponsors, perhaps banks or real estate companies, to defray costs of printing packets
- Create a quarterly newsletter to communicate directly with all historic property owners
 - Mail newsletter to all residents and property owners within historic districts
 - Newsletter will contain information regarding renovations that have been approved, changes that can be expected in the neighborhoods, Century Home designations, upcoming events and tours
 - Highlight preservation success stories and photos
 - Newsletter will be a forum to update property owners on changes in design guidelines, new processes and other city procedures
 - Send copy of newsletter to City Council representative for each historic district
- Involve St. Cloud State University Community Studies Program with HPC programs
 - Offer internships for students to get involved with HPC
 - Have interns do research for HPC publications and workshops
 - Invite Community Studies faculty and students to HPC events
 - Meet with Community Studies faculty to explore more cooperative opportunities



- Create an interactive HPC website
 - Include information about design guidelines, the design review process and links to the zoning department and permit applications
 - Website will contain detailed maps of each historic district, including Adobe files of the walking tour maps
 - Residents and property owners will be able to find design review application forms, historic designation forms, Frequently Asked Questions and a series of “How to” sheets regarding permitting and design review
- Media Relations
 - Create press kits on the Heritage Preservation Commission, including a fact sheet on the commission, a backgrounder, a synopsis of important HPC decisions and bios of the commissioners
 - Maintain relationship with *St. Cloud Times* reporters by sending press releases about HPC events and decisions
 - Invite reporters and editors to HPC events and meetings where the commission will discuss monumental decisions
- Strategy: Establish the HPC as the ultimate community resource for information and guidance on neighborhood preservation and development
 - Tactics:
 - Educate the general public, especially residents of core neighborhoods, about the benefits of historic preservation
 - Create a booklet entitled “Economic Benefits of Historic Preservation”
 - Include regional and national data on historic preservation
 - Use statistics on heritage tourism and the impact on St. Cloud to show the commercial benefits of preservation
 - Work with the CMBA to gather information about master craftspeople who specialize in historic preservation and benefits to the building industry
 - Create reference materials for historic property owners
 - Develop a community resource sheet, including information on finding building histories, location of building records, city agencies with building information



- Create a “how-to” sheet on writing the history of a historic home
- In conjunction with St. Cloud State University Community Studies program, sponsor a seminar on researching a historic home
- Create annual Historic Preservation Awards sponsored by the HPC
 - Host awards every year in May to coincide with the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s “Preservation Month”
 - Have four categories for awards—Adaptive Reuse, New Construction in a Historic District, Rehabilitation, and Overall Historic Preservation
 - Present the Century Homes designations at the awards ceremony
 - Publicize awards by sending nomination forms to HPC mailing list and residents in historic districts
 - Increase opportunities for media coverage by putting a reporter on the awards committee
- Revise the “Frequently Asked Questions” sheet to provide more information on the both the *process* and the *benefits* of historic preservation
 - Highlight the fact that most building materials required by the HPC are readily available from local building companies
 - Explain that HPC approval pertains only to the exterior of the building
 - Include questions about the long-term and short-term benefits of historic preservation
- Use website as a source of information for all aspects of preservation
 - Have a calendar of HPC meetings and a step-by-step timeline for property owners wanting to renovate their buildings.
 - Include a page of renovation and restoration ideas
 - Create a page that lists success stories in preservation throughout Minnesota and the nation
 - Include a link from the HPC website to neighborhood websites that contain listings of community events
 - Have a link between the HPC website and affiliated websites, including the city zoning department, planning department, Downtown Council, Stearns History Museum, the St. Cloud Convention and Visitor’s Bureau



- Include links to regional and national preservation websites such as the Minnesota Historical Society, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Park Service
- Provide information on federal tax credits
 - Sponsor a quarterly or semi-annual seminar on federal tax credits
 - Outline tax credit benefits and help people with the process
 - Provide a list of names of accountants and architects who understand the process and can help property owners
 - Have specialists available at the seminar to assist residents in filling out the necessary paperwork
- Advocacy
 - Act as an advocate for state and federal preservation policy
 - Lobby elected state officials to revive the “This Old House” law and include updates on lobbying efforts in quarterly newsletter and on the website
 - Include in newsletter information about how to contact state representatives about passing legislation that is sympathetic to historic preservation
- Media Relations
 - Position Planning Department staff and HPC Commissioners as experts in historic preservation and development
 - Create a press release template for Planning Department to send out whenever the HPC approves a newsworthy renovation to a building, crediting the property owner, architect, builder, and HPC for saving a piece of St. Cloud’s history

VI. Budget Considerations

The strategies outlined in this marketing plan are designed to be simple, straightforward, and relatively inexpensive. They can be implemented with a minimal out-of-pocket cost to the City of St. Cloud, the Planning Department, and the Heritage Preservation Commission. The design of the logo and identity package is included in the contract with Grasshopper Communications. There will be some additional city staff time required to get the programs up and running, but many of the programs entail one-time-only research and set-up. The website design can be done in-house with city facilities. The ongoing communication functions can be delegated among the city staff.

A few programs, especially the “Economic Benefits” brochure, the Century Homes plaques, and the packets for realtors and home buyers in historic districts, may require



additional funding. These items present excellent sponsorship opportunities because they reach a relatively broad audience. Potential sponsors include:

- Wells Fargo or other banks that provide mortgage and construction loans
- Large local businesses that want to be affiliated with the history of the area
- Real estate companies

VII. Conclusion

The St. Cloud Heritage Preservation Commission has a timely opportunity to expand its public image and role in community cohesion and historic preservation advocacy. By implementing this Community Education and Marketing Plan, the Heritage Preservation Commission can meet the objectives of raising community awareness of the benefits of historic preservation, increasing community support of the HPC, and establishing the HPC as an important resource for community history and preservation. These objectives allow the HPC to provide a significant community benefit to the citizens of St. Cloud.