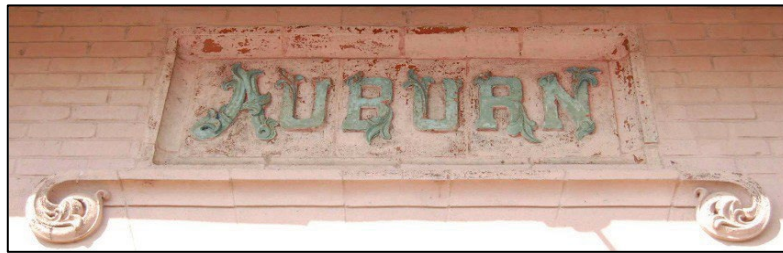


CHAPTER 9: HISTORIC PRESERVATION

9.0 Auburn Historic Preservation Commission

The City of Auburn has a rich and diverse history. Organized efforts to preserve locally significant historic and cultural resources allow the City to recognize and protect its past, while simultaneously planning for future development and growth. Preservation planning, or a lack thereof, can have a significant impact not only on aesthetic appearance, but on the unique sense of place created by a community. The Auburn Historic Preservation Commission (AHPC), the City's governing body concerning issues of preservation, was created on March 2, 1999 with the passage of Ordinance 1818 by City Council. The Commission is comprised of seven members, and is intended to meet several essential needs. For the community, it assures that Auburn's historic resources are maintained in a manner appropriate to the City's heritage. For property owners, residents and contractors, it provides primary guidance in the planning and design of projects that are sympathetic to the special character of the historic district; and that will, in turn, assure that property values are maintained and enhanced.



9.1 North College Historic District

On June 21, 2005 the City Council passed Ordinance 2302, which gave the AHPC the task of recommending designation of historic districts and properties in the city. These recommendations are presented to the Council, which then reviews them for final action. The City's first locally designated district, the North College Historic District, contains 37 parcels north of downtown Auburn and was officially designated by Ordinance 2377 on March 21, 2006. All of the properties in the North College Historic District lie within the boundaries of the Old Main and Church Street District, a National Register of Historic Places District designated in 1978. Old Main and Church Streets were prominent thoroughfares in the City's early history, and were renamed North College and North Gay Streets in the late-nineteenth century. The National Register District is slightly larger than the locally designated North College District, and includes several additional properties along Bragg Avenue, Warrior Court, the east side of Gay Street, and one on Gay Street south of the railroad tracks. An extensive inventory of contributing and non-contributing structures in the Old Main and Church Street District was conducted in October 1978. A similar survey of historic and cultural resources of the North College District was undertaken in February 2006.

The District has a dual significance - historic and architectural. Historically, the District is important in its association with the development of Auburn, from the agrarian days of the Creek Indians and early planters, to the present day educational and economic community. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the University has been a significant influence in the economic and educational growth of the Auburn and the State of Alabama. The district housed many of the school's early leaders, as well as other persons whose contributions to the state, region, and nation have been historically

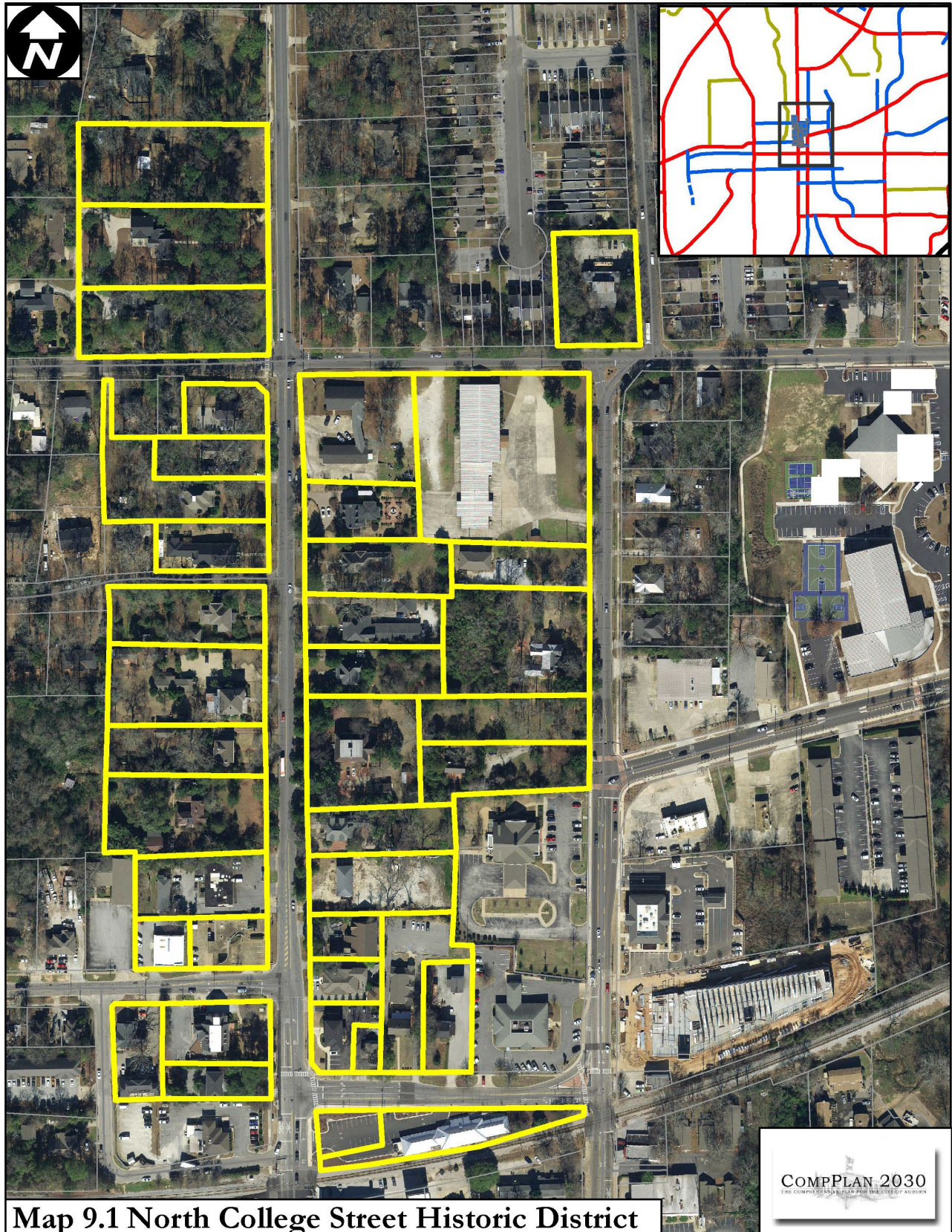
important. The architectural character of the district reflects and juxtaposes the taste and lifestyle of distinct groups of people whom, at different periods in the town's growth, comprised a significant portion of its cultural and economic base. Contributing buildings within the district were constructed between 1848 and 1937. Within a single century, the economic power base of the community shifted from the strict authoritarian structure of the plantation period, so closely reflected in the severe and simple lines of the Greek Revival style, to the post-Civil War break-up of the old economic and social system represented by the fragmentation characteristic of the Victorian style.

Auburn, Alabama, was originally land owned by the Creek Indian Nation. The Creeks ceded their land to the federal government in 1832. Indians were allowed to claim tracts of land. These tracts were later obtained by the white settlers, and the town of Auburn was incorporated in 1836. Auburn was the site of a pair of nineteenth century academies for sons and daughters of area planters and religious leaders. In 1856, the East Alabama Male College (now Auburn University) was established in Auburn as one of the first colleges chartered by the state of Alabama. The school became the state's land grant college in 1872 (at that time it was renamed the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Alabama). The college assisted in making the state's languishing agricultural industry more profitable and thus played a very significant role in resuscitating the state's economy, which had been all but destroyed by the Civil War. Closely associated with the development of the University were those academic leaders and their students who lived in the area now designated as the North College Historic District.



**Corner of North College Street and
Drake Avenue in the North College
Historic District**

For all properties within the locally designated North College Historic District, including non-contributing structures, any exterior work visible from a public right-of-way in front of the structure is subject to review by the Auburn Historic Preservation Commission (AHPC), to ensure that the investments of all the property owners in the historic district are protected and enhanced. Any major work to a structure within the district, including new construction, changes to a building footprint, or significant changes to landscape features are also reviewed by the AHPC. Minor work is reviewed by Commission staff and approved by an officer of the AHPC. Any repair or displacement where there is a change in the design, materials, or general appearance is defined as an alteration and requires a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the Commission before work may proceed. Routine maintenance is not subject to review. The review process by the Commission and staff is intended to be of assistance to the property owner to find reasonable and appropriate ways to ensure that the scale and character of the neighborhood are reinforced and enhanced by any alteration. The Commission may approve, approve with conditions, defer, or deny any application for a COA.



Map 9.1 North College Street Historic District

To provide specific guidance regarding practical review and approval of applications for COAs, the Commission has prepared and adopted design review standards for the North College Historic District. The standards are influenced by the community character and distinguishing design elements determined by substantial surveys of the contributing historic structures within the District. The standards apply to rehabilitation, alterations, additions, new construction, and elements of public streets and common open spaces. Each stage of development and construction is guided by the standards, from site design to building materials. The standards are necessarily general so that they may be used by the Commission as a guide in a variety of circumstances. The Commission strives to apply these standards as they review each COA application on a case-by-case basis, giving full consideration to the unique circumstances and characteristics presented.

9.2 National Register of Historic Places

The National Register is a list maintained by the National Park Service of preservation-worthy historic places across the United States. To be considered eligible for the National Register, a property or district must pass a rigorous evaluation of its age, integrity, and significance. Nominations are submitted by individual property owners or preservation advocates to the State Historic Preservation Office, which notifies affected property owners, solicits public comment, and makes a recommendation to the National Park Service for final review and determination. Listing on the National Register not only provides formal recognition of a property and/or district's historic and cultural significance, it also provides access to a number of incentives, including federal and state tax benefits. The following properties and districts in Auburn are on the National Register:

- **Auburn Players Theater-** 139 South College Street. Built in 1851, the Theater is the oldest public structure in the City. The building was a Civil War hospital, YMCA headquarters, and temporary classroom space for the University prior to serving as the playhouse for the University's Department of Theater for forty years. It now operates as the Auburn University Chapel. It was listed May 22, 1973.
- **Auburn University Historic District-** A collection of historic buildings dating from the 1850's to the early 1900's centered around Samford Hall on the Auburn University campus. The district was listed June 3, 1976.
- **Cullars Rotation-** Woodfield Drive. In 1911, the Alabama Agricultural and Experiment Station at Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University) received state funding to conduct fertilizer experiments on farmers' fields throughout Alabama. One of those fields was near Auburn on the farm of J.A. Cullars. Today, the "Cullars Rotation" (circa 1911) is the only one of more than 200 original on-farm experiments that has been maintained. The Rotation was listed on April 18, 2003
- **Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church-** East Thach Avenue. The church was built of hand hewn logs from the nearby Frazer Plantation by newly freed black men and women circa 1870. It was listed April 21, 1975. The Church is now owned by the Auburn Unitarian Universalist Fellowship.
- **Noble Hall-** 1433 Lee Road 97. This Greek Revival plantation home was built by Addison Frazer circa 1852. The impressive center of a 2,000 acre plantation was constructed using slave labor. It was the first historic structure in Lee County to be listed on the National Register on March 24, 1972.
- **Old Main and Church Street Historic District-** A collection of historic buildings north of downtown Auburn listed October 19, 1978.

- **Old Rotation-** Lem Morrison Drive. The Old Rotation is a soil fertility experiment on the Auburn University campus that began in 1896. It is the third oldest ongoing field crop experiment in the United States and the oldest continuous cotton experiment in the world. It was listed February 14, 1988.
- **Old President's Mansion-** 277 West Thach Avenue. Known today as Cater Hall, the building was erected in 1915 and served as the home of the University President until 1938. The Old President's Mansion was listed August 29, 2003.
- **Scott-Yarbrough House-** 101 Debardeleben Street. The house was constructed in 1847 by Colonel Nathaniel J. Scott, brother-in-law of Auburn's founder, Judge John J. Harper. Scott referred to the Greek Revival house as "Pebble Hill." It was listed April 16, 1975. In 1985, the property was gifted to Auburn University and is the location for the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities.
- **U.S. Post Office-** 144 Tichenor Avenue. The post office was completed in 1933 and is an example of the "Starved-Classical" style typical of the Federal Depression architecture. The building now serves as City Hall. It was listed June 21, 1983.
- **Sunny Slope-** 1031 South College Street. Built circa 1857, Sunny Slope was the childhood home of Governor James Samford. Sunny Slope was originally a 2,500 acre plantation and served as a Confederate encampment and training ground. The extant Greek Revival home was listed on March 12, 2009.



Sunny Slope

9.3 State Historic Preservation Office

The State of Alabama's Historic Preservation Office, the Alabama Historical Commission (AHC), operates a number of statewide preservation programs, including the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage. The Alabama Register, like its counterpart at the national level, recognizes buildings, sites, structures, and districts of historic value. The Alabama Register also includes many properties that may not be eligible for the National Register, including cemeteries, churches, and moved and reconstructed buildings. The Alabama Register is an additional means of bringing recognition to an historic site or structure. The following properties in Auburn are on the Alabama Register:

- **Auburn Depot-** 120-124 Mitcham Avenue. Built in 1904, listed January 25, 1977. The Depot underwent substantial restoration and adapted for reuse as the Depot Restaurant which opened in 2016.
- **Baptist Hill Cemetery-** South Dean Road between Old Mill Road and McKinley Avenue. Baptist Hill was Auburn's first separate black community cemetery. The land was given to Ebenezer Baptist Church in the 1870's. Baptist Hill was listed January 12, 1994.
- **Halliday-Cary-Pick House-** 360 North College Street. Two-story Greek Revival raised cottage built circa 1848, listed June 19, 1976. This property was gifted to Auburn University in 2011 and is the headquarters for Cary Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies.

- **Lane House**- 712 Sanders Street. Lane House, built in 1853, was home to many Auburn University notables. It was purchased in 1960 for the Auburn Woman’s Club, and was moved to its current location in 1962. The original location of the home was on the corner of Thach Avenue and South College Street. Lane House was listed December 19, 1991.
- **“Old Nancy”**- 350-352 Mell Street (behind Corley Building on AU campus). “Old Nancy” was the affectionate nickname J.W. Dupree gave to the steam-powered tractor he purchased in 1905 for use at his Lee County sawmill. The tractor was moved to the Auburn University campus in 1974 and was restored by the Student Branch of the American Society of Agricultural Engineers. The historic piece of machinery was listed April 14, 1978. In 2019, the tractor was relocated to the Museum of East Alabama.
- **Pine Hill Cemetery**- 303 Armstrong Street (Armstrong Street & Hare Avenue). The oldest cemetery in the City, Pine Hill was established in 1837. Auburn founder, Judge John Harper, donated six acres to the new town to be used as a community burying ground. The cemetery was listed January 31, 1978.
- **“Pinetucket” (Foster Home)**-747 Wire Road. Greek Revival home built in 1850, listed May 25, 1977.
- **Sunny Slope**- 1031 South College Street. Built circa 1857, listed June 27, 2007. In 2016, a restoration of the property was completed and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute began using the site for events.
- **Webster House**- 2484 AL Highway 14 West. Greek Revival home built c. 1832, listed May 28, 2009.

AHC jointly administers the Certified Local Government program in coordination with the National Park Service. Achieving Certified Local Government (CLG) status is a significant step for municipalities in strengthening their preservation efforts. CLGs are considered by the AHC for small matching grants from a pool of funds specifically designated for CLG sub-grant projects—at least 10% of the State’s annual Historic Preservation Fund. CLGs promote local government partnership in national and state preservation programs. Auburn achieved its CLG status on September 27, 2001.

The Alabama Historical Commission also serves as the initial body of review for National Register and National Historic Landmark nominations in the state-- a liaison to the U.S. Department of the Interior. Other endeavors of the AHC include the annual “Places in Peril” list of a select number of threatened historic sites in the state, and the historical marker program. In 2010, the Auburn Depot was placed on the Alabama “Places in Peril” list. As a result of the listing, the City of Auburn purchased the property and worked with a developer to restore the building as a restaurant, ensuring the building’s future as part of the history of Auburn. The AHC’s extensive archives, located in Montgomery, may be viewed by the public by appointment.

9.4 Local Preservation Organizations

In addition to the public oversight of the Auburn Historic Preservation Commission, the City has two active citizen-led preservation organizations. The Auburn Heritage Association (AHA) was established in 1974. It is a corporation operated by a Board of Directors elected annually. The organization is dedicated to the identification and preservation of items and material of historical significance in Auburn and its surrounding environment.¹ AHA collects historic artifacts and

¹ <http://auburnheritageassoc.org/>

memorabilia, educates the public and stimulates local interest in preservation by assisting in preservation projects, and places markers at historic sites and structures to recognize their significance. To date, the Association has erected 14 markers in cooperation with the governing historical agencies in the area. Since its inception, AHA has purchased and restored several historic properties, including Pebble Hill and Ebenezer Baptist Church. The organization moved the Nunn-Winston House to Kiesel Park, and it successfully nominated many properties to the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage and the National Register of Historic Places.

The Auburn Preservation League (APL) aspires to foster historic preservation and to promote cooperation in combining the resources of local government, organizations, associations, businesses, and citizens in order to enhance the quality and beauty of the Auburn community². The corporation is led by a Board of Directors and holds monthly meetings open to the public. APL works to promote and secure funding for local preservation projects, provide a forum for cooperative preservation efforts, and foster community sentiment for restoration and/or adaptive reuse of local historic structures and sites. Like the Auburn Heritage Association, APL welcomes any and all members of the public interested in preserving local heritage to join.

9.5 Analysis of Existing Conditions

During the comprehensive planning process, City staff, officials, and citizens identified a number of issues and needs related to historic preservation that should be addressed as Auburn progresses toward 2030. The need for greater recognition of historic resources, increased collaboration between concerned parties, and the consideration of rural land preservation were taken into account as well.

9.5.1 Zoning

Zoning within the City should be conducive to the adaptive reuse of historic buildings. Some zoning requirements may present additional, and perhaps unnecessary, obstacles to the rehabilitation of historic resources. Regulations should be reflective of the City's desire to promote the wise stewardship of its historic structures. Zoning regulations should not obstruct the pursuance of adaptive reuse as a viable development strategy, and should be flexible enough to accommodate plans for preservation and rehabilitation.

Many of the historic residential properties surrounding the urban core fall within the Urban Neighborhood zoning districts. These Districts are intended to provide for mixed land use at varying densities to meet the demands exerted by Auburn University, and to promote the conversion, redevelopment, and growth of residential, commercial, and institutional uses adjacent to the University campus and the urban core. The UN Districts are development and redevelopment Districts. The ability to redevelop parcels in these Districts with multi-family dwellings of varying densities may very well be in conflict with the preservation of historic, single-family residences; however, the UN districts do require greater setbacks and limits the height of buildings that abut single-family residential neighborhoods. Preservation and rehabilitation of historic buildings should be further incentivized to become a competitive alternative to demolition and redevelopment.

² <http://www.auburnpreservationleague.org//frmMissionStatement.aspx>

9.5.2 Public Opinion

The term “preservation” generates mixed reactions in the community. Some historic homeowners may associate organized efforts in preservation with a loss in property rights or an increase in property taxes. Preservation may also be viewed by some as an impediment to development. While there are various disadvantages to historic designation, there are many advantages as well. Designation is a means of protecting community character and the investments of homeowners and residents. It encourages more compatible design and can be a tool for neighborhood revitalization. Historic designation increases a community’s sense of pride and awareness. The benefits of preservation, economic and social need to be fully communicated so that residents and officials can make informed decisions about the future built environment of the City. Preservation must be shown to be compatible with growth and progress.

9.5.3 Recognition of Historic Resources

There are a number of opportunities in the City for future historic designations of districts and specific sites. Historic structures that are vacant or in need of repair that have not been placed under the protection of local designation and design standards are threatened by demolition, neglect, and inappropriate redevelopment. A substantial architectural survey of Payne Street has been completed, and there has been some interest expressed in creating a local historic district in the vicinity. Thus far, however, there has not been major support documented by the property owners in this area for the establishment of a district.

The creation of a local register of historic places would allow for an additional means of recognition. Unlike local historic district and site designation, properties on the register would not be subject to design review. The register would acknowledge the historical significance of a structure or landscape to the City, without placing any restrictions on the future development of the site or building. While a register would not offer any additional means of protection, it would serve as a method of showing appreciation.

At a minimum, historic resources in the City need to be identified and recorded. Without a thorough survey of all of the historic resources within the City, including those outside of locally designated historic districts, community history and character are vulnerable. Identification and documentation of historic resources can improve the City’s capacity to quickly recover and rebuild in the unfortunate event of a natural disaster.

9.5.4 Communication and Collaboration

Local citizen-led preservation organizations and the Auburn Historic Preservation Commission could benefit from increased communication and collaborative efforts in the City. In addition, local preservation efforts should draw on the resources of Auburn University, including knowledge base, funding, and alumni support. The University’s active Alumni Association has a current membership of 43,000 people across the country that care about the history and future of the community.



9.5.5 Rural and Farmland Preservation

As Auburn continues to grow toward 2030, much of the surrounding rural land subsumed by the growth boundary will change dramatically in character. This rural land is an important part of the cultural landscape of the historically agrarian-based area. Agriculture has played a fundamental role in the history of the State of Alabama and the City of Auburn. Preserving prime agricultural land not only serves to preserve history, it also allows communities to sustain local agricultural economies and maintains the environmental and aesthetic benefits associated with these lands. Agricultural lands contribute much more in revenue than they require in public service costs and provide environmental values³. Special consideration should be given to rural and farmland preservation as Auburn develops.



Auburn Depot, 120 Mitcham Avenue – 2006



Auburn Depot, 120 Mitcham Avenue – 2016

³ American Farmland Trust. Saving American Farmland: What Works. Washington, DC: AFT, 1997

9.6 Goals, Objectives, and Policies

HP 1: Make preservation and the adaptive reuse of historic buildings a viable and desirable alternative to demolition and redevelopment.

HP 1.1: Incentivize preservation to increase the economic benefits.

HP 1.1.1: Publicize and advocate for the use of the Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit and the Alabama Property Tax Reduction for historic commercial properties.

HP 1.1.2: Assist local historic property owners with the application process for both the Federal and State tax incentive programs.

HP 1.1.3: Research tools that may be used to acquire threatened historic properties and to provide small, low-interest loans to historic property owners in the City to make repairs, improvements, or for general maintenance.

HP 1.1.4: Pursue the possibility of implementing a tax assessment freeze for city property taxes on certified historic properties for a period of approximately ten years to encourage rehabilitation and reinvestment in historic buildings.

HP 1.1.5: Pursue other incentives for rehabilitation and preservation projects.

HP 1.2: Ensure zoning is conducive to preservation and adaptive reuse.

HP 1.2.1: As the urban core expands, prioritize the protection and adaptive reuse of historically significant single-family homes in surrounding zoning districts that allow for high-density redevelopment.

HP 2: Increase local support for the wise stewardship of the City's historic resources and preservation of Auburn's community character.

HP 2.1: Improve preservation's public image among Auburn residents.

HP 2.1.1: Promote the economic and social benefits of preservation through literature and lectures free and open to the public.

HP 2.1.2: Provide a rational cost-benefit analysis of local historic districts and site designations so that residents can more clearly understand the implications, both positive and negative, and make informed decisions about the future character of the community.

HP 2.2: Increase communication and collaboration between multiple preservation entities in the community.

- HP 2.2.1:** Collaborate with the Auburn Heritage Association and the Auburn Preservation League to provide greater opportunities for preservation education and assistance to citizens, publicize preservation successes in the community, and draw attention to threatened local historic resources.
 - HP 2.2.2:** Encourage and work with Auburn University's Campus Planning Office to incorporate a preservation element into the University's comprehensive planning efforts.
 - HP 2.2.3:** Draw on University resources to assist in planning efforts – including funding, knowledge base, and alumni support.
- HP 3:** Protect Auburn's significant historic resources within context for future generations to appreciate.
- HP 3.1:** Provide greater recognition of historic structures.
 - HP 3.1.1:** Create a local register of historic places in addition to the Alabama and National Registers.
 - HP 3.1.2:** Conduct a thorough survey of all historic structures within the City. This survey, and some element of preservation planning, should be incorporated into any future disaster response and hazard mitigation planning efforts.
 - HP 3.1.3:** Continue to pursue the possibility of a local historic district within the general vicinity of Gay and Payne Streets to protect historically significant single-family homes near the urban core.
 - HP 3.2:** Achieve a balance as the City grows between new development and rural land/open space preservation to maintain an element of the community's rural and agricultural heritage.
 - HP 3.2.1:** Promote the donation of preservation easements to organizations like the Alabama Historical Commission to protect historically important land areas. Provide information about the tax benefits of donating a preservation easement to landowners.