

---

# State of the City Preservation Report 2010

## Submitted by the Portland Historic Landmarks Commission

January 27, 2010

### Responsibilities of the Historic Landmarks Commission

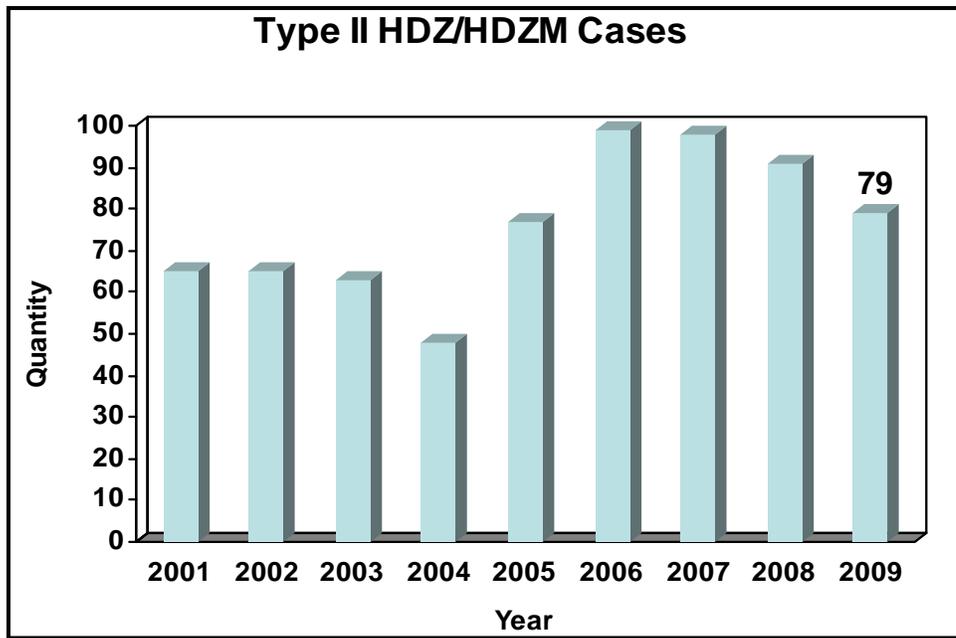
The Historic Landmarks Commission provides leadership and expertise on maintaining and enhancing Portland's historic and architectural heritage. The Commission identifies and protects buildings and other properties that have historic or cultural significance or special architectural merit. The Commission provides advice on historic preservation matters, and coordinates historic preservation programs in the City. The Commission is also actively involved in the development of design guidelines for historic design districts.

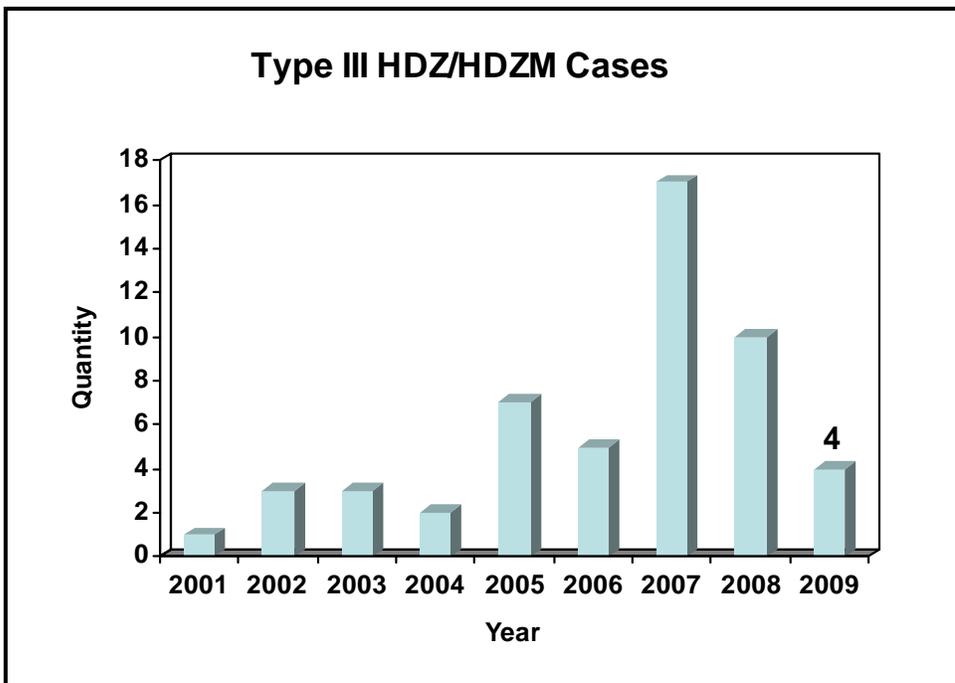
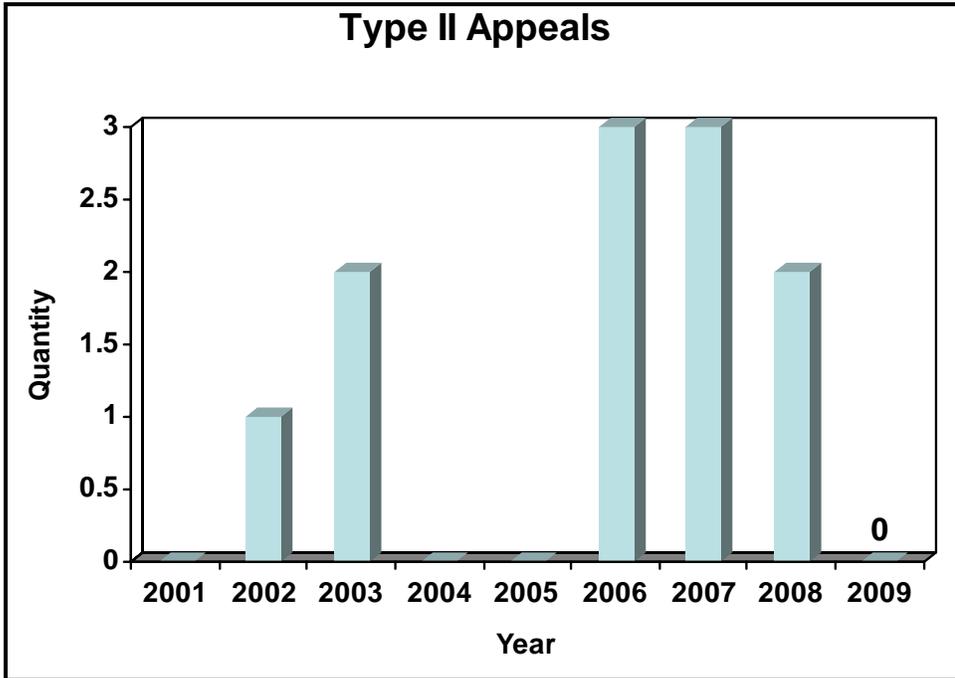
### Landmark Commission Activity Summary

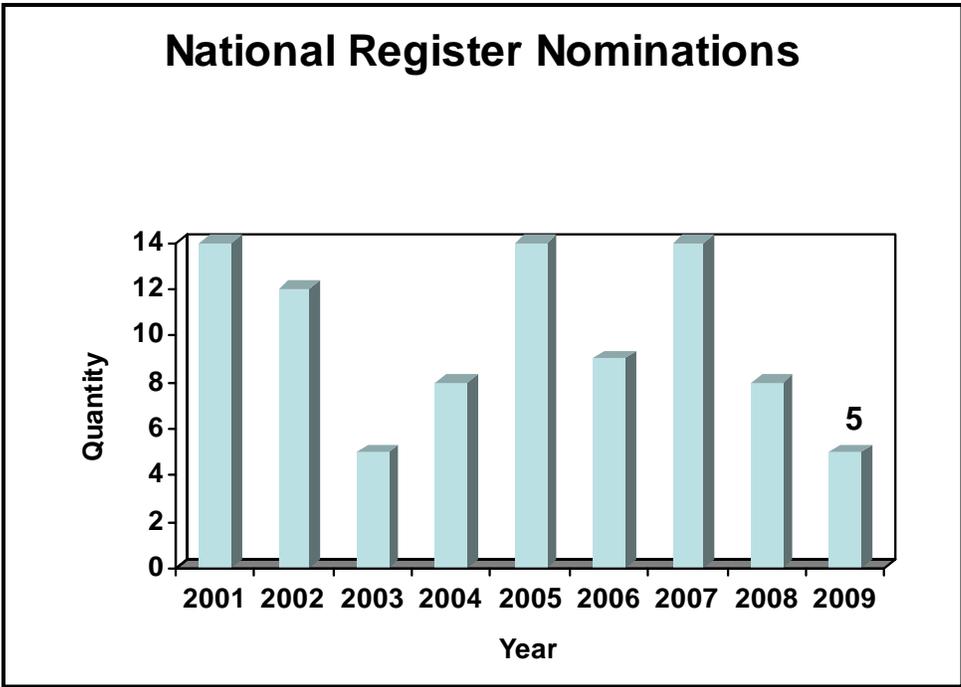
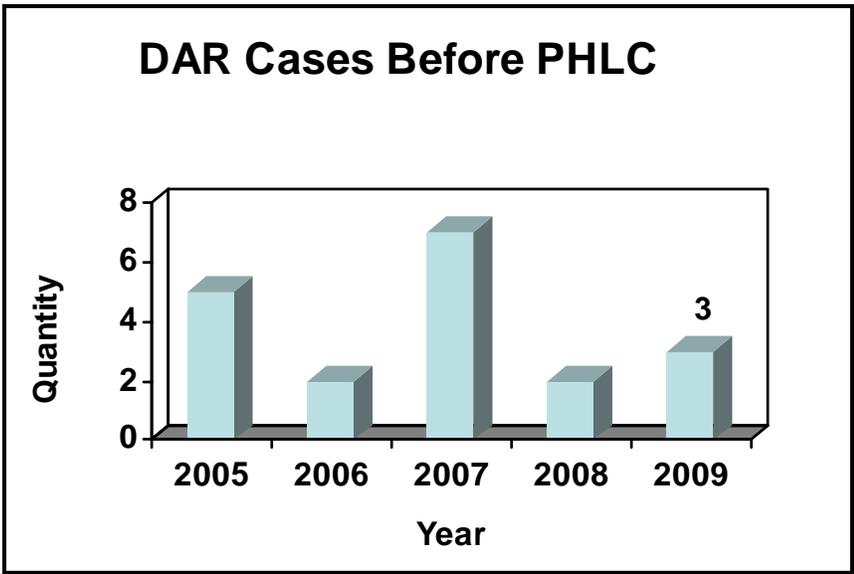
The Commission met 16 times during 2009 and conducted a Retreat on 6/10/09.

Additionally, there were twelve briefings that addressed a broad spectrum of topics including murals, streetcar special assessment, Portland Plan and the Oregon Rail Heritage Foundation.

Of the four Type III Historic Design Review decisions rendered, three of the projects were located within the Skidmore/Old Town National Landmark District. They included the Globe Hotel, the Made In Oregon Sign and the Ankeny Square Restrooms. The only case considered outside the Skidmore/Old Town District was the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Irvington







---

## **Historic Preservation Priorities**

### **I. Sustainable Preservation**

As discussed with you last year, we feel it is critical that historic preservation be recognized as a centerpiece of sustainability and elevated as one of its core principles. The misguided concept of the nobility of destroying historic resources and their embodied energy to make way for new construction that is more energy efficient must be replaced with principles that promote and acknowledge resource efficiencies generated from adaptive reuse through preservation.

As an example outside our boundaries, the long-fought demolition of historic Hillsboro High School was spun in the media as “leaving a green footprint.” The fact that the majority of the demolished century-old building was being recycled argued that this act was both acceptable and sustainable. No mention was made of the squandering of embodied energy or the substantial cultural loss of the building that clearly could have been adaptively re-used.<sup>[1]</sup>

The National Trust has launched a program in Seattle called Preservation Green Lab. Its goal is to coordinate demonstration projects to encourage municipalities to consider the historic preservation of their existing building stock in formulating climate change action plans. Primary objectives are to encourage municipal policies that support adaptive reuse and historic redevelopment of existing buildings as well as educate regarding how existing buildings can be retrofitted to achieve high levels of energy efficiency.

The Historic Landmarks Commission worked proactively to support RICAP 5, while still protecting the design character of our historic districts and we are very pleased with the final product.

Finally, we wish to add that, according to the Portland Daily Journal of Commerce, the current economic downturn is actually propelling renovation as opposed to new construction as the most financially viable means of jumpstarting our local real estate industry. So, this is an opportune time to embrace and encourage historic redevelopment within the construction industry.

### **II. Portland Plan**

With the support of the Landmarks Commission, the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability composed the *Historic Resources Background Report: Key Findings and Recommendations* and submitted it to Portland Plan representatives. This report, prepared by Nicholas Starin and Liza Mickle, recommends the integration of historic resources into the development and implementation of the Portland Plan. Key findings include these principles:

- Historic resources play a vital role in defining Portland’s sense of place and character – they comprise the places where people want to live, work and play.
- Historic preservation principles must be woven into other policy goals—particularly zoning, as density, height and FAR objectives are considered.
- Post-World War II Portland is emerging as the next wave of candidates for historic preservation; we need to inventory them now and be proactive with preservation planning.
- East Portland is underserved by preservation research polices and protections

The Chair of the Landmarks Commission will serve on the Mayor’s Portland Plan Advisory Group to help focus attention on such matters.

---

### III. Historic Resource Inventory

Portland's current such inventory was adopted in 1984 and is highly antiquated and incomplete. We cannot effectively promote preservation policies without first identifying our valued historic resources. Please note that the performance standards for a Certified Local Government (CLG) , of which Portland was designated over 15 years ago oblige Portland to maintain such a survey and inventory and has directed over \$100,000 in federal pass-through funds to implement these and other obligations. Additionally, the Historic Resources Code Amendments, approved by our City Council in 2004, re-affirmed this need. We, once again, ask you to elevate the priority of such an effort.

Related to this topic, we wish to highlight two segments of our community who control multiple historic resources.

1. *Portland Public Schools* is to be congratulated for completion of such an inventory for its stock of one hundred or so very significant historic buildings. This inventory will be crucial to PPS as it formulates its construction and renovation plans for its facilities.
2. *Portland State University*, unfortunately, does not have such an inventory, despite it, too, holding title to many of our community's prized historic resources. Perhaps a member of the Council would assist us in raising the profile of this need with our friends at Portland State.

### IV. Historic Districts

1. *Skidmore/Old Town* — It has now been 15 months since we forwarded to you our proposed Design Guidelines and Cast Iron Resolution for approval and cases continue to be presented to us that must be reviewed in accordance with woefully antiquated guidelines. When will you act to approve our recommendations?
2. *Antiquated Design Guidelines* — There are other historic district design guidelines that are inadequate with which to perform fair and predictable design reviews. The standards for review are low, vague and often not currently reflective of neighborhood interests. Please consider allocating resources for such work in the districts of Lair Hill, Yamhill, Ladd's Addition, East Portland/Grand Avenue and the 13th Avenue Historic District.
3. *Chinatown/Japantown* — As BPS and PDC entertain and financially subsidize development projects in this historic neighborhood, there is looming a substantive threat to the cultural resources in this ten-block neighborhood. Projects are being planned which either require demolition of National Register properties or are of a scale that will permanently threaten the massing and scale of this area. Unfortunately, planning for this neighborhood has demonstrated a lack of coordination between historic district designation and zoning codes focused on density, in addition to a disconnect of objectives between PDC and the Historic Landmarks Commission.

---

4. *Residential Historic Districts* — There are multiple residential neighborhoods, including Irvington, Buckman and Brooklyn, that desire the protection and benefits that go with district nomination to the National Register. However, some sort of financial subsidization is typically needed to make such efforts feasible. We look to Council for matching funding assistance that recognizes this goal as a civic priority. Again, facilitating these types of designations is a CLG obligation as well as a significant furtherance of our City's historic preservation goals.

## **V. Special Assessment**

The State Legislature renewed this tax freeze program with revisions, with the primary change being the reduction from 15 years to 10 years. There are provisions for one renewal term for both commercial and residential properties, although there is a local option to disallow the renewal term for residential buildings. Our understanding is that this Council has taken no action to disallow such renewal and has no such intent, for which we are grateful.

## **VI. Westside/Central City Urban Renewal Area**

We appeared before the task force considering this proposed URA. We explained the importance of TIF funding in historic renovations in gentrifying locations and advocated for inclusion of the historic districts and significant buildings within the final boundary recommendations of the 900 acre study area. Finally and significantly, we challenged the task force to consider adoption of a bold policy that would prohibit outright the use of TIF public funds for the demolition of properties protected by the National Register. We raise that issue to you now—believing strongly that it is a misuse of public money to destroy historic resources that are protected for the public's benefit.

## **VII. Public Commission Cooperation**

One of our goals for 2010 is to promote improved communication between the Landmarks Commission, Design Commission and Planning Commission, as we are being presented more and more matters that overlap the interests of our separate commissions.

While there are provisions for a Planning Commissioner to sit on the other two commissions, it is not practical given the massive time commitment required for such a dual role. The Landmarks Commission leadership will meet with Susan Anderson next month in order to begin that discussion. Additionally, the chairs of the three commissions, as well as staff, have expressed interest in meeting to discuss opportunities for cooperation and improved communication between our respective commissions.

---

## VIII. Budget Request

Last year we requested \$440,000 to be allocated for historic preservation matters that included funding for a new city-wide historic resource inventory as well as matching funds to assist neighborhoods wishing to apply for National Register status. We did not receive any such funding, but all of those same needs remain unfulfilled. We certainly acknowledge the budget crisis the City of Portland has had to endure, however, given the role the Commission can and will play in future preservation as well as sustainability policy and code updates this year, we feel even stronger that our requests merit consideration.

## IX. Threatened Landmark List

1. \* *Centennial Mills* — This substantial resource is threatened by inaction as the elements continue to attack this fragile, neglected property. Additionally, the development plan under consideration demolishes nearly half the complex. We are attempting to schedule a briefing by PDC to be brought current on its status.
2. \* *Skidmore/Old Town* — Proposed Zoning Code Amendments that remain under consideration by Council threaten the loss of National Landmark designation for our city's most important historic commercial district.
3. \* *Union Station* — Lack of funding precludes necessary repairs and maintenance, including structure, windows and roof, of this iconic landmark.
4. *Memorial Coliseum* — The National Register protection offers short-term relief but only a commitment to a long-term use can justify the necessary investment to restore and renovate our newest landmark.
5. *Washington High School* — This treasured icon of the Buckman neighborhood grows more and more derelict as PPS, Portland Parks and Recreation, Buckman Neighborhood Association and PDC explore redevelopment options.
6. *Public Schools with Uncertain Futures* — Jefferson High School, Franklin High School, and Chapman School are representative examples of significant school properties whose lives as schools may be in doubt.
7. \* *Morris Marks House/Dori Court Apartments* — 1134 SW 12th Avenue—Low scale buildings in an area zoned for high rises. Discussions of possible relocation have begun.
8. \* *Brooklyn Roundhouse/Locomotives* — While progress is being made since Council approved a new location for our historic locomotives, the roundhouse at SE 18th & Holgate remains a concern, as will the locomotives until funding is secured.

---

9. \* *Portland Gas and Coke Building* — 1910 icon on St. Helen's Highway south of St John's Bridge is a superfund site.

10. \* *Northwest Cultural Center* — Physical deterioration combined with financially-limited ownership causes us concern.

11. *511 Building/US Custom House* — These GSA properties are physically intact but will have uncertain futures until the schools to which they have been awarded can finance and occupy these landmark gems.

*\*Denotes 2008 Threatened Landmark*

## **X. Historic Preservation Leadership**

We wish to recognize the following people who have earned our gratitude for their significant contribution to the historic preservation field

- *Robert Gerding* — A giant of a developer and a man who passed away last year, redeveloped some of our most significant properties. Evidence of his preservation leadership can be seen in the Armory, Weiden + Kennedy Building and Blitz-Weinhard Brewery.
- *James Hamrick* — The former director of the State Historic Preservation Office and the 2009 recipient of the University of Oregon's First George McMath Award for lifetime achievement in historic preservation.
- *Alfred Staehli* — An architect specializing in historic preservation who volunteered for many years for the Historic Preservation League of Oregon and other historic preservation pursuits; Al died this past year.
- *Peter Meijer Architects* — Gratitude to Peter Meijer and Kristen Minor for their emergency nomination of Memorial Coliseum to the National Register.
- *John Tess* — His immeasurable commitment of personal time made a significant difference in convincing the State Legislature to preserve the Special Assessment Program, albeit in diluted form.
- *Historic Preservation League of Oregon* — Mike Teskey, president, and Peggy Moretti, executive director, have motivated and organized others to support the resurrection of this statewide grass-roots historic preservation organization and its façade easement program.

---

## **XI. 2009 Landmarks/Historic Preservation Successes**

- *Park 19 Apartments* — NW Glisan/19th Avenue
- *Mercy Corps* — renovation/expansion of Packer-Scott Building
- *Memorial Coliseum*— listed on the National Register
- *Ladd Carriage House* — relocated, returned and renovated
- *Yeon Building* — Kudos to Commissioner Leonard (We look forward to its listing on the National Register.)
- *Waterfront Park* — successful relocation of Portland Saturday Market within Skidmore/Old Town
- *PPS Historic Inventory*
- *Meier and Frank renovation* — open for business

## **XII. ORS 358.653**

The recent availability of federal funds for public projects, such as through Go Oregon, triggered SHPO to remind public agencies of ORS 358 653. This statute prescribes that the state and all political subdivisions of the State (including counties, cities, universities, school districts, etc.) must cooperate with SHPO to minimize the impact of construction projects. This statute applies to properties owned by these public entities and applies to historic buildings, which include National Register listed properties as well as properties that could be eligible for such listing.

That eligibility could result simply by being at least 50 years old and retaining historic appearance. Therefore, the breadth of reach is wide. The types of projects considered for this requirement can include full-scale renovations as well as less sweeping changes such as window replacement, roof replacement or new additions.

The consequence for non-compliance is vulnerability to lawsuits by aggrieved parties resulting in project delays and increased costs.

Determination as to impact on current and proposed projects has begun.

---

### **Afterword**

[1] *As Donovan Rypkema, an economist and preservationist, explained in his speech “Sustainability, Smart Growth and Historic Preservation” given at the Historic Districts Council Annual Conference in New York City, on March 10, 2007:*

*Embodied energy is defined as the total expenditure of energy involved in the creation of the building and its constituent materials. When we throw away an historic building, we are simultaneously throwing away the embodied energy incorporated into that*

---

*building. How significant is embodied energy? In Australia, they've calculated that the embodied energy in the*

*existing building stock is equivalent to ten years of the total energy consumption of the entire country. Much of the "green building" movement focuses on the annual energy use of a building. But the energy consumed in the construction of a building is 15 to 30 times the annual energy use.*

*Razing historic buildings results in a triple hit on scarce resources. First, we are throwing away thousands of dollars of embodied energy. Second, we are replacing it with materials vastly more consumptive of energy. What are most historic houses built from? Brick, plaster, concrete and timber. What are among the least energy consumptive of materials? Brick, plaster, concrete and*

*timber. What are major components of new buildings? Plastic, steel, vinyl and aluminum. What are among the most energy consumptive of materials? Plastic, steel, vinyl and aluminum. Third, recurring embodied energy savings increase dramatically as a building life stretches over fifty years. You're a fool or a fraud if you say you are an environmentally conscious builder and yet are throwing away historic buildings, and their components.*