



Sir Peter Quimsley, FRIAS

Design Champion

City of Wheelaing, Scotland

We are fortunate to have Historic Districts and structures that have been nominated by our State for inclusion in “The Scottish Register of Historic Places.”

While such designations recognize the historic importance of the buildings and districts, protect them in connection with any potentially adverse nationally funded projects, and afford favorable tax incentives for owners of structures so designated, the “national” designations do nothing to require design review or afford protection in connection with the private demolition, alteration, or construction of any buildings in the districts.

Then too, the ravages and demolition of historic structures, or the wholesale replacement of the historic stock by private or public owners in a previously designated district can result in the loss of even these modest

protections – through “de-listing” by the state.

Apart from these nationally authorized designations, there are no locally designated Historic Districts under Wheelaing municipal law that require design review or afford protection in connection with demolition, even though state law allows municipalities to implement such districts.

Thus, despite the enthusiasm for “preservation” by many of its citizens, Wheelaing has no way to legally protect historic structures or districts under local law – unlike our sister city of Edinburgh, which enjoys one the most protective (and effective) preservation-law infrastructures in the world, all mandated and implemented on a local level by the Edinburgh City Council. Not surprisingly, Edinburgh has achieved the highest honor possible in recognition of its preservation efforts – having been named by The United Nations as a

“World Heritage City.”

The failure in Wheelaing to mobilize the force of its own political will to require demolition or design review has left preservation efforts to the energies and limitations of private foundations (my appointment as “Design Champion” notwithstanding).

Not that it is all dismal. Even lacking uniform protection under local law, non-profit foundations and entities, both with and without the assistance of local government, have had some striking successes in renovating or protecting a number of historic treasures, as demonstrated recently in the case of acquisition of the Old Wheelaing Theatre, and the complimentary and beautiful private renovation of an adjoining building.

Nonetheless, without legally enforceable mandates on the local level, preservation successes have been sporadic, and far between.

Not surprisingly, the city’s own Wheelaing Historic Buildings Commission remains an unfulfilled promise, largely because the idea of “city-wide,” or even neighborhood-wide designations have been met historically with political opposition. While that opposition may be a result of a failure to educate a critical mass of the community on the cost-benefit advantages of historic preservation, it naturally springs in part from the age-old distaste for any “regulation” of one’s own property – the belief that “no one, let alone the government, is going to tell me what to do with my [hard-earned] property.”

But even within the Commission, the contours of a more effective system of garnering support and promoting preservation has emerged – what I will euphemistically refer to as private/communal stewardship at the “heritage pod” level.

But first, to what do I refer as a “heritage pod?” I take that to mean a compact area (shell) of one or more historic buildings that contain the potential (seeds) for promoting a larger flowering of community beauty, preservation and urbanity, which can be created without “official designation,” but by its owner[s], exercising organized, private/com-munal stewardship, if only on a small scale.

In this sense, Heritage Pods can be mini-versions of the magnets that Lewis Mumford saw as fundamental to city development:

“In the earliest gathering about a grave or a painted symbol, a great stone or a sacred grove, one has the beginning of a succession of civic institutions that range from a temple to the astronomical observatory, from the theater to the university.”

“Thus, even before the city is a place of fixed residence, it begins as a meeting place to which people periodically return: the magnet comes before the container, and this ability to attract non-residents to it for intercourse and spiritual stimulus no less than trade remains one of the essential criteria of the city.”(*City in His-*

tory, Chapter 1, Sec. 3.)

Each heritage pod has the potential to become an individual magnet contributing to the urban fabric; as part of a collection of others, it will form the nucleus for renewal of the urban core.

Accordingly, each pod should include one or more identifiable historical or cultural shell(s), and aspire to become itself a community magnet, a community center, a welcoming location which even though privately owned, becomes itself vital to promoting pedestrian friendly “public space” for the city. [See “Privately Owned Public Space,” by Jerold S. Kayden (John Wiley& Sons, Inc. 2000)].

An example of private/public stewardship at the “heritage pod” level is illustrated by the great strides made by Lady Rebecca Spears in organizing community preservation efforts in a “heritage pod,” which has come to be known as Chapel Hill Row.

Although Lady Spears herself serves as one of the City’s High Commissioners, her success with Chapel Hill Row springs less from her role as High Commissioner, and more from her private/com-munal stewardship as owner

of a historic structure amongst a community of historic structures on Chapel Hill Row – and her sense that effective stewardship extends beyond the shell of her own historic structure, but to the communal preservation and protection of all the historic structures on Chapel Hill Row.

Of course, “community involvement” is an abstraction so long as it remains only at the “community,” impersonal level. While everyone cheers the “concept” of community, not everyone takes a walk outside, looks up and down their own street, talks to their neighbors, gets to know their names, listens to their concerns, and engages them in finding cooperative solutions to communal problems—including the preservation of their community’s historic and cultural treasures.

Given the constraints of time and energy, even the most community oriented “steward” may not be able to personally engage a whole neighborhood, let alone a whole city. But if desired, one could engage his or her next door neighbor, or the neighbors on the right and left, or up the street; and in the case of an important



cluster of historic structures, such as Chapel Hill Row, it is this personal commitment to her own immediate community (the Chapel Hill Row “heritage pod”) that in the case of Lady Rebecca Spears has transformed “personal stewardship” into “communal stewardship.”

So this leads to this month’s first recommendation: Don’t worry so much about getting the whole downtown, or even whole neighborhoods locally designated. Although existing municipal designation laws would permit small scale designations of even a few buildings, don’t even make “designation of buildings” the first priority (that will come later).

First and foremost, promote the designation not of buildings, but of people – people who are

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interested in preservation and are willing to serve as representatives of individual heritage pods.

Heritage pod designers should not be limited to “officials.” In fact, the whole concept of using heritage pods to seed the generation of new forms of preservation and urbanity envisions the welcoming of any owner of real estate in the downtown area (who appreciates historic preservation and its necessary corollary – community) – to come forward, “adopt,” and represent a heritage pod of their own (or their neighbor’s) articulation.

Under this scenario, heritage pod representatives would be encouraged by the Commission and serve as liaisons, would be invited and welcomed to Commission meetings, extended the full support of the Commission, and plugged into design, financing, and educational opportunities.

Assistance with efforts for formal historic designation could also be forthcoming, but only if the community decides to go that route.

What could a pod representative be “expected to accomplish” under such

a plan? “Only what he or she can.” If it be to work on the preservation, interpretation, and potential of just one historically significant building, that should be encouraged. Such a singular effort itself would constitute a success in contributing to a local network of persons dedicated to preservation, and willing to work in a cooperative way towards communal goals.

As more representatives and pods are identified and acknowledged, multiple preservation efforts will germinate and grow, and before you know it there will be a re-flowering of preservation efforts in the city’s historic districts unrelated to whether or not they were ever so “designated.”

An old philosopher once suggested that the Renaissance was built on the backs of only ten individuals. Find me just ten heritage pods in the historic city center, and I will show you the start of a renaissance of preservation efforts throughout the city. So much for my first recommendation this month.

My second? “A glass of Highland Park, aged 25 years, with a mere splash of water.” Cheers! 

[Any resemblance of the city of Wheeling to any existing city in the United States of America is strictly coincidental.]

Ben Stout Profile

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alike to appreciate the importance of benthic invertebrates in headwater streams and their ability to indicate water quality.

His testimony was a major factor in policy decisions that directly affect the health and sustainability of watersheds targeted for burial under valley fills and the surrounding communities. He says he is only beginning to tell the story of mountaintop removal mining. His essay, “The Right Thing to Do,” relates his experience testifying in Federal Court against mountaintop removal to growing up in West Virginia and being educated in Appalachia. Stout’s current grant writing effort, with Mary Ellen Cassidy, is focused on achieving additional funding from the EPA CARE Program. With previous grant funds, they have convened more than a dozen meetings with citizens and academicians interested in the future of southern West Virginia. “We have achieved a consensus priority list of environmental problems that can be addressed in southern West Virginia,” Stout said. “The top issue

is getting good quality water into neighborhoods impacted by large scale mining.” If the grant is funded, they will begin to address these problems next fall through research and citizen empowerment.

As co-founder and Trustee of Ohio Valley Trail Partners, Stout has had the opportunity to use his skills to expand the Wheeling Heritage Trail. The organization has received its first grant to pave an additional half mile of trail in South Wheeling, and has submitted three additional applications for nearly \$1 million; it has also developed a 10-year, \$10 million strategy for nearly doubling the Wheeling Heritage Trail.

Stout was awarded the Environmental Stewardship Award in recognition of his ability to translate scientific principles and research findings into coherent, useful knowledge for the general public. His students are introduced to the world of stream ecology and inspired to carry out research to evaluate methods of stream conservation and remediation. 