

Preserving our past good for our future

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Bozeman is finding itself on most desirable places lists with increasing frequency — among the best college towns, best ski towns and best places to live. It's important to recognize that this desirability has been achieved in no small part due to the efforts of preservationists — those who advocate for saving open space and the restoration of historic buildings.

A drive through Bozeman today reveals some remarkable preservation achievements of recent decades.

A short list of local government open space preservation and enhancement successes would include: the establishment of Peets Hill as a park; the Kirk Park skate park; Bogert Park creek reconstruction; the Story Mansion Park; the construction of the public library; and improvement to the Bozeman Ponds and Gallatin Recreation area, just to name a few. And the soon-to-be Story Mill Park promises to be the crown jewel of the city's park system.

Some examples of private-sector historic preservation successes would include: the Ellen theater with a new lobby and preserved interior; the Emerson Cultural Center; the rebuilding of the Rialto Theater into a first-class entertainment venue; the Food Co-op downtown location; the renovation of the old post office into HRDC offices; the renovation of the old Carnegie Library into law offices; the transformation of the East Willson School into luxury condominiums; the restoration of building exteriors, including the old Chambers-Fisher building, the former Gallatin Trust Bank, the Masonic Lodge and the Avant Courier building.

And city churches have been active in these efforts with the expansion of Holy Rosary Catholic Church and renovations and preservation efforts by the Methodist, Episcopal, Lutheran and Presbyterian churches.

Public-sector building preservation successes include: enhancement to the Depression-era elementary schools in the heart of the city and the renovation of the Willson School auditorium.

Add to these the historic preservation districts in the city that date back decades and have preserved hundreds of historic homes and commercial buildings, and architectural standards that have helped ensure new construction along East Main Street to blend well with the historic buildings. And planning ordinances have demanded aesthetically pleasing new construction on North 19th Avenue and vast visual improvements to the North Seventh Avenue corridor.

Preservation efforts are not without controversy. Some have met with resistance, especially those mandated by government. But preservation has contributed immensely to the appeal of Bozeman as a place to live. And that's a lesson we need to take into the future.