

Why Does Historic Preservation Matter in Wilton?

Historic preservation is a multifaceted field that conserves and protects structures, sites, and artifacts that have significant historical, cultural, or architectural value. Preservation in Wilton has long-standing bipartisan support.

Community is the essence of historic preservation. When we think of Wilton and other CT towns and villages (169 of them!), we visualize their unique buildings or pattern of development. It is this character that differentiates the many places in our state. *Historic preservation is not the opposite of development and is not intended to stop growth. Instead, it can facilitate growth and make sure that it is rooted in the history and character of each community.*

Wilton benefits from having a well-defined planning approach for the protection of historic buildings while accommodating healthy growth. Communities need to grow and be dynamic to remain viable, and that development can be planned with an overall vision that includes aspects of the past, present, and future. *Wilton's 2019 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) identified Wilton's town-owned antique buildings as assets which must be maintained in a state of good repair.* Over 70% of Wilton respondents for the 2019 POCD confirmed the importance of historic buildings and landscapes in town as assets which should be protected, promoted and marketed.

Nationwide, study after study has shown that properties in National Register listed and/or Local Historic Districts have more stable property values, and often economically outperform other areas. In most Connecticut communities, homes in a Local Historic District *have property values that increase* at a faster rate than those located outside of a district. These increases are between 4%-19% per year. In Wilton we have six Local Historic Districts and 479 houses on the Historic Resource Inventory.



Historic preservation serves as a core for helping to create vibrant, thriving neighborhoods rooted in their unique history and character, attracting tourists, and acting as cultural hubs. Wilton has areas where this can be found, including: Cannondale, Georgetown Neighborhood Historic Districts, Wilton Historical Society and their properties, Ambler Farm, Old Town Hall and vicinity, and Route 7 Corridor north of Cannondale where adaptive reuse is common.

Historic Preservation is good for the environment. Benefits of historic preservation can also be less tangible such as seen in the positive impact on the environment. *By reducing the need for new construction and promoting sustainable land use practices, historic preservation is critical to responsible development.*



Wilton Historical Society

Misunderstandings about Historic Preservation

Myth: Preservation is too expensive.

Reality: Not preserving costs even more. Demolition has significant expenses: workers who tear down a historic place and carry away the debris must be paid; landfills grow with discarded construction materials. There are savings in using original materials instead of new, and original materials are often stronger and more durable than new materials that need replacing.

Myth: Preservation only cares about the past.

Reality: Preservation is about preserving the past for the future. By protecting our past, it helps us remember how we came to be where we are. Preservation also cares about giving future generations the same opportunities to enjoy beautiful buildings and landscapes that will last for years to come if cared for.

Myth: Preservation is bad for business.

Reality: Preservation is a good business — and a big one. A recent travel industry survey found that more than 40% of Americans made visiting a historic place — a building, battlefield, or historic community — part of their vacations, and that these people spent nearly 40% more than the typical traveler. Preservation is also better business than new construction. One million dollars spent on rehabilitation will create more jobs and keep more money in the local economy than the same one million dollars spent on new construction.

Myth: Preservation and inclusion in a local, state or national historic district eliminates funding to help fix and restore my house/structure.

Reality: There is funding. While funding for private homeowners of historic properties is limited, the State Historic Preservation Office offers a program for properties listed on the State or National Registers of Historic Places.

Myth: Preservation of old windows will not allow my house to be energy efficient.

Reality: Roughly only 10% of energy lost is through windows. The bulk of energy loss comes from attics, doors, and floors. Window manufacturers and installation companies widely promote that the new windows are “greener” than historic windows. In fact, repairing or restoring an original set of windows not only meet the efficiency standards of new, but will also be less expensive and surpass new windows on price point, structural compatibility, and overall sustainability.

Myth: Local Historic District Preservation removes my ability to make changes to the exterior and interior of my house.

Reality: False. Although there are some aspects regarding exterior work seen from a public right-of-way that require approval by Wilton’s Historic District Commission (WHDC), changes can be made, many without needing approval of the WHDC. And all interior changes are unaffected by historic designation.

For more information

Wilton Historical Society (wiltonhistorical.org) - Established in 1938 this local non-profit organization is dedicated to preserving Wilton history.

Wilton Historic District and Properties Commission (WHDHPC) (www.wiltonct.gov/historic-district-historic-property-commission) - Part of Town of Wilton’s governance, this commission is responsible for administering local historic districts and properties.

Preservation CT (www.preservationct.org) - State non-profit resource dedicated to preserving, protecting, and promoting historic places across the State of CT.

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) (portal.ct.gov/decd/content/historic-preservation/06_about_shpo/about-shpo-new) - Part of State of CT Department of Economic and Community Development this office offers programs and services, technical assistance and funding opportunities.

Preservation CT was used as a source for this information.