PLACES REIMAGINED

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Rethos: Places Reimagined is a private, nonprofit, 501(c)3 organization dedicated to connecting people to historic places, promoting community vitality and building reuse.

THANK YOU TO OUR...

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GRANT and FOUNDATION SUPPORT

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COVER IMAGE  |  Minnesota Historic Rehab Loan Projects
Rethos Donor Flashback

In 2010, when Rethos: Places Reimagined was still known as the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, we applied for a special grant of $110,000 from the National Trust for Historic Preservation to fund a new staff position as part of the national Partners in the Field program. Our application was accepted, and the race was on to find matching contributions in order to benefit from the NTHP award.

Ten generous, forward-thinking donors stepped up to provide the matching gifts needed to create the new position. That was twelve years ago. The person hired as a result of these gifts was our own Erin Hanafin Berg, the current deputy director of Rethos and the director of the Rethos Policy Institute.

We could not be more grateful to those ten early investors whose timely and generous contributions made it possible for us to add a key member of the team, Erin, who continues to serve our mission.

Jeff Allman  
Marvel Anderson  
Suzanne Blue  
Amy Douma  
Dick and Nancy Nicholson  
(Nicholson Family Foundation)

Gary Stenson  
Claire Stokes  
Carolyn Sundquist  
Phil Willkie

Your gifts in 2010 continue to pay dividends, advancing the mission of historic preservation with a purpose. Thank you!
And finally! It is summer! The days are long, (mostly) sunny, and the patios are filled with patrons looking for a good beer and that delicious Minnesota summer sun! At Rethos, we are looking forward to the summer but also looking back at what turned out to be a pretty amazing spring for us.

Where to start? I think first we start with one of our longer organization-wide efforts coming to conclusion. Since last year, we have been working with the Dendros Group on some in-depth strategic planning. We have spent a lot of time gathering together on Zoom and in person to discuss the past, present, and future of our organization. We have worked solely among the staff but also other times with our Board of Directors. The entire organization has reached out to the community and had conversations with many people who have been involved in our organization for some time and others who barely know us. We have been learning about who we are and more importantly, who we want to be. The final plan will be presented to our Board of Directors at their July meeting.

We are very excited to have come to consensus on this plan. While we aren’t ready to reveal all of it yet, I can say that one thing that we are particularly excited about is developing a new volunteer program. Over the remainder of 2022, we will be laying the groundwork for a volunteer program that will provide ways for an array of people to participate in our work, from old homeowners and architects to history buffs and individuals just looking for something different. As we start this program, we also know that who is able to volunteer their time tends to skew toward higher income
individuals. Therefore, as we develop this program, we will be looking for ways that we can develop some paid part-time opportunities, too. It may take a bit of time for us to get there but know that we are working toward that goal.

Our new strategic plan is not all that we have been working on, though. As you will see throughout this issue of Places Reimagined, we have had a lot of great things happening. Community Programs has been especially busy. Emily, Natalie, and Kelly along with a lot of help from the Faribault Main Street program put on Rethos’ inaugural Buildings on Main Conference. And it was fantastic! We are so excited to hold it again next year. Keep an eye on our website for where it is going to be!

As we left April behind us, Community Programs didn’t skip a beat! Natalie and Kelly jumped right into our series of classes on deconstruction. These three classes, funded in part by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, took attendees through an introduction to deconstruction and on through this new and emerging area in historic preservation.

Just as the dust settled from all that activity, we learned that Rethos had been awarded a $700,000 grant from the National Park Service. The vast majority of this grant will support projects in rural Minnesota Main Street communities. We are so honored to be one of less than a dozen organizations nationwide to be awarded a Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grant.

But that is not all that Rethos has been up to. Our Policy Institute, as part of the RevitalizeMN coalition, worked hard to extend the MN State Historic Tax Credit. Both houses agreed to make the tax credit permanent, recognizing that it is a program with a proven track record. Unfortunately, the historic tax credit bill got caught up in the push and pull of the end of the session. As part of the Taxes Omnibus bill, it did not make it across the finish line. On July 1, 2022 and for the first time in over a decade, Minnesota no longer has a historic tax credit to support jobs, places, and communities. We will be back in 2023 – with our coalition members Winthrop & Weinstine and New History – to revive the tax credit, but we have a lot of work ahead of us.

After such a busy spring, the Rethos team is looking forward to summer. There are plans for vacations and weekends away. By the time the end of summer rolls around, Rethos should be well on its way to moving into our new offices on the fifth floor of Landmark Center. But you’ll have to wait until the next issue to hear all about that! Enjoy your summer, everyone! And Rethos Team: Take a well-deserved vacation!
Rethos to Launch New ANNUAL CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP

The charitable investments made by companies, corporate foundations, and other institutions form the solid base upon which Rethos builds its programming each year. Over time, many of our business partners have expressed an interest in a more predictable and simple way to give. One ask, one gift, and a year’s worth of recognition.

The new Rethos Annual Corporate Sponsorship Program is an efficient and effective way for your company to invest in our work to preserve and reuse historic structures, tell untold stories, and ensure that important policies like the Historic Tax Credit are in place for the long term.

As an Annual Sponsor your gift will advance the projects and initiatives that benefit our communities. Further, your company will receive public recognition for this generosity all year long.

Rethos Annual Corporate Sponsorship is offered at five levels from $5,000 up to $50,000 or more. Sponsors at each level enjoy special recognition and participation in our work including:

- Your Brand Featured in Key Rethos Communications and Publications
- Priority Placement Within Places Reimagined, our Print and Digital Magazine
- Special Event Access and Brand Recognition
- High Visibility on Rethos’ Social Media and Website
- Opportunities to Reach Potential Clients, Customers, and Decision Makers all year long!

As an Annual Corporate Sponsor, your company will reach people interested in historic preservation, building reuse, deconstruction, affordable housing, the environment, home ownership, small businesses, public policy, history and storytelling, and so much more.

Three times each year Rethos mails over 800 printed editions of Places Reimagined. Readership includes all members of the Minnesota Legislature and the Governor’s Office, industry leaders, developers, commercial real estate professionals, commercial lenders, and hundreds of people who care deeply about preserving our historic buildings.

Rethos produces its annual fundraising gala and preservation award celebration to the delight of over 200 guests including community and industry decision makers, elected officials, preservationists, and generous benefactors. We also host an annual Rethos Policy Institute reception at which outstanding legislator awards are presented.

In 2023 Rethos will launch a series of events focused on specific building reuse projects in five (or more) states including Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Texas, and Kansas. Additional gatherings will take place to call attention to important public policy issues, successful historic preservation projects, and significant milestones in building reuse.

Annual Corporate Sponsors will be acknowledged at these events, and representatives will have exclusive access to special pre- and post-event VIP receptions and celebrations.

To learn more about how your company can become a Rethos Annual Corporate Sponsor, contact Hayden Troy, Development Officer for Institutional Giving, at hayden@rethos.org or by calling 651-293-9047.
Rethos awarded the Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grant

Rethos is proud to announce that we are one of 11 recipients of the Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grant, administered by the National Park Service. This $700,000 grant will be used to create the Minnesota Main Streets “Looking Up” program. This program will assist in second story redevelopments for historic buildings by providing direct funding to building owners located in rural downtowns.

“The Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants program fosters economic development in rural communities through the rehabilitation of historic buildings,” said NPS Director Chuck Sams. “With these funds, our state, Tribal, local government, and non-profit partners can develop subgrant programs and select individual projects that will support the economic development goals and needs in their communities.”

This subgrant program will create a series of ‘catalyst’ upstairs building renovations, with the aim that these projects will foster greater economic development and additional upstairs rehabilitations throughout the Minnesota Main Streets network. To maximize the impact, Rethos will award subgrants in the range of $25,000 - $50,000.

“This very generous grant from the National Park Service will make a tremendous difference for Minnesota’s smaller towns and their downtown businesses. It’s also wonderful recognition of all of the hard work that so many of our local partners have put into the Main Streets program already. It’s a big win for the whole team,” said Erik Hansen, Rethos board member and chair of the Minnesota Main Streets Committee.

“Rethos is thrilled to be able to provide an opportunity for physical revitalization of buildings in our Main Street Communities. Access to capital for rehabilitation is critical for the continued growth of economic development efforts in our historic downtowns and drawing attention to the upper floors of buildings will help communities solve a range of issues, from housing to expanded business space,” added Emily Kurash Casey, Director of Community Programs.

Complete details on how to access funds will be available soon. Please visit www.rethos.org to stay up-to-date on Paul Bruhn Grant opportunities.

“...drawing attention to the upper floors of buildings will help communities solve a range of issues, from housing to expanded business space.”

Emily Kurash Casey, Director of Community Programs.
This May was Preservation Month and, to celebrate, we wanted to bring you an update on a successfully reimagined. The H. Alden Smith House, built in 1887 and located just off Loring Park in Minneapolis, was once considered one of Minneapolis’ 10 most endangered historic buildings.

Recently, the building went through a renovation that was led by DJR Architecture and BV Studios. Thoughtfully restored into The Abbey Apartments, the building was integrated into a complex of 124 multi-family housing units. Keeping historic feel intact while also expanding housing in downtown Minneapolis, The Abbey Apartments are truly a Place Reimagined. Hats off to all involved!

Top photos: abbeyapartments.com
Inset photos: Erin Hanafin Berg
On June 8th, Rethos said goodbye to its longtime Education Manager, Natalie Heneghan. As a staff member for seven years, Natalie grew and shaped Rethos’ homeowner education and continuing education programs, greatly expanding our organization’s outreach and providing valuable educational opportunities to thousands of people across the country. Her talent and intuition have helped Rethos reach new heights in the fields of preservation and sustainability, setting us up for years of success to come.

In her own words, here are Natalie’s thoughts on her departure:

“As I leave my role at Rethos, I’m reflecting on seven years of good memories, and I feel so proud of what we’ve accomplished.

In my job, I had the joy of helping people learn new skills and care for their homes and communities. I loved being a connector between curious DIYers and expert tradespeople, or between passionate community members and brilliant historians. My collaborators, instructors, and students have been a source of energy and inspiration, and many have become dear friends.

I loved bringing folks to cool old buildings to learn from each other. Our workshops took shape in homes on the East & West Sides of St. Paul, in North and South Minneapolis, in an old telephone company building in Duluth, and at a historic schoolhouse in Litchfield. We gathered in farmhouses, breweries, libraries, theaters, museums, and, of course, on Zoom. The knowledge shared in these places has been put to use in homes and buildings all over the state, if not the country.

At the end of the day, our education program is about making preservation more accessible for more people. I have come to believe that fixing up and repairing our beloved buildings is a true act of generosity—to our neighborhoods, environment, families, and future property stewards. I’m grateful to have played a part in growing this community of building lovers and caretakers. Thank you to everyone who supported this work. We couldn’t do it without you!”

We will miss you, Natalie! Best wishes to you on your next adventure!
First Tour of Sauk Rapids’ First House

This June Rethos held its first tour of the mysterious and historic Robinson Stanton house in Sauk Rapids, MN! The oldest documented house in Sauk Rapids, and perhaps the oldest private home made of solid granite in Minnesota, it was constructed by Leonard Robinson in 1873 out of granite harvested from a quarry just one block away from the house itself. The Benton County Historical Society is currently in the process of converting this massive 9,400 square foot home into their new museum, research, and archives facility. At this tour, participants were among the first to get an up-close look at this stunning house! If you couldn’t join us, make sure to visit www.rethos.com or follow us on Facebook for some of the inside photos from the event.

Capitol Pathways

Alejandra (pictured center with Rethos Policy Institute Director Erin Hanafin Berg at left and Policy Associate Riley Gage at right) finished up her Capitol Pathways internship with us in June. She shared what she learned on our blog. Thanks for your work, Alejandra, and congrats to all of the Capitol Pathways interns for being part of this one-of-a-kind program!
This past May, Rethos held our first ever Deconstruction Masterclass. Comprised of three webinar classes, this series represents our most comprehensive deconstruction education effort to date. We framed each session as a panel of 3-4 experts. Speakers included staff from Better Futures Minnesota, the leading deconstruction contractor in the state; state and county level policy makers; historic preservation professionals; waste management and hazardous materials experts; and community volunteers working to advance deconstruction at a local level.

Deconstruction, the purposeful dismantling of a structure to preserve and reuse building materials, may at first seem at odd with the goal of the preservation movement. However, the materials found in old buildings are often built to last, with the component wood, windows and hardware being viable even if a building has degraded beyond rehabilitation. Deconstruction allows us to salvage the high quality, historic components of unviable buildings and put them back into the construction resources pipeline, making them usable in future projects.

The topics covered by the panels focused on several of these key aspects of deconstruction:

- Cultural heritage and preservation as they relate to deconstruction
- Architectural history
- Old building material quality and reusability
- How careful salvage and unbuilding efforts allows preservationists & historians gain better understanding of a place

Over 228 participants attended the Deconstruction Masterclass series. City planners and county executives were in attendance, as well as interested homeowners curious about how they can support efforts. The audience wasn’t limited to Minnesota either, with attendees coming from over a dozen other states and Canadian provinces.

Each panel was recorded for future sharing and viewing. The videos populate the sustainability webpage on our website. Resources about sourcing salvaged materials, deconstruction and reuse grants, and national case studies accompany the videos.

This class was made possible in part from a $5,000 Grant awarded to Rethos by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The grant supported educational programming about the environmental, social, and cultural benefits of deconstruction.
RACISM IN REAL ESTATE

1:00 PM – 3:00 PM | Zoom Webinar

Racism in Real Estate explores structural racism and the racial wealth gap as it applies to housing. We’ll consider the role of the real estate industry in the history of racial housing discrimination and the consequences of this history on housing equity today.

Recognizing that we cannot fix the issues and inequities of the present without understanding the past, this course intends to expose the racist policies and practices that shaped our cities. This class was created with materials from the Mapping Prejudice project and other research by instructor Denise Pike.

Brought to you by Rethos: Places Reimagined, this course has been approved by the Minnesota Commissioner of Commerce for 2 hours of real estate continuing education. This class also now counts for Fair Housing credit. It is open to all.

WINDOW WORKSHOP AT THE FOX HOUSE

9:00 AM – 1:00 PM | 10775 27th Ave SE, Becker, MN 55308

Do you have old wood windows in need of some TLC? Ready to practice window repair skills? Our instructor Laura Leppink will introduce you to the basics of window repair and restoration! You will learn how to glaze, refurbish, and repair windows through hands-on training. The class will be hosted at the Sherburne History Center’s Herbert M. Fox House in Becker, Minnesota, a historic farmhouse built in 1876 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Come with your questions about historic window repair! We will supply tools and windows.

REHAB LAB: RE-ROPING DOUBLE HUNG WINDOWS

9:00 AM –1:00 PM | Saint Paul, 753 Hague Ave, St Paul, MN 55104

Broken sash cords are one of the most common problems that happen with old double-hung windows. The good news is that it’s not that difficult or expensive to repair them! In this Rehab Lab, you’ll learn how to carefully remove your window sash and repair sash cords, ensuring that your window opens smoothly...and stays open.

Olivia Siem and Anders Christensen from TigerOx Painting will demonstrate proper techniques and discuss necessary tools and supplies. This workshop will take place in an old house in St. Paul with plenty of windows for you to practice on. You’ll leave with a hardware store shopping list and a brand-new home repair skill!
**REUSE FOR REAL ESTATE AGENTS**

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM | Zoom Webinar

This 1-hour CE class introduces Minnesota real estate agents to climate-conscious resources that they can pass along to their clients. Chances are that your clients want to make sustainable choices and reduce their negative impact on the environment. While many consumers think sustainability requires new “green” products, reused materials are our best option to reduce our carbon emissions and energy usage. This class equips real estate agents with the most up-to-date and localized resources in the Twin Cities’ reuse economy.

You will learn:

- Where to find local reuse and repair resources
- How best to share information with your clients
- Why reuse is essential to building a more sustainable future

Your instructors are Emily Barker, Executive Director of ReUSE MN, and Natalie Heneghan, former Rethos Education Manager.

This course is approved for 1 hour of CE credit for real estate agents, and it is open to all. Homeowners planning a renovation project, contractors, and anyone interested in creating a more sustainable future are encouraged to attend.

**LEAD, ASBESTOS, AND RADON, OH MY!**

1:00 PM – 3:00 PM | Zoom Webinar

Do the words lead, asbestos, or radon have you (or your clients) running for the hills? These are common to older homes, and as long as you know how to identify and mitigate them safely, there’s nothing to worry about!

In this 2-hour class, licensed architect Alissa Pier will demystify three substances often found in older homes: lead, asbestos, and radon. Alissa will provide context to the specific uses of each substance, explain their dangers, and walk-through mitigation methods. Lead, radon, or asbestos can be scary for prospective homebuyers. Learn how to provide safe handling resources for removal of these substances and put your clients at ease!

This course has been approved by the Minnesota Commissioner of Commerce for 2 hours of real estate continuing education. It is open to all.

**HISTORIC FINISHES: VARNISH, STAINS, DYES & WAXES**

9:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Minneapolis, MN

This class, taught by Mark Johnston of Historic Design Consulting, introduces you to wood finishes commonly found in older homes. Mark will discuss the differences between varnish, stain, dyes, and waxes. He’ll describe how to identify these finishes in your home and will demonstrate best practices for application, cleaning, and repair. You’ll have the opportunity to practice these techniques during class at a historic home in the South Side Historic University Neighborhood. We’ll supply all the tools and materials.

Mark is the founder of Historic Design Consulting. He is a member of the Minnesota Society of Architectural Historians and the Association of Preservation Technology and meets the U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s Professional Qualifications Standards for History and Architectural History. Mark does much of his work using authentic materials and techniques. Historic Design Consulting offers a wide range of restoration services for property owners, including historic paint colors, millwork, research, maintenance plans, window restoration, and more.
Late April brought both showers and dozens of folks to Faribault, MN for the inaugural Buildings on Main Street Conference.

This was the first time that Minnesota Main Streets held an in-person conference since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the energy that folks brought about downtown building revitalization to learning sessions and conversations was palpable.

Minnesota Main Streets has long held a spring Main Street Basics training, but this is the first time that we held an in-person conference in tandem with that training, including a focus on a specific topic. (However, in 2020, Main Street hosted an “Agriculture on Main Street” mini conference, which was entirely virtual.) Together with Rethos’ Education Department, this conference was geared toward people working on the buildings located in downtown districts. Topics ranged from basic building and rehabilitation terms, deconstruction, funding, success stories, and more.

In addition to the conference keynotes and breakouts, attendees had the opportunity to visit several projects that have taken place in Faribault in recent years. Kelly
Nygaard, Faribault Main Street Director, hosted an "Upstairs Downtown" tour exclusively for conference goers. This tour features projects that have taken place on upper floors in downtown buildings, and was created to give property owners, realtors, and economic developers ideas and inspiration on activating vacant and under-utilized floors of downtown buildings. Faribault has really developed a great suite of information on their Upstairs Downtown program, which you can see in-depth online at faribaultmn.org/Faribault-main-street/upstairs-downtown.

Feedback on the conference was incredibly positive, and we were so impressed with the conversation and range in topic matter that the decision has been made to host an annual Buildings on Main Street Conference each spring. This conference will be held in a different location each year, highlighting the local success stories happening in historic downtown districts across Minnesota. By moving the location around, attendees will get the opportunity to see first-hand examples of revitalization projects, hear from folks doing good work around the state, and meet with new people in each region.
Buildings on Main Street: From Faribault’s Point of View

By Kelly Nygaard, Faribault Main Street

Faribault being selected as the host community for the inaugural Buildings on Main Street conference was such a great opportunity to show off beautiful, historic downtown Faribault, and highlight the work and investments that have taken place to preserve, restore, and reinvigorate downtown. There were engaging speakers, well thought out topics and the chance to gain inspiration and resources as the efforts in the historic district continue to evolve.

Over the past few years, there has been extensive investment into the restoration and preservation of buildings in downtown Faribault, and that has really helped to create a positive momentum. The historic district is naturally charming, and is full of potential, but with the addition of public art, new businesses, fun events, building restoration, the downtown is experiencing a renaissance.

Progress doesn’t happen overnight, and sometimes we all forget how far we have come because we’re so busy looking to what is next. So Faribault being chosen to host this conference, allowed us the opportunity to reflect back on successes and pause to appreciate all of the great things that are happening and the stunning venues available. Often when thinking of conference facilities, it’s a large complex built specifically for that purpose. But having a walkable downtown, good vendors, and several great spaces to choose from, showed that with collaboration and creativity, we have the capacity to host conferences and attract new audiences.

OTHER FUN FACTS:

Since 2018 there has been over $12,327,896 (blend of public and private) funds invested into downtown buildings, on everything from new roofs, sprinkler systems, tuck pointing, 2nd story restoration, 2 new large apartment buildings, and much more. Additionally, a new downtown adjacent park is currently being finished, and another downtown park is being planned, which will both be great amenities for the community.

Micro Grants: In the past 3 years, the Downtown Micro Grant Program, a partnership between Faribault Main Street and the Faribault EDA, has awarded 21 micro grants, totaling $75,000 to help businesses open or expand in the historic district. (More info and rules and process here: https://www.faribaultmn.org/downtown-micro-grants/)

Upstairs Downtown Tour: Three in-person walking tours have been held, and another will be hosted in spring 2022, giving real estate agents, potential investors, existing downtown property owners, and potential tenants an idea of what is possible with currently underutilized upper level spaces. A digital version featuring video and pictures, along with resources of gorgeous downtown living units in Faribault is available as well: https://www.faribaultmn.org/faribault-main-street/upstairs-downtown/
We know, it is hard to keep up with all the great work our Main Street communities are doing! But did you know that they all have Facebook pages where they regularly put highlights from their downtowns? Check out these quick updates below or dig more in depth by following them on Facebook!

**Albert Lea:** Thursdays on Fountain are back in Albert Lea! During the Summer months, folks gather every Thursday evening at Fountain Lake Park in Albert Lea for live music, food, and beverages. Bring a lawn chair or pull up your boat and come join this fun-filled community tradition!

**Faribault:** Faribault will soon be selecting grant recipients for their Downtown Microgrant Program! This program is in partnership with Faribault Economic Development Authority and is open to both proposed businesses and existing businesses in the Historic District. Awards range from $500 to $5000. The application deadline is June 1st!

**Lincoln Park (Duluth):** With warmer weather officially here, you’ll want to participate in the Lincoln Park Art Walk! Explore the neighborhood and get your art fix too!

**Mankato:** After the removal of last year’s sculptures, 31 brand new sculptures were installed along the sculpture walk in Mankato!

Continued on next page
**Northfield:** Northfield Main Street Director Revee Needham and Board President Kathleen Holmes both attended the national Main Street Now Conference in Richmond, VA!

**Olivia:** Third Thursdays are back in Olivia! This free community event has food, art, and music. Don’t miss it!

**Owatonna:** With warm weather comes Downtown Thursday in Owatonna! Local food vendors, live music, and crafts will be found on Cedar Ave.

**Red Wing:** Red Wing has us all jazzed about their one-of-a-kind event, Boots on the Bridge! May through September, you’ll find over a dozen giant painted fiberglass Red Wing boots on the bridge in Red Wing’s West End District!

**Shakopee:** Downtown Shakopee has announced their 2022 Rhythm on the Rails musician line-up! So many great opportunities for live music in Shakopee this summer.

**Wabasha:** Main Street Director Mary Flicek also attended the national Main Street Now Conference in Richmond, VA, and had this to say: “Was a great venue to reconnect with colleagues from previous conferences and network with likeminded Main Street directors going through the same challenges we have faced and overcame in the last few years. I now have a set of ideas and fundraising goals for the future of our program and have gathered the contacts to plan ahead. These conferences are invaluable to Main Street Programs of our size and should be attended by more than myself.”

**Willmar:** Willmar Main Street hosted their annual Cinco de Mayo Block Party! A beautiful evening filled with food, music, and dancing!

**Winona:** Check out this photo from Winona Main Street’s Parade of Trucks! The excitement on her face says it all!
When it comes to downtown streetscape renovation, there is more than meets the eye. Water and gas lines, along with other infrastructure, are hidden pieces that are necessary to the health and vibrancy of a downtown. It is exciting when downtown utility work allows for new streetscapes to be built in districts, promoting pedestrian and family friendly activity. Owatonna’s Main Street district is doing just that—and their efforts have led to great collaboration, conversation, and partnership of businesses.

“We’re doing a streetscape update from streets to sidewalks and utilities below,” shared Owatonna Main Street Director Lisa Cochran. “We’ll have new plants and trees, lights poles benches, and even activating alleys as stop and sit areas. There’s not a single part of the street that was untouched. It’s a complete and amazing overhaul.”

Downtown Owatonna has been planning these streetscape improvements for years, but construction did not start until June 2021. Prior to work beginning, Owatonna Main Street, along with numerous city entities met with the public to seek input and guidance on what the community hoped for. High on the list was making the downtown pedestrian friendly, with places to stop and sit, eat, and enjoy the space.

One often overlooked piece during construction is communication—both before and during the project. Not only were there signs and meetings, but a live camera with footage of construction was even available to watch on the City and Chamber websites. Main Street played a key role in making sure that downtown businesses were aware of project meetings and helped create a business packet to communicate with customers how to access businesses during construction, keeping the whole...
community in the loop. These meetings were crucial, as only two blocks of the three-block project were able to be completed during summer and fall 2021. Businesses alerted community leaders that having construction going on after November 1 would be a serious disruption to an incredibly busy shopping season, and all final construction was pushed to spring 2022, with a hoped-for end date of July 20.

The streetscape work isn’t the only construction that has taken place downtown. A newly constructed apartment building opened in April, and a new hotel will open in August—complete with an outdoor café area and fire pits. These spaces are meant to be inviting for the entire community, not just hotel guests. The new construction efforts are creating positive buzz within the community, and jumpstarting new attention and energy to existing building owners considering what investments their buildings might need.

Main Street efforts have lent a hand not only to local businesses, but also the entire district. Over recent years, Owatonna has used their Project Assistance Funds, provided by Rethos, on efforts to help further the streetscape work, from sign and light design to new self-watering flower baskets. These annual pieces effectively leverage funds and assistance from Rethos and Minnesota Main Streets, as well as adhere to an annual work plan and Transformation Strategy that helps a district focus on a goal and achieve in a more comprehensive manner. Adding a small piece every year to a larger multi-year effort of district transformation can really add up. When asked what she’s most excited for about the streetscape redesign, Lisa shared “I love that this is going to attract people downtown—both people who live here and visitors. We are focusing on having a very pedestrian friendly space. We want kids and strollers and families. I really hope that the beauty of it at first will bring people, but then they’ll see how cool it is to keep coming back. People will be able to enjoy the outdoors in downtown, the chatter, the people walking, and supporting our downtown businesses.”
Within historic preservation we often focus on maintaining the rigid parameters of what a place was during its time. Traditionally, these spaces are representative of able-bodied people; created for, designed by, and traversed by the group. There is little wiggle room for interpreting these spaces for a modern age, through a new lens that might better serve all people regardless of how they navigate the world. In Saint Paul, MN the Charles Thompson Memorial Hall is looking to itself, as an architecturally distinct hub of deaf culture designed by and for that very community, to redefine what equitable space represents while laying the groundwork for all people to join in community.
Constructed in 1916, Charles Thompson Memorial Hall (CTMH) is a clubhouse for the Twin Cities’ deaf community owned by the deaf community and managed by deaf volunteers. Regarded as the first clubhouse for the deaf in the world, the hall has national significance as a revolutionary space that embodies the spirit of community ownership and representation. This is true from the original inception of the building into the present, with roots tracing back to Faribault, MN in the 1870s.

Charles Thompson and architect Olof Hanson became friends while attending the Minnesota School for the Deaf (now Minnesota State Academy of the Deaf) in Faribault. After graduating in the early 1880s, the two became notable representatives of the deaf community. Charles Thompson, with an unending passion for fostering social relationships among the deaf, transformed many of the properties he owned around Minnesota into hubs of local deaf social culture alongside his wife, Margaret Brooks. The experiment was so successful that the couple eventually built permanent cabins on the property of their Alexandria, MN lake house to establish a camp for the deaf.

Separately, Olof Hanson was slowly carving out his own legacy across the United States. Widely believed to be the United States’ first deaf architect, he attended Gallaudet College in Washington D.C. before working for numerous architectural firms and finally returning to Faribault where he established his own architectural practice in 1894. A testament to his legacy; his homes, businesses, and churches can be found throughout the American Midwest and South. Then, years after their original friendship, Hanson designed Thompson’s Lincoln Avenue home in Saint Paul, MN in 1904. After Thompson’s untimely passing in 1915 his widow Margaret used Charles’ trust and hired Olof Hanson to design a new social hub for the deaf. This building would be a tribute to her late husband, honoring his legacy of community building and empowerment among deaf people. In 1916 the building was complete, instantly becoming the epicenter of Saint Paul’s deaf community and a revolutionary space for the principles of inclusive building design.

As a deaf person, he was well versed in the nuanced ways in which the built environment is not built with his community in mind. Armed with this knowledge, his building designs contain elements that laid the groundwork for the DeafSpace movement, which is rooted in principles of open visual communication. A key component of this style is avoiding visual obstructions, such as columns, and allowing as much natural light as possible into the space so people can clearly see signs and gestures. To achieve this, each floor contains many windows, some of which reach towering heights. This excess of light allows for good sightlines and views when face to face, so whether signing or reading lips the ability to communicate is given top priority.

Additionally, the main stairs near the center of the building wrap upwards while being completely open in the middle. By having unobstructed views people can communicate via sign language between floors. The stairs are also double-wide, enabling people to converse slide by side as they go upstairs. Another nuanced inclusion are the light switches in the second-floor auditorium. Being located on the stage at the front of the room, as opposed to the back near the door entrances, gives the speaker on stage direct control of the lights. Allowing them to flash the lights on and off to gain the audience’s attention.

Throughout the 20th-century CTMH continued to be a hub for the local deaf community and in the early 1990s the members recognized the need to make the space more accessible. Members began fundraising to build an elevator so each floor could be accessed by those in wheelchairs, elderly members, and those with other mobility issues. Due to the exorbitant costs the project was put on hold. During a conversation with board President and lifelong member Herman Fuechtmann he expressed how this effort was seemingly the beginning of the restoration efforts at CTMH while pushing it forward to meet new audiences.

Since then, there have been bumps and triumphs, but it has all made Herman and those who are deeply invested in CTMH even more passionate. In 2010 state and county agencies who worked with deaf people and used CTMH as a base were forced by the Americans with Disabilities Act to cut ties due to issues of access, like the elevator. This loss of a substantial revenue stream was a tough blow, but with their 2016 centennial anniversary on the horizon the importance of this space to the community and the special nature of its history became more prescient. During this time Herman notes a renewed energy, with members becoming more focused on renovations, accessibility, and fundraising.

Within this time frame, an immense amount of planning and preparation has been done. In 2011, CTMH was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Through a legacy grant from the Minnesota Historical Society, they were able to fund construction documents for the elevator as well as the larger renovation project. This robust illustration of the grand vision works alongside a historic structure report that was completed a few years prior and listed ten priorities...
As the building evolves, Herman envisions it being a place that serves people of varying abilities and needs with ease, while also fostering a sense of learning for communities at large.

The history, status, and potential of Charles Thompson Memorial Hall has also been recognized elsewhere in the community. A group of public historians and historic preservationists at the University of Minnesota known as REPAIR: Disability Heritage Collective, led by Professor Gail Dubrow with support from Laura Leppink and Sarah Pawlicki, have been working on a case study about the hall while also using it as a focal point for a disability justice course. When speaking with Laura Leppink, she told us how the building is a perfect example of both the triumphs and limitations of disability design and historic preservation. In her mind historic preservation is limiting, with many of the core regulations making it more difficult for buildings to adapt as truly inclusive spaces that are friendly to a broad range of differently abled people.

For the research group, ideas of spatial equity and diversity do not go far enough in their present forms. According to Laura these perspectives are vital for reshaping our built environment, “In so many conversations we’re having about equity and diversity, disability and impairment has yet to make its way into conversations or be included... Disabled perspectives are valuable in shaping the world and creating better spaces for everyone. These perspectives offer creativity and a unique vision that most people don’t recognize.”

Laura hopes that the course and research will lead to more case studies regarding disability justice within the built environment. But her biggest goal is to fundamentally change preservation to include more disability frameworks, attempting to model what it looks like to advocate governments for truly equitable reform while suggesting that a disability justice lens can be inserted at any point in the process. Even for people without disabilities she sees this as crucial, not only as a means of advocating for our fellow community members but also for ourselves, “If we live long enough, we all experience impairment to some degree.”

Even before the research team was involved, Herman’s vision for CTMH went beyond an elevator and even beyond the familiar traditions of the deaf community that he so passionately loves. As the building evolves, he envisions it being a place that serves people of varying abilities and needs with ease, while also fostering a sense of learning for communities at large. While remaining anchored as a place for the deaf CTMH will also serve as a gathering place for hearing people and for locals from the Twin Cities, Minnesota, and beyond. As a destination, the building will house workshops, classes, and activities for education while also preserving the language and culture of deaf people. Locally, their neighbors throughout Merriam Park can use the space to host events or gather with safe neighborliness. There is also hope for a gift shop, a bistro, holiday events, songs and plays done in sign language, arts events, and a place where deaf children with hearing parents can come interact with adult deaf role models.

The sky is the limit for Herman and the other impassioned members of CTMH. Leaving nothing off the table and everything to possibility, the spirit of Charles Thompson lives on through the desire to connect to something greater. The CTMH building, which has stood 100+ years and will stand 100+ more, serves as a tangible reminder that the power of community and legacy exist in the relationships that we build along the way.

To stay updated with news and events at Charles Thompson Memorial Hall please visit https://charlesthompsonhall.org/ or like them on Facebook. For updates on renovation or to donate money for the renovation and elevator project please visit https://savethompsonhall.org/. CTMH is a registered 501(c)3 non-profit and all donations are tax deductible.
Selling the Historic Tax Credit: The Role of Personal Stories in Advocating for Minnesota’s Historic Structure Rehabilitation Tax Credit

By Jane Bisel and Erin Hanafin Berg

As even the most casual readers of this magazine are well aware, Rethos and its supporters have worked for more than a decade to ensure that Minnesotans have access to a state historic tax credit—more formally known as the Minnesota Historic Structure Rehabilitation Tax Credit. Over the past twelve years, this historic preservation incentive has proven to be an effective tool in repurposing existing historic buildings, helping to extend their useful lifespan, promote community vitality, and provide a more environmentally sustainable alternative to demolition.

With the original historic tax credit legislation set to expire at the end of Minnesota’s 2021 fiscal year, Rethos and a roster of organizations and businesses from relevant professional fields joined together to form RevitalizeMN, a coalition dedicated to advocacy for the historic tax credit’s reauthorization. Over the last two years, a significant focus of this work has been the development of a multi-faceted statewide communications campaign that has built awareness of the historic tax credit’s role in providing skilled jobs for local workers, promoting community culture, and supporting economic growth.

During the 2021 legislative session, the campaign began with a broad effort to make the historic tax credit better known to citizens and their elected representatives. By finding real people to tell their own stories of projects that had made a difference, RevitalizeMN situated the historic tax credit in a context of community development and job creation. This approach resonated with journalists looking for under-reported issues, as well as with community...
By finding real people to tell their own stories of projects that had made a difference, RevitalizeMN situated the historic tax credit in a context of community development and job creation.

activists and social media posters who responded to compelling and appealing accounts of once-neglected community assets brought back to life. These stories spotlighted this hugely successful, but previously obscure, provision of the Minnesota tax code. Ultimately, with broad bipartisan support, the Minnesota Legislature approved a one-year extension of the tax credit in June 2021, enabling the completion of projects already in underway—but underscoring the need for ongoing advocacy to protect this vital economic development tool.

Rethos and its RevitalizeMN partners considered the one-year extension granted in 2021 to be a victory, given the context of the COVID pandemic, its significant costs, and the associated budgetary uncertainty. But, since this valuable preservation and community development incentive was slated to sunset again after only one year, it was vital for the team to maintain public awareness of the historic tax credit’s role in supporting local jobs and its potential for building stronger, more distinctive cities and towns throughout Minnesota. With a base of support already in place within the Legislature, RevitalizeMN’s objective during the 2022 session was to make sure that House and Senate leadership understood the need to extend the historic tax credit for as long as possible, or even remove the sunset altogether.

The challenge was to find a way to make an issue that had garnered so much attention just months before seem fresh again. Reporters did not want stories that seemed like more of what they had already covered; they were looking for new angles. Furthermore, it was unlikely that another flood of social media posts and letters to the editor from local advocates would be as effective as it had been a year earlier. Instead, outreach would be more targeted and would focus on connecting key legislators with constituents who were directly involved in tax credit work and were willing to contact them personally or participate in one-on-one videoconferencing sessions organized by RevitalizeMN.

Continued on next page
The initial focus was on the Rochester area, where local business leaders and members of the historic preservation community stepped up to continue the relationships they had established with Legislators during the successful 2021 session. In early March, seven constituents from the Rochester area joined in a conference call with Senate Taxes Committee Chairperson Sen. Carla Nelson to highlight completed and future historic tax credit projects throughout that region. Direct outreach and testimony from historic tax credit project proponents in International Falls, Sandstone, Jasper, and Minneapolis also shared their stories one-on-one and in committee hearings, helping to demonstrate the reach and influence that this program has on communities across the state. After all, in many of these small cities, a historic tax credit project might be the single largest private capital investment seen in decades.

The effort appeared to be paying off when the Minnesota House passed an 8-year extension of the historic tax credit and restored the single credit payment that was in place before 2019. The taxes bill passed by the Minnesota Senate made the Historic Structure Rehabilitation Tax Credit permanent, but kept its five-year payment schedule, in line with that of the Federal historic tax credit. When the House and Senate taxes committee members met in conference committee, they agreed to adopt the Senate language, just days before the constitutionally required adjournment date. We all held our breath…

And then, despite the personal stories and successful advocacy, the Legislature adjourned on May 18 with a pile of unfinished work and unpassed bills—including the historic tax credit extension. Unsurprisingly, media attention to the looming June 30, 2022 sunset of the historic tax credit picked up substantially after that. While many other issues before the Legislature also were not resolved, the historic tax credit was the only one
with a firm deadline. RevitalizeMN held a press conference on June 9 that brought dozens of people—developers, construction workers, labor leaders, and others involved in the coalition’s campaign—to the steps of the state capitol to emphasize that real peoples’ livelihoods would be impacted by the Legislature’s inaction on the historic tax credit. Stories, editorials, and letters decrying the end of this program have appeared in newspapers in every region of the state, on local television news channels, and on podcasts and radio ever since.

Meanwhile, dozens of buildings—and the people who had been working on plans to rehabilitate them—stand in limbo. Perhaps Governor Walz will call the Legislature back into special session before the end of 2022 to finish the work that they left on the table in May. Or more likely, a new Legislature will be called into session in early January 2023 and preservation supporters will again have to make the case for reinstating the historic tax credit, this time without the support of longtime champions like Sens. David Senjem and Tom Bakk and Reps. Paul Marquart, Bob Dettmer, and Jim Davnie, who all have retired from service in the Legislature.

Whatever transpires, we will remember the lesson learned over the past two years: that personal stories can help focus attention on the positive impacts of the historic tax credit. We urge you to continue sharing these stories with the people who seek to represent you in Saint Paul as we press on towards the goal of ensuring the survival of a proven, effective economic incentive that supports preservation of local landmarks, environmental sustainability, and economic growth.
Save the Date

Rethos Gala and Awards

Thursday,
October 13, 2022

Landmark Center in Saint Paul, Minnesota

Reception at 5:30    Program at 6:30
“The New Standards” will perform.

Stay tuned for more details in the coming weeks.

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