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Historic Homes, Historic Opportunities

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Spokane has many distinct neighborhoods filled with historic homes of recognized architectural style.

Over the years, new generations of homeowners have lovingly restored older Spokane homes that have weathered almost a century of family life within their walls, and maybe even more. And, for over 95 years now as well, Spokane REALTORS® have traveled extensively across Eastern Washington, showing homes of all ages in all neighborhoods.

Does sustainable design apply to historic preservation?

Here is an interesting question. If a home is nearing 100 years old or older, it may be asking its owner, "Can I go green, too?" According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the answer is a resounding "yes!" In the Spring 2007 issue of the National Trust publication, *Forum Journal* (p.36) several 100-year old restoration projects are featured that "successfully connect historic and sustainable." The author, Sophia Lynn, writes, "With sensitivity and understanding, modern green building design and practices may be applied to historic properties, resulting in a higher standard of preservation for all."

But before making an investment in history, potential homebuyers will want to consider these questions:

- What regulations govern local historic buildings and districts?
- Does the house need extensive restoration?
- Are original or substitute materials available for repairs?
- Are craftsmen who are knowledgeable about historic materials and building systems available?
- How will the house be appraised?

Knowing what to look for in an older home is an important first step. Do you know what architectural style your home is -- Craftsman? Neoclassic? Bungalow? Victorian?

REALTOR® Magazine Online, published by the National Association of REALTORS®, features a wonderful *Architecture Guide* with drawings of dozens of historic home styles, making it easy to learn more about your home style here:

http://www.realtor.org/rmoarchitecture_guide/architectureguidehomepage

Potential buyers should understand that there are significant differences between a historic

house and a new one. Before purchasing a historic home, consumers will want to research just how much restoration is needed and how much the restoration will cost. That includes, of course, uncovering any possible environmental problems not typically found in new construction such as the presence of asbestos or lead paint.

Knowledge of any structural problem and the time and money needed to fix it should not only influence the decision of whether to buy, but also how much to offer. In some cases, the seller may be required to undertake some of the work as part of the purchase agreement.

The advantages of owning a historic house often do outweigh the work that goes into finding and securing one. There is a rewarding sense of history in the unique detailing and meticulous craftsmanship found in historic homes as well as the satisfaction of restoration.

There may also be financial benefits for a historic home owner. Those benefits range from reductions in property taxes and adjustments to assessed value, to state income tax credits and property tax freezes for qualified rehabilitation and restorations. Contact a tax professional to explore this further.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation reports that 37 states and the District of Columbia have laws that provide individuals with incentives for owning historic properties.

Not every old home is historic.

Specifically, a historic house is an example of the cultural or physical development of a community, state, or the nation due to its architecture or association with an important historical figure or event.

If a home does qualify as a historic property, then it may be listed individually or as part of a historic district. The listing of a building or district in the National Park Service's "*National Register of Historic Places*" provides public recognition of its importance. But, the National Register will not interfere with an owner's right to alter, sell, or determine how an individual property may be used.

A local or state government housing preservation organization usually will assist owners who want to pursue a historic designation. However, even if the historic building meets the designation criteria, it will not be listed if the majority of property owners in a district object for whatever reason. In this case, the building is put on an "eligible" list should the objections be overcome in the future.

For more information on historic properties, here are four valuable references: the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, at www.ncshpo.org; the National Trust for Historic Preservation, at www.nationaltrust.org; Washington state resources include the Office of Archeology & Historic Preservation, at www.dahp.wa.gov; and the Washington State Historic Preservation Office, at www.wa-trust.org.

The month of May each year is designated as National Historic Preservation month. Locally, the historic preservation committee of the Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture (MAC) has offered a Mother's Day tour of historic Spokane homes. Contact the MAC for current year information about that event.

Though the charms of historic Spokane homes are rooted in the past, they are being purchased and enjoyed by families of today, with future dreams yet to unfold within their walls. The Spokane Association of REALTORS® advises you to talk with your REALTOR® to learn more about historic homes of interest that are on the market now, to see if one is right for you. You may also view open houses any time, 24/7, at www.SpokaneOpen.com, brought to you by members of the Spokane Association of REALTORS®.

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Sources: REALTOR® Magazine Online, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Nat'l Assn. of REALTORS®