

Conversation with the Mayor - October 5, 2009
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Preservation Made Simple

Living up to that title is a challenge, but what follows should shed a bit of light on what is happening in the village with preservation. The preservation effort is not new to Palmyra. In 1972, the village applied and was approved for listing Market Street on the National Register of Historic Places. Two years later, the East Main Street Commercial District was added as an additional district. East Main Commercial begins at the William and Cuyler Street intersections with East Main Street and ends at Clinton Street and across the street from that intersection. What we still call the Garlock House was not included because it was not built as a commercial building.

The membership of Zion Episcopal Church applied for listing separately and was so honored in 1996. It is the only free standing building in the village to be listed. That listing enabled the church to apply for grants which are available only to 'sacred sites' (churches) and to revenue producing buildings. Note: Every owner of commercial property in the 2 current districts can do the same thing.

This year the village applied for a grant to do a cultural resource survey of building stock and to apply for an expanded listing on the National Register. We got the grant. We made the application and step one of the process, approval by the NYS Office of Historic Preservation, has occurred. The application has now been forwarded to the National Park Service, Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C. A jury will decide whether or not we qualify for the National Register of Historic Places designation. If listed, there will be one large district, The Palmyra Historic District, containing more than 200 properties. It will encompass parts of East and West Main, East and West Jackson, Church, Cuyler, Canandaigua and Market Street. When this is finalized, we will do a map.

Why did we do this? There are several reasons. We have a noteworthy 19th century business section already listed on the Register. We have more that should be listed – the other village churches, for example. We also have magnificent residential properties throughout the Village which are worthy of this honor. And for the owners of revenue producing structures and the churches, there are both government and private grants available for repair and 'adaptive reuse'. The latter is the use of a historic building for a new purpose without destroying the character of its historic exterior. Think of the handsome old buildings that have been turned into restaurants, offices, B&Bs. If you get government money – state, federal or local, you have to do it right.

For the owners of private residences, there is no funding, but there is the knowledge that you have a handsome home whose appearance and history are valued. If you choose, you can put up a plaque attesting to its listing and the year of its construction.

Is there a down side? I don't think so. Does being listed mean someone can tell me what I can and cannot do with my building? No, listing on the National Register in no way prevents an owner from doing what he/she will with the property. The Palmyra Hotel on East Main Street has been on the Register since 1974 as has the Jarvis Block. In both cases, the owners made

decisions as to how they would proceed to remodel the building. Will my assessment or taxes go up? Not because of the listing, but your building may benefit from being listed when and if you choose to sell. Having been found eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places and gaining access to the benefits that provide are just two more feathers in Palmyra's cap.

The bottom line is that we have a pretty village filled with handsome historic buildings that experts have found to be of value and worth honoring. If you have questions, get in touch and you will get answers. We will talk about the local ordinance and what it can do for you another time.