



Safeguarding Historic Riverton

Mayor and Council are working on new tools to protect the way Riverton looks.



Q & A

Q: Our Historic District has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1998! How come houses are still being lost, remuddled and “modernized”?

A: While prestigious, the National and New Jersey registers offer protection only if public funds are being used. They make us eligible for some grants but we’re otherwise unprotected.

Q: So why did it take so long to protect our history from loss? Lots of really nice towns have these kinds of laws, right?



A: We had a law to stop teardowns but the Groves Mansion lawsuit threw it out, leaving Riverton with nothing, though many did not realize it. It took time to develop a balance to fit Riverton’s character. Some towns are as fussy as HOAs and others don’t care and “anything goes”. Residents and businesses stress that Riverton needs to be somewhere in between.

Q: So how would these new tools find this “balance”?

A: It’s simple –

Lose no more historic character that you can see from the street.

It’s common sense: repairs are all good, replacements just have to look like what’s already here, changes are OK but need to be in character with the historic house and its surroundings. New houses need to play well with their historic neighbors.

Q: But we all worry about ... paint colors ! Painting is a change, right?

A: Fear not, no one will tell you how to repaint your house. Colors are too personal and they can always be changed again. Please realize, though, this means your neighbors can pick whatever colors they like, too. Fair is fair.

Q: Sounds like new bureaucracy. Is it?

A: No, pretty much like it’s been for decades: changes need a Borough review but now the review can tell the new flipper who bought next door that they can’t tear off the Victorian porch and gingerbread – or cover what’s left in plastic siding.

Q: OK ... but how’s this work?

A: Any work in the Historic District that would change the appearance visible from the street gets a simple review by the Historic Preservation Commission to be sure Riverton

doesn't lose even more historic appearance. Few projects will need an architect or a lawyer. If it won't harm the historic appearance, you're good to go. If it would, the HPC has knowledgeable members who can recommend alternatives that don't chip away at Riverton's historic charm.

Q: Does this mean I have to use wood windows and siding?

A: No, not at all. Remember, it only has to look like it's historic from the street. There are lots of synthetic products today that are a good investment: they don't look like plastic and will actually hold up better than wood or cheap vinyl. The HPC will be glad to help. And exceptions will be made for things like slate roofs that may be impractical today.

Q: Speaking of investment – what does this do to property values?

A: Good news: other towns have found that sensible protections make their homes more desirable because buyers looking for historic character are reassured that their investment can't be ruined by someone else "modernizing" the historic house next door.

Q: Will this stop me from adding back a Victorian porch my house probably had?

A: Not at all. You'd be a hero to your neighbors! HPC can suggest designs and materials.

Q: Do these rules make me change anything that is already there?

A: Nope. If it exists, you can keep it. Want to change something? Just don't make anything worse. Riverton has a charming, historic appearance – don't lose it. Pretty simple.

Q: How did the plan for these tools come about?

A: After the tragic loss of the Groves Mansion, a Roundtable formed spontaneously with representatives from the business and apartment owners, realtors, Historical Society, Borough Council, the Mayor, the Planning Board, the Porch Club, the Fire Company and others to find a consensus on how to keep Riverton from losing its charming appearance.

Q: When does this happen and how do I learn more?

A: We hope to have it on Council's agenda in October and November. Once introduced, the draft will be available and you will have the opportunity to help us improve it. Please reach out with your suggestions or questions:

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Historic Riverton is a unique treasure. Let's safeguard it!

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District

