

CHAPTER 10

CULTURAL RESOURCES

I. INTRODUCTION

Washington's cultural resources are as valuable as our state's rich natural resources. Since they are finite and limited, they need protection. Like wetlands, forests, shorelines, and farms, cultural resources help maintain Thurston County's quality of life. The Cultural Resources Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan works to protect these resources.

The Cultural Resources element supports several other GMA goals. For instance, renovating historic homes can be more cost-effective than building new ones. At the same time, meeting affordable housing goals. Historic preservation is also crucial to downtown revitalization and economic development. In this way, historic preservation helps harmonize different parts of the comprehensive plan.

Cultural resources benefit the county in many ways.

- Enhance a community's image for residents, tourists, and business recruitment efforts.
- Teach about the diversity of cultures in our communities.
- Conserve natural and manufactured resources.
- Provide approaches to increase density and avoid sprawl.
- Provide community pride that encourages civic stewardship.

2025 Update: Critical Issues

- Keep the historic inventory and Historic Register up to date.
- Provide adequate resources and incentives to maintain historic resources.
- Protect historic places from growth and natural hazards.
- Coordinate historic preservation with economic development plans and programs.

GROWTH MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

The Cultural Resources element is not required by the GMA. However, historic preservation is an important tool aiding the protection and enhancement of the unique attributes that make Thurston County so special.

The State, recognizing the importance of historic preservation efforts, included a planning goal in the GMA to guide historic preservation:

- Historic preservation. Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures, that have historical or archaeological significance.

RCW 36.70A.020(13)

A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Thurston County is home to a rich legacy of archaeological and historical resources that dates back thousands of years. The area was first inhabited by the Coastal Salish people, who are the ancestors of the Nisqually, Squaxin Island, and Chehalis tribes.

The British Vancouver Expedition was the first to explore the area in 1792, followed by the American Wilkes Expedition in 1841. In the 1800s, the Hudson's Bay Company explored the area by land and sea, collecting hundreds of plant specimens. Non-Native American settlers first arrived in 1846. They settled near the Deschutes Falls in Tumwater and later in Olympia. The 1850 Donation Land Claim Act encouraged more settlers by offering free land. Many homesteaded in the open prairies and along the rivers.

In 1854, the Nisqually, Squaxin Island, Muckleshoot, and Puyallup signed the Medicine Creek Treaty. The tribes gave up 2.5 million acres of tribal land in Western Washington. In return, they received a guarantee of their reservation and their hunting and fishing rights. The Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation never signed a treaty with the U.S. In 1864, an Executive Order awarded them reservation lands.

Olympia first developed along the waterfront, then extended south. Olympia's role as the southern end of the "Mosquito Fleet," an 1850s steamship company, sped up its development. The fleet provided shipping and transport in Puget Sound. Other communities grew around logging, lumber, farming, and quarrying. The arrival of the railroad through the county in 1873 spurred development along its route. The arrival of highways in the early 1900s and, later, Interstate 5 in the 1950s influenced the county's development patterns. In the 20th and early 21st centuries, the county's economy shifted from natural resources to government, services, and housing.

Thurston County Historic Commission

The Thurston County Historic Commission has 10 members. Each County Commissioner appoints two, and they can live in any district. Established in 1984 under Chapter 2.106 of the Thurston County Code, the Commission manages the county's Historic Preservation program. As a Certified Local Government (CLG), it meets state and national preservation standards. The Commission has the following tasks:

- Provide public education on history.
- Promote preserving historic sites through inventory, registration, and review.
- Review applications for the Special Property Tax Valuation program, which offers tax breaks for certified renovations.

Properties on the Thurston County Historic Register may qualify for Historic Building Code privileges, allowing some flexibility in non-life-safety building code issues.

II. PLANNING CONTEXT FOR CULTURAL RESOURCES

Preservation plans and policies connect with many other areas of planning and regulation. They often intersect with recreation, housing, transportation, and economic development. For instance, a policy might require new developments to complement historic structures. This can be

achieved through compatible mass, scale, materials, and setting to ensure design harmony. Additionally, a community could promote new projects that enhance its historic identity. These examples illustrate how cultural resources link to other elements of a comprehensive plan.

A. COUNTY WIDE PLANNING POLICIES

The Thurston County BOCC adopted the County-Wide Planning Policies in 1992 and amended them in 2015. These policies set a framework for planning in Thurston County and its cities. They also promote coordinated cultural resource planning across jurisdictions. The general policies section covers historic preservation and outlines values and goals for cultural resources. Policies 1.2, 1.9, and 1.11 are particularly relevant.



Thurston County Historic Photo Album

Bob White mill locomotive
in the Rainier area.

*Source: Washington State
Historical Society.*

B. IDENTIFICATION OF CULTURAL RESOURCES

The cornerstone of successful preservation begins with identifying cultural treasures. A community can only safeguard a resource that it recognizes. Thus, ongoing surveys and inventories are essential.

In the mid-1980s, the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation—now the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation—surveyed historic sites in Thurston County. This map is accessible via the Thurston County GeoData web map application. Not all cataloged properties are on the Historic Register. (See Section C: Historic Preservation Programs.)

Existing Archaeological Sites

Among the known archaeological sites in the county is a significant village site at Mud Bay. Archaeologists have unearthed artifacts like fire-cracked rocks, bones, charcoal, shell fragments, and netting. Other noteworthy sites, especially along Puget Sound's scenic inlets, have produced cryptocrystalline silica flakes and points. These resources are especially abundant near Black Lake and the Black Lake Portage. Other archaeological sites are at the Chambers Homestead by Rainier Road and the Northstar School site in Delphi. The Washington State DAHP keeps a confidential ledger of these historical sites.

The Nisqually, Squaxin Island, and Chehalis tribes all have cultural resources staff. Not all tribal properties or sites appear on public listings. Knowledge about their locations and significance remains a sacred tribal matter.

Existing Historic Resources

The range of historic sites and objects in the county is diverse. The inventory includes:

- cemeteries
- barns
- outbuildings
- farmsteads
- schools
- granges
- homes
- trees
- natural features
- markers, resorts
- halls
- a lighthouse
- water springs
- parks
- quarries
- churches
- cabins
- landscapes
- water towers
- ditches
- main streets
- neighborhoods
- townsites

On-site surveys and nominations identified these sites. As of 2023, 133 sites are on the Thurston County Historic Inventory. Of these, 58 are on the local register, 21 on the Washington Heritage Register, and 17 on the National Register of Historic Places. The Historic Commission updates this list regularly.



Thurston County Historic Photo Album

Oregon Trail Marker in Bush Prairie. 8820 Old Highway 99, between Tenino and Olympia. Located in front of the CH20 Company. 1916

Source: *Thurston County Historic Commission.*

C. HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAMS

Historic Inventory

Historic Inventory properties are carefully curated through fieldwork and research. The journey of preserving history begins with surveying cultural resources. The Thurston County Historic Preservation Ordinance authorizes these inventories, as detailed in Chapter 2.106 of the Thurston County Code.

A listing on the inventory is different from a listing on a historic register. The owner must consent before a property is listed on the Thurston County Historic Register.

A qualified surveyor marks a property for the inventory when it has historical or architectural significance. A property's connection to local, state, or national history isn't always visible. Uncovering historic significance demands research, creating a rich "historic context" for the area. Even the plainest buildings can hold profound meaning in a region where lumber ruled. If they resonate with this history, their value to the community is magnified.

Being on the inventory means land use actions must consider the property's effects under the Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). Some mitigation might be required before moving forward. Properties listed in the inventory could also qualify for local, state, or national registers, opening doors to further preservation possibilities.

Thurston County Historic Register

The Thurston County Historic Register recognizes properties at least 50 years old. It may include younger properties of exceptional importance. They must have architectural or historic value linked to Thurston County's history. Historic properties must also have "integrity." Their historic

appearance must be unchanged. The process for the designation and removal of registered properties is in TCC 2.106.040.

Washington Heritage Register

The Washington Heritage Register (WHR) lists cultural properties. They are important to local communities and the state. The Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) administers the program. Thurston County, as a CLG, may comment on WHR applications. Under SEPA, Thurston County must consider the effects of land use actions on WHR properties. Nominated properties receive automatic listing in the Washington Heritage Register. Property owners may object to WHR placement.

National Register of Historic Places

The National Register (NR) lists the country’s most significant historic properties. The Department of the Interior, National Park Service, administers the NR. The Washington State DAHP manages it at the local level. As a Certified Local Government, Thurston County comments on applications to the National Register. The State Historic Preservation Officer can review and comment on the project. This applies to federally funded, permitted, or licensed projects. They may affect an NR designated or eligible property. Although historically, this opportunity has often held an honorary status. Consideration must also be given to the effects of land use actions on NR properties under SEPA. Property owners may object to NR placement.

Table 10-1. Identified Historic Resources in Thurston County, April 2004¹

Jurisdiction	Survey/ Inventory	Local Register	State Register	National Register	Total ²
Bucoda	2	0	1	1	3
Lacey	241	6	4	2	242
Olympia	589	215	35	27	572
Rainier	2	0	2	1	3
Tenino	26	0	3	2	27
Tumwater	188	15	7	7	179
Yelm	168	6	0	0	170
Thurston County (uninc.)	138	58	5	5	133
Thurston County Total	1354	283	73	57	1329

¹Does not include tribal cultural resources.

²The total number of properties does not equal the sum of the jurisdictions because some properties are listed on more than one register.

NOTE: Check the Thurston County website for updated information on Thurston County Historic Resources and with the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation for archaeological resources.

*Historic Register sites are mapped in Map H-1.

Special Property Tax Valuation

The Washington State Legislature has established a law for buildings listed on the Thurston County Historic Register. If you own one of these buildings or a building in a Historic District, you may be eligible for Special Property Tax Valuation. To qualify:

- You must complete an approved property rehabilitation within two years before applying.
- The cost of major improvements must be at least 25 percent of the building's assessed value before rehabilitation.

If you meet these conditions, the assessor may exclude the improved value from your property's assessed value. This will reduce your taxes for ten years.

Allowable costs include expenses for work on the building's original structure, permit fees, and development fees. All are part of the rehabilitation period. Costs to acquire the property or expand its structure are not eligible.

Property owners must apply to the Thurston County Assessor by October 1 of each year to join this program. The approval process is:

- The Assessor forwards the application to the Historic Commission.
- The Historic Commission checks if the rehab meets cost and preservation standards.
- Once approved, the owner will sign an agreement with the Historic Commission. It will include the property's maintenance standards.
- The Commission certifies the rehabilitation to the Assessor.
- The Assessor then reduces the property's value by the approved costs for ten years. This results in lower property taxes.

Property owners must get written approval from the Historic Commission before making any changes. New owners must also sign the agreement to maintain the special valuation. There is a fee associated with this program.

Public Education

The Thurston County Historic Commission has several ways to get information to the public.

An annual event commemorating Thurston County's founding on January 12, 1852.

Published **reference books**:

- Postmarked Thurston County (1988).
- Thurston County Place Names: A Heritage Guide (1992).
- Water, Woods, and Prairies: Essays on the History of Washington's Capitol County (2019).

They have also created **videos** about the county's history and place names.

You can find **historic interpretive markers** throughout the county at:

- Scatter Creek, Maytown, and Grays Harbor rest stops along Interstate 5 and State Hwy 8.
- The Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge
- The Yelm Cemetery
- Mud Bay Park and Ride
- The interpretive center for the Bush family on Bush Prairie.
- The Grand Mound Site of Women's First Vote in Washington and Indian Summer Park.
- The Regional Athletic Complex. This marker features eight displays of countywide information. The project was a partnership with the City of Lacey.

A Historic Road Name program. This program recognizes historic road names in the county with unique signs added to existing road signs.

Heritage Grant Program

Since 2010, the Thurston County Historic Commission has offered grants to non-profits. This program supports projects that preserve history. It helps collect, preserve, and interpret the heritage of Thurston County. The funding comes from document recording fees collected by the Thurston County Auditor. According to RCW 36.22.170, these fees are for projects that promote historical preservation or programs. This includes preserving historic documents.

Thurston County has invested over \$500,000 in 105 projects since 2023. This program restores and preserves local history. Past projects include recording oral histories for Dr. Thelma Jackson's book, "Blacks in Thurston County." The Sand Man Tugboat was also restored. The museum added new displays and artifact storage. Additionally, the team created a 3D interactive tour video for the Schmidt House.

D. PROTECTION OF CULTURAL RESOURCES

Archaeological Resources

The DAHP keeps details about known archaeological sites confidential, as required by RCW 42.17.310(1)(k). Local governments can access this information by entering into Memoranda of Agreement with DAHP. Decision-makers should consult affected tribes in Thurston County, like Squaxin Island, Chehalis, and Nisqually. These tribes can provide valuable input on land use or projects impacting traditional areas or archaeological resources, as they may have more information than the DAHP.

Review of Changes to Historic Properties

According to TCC 2.106.050, the Thurston County Historic Commission must review any changes to properties on the Thurston County Historic Register. Following the Commission's recommendations is voluntary. Yet, if the owner alters a property and it no longer qualifies for the historic register, the Commission can remove it.

Project Review

The Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) safeguards our historic, cultural, and natural heritage. Under SEPA, authorities evaluate development plans for impacts on sensitive areas, like historic sites. If federal funds are involved, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act come into play (36 CFR Part 8 and 43 CFR Part 10). These laws require federal agencies to consider the effects of their projects on historic properties and indigenous lands. Thurston County can provide input on these matters. Section 106 encourages early consultation among agencies and stakeholders to address preservation issues. The aim is to identify affected properties, assess impacts, and find ways to avoid or reduce harm, including making physical changes. It also seeks to prevent disturbances to cultural landscapes.

The Thurston County Historic Commission has a mitigation policy with specific recommendations. These include using historic structures in new developments and documenting resources with photos.

Relationship of Historic Preservation to other Thurston County Goals, Objectives and Policies

Preserving historic resources in Thurston County is crucial. It supports the county's goals for land use, housing, transport, infrastructure and the environment. Preserving these resources also involves other valuable natural and human-related resources.

III. GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

GOAL 1. THE COUNTY PROMOTES AND ENCOURAGES PRESERVATION OF ITS ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

OBJECTIVE A: Establish and maintain programs to protect important archaeological and historic resources.

POLICIES:

- HR-1.A.1. Identify and evaluate cultural resources for their significance in preservation.
- HR-1.A.2. Encourage the participation of diverse groups in the historic preservation program.
- HR-1.A.3. Expand and update the historic resources inventory as resources allow. It should identify a variety of property types and themes. The county should pursue grant funding or other sources to accomplish this work.
- HR-1.A.5. Encourage registering historic resources that meet the national, state, or county standards. The county should urge owners to protect, enhance, and maintain the historic properties and to use them appropriately.

- HR-1.A.6. Incentivize the preservation and restoration of private historic properties. Allow flexibility in building codes, tax benefits, and zoning for historic and archaeological sites.
- HR-1.A.7. Maintain a plan to mark and interpret historic sites in the county.
- HR-1.A.8. The county should encourage the public to acquire valuable historic properties by various means. These properties may have historic importance to the county or may be part of another public project. The county can acquire them through purchases, grants, and donations.
- HR-1.A.9. Encourage coordinated effort among jurisdictions and organizations to identify, promote and protect the county's archaeological and historic resources. Thurston County Historic Register and Inventory properties should have the same status and protection when they are annexed to other jurisdictions.
- HR-1.A.10. Encourage cooperation with Indian Tribes to identify and preserve archaeological and historic resources. This can be done through information sharing and collaborative programs. The county should keep an updated Memorandum of Understanding with the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. This agreement allows for the exchange of archaeological records. When tribal artifacts or sites are found, the county must notify the Indian Tribes and the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. This notification should occur before removing or disturbing the artifacts or sites.
- HR-1.A.11. Promote awareness of and support for historic preservation. Emphasize the need to preserve Thurston County's archaeological and historic resources.
- HR-1.A.12. Encourage a public information program to identify, protect and promote archaeological and historic resources and support related cultural tourism initiatives within the county.
- HR-1.A.13. Identify historic resources at risk from climate impacts, like flooding, sea level rise, and wildfires. Develop strategies to preserve them amid these increased risks.
- HR-1.A.14. Continue to support the Thurston County Historic Commission and its activities.

OBJECTIVE B: The county's permitting process protects important archaeological and historic resources.

POLICIES:

- HR-1.B.1. Support land uses and developments that keep or improve cultural resources. Discourage their destruction or incompatible alterations.
- HR-1.B.2. Consider allowing adaptive reuse of historic structures in need of significant rehabilitation.

- a. Encourage adaptive reuse of structures such as factories, warehouses, office buildings, stores, and others, into affordable housing, mixed-use developments, live-work spaces, and/or senior housing.
 - b. Combine historic preservation tax incentives with housing tax credits and grant programs to package financially viable housing projects.
 - c. Include adaptive reuse and historic preservation in economic development plans for revitalization projects of downtowns, main streets, and older neighborhoods.
- HR-1.B.3. Protect and preserve cultural resources. They give a sense of place, link us to the past, and enhance our quality of life.
- HR-1.B.4. Promote coordinated park and trail development. Development should preserve, restore, and use archaeological and historic sites.
- a. Develop plans for bike and pedestrian paths next to historic trails, roads, bridges, rail lines, and waterways.
 - b. Pursue community participation in design planning.
- HR-1.B.4. Preserve and enhance historic sites on county properties. Where possible, provide interpretive info and public access.
- HR-1.B.5. Identify significant views in the county.
- HR-1.B.6. Maintain the confidentiality of historic and archaeological resources. Staff will review them in land use and permitting processes.

Table 10-2. Thurston County Historic Register Summary

SiteName	Location by Address	Category	Other Register Status	Date Built	Significance
Jamestown Granary	Rochester	Agriculture		1844	associated early pioneer family
Bush Butternut Tree	Olympia	Landscape		1845	landmark of a prominent settler
Thomas and Louisa Rutledge House and Barn	Olympia	Agriculture		1861	Founder of Littlerock
Mima Prairie Cemetery	Olympia	Cemetery		1864	Associated with prominent county figures
Ignatius and Emma Colvin House	Tenino	Agriculture		1877	used as a stagecoach way-station
Yelm Cemetery	Yelm	Cemetery		1881	associated with the Longmire family, many notable interments
Bell-Bennett House	Olympia	Residence		1885	rural pioneer style
Alex and Anna Jaaska House and Warehouse	Rochester	Residence	NRHP, WHR	1888	Finnish Settlement
Bigelow House	Olympia	Residence		1893	associated with influential resident
Erickson Farmstead/Vine Maple Farms Farmland	Rochester	Agriculture		1893	associated with Scandinavian settlers
Erickson Farmstead/Vine Maple Farms House	Rochester	Residence		1893	associated with Scandinavian settlers
McKenzie House	Yelm	Residence		1893	historic integrity
Jonas and Maria Lovisa Erickson Farm	Rochester	Agriculture	NRHP, WHR	1895	associated with Finnish and Swedish settlement

Collins School	Olympia	Education		1900	associated with Freedom community and 1955 Indian Wars
Gunstone House	Olympia	Residence		1901	farmstead connected with early settlement
Pruitt Barn	Yelm	Agriculture		1901	example of gambrel style and materials representative of the era
Poncin Estate Art Gallery	Olympia	Recreation		1902	associated with area arts and culture
McVitte/Duckwitz/Hughs House	Yelm	Residence		1902	possible associations with Hudson's Bay Company, example of squared log housing, associated with several local families
Bowman Farmstead				1906	associated with Swede-Finn settlement in Independence area
Black Lake School	Olympia	Education	NRHP, WHR	1910	associated with Black Lake settlement
Delphi School	Olympia	Education	NRHP, WHR	1910	associated with logging era boom
Salsich Lumber Co. Superintendent's House	Yelm	Residence		1910	associated with area development
Nisqually School	Olympia	Education		1911	associated with first settlement, local landmark
Swayne House	Olympia	Residence		1912	rural foursquare style
Bronson Resort	Olympia	Recreation		1915	community value

Chambers Prairie/East Olympia School	Olympia	Education	NRHP, WHR	1916	important community gathering location, bell purchased through community donations
Lackamas School	Yelm	Education		1916	craftsman style, complete historic school grounds
Lost Lake Cabin	Olympia			1920	example of a rustic style cabin common in that era
Grand Mound Schoolhouse	Grand Mound	Education		1922	built by notable architect, style and materials are representative of local history
Lake Lawrence Resort Pavillion	Yelm	Recreation		1923	associated with area development
Sunshine Hall	Centralia	Recreation		1925	community gathering location
Gregory House Thurston County Chicken Hatchery	Olympia	Residence		1925	associated with local chicken farm
Kaiser House & Outbuildings	Olympia	Residence		1925	rural pioneer style
Olympia Golf & Country Club	Olympia	Recreation		1925	associated with area development
The White House	Yelm	Residence		1926	example of a bungalow arts and crafts style
Adams House	Olympia	Residence		1928	associated with local chicken cannery
German Congregational Church	Olympia	Religious		1928	associated with Volga German settlement from Eastern Washington

Shincke House	Olympia	Residence		1929	pioneer Shincke family
The Lucas Harding Residence				1930	example of french eclectic style, designed by notable architect who also designed public buildings in Olympia and area
Long Lake Recreation Hall	Lacey	Recreation		1933	Civilian Conservation Corps project, peeled logs style
Gardner House	Olympia	Residence		1933	retains many original features, English Builder style
Otto House	Olympia	Residence		1935	associated with German settlement
Violet Prairie Grange	Tenino	Range		1935	community gathering location
Falkner/Kolze House	Olympia	Residence		1938	historic integrity, good example of houses in that area at the time
Old Boston Harbor School	Olympia	Education		1938	community gathering location
Holmes Island Water Tower	Olympia	Residence		1939	historic wind mill used to pump water for house hold use and later for irrigation.
Kinnebrew House	Olympia	Residence		1939	rare historic log home
Order of Runeberg Hall/Swede Hall	Rochester	Recreation		1939	associated with Swedish settlement, community gathering location

Offut Lake Resort	Tenino	Recreation		1940	associated with several local families
Strong House	Olympia	Residence		1941	example of local homestead
Swayne Barn and Orchard (Meadow View Farm)	Olympia	Agriculture		1941	example of rural foursquare and rural acreage
McAllister Springs	Olympia	Recreation		1949	originally used for recreation, then city water source, then transferred to Nisqually Tribe
Endicott Black Walnut Tree	Olympia	Landscape			associated with Delphi settlement
Kaiser Dairy Barn	Olympia	Agriculture			good example of a local dairy
Schneider Prairie Oak	Olympia	Landscape			cited as a bearing tree upon survey in 1855
Tibbets Property	Olympia	Agriculture			Associated with early settlement
Dye Property		Nature			Squaxin Island Tribe River crossing, Possible cultural resources