



West Virginia Department of
**ARTS, CULTURE
AND HISTORY**

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Town Council Members
Town of Bath
271 Wilkes Street
Berkeley Springs, WV 25411

RE: Property Owner Concerns about the Town of Bath Historic District

Dear Council Members:

Between April and June of 2023, our office was contacted by 33 property owners and residents within the Town of Bath Historic District who have raised concerns over the local government of the Town of Bath's lack of preservation efforts and commitment to preserving historic resources that make the town unique. These concerns are as follows:

- New development not taking into account historic resources
- No process for input from the Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) about the historic resources in the district and how they are modified or demolished
- The existing HLC being unable to promote and protect resources due to a lack of serious engagement from the Town Council
- Concern over the integrity of the historic district and the long-term effects of resource loss, which is the main factor in removal of a district from the National Register of Historic Places
- Concern that removal of the district from the National Register would disqualify property owners from financial incentives from our office and the National Park Service

In 2006, the Town of Bath became a Certified Local Government (CLG) under the federal and state government programs. That status can only be held by a municipality that commits to the tenets of historic preservation which provide an economic boost for the community, affords for thoughtful new growth, and protects and promotes the historic resources that contribute to the National Register of Historic Places and make each community unique. This formal, legal commitment from your local government to historic preservation affords the town the status of being a federally recognized CLG, technical assistance and training from our office and the National Park Service (NPS), a connection to a network of other CLGs throughout the country, and grant funding from our office and the NPS.

The concerns raised by these members of the community raise concerns from our office about the Town's commitment to the CLG program. To ensure that the Town itself is doing its due diligence to the CLG program, we ask that the local government work with the community and our office to come up with a plan to consider

the above concerns and seek mutually agreeable solutions. Although design review is not necessary to remain a CLG, we suggest that the Town government work to understand the concerns of your community members and actively explore avenues to alleviate these concerns. Possibilities may include:

- implementing optional design review by the HLC,
- enacting a demolition review ordinance,
- establishing a local historic district with more consistent updates to your own local register,
- significant promotion of financial incentives for historic preservation that are offered to historic buildings,
- creation of design guidelines,
- or other routes that may help strengthen, protect, and promote the historic resources in your community.

We suggest you look at these options to determine priorities. We are available to help facilitate discussion and map out a plan or outline next steps with the Town of Bath local government, the HLC, and community members.

We appreciate that your HLC is committed to historic preservation, but an HLC is only effective if the town government as a whole is committed as well, as has been pledged through your designation as a CLG. Though lost historic resources cannot be remediated, we look forward to working with you, your HLC, and your community members to take steps to preserve and promote those existing historic resources that tell the history of your significant community.

Finally, per W. Va. Code R § 82-1-7, your town has 120 days (until February 13, 2023) to implement improvements to your CLG program otherwise the State Historic Preservation Office can recommend to the National Park Service revocation of CLG status. Please reach out to Meredith Dreistadt, CLG Coordinator, as soon as possible at 304-5580-0220 or Meredith.C.Dreistadt@wv.gov to coordinate next steps with our office.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Pierce

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

CC: Town of Bath Historic Landmarks Commission

Megan Brown, Director, State, Tribal and Local Plans and Grants Division, National Park Service

Randall Reid-Smith, Curator/State Historic Preservation Officer