Common Preservation Questions

1. **Does Vestal really have anything worth preserving?**

   While some fine examples of Vestal’s early architecture and places of historical significance are gone, Vestal does have several remaining historic resources that residents can point to with pride. Local preservation is an ongoing process that looks ahead as well as back, anticipating the possibility of future local landmarks.

2. **How important is it to preserve these old buildings?**

   Buildings that meet the criteria for designation as a local landmark are valuable assets to the community and its residents. They represent the character, period construction, and history of the community. The preservation and reuse of historic structures has been shown to contribute a sense of place, add to quality of life, increase attractiveness for investment, and bring in tourism dollars. Currently, the Rounds House, Rounds Coal Building, and the Plantation Inn are designated local historic landmarks.

3. **What about Vestal's archaeological sites? Are they included?**

   Absolutely. Vestal is very fortunate to have at least two important archaeological sites that would be included.

4. **How old does a building have to be to be considered a local landmark?**

   National guidelines specify a minimum of 50 years old. However, age is only one of the criteria for determining eligibility and resources less than 50 years of age can be considered if they meet certain specific criteria for designation.

5. **I have an old house, would it qualify as a local landmark?**

   In addition to the minimum age requirement, a building must:
   a. be associated with events that have made a significant contribution to Vestal’s history; or
   b. be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
   c. embody distinctive characteristics of type, period, method of construction or be the work of a master, possess high artistic values or represent a significant distinguishable entity; or have yielded, or may yield, information important in prehistory or history.

6. **Who decides which buildings and places are chosen as local landmarks?**

   An independent, impartial qualified historic surveyor is hired to identify buildings and areas that meet specific criteria. The local commission uses this recommendation to choose which properties to designate.

7. **Okay, so what happens when a building is designated as a local landmark?**

   The building is listed as one of Vestal’s historical assets. The only change is that the owner submits a Certificate of Appropriateness application to the Historic Commission before making any significant changes to the exterior of the building. The commission will work with the owner to find a solution that benefits everyone.

8. **What if I want to modernize the interior?**

   Although it would be preferable to retain the original interior configuration and design elements, changes to interiors are not covered under the ordinance.

9. **What about ordinary maintenance, do I need a Certificate for that?**

   As long as the maintenance does not involve a change in design, material, color or outward appearance, a Certificate of Appropriateness is not required.

10. **If I own a locally designated landmark, do I have to register it with the State or National government?**

    No. Local landmark designation protects the historical asset. It is up to the owner to decide whether they want to seek designation on the State or National Register.

11. **What is the Historic Commission and what does it do?**

    The Commission is made up of local citizens who have an interest in or professional experience in historic preservation and local history. Appointments to the commission are made by the municipality. The Commission receives Certificates of
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Appropriateness from the owners of historic landmarks who are anticipating major changes to the exterior of the landmark. It also develops design guidelines, based on national historic preservation guidelines, for handling such requests. As a part of local government, Commission meetings are always open to the public. Minutes from the Commission’s meetings are also made public and available to everyone.

12. Someone told me Vestal already has a Historic Preservation Ordinance. Why are we filing a new one?

That's correct. In 2002 the Town of Vestal filed Local Law G of 2002 with New York State. We are refileing the Historic Preservation Ordinance because the 2002 Ordinance does not meet some of the State’s requirements which prevents Vestal from becoming a Certified Local Government (CLG) and from qualifying for certain grants.

13. Are there any other checks and balances….what if the Commission is doing a poor job…can they be “fired”.

The NYS CLG Coordinator monitors the activities of the Commission and if it finds that their actions are improper, it can rescind the town’s CLG designation. Just like the Planning Board or the ZBA, the Town Board approves members of the Commission and could dismiss a member for unethical or improper conduct.

14. How many communities have Preservation Ordinances and Commissions?

Currently there are approximately 180 across New York State. Vestal would join this growing group.

15. Can Vestal apply for grants if we’re not a CLG?

CLG grants are only given to communities that are a CLG. Grants from other state and federal agencies sometimes also use a community’s CLG status to award it extra “bonus” points for those grant rounds.

16. These grants sound good but won’t they increase our New York State taxes?

No. The money for these grants comes from the Federal Government. Each year the Federal funds are apportioned to the states for use in preservation. Currently New York State receives more money than any other state. By qualifying to compete for these funds, we are bringing money to Vestal that would otherwise go to other communities in New York.

17. How much will my taxes go up if Vestal is a CLG with a Historic Commission?

Just like the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals, the Historic Commission is composed of volunteers who offer their time and expertise to the community for free. The activities of the Commission, such as the Historic Survey, are paid for by grants.

18. Can the Commission force me to spend money to restore the exterior of my historic landmark?

No. Although many owners are very proud to own a property that has significant historical importance to the town, owners are not forced to make renovations. However, the owner cannot allow the property to fall into a serious state of disrepair.

19. A friend told me you’ll get less for a historic landmark when you try to sell it.

Well cared for property, whether a historic landmark, or a typical building, will always command a fair price on the market. Some studies across the U.S. have shown that there is a growing market for historic properties, particularly those with local protection from alterations that would impact the character.

20. You mentioned guidelines. What are they and where do they come from?

The U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties provide the basis for the Design Guidelines established by a community. They provide property owners with clear, accurate information about the care and maintenance of old structures. The Standards are available on the State Historic Preservation Office web site and Vestal’s Guidelines will be available on the town web site.

21. Where can I find out more about these topics?

a. Certified Local Government information is at: http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo/certified/index.htm
b. Restoration Guidelines are at: http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/standguide/
c. State Register information and grants are at: http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo/grants/not-for-profit.htm