

Historic Preservation



Historic streetscapes offer a visible reminder of our past



Historic Preservation

■ Historic Preservation Vision

Moravians from western Europe founded Bethlehem in 1741 as a religious community to support their missionary work among Native American Indians and colonial Pennsylvania settlers. Bethlehem began transforming from a religious outpost to a secular settlement in the early decades of the 1800's. At the same time, the town grew from a hillside village to a community with a grid street pattern.

Construction of the first bridge across the Lehigh River in 1794 and opening of the Lehigh Canal in 1829 were major steps in linking Bethlehem with the outside world. With a population of approximately 1050, the borough of Bethlehem was incorporated in 1845. The Lehigh Valley Railroad opened in 1855 and featured direct connections to Philadelphia and New York. The area later known as South Bethlehem Borough became the hub of the railroad's operations.

In 1860's, the Bethlehem Rolling Mills & Iron Company started operating along the Lehigh Valley Railroad in South Bethlehem. The company grew rapidly and evolved into the Bethlehem Steel Corporation in 1904. As Bethlehem Steel expanded in the following decades, South Bethlehem's population swelled with successive waves of immigrants. The Irish and Germans arrived first, followed by Slovaks, Hungarians and Poles in 1880's. Slovenes, Italians, Russians, Greeks, Lithuanians and Croatians arrived in great numbers during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and other Hispanic groups later followed.

West Bethlehem Borough, which was formerly part of Hanover Township, became part of Bethlehem Borough in 1904. In 1917, Bethlehem Borough merged with South Bethlehem Borough to form the City of Bethlehem—a municipality that now extended on both sides of the Lehigh River and both sides of Monocacy Creek.



The bell tower of the Central Moravian Church



The Nain-Schober House - an on-going restoration project by the Historic Bethlehem Partnership

Today, Bethlehem's historic artifacts, structures and streetscapes are visible reminders of the people who lived and worked here before us. The City's history also has economic value. Bethlehem's goals for preserving its historic resources include the following:

- Continue working with the local interest groups dedicated to preserving the various parts of the City's historic environment.
- Promote economically viable alternatives to demolishing historic structures, such as the adaptive reuse of older structures for uses other than their original use.
- Embrace new opportunities to promote Bethlehem's history to residents, tourists and other visitors.
- Continue using historic attractions to generate tourism, further economic development, stabilize neighborhoods, and enhance Bethlehem's overall vitality.

■ Historic Preservation Overview

Historic preservation is a deliberate effort to maintain, restore and protect buildings, artifacts and surroundings that tell the story of the past. Successful historic preservation takes foresight, organization and adequate funding. Government, non-profit partnerships, local businesses, local educational institutions, and private citizens all play a role in saving and celebrating Bethlehem's four centuries of historic resources.

Historic Preservation Partners

Several organizations in the Lehigh Valley help preserve and promote various aspects of Bethlehem's heritage, including the following:

- Historic Bethlehem Partnership
- Lehigh County Historical Society
- Lehigh Valley Industrial Heritage Coalition
- Moravian Archives
- National Canal Museum
- National Museum of Industrial History
- Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society
- South Bethlehem Historical Society
- Steelworkers Archives
- Sun Inn Preservation Association

The restored Burnside Plantation in West Bethlehem



Historic Bethlehem Partnership

Historic Bethlehem Partnership, Inc. (HBP) is a non-profit consortium that oversees the activities of four non-profit institutions that each play a key role in preserving Bethlehem's history.

HBP member institutions host 50,000 visitors annually, including 16,000 school children. Overall, HBP manages 19 buildings on approximately 20 acres. HBP sites include the following:

Burnside Plantation

Burnside Plantation off Schoenersville Road near Monocacy Creek is a historic farm-in-the city that interprets early American agriculture. It was founded in 1748 and was part of the Moravians' original agricultural system. Attractions at Burnside include a farmhouse, barns, gardens and other restored farm structures.

Colonial Industrial Quarter

Colonial Industrial Quarter, which is situated between Main Street and Monocacy Creek, was America's first industrial park. 18th and 19th century buildings on-site include a tannery, a spring house, a mill, a blacksmith shop and the waterworks, which housed America's first pumped town water system.

Kemerer Museum of Decorative Arts

The Kemerer Museum of Decorative Arts houses an extensive collection of artifacts from 300 years of American handwork and artistry. It consists of three connected buildings and a rear courtyard garden. The Museum is on New Street between Market Street and Church Street.

Moravian Museum of Bethlehem

This museum complex is centered around the 1741 Gemeinhaus, Bethlehem's oldest building. It also includes a historic apothecary and garden, and the only remaining 18th century residence that was built and occupied by Native American Indians. The Moravian Museum is located on Church Street at Heckewelder Place.



The Kemerer Museum houses an extensive collection of artifacts



Old World style masonry is a hallmark of Moravian construction techniques

HBP is an Affiliate Member of the Smithsonian Institution, one of only six affiliate members in Pennsylvania. In addition to tours of its historic sites, HBP sponsors a wide variety of other festivals and events.

National Museum of Industrial History

The National Museum of Industrial History (NMIH) is a proposed family education center designed to showcase America's industrial development from the mid 1800's to the present. Through its affiliation with the Smithsonian Institution, the museum plans to display large artifacts (like locomotives and steam engines) plus smaller items related to the country's inventors and entrepreneurs. The museum's exhibit space, theater, library and other educational facilities are planned to be located in buildings between Third Street and the Lehigh River that were part of the former Bethlehem Steel complex. A preview and staging facility on Roble Road in Allentown is open. The timing of groundbreaking for the permanent facility on the BethWorks site in South Bethlehem will depend on the progress of an on-going funding campaign.

Lehigh Valley Industrial Heritage Coalition

The Lehigh Valley Industrial Heritage Coalition (LVIHC) is an alliance of community groups dedicated to stabilizing, preserving and interpreting the history of former Bethlehem Steel buildings in South Bethlehem. Blast furnaces, machine shops, foundaries, and other remaining historic structures on the site are the subject of a wide-ranging effort to focus attention on the physical heritage of the former steel plant. Telling the stories of the many people who worked there and the community that resided nearby is a related aspect of LVIHC's mission.

National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the official inventory of America's historic sites. It is administered by the U.S. Department of Interior's National Park Service and managed by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in our state. The National Register includes buildings, districts, sites, and other structures significant to American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture. Most properties on the National Register are at least 50 years old.

The following table and map identifies City of Bethlehem sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Two of these sites are also National Historic Landmarks, which are federally-recognized places where significant historical events occurred, or prominent Americans lived or worked.

City of Bethlehem Sites on the National Register of Historic Places

Name	Location
Historic Structures	
Bethlehem Armory	301 Prospect Avenue
Bethlehem Silk Mill	238 West Geopp Street
Bethlehem Steel Lehigh Plant No.2 / AKA Riverport	11 West 2nd Street
Burnside Plantation	Off Schoenersville Road
Gemeinhaus-De Schweinitz*	West Church Street
Gristmiller's House	459 Old York Road
Illick's Mill	Illick's Mill Road
Lehigh Canal - Allentown to Hopeville Section	North Bank Lehigh River - Allentown to Hopeville
Lehigh Valley Railroad Headquarters Building	425 Brighton Street
Moravian Sun Inn	564 Main Street
Old Waterworks*	East Bank Monocacy Creek at Old York Rd.
Packer Memorial Church	Packer Avenue - Lehigh University
The Tannery	Old York Rd. - Moravian Industrial Area
Historic Districts	
South Bethlehem Historic Conservation District	South Bethlehem - 4th Street Corridor vicinity
Pembroke Village Historic District	Stefko Blvd. and Washington Ave. vicinity
Central Bethlehem Historic District	New St., First Ave., Lehigh River, Broad St. / Walnut St.
Elmwood Park Historic District	Dellwood Street / Hawthorne Road
Fountain Hill Historic District	Area along Both Sides of 3rd Street
Mt. Airy Historic District	Roughly Prospect Ave. between 15th and 8th Avenues

* Also designated as a National Historic Landmark

Source: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Bureau for Historic Preservation



Local Historic Districts

Groups of closely located properties are often listed together on the National Register as historic districts. These districts should not be confused with the historic districts that local municipalities establish and regulate through their zoning ordinances and through separate special purpose ordinances.

National Register sites may or may not be part of locally-created historic districts. National Register sites outside of local historic districts are not subject to any of the restrictions on renovation and demolition that local municipalities often attach to properties within their local historic districts. National Register status by itself does not legally prevent property owners from doing whatever they want to their properties, including demolition.

The City of Bethlehem regulates architectural changes in three separate historic districts, as listed below. Each of these districts is also recognized on The National Register of Historic Places. The boundaries of these three areas are shown on the accompanying map.

- Mt. Airy Historic District
- Central Bethlehem Historic District
- South Bethlehem Historic Conservation District

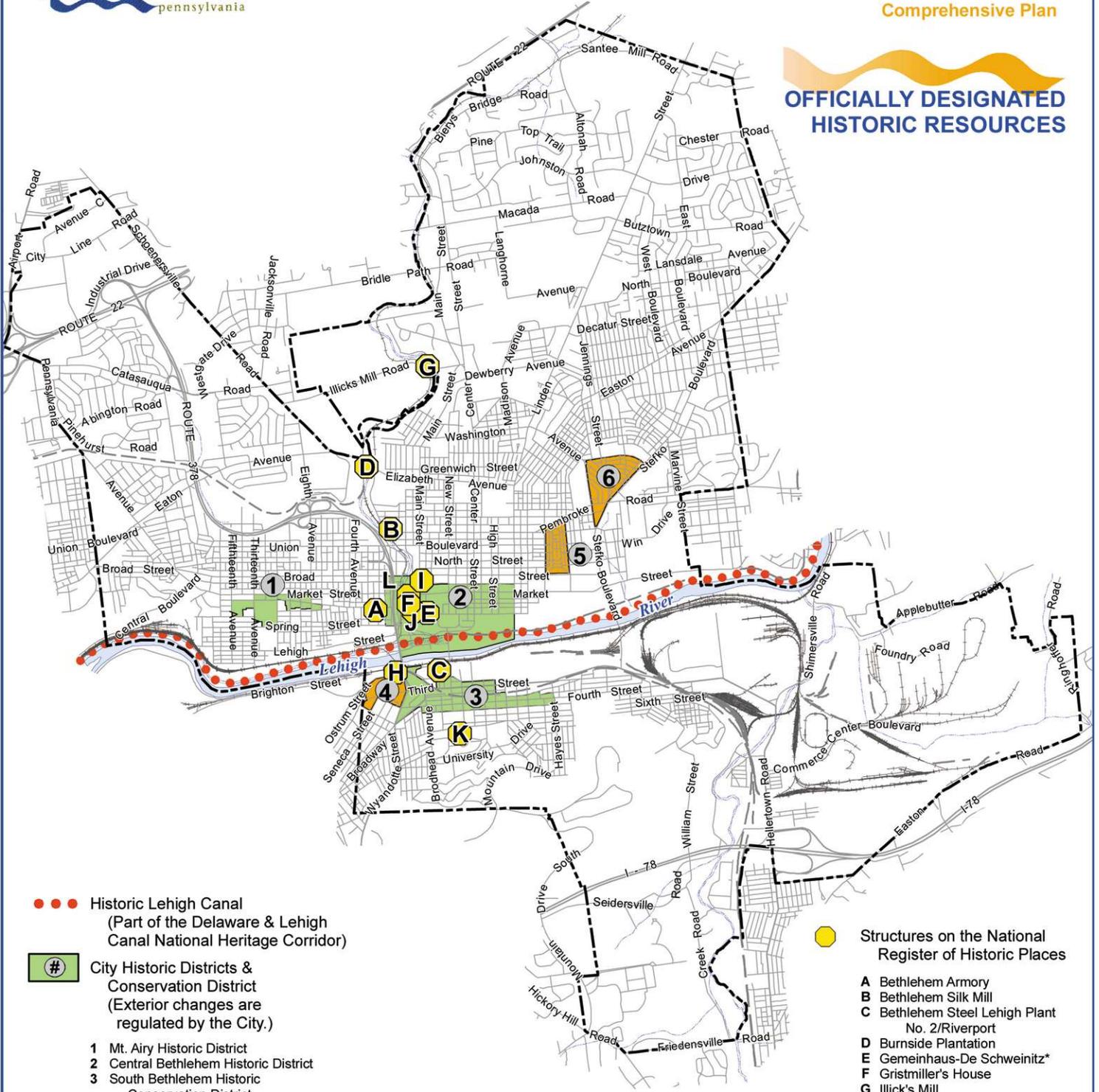
Within these three historic districts, the City must review all proposed alterations to building exteriors that are visible from a public right-of-way. The Bethlehem City Council then either issues or denies a Certificate of Appropriateness on a case-by-case basis. The City of Bethlehem has design guidelines available that property owners can reference when making plans to alter the exterior of a building in one of the City's historic districts. A Certificate of Appropriateness issued in 2008 approved historic theme streetscape improvements for the Central Bethlehem Historic District.



One of several mansions that grace the Central Bethlehem Historic District



**OFFICIALLY DESIGNATED
HISTORIC RESOURCES**



●●● Historic Lehigh Canal
(Part of the Delaware & Lehigh Canal National Heritage Corridor)

City Historic Districts & Conservation District
(Exterior changes are regulated by the City.)

- 1 Mt. Airy Historic District
- 2 Central Bethlehem Historic District
- 3 South Bethlehem Historic Conservation District

Other Historic Districts
(Exterior changes are not regulated by the City.)

- 4 Fountain Hill Historic District
- 5 Elmwood Park Historic District
- 6 Pembroke Village Historic District

● Structures on the National Register of Historic Places

- A Bethlehem Army
- B Bethlehem Silk Mill
- C Bethlehem Steel Lehigh Plant No. 2/Riverport
- D Burnside Plantation
- E Gemeinhaus-De Schweinitz*
- F Gristmill's House
- G Illick's Mill
- H Lehigh Valley Railroad Headquarters Building
- I Moravian Sun Inn
- J Old Waterworks*
- K Packer Memorial Church
- L The Tannery

* Also designated as a National Historic Landmark.



Historic Preservation Strategies

1. Sponsor concentrated facade renovations projects in targeted older areas following the model of the Wyandotte Street project.
2. Build upon the new visitors center planned for BethWorks by enhancing the visibility and improving the accessibility of visitor facilities on the North Side as well.
3. Strengthen the City’s regulations on the demolition of older buildings beyond the three City historic districts to include historic resources in other parts of the City.
4. Support the implementation of new historic preservation and education initiatives planned by Historic Bethlehem Partnership, Inc, including capital improvements, building stabilization activities, and new programs planned by HBP’s member institutions.
5. Cooperate with appropriate partners on plans to expand South Bethlehem walking tours and connect them to North Side tours. This initiative is also related to the start-up and incremental expansion of a well-signed Heritage Trail where cell phone technology could be used to assist self-guided tours.
6. Continue working with regional partners to highlight Bethlehem’s role in the overall history and development of the Lehigh Valley.
7. Ensure historic resources are not unduly affected by new land development nearby.
8. Ensure that facade rehabilitation activities complement historic preservation efforts.
9. Partner with neighborhood groups and others in trying to obtain official recognition for more historic sites and historic districts in Bethlehem.
10. Work with the Lehigh Valley Industrial Heritage Coalition in determining how the City can best use its unique steelmaking history to generate interest in historic preservation and related heritage.
11. Continue working with appropriate parties to facilitate design and construction of the proposed National Museum of Industrial History on the BethWorks Site.
12. Make a special effort to preserve built resource within the City’s historic parks.



One of many facade improvements completed on Bethlehem’s South Side



An abandoned railroad station adapted for use as medical offices



Historic structures along Bethlehem's Main Street

