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FHK COMP PLAN TALK

Good Evening. I am Jack Braunlein, a board member of the Friends of Historic Kingston, which as you know is our City's oldest not-for-profit preservation organization. While it was reassuring to read in the Comprehensive Plan that residents and stakeholders alike identified the city's historic resources as one of its greatest assets, the plan does little to ensure the preservation of those assets.

First, we would posit that historic resources are the city's greatest asset. For a municipality of this size, the breath and depth of historic resources is incredible. From the colonial period through the 20th century, there are excellent examples of wonderful structures – of houses, churches and synagogues, schools, municipal buildings, retail stores, industrial buildings and factories. Despite losses, there is so much intact that it is a glaring oversight not to recognize their extent, their value, and their importance.

Second, while the plan notes that “the success of its land use policies depends on an appreciation of that history,” it is the preservation of that history that is important not merely its recognition. It is not through awareness alone that assets are preserved as the plan currently suggests -- it is through a series of action steps emanating from a formally adapted Preservation Plan.

Third, the value of all this is that the preservation of these assets is a driver for economic development. We can all think of beautiful cities throughout America that value and promote their architecture – Charleston, Santa Fe, Portsmouth, and Chicago, for example – and can then reflect that this value brings tourists, brings homeowners, brings business to those cities. A city that recognizes and promotes its architecture recognizes and promotes its people and all they have accomplished; and that is a city that draws people to visit, to live, and to work there.

Therefore, we recommend that the importance of Kingston's historic resources be given the prominent place by moving the Historic Preservation section to the beginning of the Comprehensive Plan and that action steps necessary to ensure the preservation of those assets be fully delineated throughout the plan. Further, we recommend that the Comprehensive Plan advocate a pro-active preservation ethic for the city and the establishment of a formally adapted Preservation Plan.

Sadly, we have lost a great deal of our history through the ravages of Urban Renewal, the complicity of weak and unenforced regulations, and the delinquency of benign neglect. We must ensure that that does not continue. By taking a strong, positive stand for historic preservation, the Comprehensive Plan will establish the foundation for the retention of Kingston's greatest asset and for the promotion of the city's economic growth and future development.

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