Historic preservation is often defined as the process of identifying, protecting, and enhancing buildings, places, and objects of historical and cultural significance. This process includes the identification and evaluation of historical, architectural, and cultural resources in an area; development of planning and legal measures to protect these resources, followed by the allocation of public and private funding for the design, rehabilitation, and/or adaptive use of historic structures along with ongoing maintenance. This section outlines the importance of historic structures and areas, how they can be protected through designation, a county inventory of historic properties, places, or structures, and how to plan for the protection and preservation of Kenton County’s historical resources.

While many historic structures are easily identified within urban areas, due to their architectural design and composition of building materials, there are a substantial number of rural heritage areas, consisting of historic farms and homesteads, which often go unnoticed. These rural heritage areas are currently the most threatened historic areas within the state, often being consumed by sprawl and unplanned growth. This is particularly true for areas such as Kenton County which have experienced rapid growth and development over the past several decades.

Historic preservation efforts can occur over entire districts or by individual properties. In addition, properties located in historic districts, at any level of designation, experience an increase in value because they afford owners and investors with assurance that a neighborhood is protected from inappropriate changes to architectural detailing that would affect the unique identity of the area.

The Commonwealth of Kentucky is in the top ranks for protection and preservation of recognized historic communities and neighborhoods. Kentucky ranks fourth in the nation in total listings on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, the Kentucky Heritage Council (KHC) has documented more than 40,000 historic structures in Kentucky.

Historic properties are cultural resources that provide more benefits than merely preserving the past for future generations to experience and enjoy. They provide economic development and tourism opportunities that otherwise may not exist. Preservation efforts can give new life to communities by restoring the richness of the past and attracting new residents and businesses.

A property, or group of properties, can be included into designated historic areas at the national, state, or local level. Properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places are recognized for their importance to the history of the community, state, or nation. These properties qualify for federal tax incentives for rehabilitation and are afforded limited protection from adverse affects by federal or state involved projects. Properties listed on the State Register of Historic Places are provided protection from adverse effects from state involved projects and are also provided the opportunity to apply for state preservation grants. At the local level of designation, properties, typically grouped into districts, can be designated by the local legislative body as historic districts. Any changes or improvements to the exterior architecture of a structure often must be approved by a Design Review Board. The local level of designation provides the most oversight and protection for historic properties and places.

There are a number of efforts being pursued in Kenton County to identify and preserve historic resources. One primary tool that has been used in the urban areas are through zoning regulations. Many jurisdictions within the county utilize historic preservation overlay (HPO) zoning classifications which require a property owner located within such a district to get approval from a Design Review Board prior to making any alterations to the exterior architecture build-
ing or structure of their property. This requirement is to ensure that they will not detract from the character and form of the structure and the surrounding areas. Another method, utilized by the City of Covington, is to be awarded the designation of a Certified Local Government (CLG). Localities recognized as a CLG become an active partner in the Federal Historic Preservation Program and the opportunities this program provides. These opportunities include access to federal funding, technical advice, and a diverse network of partnerships and organizational contacts to utilize. Additionally, recognition as a CLG also shows the commitment of a community to protect resources that are historically significant from the past for future generations. Another key preservation tool currently in use by the City of Covington is a program administered by the Kentucky Heritage Council (KHC). Called the Kentucky Main Street Program, (also known as Renaissance on Main), the program focuses on downtown revitalization and economic development within the context of historic preservation, using organization, promotion, design and economic restructuring. This program is open to all local communities within the state.

In order to protect the historic resources in the county it is important to have a comprehensive database of properties that are historic. PDSKC conducted historic surveys throughout Kenton County from 1996 to 2006. The survey was made possible through funding provided by the KHC. Data from these surveys were incorporated into the county’s GIS system for documentation and mapping purposes as well as for future use. Over 450 survey forms were created from data compiled from Taylor Mill, Independence, Fairview, Erlanger, Elsmere, Ryland Heights, Lakeside Park, Bromley, Edgewood, Crestview Hills, Fort Wright, Fort Mitchell, and Park Hills, and incorporated areas of Kenton County. In 2011, the City of Independence conducted a more detailed historic resource survey, the majority of which covered a 10-acre area around the Kenton County Courthouse. With this data, the city is now considering applying to the National Register for Historic Places as a historic district.

It is the intent of the Direction 2030 Plan to support the list of areas with historical significance in Kenton County. To date, only the City of Covington has any districts or properties that have been added to the national registry. These properties and districts are shown in Figure 10.4.

In order to identify and protect historical properties and places, it is essential for the county to adopt sound preservation planning principles. The KHC has identified three key principles to successful Preservation Planning. They are as follows:

1. Important historic properties are irreplaceable if destroyed. Preservation planning provides for conservative use of these properties and permits drastic modification or destruction of historic properties only after all other alternatives are exhausted.
Chapter 10: Historic Preservation

Figure 10.4: National Register of Historic Places

Legend
- National Register Historic Districts
- National Register Historic Buildings
- National Register Historic Sites
- National Register Historic Objects

Source: City of Covington
2. If planning for the preservation of historic properties is to be effective, it must begin before the identification of all significant properties has been completed. To make responsible decisions about resources, existing information must be used to the maximum extent and new information must be acquired regularly.

3. Preservation planning includes public participation. Public involvement is most meaningful when used to define historic preservation issues at the beginning of the planning process.

The history of a community contributes to its personality. Preservation of such resources not only reflects the unique character of an area, but it also provides opportunity for cultural, social, economic, environmental and educational benefits.

A community becomes culturally richer by having a tangible presence of the past. Economically a community benefits from the opportunities for tourism and increases in property values. Social benefits include an increase in citizen pride for their local history and mutual concern for protection of such resources. Reuse and rehabilitation of existing historic building prevent a considerable amount of waste that would otherwise be disposed of in a landfill. Preservation of historic building and areas also provides an excellent opportunity to teach respect for local heritage and understanding of the past. While there are currently significant efforts underway in Kenton County to preserve and protect our historic cultural resources, it is of utmost importance to promote future identification and allocate protection for such important and beneficial assets.

Endnotes
1. Definition provided by the National Trust for Historic Preservation
4. The Certified Local Government Program is a preservation partnership between local, state and national governments focused on promoting historic preservation at the grass roots level. The program is jointly administered by the National Park Service (NPS) and the State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) in each state, with each local community working through a certification process to become recognized as a Certified Local Government (CLG).
5. The Kentucky Heritage Council is charged with identifying, preserving and protecting the historic resources of Kentucky.