

Public Open House

Proposed Changes to Design Review in Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve

A public open house hosted by the Island County Board of Commissioners, the Town of Coupeville Mayor and Town Council, and the Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve Trust Board is scheduled for the evening of January 19th from 6:00 PM to 8:30 PM. The subject of the open house is the proposed design review changes for the Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve. The open house will be held in the Coupeville Recreation Hall.

Re-Investing in Our Community Heritage

Ebey's Reserve is America's first National Historical Reserve, and the only unit of the National Park Service to be managed by a Trust Board made up primarily of local citizens like you, representing Island County, the Town of Coupeville, Washington State Parks and the National Park Service. These partners work cooperatively to bring together public and private resources for the Reserve. All of us—residents, businesses, visitors and public agencies—share responsibility for maintaining its beauty and heritage for the enjoyment, education and welfare of the local community and our national and international visitors for generations to come.

The Town of Coupeville and Island County are committed to protecting the Reserve and its buildings, scenic vistas and cultural heritage. Working closely with the Trust Board and the National Park Service, they have developed these design guidelines to protect this cultural landscape while fostering civic awareness and pride.

What Are We Trying to Protect?

Ebey's Reserve was established in 1978 to protect the unique cultural landscape of Central Whidbey Island. The Reserve's 17,572 acres contain more than 400 nationally significant historic buildings, more than 40 archaeological sites, two state parks, miles of hiking and biking trails, long stretches of shoreline, Penn Cove, woodlands, native prairies and Coupeville, the second oldest town in Washington.

The cultural landscape is the natural environment as it has been shaped by human activity, with buildings, roads, farms and forts as well as natural features – fields, hills, trees and scenic vistas. Ebey's Reserve is especially significant because it depicts history so dramatically. Its agricultural and small town heritage has left marks on the land and has deeply shaped the way people view this place. This way of life has produced distinctive field and crop patterns, hedgerows, barns, granaries, farm houses, and orchards, along with the more intimate settings of Coupeville's historic downtown, homes, gardens, deep lots. It is not just the elegant house and the special barn that are historically significant. More commonplace outbuildings like carriage houses and sheds also help us understand our history and provide a context for the more impressive buildings.

Such a fragile resource can be easily lost through incremental changes over time. Each new house, each demolition, each new roadway can diminish the historic character. In the thirty years since the Reserve was established, 36 historically significant buildings have been lost and more than 1,000 new buildings have been constructed. Change cannot, and should not, be halted, but it can be managed so as to maintain the Reserve's unique cultural landscape. These standards and guidelines are the safety net to protect the historical significance of this place for future generations.

What is Design Review?

The primary objective of the design review process and the design standards is to preserve the unique historic character of the Reserve's cultural landscape. They look beyond the historic buildings themselves to surrounding buildings and the overall landscape. The process relies on local residents working together with the Reserve partners to maintain this rural character.

Both the Town and the County portions of the Reserve have been designated historic districts since the 1970s. Design guidelines and design review has been an important tool for the Reserve for more than twenty years, and is used throughout the country by towns and historic districts striving to protect their community identity and heritage. It promotes sensitive rehabilitation and new construction by enforcing standards that respect past traditions and compatibility with the Reserve's character, thereby retaining strong property values for the entire community.

Design review for complex projects will be conducted by the appointed Ebey's Reserve Historic Preservation Commission. For most projects, the review will be conducted by County, Town and Reserve staff. Everyone involved in design review will receive training in historic preservation principles, design review and the history of the Reserve landscape and buildings. This ongoing training program will help assure that decisions are both informed and consistent. Annual reports of design review decisions will help assure accountability.

The process will be open, fair and consistent, with commission reviews conducted in public meetings with appropriate notice and opportunities for public comment before decisions are made. Staff will provide background information, take minutes and prepare meeting notices.

What Are the Key Changes Proposed for Design Review?

- Establishes a more uniform approach to design review by creating one Historic Preservation Commission, replacing the individual Coupeville and Island County review bodies.
- Establishes a more streamlined review system. As an example, exterior painting of historic and non-historic buildings is guided by objectives but is not required to be reviewed or approved by staff or the Historic Preservation Commission.
- Emphasized preservation and restoration as the guiding principles for historic structures and also allows for flexible and innovative solutions.
- Tailors design standards to the varied characters of different parts of the Reserve.
- Provides more design review support to residents and applicants in Reserve.
- Provides consistent and ongoing training to commission members and planning staff.

- Strengthens the demolition ordinance to protect historically significant buildings listed in the National Register of Historic Places.
- Gives the new Historic Preservation Commission clear standards and guidelines, authority and staff support and training

The Design Review Process

Although the entire Reserve will have design review, the standards and guidelines will differ, based on the historic significance.

- Historic buildings have the strictest standards, to preserve their character and integrity. These are the buildings listed as “contributing” in the 1995 National Park Service survey of Ebey’s Reserve.
- Buildings adjacent to a historic building have standards that assure they are compatible with the nearby historic buildings.
- Other properties have standards that assure that they are generally compatible with and do not detract from the historic resources (buildings, landscapes and vistas).

Open House Format

The open house is not a public hearing but rather an informal way of learning about the proposal and providing feedback to staff and elected officials before commencement of the formal hearing process. The open house will start with a brief staff overview presentation following which the attendees will be divided in to 3 groups. Each group will join a staff member and elected officials in discussions on:

1. New buildings and development;
2. Changes in the agricultural landscape; and
3. Historic building restoration and repair.

At the end of 20 minutes you will rotate to the next table. While you may have an interest in only one of the subjects discussed, we would very much appreciate your participation in a discussion on all of the issues. Your comments, questions, concerns, and suggestions will help formulate the final Guidelines and procedures.

Thank you for your stewardship of Ebey’s Reserve. See you on the 19th of January.