

Palm Beach Daily News

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North Fire Station shows classic buildings have a future | Editorial

Palm Beach Daily News Editorial Board Palm Beach Daily News

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The decision by the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach to honor the town's historic North Fire Station for its renewal and continuing service as a continuously operating fire stations speaks to the importance of protecting classic structures.

On Feb. 2, the foundation recognized the Mediterranean-style building, which reopened in March 2025 after a nearly three-year renovation, with the Edward E. and Susan Elson Award. The honor recognizes excellence in non-residential restoration, rehabilitation and adaptive use projects.

Too often in the United States, important buildings get torn down or dramatically changed in the name of process. One need only look at the changes occurring to the White House, where a planned — and huge — ballroom will be out of character with the nation's house, for signs that some think newer and bigger is better. Next on the list: the Kennedy Center.

Similarly, in cities across the country neighborhoods are sometimes harmed when developers or buyers tear down or enlarge architecture from an earlier era to make way for a bigger and fancier houses and buildings.

Palm Beach has long been fortunate to have a nonprofit foundation dedicated to safeguarding and preserving historic structures, working in tandem with the town's Landmarks Preservation Commission. The town's official preservation program began in 1979, when the Town Council adopted an Historic Preservation Ordinance

establishing the landmarks commission to protect the town's important architectural sites.

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That effort likely has saved more than 360 historic homes, buildings and sites from damage, among them the North Fire Station, which opened in 1927. The town landmarked the building in 1988, a designation that protects its exterior walls from significant alteration with the permission of the landmarks board.

Over nearly a century, the building has undergone several updates, but it was damaged during hurricanes Frances and Jeanne in 2004.

Efforts to restore it included work to preserve important historical features, including the original brick façade. That speaks to the town's commitment to helping preserve the island's historical character.

But perhaps more important, is the town's recognition that old isn't bad. Sometimes a distinguished building just needs to be reconditioned so it can continue to shine, and be of service. Palm Beach officials put their money where their mouth, ponying up \$17 million for the fire station project.

It's been refreshing to see the classic building move with style into the future. The renovation and restoration provided the firefighters who work there with the modern facilities they need to do their work, all while honoring the town's history and charm.

By giving the North Fire Station the Elston Award, the Preservation Foundation affirms that there is a right way to move historic buildings forward, even when they are not privately owned.