

Remarks Before the Community Preservation Commission

Heritage Tourism and The Detroit Hotel

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As most of you know Peter Belmont and I lead a number of historic walking tours in downtown St. Pete. We're honored that Emily Elwyn and Jon Wilson have joined us in this endeavor. The interest in the tours and the number of people attending increases every year. The average group is around 30 people but with a little help from the St. Petersburg Neighborhood Times we've had as many as 250 people show up for a single tour.

Simply put we provide a service to people known as Heritage Tourists. These are people who like to visit places that are historically or culturally significant or have areas or structures, buildings or homes that are significantly historic.

The Heritage Tourist is more affluent than the average tourist. They spend on average 25% more per day and also stay on vacation at least 25% longer than the average tourist.

According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Heritage Tourism is a growing field that city's around the country are taking advantage of because they see that "tourism + culture + Heritage = Sustainable Economies." Unfortunately St. Petersburg has been slow to recognize these benefits and, ironically, we are known as a tourist town.

It is always the saddest part of our tours when we have to explain what was here and why it is no longer.

It is time for us as a City to acknowledge the value of our heritage and do what is needed to preserve it not just for our residents but for the visitors who will come and support our economy. And there isn't a more important building than The Detroit for us to landmark and preserve so that we will have a reference point to show us how we began and why we deserve to be a destination for so many people, including the Heritage Tourist.

And one final point: The most consistent argument made by the owners of the Detroit Hotel is that they are invested in this historic structure and we are not. That's not true. Because of its historic importance to our city it has an economic influence on all of our citizens so that we are all invested in it.