

Ep.2.12 - Martha MacFarlane-Faes

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SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Martha MacFarlane-Faes

A Announcer 00:02

Welcome to The Michigan Opportunity, an economic development podcast featuring candid conversations with business leaders across Michigan. You'll hear firsthand accounts from Michigan business leaders and innovators about how the state is driving job growth and business investment, supporting a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, building vibrant communities and helping to attract and retain one of the most diverse and significant workforces in the nation.

E Ed Clemente 00:26

Hello, and welcome to the show. My name is Ed Clement, I'm your host today, and we have a guest that I'm really excited about because I love history. But Martha MacFarlane-Faes, make sure hopefully got it all right for you. But you're the Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer at the State Historic Preservation Office. Did I get all that correct, Martha,

M Martha MacFarlane-Faes 00:48

You did. Thank you. Nice to be here Ed, thank you for having me on.

E Ed Clemente 00:52

Oh, plus, you got a great first name. I had a lot of friends named Martha.

M Martha MacFarlane-Faes 00:56

Oh, well, I think it's a great name.

E

Ed Clemente 00:57

It is it is. You know, and let's just get this cleared up. First, you call the State Historic Preservation Office, SHPO. So if you do throw a SHPO out here and there, that's sort of colloquial what we refer to it as correct?

M

Martha MacFarlane-Faes 01:14

Yes, that's what I'm talking about. Yes. SHPO. Its State Historic Preservation Officer.

E

Ed Clemente 01:19

Yeah, no, I just because we don't always know who's listening, so I want to make sure they understand it. [Sure.] And, you know, it's sort of a seems like it'd be a self-defined term, but it's really not. Can you tell people a little bit about, if you run into them, they think historic is just about old buildings or something like that? What do you tell them?

M

Martha MacFarlane-Faes 01:38

Well, what do I tell them about SHPO, or what do I tell them about historic preservation in general?

E

Ed Clemente 01:44

Well, why don't you do both? That's fine.

M

Martha MacFarlane-Faes 01:47

So historic preservation is, as it sounds, the the notion and practice of preserving resources that are part of our shared history and maintaining them for our future. And they encompass 1000s of years of history, including early prehistoric archaeological sites, and ranging on down to buildings and monuments that are around 50 years of age, or older, is usually are cut off, or cut off date. And so we have a variety of tools that we use to preserve these. The State Historic Preservation Office is a state agency that we receive federal funds, and we were created through federal law in 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act, and we're part of a real network of public and private partnerships that act really as guardians of, of cultural resources within the state. We have a mandate to carry out a number of programs that people may have heard of, such as the National Register of Historic Places. We carry out a variety of regulatory roles in through which we protect historic properties. And also, we have our incentives program of a few grant programs and the historic preservation tax credits, which I'm sure we'll get into it as part of this conversation. Historic Preservation is important for really three reasons that that I can think of off the top of my head: one preserving a sense of place, and we are now housed within the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and Michigan Strategic Fund. And that,

of course, is one of the major pillars of what we're trying to do to bring talent and improve the places of Michigan. So, so building a sense of place and creating a sense of authenticity is a critical feature of what Historic Preservation aims to do. Also, it's a key factor in economic development throughout the state, and that's one of the reasons why we're housed within MEDC, right now, as part of our economic development incentives division. And finally, I think from a more philosophical standpoint, that cultural resources are reminders and our place-based places of memory, I guess, for us and for the way we have lived and what is important to us as a people. And there are all kinds of, of groups and individuals throughout the state of course, that identify with places and resources that are important to them and their memory. And that that is something that is, as I say, more of a philosophical, psychological point that's important to hang on to. We can't simply destroy all our past and that connection to it. So one of the things I do in historic preservation, the way I think of myself, is that I'm going forward trying to think about how we can coexist with our past, how do we keep the things that are important to us as a people, and also accommodating new things like economic development, new generations of people, and helping them to also learn to integrate the past into their current lives?

E

Ed Clemente 05:32

Well, I can even give you a real anecdotal, I think I told you, I'm on the Motor City's Heritage Board the National Heritage Board. And, you know, it's sort of like a lot of people that traditionally funded automotive were the sort of the big three, right? But now as everything's maybe going electrification, and you know, if you try to get anyone sort of under 40, to sort of appreciate sort of combustion engines, you know, and, you know, if it wasn't for, like, maybe the museums and Greenfield Village, people wouldn't really have a lot of recollection to things that maybe you and I took for common at one time, that are no longer around anymore, you know. So it is that sort of transitional generational challenge is kind of what you're sort of highlighting to and how do you maintain that?

M

Martha MacFarlane-Faes 06:14

Well, I think that is a definitely a generational challenge. What's interesting to me, though, is that, you know, when I started working in preservation, there was still a culture in which, you know, let's just get rid of everything and bulldoze it. And that there was a philosophy about economic development of starting with green fields, for example, or even brownfields, for that matter, and let's just, it's just easier to build on on that kind of space. And now, I think that that ethos is has changed a bit where people are craving authenticity, they're craving unique, unique places, and they want something of that history. They may not necessarily know the history of every building or understand all of those things, but I think that they're craving that that connection. And there's something intrinsic to historic preservation, older communities, for example, if we're just stuck talking specifically about the built environment, and buildings, you know, walkability is an important factor for people nowadays. They want to they want to be able to walk through their community, say hello to their neighbor and engage with people on the street. You can't do that in a car-based culture. So I think that's been a tremendous change that we've seen. And it has been a stimulus for bringing people back to downtown's back back into cities throughout Michigan. I mean, when I first moved to Michigan, there was a joke, I think the mayor of Grand Rapids used to say you could, the former mayor, you could just roll a

bowling ball down the street, and it wouldn't hit anybody because nobody was downtown. And now look, what we've looked what we've done. And I think Historic Preservation has played a huge part in in making those changes in the course of my career.

E

Ed Clemente 08:10

Well, I even think you brought up something you didn't realize you did. But you moved here. I think that that's obviously a huge factor in a lot of the guests we have, is that you're sort of unique. You've lived on both coasts and Chicago, right? [Yes.] And why don't you sort of tell us your path? And I think you went to a couple of pretty interesting institutions to for education.

M

Martha MacFarlane-Faes 08:33

Yeah, thanks. So I actually am a native Californian. I grew up in the Bay Area of California, in San Jose, which is now commonly referred to as Silicon Valley. And it was really a place that was just becoming Silicon Valley. At the time, I was growing up and I really, I have to say, there is something about that environment that affects a person. I mean, it is a very, very energetic, innovative environment with a lot of people with really exciting new ideas and fresh thinking in that space. But at the same time, you know, I'm somebody I just I really appreciate beauty and aesthetics and in history and heritage. And I think, you know, I mentioned earlier about, you know, tearing everything down well, I, I lived that. I lived that in my my childhood where I saw a transition from a valley, the Silicon Valley is actually the Santa Clara Valley and seeing a valley that was filled with beautiful fruit orchards. In fact, my my family, we had orchards on our property and would take care of the fruit trees and such and that that became a real practice as part of the culture of drying apricots every year. But I saw all of that, that beautiful land completely removed for freeways and Apple Computer's headquarters and of course, so on and so on. And we all see that as great economic development, and of course it was I mean, it's a thriving area, major economic engine in the country. But for me, it really, there was something that I felt of in the soul that was lost. And so my family actually is from New England. My parents are both from Massachusetts, I'm actually just second generation American, my grandparents were immigrants. And there was a strong connection for family for me. My parents wanted me to know who my family was, and so we would go back east to New England, Massachusetts, specifically and I would spend time there and my mother grew up in a 300 year old house, that's one of the oldest houses in New England, it's called the Spencer Pierce Little Farm. It's still there, it's actually a house museum now and you can visit it. And my grandparents were, on my mother's side, were Lithuanian immigrants who came to this country and they were tenant farmers at this home. So I spent my summers as a child going back east and exploring this big old 300 year old stone house and, you know, walking around in the attic, and the cellar, and I was I've always had a fascination with architecture and how buildings work and how buildings make us feel, and what our lived experiences in them. And so I, I spent my time there, little did I know, it was going to transition into a historic preservation field. I went to college, I ended up leaving California and going to Boston for college, outside of Boston. And taking my first art history class, just as part of the normal curriculum, I was at Wellesley College at the time, and I'd never even heard of the subject matter that you could study this, and I was blown away by it. And so those were some of the early influences. I had a professor who, you know, like many of us, are fortunate to have a somebody who encourages us in our career, and I have a professor who felt that I was a very visual person and had some insights there and that I should pursue it. So I, I ended up continuing my work, and particularly focused on on

architectural history, and then going to graduate school in Chicago. And that's how I came to the Midwest for the first time was, I was fortunate enough to have a scholarship to study at the University of Chicago, and I thought, well, they're paying me to go there so I'm gonna, go to Chicago. And live there, I was actually working on a PhD for a number of years. But I left academia, because I just, I felt that particularly in the humanities, it's a really, really, it's a tough, tough road. And I wanted to do some other things. So that's really how I got my start. It was an evolution, I guess. And in some ways, you know, historic preservation for me was, you know, after getting out of an academic path, what can I do with my interest in architecture and the visual arts to really make an impact and make a difference?

A

Announcer 13:42

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E

Ed Clemente 13:57

And you sort of have dovetailed into my next question because I think there's several things that are pretty big for Michigan, at least, and I know you got everything from a Governor's Award to preservation conference. And can you mention some of those things? Those are sure to like your partners and stakeholders and activities, right?

M

Martha MacFarlane-Faes 14:17

Yes, so May is generally considered Historic Preservation Month throughout the country and the National Trust and the our federal partners, the National Park Service and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, sponsor you know, a number of of events, and we all in Michigan, we have events like the Governor's Awards for Historic Preservation. We've been doing this now for 19 years, nearly 20 years we've, the State Historic Preservation Office has given these wonderful awards to honor preservation partnerships and accomplishments throughout the throughout the state. We also have a strong partner in the Michigan Historic Preservation Network and they offer their conference also in May. So it's a it's a big, it's a big month. But we do a lot of work throughout the year. Our our programs are, I mentioned a few of them National Register of Historic Places, we have a number of incentive programs in Michigan. We give Lighthouse Grants out, that's one of one of their grant programs that we can offer through the State Historic Preservation Office. Where we, if you have your Lighthouse license plate, and I hope everybody listening to this in Michigan has their Lighthouse license plate, because that is how we generate funds to raise money to preserve lighthouses and Michigan has more lighthouses than any other state. So they're a special resource for us and iconic. We also reserve 10% of our federal money that we receive for our operations, go to communities that are certified, what we call certified local governments, and they're communities that are taking the steps that are important for historic preservation. They have historic district commissions, for example, a historic preservation ordinance, so they have a real preservation ethic. And we award a certain number of grants every year to those communities as well. And then there's the biggie, which is the federal tax credit, and we've introduced a new state historic preservation tax credit, which we'll be rolling out pretty soon. We're very excited about that.

The federal tax credit offers 20% of a credit on qualified rehabilitation expenses. So you can imagine the size of a credit, for example, on something like the Book Cadillac Hotel in Detroit, when that was renovated, and rehabilitated in the mid 2000s. That was a \$200 million dollar project, rehab project. So huge, huge amounts of money there. And that's how a lot of those deals get made. Now we're now we're unrolling a state tax credit, which is going to be a 25% tax credit against qualified rehabilitation expenses for the state.

E

Ed Clemente 17:21

Yeah, and do you, this is for somebody I know everybody I know that drives around Upper Peninsula, Lower Peninsula, the whole state, will see those green signs, the Michigan like the green, like sort of metal sign [State markers?] Yeah, are those part of your offices as well?

M

Martha MacFarlane-Faes 17:37

No, those, they used to be they actually used to be back in the day, we did have the State Marker Program. And for the last 10 years or so those have been handled through the Department of Natural Resources, but we do partner with them. And there they are, you know, there are many state agencies that are our partner agencies. And one of the one of the closest is the Department of Natural Resources. So we work with them on that, but but they manage that program.

E

Ed Clemente 18:03

Yeah. And I mean, I think you also bring up a couple other things. Because when you talk about like Native Americans, for example, I've been up to the petroglyphs in Sanilac up in the thumb. And I don't know how old those are, but they're pretty old. I know that but and then you also probably have even more modern historic things throughout the state, like, you must be in almost every city or community?

M

Martha MacFarlane-Faes 18:24

Well, you know, we are a little agency with a big impact. We we are an agency, k we have existed in state government since the law was created in 1966. The law was enacted to create SHPOs, we have counterparts in every state. And we we do have a huge impact throughout the state. And I'll take you on just a little tour right now of you know, thinking about Grand Rapids, for example. You have a huge range of activities that or resources there that tell the entire preservation story, really in Michigan. The Norton Mounds are prehistoric mound site, that's a National Historic Landmark. And that is the nation's highest designation that we can offer to historic sites. Also Grand Rapids at Heritage Hill, it was created as a historic district in 1971. That was the first historic district ever created in the state of Michigan. So that's a very, very important site.

E

Ed Clemente 19:27

...not friends that live there actually...

I've got friends that live there actually.

M

Martha MacFarlane-Faes 19:28

And that's under a local historic district ordinance. And then Grand Rapids was also the site of one of the biggest preservation battles early on when laws were just being created to protect historic resources. The City Hall, the Elijah Meyers City Hall was demolished in 1969 after a very, very long fight to save it and it became a very, very prominent Historic Preservation battle in the country. If anybody gets a chance to look at some of the old pictures of that beautiful building, it was, it was the architect is the same architect who designed the Michigan Capitol. So that was a loss for Grand Rapids, but now, you'll get some a city like Grand Rapids, and they're coming back with, you know, amazing numbers of projects for has with historic using his historic preservation tax credits and other resources through MEDC, for example, we have a great collaborative relationship with with MEDC and being a part of the agency for the last three years is even even encouraged that collaboration more. But something like the Berkey and Gay Furniture factory, for example, which has now been rehabilitated into living space, and that that's another example. Detroit, our office has, is another city I'll take you on another part of the tour, where if you look at the Gordie Howe Bridge, we have a law in the United States under the National Historic Preservation Act that requires us to review and be consulted on every single federal project that occurs in the state of Michigan. That's 1000s and 1000s of projects every every year. So one of the biggies was the Gordie Howe Bridge construction. So we consulted on that, to make sure that historic resources weren't affected. And one of the biggest resources nearby that bridge is Fort Wayne. And we've worked closely with the city to preserve Fort Wayne. We, the city Detroit is also, like Grand Rapids, is a certified local government. I mentioned that program before. We gave a grant to the city of Detroit to help improve the Belle Isle aquarium, for example. So that was another place where we had a hand in. Plus, plus all of the rehab of the hotels there that are occurring with with historic tax credits. So the Shinola Hotel, the the Foundation Hotel, and I mentioned the Book Cadillac earlier. Then moving along to the U.P. and northern Michigan, we have a strong relationship, we work closely with the National Park Service on a number of levels and Sleeping Bear Dunes National Park, National Lakeshore is a partner with us to preserve resources there, as is Isle Royal and the Keweenaw National Historical Park. So we will work closely with the National Park Service to preserve resources there. Another rehab project occurring in Marquette was the rehabilitation of the Holy Family Orphanage, which is now affordable housing in Marquette. And that building was you know, you had trees growing through it, growing through the roof and it was in really bad shape. I toured it before the rehab, and now it's just beautiful.

E

Ed Clemente 19:39

Well, you know, you kind of touched on something they're real, and I think you're gonna laugh but we're getting closer to the end. This goes by fast. [I know it does.] Wow. And so but I wanted you to, just one other thing and you sort of touched on it early. But I think you is there any other points? I think a little bit with the the future you think as you go forward? Because I know you talk about walkable communities. But I do believe that, you know, Michigan has probably my count probably 10 to 15 cities that are a little distressed but probably could do it but is there other things you see that are going to help you know with your are going to change in the near future for you guys?

M

Martha MacFarlane-Faes 23:38

Well, these are these are really good points. I think coming out of the pandemic right now, I mean, I mentioned my early career and watching cities come back and now I'm a bit worried I think many of us are about what what is going to be the future for cities now post pandemic. And we have to look at new ways of dealing with that. I think there's only room to grow our incentive programs and give more attention to that. A couple of other areas we're really watchful over, creating a more inclusive history for people and to that end, we have been focused on the civil rights history of Michigan. And for, we've done some fun stuff with this. There is a survey of civil rights related sites within within Detroit, for example, and we've created a bike tour out of that. So you know, as the weather opens up for people, we encourage them to get out on their bikes and go to michigan.gov/shpo or the miplace website and look at our information we have there about this bike tour and some of the other work we're doing on on civil rights history. Also, environment and the climate are going to be another big issue that's affecting historic preservation in two ways. You know, as we look at changes in the climate, we're dealing right now with a lot of shoreline erosion, for example, which is affecting coastal communities quite a bit. And that's, that's a challenge right there that we have to address, but also in preservation, we've argued for decades that the greenest building is the building that is already built. And that the more we can preserve and keep those resources and keep the materials that we have, the better it will be for our environment instead of sending buildings into the landfill.

E

Ed Clemente 25:29

Well, it's a plateful. There's a lot going on. But you know, the last couple of questions are geared more to little bit less work related, but more personal, maybe a little bit. But is there any quick advice you'd give to your sort of 18 year old self or any high school kid right now thinking about careers?

M

Martha MacFarlane-Faes 25:52

Yeah, I think about this a lot, I have a couple of kids of my own that I actually do give give some of this advice to but I think that for one thing, realize that whatever you set yourself up to do, your life is going to look completely different. I know that if I looked at myself, or talked to myself when I was 18, and still living in California and say, Hey, you're gonna end up being in Michigan and having your career there. I probably wouldn't have believed that I've done all the things I have. But, um, so what was so I think one, one bit of advice is to be flexible and realize that plans will change. And even if you set yourself up and chart a course for yourself, you need to be open to new experiences and new opportunities and give yourself an opportunity to create those opportunities as well. But, be flexible and know that life life changes and you you build strength and resilience through that process. So I think that's what I would tell them and also, you know, take an interest in a lot of things. Also, because I know, I think I started my career off very, very singular plan, as I say, to go into academia, and it really branched out from there. And I I think being open and taking advantage of those opportunities has given me a lot of breadth in my career that I I wouldn't have had otherwise.



Ed Clemente 27:00

E Ed Clemente 27:20

Intellectual curiosity is a powerful tool. [Very much so, very much.] So this last, well, second to last one, but do you have any historical people that you'd like their leadership style? Anyone you wanted to mention?

M Martha MacFarlane-Faes 27:34

Yeah, you asked me that question. You know, the first person I could think of is somebody I've long admired is Eleanor Roosevelt. When I was in school, I did a report on her and I just liked her you know, strong and quiet demeanor. She got the country through a very, very difficult time. And was very serious and stalwart, but I think she would have been a hoot to hang out with also and so you know, she she is somebody who's whose leadership style I've I've long admired.

E Ed Clemente 28:09

Good choice. The last question might be your hardest one, is do you or your family have a favorite place you like to go to a festival or something in Michigan?

M Martha MacFarlane-Faes 28:19

Oh, well, I have a soft spot for I'm going to give a shout out to Emmet County, because I think it is so beautiful up there. We have property up in in that area that we love to go to and go boating in the summer and skiing in the winter. And honestly, you know, it's one of those places, you know, I mentioned I grew up in California and it kind of, in a strange way, reminds me of that because it has all those amenities that I remember as a kid of being, you know, the beaches and the, and the skiing and the hills and I love hills too. I miss that a lot. So I like being around that.

E Ed Clemente 28:57

No, no, no, it's your our official first Emmet County shout out ever. Well, once again, I want to thank Martha MacFarlane-Faes. she's the Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer at the State Historic Preservation Office. Thanks, Martha. You did a great job, you're really informative. I appreciate you taking time to talk to us today.

M Martha MacFarlane-Faes 29:20

Thank you so much Ed, I really enjoyed it. Appreciate the opportunity.

E Ed Clemente 29:24

Join us for our next episode where our guests will be Conrad Haremza up with Proximo Spirits and the Michigan Spirits Association and Jamie Wright with the Detroit City Distillery.



Announcer 29:36

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