ABSTRACT

THESIS: Interpreting Historic Districts: Using digital media within a comprehensive model to improve public appreciation and support for historic districts

STUDENT: Margaux Dever

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Historic districts are an important tool for protecting and preserving the cultural legacy of the built environment. Unfortunately, recent changes in legislation for several states regarding local historic districts have revealed that the general public does not recognize the value of historic districts. Interpretation is a form of communication which facilitates learning by making connections between people and resources. Comprehensive interpretation uses multiple interpretive methods in order to reach multiple audiences with messages about the value of historic districts. This study presents an interpretation model for historic districts made more comprehensive and effective with the addition of digital media components. Digital media, including websites, blogs, audio, video, social media and mobile apps, have changed the way we communicate on a daily basis. In order to reach as many audiences as possible, interpretation should include digital channels. Digital media interpretation methods allow for interpretation both on and off site and give audiences means to participate in the interpretation process by contributing to an online dialog. This thesis presents a case study on applying digital interpretation techniques to a recently nominated mid-20th-century historic district, Layne Crest, located in Muncie, Indiana.