

Alan Cleveland champions Athens' historic preservation efforts

Clara Lee



Alan Cleveland stands in his office, R. Alan Cleveland, LLC, on Sept. 16, 2025. Cleveland discusses the importance of historic preservation in Athens, Ga.

Alan Cleveland is a personal injury lawyer in Athens, devoting his time to historic preservation efforts as president of Historic Athens and a member of Athens-Clarke County Unified Government's Historic Preservation Commission.

Q: How do new businesses that would like to occupy historic buildings respond to preservation efforts?

A: There are developers who have a niche that can find adaptive reuses for historic buildings. The President's House is a good example. That's the current one. ... But, to save some of these historic buildings, like the President's House, it has \$2 million worth of deferred maintenance in it right now. Somebody's going to pay \$5 million for the property, spend \$2 million to get it restored, just to keep it from falling down, and then they've got to get a return on their investment. So, what could it be? It's not going to be a house. It's not going to be a five-room boutique hotel. It's going to have to be something bigger than that. And if we want to save buildings, we have to find solutions that fit the neighborhood, the use and the community.

Q: So, you feel like the President's House fits all those criteria?

A: Historic Athens has been monitoring that, and it's a thoughtful project. We're listening to all the sides. We haven't really taken a position on whether it's a project that we could support. The size seems to be the big issue. It's just really big — a lot of square footage for that area. That seems to be the tipping point that will have to be decided. I think whether it's going to be something that moves forward or gets put down.

Q: Since you've been a part of this organization, what would you say is your proudest accomplishment?

A: Historic Athens, since I've been involved, just the quality of the programming, the message that we're getting out. Our mission is to make relevant the importance of historic buildings and neighborhoods and cultural heritage in Athens. ... We've expanded our events to bring people into the neighborhoods. [Historic Athens] Porchfest is going to be bigger than ever.

Q: How would you say Porchfest emphasizes the significance of historic preservation and importance in Athens?

A: Well, for one thing, you're getting to see these houses up close. There are hundreds of houses with important architects. They're architecturally important. I mean, houses that have names attached to them. So if you come to Porchfest, you get to hear great bands, every kind of genre of music. You get to actually spend time on foot, walking around in these neighborhoods and seeing these houses up close, which I think is something that you might not do. If you're a student in Athens and you never walk down Boulevard or Hill Street in Cobbham, you're going to be amazed at the houses that you'll see that are just these beautiful, old houses that kind of give Athens its character.

Comments trimmed for length and clarity.

Why I Wrote The Story

This interview allowed me to gain a contact within my beat while gaining valuable, newsworthy information. Shortly after this interview, local media outlets published articles about the President's House. I gained researching and interview skills. I also learned the importance of preparation ahead of interviews.