

## ***Chapter VI: Historic Resources***

### **I. Why Preserve?**

Preservation of old buildings and neighborhoods enriches inhabitants and visitors alike by affording them more pleasant surroundings, and more importantly, by keeping them in touch with a part of their heritage. A practical reason is reflected in the economics of new construction. Rapidly rising building costs make the use and restoration of older buildings more economical in many cases. It is impossible to match the space and quality of workmanship of an old house with new construction. Complete restoration of a building is usually cheaper, or costs no more, than new construction. Simple fix-up with a new roof, paint, wallpaper, and new utilities is far cheaper than building a new house.

The rich architectural diversity of Bristol lies in its neighborhoods and span of building history. Greek Revival and Victorian styles exist side by side in the same area. Neighborhood streets, such as South Main, North Main, Summer, School and Central Square, offer a rich diversity of lifestyles, as well as architectural styles and scale.

Along Bristol's neighborhood streets, there are a great many structures in varying stages of use and repair. These buildings can be repaired and restored and will continue their productive life for a long, long time. The goal is to preserve a bit of the past economically, live in pleasant surroundings, and live comfortably and safely.

There have been many successful projects involving historic preservation within New England and on the national level. Some examples include Portsmouth downtown and Strawberry Banke, Salem, Massachusetts, and Faneuil Hall Marketplace in Boston; Mount Vernon; the Paul Revere House; Portland, Maine Waterfront; and Charleston, South Carolina. The current trend applies the historic house concept to entire neighborhoods. Rather than preserve one old house, historic preservation is now involved on a larger scale.

### **II. Historic Districts**

The term "historic district" can refer either to a locally designated historic district or to a National Register Historic District. The New Hampshire Register of Historic Places does not currently provide for historic districts, but the properties making up such a district could be registered individually. Registration at the federal, state and local levels are all useful historic preservation mechanisms, but they differ in the manner in which they are established and the protection they afford.

A locally designated historic district is a district designated by the local legislative body (the Town Meeting), as authorized by RSA 674:46. The legislation provides for the appointment of an Historic District Commission (HDC), whose powers and duties are specified in RSA 674:46-a. (A Heritage Commission, which has a broader mandate, may be authorized by the Town Meeting to assume the duties of an Historic District Commission.) Most significantly, Historic District Commissions are empowered by RSA 675.6 to adopt regulations for the district by majority vote of the HDC after a public hearing. Historic District Commissions clearly have significant control over the actions of private property owners in a locally designated district. Such controls limit some individual property rights; however, they also provide useful tools to conserve the community's cultural heritage and to protect property values for district property owners.

The New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places is maintained by the NH Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR), which is the state's Historic Preservation Office. Listing in the State Register can contribute to the preservation of historic properties in a number of ways. It gives public recognition to the historic significance of the property, can help qualify the property for financial assistance for preservation projects, and can provide special consideration or relief in the application of some access, building and safety code regulations.

A National Register Historic District is a district listed in the National Register of Historic Places, maintained by the United States Department of the Interior and established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The National Register is not limited to historic districts. It also lists individual structures, sites, objects and buildings, significant in local, state or national history, architecture, archaeology or culture. The Central Square Business District has been listed in the National Register since 1983.

National Register listing recognizes resources worthy of preservation, but does not impose any restriction or limitation on the use of private or non-federal property unless federal funds or programs are involved. National Register properties are eligible to be considered for federal matching grants-in-aid for protection, preservation, rehabilitation, or reuse. In addition, National Register designation provides for review and amelioration of effects which any federally funded, licensed or assisted project might have on the property.

Registration of historic properties and historic districts at local, state or federal levels has the same general purpose of recognizing significant community resources. However, the different registers function in different

ways, so it may be most effective to have a property or district included on more than one register.

## **A. Purpose of Historic Districts**

The primary purpose for establishing historic districts is to protect area of outstanding architectural or historic value from encroachment by inappropriate building forms or development patterns which could extremely affect the area's character.

New Hampshire Enabling Legislation (RSA 674:45) declares that the preservation of cultural resources, and particularly of structures and places of historic, architectural and community value is a public purpose. The legislation identifies the following purposes of historic districting:

- (1) preserving districts in the municipality which reflect elements of its cultural, social, economic, political, and architectural history;
- (2) conserving property values in such districts;
- (3) fostering civic beauty;
- (4) strengthening the local economy;
- (5) promoting the use of an historic district for the education, pleasure and welfare of the citizens of the municipality.

## **B. The Character of an Historic District**

An historic district, characterized by a grouping of structures and/or sites should be more or less a homogeneous grouping of structures dating primarily from the 18th and 19th centuries. Historic districts should be areas in which the character of the past is rather strongly asserted both in number of structures and in overall visual quality. In other words, age combined with the visual and spatial grouping of structures on the lands should be the main reason for an historic district. These may include groups of related buildings and spaces that represent the standards and tastes of the community or neighborhood during one period of history, unrelated structures that represent a progression of various styles and functions, or cohesiveness that possess an identity of place. A test in considering an area for historic districting might be:

- (1) Are there a sufficient number of 18th and 19th century buildings in a related proximity to create a distinctive setting?
- (2) Are the buildings within the area sufficiently distinctive and sufficient in number so that clear elements of control can be established and

elaborated for buildings of different ages and styles?

- (3) Do the buildings, structures or sites represent a variety of functional types, styles, uses, and periods of development.

### **C. Historic District Ordinance**

The purpose of an Historic District Ordinance is to establish an overall framework for the Historic District Commission's decisions and administration. An ordinance should be developed which will assure preservation and safeguarding of the town's historic heritage.

An Historic District Ordinance is adopted by the same procedures as a zoning ordinance or amendment, following the procedures set out in RSA 675:3. A public hearing must be held after a minimum of 10 days public notice. If substantive changes are made at or after the hearing, a second hearing must be held at least 14 days after the first hearing with the same notice required. The ordinance is adopted by majority vote of the electorate.

The Historic District Ordinance should outline precisely what is permitted, what is prohibited and what is regulated activity. Activities expressly permitted as of right now, for example might include routine maintenance, painting, replacement of exterior features with similar features, interior maintenance and rehabilitation and routine landscaping. Prohibited uses might include lighted signs, fluorescent or neon exterior lighting, replacement of siding with inappropriate materials, and so forth. All other activities are subject to regulation.

Details of regulation may be spelled out in the ordinance in whole or in part; or the ordinance may delegate authority, in whole or in part, to the historic district commission to develop and adopt regulations.

### **D. Local Historic District Commission**

In order to carry out the purposes for establishing an historic district, the town must create an Historic District Commission and appoint the commission membership. The Historic District Commission may perform research and prepare the content of the historic district ordinance prior to its adoption. Once the ordinance is adopted, the HDC is empowered to issue building permits within the historic district. The commission's task is to see that modifications to structures within its jurisdiction are compatible with the characteristics and design histories of each property and that design standards are consistently and equitably applied.

### **III. Historic Building Rehabilitation - Tax Incentives**

Owners of National register listed properties may be able to obtain Federal historic preservation funding, when funds are available. National Register designation may also provide for certain types of tax relief. Since 1976, the Federal Internal Revenue Code has contained a variety of incentives to encourage capital investment in historic buildings and to spur revitalization of historic properties. These incentives, including a 20% investment tax credit, encourage the preservation of historic commercial, industrial, and rental residential buildings listed in the National Register by allowing favorable tax treatments for rehabilitation and discouraging destruction of historic properties. Owners of National Register properties who choose to participate in the preservation tax incentive program must follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and receive approval by the National Park Service of the rehabilitation project in order to receive the tax credit. The Federal Internal Revenue Code also provides for Federal income, estate, and gift tax deductions for charitable contributions of partial interests in real property (land and buildings).

Additional information about the National Register of Historic Places and tax incentives for rehabilitating historic buildings is available on the Internet at [www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/brochure/](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/brochure/). Information on both the federal and state programs is available from the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources located at 19 Pillsbury Street in Concord and on the Internet at [www.state.nh.us/nhdhr/](http://www.state.nh.us/nhdhr/). Staff can also be reached at 603-271-3843, at [preservation@nhdhr.state.nh.us](mailto:preservation@nhdhr.state.nh.us), or at PO Box 2043, Concord, NH 03302.

### **IV. The Historic Inventory**

The Bristol Historic Resources Inventory is limited primarily to properties of significance because of age or architectural style. The original list, created for the 1982 master plan and containing eighteen properties, is retained in this plan. There are undoubtedly a number of other buildings in Bristol which are significant because of their historic or architectural character, quality and importance, and should be added in the future.

The properties included in the historic inventory are recorded on survey forms, identifying each by common and historic name, location, owner, use and basic description of the structure. Each building has been numbered and photographed, and descriptive information is included regarding structure type, style, age, condition and other architectural and historical features of significance or interest.

A listing of properties inventoried is provided on the following page. The location of these properties is also identified on the map on page 6-7.

## V. Recommendations

When the last master plan was created in 1982, the process of nominating the Central Square Business district to the National Register of Historic Places had just begun. Completion of this process apparently had a high priority, as did the creation of a corresponding local historic district. The Central Square Business District was in fact listed on the National Register in 1983, but Bristol has never created a local historic district or Historic District Commission. Fortunately, for the most part, good taste and common sense have prevailed, so that Central Square maintains its basic architectural integrity. However, because the town has not created a local historic district, it has been impossible to regulate such changes as inappropriate signs which take away from the appearance of the square. This plan again recommends that a local historic district be created with a Historic District Commission to create and administer appropriate regulations. However, in doing so, great care should be given to avoid regulation that unreasonably burdens individual property owners. This is only one component of revitalizing the downtown area, covered in detail in another section of this plan, but it is one of the most important. Another recommendation would be that Bristol takes better advantage of the National Register status of its downtown, by creating appropriate signage and possibly by other means. Finally, as was noted in 1982, the Historic Resources Inventory included in this section remains incomplete and should be expanded in future revisions of this plan.

### HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY BRISTOL, NH

#	Common Name	Architectural Style	Date	Tax Map/Lot	Address
1.	Homestead Restaurant	Georgian Vernacular	c. 1790	221-008	Route 104
2.	Hobart House	Vernacular	1799	114-079	150 Summer Street
3.	Higgins House	Vernacular	1800-1830	115-038	55 Prospect Street
4.	Beno House	Vernacular Federal	c. 1830	114-092	42 Central Square
5.	Bristol Town Hall	Greek Revival	1850	114-047	45 Summer Street
6.	Westfall House	Greek Revival	1837-1861	114-100	49 Spring Street
7.	Reynolds House	Greek Revival	1857-1860	114-134	81 South Main Street
8.	Alias Smith & Jones Restaurant	Second Empire	c.1850	114-125	24, 26 Central Square
9.	Faye D. Foster Antiques	Victorian Commercial	1850	114-174	14 Central Square
10.	Bristol Bakery	Victorian Commercial	c. 1863	114-173	8 Central Square
11.	Rollins Block	Victorian Commercial	1874	114-172	12 Central Square
12.	Tin Shoppe Antiques	Victorian Commercial	1872	114-171	16-18 Central Square
13.	Bristol Federated Church	Victorian	1827	115-064	15 Church Street
14.	Minot-Sleeper Library	Gothic Vernacular	1884	114-179	35 Pleasant Street
15.	Tapply-Thompson Community Center	Queen Anne	1889-1890	114-009	15 Church Street
16.	Hantz House	Queen Anne	1884	115-070	91 South Main Street
17.	Emmon's Funeral Home	Queen Anne	1895	115-072	115 South Main Street
18.	Whipple House Bed & Breakfast	Queen Anne	1904	114-051	75 Summer Street

