The Role of Local Historical Commissions in Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Historical Commission

Introduction to Historic Preservation Planning

March, 2019

Welcome and Introductions

MHC Workshop: Introduction to Historic Preservation Planning

Thank you!

A great, big thank you to those of you serving on a planning board or zoning board of appeals!

Local Government Programs at the Massachusetts Historical Commission

Assisting all 351 Cities and Towns of Massachusetts in Community-Wide Historic Preservation Planning. Primarily, the Local Historical Commissions.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission

Established in 1963 to identify, evaluate and protect the significant historic and archaeological assets of the Commonwealth.

Staff at the MHC includes architectural historians, preservation planners, planners, archaeologists and architects.

Highway Projects and Urban Renewal were the catalyst for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

Identification of historic resources was a key task of the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the Local Historical Commissions.
Similar Names – Different Responsibilities

Local Historical Societies

Local Historical Commissions

Local Historical Commissions

Why Do We Need Local Historical Commissions?

Part of Municipal Government

Community-Wide Historic Preservation Planning

1. Identification
2. Evaluation
3. Protection

Introduction to Historic Preservation Planning

Step 1. Identification
Identifying Historic Resources

Such as...
- Buildings
- Town Commons
- Landscapes
- Burial Grounds
- Bridges and other Structures

Step 1. Identification of Historic Resources

Not necessarily just old properties...

Step 1. Identification of Historic Resources

Are there underrepresented resources and communities?

MHC Inventory Forms
- The Identification and Documentation of Historic Resources
- Form B - Building

Step 1. Identification of Historic Resources

There are different types of MHC Inventory Forms
- Areas - Form A
- Buildings - Form B
- Objects - Form C
- Archaeological Sites - Form D
- Burial Grounds - Form E
- Structures - Form F
- Streetscapes - Form G
- Parks & Landscapes - Form H

Step 1. Identification of Historic Resources
1. Identification of Historic Resources

The inventory forms have a wide range of uses.

- Planning for What to Protect
- The Basis for Determining National Register Eligibility
- Federal and State Regulatory Reviews by the Massachusetts Historical Commission
- Owner Appreciation
- School Projects
- Master Plans
- Open Space Plans

What Inventory Forms Have Been Done for Your Community?

Visit Our Website and Contact Us for More Information
1. Identification of Historic Resources

Neo Colonial, Constructed 1987

Should an Inventory Form be filled out for this building?

2. Evaluation of Historic Resources

Historic Property Survey Plans

Evaluating Historic Resources

The information in the survey is the basis for determining which properties are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

2. Evaluation of Historic Resources

National Register of Historic Places Criteria

- Association with events, activities, or patterns.
- Association with important persons.
- Distinctive physical characteristics of design, construction or form.
- Potential to yield important information.
2. Evaluation of Historic Resources

National Register Districts

Very Old Properties

Recent Past Properties

Most properties listed on the National Register are significant primarily on the local level.
Advantages of National Register Listing Include:

- Community Pride
- Owner Appreciation
- Eligibility for Funding Assistance if a Municipality or Non Profit Organization.
- Eligibility for Tax Credits for Income Producing Properties

The Process of Listing

- Eligibility Opinion
- Preparation of a NR nomination
- Public Meetings
- State Review Board
- Submittal to the National Park Service

The State Register of Historic Places

The State Register of Historic Places is a compendium of historic resources including all National Register listings, local historic district properties and properties with preservation restrictions.

Step 3. Protection

Is this building protected from demolition?

John Perkins House
Wenham, MA
Circa 1710

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990

Demolished in 2011
There are two kinds of historic districts in Massachusetts.

- **National Register Districts**
  - Established by the National Park Service
  - Primarily an honorary designation
- **Local Historic Districts**
  - Established by Town Meeting or City Council
  - Very effective at protecting historic resources

3. Protection of Historic Resources

There’s a big difference between a National Register District and a Local Historic District.

**Regulatory Tools**
- Local Historic District Bylaws
- Demolition Delay Bylaws
- Other Bylaws and Ordinances

**Non Regulatory Tools**
- Public Education
- Advocacy
- Historic Preservation Planning
- Active in Local Politics
- Friends Group
- Creating a Non-Profit Organizations
- National Register of Historic Places
- Constituency Building

3. Protection of Historic Resources

“We can’t do historic preservation in our town. We don’t have any regulations, no bylaws.”

3. Protection of Historic Resources

Here is the counterintuitive reality...

You can do historic preservation with **only** non-regulatory tools.

You can do historic preservation with regulatory and **non**-regulatory tools.

You can’t do historic preservation with **only** regulatory tools.
3. Protection of Historic Resources

Public Education

Walking Tours

Events

Signage

Historic Plaque Programs

Award Programs

Advocacy

1863

John Hancock Mansion

The Canals of the City of Lowell
3. Protection of Historic Resources

Advocacy

The future is determined by those who show up.

at town hall.

Local Historic District Bylaws and Ordinances

- Can guide appropriate changes and prevent inappropriate changes to structures.
- Can permanently prevent the demolition of significant structures.
- Requires a 2/3 majority vote of town meeting or city council
- Regulated by a Local Historic District Commission

In a Local Historic District, inappropriate alterations and demolitions can be prevented.

A recent demolition from the North Shore

Not in a Local Historic District

Large and Small - Local Historic Districts Statewide

Yes, you can establish single building local historic districts.

Separate or Combined Commissions

Some cities and towns have combined commissions

- Salem Historical Commission
- Worcester Historical Commission
- Springfield Historical Commission
3. Protection of Historic Resources

Demolition Delay Bylaws and Ordinances

- Demolition delay bylaws prevent historic resources from disappearing overnight.
- Provide a window of opportunity to consider other alternatives.
- Delay periods are typically 6, 12 or 18 months.
- Adopted by Town Meeting or City Council.
- Administered by the Local Historical Commission.

State and Federal Regulations

Projects that have a state or federal involvement may trigger a review by the Mass Historical Commission.

Examples of state or federally involved projects:
- Telecommunications Towers
- CDBG Funding
- Roadway Projects
- Other projects that include federal or state licensing, permitting or funding.

A consultative process when there is an adverse affect.

National Register of Historic Places

- 3. Protection of Historic Resources

Grants

Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund

Survey and Planning Grants

Survey Forms

Public Education

3. Protection of Historic Resources
3. Protection of Historic Resources

**Federal and State Tax Credits**

For a Substantial Rehabilitation of an Income Producing Property.

**Preservation Restrictions**

An agreement between a municipality or non-profit organization and the property owner to preserve certain characteristics of the resource. The restriction is recorded at the registry of deeds.

**Community Preservation Act**

A funding mechanism for historic preservation, affordable housing and open space preservation.

**Working with Other Municipal Officials**

**Local Preservation Plans**

**MHC Publications to Assist You**

Lots of Material from Our Website or Upon Request
It has been a pleasure to be here today! Thank you for serving your local community!

Chris Skelly
Christopher.Skelly@state.ma.us
Director of Local Government Programs
Massachusetts Historical Commission