

3.7 Neighborhood Heritage Districts

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Neighborhood Heritage Districts offer a more flexible alternative to local Historic Districts (as distinct from National Register Historic Districts). Neighborhood Heritage Districts (NHD) differ in two primary ways: 1) they are administered by the Planning Board with assistance from an Advisory Committee (in contrast to a separate Historic District Commission), and 2) their primary purpose is to protect an area's overall character rather than specific architectural features and details. They are most often initiated at the grass roots level by a neighborhood association or group that can generate widespread support for such a measure and help assure its adoption. Through a customized set of guidelines and standards, and a team approach of advisory committee and the municipal planning board, NHDs review and regulate proposed change in a limited range of circumstances—usually new construction, demolition, major additions, and removal or installation of major landscape features.

This land-use tool has been in use in other states since the early 1980s. Elsewhere it is frequently called a Conservation District or Neighborhood Conservation District because the emphasis is less on preserving specific features and details of buildings and more on conserving the overarching characteristics of a neighborhood or area. Resources in such a district do not have to be 50 years old or older, as is typical with traditional historic districts, but the designated area must convey some aspect of the community's historical, architectural, or cultural heritage.

Goals in creating a Neighborhood Heritage District may include protection of rural character, encouraging compatible new investment, controlling demolition, stabilizing property values, limiting unsympathetic commercial encroachment, or maintaining traditional scale, form or uses. NHDs are most often adopted as an overlay to existing traditional zoning.

In 2008, the N.H. Division of Historical Resources published *Neighborhood Heritage Districts, A Handbook for New Hampshire Municipalities* by Elizabeth Durfee Hengen and Carolyn Baldwin, Esq., describing an extensive collabora-

RELATED TOOLS:

- Village Plan Alternative
- Infill Development
- Pedestrian Oriented Development

CHAPTER NOTE

The production of this information was supported by HUD Community Challenge Planning Grant No. FR-5500-N-33. The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under an award with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government.

~ Maggie Stier, NH Preservation Alliance, 2014. With assistance from Elizabeth Durfee Hengen, preservation consultant; Carolyn Baldwin, Esq.; and Elizabeth Muzzey, State Historic Preservation Officer.

tive planning process and setting forth the process to introduce and encourage use of this tool (http://www.nh.gov/nhdhr/documents/neighborr_hert_handbook.pdf). Subsequent efforts to create NHDs have relied heavily on that effort.

FIGURE 3.7.1



Village Center, Washington, NH.

APPROPRIATE CIRCUMSTANCES AND CONTEXT FOR USE

NHDs can protect the character of an area where there are distinct characteristics worth preserving but a desire for a less regulatory framework than a local historic district. A Neighborhood Heritage District may be appropriate for managing change in a variety of situations: urban or suburban neighborhoods, clusters of waterfront cottages, districts of farms and open land, and travel corridors with historic buildings that contribute to the road's special character.

NHDs are especially suited for areas that are primarily residential where there is a high percentage of owner-occupied property and a general consensus on the value of regulatory oversight to protect essential features or characteristics. There must be a willingness to work cooperatively through a town-appointed advisory group, and to develop appropriate standards that the Planning Board will have the authority to implement. Funding for the effort to create a NHD is generally provided by the volunteer group.

LEGAL BASIS AND CONSIDERATIONS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

An effort to create a framework for allowing NHDs in NH was launched in 2007, with New Hampshire's innovative zoning statute, RSA 674:21, enabling this concept. The result was the December, 2008, issuance of *Neighborhood Heritage Districts, A Handbook for New Hampshire Municipalities* by Elizabeth Durfee Hengen and Carolyn Baldwin, Esq.

Despite initial interest, the concept was not fully explored until 2012 when the NH Housing Finance Authority, under a HUD-funded Community Planning Grants program, offered matching grants to two communities interested in pursuing adoption of an NHD. Selection criteria included consistency with the municipality's master plan, consistency with the NH Livability Principles, readiness to proceed, an outreach plan and clarity in the proposed scope of work. The NH Preservation Alliance, under the terms of the grant program, was designated to provide assistance to the two grantees. The Alliance also received grant funds to prepare additional written materials and to provide training to New Hampshire Regional Planning

Commissions. Copies of all materials produced are available from the Alliance, 603-224-2281 or admin@nhpreservation.org.

As with any tool originating from NH's Innovative Zoning statute, clear justification for a Neighborhood Heritage District must be contained within a community's Master Plan, either in an optional chapter on Historic and Cultural Resources or in another section. Zoning regulations must already be in place, and there must be a Planning Board willing to take on the additional responsibility of regulating the district. In communities with an appointed, non-regulatory Heritage Commission, some assistance in carrying out this new mandate may come from its members, although there is no explicit authority for this contained within RSA 674:44-b, the statute that covers Heritage Commission.

In NH (and elsewhere), there is often misunderstanding about historic districts and resistance to regulation of private property. That could also be a factor in creating an NHD. There might also be confusion about distinctions between the words "historic" and "heritage" or use of the word "neighborhood" when, in fact, a district could be a rural area or village center. Using "conservation district" instead of Neighborhood Heritage District does not eliminate all confusion either, because people might then assume that the district's primary purpose is land conservation.

Therefore, we suggest that some communities might want to choose terminology that is as distinctive as possible. "Neighborhood Heritage Area" or just "Heritage Area" might be suitable to engender more open-minded consideration, clarify purposes, and dispel negative or erroneous connotations.

EXAMPLES AND OUTCOMES

There are no Neighborhood Heritage Districts in New Hampshire as of September, 2014. Both Greenfield and Hooksett received grants to pursue creation of an NHD, and only Greenfield presented its voters, in March, 2014, with a proposal to establish an NHD. The measure failed to pass. The Division of Historical Resources and the NH Preservation alliance both provide assistance to communities that are considering creation of a Neighborhood Heritage District.

GREENFIELD, NEW HAMPSHIRE

The town of Greenfield lies at the intersection of north/south and east/west state highways in Hillsborough County. Its historic economy was based on farming and railroad transportation, along with summer tourism in the late 19th and early 20th century. Now it is a growing bedroom community within an easy drive of Manchester, Nashua, Peterborough, Amherst and Milford. In the village center, public and commercial buildings include the library, meetinghouse, former school (now town offices), a small grocery store and gas station, restaurant, and a few professional offices. Within walking distance along new sidewalks are the elementary school, historical society, and new senior housing complex.

Several factors influenced the town's decision to pursue a Neighborhood Heritage District. Much of the town's outlying acreage is untaxed (Greenfield State Park, Crotched Mountain Rehabilitation Center), and many residents consider their prop-

WHAT IS A HERITAGE COMMISSION?

- Town-appointed Board/Commission composed of citizens acting to protect and promote cultural and historic resources. Does for cultural resources what conservation commissions do for natural resources.
- Conducts historical and cultural resource inventories, educates the public, serves as a revitalization resource, provides information on historical resources.
- Primary duties are to advise and assist other local boards and commissions, including the planning board.
- Heritage commissions are forward looking, planning for the future. They are intended to have town-wide or city-wide scope and engage in a range of activities determined by each individual municipality. They are a local government entity rather than a private organization (such as most historical societies).
- Heritage Commissions are empowered to accept and expend funds for a non-lapsing heritage fund, and to acquire and manage property and property rights on behalf of the town.

WHAT IS A HISTORIC DISTRICT? (Two types)

Locally Designated Historic District

A locally designated historic district is a zoning district (usually an overlay), created at the municipal level and administered by a local citizen commission. Historic District Commissions review proposals for exterior alterations, new construction and demolition on properties within the district, using regulations and guidelines developed by the community. Property-owner's plans must meet with the approval of the Historic District Commission before construction can begin.

National Register Historic Districts

A National Register district is initiated at the local level for ultimate approval by both the state and federal government. Such districts are strictly honorary, and impose no review or restrictions on the use or alterations to properties in the district--unless state or federal funds, permits or licenses are involved. Then a consulting review process must be followed, called Section 106 that aims to eliminate, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects to historic resources brought about by the federally funded, licensed, or permitted action.

WHAT IS A NEIGHBORHOOD HERITAGE DISTRICT?

Neighborhood heritage districts are cohesive areas designated by a community, usually as an overlay zoning district, to manage change in flexible ways that fit that area's particular needs. Those needs and goals may include one or more of the following:

- To preserve the character of an existing neighborhood that has some unique qualities
- To increase or preserve the supply of affordable housing
- To guide small business expansion into residential areas
- To revitalize/protect unique neighborhoods
- To control demolition
- To prevent commercial development that is out of scale with the district and/or use that is incompatible with existing uses
- To prevent commercial encroachment or sprawl

There is a high degree of citizen participation in creating and administering a neighborhood heritage district. Residents of the area initiate the designation process and participate in drafting the neighborhood plan and standards of review. At least one resident must also serve on the district's advisory committee. Before construction can begin, a property-owner's plans are reviewed first by an advisory committee, and then must receive approval of the Planning Board, which receives input from the advisory committee.

erty taxes to be a burden. With a growing population, there is also a need for more services and commercial activity. Limited new investment in existing properties has begun in the village center where, so far, historic character has been maintained, but there are worries that other development may not be so sensitive. The Master Plan cited increasing the tax base as a key goal. A town-wide survey showed strong support for new mixed-use redevelopment as a way to broaden the tax base, and for maintaining the village's scale, character, and sense of community.

With those mandates, and the availability of grant funding, the Planning Board decided to develop a Neighborhood Heritage District ordinance for the village center. A volunteer advisory committee assisted the Planning Board chair in extensive outreach efforts. A preservation consultant surveyed the area's historic resources and proposed boundaries and review criteria. The regional planning commission assisted in drafting the ordinance for a new Neighborhood Heritage District overlay. Public forums were well-publicized and well-attended, articles were published in the town-wide newsletter, flyers were mailed to every household, and information posted on the town website. Despite these preparations, opposition emerged before the March, 2014, town meeting, and the warrant article was defeated.

Two primary lessons emerged from this process. First, district-based grassroots support is essential. The impetus for an NHD ideally comes from the residents of the proposed district or an organization representing the residents. Although there was an advisory committee in Greenfield, the Planning Board led this initiative. Residents did not have full buy-in and "ownership" of the concept. Second, strong support from affected property owners will help to achieve broad support.

HOOKSETT, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Hooksett's Master Plan envisions the historic village center as "the heartbeat or spiritual heart of the community." This area developed around the falls of the Merrimack River, just north of Manchester, and was for many years a manufacturing and transportation hub. It contains a mix of civic, commercial, and residential structures, linked by the railroad, former mills, and major roadways and bridges. Surrounding the village are four discrete neighborhood sub-divisions built in the years after World War II, a time of strong residential, suburban growth in Hooksett. Sprawling commercial development defines other areas of the town and strong overall population

FIGURE 3.7.2



Unique neighborhood in Concord, NH.

growth continues.

The town wanted to work with residents to improve housing, promote walkability, and manage appropriate limited commercial growth in the village center. An earlier attempt at re-zoning this area had failed, and it was hoped that a Neighborhood Heritage District might provide a more flexible and acceptable alternative.

The effort to create a new NHD ordinance was led by the town administrator, town planner, and chair of the Heritage Commission. This team engaged potential stakeholders, recruited advisory committee members and worked with planning consultants and the NH Preservation Alliance. The consultants reviewed an existing survey of the village center's historical resources and gathered data on public opinion by means of a visual preference survey and several public meetings.

Lacking broad support for the ordinance, the planning team instead recommended consideration of voluntary design guidelines, more promotion of the adopted but so far unused RSA 79-E (Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive), and creation of additional incentives to encourage new investment in needy properties. Continued citizen engagement with clear information about the community planning process would be helpful as well.

In both Greenfield and Hooksett, municipal officials worked with consultants to develop and implement innovative zoning measures. This format was at odds with the basic premise of a Neighborhood Heritage District. The idea should be proposed and championed by a neighborhood association or group, and the residents' unanimous grassroots support and advocacy are essential in getting the zoning change adopted and making this tool work effectively.

Model Language and Guidance for Implementation

A community considering creation of an NHD should meet these readiness factors:

- Master Plan chapter on historic resources
- Some zoning already in place
- Existing survey or neighborhood plan, or capacity to prepare one*
- Expressed desire of residents in a local area to protect historic character
- Expertise to administer district and willing volunteers to serve
- Concern about preserving the character of a district and the desire to manage future changes
- Ability to hire necessary technical assistance, if needed
- Full support from the local Heritage Commission, if one exists.

**For the definition and contents of a Neighborhood Plan, refer to page 11 of Neighborhood Heritage Districts: A Handbook for NH Municipalities (2007). http://www.nh.gov/nhdhr/documents/neighborr_hert_handbook.pdf.*

While the ordinance developed and proposed in Greenfield has already been presented, a sample Model Ordinance that may be adapted for local use is included here. This model ordinance originally appeared in *Neighborhood Heritage Districts: A Handbook for NH Municipalities (2007)*, and was updated in September, 2014, with permission from the authors.

MODEL ORDINANCE FOR ZONING

ARTICLE __: NATURAL HERITAGE DISTRICTS

I. PURPOSE

A neighborhood heritage district is established under the provisions of RSA 674:21, “Innovative Land Use Controls,” to preserve, conserve and protect the health, safety, economic, cultural and general welfare of the public. Specifically, the purposes of a neighborhood heritage district are: [choose from some or all of the following, based on applicability]

- A. To protect the distinctive characteristics of the district’s character, setting, buildings, structures, landscape features and public spaces in a manner that is supported by the Master Plan;
- B. To discourage demolition of buildings and structures or removal of landscape features;
- C. To guide change, reuse and reinvestment in the district;
- D. To enhance the livability, vitality, stability and local identity of the district for its residents and businesses and all residents of the [town/city];
- E. To retain traditional development patterns;
- F. To retain a pedestrian-friendly, accessible environment;
- G. To encourage design that is either traditional or contemporary, but is sensitive and compatible with the established character of the district;

- H. To retain the diversity of uses that have traditionally existed in the district;
- I. To develop guidelines that articulate the character and setting of the district and its buildings, structures, and landscape features and that clarify the community's expectation for the type and quality of change and new development within the district;
- J. To further "green" principles, by discouraging demolition and thus reusing existing building stock and materials
- K. To adhere to smart growth precepts by encouraging investment within already developed areas and focusing on infill, rather than sprawl
- L. To serve as a buffer to a local historic district [or other zoning districts].

II. DEFINITIONS

[Definitions should reference the basic zoning ordinance, adding any terms that are not included there. This could be a separate amendment to the zoning ordinance to add necessary definitions.]

III. ESTABLISHMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD HERITAGE DISTRICTS

[Note: If it is your intent, the ordinance should specifically include the review of municipal buildings, as otherwise they are automatically excluded.]

- A. To achieve these purposes, the town/city may designate one or more neighborhood heritage districts. A neighborhood heritage district shall be established within the zoning ordinance, in accordance with the applicable provisions of RSA 674.1
- B. The boundaries of the neighborhood heritage district are shown on the [name of municipality] zoning map.
- C. The designation of a neighborhood heritage district is intended to accommodate unique land use, design, and other distinctive characteristics of a neighborhood and encourage flexible, but consistent design review for new construction, additions, alterations or demolition.
- D. The neighborhood heritage district shall be administered by the Planning Board with the advice of a Neighborhood Advisory Committee to be created as provided in section IV.

IV. NEIGHBORHOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- A. Upon adoption of a neighborhood heritage district as a section of the zoning ordinance, the Planning Board shall appoint a Neighborhood Advisory Committee. The committee shall consist of not fewer than three and no more than seven members who may include: one or more residents and/or landowners in the district; a person familiar with the history and character of the neighborhood; an architect; a business proprietor; a member of the Historic District Commission or Heritage Commission; and a member of the Planning Board.

The Planning Board may appoint up to three alternate members to the advisory committee.

- B. In the event there is more than one neighborhood heritage district in the town/ city, the advisory committee shall include a member from each district.
- C. The Neighborhood Advisory Committee shall:
 1. Prepare a final neighborhood plan for submission to and approval by the Planning Board;
 2. Establish rules of procedure, in accordance with RSA 676:1. In addition to procedures for review of applications referred by the Planning Board, the committee may provide for informal preliminary non-binding discussion and review of activities subject to regulation under this ordinance;
 3. Adopt design guidelines for construction activities within the neighborhood heritage district;
 4. Advise the Planning Board on creating an application form for activities subject to review;
 5. Submit written recommendations to the Planning Board to guide its decision on applications received;
 6. Where applicable, the advisory committee may make recommendations to the zoning board of adjustment regarding applications for variance or special exception for properties within the neighborhood heritage district.

V. ACTIVITIES SUBJECT TO REVIEW

[choose from some or all of the following, based on applicability]

- A. Demolition, partial demolition, or removal of a building or structure
- B. Any new exterior construction. (Exempt from review is construction of a new accessory structure, such as a clothesline, tree house, playhouse, flagpole, play equipment, providing the structure does not exceed 100 square feet in area.)
- C. Any addition to an existing building or structure that is visible from the street. (If the addition is not visible from the street and is less than 100 square feet or constitutes less than XX% of the existing buildings on the lot, whichever is less, it is exempt from review.)
- D. Removal of a porch, portico, doorhood or bay window visible from the street
- E. Altering the size of window or door openings visible from the street
- F. Removal of landscape features that define the streetscape, including but not limited to mature trees, granite retaining walls & posts, fences
- G. Site work that increases the amount of paved surface, such as increasing a parking area
- H. New or replacement signs

VI. STANDARDS FOR REVIEW

[choose from some or all of the following, based on applicability]

The application for proposed work shall demonstrate that the project as proposed is consistent with the neighborhood plan and the following standards. The Planning Board, according to its authority under Site Plan Review, may require that the proposed work application be reviewed by a licensed architect or historic preservation consultant at the expense of the applicant.

- A. New construction shall be compatible with the distinct characteristics that define the area.
- B. Setback, height, scale, mass, fenestration and spacing of new construction shall be compatible with adjacent traditional buildings and the context of the district. Buildings shall be spaced in a manner that is consistent with the traditional development patterns of the street. Creative new design is encouraged, especially when it references or acknowledges local, traditional forms or design elements.
- C. Architectural features in new construction or additions should be used to enhance visual interest and provide a pedestrian scale. Details that reference, but do not necessarily mimic, traditional buildings are encouraged.
- D. New construction or additions shall have rooflines that are similar to those traditionally seen in the district, in terms of type, shape, pitch and orientation.
- E. Building materials for new construction shall contribute to the visual continuity of the district.
- F. Building materials for major additions shall be consistent with, or similar to, those already on the building or structure.
- G. New construction shall preserve character-defining landscape features of the district.
- H. Parking shall be set back from the primary front wall of the building. Garages shall be set back from the front plane of the building; if that is not possible, they shall be rotated so that the vehicular doors do not face the street. Driveways that are double wide are discouraged. Shared parking is encouraged.
- I. Demolition, partial demolition, or removal of buildings and structures, as well as removal of landscape features shall be considered only under the following circumstances:
 1. Replacement structures or other use of the site meet the intent of the design guidelines and do not have a negative impact on the character or cohesiveness of the district; or
 2. The applicant for a demolition permit has demonstrated that reasonably feasible alternatives to demolition have been considered including renovation or adaptive reuse of the existing building or structure proposed for demolition; or

3. The applicant has demonstrated that retaining the resource would constitute economic hardship due to unavoidable quantifiable and verifiable expenditures or a fiscal loss that would ensue should the resource not be demolished; or
4. The building or structure has been determined structurally unsound based upon a written technical report prepared by an architect or professional engineer registered in the State of New Hampshire that clearly demonstrates that the building or structure presents a risk to public health, safety and welfare; and the structurally unsound condition has not been caused by willful or negligent acts by the owner or failure to perform normal maintenance and repairs; or
5. In the case of a mature street or front yard tree, a professional arborist or other qualified professional has determined that its removal is necessary for safety reasons.

VII. PROCEDURE

- A. The Planning Board, with the written advice of the advisory committee, shall establish an application form in accordance with its procedure for site review applications. The procedure shall provide for notice to abutters as required by RSA 672:3. A pre-application meeting with the advisory committee is an option that is encouraged.
- B. Upon receipt of an application for a regulated activity in the neighborhood heritage district, the Planning Board shall determine whether the application is complete for review in accordance with the provisions of RSA 676:4.
- C. The completed application shall immediately be referred to the Neighborhood Advisory Committee. The Committee must hold one or more duly noticed public hearings and shall, within 30 days of receipt of the application, submit its recommendation to the Planning Board. The Committee may recommend approval with written reasons, denial with written reasons, or approval with conditions.
- D. The Planning Board, upon receipt of the recommendation of the Neighborhood Advisory Committee, shall hold at least one public hearing, typically part of their regular meeting. Once the public hearing portion has been closed, the Planning Board in its deliberations shall consider the recommendations of the advisory committee. The Planning Board shall approve the application, approve with conditions, or deny, with written reasons provided. If the Planning Board's decision is contrary to the recommendations of the advisory committee, the board shall state specifically the basis for its decision.

VIII. APPEAL

Appeal of a decision of the Planning Board shall be in accordance with RSA 677:15.

IX. ENFORCEMENT

Decisions of the Planning Board shall be enforced in accordance with the provisions of the zoning ordinance.

HOW TO ESTABLISH A NEIGHBORHOOD HERITAGE DISTRICT IN YOUR TOWN

PROCESS

1. A neighborhood association or other group presents the Planning Board with a proposal to establish a district, identifying the need, purpose and objectives, and how it is supported by the Master Plan. Approximate boundaries and a brief summary of existing local support may also be included.
2. When the Planning Board accepts the proposal, they instruct the neighborhood group to develop a preliminary neighborhood plan that includes:
 - a. Type of district (zoning overlay or discrete district).
 - b. Inventory or survey of proposed district's resources and defining features
 - c. Proposed actions for review and standards for review. Suggestions for non-binding review items may also be included.
 - d. Proposed boundaries and rationale.
3. Planning Board assists neighborhood group in drafting an ordinance and then submits it as a proposed amendment to the municipal zoning ordinance. Note: In most cases, the work of creating an NHD falls on neighborhood volunteers, who may also be assisted by the Heritage Commission if one exists. The neighborhood group most often also provides funding for whatever technical assistance is needed although the local government may also choose to invest in this process.
4. Amendment is voted on as part of town warrant, by city or town council, or municipal board of aldermen.
5. If ordinance is passed, Planning Board appoints NHD Advisory Committee of 3-7 members and up to 3 alternates, with representation of residents of the district.
6. Neighborhood Advisory Committee drafts and adopts Rules of Procedure and finalizes their plan, actions for review, illustrated guidelines, and standards of review for approval by the Planning Board.

REFERENCES

Elizabeth Durfee Hengen and Carolyn Baldwin, Esq. , Neighborhood Heritage Districts: A Handbook for New Hampshire Municipalities, NH Division of NH Historic Resources, 2008. http://www.nh.gov/nhdhr/documents/neighbor_hert_handbook.pdf

NOTE: The Planning Board and Advisory Committee may choose to hold joint public hearings in order to avoid duplicate hearings and facilitate efficient decision-making. The NHD committee should submit its recommendation to the Planning Board before the Planning Board renders its decision. The Statutes encourage this procedure (RSA 676:2).

These six steps, which originally appeared in Neighborhood Heritage Districts: A Handbook for NH Municipalities (2007), were updated in September, 2014, with permission from the authors.

Elizabeth Durfee Hengen et. al., *Preserving Community Character: A Preservation Planning Handbook for New Hampshire*, New Hampshire Preservation Alliance, 2006.

Rebecca Lubens and Julia Miller , *Protecting Older Neighborhoods Through Conservation District Programs*, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2004, <http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/law-and-policy/legal-resources/preservation-law-101/resources/Conservation-District-Programs.pdf>

Jessie McClurg, Assoc. AIA with Greg Donofrio, Ph.D; *Alternative Forms of Historic Designation: A Study of Neighborhood Conservation Districts in the United States*, Feb., 2011, http://www.cura.umn.edu/sites/cura.advantagelabs.com/files/content-docs/CD_Report_Final.pdf

Marya Morris, *Innovative Tools for Historic Preservation*, National Trust for Historic Preservation and American Planning Association, Washington, DC, 1992

For guidance on how to administer a Neighborhood Heritage District, please refer to *Neighborhood Heritage Districts: A Handbook for NH Municipalities*, p. 13 - 14. (2007) at http://www.nh.gov/nhdhr/documents/neighbor_hert_handbook.pdf

RELATED TOOLS

HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY

A survey identifies the historic resources of a community. Houses, churches, schools, mills, bridges, cemeteries, railroad lines, stone walls and archeological sites are resource types that are typically included in a survey. This work provides the basis for the master plan chapter on historic resources, guides the work of Heritage Commissions and Historic District Commissions, and helps citizens make informed decisions about preservation priorities. Surveys may be of two types, reconnaissance or intensive, and they may be limited to a particular resource type such as barns and agricultural structures, or to a specific area. The type of survey and the size of the survey area will be determined by a community's needs and finances; often the Heritage Commission takes the lead in doing this work. Since historic resources are generally defined as fifty years old or older, the survey will need to be updated every five to ten years to stay current.

MASTER PLAN CHAPTER ON HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

The municipal master plan provides data and recommendations to guide future growth, change and development. State statute requires chapters on vision and land use; other chapters are optional. A chapter on historic and cultural resources is usually written by a committee comprised of citizens already involved in or knowledgeable about local history and culture. The master plan chapter should include an overview of the community's history and pre-history, the findings from a survey of historic resources, a map of historic resources, a summary of past preservation activity, and goals and implementation strategies to protect and preserve that heritage. Work sessions and public forums are an essential part of developing this master plan chapter.

LOCALLY DESIGNATED HISTORIC DISTRICT (REGULATORY)

A locally designated historic district is a zoning district (usually an overlay), created at the municipal level and administered by a local citizen commission. Historic District Commissions typically review proposals for exterior alterations and additions, new construction and demolition on properties within the district using regulations and guidelines developed by the community and derived from the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of historic properties. A property-owner's plans must meet with the approval of the Historic District Commission before construction can begin.

NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT (HONORARY NOT REGULATORY)

A National Register district is initiated at the local level for ultimate approval by both the state and federal government. Such districts are strictly honorary and impose no review or restrictions on the use or alterations—and even demolition—of properties in the district. However, if federal funds, permits or licenses are involved in actions that affect National-Register properties, a consulting review process, called Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, must be followed. This process is designed to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects to historic resources brought about by the federally funded, licensed, or permitted action.

DESIGN REVIEW

Design review reflects the broad values of a community and can be a highly effective means of managing the appearance of both new construction and rehabilitation. In most communities, design guidelines that include both text and illustrations, are the basis for a mandatory architectural design review process. The design review usually applies only to specific areas or certain types of development. Good examples may be seen on websites for Exeter, Concord, and Meredith. The town of Wolfeboro has voluntary design guidelines for their central business district.

FORM-BASED CODES

Form-based codes use physical form, rather than specific use, as the organizing principle. They are regulations, not just guidelines, adopted into local law, most often as an alternative to conventional zoning (also called Euclidian zoning). Form-based codes address the relationship between building facades and the street, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks. Their regulations and standards are presented in both words and clearly drawn diagrams and pictures. They are keyed to a regulating plan that designates the appropriate form and scale (and therefore, character) of development, rather than only making distinctions based on land use.

This approach contrasts with conventional zoning's focus on the management and separation of land uses, and the control of development intensity through abstract parameters such as floor-to-area ratios, dwellings per acre, setbacks, and parking ratios. In New Hampshire, Dover, Lancaster and Enfield have all adopted modified versions of a Form Based Code.

DEMOLITION REVIEW

Several New Hampshire municipalities have demolition review ordinances. While these do not prevent demolition of a historic building, they bring the pending loss to the attention of other town boards and commissions, interested parties and the general public. They allow for a period (usually 45, 60 or 90 days) of discussion, education, and exploration of alternative approaches, which may include different outcomes such as re-use, transfer to a new owner, or removal of the building to a new location. Communities with a demolition review ordinance have successfully saved a number of buildings from the wrecking ball while keeping property on the tax rolls and spurring creative new development.