

3. Issues and Needs Related to Historic Preservation in Bolton.

The issues and needs related to historic preservation in Bolton have been determined by interviewing various boards and private organizations in town. In addition, planning documents prepared by the Town have also been reviewed for their content and recommendations.

The draft of the Bolton Open Space and Recreation Master Plan was released during the preparation of the Preservation Plan and has provided an opportunity for the recommendations in the two plans to be coordinated and to complement one another. Members of both the Bolton Historical Commission and the Bolton Conservation Commission met for the first time to begin coordinating not only the recommendations contained in the two plans but also to begin what both commissions hope will be a long-term and productive working relationship through a continuing dialogue on issues of mutual concern. It is unusual for historical and conservation commissions to coordinate their planning efforts, so this initiative by the two Bolton commissions is indeed significant and noteworthy.

The goals of the Historical Commission and the Conservation Commission overlap considerably because, in a rural community such as Bolton, the preservation of historic resources involves not only the preservation of structures but also the protection of historic farms; historic landscapes; scenic vistas that define the town's character; historic dam and mill sites; Native American archeological sites; and significant geologic formations. Protecting historic sites needs to involve not only the protection of buildings but also the context or viewshed of these buildings, and that involves the protection of open land. There are indeed many areas where the conservation and preservation efforts of the two commissions will complement one another for the benefit of all of the town's citizens.

The community forum sponsored by the Bolton Historical Commission on Saturday, February 28, 1998, was well-attended and well-received. This first forum was held to elicit preliminary comments on needs in the area of historic preservation in the Town of Bolton. A second forum to review the recommended goals and objectives contained in the draft Preservation Plan was held on May 16, 1998. Many excellent recommendations resulted from these two morning sessions. Appendix F contains the full range of comments received during both forums.

The following issues and needs reflect the comments received in writing, during interviews and at the forums and also reflect the recommendations of the planning consultant.

3.1 Survey and Planning Needs

- **Survey and Inventory Needs:**

Historic resources inventory research currently being conducted by Anne Forbes, a preservation consultant to the Bolton Historical Commission, will be a major step in moving towards the completion of the town's inventory. However, the scope of the

work being conducted by Ms. Forbes under the current contract will not incorporate all of the tasks necessary to complete the town's inventory.

Ms. Forbes, in the Final Report of the Bolton Survey of Historic, Architectural and Cultural Resources, recommends that the Town pursue the following additional surveys:

Further updating of survey forms: While Ms. Forbes has updated many of the historic resources surveyed during the earlier inventory effort, some have not been documented to current Massachusetts Historical Commission standards. These properties should receive the same level of professional research that was conducted as part of the 1998 survey, including detailed historical and architectural descriptions of all of the properties within the Bolton Center National Register District and other significant sites included in the earlier survey.

Survey of Bolton engineering sites: Many local engineering sites are not yet documented, including numerous fieldstone culverts and small stone bridges. Some of these appear to be quite old. Additional dam and mill sites also remain to be documented, also. Examples of these include the fieldstone wagon bridge south of Main Street in the center of town that may mark the crossing of an old road to the South Burying Ground and the foundation of a small Whitcomb family mill northeast of Whitcomb Road.

Further survey of 20th Century resources: Many of the structures built in this century, while modest compared to older historical resources, will increase in significance over time. They deserve to be documented as part of the town's total inventory of its historic resources.

Archeological survey: Information about Native American sites in Bolton is almost non-existent. There is a need for at least a basic survey by a professional archeologist to identify sites so that they can be either protected or flagged when development is proposed at these locations.

Future updating of all inventory forms: All inventory forms, even those prepared during the 1998 survey, will need to be updated on a periodic basis. Some of the forms include recommendations for genealogical or deed research, and interior inspections of buildings provide clues on how significant buildings may have been expanded over time or yield important data on the existence of important structures that may not be otherwise visible.

Ms. Forbes further identified a need for the Bolton Historical Commission to develop a procedure for adding new information to the existing survey forms.

- **Planning Needs**

The Bolton Preservation Plan has identified many areas where additional planning needs to occur if town's historic resources are to be preserved. The scope of

this study allows only an overview of these needs that deserve more detailed study. For example, the several historic viewsheds that have been identified in the Preservation Plan as deserving protection need further study to identify how far the viewshed extends, which properties should be identified for protection in order to preserve the viewshed, and the strategy that would be most productive and cost-effective for each identified parcel.

Additional planning needs to occur to identify the extent of “historic landscapes” that have been identified in the Preservation Plan. What parcels, for instance, should be included in The Plan? This plan has made a generalized recommendation, but the line needs to be refined by a more detailed analysis that is beyond the scope of this study.

Another planning need is to research the status of planning for the protection of historic resources that the Town of Bolton shares with abutting towns. Greater coordination of planning activities needs to occur---for example, with Berlin on the protection of the Quaker landscape and on the protection of the area south of the Shartner and Nicewicz farms on Sawyer Road---if these commonly-held resources are to be preserved. For some historic resources, it is not enough that Bolton alone be vigilant.

Finally, a common theme repeated by residents was the need for greater communication and coordination among Bolton boards and private agencies that either regulate development or that have an historic or open space mission. In particular, the advancement of historic preservation in Bolton would benefit by an increase in coordination among the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and the Historical Commission and the Bolton Conservation Trust and the Bolton Historical Society.

3.2 Regulatory Issues and Needs

Public comment on preserving the town’s historic character through regulatory approaches emphasized the strong property rights sentiment that exists in town. This sentiment tends to create a difficult environment for implementing new controls on development.

The need and challenge here is to balance individual rights with the duty of the community to protect its heritage for the benefit of current residents and future generations. The general tenor of citizen comments was for the Town to use incentives more and disincentives less, although regulations by their very nature are more prohibitive rather than encouraging.

The Preservation Plan proposes a vision for the Town of Bolton, then provides guidance on how that vision might be realized. Regulatory revisions is one part of the overall strategy to realize that vision.

- **Zoning**

Zoning as a tool for advancing historic resource protection in Bolton can be

subdivided into the following categories: (1) amendments that reduce the impact of new development on historic resources; (2) amendments that increase the options available to developers to protect these resources; (3) encouraging the use of zoning provisions already in place that would advance historic preservation; and (4) area-wide districts.

Zoning provisions that reduce the impact of new development on historic resources: The identification of need in this area includes developing new zoning amendments that provide incentives for placing new residential development out of sight of the town's scenic roads by keeping new dwellings out of open fields, out of special viewsheds and generally away from the street.

Another identified need was to assure that new construction was compatible with the historic architecture of Bolton and respected the character of the town. Should this be done by design review or some other method? Design review has been more accepted when it has been applied only to commercial properties and to ancillary issues such as signs and lighting. Design guidance for residential structures is generally more acceptable when it is presented in the form of a design manual that can be used on a voluntary basis by developers and homeowners. While these manuals are not fully effective, they at least provide valuable advice to receptive developers and owners and over time can assist in building a design ethic in town. In the absence of design controls for new residential structures in town, there is a need for both a residential and a commercial design manual.

Other needs identified in this area included either a prohibition against commercial parking in front of buildings or encouraging the placement of parking behind business buildings through the site plan review process.

Additional identified needs include revising site plan review procedures to include consideration of impacts on historic resources and the revision of the Planning Board's Subdivision Rules and Regulations to incorporate adequate protections for historic sites. Denying a subdivision plan because of its impact on historic resources could be strengthened with the appropriate added language.

Zoning provisions that increase the options available to developers to protect historic resources: Bolton has been progressive in adopting zoning amendments that encourage the protection of the town's historic heritage. There are, however, additional "tools" that the Planning Board may want to consider such as the transfer of development rights (TDR). The adoption of TDR provisions would allow the Planning Board more flexibility in approving development plans that transfer density from one parcel to another, therefore allowing a greater amount of open space to be provided in the "sending" parcel. While the use of such provisions may be infrequent, they are useful to have in the bylaw when the need arises.

Encouraging the use of zoning provisions already in place: Some of new provisions of the Bolton Zoning Bylaw are not being used as much as they could be. The town's new Farming and Open Space Planned Residential Development (FOSPRD) amendment, the provision that allows the clustering of development if a certain amount of protected open space is set aside, is still new and therefore yet to be widely used. However, because of the requirement in the new Major Residential Development section of the bylaw, the Planning Board will have the authority to require

that developers use the FOSPRD bylaw to develop a site where the site is over a certain size threshold and if the FOSPRD plan is superior.

The new and innovative Agricultural/Business bylaw can be an additional means of helping to assure the economic viability of farming in the town. However, only Nashoba Winery has taken advantage of it to date. This appears to be because of the requirement that the property, to qualify, must be restricted as conservation or agricultural land. As additional farms become protected with permanent restrictions, this amendment may become more attractive.

Area-wide districts zoning needs: The Bolton Preservation Plan proposes that an effective approach for the Town to pursue in preserving its historic resources is through the Historic Landscapes Preservation Strategy. However, there is a need to identify what additional zoning techniques are needed to assist in implementing the strategy. One zoning tool that is available to achieve this purpose is the neighborhood conservation district. Neighborhood conservation districts are overlay districts that provide an additional layer of review for development proposals. They provide a level of protection that is less than a local historic district yet more than underlying zoning.

- **Non-Zoning Regulations**

In addition to the above recommendations, there is a need for the Planning Board to notify the Historical Commission when a preliminary subdivision plan is submitted by a developer. This would provide additional time for the Commission to review plans for their impact on historic resources. Currently, the Commission is not notified of definitive plan submissions (which are filed following the submission and review of the preliminary plan), but that is often too far into the subdivision review process to effectively influence the design and layout of the subdivision.

3.3 Acquisition Issues and Needs

In the forums and in interviews, there was a strong consensus that the preservation of the town's historic character required the preservation of its farms and scenic vistas.

It is interesting to note that when residents spoke of acquisitions in relation to historic properties, they referred principally to open space acquisitions: open vistas, farms and farm fields. This was true in both the forums and during individual interviews. This is probably because public acquisition of private property is usually thought of in terms of purchasing open land, not buildings. Public agencies usually shun purchasing structures because of the responsibilities they entail or because of the widespread opinion that historic buildings should be the responsibility of the private sector. The exception to this is those rare instances where public ownership is required as a last resort or because of the extraordinary nature of the historic property.

The needs expressed during the forums and elsewhere reflected this dichotomy. When residents spoke of protecting views, fields and farms, it was usually in terms of purchasing an easement or full rights to the land. Protecting buildings, however, was usually discussed in the context of continuing private ownership.

In discussing acquisition needs, residents usually spoke of the need to acquire all or partial rights (e.g., easements or conservation restrictions) to the following:

- Scenic vistas, especially those on Wataquadock Hill.
- Farm fields and agricultural land.
- Landscapes and open land connected to historic structures.
- Wooded viewsheds that “frame” groups of historic buildings (e.g., in back of Bolton Center).
- Native American settlement sites to prevent them from being destroyed.
- Unique geologic sites that could be destroyed through development

When discussing the protection of historic buildings, however, the focus of discussion usually turned to voluntary actions by private property owners, including:

- Protecting farm buildings by finding new accessory private uses for them.
- Preserving farm buildings by preserving the viability of agriculture in town.
- Protecting historic dwellings by the owner gifting a facade easement.

In a few instances, the need to preserve a significant privately-owned structure through public purchase was mentioned, such as the old Robinson Hall in Bolton Center.

Given that there is a strong resident preference for the acquisition of historic sites through the process of buying land for conservation purposes, and given that state funding programs are oriented towards purchasing land for open space protection, the acquisition of historic sites should be coordinated with the acquisition strategies of the Conservation Commission and the Bolton Conservation Trust. The Conservation Trust has indicated an interest in advocating preservation facade easements to property owners when these owners are considering placing conservation restrictions on their land.

However, there will still be a need for acquisition funds to protect historic resources. These funds can be used to purchase sites, place restrictions on them, then resell the property with the restriction in place. A private dedicated fund for this purpose is therefore needed.

3.4 Town Projects Issues and Needs

The principal issue of concern among residents related to town public works responsibilities is clearly the protection of scenic roads in town. This has been a very topical issue in Bolton in recent months because of a controversy arising out of the placement of metal guard rails on an historic road in town. There is a need to address this problem from two perspectives. First, there needs to be a review of alternatives to metal guard rails and the conditions under which they must be used. The Bolton Department of Public Works is currently exploring the use of alternatives, such as wooden rails and reflectors where the dropoff from the road is slight. Secondly, there may be a need to notify boards such as the Historical Commission to allow their comment on road improvement plans early in the planning stages.

There are also many historic resources within the rights-of-way of historic town roads, including stone walls, stone bridges, major trees and old dams. These deserve to be inventoried and to be protected whenever possible. Whenever a road is repaired or resurfaced, for example, the decision must be made whether to preserve or replace a stone bridge.

All of the major historic cemeteries in town are also in Town of Bolton ownership and need special consideration to assure that artifacts such as historic headstones are adequately maintained and protected.

The appropriate design of new town buildings was another need that residents identified as needing attention. One of the examples of this was the need to assure that the new addition proposed for the town library will be in keeping with the historic style of the existing building.

3.5 Public Awareness/Advocacy Issues and Needs

Perhaps the most overriding need in the area of public education is to increase the awareness and sensitivity of new owners of historic properties. All new owners would benefit from knowing more about the historic and architectural value of their properties. Knowledge of a property's history tends to result in a greater sense of owner stewardship, making it less likely that inappropriate alterations or demolition will occur.

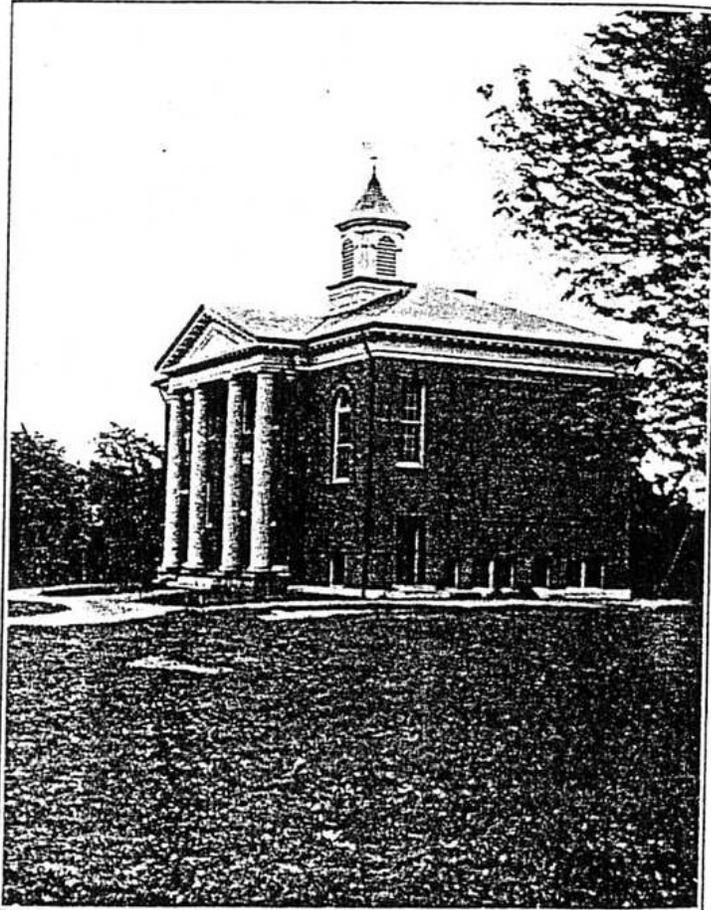
Local realtors also need to be targeted as a group that has an important role to plan in matching appropriate owners with historic properties. Realtors should be educated on the historical merits of the properties that they are marketing so that they can adequately convey the importance of a listed property in the history of the town or for its architectural uniqueness.

Public apathy and lack of awareness in Bolton concerning the town's history is a major problem that needs to be seriously addressed. This issue was mentioned many times as an obstacle to the preservation of the town's historic resources. This apathy, coupled with a strong property rights sentiment in town, will tend to result in the frustration of preservation goals if not reversed.

In order for this to occur, however, requires that there be (1) adequate informational materials and (2) a delivery strategy to get these materials to their intended destination. Necessary materials needed include house plaques, walking tour brochures, educational displays in public areas, school educational materials and related materials.

Educational activities should include informing farmers and other property owners of funding and other programs that could benefit them while preserving the historic value of their property. Other educational initiatives should include explaining to town residents the costs of developing historic landscapes as opposed to preserving them for future generations.

Finally, educational initiatives should include the adequate safekeeping of historical records and artifacts and making them available to researchers.



Emerson School (1923)
Mechanic Road

This photograph shows how the Emerson School looked in 1923 when it opened as the Town's first modern elementary school. The building was donated by Edward D. Emerson in memory of his wife and daughter, who were both lost on the Titanic in 1912.