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HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The city of North Adams has many historic structures and neighborhoods which tell the story of our community's heritage. The city's historic fabric is laced with church steeples, industrial buildings, and compact neighborhoods. While significant aspects of North Adams' physical history were lost to Urban Renewal and disinvestment, many layers of history remain which will benefit from community stewardship.

In many instances, historic structures and cultural features of the community have been shown to have economic benefit. During the past two decades, the city has supported and encouraged the adaptive reuse of historic mills for artist lofts and galleries, a museum, business incubator space, and a community youth center. The City aims to continue working with property owners and partners in the community, to be mindful of preserving the structures, landscapes and other aspects of the city's historic fabric.



Related Maps

Map 7: Historic and Cultural Resources

Located in Appendix C

GOALS, POLICIES AND ACTIONS

GOAL HP 1: PROVIDE THE HISTORICAL COMMISSION WITH THE SUPPORT AND RESOURCES NEEDED TO ACHIEVE THE CITY'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION GOALS

The North Adams Historical Commission is the group of residents who work on behalf of the city to identify, protect, and highlight important historic resources. They do this through the historic survey and nomination process, providing comments about certain development projects, and by helping with broad engagement of residents and visitors in appreciating historic sites or districts. This group, however, sometimes works in relative isolation from other city processes and with little to no resources to support their volunteer work. Moving forward, the city will work to integrate historic preservation and the Historical Commission into the work, trainings, and awareness of related boards and departments such as the tourism office, public works department, and planning and zoning boards. It will also better support the work of the Historical Commission as it relates to the successful implementation of the goals and policies of this comprehensive plan.

Policy HP 1.1: Maintain and expand historic inventory and listing activity.

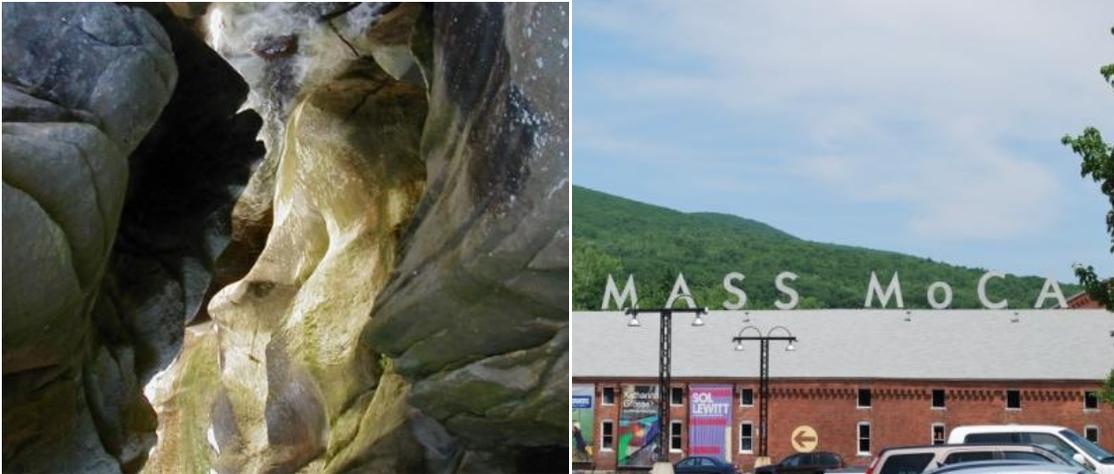
Historic resource inventories are the foundation of preservation planning for any community. Only after resources have been identified can they be prioritized, listed, and protected through a variety of means. The city will work to update, expand and make widely available inventory and survey information by pursuing the following actions.

Action A: Bring All Existing Surveys Up-to-Date

The city has numerous surveys completed for historic sites, most of which were completed in the mid-1980s. While there is no exact expiration, thirty years is almost certainly too far out-of-date. It is considered good practice to update the inventories to capture changing conditions such as modifications, demolitions, or additional properties that would have become age-eligible for surveys. The North Adams Historical Commission has identified updating survey work as an immediate need.

Action B: Identify and Prioritize Additional Survey Areas or Resource Types

The city has many areas that likely have historic properties which have never been surveyed. This includes many neighborhoods or sites from the turn of the last century as well as post-WWII era construction which may now be eligible for historic listing.



Natural bridge State Park (left) and MASS MoCA (right) are both great examples of how historic resources can become quality of life amenities and tourism draws to increase economic activity.

Action C: Identify Ongoing Revenue Sources to Fund Survey Work

Identify and pursue resources to support new and updated survey work on an annual or biennial basis. This should include pursuing grants such as the Mass Historical Commission matching grant for survey work, among others, to defray the cost. In the recent past it has been challenging to provide required matching funds for state grants to conduct inventories; a consistent funding source for this activity will ensure it proceeds on a regular basis.

Action D: Make Historic Inventories Available Online

Support the North Adams Historical Commission's efforts to make inventories available electronically. This will make information readily accessible to property owners and community members. A lack of understanding about the significance of a property may lead to the loss of its integrity and value.

Action E: Map Historic Resources

Incorporate inventory information into city Geographic Information Systems (GIS) as that capability is developed. Mapping available information can help plan for historic resources in a comprehensive manner, by providing tools to identify under-recognized neighborhoods or types of buildings, or areas which are most in need of updated inventories.

Action F: Pursue Regional Survey Partnerships

Collaborate with other local historical commissions or historical societies to identify multi-jurisdictional or regional survey needs and jointly pursue survey applications. Such efforts can help streamline the process to hire consultants, reduce cost, and allow the city to link and discuss resources by type across municipal boundaries. This broader thinking can help support the area's heritage tourism development.

Policy HP 1.2: Integrate the Historical Commission into larger city government functions and decision-making.

The reuse, modification, and maintenance of historic properties and landscapes in the city involves and impacts the work of numerous agencies, departments, boards, and commissions. The city will work to strengthen channels of communication across all impacted parties and cultivate a common preservation ethic in the city.

Action A: Increase the Capacity of the North Adams Historical Commission

Ensure that commission appointments include persons with appropriate skills and professional experiences including architects, restoration contractors, historians, archivists, and also overlapping membership with the North Adams Historical Society, Inc. The commission's most important goal is the preservation of the community's historic places. The purpose of a local historical commission is to work toward this goal by planning and implementing programs for the identification, evaluation, and protection of its community's historical resources.

Allocate municipal staff time to support appropriate efforts of the North Adams Historical Commission. Depending on the specific needs of the Commission, the Office of Community Development or the Building Department can provide support. Professional assistance and internal coordination, and information sharing among municipal departments can help advance the work of the Commission in an efficient manner. This may require in-house education on linking and supporting efforts.

Action B: Historic Preservation Tools and Techniques Education and Outreach

Develop targeted education for the public and municipal leaders about measures for protection of historic resources. Introduction of demolition delay, local historic districts and other protective measures will certainly require multiple levels of education. Any efforts should underscore the broad historic resources and the benefits of preservation.

GOAL HP 2: RETAIN AND MAINTAIN THE HISTORIC FABRIC OF THE CITY TO THE GREATEST EXTENT FEASIBLE

The protection, promotion and enhancement of the physical historic and cultural resources throughout the city require a coordinated effort. The following are policies and actions which address the needs and opportunities to maintain the city's existing historic fabric.

Policy HP 2.1: Implement municipal bylaws and policies to protect historic resources from irrevocable harm.

There are a number of historic preservation bylaws and municipal practices which can be employed to help retain the historic fabric over time. A number of these should be considered as the city moves forward to revise its zoning ordinances.

Action A: Adopt a Demolition Delay Bylaw

Adopt a strong demolition delay bylaw for historically-significant structures in order to investigate and promote options for reuse prior to removal. The elimination of significant properties can cause irrevocable harm, as was evidenced during the period of Urban Renewal. Instituting a review process will provide opportunity to more comprehensively understand a building's contributions to the city and neighborhood and investigate alternatives to demolition. *Note: During the course of this plan's development, the City of North Adams enacted a 12 month Demolition Delay bylaw as an early implementation step. The City will need to continue education about Demolition Delay and its significance in historic preservation.*

Action B: Adopt an Affirmative Maintenance Bylaw

Reduce loss through demolition by neglect. When owners fail to maintain their property, the neighborhood, residents, and property values suffer. Support the city's current efforts to establish a type of affirmative maintenance bylaw to provide local regulatory authority over threatened buildings, including historically-significant ones, and mandate that owners take necessary actions toward stabilization.

Action C: Identify Buildings with Maintenance Concerns Early

Encourage the North Adams Historical Commission to work with the Building Department to facilitate identification of early code violations in historic properties, and particularly in historic districts. Flagging sites of concern as early as possible may slow or stop the harmful process of neglect. Education and financing may be necessary to incentivize improvements.

Action D: Identify Priority Areas to be Protected through a Local Historic District

The strongest tool for preserving historic properties and districts is a local historic district. Local historic districts can protect the character of important areas through the use of design guidelines that seek to foster preservation and ensure compatible infill development projects. These can be applied to both residential and commercial areas, such as traditional Main Street downtowns.

Action E: Identify Priority Areas to be Protected through Architectural Preservation Districts, aka Neighborhood Conservation Districts

Less rigorous than a local historic district, a Neighborhood Conservation District establishes project review on additions, major alterations, demolition and new construction, for properties within a designated district. The ultimate goal of such a district is to ensure that defining characteristics of the neighborhood remain while allowing for sensitive change and development.

See Key Tools and Techniques on the following page.

Policy HP 2.2: Develop and make available financial incentives supporting historic property reinvestment in the city.

Developing financial assistance mechanisms, particularly for private landowners, has been noted as a strong desire and need in the community. Though some private owners may recognize the significance of their historic properties, attaining the financial resources for their maintenance is challenging for many.

Action A: Establish a Revolving Loan Fund

Support current regional efforts to establish a Revolving Loan Fund for privately owned historic properties. Investigate the potential to establish a North Adams specific fund and consider expanding to cultural institutions and locally-owned commercial properties. Such an option would provide a direct funding source at low- or no-interest to encourage historic building reinvestment projects, facilitate their financing, and reduce the overall project cost.

Key Tools and Techniques

Two key tools municipalities can pursue are Demolition Delay and Local Historic Districts. The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) is the State Historic Preservation Office, which recommends that at a minimum, municipalities have a Demolition Delay ordinance to protect the most vulnerable historic assets. A local historic district is probably the strongest tool a community can enact for historic preservation; often local historic districts are confused with National Register Districts. The differences are described below.

Demolition Delay – *The Details*

When a municipality has a Demolition Delay ordinance in place, it creates an opportunity to find alternative solutions to demolition. For example, in some places where Demolition Delay exists, property owners did not understand the building’s historical significance and importance to the community until their plans for demolition were publicly reviewed. During the delay period, the building owner, historical commission members, and appropriate municipal officials can explore opportunities to preserve or move the threatened building.

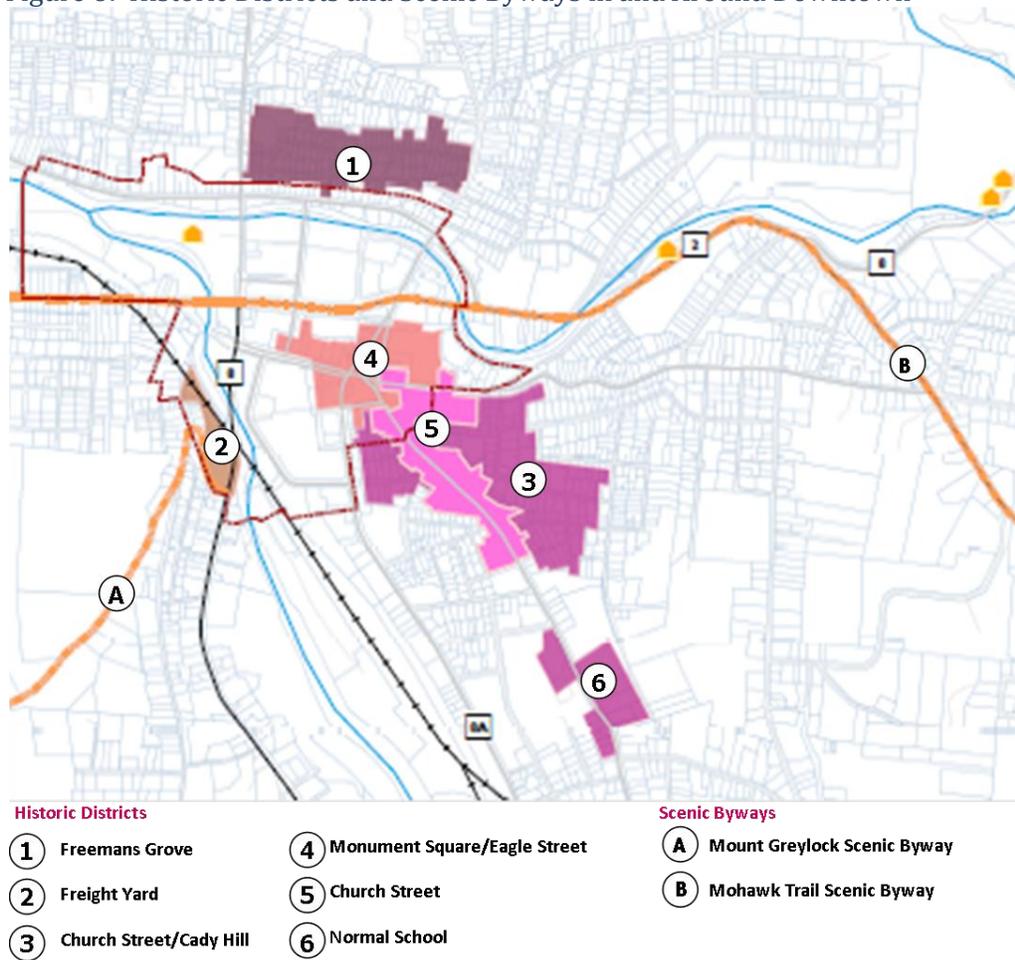
A Demolition Delay ordinance should be specially tailored to the community. Established as a general ordinance requiring a simple majority vote of the City Council, it can be tailor-made to suit the municipality’s specific needs and wishes. The length of delay typically ranges from 6-12 months. The ordinance may apply to buildings of a certain age, those that are listed on the state or national historic register, or a combination of requirements. The delay is enacted if the Local Historical Commission determines that the building is preferably preserved. The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) recommends an age-based requirement, in order to ensure comprehensive application, and a delay of at least 12 months.

Local Historic Districts and National Register Districts – *What’s the Difference?*

In general, local historic districts are more effective at preventing inappropriate changes than National Register Districts. Local historic districts can protect the character of important areas through the use of design guidelines that seek to foster preservation and ensure compatible infill development projects. These can be applied to both residential and commercial areas, such as traditional Main Street downtowns.

National Register District		Local Historic District
900+	# in Massachusetts	200+
Federal designation process through the MHC. Won't pass if majority of property owners object.	Establishment	Specific steps outlined in MGL Ch. 40C; require 2/3 majority of City Council vote.
Massachusetts Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)	Oversight	Local Historic District Commission
No state or federal involvement in the project (\$ or permitting) = no protections or limitations changes.	Property rights	Reviews exterior architectural changes visible from a public way for respect to historic character of district.
Promotion and appreciation of architectural heritage; minimal protections. Potential tax benefits for income-producing properties.	Benefits	LHD's have saved historic structures, neighborhoods and villages from inappropriate alterations and demolition.

Figure 8: Historic Districts and Scenic Byways in and Around Downtown



See also, Map 7 for a complete citywide map of historic and cultural resources.

GOAL HP 3: MAXIMIZE THE BENEFITS OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION TO THE CITY'S ECONOMY

The protection, reuse, and promotion of the city's historic resources can positively contribute to the local economy. Zoning and tourism strategies which acknowledge and enhance historic resources should contribute to economic development. These efforts will rely on partnerships with the North Adams Historical Society, Inc., Office of Tourism, Office of Community Development, the North Adams Historical Commission, Berkshire Cultural Resource Center, and organizations and non-profits.

Policy HP 3.1: Promote and facilitate the sensitive and robust reuse of historic residential, commercial and industrial properties throughout the city.

The city's zoning code is in need of a comprehensive reiteration. Amendments have been made regularly to address immediate needs without the opportunity to holistically evaluate how effective or appropriate the zoning bylaws are. Conflicts exist where there is a mismatch between current zoning and development which occurred prior to that zoning. Ensure that historic preservation is a consideration in the development of updated zoning.

Action A: Include Up Zoning and Down Zoning in a Comprehensive Zoning Rewrite

A comprehensive zoning rewrite should consider the uses and required parcel dimensions of each zoning district in order to protect historic patterns and properties, as well as to allow for uses which contribute to more vibrant and active neighborhoods. The zoning processes are called up zoning and down zoning. See the call-out box, right, for more information on this process.

Policy HP 3.2: Integrate historic tourism into the city's overall culture and tourism strategy.

Tourism can be for both the out-of-towner and the local resident – tourism activities in North Adams should support both user groups. There are many diverse offerings and organizations in the city that are engaged in cultural activities attractive to tourists. However, there is a lack of coordination and support which makes it difficult to sustain these efforts.

Action A: Make the Historic Fabric of North Adams Part of a Wayfinding Campaign

Develop a wayfinding campaign throughout the city, incorporating attractions such as MASS MoCA which helps to tell the story of North Adams' industrial heritage to its present-day cultural development. Underscoring the important roles historic properties play in defining the character of North Adams is vital in this effort to help visitors navigate the city in a meaningful way and to encourage residents to experience their community more profoundly.

Action B: Maintain and Enhance a Historical Museum

The North Adams Historical Society, Inc. currently maintains the North Adams Museum of History and Science at the Western Gateway Heritage State Park. The city will ensure that a venue for local history remain, and explore ways to expand and enhance its reach. Expansions should include multi-media options such as video stations, digital tour companions, and virtual tours.

UP ZONING & DOWN ZONING

These modifications are best implemented following a comprehensive planning process.

Up Zoning: Intensifying uses, decreasing dimensional requirements, allowing-mixed use (i.e. a building with retail, offices and housing) is called up zoning. This can help preserve historic resources if the new zoning requirements more closely align to the historic pattern of the area. Up zoning should permit positive adaptive reuse of buildings (i.e. conversions of large homes to Bed and Breakfasts), and provide for sensitive infill development.

Down Zoning: Modification of a zoning district to encourage less intense use and increasing the dimensional requirements of a parcel are part of down zoning. This approach can be used to protect historically sensitive areas from detracting development.

Implementing Zoning Changes:

Any change to zoning, including increasing or decreasing intensity requires a 2/3 affirmative vote of the City Council, following a report of the planning board and a public hearing.

Action C: Support Efforts to Designate Downtown North Adams as a Cultural District

Through an act of the State legislature in 2010, the Mass Cultural Council established a process for designating Cultural Districts. The intent of this designation is to strengthen the sense of place, stimulate local economic activity, and improve the personal experience of visitors and residents. The historic fabric of North Adams contributes significantly to its potential as a Massachusetts Cultural District. This designation will bring attention to the City of North Adams as a tourist destination, rather than one or two individual sites. It will also build a case for applying to grant programs and focusing investment.



The North Adams Public Library, a LEED Silver building, is a shining example of how historic buildings, including civic buildings, can be retrofitted to be energy efficient while retaining the historic integrity of the structure,

Policy HP 3.3: Support preservation and robust use of local landmarks and institutional uses.

The city has a rich inventory of historic landmarks which create interesting spaces. These sites provide settings for local events, and when linked together (i.e. through tours), they can tell the larger story of the city or the region. The city should work to maximize the benefits of having these notable places.

Action A: Develop Zoning to Protect Landmarks and Civic Uses

Develop overlay districts where landmarks are clustered to protect their character-defining attributes and promote active uses in the surrounding areas. Areas such as the juncture of Church, Ashland, Eagle and Main Streets, offer a cluster of historic buildings, landmarks and vistas, which should be protected and enhanced where appropriate.

Action B: Locate Cultural Activities within and around Historic Properties

Encourage the location of cultural activities and events at historic properties (i.e. existing Eagle Street Beach Party); consider relocating popular events to such locations (i.e. Saturday Farmer's Market). Bringing as much foot traffic to these sites and encouraging residents and visitors to have a positive experience there will help build appreciation and stewardship.

Action C: Call Attention to Lost or Hidden Historically Significant Sites

There are a number of historic sites in North Adams which have been lost to time or development, or are obscured by existing conditions. Calling attention to these sites, such as Monitor Park, where parts of the Civil War ship, The Monitor, were made, or former Fort Massachusetts, offers additional opportunity to identify what makes North Adams distinctive. In particular, Monitor Park could serve as a linkage between MASS MoCA, downtown, and the Western Gateway Heritage State Park. Directly across the West Main Street from Monitor Park is the Scenic Byway kiosk which could be enhanced and used as a linkage between the sites.

GOAL HP 4: SET HISTORIC PRESERVATION PRACTICE AS A CORNERSTONE FOR AN OVERALL HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS STRATEGY

North Adams has ample historic resources within its boundaries, including homes, commercial buildings, monuments and public spaces. But the city was built for a much larger community, nearly twice its current population. There is an excess of housing, contributing to a high vacancy rate, and more infrastructure to maintain. Economic constraints of the population over recent decades have led to blighted buildings which are now difficult, if not impossible, to bring up to state building code. Residents and city administrators acknowledge these conditions require a balance of reinvestment and relinquishment (ex. demolition) of residential and institutional resources. Engaging in a deliberate process of prioritizing preservation and reinvestment will best utilize funding and protect valuable physical resources.

Policy HP 4.1: Facilitate Homeowner Access to Information on Historic Properties and Preservation Options

Owners of historic homes may be unaware that their property is listed, particularly as ownership changes over time. Additionally, property owners may not be aware of sources of information on how to appropriately care for their home to maintain or even enhance its historic significance. This is especially challenging as new materials for historic renovations are constantly being developed to offer better appearance and performance.

Action A: Promote Publicly Available Information on Historic Properties

Work with the North Adams Historical Commission and the North Adams Historical Society to make information available about historic properties throughout the city. Distributing existing inventory forms and promoting expanded, electronic versions when available will help owners understand, and hopefully protect, the historic value of their properties.

Policy HP 4.2: Promote and facilitate the purchase of and investment in historic properties in foreclosure or owned by the city.

The city has a number of vacant and foreclosed properties within its neighborhoods that contribute to blight or are slated for eventual demolition. In some cases, these properties were seized for tax delinquency and are now the responsibility of the city. The city will work to highlight the historic merits of and promote private investment into these properties, where appropriate.

Action A: Create a Catalogue of Historic Homeownership Opportunities with a Financial Incentive

Develop a catalog of vacant historic buildings available for renovation into homes. Feature pictures, critical information, and historic attributes. By utilizing marketing tools, the city can promote the redevelopment potential of these priority properties to local banks, real estate agents, and individuals. A financial incentive per unit (i.e. \$5-10,000) can further entice the purchase of these buildings.

Action B: Offer a Guide to Historic Housing Rehabilitation

Develop and distribute a guide to the intricacies of historic home rehabilitation. This guide should address issues of maintaining key historic details, lead paint, energy efficiency, and specialty contractors. If North Adams designates one or more local historic districts, an additional guide should be developed to help owners understand the designation and make appropriate choices about their renovations.

GOAL HP 5: MAXIMIZE SOCIAL BENEFITS OF HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCE BENEFITS FOR THE COMMUNITY

Policy HP 5.1: Build community awareness and support for historic preservation.

Because so much of the built environment in slow growing New England communities is historic, residents often take for granted the historic and architectural values that surround them. These can serve as a resource for education of all ages, job creation, and rebranding the city. The city will work to highlight and build community awareness and pride for its history and the great potential preservation offers the future of its built environment.

Action A: Encourage Local History in Elementary and Secondary Schools

Expand and support efforts to teach local history in elementary and secondary schools. Provide a combination of bringing students to sites and providing materials and support for teachers to bring into the classroom. This will serve a two-fold purpose: it will enhance existing lessons (creating a ‘tangible’ history), and cultivate an appreciation of North Adams at an early age.

Action B: Support Local History at Institutions of Higher Learning

Encourage continued and additional public history classes taught through MCLA, Berkshire Community College, and Williams College. There has been positive response to classes including local history taught at MCLA, and programs are expanding to offer education for teachers through these institutions. These are important opportunities to maintain for residents interested in developing a deep understanding of their local history and its connections to historic events and time periods.

Offer continuing education credits for professionals utilizing local architecture and other aspects of the built environment. Work with area educational institutions such as MCLA and Berkshire Community College to offer professional requirements locally in order to educate architects, planners and others about North Adams.

Action C: Offer Glimpses of City History on a Daily Basis

Create opportunities for residents to learn about local history and culture through modest efforts such as signage and newspaper articles, historic building and home visits, and lectures. Integrating the history of North Adams into the daily lives of residents can help enrich lives and experiences. Utilizing many types of media and outlets will allow the message to reach a broader audience.

Action D: Continue and Enhance Historic Tours

Continue to offer historic tours (walking and trolley) and support their enhancement. As part of a broader city branding and marketing strategy, enhancement and variation of the tours should be considered. A tour linking the historical resources, cultural developments, and natural resources of the community may be a model to consider. Incorporation of technology to supplement and expand existing tour options should be utilized.

Action E: Develop a Clearinghouse of Information about North Adams History

There have been numerous projects developed (many at the college level) studying the history of North Adams. Often students or groups recreate past work because there is no central location for projects specific to the city. Developing a site where such information or links to it can be accessed would benefit future study and reduce the burden on residents or people acting as information resources.

Action F: Promote the Connection of Historic and Cultural Resources

Connect historic and cultural resources within promotional materials and tours wherever possible; harness the broader audience for cultural attractions to provide information about the historic resources of the area. Making explicit the connections between cultural developments and the historic fabric of a place will enhance the visitor’s and resident’s experience and deepen their appreciation for North Adams.

GOAL HP 6: SUPPORT REGIONAL PRESERVATION INITIATIVES AND ENSURE CITY IS WELL REPRESENTED

Policy HP 6.1: Support efforts to coordinate historic preservation initiatives and programs at the regional-scale.

Regional-scale historic preservation planning initiatives have begun to gain momentum over the past decade. The city has already benefited greatly from programs such as the federal Scenic Byways program which highlight Route 2 and the tour over Mount Greylock. The recently designated Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area, while stopping just south of the city, provides a regional resource and partner (Housatonic Heritage) to help link the city to regional historic tours and trails, such as the paper trail.

Action A: Encourage a Revolving Loan Fund for Private Homeowners

Participate in and support current regional efforts to establish a Revolving Loan Fund for private owners investing in historic properties. Research along the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway showed that private homeowners hold responsibility for a majority of its historic resources, yet they have the fewest available financial resources. A feasibility study is underway for the development of a Revolving Loan Fund to offer low- or no-interest loans to these owners to support reinvestment along the byway. Route 2 in North Adams is one of the areas included in this pilot project.

Action B: Participate in Scenic Byway Planning

Continue and enhance involvement in scenic byway planning to make best use of this tourist activity and draw. The Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway and the Mount Greylock State Reservation Scenic Byway both have segments traveling through North Adams. The development of the Mount Greylock access trail from downtown North Adams will help capture these visitors.

Action C: Support a Regional Historic Preservation Organization

Participate in efforts to establish a regional organization dedicated to historic preservation in Berkshire County. Local Historical Commissions and local history organizations across the county support the creation of a group which would represent the regional interests of historic preservation organizations, providing technical assistance and coordination efforts. North Adams representatives should participate in this process to the extent possible.

