



CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCE FORUM COMMENTS

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OVERVIEW

The Historic Preservation and Cultural Resource Forum was held on October 13th, 2011 from 6:00-8:00pm at the North Adams Public Library. A total of 23 residents attended. Mayor Richard J. Alcombright was in attendance, and the BRPC staff members present were Amy Kacala, Lauren Gaherty, and Mackenzie Greer.

The agenda for the two-hour event was:

1. Presentation (30 Minutes)

Amy Kacala provided an overview of the comprehensive planning process, and the agenda for the evening. Ms. Kacala reviewed significant historical features and resources in the city, major developments which have affected historic resources, and she gave an overview of the cultural resources.

2. Small Group Work (1 hour, 20 Minutes)

The participants divided up into four groups which rotated through four tables, each discussing a different topic related to historic and cultural resources. The groups discussed historic preservation, landscapes, cultural resources and neighborhoods. The results from each small group are summarized below.

4. Wrap-up and Next Steps (10 Minutes):

At the end of the meeting there was an opportunity for participants to ask any questions and Ms. Kacala reminded them of the continuing process.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

This group was asked to review properties and districts listed on the National Register for Historic Places. They noted concerns about these properties and other preservation priorities. There were also a number of strategies for described. Responses are organized into site-specific comments and suggested strategies, below.

GENERAL COMMENTS

- North Adams was built for a much larger community, which leads to challenges related to its built infrastructure, a preponderance of empty houses, and concerns about the financial feasibility of bringing everything up to date.
- Historic preservation may be considered an elitist activity. The historic assets are underappreciated. There are no updated local histories.
- Historic preservation in a broad sense is understood. It is viewed positively when related to adaptive reuse.
- Historic preservation can be a burden for older families (i.e. those with houses passed through generations).
- Blighted buildings are difficult to bring to modern code. Some should come down, some should remain.
- City parcels are up for auction, it will lose control of them. There is a need for long-range planning for these holdings.

- Common themes among the historic resources described: engineering, churches, and Colonial and post-Colonial. It was noted that little is done currently to promote the Colonial and post-Colonial. Events such as the shipping of artillery from Saratoga and Albany across the Mohawk Trail; the area's role in war of 1812; broadening history told will broaden its audience.

BUILDINGS AND SITES OF CONCERN

MCLA area: The campus development and expansion is happening without transparent planning or community involvement. Does MCLA consider the impacts to residential neighborhoods and private investment there? As a result of student housing, there are conversions from one-family houses.

MASS MoCA: Infilling vacant lots with new houses is a "ridiculous" approach. These sites would be better as pocket parks. Instead reinvest in existing housing and buildings.

Cherry/Wall/Holbrook Streets: There is a large area comprised of separate lots. Has potential for a large subdivision (described in a negative way).

East Street Market: In peril; art deco façade.

Eagle Street: Empty stores, slowly decaying.

ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES FOR PRESERVATION

Congregational Burial Ground: Near future WalMart; should be on Register.

Churches: There are none on the Register, they are endangered, many have stained glass. St. Francis is an example.

Cemeteries: Wilbur, Blackinton, Congregational, Ehab and Rota.

Berkshire Hills Sanatorium: Only the site remains.

Stickley House on Cherry Street: No specific note beyond being a priority for preservation.

Hoosac Valley Agricultural Fairgrounds: There is interest in using it as a festival site.

Windsor Mill: See Landscapes group summary

Button Houses: No specific note beyond being a priority for preservation.

Monitor Monument: Remains of iron mine; behind Williams River.

Mohawk Theater: No specific note beyond being a priority for preservation.

STRATEGIES FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Protective and Flexible Zoning

- There was interest expressed about protective zoning in general, demolition delay, affirmative maintenance, local historic districts, and establishing a landmarks commission.
- Create historic districts around Church Street, MASS MoCA, and Cady Hill District. These should include guidelines and protections.

- Include/support conversion of big houses into B & B's. There aren't enough hotel rooms for large events.

Ownership of Historic Homes

- Offer tax incentives to owners who rehabilitate historic properties.
- Develop a strategy to address foreclosures. The bank holdings lead to neglect, need to continue their maintenance.

Education/implementation guidance

- Education for the public and municipal leaders about protective zoning, demolition delay, affirmative maintenance, local historic districts, and landmarks commissions.
- Classes and lectures about city history, i.e. how much was built in such a small time, the Hoosac Tunnel and mill history; a class was taught by Prof. Petra at MCLA about this; students were very interested in the social history.
- Need to support existing and more local history in the elementary and secondary schools. Currently done in 3rd grade and through an afterschool program.
- More options for learning about local history through historic building and home visits. Things are still made in these mills, could be highlighted through tours.
- Educate through signage, regular history pieces in newspaper.

Branding and Marketing

- Things still being made in the mills.
- Get a train to go through the Hoosac Tunnel.
- Market the important sites; don't put a shiny glaze on it.
- Rebrand the city.
- Need a market study.
- Need to change perceptions from surrounding communities. Must change first with those who live here.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Participants were asked to list cultural resources in North Adams. After each group named the sites, buildings, general resources, etc., they also gave ideas for the next important steps to advance culture in the City. The full list was transcribed and divided into categories.

CULTURAL SITES

Branding and Promotion

- Marketing/information/survey
- Build upon/brand/market: museum mile (Clark to the Beaver Mill)
- Info kiosk – real or virtual: history, culture

Connections

- Bridge MASS MoCA with natural resources: sculpture parks, private/public
- Use of MCLA as a green space for community: include four-legged friends
- Bring MASS MoCA downtown

Natural

- Develop natural resources (carefully) or at a minimum maintain: cascades, camping (develop Camp Decker), Hoosic River (include fishing)
- Mount Greylock – access
- Windsor Lake (aka Fish Pond): concerts, events, facilities, has potential for more activities
- Trails/falls/cascades
- Natural Bridge
- Appalachian Trail
- Hoosic River
- Hoosac Tunnel Museum and Visitor's Center

Recreation (not natural)

- Noel Field, Steeplecats
- Recreational facilities: bowling alleys, The Range (batting)
- Windsor Mill
- Bike paths
- Skating Rink

Performing and Studio Arts

- Minerva Art Center
- Mill City Players (at Heritage State Park)
- Eclipse mill: gallery space, artist studios
- Educational art center
- More festivals, museums, galleries
- Education at all levels: geared toward the arts, art schools, art in the schools

Historical Sites and Promotion

- Working demo-history mill
- Historical Museum
- Historic trail: stories, people, parks, community gardens
- Utilize historic commission and history museums
- Heritage State Park – *all* of it

Restaurants/Services Industry

- More coffee shops, cafés, tourist friendly shops in walking
- More beds, B & B’s, youth hostel
- distance to MASS MoCA, Porches
- Develop conference capabilities: housing, hospitality, capacity, utilize dorms during summer
- Restaurants: develop new, culinary culture
- Farm to table: farmer’s markets, CSA’s

General Built Environment (i.e. infrastructure, buildings)

- Downtown: all of downtown, DownStreet, DownStreet Art, Main Street events
- Churches/Steeple: save, reuse, active churches, Congregational has Tiffany windows
- Cemetery and related historic trails

Specific Sites

- Gas lines (arches over the river), develop
- Masonic lodge reuse
- Future Bike Trail
- North Adams Public Library
- Movie theater
- YMCA
- Armory building: basketball, wrestling, concerts, expos, dances, conferences
- MASS MoCA
 - More community involvement (both ways)
 - More branding of North Adams, not separate

- More large performing arts events (condensed, shared with city)
- City-wide festival
- Physical area around MASS MoCA: secure **AIG** lot (Brown Street)
- Get people off the campus into other areas of the city

- Fairgrounds
- Use of MCLA parking
- Chapel of Humanity
- Eagle Street (has future possibilities)

Non-traditional Cultural Sites

- Non-traditional: Schools - Drury Drama, McCann (a diamond in the rough), future of Conte; Airport, City Hall, Hospital
- Clubs: Elks, Mason, Eagles, American Legion
- Cultural districts: ethnic history

Events/Activities/Programs

- City events
- Creative conference
- Geocaching
- Television studio – Northern Berkshire Cable Television
- Ballooning festivals – bring them back
- Year-round culture: include winter activities for indoor and outdoor
- Trolley
- More festivals, museums, galleries

People

- Showcase local talents
- Greater use of Church Street Center for performances
- Natural Bridge: a sound installation

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

- Start by looking what North Adams has that underutilized such as Windsor Lake and Heritage State Park
- Reopen the Mohawk Theater: partners/multi-use, home for community theater groups, MCLA programs, lecture series, concerts
- Focus on quality of life for locals, tourists, future tenants
- Create a cultural district
- Venue assessment/central clearinghouse
- Creative programming and linkage through programming
- Community calendar/promotion

LANDSCAPES

This group was asked to identify and mark on a large map the locations of and comments about gateways, corridors, and landscapes in North Adams.

GATEWAYS

- The State Street gateway area (Chenaille Terrace to Ashton Ave) is a historic corridor with Tudor Houses. It is not listed on the National Register but has potential.
- Gateway overlay districts could be developed to help soften the strip-mall appearance.
- When planning gateways, consider the potential audiences: from the East, Boston; from the South, Tanglewood; and from the West, Williamstown.

CORRIDORS

- The area between Massachusetts Avenue and the Hoosic River needs more green.
- The Hoosic River, as a corridor received a number of comments:
 - From the Eclipse Mill to the Beaver Mill should be a natural river corridor.
 - In the area of Beaver street to the branch convergence, the dam should be beautified.
 - The River in the Noel Field area should be part of a historic mill district and efforts there should include landscaping and façade work with façade easements.
 - Spruce up the façade of the little tunnel at the branch convergence.
- From MASS MoCA to Heritage State Park, there should be a footbridge over West Main Street.
- Scenic byways in North Adams also received a number of comments:
 - Mobile homes on the Mohawk trail are in poor condition and are in need of landscaping.
 - Signage about the trails is needed throughout the City.

- North Adams could be promoted as the capital of a hiking corridor through the county.
- It was suggested to line Vietnam (Memorial?), Route 2, and Main Street with flowers.

LANDSCAPES

- Lois Street, off of Route 2/State Road has 75 year-old greenhouses.
- On State Road, near Protection Ave is the Cariddi Mill with a façade like Eclipse Mill with new windows, etc.
- The Cascades need entrance stairs.
- The Hoosic River was a noted landscape – see notes in the Corridor discussion. Similarly, steeples were noted as a landscape feature; they are in the buildings discussion.
- Windsor Lake Park could contain a dog park and community gardens.
- Heritage State Park needs improved signage.
- In general trees need greater protection; they are easy to take down.

BUILDINGS

Building-related Comments

- There were comments about mill buildings throughout city. The most significant mills noted are Noama, Cariddi, Barber Leather, Eclipse, Beaver, Blackington, Windsor, Clark Biscuit, MASS MoCA. The most endangered are Noama, Barber Leather, Cariddi.
- Closed churches include Notre Dame, St. Francis, Holy Family, and Methodist. The churches are part of the historic city pattern – work, churches and homes. Steeples are visible throughout the City.
- There are demolition threats throughout North Adams; specifically noted were the Corner of Union Street, Flat Iron building, W. Main St., Church St. Ransford Property, and Conte School.
- It was noted that a parking lot across the street from the Eclipse Mill is needed and the area could be spruced up with flowers and a garden.

NEIGHBORHOODS

This group was asked to identify and mark on a large map the boundaries of neighborhoods in North Adams. Each described neighborhood was given a number on the map. Participants coded and added the status of each, included in a key below:

- Green = good conditions
- Orange = mixed conditions
- Red = poor conditions such as blight and neglect
- Green dots were used to identify _____.
- Orange dots were used to identify _____.
- Additional comments providing more detail about the conditions were noted for some neighborhoods.

Map #	Name	Status	Green or Orange Dot	Comments
1.	Veazie Street	Green	Green	
2.	UNO (United Neighborhood Organization)	Orange		Some recent improvements. "Tooth problem" – <i>caused by demolitions?</i>
3.	Fort Massachusetts	Red		
4.	Walker Street	Green		
5.	Beaverville	Orange		Some demolitions; "on edge"
6.	MCLA	Orange		Mixed quality
7.	Marion Ave./Webber Estate	Green		Very green
8.	Veteran's	Green	Green (adjacent)	
9.	Button House (tudor?)	Green	Green	
10.	Minor Street/Union Street	Red		Blight, neglect, trash
11.	Blackinton	Orange	Orange	Historic homes, not kept up as well; past village identification with mill, church, etc.
12.	Holbrook	Orange	Orange	Scattered good to poor quality; good downtown access
13.	High Street	Red		Some demolition, condemned signs; homes are very large and difficult to renovate

14.	Furnace	Orange		Area is mixed; some homes renovated. "Little Italy"
15.	Freeman School	No indication	Orange	
16.	Greylock School	No indication		Combine with #8?
17.	Greylock Village	No indication	Green	Combine with #8?
18.	Eclipse Mill/Unionville	No indication	Orange	
19.	Mohawk Forest	No indication		
20.	South Church	No indication		Includes St. Joseph's Cemetery
21.	East Main Street	Orange	Orange	Combine with #10? Or part of 12? Some amazing structures; others in need of TLC.
22.	Upper Walnut	Green		
23.	Kempville	Green		Kemp Park acts as an anchor.
24.	Church	Orange		
25.	Notch			
26.	Woodlawn			

Other Neighborhood- and Housing-Related Comments:

- Do we have the craftsmen we need to improve for energy efficiency? More education is needed around historic homes and energy efficiency.
- Significant costs to the owner
- Non-profit for historic preservation could include renovation financing
- Redefining "progress" = be picky, not desperate
- It is challenging to sustain awareness in predominantly renter-occupied areas.
- Maintenance strategies: develop tax incentives on merit of historic preservation; call attention to positive actions in terms of renovations; endangered property lists; and better enforcement of derelict properties.