

Executive Summary

Wakefield Preservation Plan

Summary History of Wakefield

The structures and landscapes that comprise Wakefield's historic resources are a result of the cumulative activities of human beings in the area. The thousands of years of habitation of the region by local native tribes has left no visible trace of their existence. Archaeological evidence suggests that there was extensive settlement of native tribes along the lakes and rivers in the town. Lake Quannapowitt, Crystal Lake, Mill River and the Saugus River all show archaeological evidence of settlements dating back thousands of years. Artifacts found in Wakefield indicate that quarrying of the Lynn Felsite for hunting points occurred in the upper hills of the town about 8,000 years ago. At about 1,000 AD, agricultural practices were adopted by the local Pawtucket tribes.

The major migration of Puritans that began in 1630, when John Winthrop landed in Salem harbor, resulted in pressures to found new settlements. In 1638, the area around what is now Wakefield (incorporated as the Town of Redding) was surveyed by Puritan scouts and, in 1639, 29 inhabitants of Lynn left that community and settled along abandoned Pawtucket planting fields on the southern shore of Lake Quannapowitt. By 1667, there were 59 houses in Redding.

For the next 200 years, the predominant economic base of Wakefield (then known as South Redding) was subsistence agriculture. Virtually all of a family's needs were met through its own resourcefulness. Surplus agricultural products---and off-season cottage industries such as making shoes---provided cash for those items that could not be provided by themselves, such as grinding of corn and grains, sawing of lumber and iron parts of tools.

This era of subsistence agriculture left a substantial legacy of Georgian and Federal dwellings in Wakefield. At least 67 Georgian and Federal dwellings dating from 1668 to 1830 still exist in the town. They provide a rich and important legacy of that era.

The arrival of the railroad in Wakefield in 1844, 200 years following the incorporation of the town, signaled a new historical era for Wakefield, bringing with it the Industrial Revolution. Within 10 years of the railroad's arrival, manufacturing activity was transformed from a cottage industry conducted in farm shoe shops by family members to one where new corporations created manufacturing enterprises that hired new immigrants to work in mechanized factories.

By 1855, manufacturing enterprises such as the Heywood Brothers and Wakefield Company Rattan Factory on Water Street and the B&M Foundry at the main railroad junction were formed, both by Cyrus Wakefield. By 1863, the Rattan Factory employed approximately 200 persons and in 1873 up to 1000 employees, surpassing the shoe industry in employment. Textile production in the Harvard Mills located at the railroad junction south of Albion Street also became a major employer in the town.

This new enterprise brought with it new wealth to invest in private dwellings and civic buildings. The town's rich inventory of Greek Revival, Italianate, Second Empire and Queen Anne styles attest to the wealth and style that the Industrial Revolution brought to Wakefield. Among the most prominent civic buildings that represent this era include the Italianate First Baptist Church (1872) and the Unitarian Universalist Society (built as a Greek Revival in 1836 and later modified to Italianate in 1859).

In the 20th century, the major social influence on the Town of Wakefield affecting its development pattern has been suburban development. With the coming of the railroads, access from Boston was now convenient and the possibility of daily commuting from the city to Wakefield opened up the town to a new development influence. New residential development began to occur around the Greenwood Railroad Station and the Wakefield Station.

This suburban development began to spread beyond walking distance of the stations when horse drawn street cars were introduced and was accelerated when electric street cars came into use in Wakefield in 1892, with the inauguration of the Wakefield and Stoneham Street Railway Company. Early streetcar lines extended along Main, Albion and Water Streets. Electric streetcar service was subsequently extended to Melrose (1893); to Reading (1894); Saugus; Peabody and Salem (1898); and to Wakefield Park (1902).

Suburban development brought with it the accelerated development of the Wakefield Park and Greenwood sections of town. Wakefield Park in particular has a striking preponderance of Shingle Style and Colonial Revival architecture that was characteristic of the later decades of the 19th century. Wakefield Park is listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places.

The influence of the automobile brought with it gradual expansion of newer suburban growth that has blurred the distinction between historic neighborhoods. One of the challenges of historic preservation in Wakefield today is to define the distinctiveness between historic areas in a manner that defines and identifies them and that assists in preserving them for future generations.

Recommendations of the Preservation Plan

After a thorough review of the needs of the town in the area of preserving the town's historic resources, the Wakefield Preservation Plan recommends 11 goals and an action plan to realize those goals.

The overall goal of historic preservation efforts in Wakefield is to preserve and enhance the town's historic character. This can be accomplished by implementing the following actions:

Goal 1: Expand the inventory of historic resources.

This would include expanding the town's Inventory of Historic Resources to include all historic properties in town; revising existing surveys to bring them up to the standards of the Massachusetts Historical Commission's 1995 Survey Manual; and commissioning new planning studies and inventories of archaeological and other historic landscapes.

Goal 2: Prepare and submit new district and individual nominations to the National Register of Historic Places.

This goal recommends the preparation of National Register nominations for new and expanded NR districts identified in this Preservation Plan, including the creation of 10 new districts, including one in the Harvard Mills/RR Depot area and one in the Downtown, and the expansion of the Common and Lafayette-Church Streets Historic Districts and the Wakefield Park Historic District.

In addition, individual nominations to the National Register are recommended in the Preservation Plan.

Goal 3: Preserve the historic resources of the downtown as part of a larger revitalization effort.

The first need here is to develop a vision plan for downtown, including urban design and market revitalization components that will serve as a guide for downtown revitalization efforts.

The next step is to develop an organizational structure with staffing that will be a viable downtown organization that can begin initiating urban design and marketing recommendations, including parking solutions.

The goal includes a recommendation to create a viable funding source that will provide the financial basis for a long-term revitalization effort. This could include a Business Improvement District structure or some other funding source.

The Preservation Plan's regulatory recommendations for downtown include adopting a downtown zoning district that incorporates design review, sign regulations and facade guidelines. Related recommendation include designating Wakefield Center as a 40C Local Historic District; implement signage, facade and streetscape improvements using CDBG funds and implementing a downtown parking study.

Goal 4: Preserve the historic and architectural integrity of Wakefield's neighborhoods.

One of the major needs related to preserving historic neighborhoods is to increase the awareness and appreciation of the value of historic preservation among owners of residential and commercial properties. This includes providing additional information and resources on property rehabilitation to owners of historic structures; conserving and improving streetscapes in historic neighborhoods; preserving large and wooded lots in neighborhoods; and improving the delivery of the preservation message through neighborhood associations. It also involves giving priority to neighborhood-level planning and to increasing the self-awareness of historic neighborhoods.

Goal 5: Preserve Wakefield's historic landscapes.

Historic preservation includes not only the preservation of structures but the protection of historic landscapes. This goal recommends the protection of Reedy Meadow as a landscape of particular significance to the settlement of Wakefield. In addition, the goal recommends protecting and preserving the landscape surrounding Lake Quannapowitt and Crystal Lake and the preservation of the integrity of Breakheart Reservation.

Archaeological sites should have an effective protection strategy in place. One of the ways of assuring this is to create greenways along the Mill and Saugus Rivers as a means of protecting the historic resources along the river.

Historic landscapes need to be protected through adequate planning.. This would include implementing a landscape master plan for the park system in Wakefield, including the upper and lower Common, emphasizing the Olmsted-like qualities of their design. Planning activities should include the revision of the 2000 Wakefield Open Space and Recreation Master Plan to include the historic landscape recommendations contained in the Wakefield Preservation Plan.

Finally, the preservation of historic landscapes requires a lands committee to be the advocate for these landscape initiatives.

Goal 6: Improve historic urban design in Wakefield.

Urban design is important to historic preservation because it provides the context and setting for historic structures. For example, urban design includes the development and implementation of a tree planting plan for main thoroughfares and neighborhood streets in Wakefield, including the improvement of the aesthetics of public and private parking lots through tree planting and other amenities.

In addition, a Capital Improvement Program should be prepared that would allow the Town to plan the financing for placing utility lines underground.

Other urban design objectives include improving the aesthetics of Greenwood Center; revising the Town's sign bylaw to improve future sign design; designing and implementing a pedestrian-friendly path system in town and installing period lighting in historic neighborhoods.

These recommendations will require the creation of a Civic Design Commission to guide new public building projects in the town and to improve the level of civic design of MBTA rail projects.

Finally, this goal includes creating a boulevard plan for the town's main arterial streets.

Goal 7: Preserve historic properties owned by the Town of Wakefield.

The Town of Wakefield is the largest owner of historic properties in the town. As such, it has a special responsibility to see that these historic resources are protected for future generations. The Preservation Plan recommends the implementation of a strategy to preserve historic properties owned by the Town, including the preparation of a Townwide Preservation Plan for Historic Schools.

In addition, the Town's war memorials should be surveyed, preserved and restored to honor the Town's war dead. Other initiatives include developing a long-term space needs plan for the Town that incorporates adaptive reuse of the Town's historic properties and developing an open land study to identify long-term needs for open sites that will prevent intrusions into historic landscapes.

The Preservation Plan also recommends a system of "Special Places" in Wakefield connected to historic sites and landscapes.

Goal 8: Implement new historic preservation initiatives for privately-owned sites.

By far the greatest number of historic properties in Wakefield are owned by individual private property owners, typically homeowners. Public education and resources are important here and the plan recommends initiating a homeowner assistance program that provides a range of non-financial assistance to homeowners.

The plan also recommends an assistance program for owners of non-residential historic properties that provides a range of non-financial assistance to owners and the creation of a private Preservation Emergency Loan Fund that can be used to preserve threatened historic properties.

New funding sources are available in the Community Preservation Act, which could provide resources for both private and public historic preservation initiatives.

A Wakefield Preservation Trust, recommended here, would have the ability to purchase, restrict and resell threatened historic properties.

Goal 9: Implement Town regulations that will assist in preserving historic structures and landscapes.

Regulatory measures can be of great assistance in preserving the town's historic resources. One of the principal recommendations of the Preservation Plan is to adopt 40C local historic district designation for the Commons and Church-Lafayette Streets National Register Districts and for Downtown Wakefield.

In addition, the Town needs to strengthen its sign control bylaw and to amend the Zoning Bylaw and the Subdivision Regulations to require more information on historic sites. In addition, the Subdivision Regulations need to incorporate provisions that will assist in the preservation of historic resources, including incorporating "due notice" provisions in the regulations.

Many controversial issues have occurred because the Wakefield Historical Commission has not been notified---or not been notified early enough---of an impending threat to an historic structure or site. Therefore, the Historical Commission needs to be included as a plan reviewing agency in the regulations of the Planning Board, the Board of Appeals and other boards that review development plans.

In addition, the Town should adopt a regulation requiring utility lines to be placed underground, giving preference to historic neighborhoods and main arterials. No plan for placing utilities underground currently exists.

Another regulatory initiative is to amend the Zoning Bylaw to create a special downtown district that allows flexibility in redevelopment and an amendment to allow historic barns to be used as principal structures, with a Special Permit.

New districts could also increase protections for historic resources. Neighborhood conservation districts might be considered as an alternative to neighborhood historic preservation regulations, where neighborhoods do not meet the test of a 40C district. In addition, an archaeological overlay zoning district would increase protections for vulnerable sites. The Preservation Plan also recommends the adoption of a resource protection district for the Reedy Meadow area to preserve its environmental and historic resources.

Other regulatory recommendations include the revision of the Demolition Delay Bylaw to exclude newer accessory structures; the creation of a task force to study how design of new construction can be improved in the town; and the revision of the Town bylaw regulating wireless communications facilities to increase protections for historic properties.

Goal 10: Increase the public's awareness of the value of historic preservation.

Public education should be the foundation of any historic preservation program. Without an informed public, preservation efforts will be considerably more difficult.

The Preservation Plan recommends many public awareness initiatives, including educating owners of historic properties on the value of their sites and their role as stewards; the compiling of adequate support materials for use by property owners; developing a public education delivery system for the historic preservation message; and establishing a space that can serve as a museum of Wakefield's history, including a museum of the rattan industry.

Goal 11: Improve organizational capacity to achieve historic preservation goals.

Implementing the ambitious historic preservation agenda described in this Wakefield Preservation Plan will take considerable effort and organizational capability. The plan recommends the creation of a private entity that will be the advocate for historic preservation in the town and the creation of a private preservation trust and a loan program. It also recommends investigating the need for a downtown Business Improvement District to allow adequate financial support for realizing downtown preservation goals.

Finally, plans become obsolete within a few years and, in order to keep the preservation agenda relevant to current issues, challenges and opportunities, the

Preservation Plan recommends initiating an annual “Wakefield Planning Day” to update the agenda included in the action plan.

In order to assist citizens in implementing its recommendations, the Preservation Plan includes a Five-Year Action Plan that details how the plan can be implemented. The plan’s goals and objectives are further divided into tasks that describe how to realize each objective, who would be the lead agency for the objective and the year in which it would begin being implemented.

Ultimately, the historic character of Wakefield will be preserved only if dedicated citizens commit themselves to make it happen. This Preservation Plan includes a bold vision and an ambitious action plan to implement that vision; however, Wakefield has shown that it has the ability and the individuals to realize great things. There is every reason to believe that they will continue to do so.

“If you have built castles in the air,” said Henry David Thoreau, “your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.”