Preliminary Preservation Audit and Assessment Project
New Hampshire Municipalities
September 2016
For
Freedom’s Way Heritage Area

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Overview/Background

The N.H. Preservation Alliance developed the following findings and recommendations as a step toward Freedom’s Way Heritage Area’s (FWHA) goal of achieving a comprehensive, ongoing historic preservation program in each of the local communities within the heritage area. This audit and assessment, carried out in the summer and fall of 2016, focused on the eight New Hampshire municipalities that are part of the Freedom’s Way National Historic Area: Amherst, Brookline, Greenville, Hollis, Mason, Milford, Nashua, and New Ipswich.

The FWHA Management Action Plan (4.5.2) identified such an assessment as a first step. This report features descriptions of needs and opportunities, examples of challenges and successes, and specific, practical recommendations for next steps. It seeks to reinforce, refine and add to recommendations of the Plan. This may be adapted for the other Freedom’s Way communities in Massachusetts as well.

Methodology

The assessment, for the region and all eight towns, was accomplished through a variety of measures. Activities included:

- interviews with municipal and community leaders
- windshield surveys of key resources
- review of existing files and documentation housed at statewide preservation organizations (the NH Division of Historical Resources and the N.H. Preservation Alliance); review of municipal master plans; review of minutes of Heritage Commission and/or Historic District Commission meetings and activities.

Data was analyzed to consider overall strengths and opportunities in the New Hampshire municipalities that are part of the Freedom’s Way Heritage Area.
Key Findings
The nature of preservation needs, the use of historic preservation tools, and individual records of preservation success vary across the New Hampshire Freedom’s Way Heritage Area communities. However, there are many common preservation-related strengths and opportunities. The following information seeks to reinforce, refine and enhance concepts found in the Management Action Plan. Here are several findings associated with external and internal forces:

Strengths and Opportunities:

• **The area contains a rich collection of historic resources.** Every town has significant landmarks and landscapes that provide a sense of local identity, gathering places, stories to interpret and places around which to enhance community and local and regional economies. Community landmarks like town halls, farms, historic stone walls, and many other resource types are clear candidates for action.

• **There are outstanding preservation success stories of re-use, revitalization and stewardship in the region and an on-going commitment to those goals.** Major adaptive uses of large mill complexes or examples of good stewardship of historic town buildings, schools, churches, homes and barns can provide practical insight and inspiration to a new generation of property owners and community leaders. Municipal plans and other information point to local leader and citizen interest in protecting rural character, and revitalizing historic downtowns, village centers and historic buildings, or a combination of the two.

• **There are strong connections to place among long-timers and newcomers, and a strong spirit of volunteerism that affords opportunities for preservation activity.** The area contains strong leaders and a growing base of support to build on. For the Alliance, the percent of members and supporters per capita in the Freedom’s Way towns is higher than in other towns statewide. Based on our assessment of existing planning work and local interviews, we feel that many residents and communities value historic buildings and have at least a basic level of historic preservation awareness.

• **The extent and cohesiveness of the Freedom’s Way area lends itself to fostering strong networks and community development activity.** Its relatively small geographic size, ease of travel community to community and similar history and current issues are assets.

• Freedom’s Way Heritage Area has a strong foundation and growing visibility, and networks and resources that can help advance preservation collaborations and projects. Partners include N.H. Preservation Alliance, Plan N,H, AIA-NH, N.H. Division of Historical Resources, and regional planning commissions.
Challenges:

- **Many of the external threats to historic resources relate to economic vitality and long-term shifts in land use patterns.** As a result, there are vacancies in mill buildings, residential development of former farmland, pressure on main street buildings from big box development, and changing space needs for municipal buildings. Vacant or under-utilized historic buildings are particularly vulnerable. Potential large-scale energy projects that would require extensive above-ground infrastructure are an emerging threat.

- **Projects and people need education, technical assistance and financial investment.** Basic and specialized preservation education, technical assistance, and sources of funding are desired and needed. Such assistance would take into account that needs and audiences are constantly in flux as market and land use forces shift, new opportunities emerge, and volunteer boards and property owners change.

- **Historic preservation tools are under-utilized, and there are opportunities for expanded use.** There is great potential to increase use of survey, protection and promotion tools, and incentives to further the goals of FWHA and its communities.

- **Towns and cities within the area do not share the same level of preservation action and participation.** A few towns have participated in many existing programs and have local leaders and volunteers who have developed knowledge about preservation tools and techniques. In other towns, that is not the case. Both desire and capacity may be limiting factors.
Recommendations

Here are major recommendations from this assessment. Each includes some rationale and ideas associated with execution.

**Mill pond, Greenville**

**ACTION: Encourage comprehensive area-wide surveys of historic resources.**

Comprehensive documentation of what exists in each community is an essential building block for preservation activity. Survey data is used as the foundation for shaping the preservation component of a municipal master plan, provides background information and context to local officials and citizens, and can be used as a guide in making planning and investment decisions. Though three of the eight New Hampshire FWHA towns have previously engaged in this activity, two of the surveys are already ten or more years old. Because the fifty-year threshold for inclusion in survey is a moving target, it is recommended that surveys be updated every five to ten years. As noted in the Management Action Plan, some existing survey work is not comprehensive (i.e., it doesn’t include certain eras or themes), and should be expanded.

Landscape-scale survey is a strong fit for this region and heritage area concept. Recent energy proposals have reinforced the need and opportunity for this approach that was suggested in the Management Action Plan. When development or construction proposals include any federal funding, licensing or permitting, survey and consideration of eligibility for listing to the National
Register of Historic Places is required through the National Historic Preservation Act’s Section 106 process.

Notes regarding execution:

- A recent landscape-scale initiative in the Squam Lakes region of New Hampshire offers an excellent model for building awareness and large-scale analysis. Example: Squam Lake
- The Freedom’s Way National Historic Landmark project now underway will likely offer information on new themes and strategies to enhance existing research and Landmark listings.
- Many communities have undertaken survey projects as a collaboration of consultant and volunteers, resulting in great projects, lower costs, new leaders, and increased awareness.
- Simple processes like “Community Cornerstone” projects, where community members identify places that matter to them, bring people together and are relatively easy to execute. Example: Deerfield Cornerstone
- Surveys that focus on particular property types or themes, such as barns and/or agricultural structures, can help attract community involvement, yield important information and generate new community preservation, agricultural or conservation activities.
- State historic preservation offices are critical advisors in these projects. In New Hampshire, towns that entered into a collaboration with the NH Division of Historical Resources (the state historic preservation office) to become Certified Local Governments have access to an increased level of preservation assistance and access to survey and planning grant funding. Three of the eight FWHA towns in New Hampshire, Nashua, Amherst and Hollis, have this status; others should consider it.
ACTION: Encourage the development of an up-to-date historic resources chapter in municipal Master Plans.

Not all of the communities within the New Hampshire portion of the Freedom’s Way Heritage Area have historical resources chapters in up-to-date master plans. Although such chapters are not required, many communities want to include these historic resources chapters in these critical planning documents, and doing so creates a valuable reference and sets planning policy for the municipality. The master plan contains maps, charts and supporting text which helps inform community decisions and includes the maintenance of community character as a factor in managing and directing growth and change. Good master plans and their on-going use should be recognized and celebrated, and leaders should be recognized and encouraged to adhere to a schedule of regular updates.

Notes regarding execution:

- Key players include historic district and heritage commissions, local planning boards, and regional planning commission staff. Volunteer boards in small towns often struggle with executing a sound planning project in addition to on-going activities.
- Additional stakeholders including developers, historical society members, and conservation and housing interests, should help inform analysis and recommendations
• In addition to good models within the region, there are examples to draw from in Merrimack: Master Plan
  Exeter: Master Plan
  and Pembroke: Master Plan
**ACTION: Provide Educational Programs and Technical Assistance**

The towns and cities within the New Hampshire portion of the Freedom’s Way Heritage Area have differing levels of experience and expertise with preservation practices. There is a large need for preservation resources, education, training and technical assistance across the area, particularly in the smaller agricultural towns to the west. Moving forward, it is also important to foster greater communication between communities to utilize the strengths of one to inform another. Target audiences include heritage commissions, historical societies, municipal officials, and conservation commissions, as well as property owners and developers.

Notes regarding execution:

- Questionnaires can help refine areas of interest, but often constituents don’t know what they need or the neediest constituents aren’t engaged.
- Interviewees mentioned that there is a need to correct many misperceptions about preservation tools and activities like National Register status (that it doesn’t prevent demolition) or local historic districts (that they don’t “freeze” things in time).
- An emphasis on preservation’s connections to other disciplines would be useful. For example, environmental issues like energy efficiency in old buildings and investing in old buildings and infrastructures help create sustainable communities.
• Annual workshops, perhaps offered as a collaboration by two or more organizations, can provide substantial visibility and significant impact for preservation. “Scholarship” funds to attend existing statewide programs and conferences may be effective ways to increase local knowledge too. Freedom’s Way groups of webinar watchers could help provide access to information and also build and strengthen FWHA networks.

• Mentoring networks and technical assistance grants offer very effective ways to provide education and support.

• Free or paid services, provided by consultants, the Preservation Alliance or other organizations, can boost local capacity in the early stages of a project.

• Web resources can be provided with links to other organizations like the Preservation Alliance and the Division of Historical Resources.

Suggested education and training programs and materials could include:

• Who Does What: Introduction to roles and responsibilities of local groups in preserving community character

• Getting started: saving, reviving and stewarding historic properties

• Preservation planning toolbox – what methods and incentives are right for your community

• HDC and Heritage Commission training; connect with planning and other municipal boards

• Fundraising for preservation projects

• Critical issues – directing development, re-use opportunities for certain property types like mills, how to adopt and use certain tools

• Old House Doctor sessions

• Barn preservation strategies
ACTION: Provide Assistance through Grants

Financial assistance is needed and desired in communities across the region. Strategic project design and deployment is needed to ensure effective use of limited resources.

We recommend that FWHA consider developing a program to award grant funds in the following areas and that you consider the interrelationship and “fit” of any new program within the existing New Hampshire market. It’s also very important to recognize that investments of funds need to be matched with expertise and organizational capacity.

- Small grants for professional consultations. Paying for the services of an architect, contractor, fundraising consultant or other needed expertise can propel projects forward.
- Small grants to cover mentoring costs of one person or group leaders helping another group, which can be very valuable for the grantee as well as the mentor.
- Grants for substantial assessment and feasibility study. This work is required by many funders and a “best practice” for efficient advancement of preservation projects.
- Construction-related grants for “bricks and mortar” work or grants for the acquisition of historic properties are also needed in the region.
Notes about execution:

- Freedom’s Way grant programs could provide needed capital in your regional market, and leverage existing programs like the “Mooseplate” program, and the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) which are staples in New Hampshire.
- Matching the right professional to the project needs is important, and additional technical assistance and coaching is often needed.
- The Preservation Alliance can provide information on strategy, criteria and/or services.
- The Preservation Alliance or other funders may be able to coordinate grant review or grant-making services.
New Ipswich Library

**ACTION: Develop and Implement Special Programs to promote place-based identity.**
There are many other proven preservation-related programs that could engage partners in the arts, housing, tourism, conservation and other sectors, and support the goals of Freedom’s Way that may already be on your “to-do” list:

- Coordinated sign program can celebrate special places and improve identity for Freedom’s Way.
- Awards program can recognize great work and inspire others and improve identity for Freedom’s Way.
- Campaigns related to critical issues like old farms and barns, historic trails and recreation, old mills or other community landmarks.

**Next Steps**

These five action areas related to data collection and planning, education and technical assistance, financial resources and special initiatives can be sequenced and overlapped in various ways depending on the Association’s priorities and capacity. Freedom’s Way has many great opportunities ahead.
Appendix A: Interview Questions

In order to better understand the strengths/weaknesses, preservation track records, and preservation climate in each of the eight New Hampshire communities, the following survey questions were posed to local experts (members of historical societies, heritage and historic district commissions, and concerned citizens), preservation consultants with experience in the area, municipal representatives, and regional planning commissions:

1. Has an Historic Resources Survey been conducted in your town? If so, when and by whom?
2. Is there a Historic Resources chapter in your town Master Plan? If so, who wrote it, and when was it last updated?
3. Does your community have an active Heritage Commission or Historic District Commission?
4. Is the loss of historic structures and landscapes in your town a growing concern? Are there specific threats or concerns?
5. Does your community have a Demolition Review Ordinance?
6. Does your community have any designated scenic roads/byways?
7. What do you see as your community’s strengths when it comes to Historic Preservation?
8. Conversely, what do you see as the weaknesses?
9. How can you raise awareness of Historic Preservation in your community?
10. Do you think educational programs and workshops would help promote preservation in your town?
11. Are there other preservation advocates in town or nearby towns whom we should know about and talk with? If so, who are they?
12. Do you have any other comments relating to Historic Preservation in your town?

Interviewees are listed in Appendix F.
Appendix B: Notes on Municipalities

Amherst:
Amherst is a medium-sized town with a population of 11,234 in 2014. The town is a Certified Local Government. In 2009, Amherst utilized a CLG grant to hire a professional preservation consultant to conduct a town-wide survey. The 2010 Amherst Master Plan has a Historic Resources Chapter which recommends further preservation of the town by continuing the historic resources inventory. They have also worked on a demolition review ordinance. The Amherst Heritage Commission is quite active and fairly successful and could prove to be a great regional leader in preservation planning.

Brookline:
Brookline is a relatively small agricultural town with a 2014 population of 5,051. The 2010 Brookline Master Plan has a Historic Resources chapter with recommendations to prepare an historic resources inventory and consider a future Heritage Commission. Brookline has done very little historic resources planning in the past, but leaders seem ripe for learning about and using preservation planning tools. Re-use/stewardship models include library in historic church, town offices in academy building, and home in railroad depot building.

Greenville:
Greenville was part of Mason until 1872. The town had a 2014 population of 2,374 and is somewhat economically depressed. The Southwest Regional Planning Commission is currently helping the town to draft a new Master Plan. This new plan includes the first draft of a Historic Resources chapter. Because of the impoverished, younger demographic, the Planning Commission is having trouble identifying volunteers and local people who are able to aid with the chapter. Greenville, to date, has had virtually no contact with the NH State Historic Preservation Office (NHDHR).

Hollis:
The Town of Hollis had a population of 7,721 in 2014. Hollis is largely an agricultural community with a sizeable commuter population and a cohesive sense of community identity. Like Nashua, Hollis is dealing with growth pressures. The town of Hollis is also a Certified Local Government. The 1998 Master Plan has an Historic Resources chapter that recommended the development of a Historic District Commission with design guidelines, the development of a Heritage Commission, and a town-wide survey. Both a Heritage Commission and Historic District Commission were formed, along with accompanying regulations and guidelines, and a town-wide area form was completed in 2006. There has been less preservation activity in recent years and the 2006 survey has not been used for planning purposes. Recent preservation activities have been done in conjunction with preservation Tax Credit projects and limited to specific building sites such as the NH Land and Community Heritage Investment Program.
(LCHIP) grant-funded study of the Hollis Town Hall. It’s a “Right to Farm” town with agricultural history and activity, re-use/stewardship model with Lawrence Barn, and uncertain future with Farley Building.

**Milford:**
The Town of Milford is large, with a population of 15,133 in 2014. The 1999 Town Master Plan does not have an Historic Resources Chapter. Though they have an active Heritage Commission, several State and National Register listed properties, two NH State Highway Markers, and recent Preservation Tax Credit projects, Milford has not done a town-wide inventory of historic resources. With its proximity to Rt. 101, Milford is dealing with growth pressures but lacks preservation planning.

**Mason:**
Mason, New Hampshire is a very small agricultural town with a 2014 population of 1,329. The rural town has not done significant survey or inventory. The 2007 Master Plan was put together with the help of the Southwest Regional Planning Commission and includes a chapter that combines Historic Resources with Conservation Resources. This chapter recommends an historic sites inventory and supports listing resources to both the State and National Register (Mason has no National Register Listed properties and one recent State Register property). Though Mason does not have a Heritage or Historic District Commission, the town Conservation Commission has taken the lead in some preservation matters and drafted the State Register Nomination. As way of combatting a proposed high-pressure gas pipeline project, the Conservation Commission applied for and received an LCHIP grant to secure 508 acres as part of the Fifield Tree Farm Conservation Easement. Though this project was directed towards land conservation, it shows a great deal of leadership toward the stewardship of local resources and may indicate a good climate for potential historic preservation efforts. Re-use/stewardship models include town offices in 18th century house, and historic school with addition. Also recreation/history connections like the Mason Rail Trail.

**Nashua:**
Nashua is the largest municipality in the Freedom’s Way Heritage Area in New Hampshire, with a 2014 population of 86,799. The city was very active in historic preservation initiatives in the 1980s and early 1990s, with projects spearheaded by the Nashua Regional Planning Commission. Though many buildings have been surveyed, there are gaps in the data and lots of out-of-date information. Though they are a current Certified Local Government (CLG), the city has not been actively involved in the program in recent years. The City Master Plan was last updated in 2000, and contains no Historic Resources chapter. The City faces strong business and development pressures, and has had some recent Preservation Tax Credit projects. Most recent preservation activities have been project-specific and have not looked at holistic development of neighborhoods or overarching themes of development.
New Ipswich:

New Ipswich is a relatively small town with a 2014 population of 5,123. Like nearby Greenville and Mason, it is primarily agricultural and has a low population density. In decision-making, there seems to be a divide between a large Apostolic Lutheran Finnish farming community with strong limited government sentiment, and summer residents. In the 1980s, New Ipswich was very involved with preservation activity, and the entire center village was listed to the National Register of Historic Places. In 1988 a reconnaissance-level survey of the entire town was undertaken. Like other communities, New Ipswich has struggled trying to balance the rights of private property owners and businessmen with maintaining a historic village core. The 1995 Master Plan (updated in 2004) has a chapter titled “Conservation and Preservation Analysis” which recommends expanding the current inventory, developing a demolition review ordinance, and establishing a “preservation task force” to seek funds to develop a new town preservation plan. The historical society has made very positive progress, but little other preservation work has happened in New Ipswich in the last decade. A recent LCHIP grant was secured by Historic New England to do some drainage work around the historic Barrett House.
Appendix C: Sample Success Stories

The Historical Society of Amherst’s *Walking Tours of Amherst Village* is a model for community-based educational initiatives.

The recent revitalizations of the Cotton Mill, Nashua (pictured) and the Hillsborough Mill in Milford are two of many examples of transformative revitalizations of old mills that provided housing and serve as a catalyst for additional community development activity.
Nashua Fairgrounds Jr. High School (Nashua) team is an outstanding model of youth involvement in preservation activities. More at: Student Historic Preservation Team

The rescue and re-use of the Lawrence Barn in Hollis is an inspiring community model. More at: Hollis Barn History
## Appendix D  Statistics of use of preservation tools.

Data based on research and interviews.
Appendix E  Map of preservation related organizations and agencies

**Private Sector**

- National Trust for Historic Preservation
  - www.nthp.org
- Preservation Action
- New Hampshire Preservation Alliance
  - www.nhpreservation.org

**Public Sector**

- National Park Service
  - www.nps.gov
- National Council of State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO)

- NH Division of Historical Resources (SHPO)
  - www.dcr.nh.gov

**Affiliated non-profit organizations in conservation, economic development, housing, tourism, etc.**

- Main Street PlanNH
- AIA NH, LCHIP

**Individuals**

- NH Historical Society, local historical societies, "Friends" groups, museums and historic sites, heritage groups

**Municipal Heritage Commissions, Historic District Commissions**

**Other state agencies: transportation, arts, tourism, etc. including DRED’s State Historic Sites**

- Planning boards
- Zoning boards
- Conservation commissions

*Where Does Freedom’s Way Heritage Association Best Connect?*