

Local Historical Commissions in Massachusetts

A Summary Sheet for New Commission Members

William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Chairman, Massachusetts Historical Commission

Local Historical Commissions are an important part of municipal government in Massachusetts. Almost all cities and towns in Massachusetts have established a local historical commission. Historical Commissions are responsible for community-wide historic preservation planning.

Inventory Forms

Compiling a historic properties inventory is an essential first step for a Historical Commission. This is done on MHC inventory forms. Inventory forms address the first task of preservation planning - Identification. The front of a sample inventory form is shown to the right. For more information, contact MHC for a guidebook entitled *Historic Property Survey Manual*.

National Register Nominations

After a comprehensive inventory is compiled is the preparation of National Register nominations. The National Register of Historic Places is a federal listing of buildings, structures, sites, objects and districts significant in our nation's history, culture, architecture or archaeology and that are worthy of preservation. The National Register is a formal recognition of the significance of the property but places absolutely no restrictions or conditions on private property owners unless there is state or federal involvement in a project or unless some other regional or local regulation is in effect.

Survey and Planning Grants

While inventory forms and National Register nominations may be done through local volunteer efforts, many Local Historical Commissions in Massachusetts will apply for a matching Survey and Planning grant. With an S&P grant, a Historical Commission can hire a professional preservation consultant to prepare the documents. S&P grants are awarded annually by the Massachusetts Historical Commission and are available for inventory form preparation, National Register nominations, preservation plans and public information documents.

Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund

As a member of a Historical Commission, you may be interested in seeing a municipally owned property in town rehabilitated for a new use or restored. The MPPF is a state-funded matching grant program available to cities and towns and non-profits for the restoration and rehabilitation of significant properties.

FORM B - BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MA 02125

Assessor's number _____ USGS Quad Lynn Area(s) _____ Form Number 119

Town Nahant

Place (neighborhood or village) _____

Address 80 Spring Road

Historic Name J. T. Wilson House

Uses: Present residential
Original residential

Date of Construction 1882-1883

Source J. T. Wilson Job List

Style/Form Queen Anne

Architect/Builder J. T. Wilson (builder)

Exterior Material: _____

Foundation uncut stone

Wall/Trim clapboard, wood shingle

Roof asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures none

Major Alterations (with dates) _____

Condition good

Moved no yes Date _____

Acreage less than one acre


Setting residential

Recorded by Northfields Preservation Associates/MHC

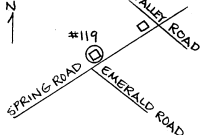
Organization Nahant Historical Commission

Date (month/year) June 1989/edited June 1992

Follow Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey Manual instructions for completing this form.



Sketch Map
Draw a map showing the building's location in relation to the nearest cross streets and/or major natural features. Show all buildings between inventoried building and nearest intersection or natural feature. Label streets including route numbers, if any. Circle and number the inventoried building. Indicate north.



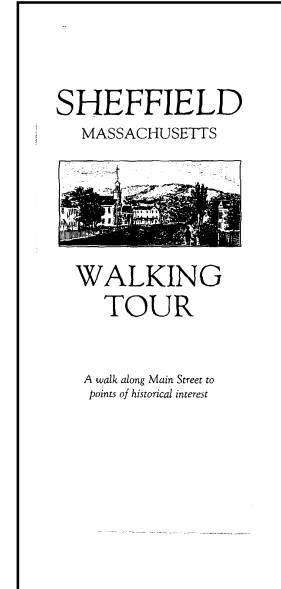
The front of an inventory form includes information such as the address historic name, date of construction and style. The following pages of an inventory form include a historical narrative and architectural description.

Section 106 and Chapter 254

Historical Commissions may occasionally receive inquiries from the Massachusetts Historical Commission or state or federal agencies asking for comments on a proposed “state or federally involved” project in your community that may impact on historical or archaeological resources. Section 106 and Chapter 254 are federal and state laws that require MHC review when a state or federally involved project is undertaken in Massachusetts. Examples of state or federally involved projects include state funded road widening projects, telecommunications towers that need an FCC license and school rehabilitations although there are many others. MHC reviews over 8,000 federal or state involved actions each year. As part of these reviews, local historical commissions are encouraged to participate.

Public Relations

As a Historical Commission, it is important for you to get the message across that your community’s historic resources are important to preserve. Typical methods include walking tours, plaque programs, newspaper articles, lectures, newsletters, distributing inventory forms and school programs.



Advising Your Municipal Leaders

Historical Commissions advise elected officials and other boards on historic preservation issues. Issues could include zoning changes, the re-use of municipally owned historic buildings, master planning or preservation of historic landscapes.

Demolition Delay Bylaws

Ordinarily, Historical Commissions do not have a regulatory function. However, many towns, through local bylaw passed at town meeting, have given their Historical Commission additional authority such as demolition delay bylaws. With a demolition delay bylaw, a Historical Commission can delay the demolitions of historically significant property in the hopes of finding an alternative to the demolition.

Preservation Plans

A Historical Commission may find that a Preservation Plan is needed to better coordinate the many activities that will help to preserve the community.

Local Bylaws and Ordinances

A Historical Commission may seek to create or change local bylaws to better protect historic resources. Examples might be local historic districts, demolition delay bylaws, scenic road bylaws or village center zoning. For more information, contact MHC for a copy of *Preservation through Bylaws and Ordinances*.

Similar Names and Different Responsibilities

A Historical Commission is often confused with a Local Historic District Commission and a Historical Society. It is important that you understand the difference between these three organizations. Local Historical Commissions are the official agents of municipal government responsible for community-wide historic preservation planning. Local Historic District Commissions are the review authority responsible for regulatory design review within designated local historic districts created through town meeting or city council vote. Note that in some communities with local historic districts, the Historical Commission and Historic District Commission are combined. A Historical Society is a private, non-profit organization. Historical Societies often preserve local history through house museums, maintaining collections and records and public programs.

For additional information, contact the Massachusetts Historical Commission at (617) 727-8470 for copies of the *Preservation Planning Manual and Current Activities of Historical Commissions in Massachusetts*.