Throughout Massachusetts, cities and towns struggle with the loss of their historic villages, buildings and landscapes.

While it may seem as if this is just the inevitable result of progress, there are actually many things cities and towns can do to better protect their fragile community character. Simply put, every community in Massachusetts can grow while still protecting what is most important to them. However, protecting the historic and cultural resources in your town can’t be done - without a plan.

Many communities in Massachusetts have realized the value of a preservation plan. A preservation plan for your town or city will greatly assist in identifying historic and cultural resources, assessing their current status and recognizing issues and opportunities to better protect those resources.

A preservation plan will help answer the following questions and many others:

- Have we identified and documented our historic and cultural resources adequately on MHC Inventory Forms?

- What resources should be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places?

- What financial resources could best assist our town?

- Do our existing regulations, like zoning, need improvement so that our resources will be better protected?

- Do residents understand that the historic resources may not be well protected?

- What tools will help to protect our significant historic resources.

- What can we realistically accomplish each year?

Recent municipal preservation plans completed in Massachusetts have been funded by survey and planning grants. These are annual competitive matching grants awarded by the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

On the reverse side is a sample Table of Contents for a Municipal Preservation Plan. It should be pointed out that this version is very comprehensive. If resources are limited, your community might be interested in developing a preservation plan that only includes certain sections. The important thing is to start planning now!

For a complete sample preservation plan, contact the Director of Local Government Programs at the Massachusetts Historical Commission. (617) 727-8470.
Listed below is a sample table of contents for a municipal preservation plan:

Sample Municipal Preservation Plan

Table of Contents

Executive Summary
This section of the plan is a stand alone document that summarizes the recommendations in the plan. This is very useful for larger meetings in which you want as many residents as possible to become familiar with the findings of the plan.

History of the Community
This section briefly describes the pre-historic and historic development of the community.

History of Planning in the Community
This section describes what other plans have been done in your community. Other plans might include Master Plans, Open Space Plans, Downtown Plans, neighborhood plans among others. A review of these plans will help gain a perspective on what has been proposed in the past.

Our Community Today
This section describes the historic resources that your town has lost, historic resources your town still has and historic resources your town could still lose. Next, this section describes how your town can better protect its historic resources.

Inventory
This section describes what an inventory is and how it is the first and foremost method of preservation planning. Next, this section describes which properties currently have inventory forms, which inventory forms need to be updated and which properties need to be documented on inventory forms.

National Register
This section describes the National Register of Historic Places. It includes what is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places and what may be eligible for listing. Maps showing existing or recommended National Register Districts are very useful in this section as well as an explanation of investment tax credits and applicable grant programs.

Public Perception
This section investigates how residents in your town feel about historic resources. Do they appreciate the existing historic properties? Are there efforts that can help newcomers appreciate what your town has. If your town’s historic resources are not well-protected, do residents understand how vulnerable they are to loss. Do they understand what would happen to the town under current zoning?

Municipal Regulations
This section reviews the existing municipal regulations that impact historic preservation including zoning, subdivision regulations, signage bylaw, site plan review and others. This section might recommend changes to existing regulations or additional by-laws that could help to protect historic resources. These might include local historic districts, demolition delay, scenic roads or village center zoning.

Municipal Policy, Management and Capital Improvements
This section includes a list of all the historic municipally owned properties such as school buildings, libraries or parks. Next, it would describe the current management practices and whether changes should be made to better protect the significant resources. This section also investigates future capital improvement projects such as transportation projects, new municipal buildings, sewer line extensions for their impact on historic resources. Recommendations might include improving communication between municipal boards, applying for a Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund, redirecting investment to other areas or developing better asset management practices.

Action Plan
This section outlines a realistic year by year schedule for implementing all of the above recommendations. This would include the name of the organization or board responsible for implementation. An action plan might also include ongoing and long term goals. A preservation plan should be updated every 5 years.

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