

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TOWN OF WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS



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Town Center/Greenbelt Plan

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Building Department	Parks and Forestry Superintendent
Buildings & Grounds	Police Department
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Conservation Commission	Town Clerk
Computer Advisory Committee	Highway Department
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TOWN OF WEST BRIDGEWATER MASTER PLAN 2001

Protecting Our Town Character While Responding to the Challenge of Growth

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HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Historical and cultural resources are an important element in the town's fabric. These resources include structures, archeological sites, historic sites, cemeteries, and scenic roads. They form a framework, providing a hedge against rapid change, so as to preserve the town's quality of life. In most cases, on the other hand, these resources are hidden from the public. The citizens of West Bridgewater need to support a public effort to protect and enhance their historic and cultural resources. A number of simple actions identified in the recommendations would leverage substantial benefits to the town.

Historical Context

What are those assets which provide an important sense of quality to life in West Bridgewater? While these might differ for each individual, one can be certain that the list of 22 historic assets are important symbols of local pride. These sites tell the town's history by marking important time periods, events, and traditions. A beginning point in community planning is the task of identifying the town's historic resources and subsequently carrying out surveys of important sites and facilities followed by developing strategies to protect and publicize these sites. Historic resources in West Bridgewater include homes dating from the 17th Century, side entrance, hip roof, and early colonial, industrial properties and facilities such as War Memorial Park, and institutional buildings; churches and schools. Cemeteries, roads, and bridges as well as scenic and archeological sites, in addition, represent the major historic elements.

Opportunities

Unlike adjacent towns such as East Bridgewater, the local Historic Commission is only now getting more focused on surveying and prioritizing local assets and developing appropriate preservation strategies. Four key opportunities exist:

1. Identify and survey town's historic assets, especially those such as the Town Center, which impact future development
2. Clarify the role of the Historic Commission which should be actively involved in planning and regulation and the Historic Society whose role is research and education
3. Identify priority strategies to be supported by the Town
4. Build public support

Vision and Goals

The incorporation of preservation strategies into town planning initiatives is a major goal of the master plan. The recommended strategies will enable the Town to achieve a number of important policies to address preservation issues.

Recommendations

Five recommendations are identified. Of primary importance is the need to consider new zoning by-law amendments which would begin to involve the Commission in local planning issues. Public education, promotion of historic preservation, collaboration with local historic societies and pursuit of grants are some of the recommended strategies.

5.1 INTRODUCTION/HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Historical Context

West Bridgewater was originally inhabited by a people affiliated with the Wampanoags or Pokanokets, a Native American people that populated much of Southeastern Massachusetts. There may have been a large village on the Hockomock River, which probably provided good fishing and navigable transportation. However, this area did not have the wide variety of freshwater sources enjoyed in other parts of the region, such as Middleborough. The local people probably had a relationship with the Titicut settlement in southwestern Bridgewater. Regional trails used by Native Americans may have included what are now Ash, South, Matfield, Copeland, Prospect, Center and West streets. North Elm, also historical, River, Arch, Howard, Center, Main, Walnut, South Elm, Pleasant, Ash, Matfield, Manley Streets.

The population in this area was very low for a long period after other parts of Plymouth Colony had been more thickly settled. At the time King Philip's War began in the 1660s, there were just 64 white males listed as living in what was then part of "Old Bridgewater," although there were many fewer people living in what are now Brockton, East Bridgewater and Bridgewater. The first grist mill was built in 1662 by Deacon Samuel Edson, but additional industry was discouraged until after the war by fears of Native American attacks. White settlement received a boost when the Plymouth Colony Court granted land "about Satucket," centered in what is now East Bridgewater, to the town of Duxbury in 1645. Ousamequin (Massasoit), the Native American sachem in this region, agreed to sell the area to the whites in 1649. Early settlers chose land on or near Town River close to the East Bridgewater line; in later years, new residents moved to areas closer to West Meadows Pond where land was still available.

The first meeting house was built in 1661 on South Elm Street or Howard Street. It served people from the neighboring towns as well as West Bridgewater. While the structure of the church parishes changed, West Bridgewater remained the site of Old Bridgewater's town meetings. Yet after the 1740s, the community's population declined as its neighbors grew in economic importance. The last meeting house was built in 1801; it still stands.

The town's early economy included a number of lumber mills, which harnessed the hydropower of the Town River and West Meadow Brook. The mills supplied wood to build houses locally and also supplied the needs of the Union in the Civil War. The center of the community developed around what is now Central Square, first as a residential area and then as host to a variety of manufacturing mills. Some of the lumber mills were replaced in the 19th century by factories, including that of the Ames family, which made shovels and other farming tools here. Another producer in the area was Forbes, Reed & Company, which operated a nail factory. The first iron furnace in the town was probably built in the 1820s on Belmont Street at Salisbury Plain Brook. The major industry in the 1830s and 1840s was boot and shoe-making; by 1855 there were 300 people in the town who did this work in their homes. During this period the town saw a sizable immigrant population arrive from Ireland.

The town remained largely agricultural into the 20th century, although new industries brought newcomers to the community. The population fell and rose with the coming and going of large firms; a new steam foundry built early in the 1900s may have played a role in the growth of the Portuguese immigrant population, for example. By the early 20th century, many mills had been abandoned and farms began to have a less critical place in the economy.

After World War II the town saw little of the rapid growth common to areas closer to Boston. Many farms dating from the previous century continued to operate on East Street and in the southern half of the town. The town saw an expansion in automobile traffic as growth occurred along major highways, including Routes 24 and 495, located in the area. In recent years, new subdivisions have appeared in parts of the town long appreciated for their rural qualities. The growth of Boston is beginning to have a larger impact on the community.

West Bridgewater History Timeline

- From prehistoric times to 1660s - Settlements of Native people
- 1645 - Land granted to white settlers in area
- 1656 - Town incorporated as "Bridgewater"
- 1661 - First meeting house built
- 1662 - First grist mill built by Deacon Samuel Edson
- 1664 - James Keith named first minister of town
- 1774 - Ames Ironworks
- 1785 - Baptist Church organized in West Bridgewater
- 1801 - First Congregational Church built on Howard Street
- 1820s - Iron furnaces and wool mill launch industrial age in town
- 1823 - West Bridgewater, formerly the West Parish of Bridgewater, is incorporated as a separate town
- 1844 - Methodist Church built in Cochesett
- 1845 - Copeland and Hartwells Shoe Manufactory established, employing 50; joins other towns in Southeastern Mass. shoe trade
- 1875 - Howard Seminary, first high school in West Bridgewater, is completed
- 1879 - Public Library organized
- 1910 - Water Commission established
- 1910 - Board of Health established
- 1933 - St. Ann's Catholic Church built
- 1952 - New junior-senior high school replaces Howard Seminary
- 1954 - Union of Congregational and Unitarian churches
- 1956 - Spring Street School built
- 1957 - Route 24 construction initiated
- 1957 - Zoning By-law adopted
- 1965 - Conservation Commission established

5.2 HISTORIC RESOURCES

Recognizing the importance that historic and cultural resources can have on retaining the town's identity and shaping new growth, has led to the identification of important cemeteries, historic sites, and scenic areas.

Historic Sites

Historic sites consist of a mix of houses, former industrial sites, churches, dams, bridges, farms, and cemeteries. These are located on Map 5-1. These sites mark important time periods, events, natural areas, and cultural traditions which have shaped the character of the town and the quality of life experienced by the residents. The preservation of these sites allows residents to maintain a local identity and to shape new growth which will preserve important traditions and values.

One of the most important historic sites in West Bridgewater is the War Memorial Park on River Street, close to Central Square. This site is located in the area of the town's earliest white settlements. Many houses built in the 18th century in this area still stand. The park itself commemorates the town's industrial heritage; it is regarded as the country's first "industrial park," where shovels, nails and other farming tools were produced in the late 18th century. Weirs and dams along the Town River that were used by mills and factories in the area are intact. The park is open to the public and provides access to the Triple Arch Bridge, a historic bridge which connects to Arch Street on the opposite side of the Town River.

Among the homes in the area of the park is one built in 1654 and inhabited by the Rev. James Keith; the house served as his parsonage. In addition, during King Philip's War in the 1660s, the house operated as a garrison for white settlers, and King Philip's wife and son were held captive there.

Howard Street, on the north side of Route 106 across from War Memorial Park, is the location of structures from the town's early days, including the First Congregational Church, which was probably built about 1810. Howard Street has continued to evolve as the town's civic center with the location of the public library, two schools, the police and fire stations, and a proposed new senior center. Town Hall, which is over 100 years old, stands just east of Howard Street on North Main Street.

The Brick Kiln, located on Ash Street, is a significant early industrial site. Pottery was made here in the early 1800s.

There are four one or two-room schoolhouses located on South Elm, North Elm, South Main and East streets, which have been converted into homes.

A survey by the West Bridgewater Historical society identified some 400 homes that are at least 75 years old. Approximately 130 are of historical significance; with a number of structures dating from the 17th and 18th century. Approximately 185 side entrance homes and 100 homes of hip roof style were also identified.

As the Town is known for its wetlands and high water table, bridges have been an important part of the town's history. In addition to the Triple Arch Bridge, other historic bridges in the town include the Forest Street bridge and the Skim Milk Bridge on Scotland Street.

Key Historic Sites (numbers correspond with historic sites map)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1) Howard Hill | 12) Forge Site |
| 2) Manley Farm | 13) Forest Street Bridge |
| 3) Salt Works Copper Site | 14) Rev. Keith Parsonage |
| 4) Howard Mill site | 15) War Memorial Park |
| 5) Mill Pond Dam | 16) Triple Arch Stone Bridge |
| 6) Quaking Bog in Pine Hill Cemetery | 17) Brick Kiln |
| 7) Matfield Street Cemetery | 18) Pete Cook's Place |
| 8) First Congregational Church | 19) Skim Milk Bridge |
| 9) Drury Bell | 20) Solitude Stone |
| 10) Town Hall | 21) South Street Cemetery |
| 11) Porter Farm | 22) Pleasant Hill Cemetery |

Scenic/Historic Roads and Bridges

The earliest roads in the town include many roads that are well-traveled today. Regional trails used by Native Americans may have included what are now Ash, South, Matfield, Copeland, Prospect, Center and West streets. The first white settlers built homes on streets close to Central Square, including River, Arch, North Elm and South Elm, Howard, Center, Main and Ash streets. Houses and other historical sites dating from the 18th century can also be found on Walnut and Manley streets in the northwestern part of the town, as well as on Pleasant and Matfield streets. In addition a number of bridges in the Town are historic. The Arch Street Bridge and the Triple Arch Stone Bridge are both located in Memorial Park. Vehicular traffic has been prohibited. The bridges need to be maintained. The Forest Street bridge on River Street is also noted as historic.

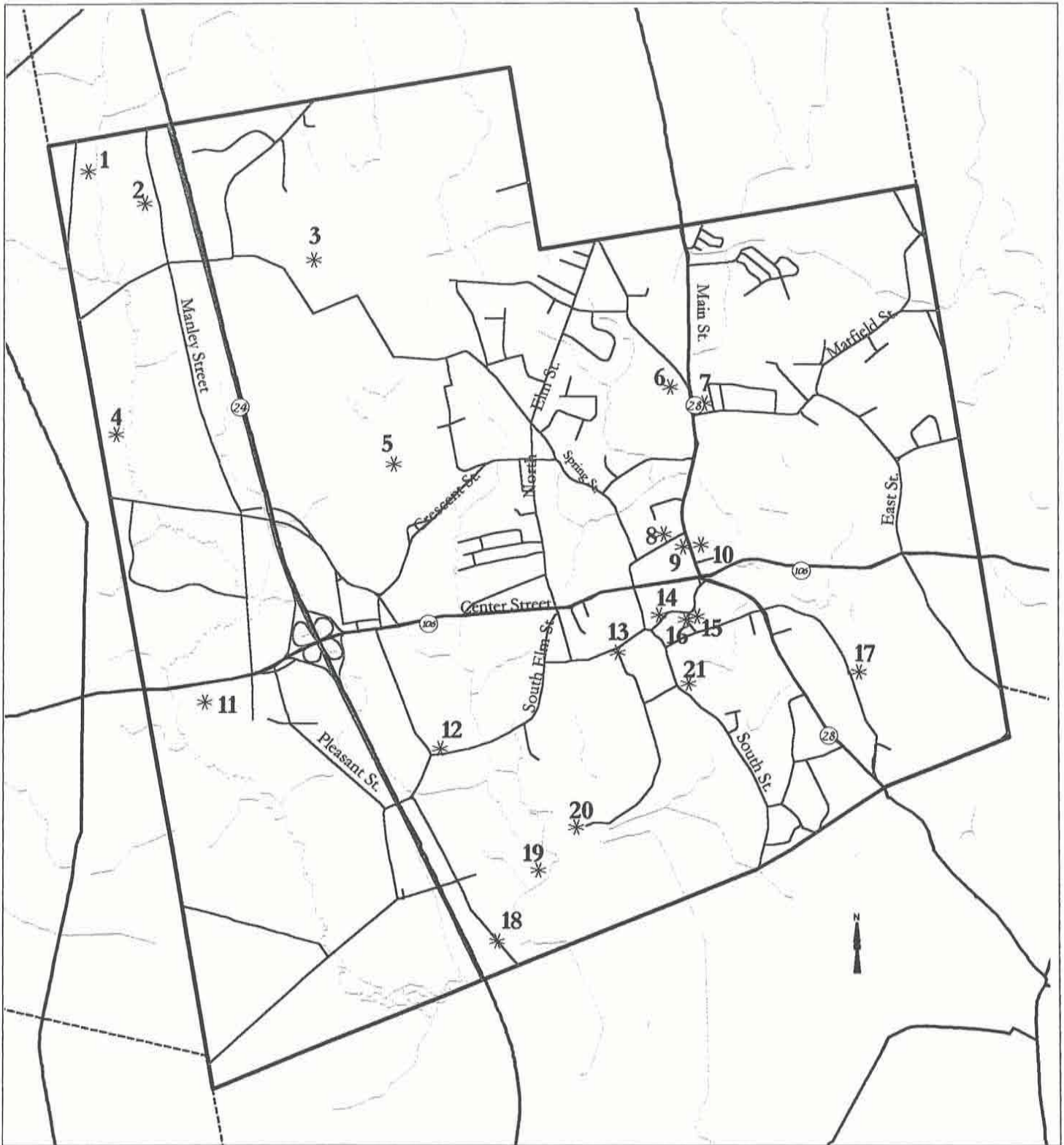
Historic Homes

The most historic properties consist of early farm houses, residences including in particular an unusually large number of side entrance (approximately 185) and hip roof (approximately 100) homes, and approximately 130 early colonial, commercial and institutional buildings. They are located throughout the town. Major concentrations are found on the following streets: Matfield, North and South Main, West Center Street, North Elm, River, Spring, Pleasant, Walnut and Crescent the Historical society is presently surveying and locating these properties.

Cemeteries

Historic cemeteries are located in several parts of West Bridgewater including:

- West Center Street, close to the interchange with Route 24
- Powder House at the corner of North Main Street and Matfield Street
- Pine Hill, is across the road on North Main Street. There are some recent gravestones as well as others from early in the century
- Jerusalem Graveyard on Manley Street
- The Old Graveyard on South Street
- Dunbar Family Cemetery on Walnut Street
- Pleasant Hill Cemetery on Pleasant Street near Route 106.



Legend

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1) Howard Hill | 12) Forge Site |
| 2) Manley Farm | 13) Forest Street Bridge |
| 3) Salt Works Copper Site | 14) Rev. Keith Parsonage |
| 4) Howard Mill Site | 15) War Memorial Park |
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| 9) Drury Bell | 20) Solitude Stone |
| 10) Town Hall | 21) South Street Cemetery |
| 11) Porter Farm | |

Map 5-1

Historic Sites

**Town of West Bridgewater
Master Plan**

Prepared by Larry Koff & Associates

5.3 OPPORTUNITIES/ANALYSIS

The historical heritage of West Bridgewater provides the town with an opportunity to shape new development in a manner which will reinforce its evolution from a collection of small villages, to a mill town, a center of agriculture, and a suburban town with substantial industry and a dispersed pattern of single family residences. The Town's historic resources can provide a context for shaping future development. Numerous studies have shown the economic benefits of promoting historic preservation.

Identifying the town's historic assets as they impact future development

Town Center

Central Square and its environs is the major location of the Town's historic sites. The preferred design concept for this center is that of a New England Village. Proposed traffic improvements and commercial development should build on the rich history which has existed in this area. Historic buildings and artifacts should be retained wherever possible. The civic importance and mix of uses should continue to be themes which shape the development of this district. A pedestrian scale should be retained and not overwhelmed by cars and traffic.

Villages

In addition to Central Square, the convenience oriented commercial area near Route 106 and 24 near Crescent and West Street was a village center. With recent transportation and commercial development, this memory has been mostly lost. It might, on the other hand, be possible, with new commercial development in this location, to re-create more of a sense of place. The current mix of uses are primarily of national chains and convenience oriented uses. No distinct identity has been fostered.

Historic properties and Districts

The local Historical Society has located historic properties by address. While a number are clustered around the Town Center on Ash, River, South Main and Bryant, they are also concentrated in other parts of town along Matfield North Main, Copeland, North Elm, Crescent, and Walnut Street. These properties might be identified by a plaque and a historic walk and guide book developed to highlight these areas. The designation of a protection district would take considerable additional work and broad support by the community.

Scenic Roads and Bike Routes

The Transportation element of the Master Plan has identified scenic roads and bike routes. These routes could provide a foundation for organizing a protection strategy for the town. Roads, views, historic sites would all be identified and located within a series of historic and recreation walks and rides. Old roads and stone walls would be preserved.

Bridges and Natural Landscapes

The Town's natural environment along with its historic resources provides a context for shaping future growth. Wetlands, bogs, and bridges have been a significant part of the Town's fabric. How can the town preserve this fabric as well as adjust to changes brought about by the continued development of the Town?

Role of the Historic Commission and the Historical Society

The Historical Society is charged with the responsibility of building the town's inventory of historic resources. A summary of some of this inventory was discussed previously. A second

responsibility of the Society is to publicize and educate the public about the town's history. This is a time consuming effort. The Historical Society has been active in town for over 30 years. They have their own building which contains a library, a portrait collection of early town leaders, and artifacts of importance to the area and the settling of West Bridgewater.

The Historical Commission has recently been re-activated. The Selectmen appointed 6 members, and the Commission has been expanded to include 7 members. The role of the Commission is to work towards the preservation of the town's historic assets. The Commission achieves this goal by "planning for and implementing programs for the identification, evaluation, and protection of its community's historic resources".¹

- To be effective, local historical commissions must be active participants in local planning efforts.
- The first step is to develop an effective local preservation program, i.e., identify resources, threats, a vision, and priorities.
- Local commissions must work in cooperation with other municipal boards and agencies to ensure that the goals of historic preservation are considered in planning the town's growth. Important boards include:
- The Selectmen, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and, of course, the Historical Society.

What is the Town's historic preservation vision?

Should the Town be concerned with preservation of sites, structure, or areas? The Commission, working with the Society, needs to establish a vision and set of priorities. At present the town has no historic districts. Nor does it have a means to recognize historic structures.

How much public oversight is appropriate for West Bridgewater?

In order for the Town to truly protect its resources and allow development which will be consistent with the town's rural heritage and character, there needs to be more of a consensus as to what preservation strategies should be preserved.

- What type and degree of architectural control is appropriate for the town's scenic areas as well as the commercial districts?
- Should the Commission provide the Planning Board input during the Site Plan review process with issues of historic and cultural importance?
- Should architectural districts be organized which would give oversight authority directly to the District Commission? Most towns, especially when there is a shortage of volunteers, have avoided granting the District independent review authority.

Role of Town Historic Committee in Site Plan and Subdivision Review

The Site Plan Review Bylaw, which allows the town some oversight on new commercial and industrial projects, could be modified to include the review of historic preservation issues in site plan review. Sub-division review could also include, where historic resources are involved, the input from the Commission. Would the town want and would the Historic commission be interested in participating in development review of historic issues?

¹ Preservation Planning Manual, Local Historical Commissions: Their Role in Local Government, Massachusetts Historical Commission, 1992, p. 1.

Design Guidelines for Protection of Scenic Areas

As development continues along the major arterials, the Town needs to consider its vision for the future and how to best protect it. Views along the roads to a rural scenic landscape in the rear will be obliterated under the current pattern of development. The Historic commission has the opportunity to support new zoning tools which will protect the town's historic and scenic resources.

Should the Commission consider establishing protection districts?

First a survey would need to document the location and importance of a district. Second, the Commission, with the concurrence of the Selectmen, would have to be prepared to develop design guidelines for reviewing projects within the district.. The Commission would then need to be involved in design review. Without substantial volunteer support for taking on new responsibilities, it is not recommended that towns adopt district designation.

Or should the Commission concentrate on providing information and support to other Boards?

The Planning Board and Conservation Commission, as well as the Building Department, could utilize support in providing information on the background and importance of various sites and buildings. By cooperating in this manner and working towards a common vision for managing future growth, all boards will benefit.

Will the creation of historic districts discourage investment in the designated properties?

A number of studies have been undertaken to assess the economic impacts of undertaking preservation strategies. These strategies usually include district designation, organization of a public review process to monitor change, and the adoption of programs to encourage both public and private investment. These studies have shown that "Historic Districts are Good for Your Pocketbook"² One of these articles noted twenty lessons learned from historic district Designation.³ These lessons include the following points:

- *No evidence that local historic district have any adverse effect on property values.* In fact, studies noted above, have shown that values within the designated districts have 20% to 27% higher values and appreciate at an annual rate that is 50% higher than similar homes that are not in an area with preservation restrictions.⁴
- *Historic districts do not deny the right of a property owner to fully enjoy the appreciation of a property in the overall market conditions*
- *Local Historic Districts do not discourage reinvestment in existing buildings.*
- *The stability of residential historic districts was paralleled by businesses downtown-historic downtown s provide the location of choice for businesses*
- *Historic Districts do allow for new construction*
- *Local Historic Districts have come to mean far more than what color the shutters are painted; they have emerged as a central vehicle for reestablishing a sense of community in towns and cities of all sizes.*

² A collection of articles was provided by the Massachusetts Historical Commission including: The Impact of Local Historic Districts on House Prices in South Carolina, Economic Impacts of Preservation in New Jersey and Texas, Forum Journal,, Spring 2000, The Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Local Historic Districts in Maryland, Maryland Association of Historic District Commissions, May, 1999.

³ Twenty Lessons Learned: Economic Benefits of Local Historic District Designation in Indiana, Adrian Scott Fine and Karen L. Kiemnec,

⁴ Boston globe, November 1, 1998

5.4 GOALS AND POLICIES

VISION

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*Identify and protect the Town Center and other historical areas, sites, and scenic places of importance to maintaining the character and identity of West Bridgewater.*

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POLICIES

1. Have the Historic Society and the Commission confirm the list of unique environments, scenic views, and historic places and build consensus around a unified protection strategy
2. Identify appropriate protection strategies for village centers, sites, and scenic areas.
3. Get support of relevant town Boards and State agencies for pursuing appropriate preservation strategies.
4. Have the Historical Commission work with Planning Board, the Conservation Commission, and the Building Inspector to assist in the review of activities which would impact landmarks, scenic roads, historic sites and buildings.
5. Incorporate historical/cultural resource education into the public schools and Town Boards.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Publicize list of scenic, historic and special places

2. Promote Historic preservation by:

- Placing markers on historic properties which are consistent with a uniform system and theme of town signage (shape, material, size of signs, color).
- Protecting scenic views and entry-ways into the community
- Protecting historic resources by seeking grant funding
- Undertaking a program of public education

3. Formalize role of Historic Commission in review of impacts on local historic, cultural and scenic resources:

- Site Plan review
- Subdivision review
- Conservation Commission review

4. Consider new zoning by-law amendments

- ***Demolition by-law***

A demolition delay ordinance is just that: A mechanism whereby demolition permits for certain buildings are delayed for a specified period of time in order to allow for consideration of preservation options. The Historic Commission should have an informal or formal agreement with the town Building Inspector to review and comment on demolition permits for properties listed in the inventory of historical sites. The delay allows the Commission time to contact owners who may not be aware of their property's significance or of the potential benefits of preservation (including, in some cases, federal tax credits and state grants).

- ***Protection of scenic roads, views, natural features, historical and archeological sites***

West Bridgewater has a wealth of scenic roads, particularly south of West Center Street. The town has the option of designating any road as scenic, which would mean the consent of the Planning Board would be required before any construction, tree removal, or demolition along the roadway. Scenic road designation does not prevent development along a road, but it gives the town another way to influence that development in a manner that causes the least harm to a road's historic character. This designation can be recommended by the Planning Board, Conservation Commission or Historical Commission. This strategy will require more consideration and public awareness.

- ***Historic District Protection***

The Historic Commission would like to identify and subsequently designate a town Center Historic District as well as several sub-area districts. The Master Plan Committee has suggested that the Commission complete its inventory and undertake a process of public information and awareness. There is substantial concern on the Committee that private property rights not be limited by this initiative.

5. Collaborate with the historical societies and commissions in East Bridgewater, Brockton, and Bridgewater to identify shared history.

The history of West Bridgewater is intertwined with that of its neighbors, the communities that together made up "Old Bridgewater." The historical organizations should collaborate as much as possible to share ideas about historical trails and other methods of preservation that cross town and city boundaries.