

## **CURRENT THREATS TO HISTORIC RESOURCES and CRITERIA FOR ADDITIONAL SURVEY WORK**

### **THREATS**

Gloucester's historic core— with its civic, commercial, and residential buildings along Middle, Pleasant, and Main streets and Dale Avenue— is well-protected by designation as both a National Register and local historic district. (The boundaries of the two districts are largely but not completely coincident.) The National Register listing for the East Gloucester Square District (which extends along East Main Street from Norwood Court to Rocky Neck, and up Highland and Plum streets to parts of Mount Pleasant Avenue) also provides an important level of protection for a large number of prominent and important resources, through design review of federally or state funded, licensed, or permitted projects.

Most of Gloucester's buildings have no protective historic designations, however. Downtown Gloucester has been thoroughly covered with vinyl and aluminum siding, which has resulted in a profound loss of historic and architectural character in the densest part of the city. Historic siding materials, texture, and detail still predominate in the outer villages and neighborhoods. The most common threats to historic resources in Gloucester are synthetic siding, lack of maintenance, inappropriate replacement windows, or insensitive additions.

As in many communities, deferred maintenance is a common problem in Gloucester, due to the high costs of construction and limited financial resources. The long decline in the local fishing industry during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has been exacerbated by the current economic recession. Vacant, underutilized, and/or remote properties often suffer more intensely from lack of maintenance and from vandalism. Examples include the First and Second Parish Burial Grounds, the fish shack at Lane's Cove, and the Tarr & Wonson Paint Factory on Rocky Neck. A city-appointed committee has been meeting to actively investigate options for preserving the fish shack, a vacant and deteriorated industrial building in Lanesville. Renovation of the Paint Factory is finally proceeding, but with difficulty. The burial grounds continue to suffer from physical and cultural isolation and the lack of public funds.

Replacement windows are a widespread preservation concern. While they respond in part to legitimate concerns for energy conservation, they frequently diminish the historic character of a property. Massive promotion by the large window manufacturers is, however, now being challenged by the preservation community, which seeks to educate the public on sensitive, effective, and affordable alternatives that preserve historic material and integrity.

Outright demolition of historic resources appears to be sporadic in Gloucester in recent years, although several cases (the Moose building on Pleasant Street and the Webster-Lane House on Main Street, for example) have had major profiles. Interestingly, given the high number of small historic buildings in the city, tear-downs of smaller, older houses and replacement with larger new dwellings appears not be a significant issue in Gloucester at this time. Large additions, however, are relatively common, and are often out of scale with the proportions and

massing of the original historic building on the property. Rocky Neck is an example of a small-scale, dense neighborhood that has experienced intense pressure from alterations and redevelopment.

Few large-scale development projects are envisioned or active in Gloucester at this time. At the Birdseye property— an historic industrial complex on downtown’s Commercial Street— a proposed Birdseye Mixed-Use Overlay District (BMOD) includes among its objectives the promotion of “the historic assets of the BMOD and the natural environment, while improving infrastructure and introducing high quality design and development.” (Proposed Zoning Ordinance Section 5.25) Adaptive re-use of the Tarr & Wonson Paint Factory on Rocky Neck, which is being developed by the marine research organization Ocean Alliance, is hindered by the extremely poor condition of several of the buildings in the complex and by hazardous materials on-site. As the City of Gloucester works to revitalize the local economy by redeveloping vacant and underused sites along Gloucester Harbor, challenges to surviving historic resources along the waterfront may become more prevalent.

Gloucester’s historic commercial buildings are susceptible to normal cycles of storefront renovations, and industrial structures are continually subject to changes in function and technology. With Main Street and Lanesville Center presently well-occupied by vibrant local businesses, inappropriate façade treatments are a concern. The West End of Main Street (from Washington Street to 78 and 85 Main Street) is located in the local historic district, providing design review for exterior alterations. Lexington Avenue, Magnolia’s commercial thoroughfare, has suffered from loss of much of its distinctive historic streetscape through fire, demolition, and incongruous new infill construction.

Finally, Gloucester has a very high percentage of open space convenient to major thoroughfares and highways such as Washington Street and Western Avenue (Route 127), Essex Avenue (Route 133), and Concord Street. Much of this open space is protected from development through conservation restrictions or ownership by the City and conservation organizations. Surprisingly, the recent extension of the city sewer system to the northern villages has not yet resulted in significant new development. The character of historic roadways remains vulnerable, however, to new development that proliferates without sufficient design or zoning controls to maintain historic settings.

## **SELECTION CRITERIA FOR FUTURE SURVEY WORK**

Future survey work should take into account not only threats to historic resources, but also opportunities to complement and benefit from related planning and development efforts. To maximize positive and productive results, potential criteria for undertaking future survey work should be considered both individually and as part of an interconnected framework. The following criteria for continuing survey work are recommended:

1. *Underrepresented categories of resources:* Examples include 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings; historic and cultural landscapes; industrial and commercial buildings; properties related to artists’ communities; quarries; and structures such as sea walls, piers, bridges, and

landscape walls. In addition, private residential developments (particularly in northern and West Gloucester) were often, but not always, neglected in previous survey efforts, as survey work is typically restricted to buildings visible from a public way.

2. *Underdocumented resources:* Especially areas and village centers, where many existing forms are weak in historic documentation and significance. Updated and upgraded area forms can provide essential context for understanding individual resources and for directing larger-scale planning and preservation efforts.
3. *Potential for historic designation:* Areas, landscapes, and properties recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or being considered for potential local historic district designation. These survey forms could be plugged into existing and future narratives of historic context for the citywide Multiple Property format nomination for the National Register, simplifying and accelerating future National Register listings in Gloucester. The symbolic, planning, and financial benefits of such designations would be greatly advanced.
4. *Relation to recent and ongoing related planning efforts:* These opportunities include but are not limited to the following:
  - “Gloucester Reconnaissance Report” for the Essex County Landscape Inventory (Mass. Dept. of Conservation and Recreation and Essex National Heritage Commission, 2005)
  - City of Gloucester’s Harbor Walk
  - Designation of a Cultural District in East Gloucester, under the auspices of the Massachusetts Cultural Council
  - Increasing development of cycling and walking trails, e.g., MAPC’s Greater Boston Cycling and Walking Map (2011)
  - Essex National Heritage Commission’s “Essex Coastal Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan” (2011)
  - City of Gloucester “Open Space and Recreation Plan” (2011)
  - City of Gloucester “Facilities Capital Management Report” (2010)
  - City of Gloucester “Harbor Plan and Designated Port Area Master Plan” (2009)
  - “Gloucester Harbor Economic Development Plan” (2011)
  - North Gloucester Woods study project (ongoing, 2011)
5. *Threats:* Susceptibility to development pressures, such as along Gloucester Harbor and Main Street in downtown Gloucester, or known demolition plans (including demolition by neglect).
6. *Visibility:* Physical, historical, and/or cultural prominence. This factor should also take into account a property’s relation to other, already-surveyed properties, as negative impacts of potential alterations or development may reverberate throughout a neighborhood.