



Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

Heritage Landscape Inventory Program

Attleboro

Reconnaissance Report

Prepared for
The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
by
Public Archaeology Lab, Inc.
December 2001

MASSACHUSETTS HERITAGE LANDSCAPE INVENTORY ATTLEBORO RECONNAISSANCE REPORT

PLANNING ISSUES

Need. Attleboro is the only city that is part of the heritage landscape pilot project and is unique in its urban and suburban development with rapid loss of its open space resource to development of over 1700 units in the 1990s in 98 subdivisions. The EOEA build-out study demonstrates a possibility of an additional 12,600 dwelling units and over 8 million square feet of commercial space. Attleboro's location on the Boston-Providence commuter rail service with two stops in Attleboro and at the intersection of Interstates 95 and 295 as well as only a few minutes from I-495 and I-195 make the City a perfect location for rapid residential development.

Resources and Documentation. Attleboro has several large documents to assist in guiding growth as well as protection of the cultural resources. The Comprehensive Plan, which is dated November 1990, briefly addressed Conservation/Historic Preservation with goals: to preserve environmental quality, to preserve and provide green areas throughout the City, and to protect significant examples of Attleboro's historic heritage. Development of a new Comprehensive Plan for the City will begin in Fall 2001. The Land Use Growth Management Study of June 2000 which addresses community character but talks only peripherally of open space and cultural resources, and the Zoning, Land Use, and Transportation Corridor Study of 1999 will provide the basis for the new Plan. The Open Space and Recreation Plan of 1994 soon will be updated. Historic resource documentation for 603 properties survey forms was prepared in 1985 as part of a Survey and Planning Grant. There are nine individual listing and two districts as well as Determination of Eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. The two districts are the Hebronville Mill Historic District listed in 1984 and the Blackinton Houses and Park district listed in 1979. Also included in the files are staff determinations of eligibility for Dodgeville Mill Village (2000), Capron Park (1986), the Main Pumping Station, and the Attleboro Falls area recommended to be written as a Multiple Property nomination of several small districts and individual nominations.

Staff support includes a Planning Department with three professionals: a City Planner, Land Use Planner, and Environmental Planner. Coordination and cooperation within one city department is an asset as well as the Planning Department's support of the Planning Board, Conservation Commission and Historical Commission. The Historical Commission presently is working on a demolition review by-law, a local historic district study committee, a markers program and additional National Register nominations.

Planning Issues. Significant issues are protection of the Ten Mile River watershed for its importance to natural habitats and recreational opportunities.

SITE VISIT REPORT

The meeting was attended by the Local Projector Coordinator, members of the Historical Commission and a representative from the Attleboro Area Industrial Museum, as well as PAL team members. The purpose of the meeting was to review the list of potential heritage landscapes compiled by the city and to conduct a windshield survey. The list of seven sites was compiled by the Local Projector Coordinator in collaboration with Historical Commission members and staff of the Department of Planning and Land Use.

Dodgeville Mill Village. This historic mill village includes mill buildings, workers housing, dam and pond (on Ten Mile River). One of the most compelling landscape features is a city-owned island in the center of the millpond with the Dodge family cemetery located on it. Access to this area is through a narrow easement between two houses but the island is particularly scenic with extensive wetlands and open water surrounding it. This area is a hidden gem that combines natural and cultural resources in an overgrown but scenic setting. Threats are neglect, vandalism (of cemetery), natural processes that impact the pond, and potential changes in use or demolition of the mill building (which has multiple ownership).

Blackintonville. This remnant landscape along North Street includes a city-owned park (a small but scenic area), millpond, and dam over the Bungay River that were formerly part of a mill complex. There are also adjacent historic residences, a large 19th century cemetery, a small family burial ground, and a memorial bridge. Modern intrusions such as a new CVS detract from the cohesiveness of the area.

Attleboro Downtown Center. Attleboro's downtown business district includes many historic commercial and mill structures, the Old Kirk Cemetery, and Veterans Common, a relatively small area that has been redesigned as a memorial park. The elevated railroad that runs through the center of town, especially its three stone arched bridges, is another dominant feature. This appears to be more of a traditional historic district than a landscape area.

Mill Street/Union Street Area. This important commercial and institutional district adjacent to downtown area includes primarily buildings. It appears to be more of a traditional historic district than a landscape area.

Newport Avenue Historical Settlement. This primarily residential area includes somewhat scattered historic resources, including former militia training ground (now someone's back yard), Newell burying ground, historic mill buildings.

Capron Park/County Street Area. This large circa 1900 park with zoo and monuments retains the romantic landscape quality associated with its period of development. The upper class neighborhood that developed around the park, particularly along Country Street, contains many well-preserved late 19th and early 20th century homes in the Victorian and Queen Anne styles. The location along County Street serves as an important and visible gateway to Attleboro. This is a particularly cohesive area that has strong potential as a historic district with the park at its core.

Hebronville Mill Village. This historic mill village located along the Ten Mile River in the southern section of Attleboro is already listed on the National Register (NRDIS 5/17/84). It includes mill complex, pond, dam on Ten-Mile River, and workers homes. It includes both natural and cultural resources.

Other Resources Discussed

Other resources discussed included the LaSallet Shrine and Seminary and the former Talequa Park, previously a trolley park, casino and farm area now used as a nursing home. Both sites were rejected

because they lack integrity as landscapes. The Manchester Reservoir was also considered and rejected because it was built in the mid-20th century. Some of the more rural roads in town were explored as potential scenic roads but most were too densely developed to qualify. The Queen Anne style homes along South Main Street appear to have potential as a historic district but the focus would be on buildings rather than landscapes.

The *Master List of Projects of the Olmsted Firm in Massachusetts* indicates eight Olmsted firm projects in Attleboro, most dating to the Olmsted Brothers era (1919 – 1928) including several projects associated with Capron Park (but not the original design).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Preliminary List of Sites Recommended For Further Study

The following sites are recommended for intensive study:

- Dodgeville Mill Village – amend previous forms with focus on island and cemetery?
- Hebronville Mill Village – amend previous forms?
- Lower Ten-Mile River – consider this as a potential river corridor?
- Capron Park/County Street area – evaluate as potential historic district?

This recommendation is based on site visits and discussion with Attleboro's

2. Funding for Blackinton Park Preservation Plan

Although the City has applied for funding which it did not receive, the project as improvement, stabilization and interpretation of the historic resources making up this gateway to the City should continue to be the subject of new applications to the DEM Historic Landscape Preservation Grant Program and Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) administered by the MHC provided the latter is funded for beyond 2001.