



Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

Heritage Landscape Inventory Program

East Bridgewater Reconnaissance Report

Prepared for
The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
by
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MASSACHUSETTS HERITAGE LANDSCAPE INVENTORY EAST BRIDGEWATER RECONNAISSANCE REPORT

PLANNING ISSUES

Need. East Bridgewater's application the Heritage Landscape Inventory Program states that its greatest challenge to maintain momentum for historic preservation is the major competing interest of schools that need significant resources to meet State standards. Although traffic is heavy on Rt. 18 which is a north-south route that cuts through the Town, the major highways are 15 minutes away. Development is the greatest pressure with ten subdivisions (160 proposed houses) before the Planning Board at this time, and an expected build out that would double the population and the number of dwelling units. Discussions and studies about public sewers would drastically increase the construction figures. The impact of Brockton's water and sewer issues also is having an impact on East Bridgewater.

Resources and Documentation. East Bridgewater has strong advocates for historic preservation in its Historical Commission, Historical Society, and its Department of Public Tree & Land Management. The Town has a master plan written in 1989 and an open space plan. Historic resources are featured in both documents. The #1 Goal in the Master Plan is the "Preservation of East Bridgewater's semi-rural character including its views across open fields and its commonly compact concentrations of 18th and 19th century houses." Recommendations include National Register districts and local historic districts. Historic resource documentation includes 240 survey forms written between 1973 and 1996. The East Bridgewater Common Historic District is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (1998). The MHC East Bridgewater Reconnaissance Survey Report of 1981 establishes the basis for the local historic context. Through DEM's Town Commons program the East Bridgewater Town Common was restored in the 1980s.

Planning Issues. Planning issues and protection of community character in East Bridgewater fall into four categories: stewardship of town owned-property such as Sachem Rock Farm; preservation of farmsteads and accompanying agricultural landscapes; preservation of town centers or villages in terms of use, scale and design; and the role of the Town in the preservation of industrial resources. The fate of the structural artifacts of at least one mill presently is of major concern to all land use boards as well as the Selectmen. The role of the Town will be determined in the immediate future.

Stewardship of town-owned resources relies on budgeting time and money into the Town's overall plan to properly care for these resources. This challenge is particularly apparent with the present task of determining the future and maintaining Sachem Rock Farm and Leland Farm, both important open space resources that are part of the cultural landscape. The maintenance of burial grounds also needs funds that often are not available, although most are privately managed.

Agricultural landscapes are highly significant resources that articulate the community's identity. There is at least one large agricultural landscape that is part of a working farm with many historic resources providing scenic views as well as important information about agriculture in the Town. Other smaller farms are in varying states of use and all are subject to rising costs of farming as well as the enormous increase in land values if sold to developers.

East Bridgewater has at least two village centers – Elmwood and Town Center – that are in danger of losing resources, uses, and scale of properties.

SITE VISIT REPORT

The meeting was attended by the Local Project Coordinator and members of the Historical Commission as well as PAL team members. The purpose was to review the list of potential heritage landscapes prepared by the town and to conduct a windshield survey. The preliminary list of landscapes was compiled by the Local Project Coordinator and members of the Historical Commission and the Historical Society.

Sachem Rock Farm. This 31-acre farm with open fields, tree-lined drive, house (ca. 1920s) and barn (ca.1850s) is highly visible within the community. It was purchased by the town in 1998 for open space but the exact use has not been determined. The entire area is archeologically sensitive because of strong Native American associations, which will limit subsurface disturbance. The Historical Commission has been coordinating closely with MHC. Although owned by the town, there are no funds for management of the property and future treatment and use of the buildings will have to be sensitively determined. The Historical Commission feels that they have adequate documentation of the property.

Satucket Dam/Carver Cotton Gin Dam. The Carver Cotton Gin Company was established in 1842 and remained in East Bridgewater until the early 1990s when the company moved to Georgia. The brick mill building (mid-19th century) presently is used for storage. The most pressing issue is the adjacent dam which has a leak and is under order from the Department of Dam Safety to either be repaired or removed immediately. Repairs would be too costly for the owner to undertake but the town may be willing to take ownership of the dam in order to preserve it and the adjacent mill pond.

Elmwood Center/Post Office. Elmwood was initially one of the small villages that comprise East Bridgewater. It is a relatively coherent 19th century village center, the focal point of which its 1862 post office (now a commercial building) that has recently been sold and is in danger of being torn down.

Town Center. The town center, which includes many 19th century buildings, is undergoing rapid change and losing its coherence and sense of place. Lack of parking has driven out many businesses. Many historic building have been torn down to create parking lots and more are threatened.

Robins Pond Park And Resort. In the late 19th and early 20th century this area adjacent to the largest pond in town was an active recreation area with merry-go-round, dance hall and roller skating rink. This 26.4-acre site is a prime recreation area with good access to the pond for swimming and is rumored to be of archeological value from the days of the local Indians. It is currently used by a religious group from Brockton and is inaccessible to the public. The owner is ill. Sale of the property will likely be for house lots.

Komarnisky's Farm. The former town poor farm has been operated as a dairy farm by the Komarnisky family for over 60 years. It is one of the few surviving farms in a community where there were once over 50 working farms. The several hundred acre property with several houses, barns and outbuildings is located at a prominent crossroads in the eastern section of town.

Northville School. The last one-room schoolhouse (ca. 1850s) in East Bridgewater is owned by the town but lacks a current use and has been subject to vandalism. The Historical Commission feels that moving the schoolhouse to a larger site where it may more easily find an appropriate use may be the best way to protect it. Other communities that have found new uses for old schools include Westwood, Halifax and Brockton.

Rogers And Sheldon Mill Site. This area was the site of a rolling and slitting mill and tack factory from 1760 to 1887 when the factory burned. It is owned by the town. Some restoration of stonework was done

in the 1970s by Roland Robbins but the area is now quite overgrown and the town lacks funds for additional work. There is a small park and bench near the street.

Washburn Mill Site/Jones Pond. This is another town-owned former industrial site which consists of Jones Pond and a high stone dam. Another former pond has filled in. This is a visible and scenic area that is used as a public park. The town has done some clearing but does not have funds to make major capital repairs.

Parlee Keith's Cattle Tunnel. When the town wanted to put Elm Street through Captain Keith's property, he agreed so long as they built a tunnel for his cows to get from his farm to the pond for water. The tunnel is now a culvert which is mostly filled in. This area is very near Jones Pond. While the tunnel is barely visible, this is a good story that might be appropriate for an interpretive plaque.

Other Resources Discussed

Common. The town has an attractive common that benefited from the DEM Town Commons program of the 1980s. It is highly valued but was not included in the heritage landscape inventory because it is not considered threatened.

Cemeteries. There are at least eight in town (see list in Open Space Plan), are generally not perceived as threatened although funds are not available for stone cleaning and repair.

C.N. Smith Farm. This is a major vegetable farm and plant nursery with a retail outlet in town. It was also omitted from the list because it is not considered threatened. There are also several smaller less active farms in town including several cranberry bog.

Leland Farm. This 160-acre farm was recently purchased by the town and will be used as a recreation complex with soccer fields etc.

The East Bridgewater *Open Space Plan* lists archeological sites, mill and factory sites, other sites and structures, cemeteries and railroads (including several sites described above) in its inventory of scenic resources and unique environments.

The *Master List of Projects of the Olmsted Firm in Massachusetts* does not indicate any Olmsted firm projects in East Bridgewater.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Preliminary List of Sites Recommended For Further Study

The following sites are recommended for intensive study:

- Satucket Dam/Carver Cotton Gin Dam – pending outcome of hearing on dam
- Elmwood Center and Post Office
- Town Center
- Komarnisky's Farm
- Robins Pond Park and Resort – if access can be arranged

This recommendation is based on site visits and discussion with East Bridgewater's Director of Public Tree & Land Management and members of the Historical Commission.

2. Zoning for village or town centers

At first glance there appear to be parking issues at the Town Center with significant areas for parking behind buildings and not much on-street parking in front. Also present zoning by-law setbacks do not conform with existing nineteenth and early twentieth century setbacks. Look at Village Model By-Laws (Cape Cod Commission) to build in incentives in zoning code.

3. Cemetery Documentation and Maintenance

Most of the burying grounds are managed by a private board of trustees and some are threatened by the economics of maintaining cemeteries today. The Department of Public Tree and Land Management assists when possible. Perhaps the Town could help to organize a training workshop with surrounding towns on burying ground maintenance. As noted above the DEM Historic Cemeteries Initiative book also contains useful information.

9/4/01