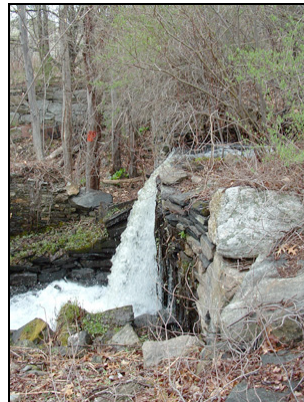


# **OXFORD RECONNAISSANCE REPORT**

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## **BLACKSTONE VALLEY / QUINEBAUG-SHETUCKET LANDSCAPE INVENTORY**

### **MASSACHUSETTS HERITAGE LANDSCAPE INVENTORY PROGRAM**



**Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation**

**John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor**

**Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor**

## **PROJECT TEAM**

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**June 2007**

**Cover Photographs:** Eames Pond Mill  
Casavant Farm  
Oxford Center

## **CONTENTS**

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<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Part I: Oxford's Heritage Landscapes</b>	
Oxford's Landscape Through Time.....	2
Community-Wide Heritage Landscape Issues .....	4
Oxford Priority Landscapes .....	5
Oxford Center	5
Eames Pond Mill Site	
French Gardens	
Casavant Farm	
Buffalo Hill Farm	
French River Corridor	
<b>Part II: Building a Heritage Landscape Toolkit</b>	
Eight Toolkit Basics .....	20
Oxford's Toolkit: Current Status and Future Additions.....	21
<b>Conclusion and Implementation .....</b>	<b>28</b>
Appendix A: Oxford Heritage Landscapes .....	i
Appendix B: Guide to Preservation and Planning Tools for Heritage Landscapes .....	v

## **INTRODUCTION**

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The 22 Massachusetts communities within the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor (BRV) and the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor (Q-S) are linked by a common heritage of agriculture and industry powered by the rivers and streams that dominate the landscape of south central Massachusetts. River Corridor towns extend from Mendon on the east to Brimfield on the west. While they range in size from the city of Worcester to the compact town of Hopedale, each is equally shaped by the interaction of nature and culture over time.

Heritage landscapes are special places created by human interaction with the natural environment that help define the character of a community and reflect its past. They are dynamic and evolving; they reflect the history of a community and provide a sense of place; they show the natural ecology that influenced land use patterns; and they often have scenic qualities. This wealth of landscapes is central to each community's character, yet heritage landscapes are vulnerable and ever changing. For this reason it is important to take the first step toward their preservation by identifying those landscapes that are particularly valued by the community – a favorite local farm, a distinctive neighborhood or mill village, a unique natural feature or an important river corridor.

To this end, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the two National Heritage Corridors (BRV and Q-S) have collaborated to bring the Heritage Landscape Inventory program to communities in south central Massachusetts. The goals of the program are to help communities identify a wide range of landscape resources, particularly those that are significant and unprotected, and to provide communities with strategies for preserving heritage landscapes.

The methodology for the Heritage Landscape Inventory program was developed in a pilot project conducted in southeast Massachusetts and refined in Essex County. It is outlined in the DCR publication *Reading the Land*, which has provided guidance for the program since its inception. In summary, each participating community appoints a Local Project Coordinator (LPC) to assist the DCR-BRV/Q-S consulting team. The LPC organizes a heritage landscape identification meeting during which residents and town officials identify and prioritize the landscapes that embody the community's character and its history. This meeting is followed by a fieldwork session including the consulting team and the LPC, accompanied by interested community members. This group visits the priority landscapes identified in the meeting and gathers information about the community.

The final product for each community is this Reconnaissance Report. It outlines the community's landscape history; discusses broader land planning issues identified by the community; describes the priority heritage landscapes and issues associated with them; and concludes with preservation recommendations. Two appendices include a list of all of the heritage landscapes identified at the community meeting and a reference listing of land protection tools and procedures.



**PART I**

**OXFORD'S HERITAGE LANDSCAPES**



## **OXFORD'S LANDSCAPE THROUGH TIME**

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Oxford lies on the French River which flows the entire length of the town and drains its eastern half. In the north, the river descends 200' in two miles, making it a prime source of power for many mills. The center of Oxford is a large glacial outwash plain of valuable agricultural land. Oxford is bordered by Webster, Dudley, Charlton and Auburn on three sides, all towns that were part of Oxford's original land grant; to the east it borders Millbury, Sutton and Douglas.

During the precontact era, the French River provided an important transportation corridor for the Nipmuc peoples who lived in and traveled through the area. The northeast/southwest "Bay Path" often used by early English colonists and missionaries, followed another Native American route from Massachusetts Bay to Connecticut that ran through the southern part of town. It is likely that short-term Native American camps were located in the alluvial plain and around a cluster of small ponds in the southeast. In 1682, the Nipmuc transferred a large area that included Oxford to English investors, who encouraged settlement of the area by, among others, a group of French Huguenots who established a significant farming settlement in the eastern part of town. This frontier community experienced two incidents in the following two decades, during the continuing unrest that followed King Philip's War. The Huguenots left in 1696 following the so-called Johnson massacre, when three children and their father were killed. In 1704, the Huguenots left and did not return. Subsequent settlement was undertaken by English settlers, who relocated the village to what is now called the Old Common, immediately north of the present town center. The French, and later the English, built grist and saw mills along the river, while extensive cedar swamps provided raw material for fencing, clapboards and shingles.

By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the institutional focus of the town had extended southward along Main Street. Farms spread into the western highlands with an emphasis early in the century on sheep and livestock, that by mid-century moved to dairying. An early cotton mill was built at Rockdale (now part of Webster) on the French River in 1814; in 1816 the Oxford Central Cotton and Woolen Manufacturing Company built a mill in North Oxford, followed by other textile mills at Buffumville, Hodges Village, North Oxford, and Texas. Another industry in town was metal working: scythes, nails and cotton machinery were all manufactured. The forest provided wood for the charcoal needed by forges and trip hammers, and for potash. There were at least six potash works in Oxford. A manufacturing facility for boot and shoemaking was located in Oxford Center.

In 1840 the Norwich and Worcester Railroad was laid out along the French River Corridor, with a depot in Oxford Center, encouraging industrial development along its path. Consequently the textile industry in Oxford developed in a linear pattern down the river from North Oxford to Buffumville and Hodges Village. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century every mill in town but one had burned at least once, and most of them closed periodically due to financial reversals. While the Civil War resulted in increased textile contracts, it also interrupted the market for shoes and boots, which had been sold mainly in the south. The last shoe manufactory in Oxford, A.L. Joslin Co., was destroyed by fire at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Forest products were more stable commodities, both in the form of lumber and cordwood for fuel. As was true throughout Worcester County, market farming in the later 1800s shifted from butter and cheese to milk production.

Streetcars came to Oxford at the turn of the century, one line from Worcester to Webster (north/south), the other from Worcester to Southbridge (east/west). The early 20<sup>th</sup> century also saw a surge in the town's textile industry which continued through the World War, but then went into a steady decline from then through the Depression. Despite the downturn of business during the Depression, Chaffee Brothers Co. continued to expand its lumber business, and the shoe industry was reintroduced by C.A. Grosvenor Co. of Worcester, with a new factory. After World War I, automobile traffic effectively replaced streetcars as the transport of choice; Route 12 from Worcester to Norwich, CT was developed and the new Route 20 was established through North Oxford. Oxford's farms specialized in products that demanded less of the land and were in steady demand: dairy products, orchard products – especially apples – and poultry. Marginal farm land was allowed to revert to woods, or developed for residential use by commuters.

Important recent impacts on Oxford's landscape and its economy have included the 1960 federal flood control project at Hodges Village, which forced all the village structures within the project area to be moved, but significantly increased recreational open space along the French River; and the development of Interstate Route 395 through town, with an interchange adjacent to the town center.

## **COMMUNITY-WIDE HERITAGE LANDSCAPE ISSUES**

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Concern for heritage landscapes is not new to Oxford. The town's Open Space Plan, prepared in 2006, dedicated a great deal of space to identifying the town's unique cultural and scenic resources and recommending actions to protect them. This included a long list of historical and cultural resources prepared by the Historical Commission.

Oxford's Heritage Landscape Identification meeting, attended by interested residents including many representing town boards and local non-profit organizations, was held on February 22, 2007. During the meeting, residents compiled a lengthy list of the town's heritage landscapes, which is included as Appendix A of this report. As the comprehensive list was being created, attendees were asked to articulate the value of each landscape and identify issues relating to its preservation.

Residents emphasized broad issues related to heritage landscapes and community character. These issues are town-wide concerns that are linked to a range or category of heritage landscapes, not just to a single place. In Oxford, three related issues stand out:

### **Historic Buildings**

Oxford has seen the loss of some important cultural resources through tearing down of historic buildings and building of inappropriately designed ones, particularly in the Town Center. Without a Demolition Delay Bylaw or Local Historic Districting, the town lacks any mechanism to slow down this trend and create the space for an exploration of alternatives.

### **Agricultural Lands**

As Oxford faces increasing demand for housing stock and the economics of farming make the lifestyle more challenging, the Town is witnessing development of its farmland and loss of this important element of its rural character. Mechanisms that provide protection for the land as well as for the activity of farming are essential to ensure that Oxford's farms can be sustained for years to come.

### **Historic Resources and Traffic Pressures**

Increased traffic from development within the town and adjacent towns has placed pressures on Oxford's roads. This pressure poses threats to the scenic and historic resources along them as concerns about increased use have led to discussions about road widening. It is critical that careful assessment of the advantages of proposed road treatments be made, in terms of their impact on traffic, on the scenic quality of the road itself, and on adjacent heritage landscapes.



## **PRIORITY HERITAGE LANDSCAPES**

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Based on information gathered at the community meeting, attendees identified a group of priority landscapes for the consulting team to focus on, through field survey, documentation and planning assessment. Each of the priority landscapes is highly valued and contributes to community character. None of them has any permanent form of protection.

Oxford's priority landscapes range from a hidden cliffside garden to the Town Center. A hillside farm is indicative of the town's ridge-top settlement and strong agrarian roots, while an old mill site and the French River Corridor echoes the Town's historic reliance on water-powered industry.

The landscapes which were given priority status by Oxford's community meeting represent a range of scales and types of resources. Each landscape is also representative of other, similar properties in the town and each demonstrates the multiple layers of significance that are common to most heritage landscapes.

Natural and cultural features, individual and civic histories, combine to present property owners and concerned citizens with a complex combination of present-day issues and opportunities. The descriptions and recommendations that follow are intended to be first steps and constructive examples for what needs to be an ongoing process: to identify what is valued and irreplaceable in the community, and develop strategies that will preserve and enhance Oxford's landscape heritage.

### **Oxford Center**

Description: Oxford Center is located at the intersection of Main Street (Route 12) and Charlton Street/Sutton Avenue. It is at this major crossroads that the east-west road connecting Oxford with Charlton to the west and with Sutton to the east changes name. The Center stretches along Main Street from Front Street in the north to Huguenot Road in the south. Main Street is the major north-south road through Oxford, and roughly parallels the French River to the west. Several side streets including Maple Road, Fremont Street, Barton Street, East Main Street, and properties west of the Center on Charlton Street and east of the Center on Sutton Avenue are also a part of Oxford Center.

Oxford's Main Street is very wide, purportedly the second widest main street in New England. In Duane Hurd's 1889 History of Worcester County, the Center was described as a village "built on an extensive plain surrounded here and there by hills, and its main street is a mile long, nearly one hundred and fifty feet wide and lined by rows of thrifty trees." Today, Main Street retains its impressive width, visually extended by very generous planting strips between the road and the sidewalks and deep setbacks allowing broad lawns in front of many of the residences. Today, the tree planting in the planting strip is discontinuous and includes canopy trees as well as smaller understory species. Rows of mature canopy trees in the broad green spaces in front of adjacent properties strengthen the verdant character of the street. This extensive green space combined with Main Street's historic residential and civic buildings strongly characterize the Center.

A number of historically significant churches are located here, including the Universalist Church—which claims to be the oldest Universalist Church in the world—dating to 1792-93, the Greek Revival Congregational Church, and the Gothic Revival Grace Episcopal Church built in 1864. Other significant buildings include Oxford's impressive Victorian Gothic Town Hall, constructed in 1873 to honor Civil War dead, and the Classical Revival former High School, which is an anchor for Main Street. The owner is renovating the building, preserving and replicating architectural elements of the structure. Along with civic and commercial buildings, there are also a number of large and impressive historic houses along the length of Main Street, reflective of the development of the street as a high-income residential corridor by the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



There are many locally owned businesses in the Center, but in recent years chain stores have come to Main Street. About eight years ago, CVS demolished a historic home and replaced it with a new building. Cumberland Farms constructed a modern building on the northwest corner of Main St., Charlton St. and Sutton Ave. set back from the road in order to develop parking in the front, breaking the rhythm and impacting the character of the street. At least four historic structures were taken down in order to construct the CVS. Currently, Walgreens has an interest in demolishing four buildings on the opposite corner of the street from Cumberland Farms and across Main Street from Town Hall, in order to construct a modern store building. Three of these houses are historic.

Joslin Park is a green space that was a gift of Dr. Joslin to the town, purchased by him to prevent it from being developed. The land was the site of one of the first public schools in Oxford. It contains memorials to the veterans of the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the 1872 North Gore District 8 Schoolhouse, a Native American grinding stone, and a watering trough originally on the south corner of Main and Charlton Streets.

There is a significant amount of traffic on Main Street and particularly on Sutton Avenue/Charlton Road, where traffic from fast-developing Charlton to the west moves through Oxford on its way to Route 395. There is a serious traffic problem during peak hours of the day.

Background: Oxford Center was home to most of the 30 English families who came to the town in 1713 to settle. It was easily accessible from the Sutton Avenue/Charlton Road corridor, an early Native American trail and major east-west route for western settlers.

Soon after their arrival, the settlers laid out Main Street as the major north-south corridor for the town. According to Daniel's History of Oxford, tradition holds that Main Street was laid out eight rods wide because the seat of Worcester County was intended to be located here. According to Daniels, the offer was rejected by the town on the grounds that the presence of the government would corrupt the morals of the town's youth.

Although the Center did not become the seat of the county government, it was the focus for nearly all the early commercial, civic and religious activities of the town. A meeting house and a school were constructed in 1736 and at least two taverns were operating by 1739. By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the civic and religious focus of the town shifted away from Oxford Center to the North Common, which at that time was the demographic center of the town and the site chosen for the second meeting house. A struggle in the 1830s about location of the town's first town hall reflected a division between the industrial villages of North Oxford and the commercial focus of Oxford Center. The first town hall was constructed in North Common, mid-way between the two areas. The construction of the current town hall in 1873 marked the return of the civic focus to Oxford Center for the first time since the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. By then, the Center was experiencing significant commercial activity and prosperity, spurred by bootmaking and shoemaking, the principal industry of the Center during the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Commercial development continued along Main Street in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, mostly around the Sutton/Main/Charlton crossroads. The prosperity of the time is reflected in the houses along Main Street, constructed during a tremendous building boom from the late 1830s through the 1850s, which created the general landscape of Main Street today.

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of economic prosperity and population increase in Oxford. Oxford Center saw continued commercial growth, particularly at the Sutton/Main/Charlton intersection. During the 1920s Main Street became a major auto route, Route 12, from Worcester to Norwich, Connecticut. Construction of I-395 in the 1970s and the recent improvements to Route 146 brought increased traffic to town.

There are two studies currently underway for the Center. One is an engineering study, focused on the Main/Charlton/Sutton intersection, that has produced several alternatives to control traffic flow. Two primary alternatives being explored are a roundabout that was proposed by Mass Highway, and a one-way loop system. The second study is a master plan focusing on design guidelines that seek to preserve the historic character and architectural rhythm of Main Street. It incorporates the traffic alternatives into the plan. Proposed intersection improvements at Cudworth Rd. and Route 12 would relieve traffic pressures on Oxford Center.

#### Issues:

- Development pressures and changes to historic fabric: modern structures and loss of historic buildings have negatively impacted the character of the Center.
- Traffic congestion: traffic itself has a negative impact on the experience and comfort of users of the Town Center. However, proposed traffic changes need to be assessed in light of their impact on the historic character of the Center.
- Lack of Permanent Protections: the lack of permanent protection, and the fact that many historic resources are owned privately in the Center, poses threats to the

resources of the district. Demolition activity and commercial plans raise concerns about the likelihood of further loss of resources.

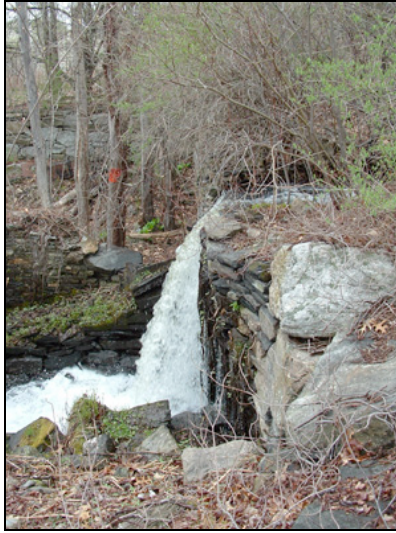
- Outdated and Inadequate Historic Survey: the existing historic resources survey was completed over 20 years ago, and does not provide adequate information from which to make planning decisions.

#### Recommendations:

- Share the findings of this report directly with property and business owners. It is important for them to understand the high value placed on this heritage landscape by Oxford's citizens.
- Review and adopt master plan recommendations and design guidelines that strengthen the character-defining features of the Center.
- Update the 1984 historic resources survey, define the boundaries of the Center, and complete any additional historic resources survey work as necessary.
- Make every effort to designate Oxford Center as a Local Historic District. This designation provides a high level of protection for historic buildings and features. Local Historic Districts are further described in Part II and in Appendix B.
- Once formed, the Historic District Commission should review the status of all buildings and landscapes within the district, and develop a set of recommendations to guarantee permanent preservation of these irreplaceable features. It should make an effort to inform private property owners of the values associated with Preservation Restrictions, and it should develop a priority list of buildings and landscapes that should be protected.
- Prioritize this district for National Register listing and work with MHC to complete the nomination process.
- Move to implement the intersection improvements proposed for Cudworth Rd. and Route 12 in order to relieve some of the traffic pressure on Oxford Center.

#### **Eames Pond Mill Site**

Description: The Eames Pond mill site is located on Sutton Avenue opposite Fort Hill Road, about one mile from Oxford Center. The pond sits in the middle of a ten-acre parcel of land and occupies approximately half of the parcel. Pond wildlife includes fish, beaver and otter. The residence on the property is located along the southeastern parcel boundary. A grass path on the property near the road was the former alignment of Sutton Avenue before the current road was built.



The dam is about 20 feet from the edge of the road. No Trespassing signs are posted to discourage inappropriate activity and accidents caused by climbing over the stonework. Trash has been dumped on the site at times.

The water spills down an approximately 12-foot drop, creating a dramatic scene during times of high water. When leaves are off the trees, the dam and waterfall are visible from the street, but obscured during the summer and fall. The dam and its embankment are approximately sixty feet long, including foundations of the former mill to the northwest. What is visible of the dam's stonework is one hundred years old; the dam has been rebuilt approximately once every century. The mill foundation walls extend northwest and then turn southwest. A variety of stone work in the walls seems to indicate successive building or rebuilding over time. A stone area measuring 6' x 10' (about 75 feet northwest of the dam) is apparently a cow watering station, provided by easement to a former neighbor for watering his cows.

A stone-lined spillway with very large capstones is located to the southeast. The spillway dries up in summer, and the water flow over the dam itself becomes reduced during the summer months. Water from the dam goes into a conduit under Sutton Avenue and merges with a second stream from the pond about fifty feet downstream south of Sutton Avenue.

A huge sugar maple stands in front of the dam close to Sutton Avenue, and second growth deciduous and evergreen trees are growing in front of the dam and on top of it. There is also some vegetation growing out of the foundation walls. The dam needs to be repaired, and the owner has filed for the work with the state's Office of Dam Safety. Vegetation also needs to be removed to prevent damage to the stonework. The Office of Dam safety has rated the dam as Significant Hazard Damage. They are working on their priority dams, those that have been rated High Hazard. It is not clear at this time when the dam can be cleared for repair. The owner intends to ensure that the new work preserves the stone character of the dam, and that any concrete used is not visible.

The site is located within the section of Sutton Avenue that was designated a Scenic Road in 1975. It appears that the designation was sought in order to protect the mill site. The road has been experiencing increasing traffic over the years, exacerbated by Sutton

Avenue's connections to Routes 395 and 146. Residential housing and a recent Home Depot development have also contributed to the traffic increases.

Background: The group of French Huguenots who came to Oxford in the 1680s established a farming settlement in the eastern part of town near Eames Pond, where they constructed a sawmill in 1688. Although the exact location of that mill has not been confirmed, the opinion from an archaeological reconnaissance of the site in 1999 was that there might be stonework from the original 17<sup>th</sup> century dam under the present Eames Pond dam. The History of Oxford by George F. Daniels (1892) notes that, according to tradition, Thomas Davis, in 1747, built a grist-mill on his farm one mile east of Main Street (which would describe this location). His heirs continued to operate the mill until it was purchased in 1824 by Capt. Ebenezer Rich. After operating it for several years, it became dilapidated and after a time was removed, and the water-power unimproved for many years. In 1847, Capt. Rich deeded one-half the water-privilege and half an acre to Ivers Davis, who in partnership with Rich erected a saw-mill. Rich's son added a grist-mill after 1852, and in 1858 a second son rebuilt the mills and operated them successfully until 1884, when the farm and mills were sold to Abel M. Chaffee, who made radical improvements, adding a cider-mill.

The book The Huguenots in the Nipmuck Country by George F. Daniels (1880), remarks of the site that it preserves the "most complete memento of the extinct colony" of the Huguenots in Oxford. It states that, at the dam site "the kindly hand of nature has protected and preserved the handiwork of the Huguenots, as it has been kept in no other locality in Oxford." This is probably a reference to the subsequent rebuilding and use of the site for a variety of mill operations.

#### Issues:

- Lack of Documentation: a 1999 archaeological survey was conducted for MHC (Form D), but it is only a cursory overview and the site needs further research and documentation.
- Need for periodic dam repair and lack of permanent protection: the site lacks permanent protections against inappropriate development or alteration. The current property owner is a good steward, but it is critical to ensure that over time the site will be preserved and treated appropriately.
- Threats from Sutton Road: there are concerns about widening of Sutton Road, which could impact this sensitive site.

#### Recommendations:

- Share the findings of this report with the property owner. It is important for him to understand the high value placed on this heritage landscape by Oxford's citizens.
- Document the landscape and its historic features according to MHC standards, filing forms with the local historical commission and MHC.
- Any repairs to the dam need to be done sensitively to avoid impacting the historic integrity of the resource, and avoid damage to nearby archaeological resources.
- Explore options for permanent preservation with the owner, including putting a Conservation Restriction (CR) or a Preservation Restriction (PR) in place.
- Advocate for protection of this site in town discussions concerning improvements to Sutton Avenue.

## **French Gardens**

Description: French Gardens are located about one-third of a mile south of Fort Hill, off Fort Hill Road (south of 94 Fort Hill Road). They consist of terraced gardens built into cliffs, and are located on private property. The cliffs and gardens overlook Webster Lake, but are not visible from the road. Ownership of the gardens is unclear.

Background: The Huguenots settled in the Fort Hill area and terraced the hillside for gardens in the early 1700s. In the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, the property was a farm owned by the Mayo family. A description of the terraced garden site in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century is found in George Daniels' 1892 History of the Town of Oxford:

“...a site of much natural beauty exists on the Mayo farm in the woods about 100 rods south of the fort. Here the ground suddenly falls off to the southward at a high ledge of rocks, which forms a covert for a sunny nook in which are the remains of an old garden. From the top is a fine view several miles in extent...the place was cultivated by the Mayo family in the last century and was known as the “French Garden,” and the “Vineyard.” Its principal shelter is a straight, even faced, almost perpendicular cliff of about 30 feet in height and nearly 100 in length running northeast and southwest, under which is a plot of about 30 square rods, originally wild and rocky, which has been enclosed, subdued and cultivated. A large part of the surrounding wall—from two to three feet high—is now standing. At the east end, near the cliff, are two well preserved terraces of about a square rod each, made by filling between the larger rocks and walled at the outer side. Sequestration is here so complete that the work has been well preserved. Larger gardens...existed around the fort, but the exposed situation was unfavorable for the growth of other than hardy plants, and among the exotics imported here there must have been some which could exist and thrive only in a sheltered position. This place...was well adapted to the purpose, and was doubtless a cherished spot where were nursed the choicest mementos of the far away homeland.”

### Issues:

- Lack of Clarity of Ownership: it is unclear who are the owners of the Gardens.
- Lack of Public Access: the public has no access to this special place.
- Lack of Permanent Protection: there is presumably no permanent protection for these significant gardens, part of the legacy of the Huguenots in Oxford.

### Recommendations:

- Find and contact the owner, and share this report in order for him to understand the high value placed on this heritage landscape by Oxford's citizens.
- Research and document the Gardens, according to MHC standards, filing forms with the local historical commission and MHC.
- Discuss protection options with the owner, including putting a Conservation Restriction in place.



- Discuss the possibility for public access, perhaps on specific days when the Gardens and their significance can be highlighted, or during a larger celebration of the town's heritage landscapes and specifically of the Huguenot's legacy in Town.

### **Casavant Farm**

Description: Casavant Farm is a dairy farm located on Fort Hill Road about a quarter of a mile south of its intersection with Sutton Avenue. The farm consists of two parcels to the east and west of the road, totaling 62 acres, 19 of which is forested. The cluster of farm buildings sits on the larger, western parcel, with the entry drive culminating in a yard formed by the south-facing farmhouse and nearby barns. Spilt rail fencing lines the western side of the road and creates fenced areas of the yard. The barn cluster includes two silos, one that was built in 1937 and is no longer used and a second one that went up in 1970. The original silo has been kept up for its scenic effect.

Behind the barns, a high, panoramic vista spreads out to the northwest over the valley to Oxford Center, where the spires of the First Congregational Church, St. Roch's Church and Grace Episcopal church can be seen. The scenic landscape is marred by the presence of Lane's Gravel on Clara Barton Road, developed 8-10 years ago.

The farm has 60 head of cattle. Milk is sold to Agri-Mark, a regional cooperative in Methuen, who then sells it to Garelick. Besides use of the farm's fields to grow hay and corn for the cattle, the farmer leases 45 acres of fields at Buffalo Hill Farm on Dana Road (see Buffalo Hill Farm, below). He leased cornfields on property on Sutton Avenue previously, but the land was developed.

The farm is under Chapter 61A. The farmer had considered having a farm stand, but decided it would be too difficult to manage.





Background: Farming on Casavant Farm land began during the years of the Civil War with the Moores, after which it was owned and farmed by the Shortsleeves family. The next family to farm the land was the Johnsons, who lived there for 30 years. The parents of the current farmer bought the farm in 1959.

The farm's pastures were once divided by stone walls, which were removed when farm operations changed and they were no longer needed. The stone from the walls was sold for use in the Auburn Mall retaining wall.

Sixty years ago there were 14 dairy farms in Oxford, and today Casavant Farm is the last remaining dairy farm.

Issues:

- Difficulty of Sustaining Farm Operations: loss of leased fields, lack of help from a next generation, and the economics of farming all make continuing the operations of the farm a challenge.
- Lack of Permanent Protections: like many farms in the region, Casavant Farm is not permanently protected.

Recommendations:

- Share the findings of this report with the property owner. It is important for him to understand the high value placed on this heritage landscape by Oxford's citizens.
- Work with the owner to explore protection options, including placing an APR or a CR on the property.
- Document the farm using an MHC Area form.
- Establish an Agricultural Commission in Oxford, or explore the potential to have a joint Commission with another community, to advocate for the needs of farmers.
- Utilize the Cluster Zoning provision recently adopted by Oxford, to protect the important qualities and features of agricultural lands in the event they are developed.

## **Buffalo Hill Farm**

Description: Buffalo Hill Farm, the former summer home of Dr. Elliot P. Joslin, is located on Dana Road, with land both on the north and south of the road. The property consists of approximately 300 acres, 45 of which are tillable and leased by Casavant Farm (see Casavant Farm, above). The house, barn and caretaker's house are located on the parcel south of Dana Road. Other than the open space around the buildings and the 45 acres of field, the remainder of the property is wooded. There are wetlands along the edge of the property south of Dana Road. Several valleys drain water into a large marshy area of the property, which drains south toward Brown (Joslin) Road. Beavers have created a pond several acres in size on the site. A recent development was located southeast of the property, accessed by Stone Creek Circle which is an extension of Brown Road.



The farmhouse is a vernacular design. The house and barn area are approached by a long entry drive flanked by double rows of oaks and lindens, which are the original trees from the 1911 planting design by the Olmsted Brothers. Cropland can be seen through the trees to either side. The design of the drive heightens the visitor's experience of arrival, ending in a circular drop-off area by the house, then continuing on to the barn beyond. A small stone well house with a gabled shingle roof and shrub planting around it sits at the edge of the cornfield across the drive from the house. The long barn has an apartment at one end, built for a caretaker to live there during the summer and oversee haying operations. A second house was constructed beyond the stable around 1920 to serve as a year-round residence for caretakers, and caretakers live there currently. A cottage on the property, located at the corner of Brown Road and Dana Rd was built for Dr. Priscilla White, one of the original founders of the Joslin Clinic. Dr. White was a pioneer in helping diabetic women have healthy pregnancies and babies.

The front and rear yards have a variety of shrub plantings including rhododendron, forsythia, and high-bush blueberries. There is a huge oak in front of the house and a grove of mature oaks between the house and barn. From the rear of the house there are vistas west to Oxford Center and beyond.

The interior of the house is very much as it was during Dr. Joslin's tenure, including original furniture. The property is under Chapters 61 and 61A, and is held in trust by members of the Joslin family.

Background: Dr. Joslin, born in Oxford in 1869, was an American diabetologist and founder of the Joslin Diabetes Foundation and Clinic in Boston. While still a medical student, he wrote the work that was to become a mainstay of diabetes treatment. He built his summer home, named "Buffalo Hill", here in 1910 and engaged the services of the Olmsted Brothers beginning in 1911. Correspondence from the Olmsted office in the family's possession indicates that design consultation continued through 1914. The office did considerable work on the entrance drive and the site's plantings. A planting plan dated May 4, 1911 and plant lists exist in the family's collection, although correspondence from the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site indicate that the original plans—including a topographical plan, planting plan and boundary survey—were destroyed.

An 18-page letter to Dr. Joslin from John C. Olmsted, dated October 19, 1910, illustrates the considerable thought that was put into design of the entry drive and the character of the plantings around the house. The firm consulted on the organization of uses of the

land, including the location of arable and pasture lands and their proximity to the barn. Olmsted urged Dr. Joslin to purchase a 10-acre tract of land, which would give him a much better approach to the house, both topographically and in terms of views of the house. Joslin did purchase the land and implemented Olmsted's recommendations. Olmsted wrote:

“Considering that it is your conception to treat the place primarily as a farm and to reduce the landscape gardening treatment that would require expense for maintenance irksome to a farmer at a minimum, it seems best that the approach drive...should be on a straight line so as to be obviously convenient and farmlike....It will perhaps seem almost too utilitarian to have the drive without any shade trees so the hayfield would need to be sacrificed slightly in that regard.”

J.C. Olmsted thought carefully about the effects of “domesticity” or “wildness” around the house, and the utilitarian functions of various parts of the yard, in his planting recommendations. The Planting Plan gives quantities of proposed species, with numbers that are keyed to the accompanying plant list. Views of the hills to the west and to a proposed seating area south of the house are indicated. He wanted to manage vegetation so as not to lose the scenic views to the southwest, which today are constricted by vegetation growth on and off the property. The plan indicates an Ice House as well as a Poultry House and associated Chicken Run. The ice house is no longer extant, and there are only remnants of the poultry house.

During the Joslin family's tenure, the land has always been leased to local farmers. Originally there were cows and sheep to maintain the open space. The property has been consistently used by the family during summers and special occasions. A family member lived on the property year-round from 1990 through 2004. The owners have been in disagreement about the disposition of the property, and it is currently in court.

#### Issues:

- Significance of the Site: the association with Dr. Joslin, a noted figure in Oxford and medical history, landscape design by the Olmsted Brothers and documentation of that work, and important surviving elements of that design work all make this an extremely significant property.
- Uncertain Future: there is a lack of consensus (and as a result, currently a legal struggle) among members of the extended family about development or preservation of the property.
- Lack of Documentation: the property was not documented during the 1984 historic resources survey of the town.
- Lack of Permanent Protection: the site lacks permanent protections for the historic landscape and for agricultural use of the land.

#### Recommendations:

- Share the findings of this report with the property owner. The owner needs to know that this heritage landscape is highly valued by Oxford's citizens and of great historic landscape significance.

- Inform the owners about the benefits of Preservation Restrictions, Conservation Restrictions, and resources for technical and financial support for preservation measures.
- Conduct a thorough inventory of the property in accordance with MHC standards.
- Prioritize the property for listing on the National Register.
- Discuss with the owner the importance of preparing a master plan for the property. This would include a cultural landscape report and natural resources assessment that articulates the site's significance, identifies character-defining features, and makes recommendations for preservation, maintenance and appropriate use.

### **French River Corridor**

Description: The French River lies in the Thames River Basin and originates at the outlet of Rochdale Pond in Leicester just north of the Oxford town line. The river runs the entire length of Oxford, from its boundary with Leicester in the northwestern reach of the town to the Webster town line, and served to power the textile industry in Oxford, thus influencing the development of the community. Over half of the watershed of the river in Oxford is located within land designated as Priority Habitat by the state's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program. The river harbors two species of "special concern", Creeper and Triangle Floater Mussels. In addition, the river corridor is home to great blue herons, swans, Canada geese, and several varieties of ducks. Many varieties of turtles, frogs, and snakes are common, as are bass and bluegill. Deer, foxes, mink, otters, and beavers are among the mammals seen.

The river passes through the Greenbriar Flood Control Area, over 1100 acres of land managed by the Army Corps of Engineers (ACE), which has to be maintained in its undeveloped state. The ACE has 15 miles of trail throughout the flood control area that are currently underutilized by the community.

In addition to its environmental values, the corridor has an abundance of scenic, historic, and recreational values. The Greenbriar Flood Control Area is located upgradient of the original Hodges Mill and dam, remnants of which are still visible. Bartlett's Bridge, that carries Clara Barton Road over the river, is listed as an individual property on the National Register. It is located near Lane's Gravel operation, and many trucks travel over the dam coming to and from the quarry. Lane's recently paid to reinforce the bridge, but some of the historic elements were lost in the process. (This has not impacted its listing on the National Register.) An asphalt plant, sand quarry and transfer station for rubbish are also located along the river in North Oxford.

The French River Connection, a citizen group working to create a greenway along the river and a blueway on the river, has done research on land ownership and identified opportunities for access, river use and connections to the regional network of trails. A four-acre parcel of privately owned land on the river off Dudley Road has an unofficial dirt ramp into the river. It is a narrow triangle of land that may be undevelopable, and it borders an abandoned railroad bed owned by National Grid, which follows the river about 4-5 miles north to Clara Barton Road.



The Town's Open Space Plan states that the river's water quality is poor, and needs a multi-faceted strategy to achieve Class B designation. Water quality has been improved greatly over the years, and some portions of the river are cleaner than others. Water flow is affected by impoundments north in Leicester, which are used by that town for recreational purposes. There are times during the summer months when water flow is too low to maintain an adequate flushing rate for its fish population.

The ACE conducted a detailed study during the 1980s in association with a dredging and impoundment project they were proposing. The study included assessment of wildlife habitat, water quality and contamination, and the historic resources along the river.

Background: The stretch of river from near the Leicester town line to the Greenbriar Flood Control Area drops 200 feet in four miles. An 1891 perspective sketch of North Oxford shows a succession of mills along the French River in this north area, drawn by the availability of water power that made possible the development of an extensive textile industry in the area. Mills were established in Hodges Village, North Oxford, Rochdale and Texas. When the dams along the river broke during the flood of 1955, the flow reverted to its original river base, except in places where dam rubble allowed a small impoundment of river to remain. Hodges Dam was completed in 1960 to address flood control, and the Greenbriar Flood Control Area as it is known today was created.

Hodges Dam has a put-in site for canoes and kayaks, which is currently the only legal usable point of access on the river in Oxford. In July of this year, the Board of Selectmen voted to place an article on the fall Town Meeting to allow the Board to support the development of a canoe launch site and associated parking on a town-owned parcel south of Harwood Street on the west bank of the river. Assistance is being provided by the state's Public Access Board. This would allow a 2.75 mile canoe trip between Hodges Dam and the new launch site. The project would implement a proposal made by a University of Massachusetts study of recreational use of the river.

Oxford's 2006 Open Space and Recreation Plan notes that the French River "is assigned a critical role in the Plan. As a long-range vision, the River should be designated as a greenway with land acquired or protected that has high potential for water-based

recreation, increases public access and enjoyment, and preserves valuable habitat for wildlife and rare plant species.” One of the Plan’s goals with four associated objectives focuses on the French River.

Issues:

- Minimal Public Access to River: the proposed new canoe launch will provide additional needed access to the river, for which there is currently only one public access point to this major recreational resource.
- Lack of Awareness of the Recreational and Historical Resources: the significant recreational resources on ACE land is not well known by the community. The interpretive potential of dam/mill sites, and story of the river as it changed over time, is largely untapped
- Need for Conservation of Wildlife Habitat: the river harbors important wildlife habitat that needs to be protected.
- Concern about Adequate River Flow: impoundment areas in Leicester with control over flow in the French River at times not releasing enough CFS (cubic feet per second) for standard flush rate for fisheries. The state is looking into legislation that would require maintenance of minimal summer flows.
- Threat to historic resource—need for monitoring to prevent inappropriate alterations to historic resources, in particular Bartlett’s Bridge.

Recommendations:

- Build on the groundwork of the French River Connection and the Town to implement the Open Space Plan’s recommendations for recreational and environmental improvements to the river.
- Expand efforts to increase public awareness of the values and threats to the French River corridor and build support for protection of the historic and ecological resources along its banks. Use a variety of means to peak interest and educate the public, including school curricula and tours.
- Ensure that Bartlett’s Bridge is adequately reinforced, and that any work done in the future on the structure protects its historic character. Monitor its condition periodically.
- Ensure that proper monitoring is conducted of operations along the river that could negatively impact water quality, and continue to monitor the river’s water quality.
- Publicize the trail in the Greenbriar Flood Control Area, using signage, maps and town publications to promote its recreational assets to the community.
- Pursue possible purchase of the four-acre waterfront parcel for passive park development and access to the river. Work with National Grid to create a rail trail along the abandoned railroad line that can connect with other regional trails.
- Work with Leicester and the state to ensure adequate water flow in the river during the summer months.
- Take measures to protect the Hodges mill and dam remnants.



## **PART II**

### **BUILDING A HERITAGE LANDSCAPE TOOLKIT**



## **EIGHT TOOLKIT BASICS**

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As our communities undergo rapid land use changes, heritage landscapes are particularly threatened because they are often taken for granted. There is a broad variety of resources that communities can call upon to protect these irreplaceable resources. Below is a checklist of the basics. Each is discussed in the sections that follow and in Appendix B.

### **1. Know the resources: Inventory**

We cannot advocate for something until we clearly identify it – in this case, the physical characteristics and historical development of the town’s historic and archeological resources. The necessary first step is to record information about the resources at the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

### **2. Gain recognition for their significance: National Register Listing**

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation’s official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. Listing brings a number of benefits including recognition, consideration when federally-or state-funded projects may impact the resource, eligibility for tax credits, and qualification for certain grant programs.

### **3. Engage the public: Outreach, Education and Interpretation**

In order to create a community of advocates, we need to raise public awareness and broaden the base of support. This includes developing opportunities to learn about and celebrate the places and history of the town, as well as to care for them.

### **4. Think in context: Comprehensive and Open Space Planning**

It is important that Open Space Plans and Comprehensive or Master Plans address heritage landscapes as vital features of the community, contributing not only to unique sense of place but also to environmental, recreational and economic health.

### **5. Develop partnerships: The Power of Collaboration**

Protecting community character, respecting history, and promoting smart growth are interrelated concerns that impact heritage landscapes and require collaboration across a broad spectrum of the community. This includes communication among town boards and departments, as well as public-private partnerships.

### **6. Defend the resources: Zoning, Bylaw and Ordinance Mechanisms**

Effective and innovative preservation tools exist in the legal and regulatory realm. These range from a wide array of zoning, bylaw and ordinance mechanisms, to incentive programs and owner-generated restrictions on land use.

### **7. Utilize the experts: Technical Assistance**

Regulations and creative solutions for heritage landscapes are constantly changing and emerging. Public and private agencies offer technical assistance with the many issues to be addressed, including DCR, MHC, the Heritage Corridor and the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission.

### **8. Pay the bill: Funding Preservation**

Funding rarely comes from a single source, more often depending on collaborative underwriting by private, municipal, and regional sources. Each town also has a variety of funding sources that are locally-based and sometimes site-specific.



## **OXFORD'S TOOLKIT – Current Status and Future Additions**

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What follows is a review of the tools that Oxford already has in place, as well as a number of additional tools that fall within some of the categories noted above (The tools already in place for Oxford provide a good foundation for heritage landscape preservation, but their efficacy as protection for the town's natural and cultural resources can be significantly improved by strengthening existing measures and putting others in place. Appendix B includes extended descriptions of preservation measures; the specific applications of those tools to Oxford's resources are described below. In addition, the appendix contains a full description of additional avenues and creative approaches that Oxford can consider in developing a multi-pronged strategy for preservation.

A tool that has been proven to be one of the single most valuable resources in protecting heritage landscapes has been the Community Preservation Act (CPA). Towns that have approved the CPA have been able to leverage funding for such activities as historic resource surveys, acquisition of conservation restrictions and open space, adaptive reuse of historic structures, and signage programs. More information about the CPA can be found in Appendix B under 6. Defend the Resources: Laws, Bylaws and Regulations and 8. Pay the Bill: Funding Preservation. Oxford's Open Space Plan recommends the commencement of an educational program to inform residents of the advantages of adopting the CPA – this recommendation should be acted upon. The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor is currently working with town boards to have the CPA considered on a town warrant article either this fall or the spring of 2008

These tools should be considered in combination with those recommendations made in Part I for Oxford's priority landscapes.

### **1. Know the resources: Inventory**

**Current:** According to the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the town's inventory (conducted in 1984) includes documentation for 272 buildings, structures and sites. In addition, fourteen historic archaeological sites have been inventoried in Oxford.

**Additions** Survey methodology has improved over time and the inventory work conducted in 1984, while extensive, should be revisited. Most important to heritage landscape preservation, there has been an increased focus on landscapes; the survey work of the 1980s focused heavily on architecture. In addition, significant sites like Buffalo Hill Farm were not included. Survey work should prioritize heritage landscapes and in particular those listed in this report.

It is recommended that a comprehensive archaeological survey be completed for the community. Known and potential precontact Native American and historic archaeological sites should be documented in the field for evidence of their cultural association and/or integrity. Funding assistance for this effort would also be available from the MHC Survey and Planning grants, as well as CPA funding.

## **2. Gain recognition for their significance: State and National Register Listing**

**Current:** Oxford has only five individual properties listed in the National Register, and no National Register Districts. The individual properties are:

- Huguenot Fort (1988), which also has a Preservation Restriction (1989)
- Clara Barton Homestead (1977)
- Bartlett's Bridge (2000)
- Huguenot Monument (1988)
- Hudson Homestead (1977)

There are no local historic districts in Oxford.

**Additions:** According to the town's Open Space and Recreation Plan, MHC identified several villages and Oxford Center as worthy of consideration for inclusion in the National Register. They include: Wells Street and Watch Street; Learnedville; North Oxford; North Common; Oxford Center; Huguenot Square. This last is the intersection of Main Street and Sutton Avenue/Charlton Street, and would presumably be included in Oxford Center.

It is recommended that the Oxford Historical Commission pursue designation plans with the MHC and revisit their prioritization of sites and areas for listing, which might first involve preparing updated MHC inventory forms. The Open Space Plan has included this in its Five-Year Action Plan. In light of the issues addressed in this report, Oxford Center and Buffalo Hill Farm should be given priority.

## **3. Engage the public: Outreach, Education and Interpretation**

**Current:** The Oxford Historical Commission published an interpretive brochure in 1984 giving brief descriptions of 20 sites of historical interest in Town, accompanied by illustrations and a map. A new flyer has been prepared, as well as one about Joslin park.

There have been school trips to the Huguenot Fort, and the Oxford Historical Commission has sponsored bus tours of Oxford. The Boy Scouts have worked at the Fort site, including two scouts who were awarded Eagle Scout rank through coordinating a rush cutting at the Fort. Town-wide events and programs have been sponsored at the Fort by the Historical Commission and the Huguenot Memorial Society of Oxford.

**Additions:** The Open Space Plan recommended that the community be engaged in preparing outreach materials and creating a historic signage program, to continue the good work already being conducted by the Historical Commission. The signage program was recommended to be a collaboration between the Historical Commission and the Highway Department. These are excellent recommendations and ones that other towns have found to be extremely valuable in raising awareness and creating advocates for community preservation.

Other excellent recommendations of the OSRP are to create an informational packet for landowners encouraging them to pursue voluntary land preservation techniques, and to create a non-profit land trust that can accept land donations and assist in

purchasing key open space parcels. The town should talk to neighboring towns with local land trusts to learn about the benefits.

Preservation Mass, as the statewide preservation advocacy organization, is a source of support for advocacy. They have a program that annually identifies and publicizes the 10 Most Endangered historic resources in the Commonwealth, which is a good way to advocate for resources that are imminently threatened.

#### **4. Think in context: Comprehensive and Open Space Planning**

**Current: Master Plan 1976.** The Town's Master Plan is decades old and needs to be updated. Topics of concern have been addressed separately, such as a housing study, a transportation study and the downtown study, but looking at these issues comprehensively and interdependently, with overarching town-wide goals, is an important exercise that should follow.

**Current: Open Space and Recreation Plan 2006.** Oxford's OSRP contains many goals that directly relate to heritage landscape preservation and enhancement. The citizen survey conducted as part of the process showed clearly that residents want to preserve open space and the many significant historical assets of the Town, as well as improve water-based recreation and access to the French River in particular.

A warning note was sounded in the Plan about Oxford being at a crossroads, with several historic sites at risk including Huguenot Square in Oxford Center. It stated that "What is done with each historic property affects the entire community. It is important to recognize that with the disappearance of even one more piece of Oxford's history, there is less history remaining to preserve."

Several OSRP Goals specifically address issues related to priority heritage landscapes. One deals solely with the French River. The objectives laid out for these resources should be given priority. The objective to prepare design guidelines for Oxford Center is currently underway.

**Additions:** The OSRP included an extensive listing of sites of historic significance, which along with this report can be used as the basis for prioritizing sites for an updated historic resources survey, NR listing, and other protection mechanisms recommended below to protect significant, sensitive and threatened resources.

The Plan recommended that the Town implement Open Space Residential Design concepts and review the Zoning Bylaws for conformance to Smart Growth principles, two of a number of important tools that should be explored in the Master Plan update process.

It is vital that there be strong links between community economic development, open space, and recreation agendas in order to successfully address Oxford's environmental and development challenges. There should be regular joint meetings of the town boards involved with all land-based and cultural resource issues. This scheduled interaction will help to maintain communication, coordinate planning priorities, and advance programs that support and promote community character and heritage landscapes.

## **5. Develop Partnerships: the Power of Collaboration**

**Current Status:** Oxford's Historical Commission has had good relationships with the Highway Department, who helped with the stone wall at Fort Hill, and with the Board of Selectmen. Town boards work well together and share joint interests and objectives.

**Additional Efforts:** It is essential that there continue to be good communication and cooperation between the town boards and commissions involved with land-based and cultural resource issues.

## **6. Defend the Resources: Zoning, Bylaw and Ordinance Mechanisms**

### **Current Mechanisms**

**Rate of Development Bylaw:** Town Meeting voted on and passed a Rate of Development Bylaw which restricts the number of homes that may be built on a parcel of land, until 2021. The OSRP recommended that the Town's bylaw be reviewed to determine its impacts, and to revise as appropriate.

**Cluster Zoning:** Oxford has had cluster zoning for several decades, and made some changes to its Bylaw in 2005 including allowing cluster by right rather than special permit.

**Central Professional District:** Oxford has a district that occurs along Main Street immediately to the north of the town center intended to allow limited commercial activity in the many historic homes on the street while preserving historic character.

### **Additional Mechanisms**

Three basic strategies have consistently proven effective as basic preservation tools in communities throughout Massachusetts.

**Demolition Delay Bylaws** provide a time period in which towns can explore alternatives to demolition. The Oxford Historical Commission should work with MHC staff to develop a bylaw that could best suit Oxford's needs. They should also work with other town groups to publicize the advantages of a demolition delay bylaw to the community. The most valuable aspect of this bylaw is that it creates space within which to have a conversation about how private and public needs can both be met in the service of preservation. Many towns have found that a delay of one year is the most effective time frame within which to negotiate alternatives to demolition. A majority of the bylaws apply to all structures built over 50 years ago, in accordance with federal standards.

**Neighborhood Architectural Conservation Districts (NACD)**, further explained in Appendix B, are also local initiatives that recognize special areas within a community where the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places are preserved and protected. The Oxford Historic Commission should work with the MHC staff to

determine how an NACD can help to maintain the character of areas which have changed through time, but which retain a valued neighborhood “feel” that may be threatened by incompatible development.

**Local Historic Districts (LHD)**, further explained in Appendix B, are also local initiatives and the strongest form of protection to preserve special areas with distinctive buildings and places. Unfortunately, National Register listing provides minimal protection for historic landscapes and structures. Local designation can be tailored to specific community needs, and often protect private investment by enhancing property values. The key to tourism and, in part, to economic development, is the preservation of the rural and village center character of the Town. The recommendation made for LHD designation for Oxford Center should be pursued.

### **Additional mechanisms specific to Oxford’s landscapes**

The following recommendations are organized by the types of resources that Millbury has, and measures that should be considered to strengthen their protection.

#### Mill Villages and Industrial Structures

A defining characteristic of the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley and Oxford in particular are the mill villages that exhibit the vestiges of the transformative power of the industrial revolution in mills, dams, mill worker housing and transportation elements such as the associated rivers, canals and railroads or rail traces. Oxford exhibits that history in the villages of Learnedville and North Oxford.

Oxford should adopt an Adaptive Reuse Overlay Bylaw which would provide flexibility in considering adaptive reuse options for mill buildings.

#### Agricultural Lands

Preservation of agricultural landscapes means preservation of the farming activities; otherwise, it simply is the preservation of land as open space. There are instances in which changing technology requires modifications to existing farm structures, or the addition of new ones. It is important to know what the features of an agricultural setting are and which features the community treasures in order to make a case for preservation of these settings.

Appendix B has a full list of regulatory tools that should be considered to protect agricultural land; the following highlights important measures to meet the needs of agricultural protection in Oxford.

1. Create an Agricultural Commission, a standing committee of town government created through vote at Town Meeting. This Commission would represent the farming community, promote agricultural-based economic opportunities, and work to protect and sustain agricultural businesses and farmland.
2. Prioritize parcels under Chapter 61A for future acquisition. Should the landowner choose to sell land recently withdrawn from Ch 61, the town has only 120 days to act on its right of first refusal. The need to pay fair market value, combined with

- lack of readily-available funding from a program such as the Community Preservation Act, makes it difficult for the town to effectively act on this right.
3. Strengthen public-private partnerships to preserve farmland through purchase of APRs or CRs
  4. Develop partnerships to raise funds to purchase development rights on farms or to assist a farmer in the restoration of historic farm buildings for which the owner would be required to donate a preservation restriction (PR). This includes following up on the Open Space Plan's recommendation to create a land trust.
  5. Make information about the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources programs available to farmers, including the Farm Viability Enhancement Program (technical assistance, funding) and the Agricultural Environmental Enhancement Program (supports best management practices for agricultural operations to mitigate impacts on natural resources).
  6. Document farms that are considered critical to the character of Oxford's community using MHC survey forms.
  7. Adopt a right-to-farm bylaw which allows farmers to carry on farming activities that may be considered a nuisance to neighbors. Refer to Smart Growth Toolkit at: [http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart\\_growth\\_toolkit/bylaws/Right-to-Farm-Bylaw.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart_growth_toolkit/bylaws/Right-to-Farm-Bylaw.pdf)
  8. Explore Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), a partnership between a farm and a community of supporters. Community members cover a farm's yearly operating budget by purchasing a share of the season's harvest. This relationship guarantees farmers a reliable market, while assuring the members high quality produce, often below retail prices.

### Scenic Roads

Scenic roads are an integral part of the historic fabric of the community. They are highly valued by Oxford residents and visitors alike. Roads must also accommodate modern transportation needs and decisions regarding roadways are often made with travel and safety requirements as the only considerations. Oxford has not adopted the Scenic Roads Act (MGL Chapter 40-15C), but it has designated 14 roads for which there would be review and approval for the removal of trees and stone walls within the right-of-way. The Town should discuss whether they would be better served by adopting the statute. In addition to roadway issues, much of what we value about scenic roads – the stone walls, views across open fields and the many scenic historic buildings – is not within the public right-of-way. The preservation and protection of scenic roads therefore requires more than one approach.

1. Complete an inventory with descriptions and photo documentation of each of the roads in Oxford considered to be or designated as scenic, including the character-defining features that should be retained.
2. Discuss the advantages of adopting a Scenic Road Bylaw and designate and additional town roads protected by the bylaw beyond the roads already designated as Scenic. (The designation cannot be applied to state numbered roadways.) Add design criteria to be considered when approving removal of trees and stone walls.
3. Post attractive road signs that identify the scenic roads in town.
4. Coordinate procedures between Highway Department, Planning Board and Historical Commission.
5. Consider a Scenic Overlay District which may provide a no-disturb buffer on private property bordering on scenic roads or adopt flexible zoning standards to

protect certain views. Such bylaws would apply to the landscapes bordering state numbered roadways, which would not be protected under the scenic roads designation, as well as to landscapes bordering town roads.

6. Develop policies and implementation standards for road maintenance and reconstruction, including bridge reconstruction, which address the scenic and historic characteristics while also addressing safety. This is an important public process in which the community may have to accept responsibility for certain costs to implement standards higher than those funded by Mass Highway Department. Such standards should have a section addressing the way in which the local Highway Department maintains roads; for example, requiring a public hearing if any new pavement width is to be added to a town road during reconstruction or repair. Policies can be adopted by local boards having jurisdiction over roads, or can be adopted at Town Meeting through a bylaw. In developing policies consider factors such as road width, clearing of shoulders, walking paths and posted speeds. A delicate balance is required.

#### **7. Utilize the experts: Technical assistance**

A list indicating the full range of available governmental and non-profit sources of technical assistance can be found in Appendix B.

#### **8. Pay the Bill: Funding Preservation**

A list indicating the full range of available governmental and non-profit sources of funding can be found in Appendix B. As discussed above, the most effective way to combine the limited financial resources of a community with those of the state is through the CPA.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLEMENTATION

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Oxford's residents have a strong sense of place, defined by the town's varied natural features and the historic land use patterns that grew out of them. The town has already begun to document and evaluate its most significant buildings and natural areas. It must now also look beyond these traditional resources to the landscapes, streetscapes, rural roads, neighborhoods and other natural and cultural assets that define the community's character. Like most municipalities, Oxford is facing multiple pressures for change that will have permanent impact on land-based uses and natural resources, especially its remaining farming areas. Special places within the community that were once taken for granted are now more vulnerable than ever to change.

The Oxford Reconnaissance Report is a critical tool in starting to identify the rich and diverse heritage landscapes in Oxford and in developing creative preservation strategies and partnerships. Oxford will have to determine the best ways and sequence in which to implement the recommendations discussed above. The town would do well to form a Heritage Landscape Committee, as described in DCR's publication, *Reading the Land*.

Landscapes identified in this report, especially the priority landscapes, will benefit from further documentation in accordance with MHC guidelines. The documentation in turn will provide an information base for the local publicity needed to build consensus and gather public support for landscape preservation. Implementing many of the recommendations in this report will require a concerted effort by and partnerships among municipal boards and agencies, local non-profit organizations, and regional and state agencies and commissions.

There are no quick fixes for the challenges of managing growth and funding preservation. Many of the recommended tasks and approaches will require cooperation and coordination among a number of municipal, regional and state partners to be successful. They will require time and a good dose of patience, as volunteer schedules, legislative procedures, and funding cycles try to mesh.

Circulating this Reconnaissance Report is an essential first step. The recommendations should be presented to the Board of Selectmen, who represented Oxford in its application to the Heritage Landscape Inventory program. Copies of the report should be available on the town's web site and distributed to town departments and boards, particularly Oxford's Historical Commission, Planning Board, and Conservation Commission and will also be useful for the Oxford Historical Society, neighborhood associations, local land trusts, and other preservation organizations. Finally, a reference copy belongs in the town library. All of these circulation efforts will broaden citizen awareness, and result in increased interest and support for Oxford's heritage landscapes.

**Finally, the project team suggests that the following recommendations be the top three priorities for Oxford as the town works to protect the character of its community:**

1. Consideration of a Local Historic District for Oxford Center
2. Passage of a Demolition Delay Bylaw
3. Passage of a Scenic Roads Bylaw



## APPENDIX A

### OXFORD HERITAGE LANDSCAPES

This list was generated by local participants at the Heritage Landscape Identification meeting held in Oxford on February 22, 2007 and follow-up fieldwork on April 27, 2007. **There are undoubtedly other heritage landscapes that were not identified at the HLI meeting noted above.** The chart has two columns - the name and location of the resource are in the first; notes about the resource are in the second. Landscapes are grouped by land use category. Abbreviations used are listed below.

APR = Agricultural Preservation Restriction

LHD = Local Historic District

PR = Preservation Restriction

TTOR = The Trustees of Reservations

CR = Conservation Restriction

NRD = National Register District

NRI = National Register Individual Property

**Bold** = Priority Landscape

#### Summary of Priority Landscapes:

**Casavant Farm**

**Eames Pond Mill Site**

**French Gardens**

**Oxford Center**

**French River Corridor**

**Buffalo Hill Farm**

<b>Agriculture</b>	
<b>Casavant Farm</b> Fort Hill Rd	active; overlooks Oxford Center; can see farm from Sutton Ave. and Route 395
Thibau's Farm Old Webster Rd.	adjacent to river, hayed not farmed; beautiful pine grove behind; one of few farm areas in town; land up for sale
Federal Hill-Bigelow's Nursery	
Goat Hill	APR
<b>Archaeology</b>	
<b>Eames Pond Mill site</b> <b>Sutton Ave. at Fort Hill Rd.</b>	dam and early mill site, original sawmill dated 1688
Saccarrappa Mill site Sacarrappa Rd.	known to make nails, etc. Triphammer Sacarrappa Bridge and nearby raceway, part of mill; 3-4 businesses located here
Old Pope cellar hole	NE of Strack's Corner
Garrison House	cellar hole; off Federal Hill Rd.
chamois/washed leather mill site Just off Sutton Ave.	in a field along the brook leading southwest from Eames Pond
Huguenot Church and Burial Site	traditionally thought to be north of Huguenot Rd.

Huguenot Fort Fort Hill Rd.	On Mayo's Hill, otherwise known as Fort Hill Rd.; site considered most historically sensitive area of town; NRI 1988; PR 1989.
<b>Burial Grounds and Cemeteries</b>	
South Cemetery	also known as Old Burying Ground; behind Congregational Church
Gore Cemetery Pleasant St.	in that part of Oxford that is known as Merriam District
North Cemetery Main St.	Especially the old cemetery lots in NE corner closest to Main St.
St. Roch's Cemetery Federal Hill Rd.	
Grace Episcopal Church Cemetery Main St	Grace Episcopal Church
Clark Cemetery	Prospect Hill
family cemetery Whitin Rd.	
old Indian Burial Ground	Thought to be in vicinity of Water St.
<b>Civic / Institutional</b>	
<b>Oxford Center</b> includes Huguenot Square (crossroads of Sutton Ave. and Charlton St.)	Front St. (N) to Huguenot Rd. (S) on Main St., & beyond on W/E (exact boundary to be determined); lined with crabapple trees and double wide in this area - had horse races, wanted to be county seat for Worcester County. Dr. Joslin paid Olmsted to do first master plan for Oxford, made recommendations for that part of Main St.
Churches on Main St.	Grace Episcopal Church; Universalist Church (presumed to be oldest Universalist church in world; 1792-93; considerably changed from original form); Congregational Church; First Baptist Church; St. Ann Church;
North Gore District 8 Schoolhouse	Moved from Merriam District to Joslin Park
Oxford Town Hall	also known as Memorial Hall, a memorial to Oxford veterans of the Civil War
Old High School Main St.	built around 1913 (may have been earlier)
Charles Larned Memorial Library	common name now is Oxford Free Pubic Library
<b>Commercial / Industrial</b>	
Krintzman Mill Route 12	in North Oxford on the French River, also known as Sibley Mill
water tower	metal
Blacksmith Shop and Toll House Sutton Ave. at Joe Jenny Rd.	toll house for central Boston-Hartford Turnpike built 1826.

Chaffee Bros. Co. Mill Complex Rt. 12	c. 1900
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	
Huguenot oak Huguenot Rd.	
Bartlett's Bridge Clara Barton Rd.	stone arch bridge over the French River NRI 2000
keystone bridge Rt. 12 at George St.	railroad bridge over French River
Stagecoach Rd. mile marker	Stone marker; moved to Larned Rd., placed in wrong place and in sun—deteriorating; other historic mile markers found throughout town
Maanexit ford Harwood St.	crosses French River Maanexit Dam may be located near the ford crossing
Markers and monuments to individuals, events	Includes Hartland Monument, Johnson Monument (Main St. near Johnson Lane, in memory of what was known as the Johnson Massacre, King Philip's War, 1676. Memorial erected 1929)
"Devil's Den" off Clara Barton Rd.	Probably the cave referred to as Clara Barton Cave. Reached from road to Lane Corp. using Stumpy Pond as a landmark
Lindbergh's Landing	Historic marker at S. end of town, on Marshall at turn of road
<b>Open Space/ Recreation/ Parks</b>	
<b>French River Corridor</b>	dams, gorges; trails in ACE land; waterfall, cave, hemlocks long west side of river associated with Clara Barton (not near Birthplace); corridor is one of most untapped town open space resources
<b>French Gardens</b> top of Fort Hill Rd.	Built into cliffs, very scenic (but not visible from road). Huguenots settled there, terraced the hillside for gardens in early 1700s. Private ownership.
Mid-State Trail Rocky Hill Rd.	Trail has old rights of passage with no legal status; effort to secure easements for trail's passage
Greenbriar Flood Control Area	ACE-owned land; floodplain and hiking trails
Lowes Pond	
Joslin Park Main St.	Includes memorials to veterans of Korean War and Vietnam War; 1872 North Gore District 8 Schoolhouse, Native American grinding stone, watering trough originally on corner (south side) of Main and Charlton
<b>Residential</b>	
<b>Buffalo Hill Farm</b> 90 Dana Rd.	summer home of Dr. Elliot Joslin, still in the family; Olmsted Bros. laid out drive and planting plan, double rows of oaks and lindens; beautiful views
Clara Barton Homestead Clara Barton Rd.	House built 1818; over 100 acres including summer camp. NRI 1977.

Clara Barton summer house	
Bartlett Houses 146 & 148 N. Main St	2 houses built 1890.
Allen L. Joslin house 345 Main St.	built 1866
Whittaker Mansion	
William Hudson Homestead Hudson Rd.	c. 1720; considered oldest home remaining in Oxford; NRI 1977.
Davis-Lovett House 99 Lovett Rd.	c. 1784; thought to be one of the earliest homes remaining from the English settlers
Davis-Bernon Farmhouse Lovett Rd. at Sutton Ave.	thought to be one of the earliest homes remaining from the English settlers; MHC inventory forms says it dates from 1857
19 <sup>th</sup> century homes on Main St.	Capt. Abijah Davis House (243 Main St., built 1814); Benjamin Paine House (259 Main St., built 1815);
19 <sup>th</sup> century homes on Charlton St.	residence (15 Charlton St., built 1835); residence (7 Charlton St., built 1846)
<b>Transportation</b>	
“corduroy” road	stretch of log roadbed at end of leading to Bug Swamp named Bug Swamp Rd. in Oxford, Eight Lots Rd. in Sutton
<b>Village</b> <i>Note – all of the villages listed below have MHC Area forms on file</i>	
Oxford Center	see also Civic/Institutional for details on Center
Larnedville	also known as Texas Village, Larned Village; Route 56 between Routes 20 and 12.
North Oxford	Along Route 12 from Leicester St. south to Depot St. including Clara Barton Rd. and 1 Old Depot Rd. Area includes Hawes Village/White Village at southernmost end
Howarth Village West Oxford north of Charlton St.	
Buffumville West Oxford south of Charlton St.	
North Common area	From Federal Hill Rd. south along Route 12 through Chaffee Bros. Mill Complex including Holman St.
Rochdale Wells and Watch Streetscape	

## APPENDIX B

### GUIDE TO PRESERVATION AND PLANNING TOOLS FOR HERITAGE LANDSCAPES

Preservation planning is a four-step process: **identification, evaluation, education** and **protection**. Within the realm of protection, there is a vast array of tools that communities can call upon and that are most effective when used in combination with one another. Stewardship of these resources involves education and community support, planning with a clear set of goals, and regulatory mechanisms.

Three useful documents to consult when planning preservation strategies are:

- ◆ Department of Conservation and Recreation, *Reading the Land*
- ◆ Massachusetts Historical Commission, *Survey Manual*
- ◆ Massachusetts Historical Commission, *Preservation through Bylaws and Ordinances*

The following eight sections – based on the Toolkit Basics – detail the resources and strategies available for heritage landscape preservation—from documentation and evaluation, to public education, to regulating activities and finding the revenue necessary to fund the effort.

#### 1. KNOW THE RESOURCES: INVENTORY

The vital first step in developing preservation strategies for heritage landscapes is to record information about the resources on MHC inventory forms. One cannot advocate for something unless one knows precisely what it is – the physical characteristics and the historical development.

Survey methodology has advanced since the early work of the 1980s. If a community had survey work done during that time period, it is time for an inventory update, looking at resources in a more comprehensive and connected way than may have been done at that time. Even if survey work is more recent, there may be a need to document more resources throughout the community.

Using the Massachusetts Historical Commission survey methodology:

- ◆ Compile a list of resources that are under-represented or not thoroughly researched, beginning with heritage landscapes.
- ◆ Document unprotected resources first, beginning with the most threatened resources.
- ◆ Make sure to document secondary features on rural and residential properties, such as outbuildings, stone walls and landscape elements.
- ◆ Record a wide range of historic resources including landscape features and industrial resources.
- ◆ Conduct a community-wide archaeological reconnaissance survey to identify patterns of prehistoric and historic occupation and to identify known and probable locations of archaeological resources associated with these patterns. Known and potential precontact and historic archaeological sites should be professionally field-checked to evaluate cultural associations and integrity. A professional archaeologist is one who meets the professional

qualifications (950 CMR 70.01) outlined in the State Archaeologist Permit Regulations (950 CMR 70.00).

**NOTE:** The Inventory of Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth contains sensitive information about archaeological sites. The inventory is confidential; it is not a public record (G.L. c. 9, ss. 26A (1)). Care should be taken to keep archaeological site information in a secure location with restricted access. Refer to the MHC article "Community-Wide Archaeological Surveys" which appeared in Preservation Advocate, Fall 2005, and which can be found at the following MHC link: <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcpdf/pafall05.pdf>.

## **2. GAIN RECOGNITION FOR THEIR SIGNIFICANCE: NATIONAL REGISTER LISTING**

Survey work includes evaluation of whether resources meet the qualifications for National Register listing. This will provide new information about the eligibility of properties. Using the information generated in the survey work and the accompanying National Register evaluations, expand your town's National Register program.

- ◆ Develop a National Register listing plan, taking into consideration a property's or area's integrity and vulnerability. Properties in need of recognition in order to advance preservation strategies should be given priority.

## **3. ENGAGE THE PUBLIC: OUTREACH, EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION**

The best stewards and advocates for heritage landscape protection are members of the community. There are many ways to communicate the importance of these special places to the public, and to connect their preservation with the shared values and goals that community members have already expressed in various planning documents and forums.

Think creatively about how to educate the community about the values and threats to heritage landscapes, and how each town resident benefits from these special places. Use a combination of strategies to get the word out about heritage landscapes and preservation of community character, including:

- ◆ **Festivals and Tours** – Tours are a great way to draw attention to the history around us, and to engage more people in caring for it. Consider hosting a Heritage Celebration Day including tours and family-friendly activities, or plan a celebration around a particular place or area on a meaningful date. Make sure events are well publicized.
- ◆ **Signage and Banners** – Signs are a very effective way to announce special historic sites and districts. Banners can also bring attention to the significance of an area and make a celebratory statement about its contribution to the town.
- ◆ **Written Materials** – Clear, concise and engaging written material with engaging illustrations is a reliable way to relay information about community character and heritage landscapes. Make use of fact sheets and flyers to get the word out on particular issues such as a town ordinance that protects heritage landscapes, a threat that needs to be addressed, or an upcoming event.
- ◆ **School Curricula** – Start teaching at a young age. Children are very receptive to engaging stories, and there are no better stories to excite childrens' imaginations and build pride of place than stories of their town's past and present. Teachers have an opportunity to connect history

with environmental issues through classroom study, hands-on history projects, and field exploration of a town's heritage landscapes. Subsequently, students have an opportunity to teach their parents that preservation is everybody's business.

- ◆ **Lectures and Workshops** – Use these forums to raise awareness, educate at a deeper level about the community's history and its resources, and broaden the base of interest.
- ◆ **Website** – Keep Historical Commission and local historical organizations' entries on the town's website current, and include information about issues, proposals for preservation strategies, and upcoming events.
- ◆ **Press Releases** – Use all avenues including press releases to keep the public informed when a meeting or event is about to occur. Work with local reporters to develop special interest articles that highlight landscape resources.

Remember that bringing an issue or a heritage landscape to people's attention once will have only short-term effect. Outreach, education and interpretation must be ongoing concerns that involve preservation and conservation interests, teachers and community organizations in repeated projects to attract and engage the general public.

#### **4. THINK IN CONTEXT: COMPREHENSIVE AND OPEN SPACE PLANNING**

Communities use a variety of planning exercises and documents to define their goals and vision of the future, address community-wide issues, and recommend measures to respond to them. There are state mandates for towns to prepare Comprehensive or Master Plans and Open Space and Recreation Plans.

- ◆ Comprehensive or Master Plans provide an important frame of reference for land use decisions, and incorporate all of a community's issues including economic development, housing and transportation into an integrated plan. Heritage landscapes need to be seen through the lenses of community character, historic preservation, environmental health, and economic viability and growth. Their future and the values they contribute should be addressed within these multiple perspectives, not solely as historical assets of the community.
- ◆ Like Comprehensive Plans, Open Space Plans look holistically at the community—its history, demographics and growth patterns, and current conditions—to make recommendations that protect open space and natural resources for ecological health and public benefits. The Heritage Landscape Inventory Program provides a framework for looking at these important resources, and this new understanding should be incorporated into Open Space Plans.

#### **5. DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS: THE POWER OF COLLABORATION**

Because heritage landscapes encompass such a broad range of resources and issues—from preservation of town centers, scenic roads and river corridors to promotion of smart growth and economic development – stewardship of these resources involves many interests in a community. It is essential that there be good communication between the many departments and committees that address issues related to heritage landscapes. Collaboration between public and private partners is also an essential element in a successful preservation strategy. National Heritage Corridor personnel are helpful guides to partnership opportunities for projects you may have in mind.

- ◆ Broaden the base. Preservation, particularly preservation of landscapes, is not just for the Historical Commission. It is important that the cause not be marginalized by those who view preservation as opposed to progress, or to personal interests. A look at DCR's *Reading the Land* shows the range of organizations and viewpoints that value heritage landscapes.
- ◆ Nurture public-private partnerships. Friends groups, neighborhood associations, and local land trusts all have important roles to play to spread the word, and to expand the capacity of the public sector to care for heritage landscapes.
- ◆ Take advantage of forums created to share issues and ideas. For instance, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources offers a "cluster" format for monthly discussion and information exchange meetings among area farmers.
- ◆ Share resources across communities. Towns that lack funding for a town planner position, for instance, have found that "sharing" a planner with another community can be quite effective.

## 6. DEFEND THE RESOURCES; LAWS, BYLAWS AND REGULATIONS

A wide range of laws, bylaws and regulations is available to protect heritage landscapes. Following are brief descriptions of some of the most widely used and/or most effective of these tools, arranged alphabetically.

### **Adaptive Reuse Overlay District**

An Adaptive Reuse Overlay District is superimposed on one or more established zoning districts in order to permit incentive-based reuses of existing built properties. These districts can be created to allow for the adaptive reuse of properties of a certain kind, or within a specified area within a community. As an overlay zone, all regulations pertaining to the underlying zone apply, except to the extent that the overlay zone modifies or provides for alternatives to the underlying requirements.

### **Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR)**

This program, managed by the Department of Agricultural Resources, offers to pay farmers the difference between the "fair market value" and the "agricultural value" of farmland located on prime agricultural soils, in exchange for a permanent deed restriction which precludes any use of the property that will have a negative impact on its agricultural viability. This program is different from the *Chapter 61* program, which provides tax incentives for short term restrictions.

### **Community Preservation Act**

The Community Preservation Act is statewide enabling legislation that allows communities to assemble funds for historic preservation, open space protection and affordable housing through a local property tax surcharge (up to 3%, with some allowable exemptions) and state matching funds. These funds can support a wide variety of activities, including inventory and documentation of historic resources, restoration and acquisition.

### **Conservation Restrictions (CR)**

A permanent deed restriction between a landowner and a holder - usually a public agency or a private land trust; whereby the grantor agrees to limit the use of his/her property for the purpose of protecting certain conservation values in exchange for tax benefits. EOEEA's Division of Conservation Services provides assistance to landowners, municipalities, and land trusts regarding conservation restrictions and has produced *The Massachusetts Conservation Restriction Handbook* as a guide to drafting conservation restrictions.



### **Corridor Protection Overlay District**

A Corridor Protection Overlay District is intended to promote appropriate development within a given corridor, serving to protect natural (and sometimes cultural) resources. As an overlay zone, all regulations pertaining to the underlying zone apply, except to the extent that the overlay zone modifies or provides for alternatives to the underlying requirements. The Corridor Protection Overlay District can be used cooperatively by adjoining communities to help maintain continuous protection across town lines.

### **Demolition Delay Bylaw**

With a Demolition Delay Bylaw, requests for a permit to demolish a historic building must first be reviewed and approved by the local historical commission. Demolition Delay Bylaws are either list-based (applying only to a specific list of buildings that have been previously identified), age based (applying to all buildings that are older than a certain age – typically 50 years), or categorical (applying only to resources that meet a specific criteria, such as having been documented on Massachusetts Historical Commission forms). If the historical commission does not approve of the demolition and deems a structure significant, it can impose a delay period, during which time the property owner is encouraged to explore alternatives to demolition. Delay periods of 6 months are common, although communities are increasingly adopting delay periods of up to one year.

### **Design Review**

Design Review is a non-regulatory process that is undertaken by a town appointed Design Review Board. The board reviews the design of new construction and additions – typically those taking place in already built-up areas. Recommendations are made to the planning board to help preserve appropriate building patterns and architectural styles, with the goal of maintaining the overall character of a given area. Design Review Boards often limit their review to exterior architectural features, site design and signage.

### **Downtown Revitalization Zoning**

Downtown Revitalization Zoning seeks to encourage businesses to locate in downtowns. Zoning of this nature is typically written to be attractive to businesses of a certain kind that would work well within the given infrastructure and transportation needs, but can also incorporate some of the same elements as Village Center Zoning (see below), such as encouraging mixed use development at a pedestrian-friendly scale, with minimal setbacks and offsite parking.

### **Flexible Development Zoning**

Flexible Development Zoning allows for greater flexibility and creativity when subdividing land, to conform and work with the natural and cultural resources of a site and minimize alteration or damage to these resources, rather than follow standard requirements of subdivision regulations. While this does not prevent land from being subdivided, it does allow for the protection of some features, serves to preserve some undeveloped land, and promotes better overall site planning.

### **Local Historic Districts (LHD)**

LHDs recognize special areas within a community where the distinctive characteristics of buildings and their settings are preserved. They offer the strongest form of protection available for historic resources. LHDs are administered by a Local Historic District Commission (distinct from the community's Local Historical Commission), which reviews proposed exterior changes to buildings within the district. The kinds of changes that are reviewed vary according to the terms of the local bylaw.

### **Neighborhood Architectural Conservation Districts (NCD)**

Neighborhood Architectural Conservation Districts (sometimes known as Neighborhood Conservation Districts) are local initiatives that recognize special areas within a community where the distinctive characteristics of the neighborhood are important. They are less restrictive than Local Historic Districts in that they focus on a few key architectural elements and massing, scale, and setback in an effort to embrace overall neighborhood character. As in Local Historic Districts, changes are reviewed by a Neighborhood Architectural Conservation District Commission.

### **Open Space Zoning**

Open Space Zoning – also known as Cluster Development Bylaw, Open Space Communities Zoning, Open Space Development Overlay District, Open Space Preservation Subdivision, or Open Space Residential Development – allows greater density than would otherwise be permitted on a parcel, in an effort to preserve open space. Typically, construction is limited to half of the parcel, while the remaining land is permanently protected under a conservation restriction.

### **Rate of Development Bylaw**

A town may slow the rate of its growth within reasonable time limits to allow the community to engage in planning and preparation for growth. This measure must be used for the purpose of conducting studies and planning for rational development, and not for restraining the rate of growth for a period of unlimited duration.

### **Right to Farm Bylaw**

A Right to Farm Bylaw asserts the rights of farmers to pursue agricultural activities, provides community support for farming activities and requires dispute resolution so that abutters cannot make nuisance claims. Agricultural landscapes are widely considered to be significant heritage landscapes for which there is constant concern of potential development. This bylaw serves to help active farmers remain just that - active.

### **Scenic Overlay District Zoning**

Scenic Overlay District Zoning protects scenic vistas by providing for a no-disturb buffer on private lands, thereby helping to maintain specific viewpoints. This type of zoning is more far-reaching than a Scenic Roads Bylaw (see below) and may be applied to numbered routes.

### **Scenic Roads Bylaw**

The Scenic Roads Bylaw requires that a public hearing be held prior to the removal of any trees or stone walls that fall within the public right of way on a designated scenic road. Depending on how it is written, the bylaw may apply to a predetermined list of roads or encompass all roads in a community (other than numbered routes). The bylaw applies whenever there is any public or private impact to trees or stone walls within the right of way, including activities such as road widening, utility company work or creating private driveways.

### **Scenic Vista Protection Bylaw**

Scenic Vista Protection Bylaws require additional design criteria for any proposals for new construction in areas that are determined by the town to be a scenic vista. Vistas may encompass natural, cultural and historic features.

### **Shade Tree Act**

The Shade Tree Act is a part of MGL Chapter 87, which defines all trees within the public way as public shade trees. The municipal Tree Warden is responsible for the care, maintenance and protection of all public shade trees (except those along state highways). Trimming or removal of any public shade trees greater than 1.5” in diameter requires a public hearing. Chapter 87 applies to all communities; however,

some communities have adopted their own Shade Tree Act Bylaws that provide stricter regulations than those mandated in Chapter 87.

### **Site Plan Review**

Site Plan Review provides the planning board (and other boards and committees, depending how the bylaw is written) with an opportunity to consider a variety of community concerns – such as impacts to vehicular circulation, scenic vistas, topography and natural resources – during the permit process. Boards may comment on site plans and request changes to the design. Site Plan Review is typically limited to large scale projects and tied to the special permit process.

### **Smart Growth Zoning – Chapter 40R**

Smart Growth Zoning (Chapter 40R) provides financial rewards to communities that adopt special overlay zoning districts allowing as-of-right high density residential development in areas near transit stations, areas of concentrated development, or areas that are suitable for residential or mixed use development. Such zoning can help direct compact growth to areas that are already developed – such as historic village centers – thereby discouraging growth in less suitable areas.

### **Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)**

TDR is a regulatory technique that allows a landowner to separate building or development rights from the property and sell them, receiving compensation for preserving land and allowing for the development to occur in areas selected for higher density projects. In essence, development rights are "transferred" from one district (the "sending district") to another (the "receiving district"). As a result, development densities are shifted within the community to achieve both open space preservation and economic goals without changing overall development potential.

### **Village Center Zoning**

The goal of Village Center Zoning is to meet the needs of a small-scale, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly area by encouraging compact development. New construction is required to be built at a scale that is compatible with the neighborhood and to have a reduced (or no) setback from the street. Parking may be directed to discourage large lots in front of buildings. Village Center Zoning shares many similarities with Traditional Neighborhood Development, and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably.

### **Wetlands Protection Act and Bylaws**

The Wetlands Protection Act (MGL Chapter 131, Section 40) protects wetlands by requiring a careful review by local conservation commissions of proposed work that may alter wetlands. The law also protects floodplains, riverfront areas, land under water bodies, waterways, salt ponds, fish runs and the ocean. Communities may also adopt their own Wetlands Protection Bylaw, providing stricter regulations than those mandated in Chapter 131.

## **7. UTILIZE THE EXPERTS: TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

Beyond DCR and the Heritage Corridor, technical assistance is available from many governmental and non-profit sources, most often free of charge to municipalities and non-profit organizations.

- ◆ [American Farmland Trust](#): Clearinghouse of information supporting farmland protection and stewardship.
- ◆ [Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission](#): The regional planning agency charged with assisting communities with local planning efforts in this region.

- ◆ [Citizen Planner Training Collaborative](#): Provides local planning and zoning officials with training opportunities and online information; they also hold an annual conference to support land use planning.
- ◆ [Green Valley Institute](#): Provides technical assistance about land use planning to communities within the Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor. Web site and publications contain information of use to communities throughout the region.
- ◆ [Massachusetts Historical Commission](#): Provides technical assistance as well as grants to municipalities and nonprofits for preservation planning and restoration projects.
- ◆ [New England Small Farm Institute](#): A non-profit dedicated to providing technical assistance, information and training to farmers.
- ◆ [The Trustees of Reservations](#): Offers conservation and landscape protection workshops, publications and connections through the **Putnam Conservation Institute**. The Trustees also manages a unique **Conservation Buyer Program** that links interested sellers with conservation-minded buyers and assists with establishing permanent property protection mechanisms.
- ◆ [Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources](#) is the state agency dedicated to supporting the agricultural activities in the state through special initiatives, programs and technical assistance.
- ◆ [The Trust for Public Land](#) is a national non-profit that assists municipalities with land conservation efforts.
- ◆ DCR's [Lakes and Ponds Program](#) works with local groups and municipalities to protect, manage and restore these valuable aquatic resources. They provide technical assistance to communities and citizen groups, help to monitor water quality at various public beaches to ensure public safety, and provide educational materials to the public about a range of lake issues.
- ◆ [Massachusetts Agricultural Commissions](#) has recently launched a new website that includes helpful information both for communities with Agricultural Commissions and for those learning more about forming one.
- ◆ [UMASS extension \(NREC\)](#)– Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation) can provide assistance on issues related to land and water resource protection, smart growth/sustainability measures and forestry and farming management.

## 8. PAY THE BILL: FUNDING PRESERVATION

Funding for preservation projects is an important aspect of implementing strategies to protect heritage landscapes. There are local, state, regional, national and non-profit funding programs and resources that can assist communities in preservation and land conservation-related issues. The availability of such assistance varies from year to year and private property is not always eligible for funding. Examples include:

### Local Funding Assistance

- ◆ Towns that have adopted the **Community Preservation Act (CPA)** find it to be an excellent funding source for many heritage landscape projects. While tricky to pass in lean economic times, the number and types of projects that are benefiting across the Commonwealth makes the CPA worthy of consideration. Such projects include MHC inventory, National Register nominations, cemetery preservation, open space acquisition and preservation and restoration of public buildings. The CPA (M.G.L. Chapter 44B) establishes a mechanism by which cities and towns can develop a fund dedicated to historic preservation, open space and affordable housing. Local funds are collected

through a 0.5% to 3% surcharge on each annual real estate tax bill. At the state level, the Commonwealth has established a dedicated fund which is used to match the municipality's collections under the CPA. The amount of the surcharge is determined by ballot vote at a local election.

Adoption of the Community Preservation Act, by a majority vote on a ballot question, fosters **partnerships** among historic preservationists, conservationists and affordable housing advocates. At least 10% of the funds must be used to preserve historic resources; at least 10% must be used to protect open space; and at least 10% must be used to advance affordable housing. The remaining 70% must be used for one of these three uses as well as recreational needs and can be distributed in varying proportions depending upon the projects that the city or town believes are appropriate and beneficial to the municipality. Additional information about the CPA can be found at [www.communitypreservation.org](http://www.communitypreservation.org).

- ◆ Municipalities can establish **land acquisition funds**, increasing their revenue from sources such as an annual fixed line item in the municipal budget; income from forestry, farming and leasing of town-owned land; gifts and bequests; grants and foundation funding; and passage of the CPA, detailed above.

### State Funding Assistance

Funding for a variety of preservation projects, primarily for municipalities and non-profit, is available through the [Massachusetts Historical Commission \(MHC\)](#), the EOEEA [Division of Conservation Services](#) (DCS), the [Department of Conservation and Recreation](#) (DCR) and other state agencies. Further information on these programs is available on the agency websites.

- ◆ **MHC Survey and Planning Grants** support survey, National Register and a wide variety of preservation planning projects.
- ◆ The **Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF)**, administered through the MHC, funds restoration and rehabilitation projects.
- ◆ Towns that have a local historic district bylaw may apply for **Certified Local Government (CLG)** status which is granted by the National Park Service (NPS) through the MHC. At least 10% of the MHC's yearly federal funding allocation is distributed to CLG communities through Survey and Planning matching grants. To become a CLG, the town completes an application; after being accepted as a CLG, it files a report yearly on the status of applications, meetings, and decisions; in return the town may apply for the matching grant funding that the MHC awards competitively to CLGs annually. Presently 18 cities and towns in Massachusetts are CLGs. **NOTE:** CLG status is dependent in part on a municipality having at least one Local Historical District as evidence of the community's commitment to historic preservation.

Open Space Plans, with a requirement of updating the plan every five years, make a community eligible for **Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) grants** and technical assistance programs through the Department of Conservation Services.

- ◆ The [Massachusetts Self-Help Program](#) of DCS assists local conservation commissions in acquiring land for the purposes of natural and cultural resource protection and passive outdoor recreation.

- ◆ The [Massachusetts Urban Self-Help Program](#), another DCS initiative, is geared toward assisting towns and cities in acquiring and developing land for park and outdoor recreation purposes.
- ◆ DCS [Conservation Partnership Grants](#) assist non-profits in acquiring interests in land for conservation or recreation, and have also been used in the past to help protect active agricultural lands.
- ◆ The [Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund](#), distributed through the DCS, can support heritage landscape protection by providing up to 50% of the total project cost for the acquisition or renovation of park, recreation or conservation areas. Municipalities, special districts and state agencies are eligible to apply.

The **Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)** administers a variety of grant programs that can help with heritage landscape preservation:

- ◆ [Urban and Community Forestry](#) grants fund projects which will result in sustained improvements in local capacity for excellent urban and community forestry management.
- ◆ The [Recreational Trails Grant](#) Program provides funding on a reimbursement basis for a variety of recreational trail protection, construction, and stewardship projects.

The **Department of Agricultural Resources** [Farm Viability Enhancement Program](#) works with farmers to develop sound business plans and funding assistance to implement them.

### **Regional and Non-Profit Funding Assistance**

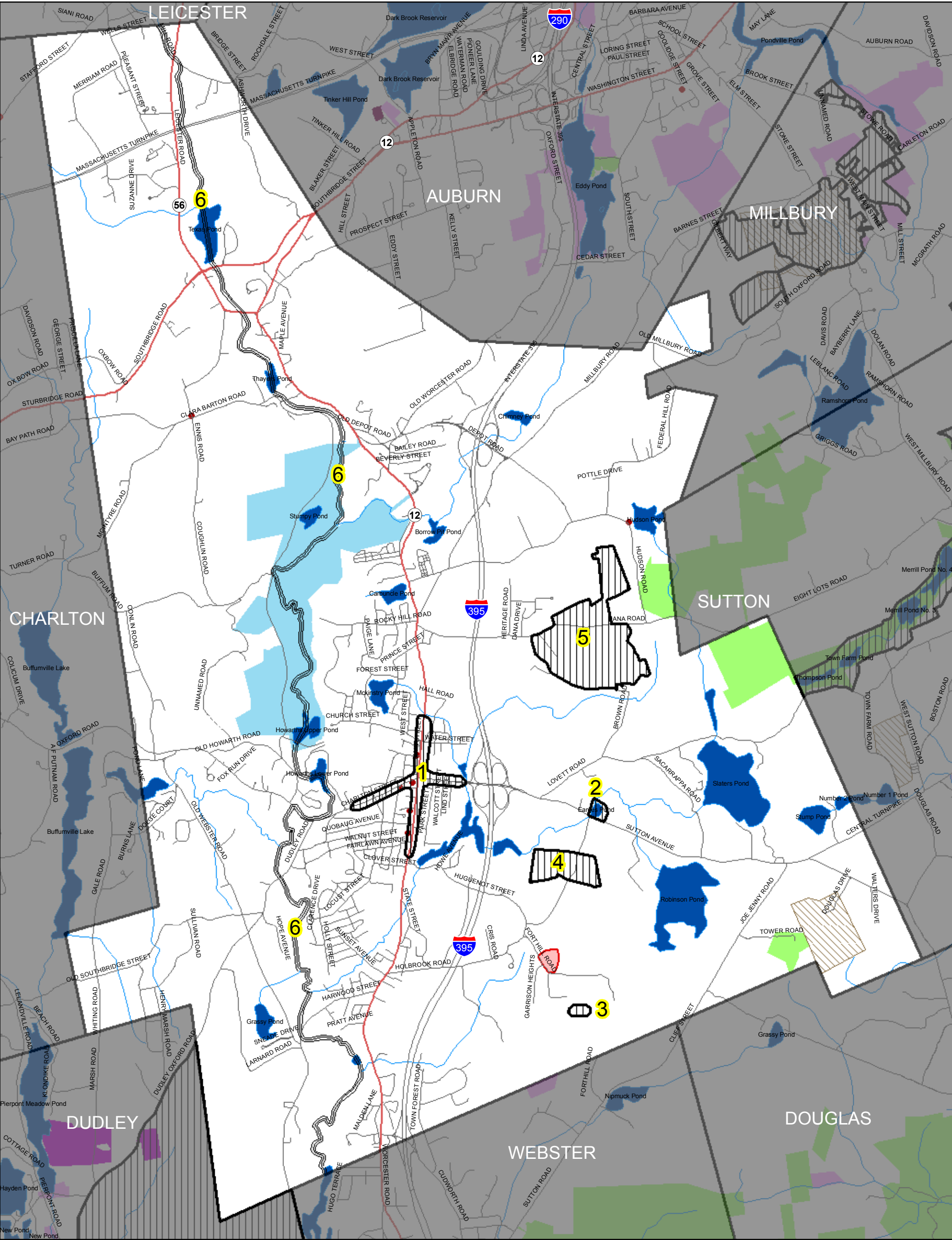
- ◆ The [John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission's Heritage Partnership Program](#) supports projects in corridor towns that further the Corridor goals of historic preservation, community revitalization, ecological restoration, land use planning, riverway development and educating people about the Valley's heritage. Communities and organizations located within the Corridor are eligible to receive funding, subject to availability.
- ◆ [Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers National Heritage Corridor](#) provides mini-grants to member towns, supporting preservation of heritage landscapes including projects involving sustainable agriculture, river clean-ups, open space planning and natural resource conservation.
- ◆ The [Greater Worcester Community Foundation](#) provides grants to non-profit organizations for community enhancements.
- ◆ [The Trust for Public Land](#) (TPL) is a national, nonprofit, land conservation organization that conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, community gardens, historic sites, rural lands and other natural places. TPL helps communities identify and prioritize lands to be protected; secure financing for conservation; and structure, negotiate and complete land transactions. TPL's New England Office recently launched the [Worcester County Conservation Initiative](#), to accelerate the pace of land conservation in central Massachusetts by helping communities plan and finance conservation projects.

- ◆ The [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#) offers a variety of financial assistance programs. Based on the availability of funding, the National Trust awards more than \$2 million in grants and loans each year for preservation projects nationwide.
- ◆ The [Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission \(CMRPC\)](#) does not administer grants, but can work with communities to write grants or help them find funding.

### **Federal Funding Assistance**

- ◆ The [Farmland and Ranchland Protection Program](#) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture has protected 85 farms to date in Massachusetts on 6,335 acres with matching funds. Eligible organizations are federally recognized Indian tribes, states, local government, and non-governmental organizations. They are required to provide 50-50 matching funds for purchase of conservation easements in land with prime, productive soils that are subject to a pending offer, for the purpose of limiting conversion to non-agricultural uses of the land.
- ◆ All of the communities within the Blackstone Heritage Corridor have been designated [Preserve America](#) communities, making them eligible to receive technical assistance and matching grants related to heritage tourism. Eligible grant activities include research, documentation (e.g., historic resource surveys and National Register nominations), interpretation and education (e.g., signage, exhibits and itineraries), planning, marketing and training. (Communities within the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor may want to pursue Preserve America designation in order to take advantage of these funding opportunities.)
- ◆ The National Park Service's [Rivers & Trails Program](#) provides technical assistance to community groups and government agencies so they can conserve rivers, preserve open space, and develop trails and greenways. The program does not offer grants, but can provide staff to help identify needs, assist partners in navigating the planning process, and help with organizational development and capacity building. The program can serve as a catalyst for successful trail development and conservation efforts.





# OXFORD

# HERITAGE LANDSCAPE INVENTORY













Priority Landscapes



- 1. Oxford Center
- 2. Eames Pond Mill Site
- 3. French Gardens
- 4. Casavant Farm
- 5. Buffalo Hill Farm
- 6. French River Corridor

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NOTE RE BOUNDARIES: Priority Landscape outlines are not legal parcel boundaries; they indicate local focus of concern. All other GIS data were obtained from MassGIS and may not include 2007 updates.

 Priority Landscape  
 Linear Priority Landscape  
 State Register of Historic Places  
 State Register of Historic Districts  
 Major Road  
 Road  
 Agricultural Preservation Restriction  
 Commonwealth of Massachusetts Lands  
 Non-Profit  
 Federal  
 Municipal  
 Land Trust

0

0.45

0.9 Miles