



Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

Heritage Landscape Inventory Program

Westport

Reconnaissance Report

Prepared for
The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
by
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December 2001

MASSACHUSETTS HERITAGE LANDSCAPE INVENTORY WESTPORT RECONNAISSANCE REPORT

PLANNING ISSUES

Need. Unprecedented growth in residential property as evidenced by the 175 new single residence lots created by seven subdivisions and 49 Approval Not Required (ANR) lots as well as the 72 units created through a comprehensive permit, all in 2000, puts pressure on all of Westport's services and highlights the need for planning and protection of the developable farm land. The recent EOEA build out study predicts that there are over 20,000 acres that are potential house sites. I-195 crosses the northern part of Westport and provides easy access to New Bedford and Fall River in only a few minutes as well as Providence which is 26 miles northwest. In this northern section are a number of small farms that are vulnerable to development pressures.

Resources and Documentation. The Master Plan Update Committee has been convened since 1998 and recently hired Beals and Thomas to assist in preparing the Master Plan Update. The recently formed Agricultural Commission is considering the Community Preservation Act and Executive Order 418. The historic resource inventory includes documentation of 808 individual resources and 9 areas. Most of the survey work was completed in the late 1980s. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places is the Westport Point District with 263 resources of which 87 are protected by Chapter 40-C, local historic district legislation. The MHC Westport Reconnaissance Survey Report of 1981 and the 1997 Proposed Historic Preservation Plan. Other village centers have been determined eligible for National Register listing by MHC staff.

Planning Issues. Planning issues and protection of community character in Westport are focused on the future of scenic and historically significant farms and water vistas along the two rivers, harbor, and sea, and a couple of the small village centers with water related activities. Agricultural landscapes, particularly working farms, are a dominant part of the community character and for this reason land use planning for these resources as well as financial programs are high on the list of preservation technology for this type of resource.

SITE VISIT REPORT – August 7, 2001

The purpose of the meeting was to review the list of potential heritage landscapes prepared by the town and to conduct a windshield survey. The preliminary list of landscapes was compiled by the Local Project Coordinator and members of the Historical Commission, the Historical Society and the Planning Board at a brainstorming meeting. Unlike most towns, Westport chose to be as inclusive as possible rather than submitting only a limited number of sites. A total of 28 forms were submitted which were organized by resource category.

1. SCENIC ROADS

The town place great value on scenic roads, which they believe are a defining element of the community. They value the winding roadways, varied stone walls, adjacent open fields and agricultural uses, older homes, and in some cases distant views towards the river or harbor. Eight scenic roads were identified:

Sodom Road from Charlotte White Road to Adamsville Road

Main Road from just below Central Village south to Westport Point

Drift Road entire length

Horseneck Road from Hixbridge Road to the coast at East Beach Road

Pine Hill Road old and new sections

Gifford Road from Route 6 to Old County Road

Adamsville Road state to Main Road

Hix Bridge Road from Main Road to Dartmouth line

2. SCENIC WATERWAYS

The second essential characteristic of Westport is that it is a coastal town bisected by the east and west branches of the Westport River. Perhaps its best known feature for those outside the community is Horseneck Beach, a large oceanfront beach owned by the state. Issues associated with the waterway are: pollution, development, commercial fishing, water activities and use conflicts. The two branches of the river are analogous in many ways to the scenic roads, both in terms of their importance to the community and the rapid changes that are occurring. The river is visible from many parts of town. Westport Point and the town wharf lie at the intersection of the two branches which forms Westport Harbor at the mouth of Buzzards Bay.

Westport River (East Branch) – Wide tidal river through eastern part of town, extending all the way up to Head of Westport.

Westport River (West Branch) – Shorter and less active branch of the river extending from the harbor to the Gray's Mill site at the Westport-Little Compton (RI) line.

3. VILLAGES

Head of Westport – Primarily residential area with 19th century homes, town landing and Bell Schoolhouse. Could be a historic district.

Factory Village – An industrial village with very little historic fabric left.

The Narrows – Off Route 6 near Fall River, largely destroyed when I-95 was constructed.

Westport Point – At harbor, where town pier is located. Water oriented village already listed on the National Register and designated a Local Historic District. (Note: this was not included in the town list because it is considered protected.)

4. AGRICULTURAL PROPERTIES

Westport retains an unusually high amount of agriculture for a southeastern Massachusetts community. The diversity of the farms is also unusual – ranging from potatoes to dairies to corn to orchards to nurseries to vineyards. There are also many farms whose acreage is protected by APRs and a large number of Chapter 61A farms. Farms identified as either significant or threatened include the following:

Samson Potato Farm and other farms in north part of town – Blossom Road

Santos Farm – Main Road

Smith Family Orchard – Drift Road

Farm on Devol Pond

Town Farm was also discussed.

5. RESIDENTIAL

Former Cuffee Homestead – Although listed on the National Register and as a National Historic Landmark (1974) as the Paul Cuffee Homestead at 1504 Drift Road, there is some debate about the actual location of the Cuffee homestead.

Clifford Ashley Property – 53-acre gentleman's farm with outbuildings

6. INDUSTRIAL

Gray's Grist Mill and Pond – shingled 19th century mill and adjacent pond

Gifford Grist Mill – not visited

Remains of old stone factory on Route 6 – not visited

7. COMMERCIAL

Town Pier - the center of marine related activities in Westport at the Point.

Ice Houses – no longer extant

8. FUNERARY

Cemeteries and Native American burial grounds – There are 50-60 burial grounds in town, some maintained by the town.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Preliminary List of Sites Recommended For Further Study

The following sites are recommended for intensive study:

- Drift Road or Sodom Road
- Head of Westport
- East Branch of Westport River
- A farm to be selected in consultation with town's Agricultural Commission

This recommendation is based on site visits and discussion with Westport's Town Planner and members of the Master Plan Committee.

10/26/01