

The Landscape of Opportunity Symposium Action Agenda

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Introduction

The Landscape of Opportunity Symposium was the culminating element of the Essex County Reconnaissance Survey, an inventory of the region's heritage landscapes undertaken jointly by the Essex National Heritage Commission (ENHC) and Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) as part of DCR's statewide Heritage Landscape Inventory (HLI) Program.

Twenty-four of Essex County's 34 communities participated in the yearlong inventory, which was designed to assist and unite local land conservation and historic preservation efforts. Over 300 residents attended local identification meetings and the inventory's team of professional consultants conducted fieldwork in all participating communities. In all, over 1,300 heritage landscapes were documented, resulting in the largest such undertaking in Massachusetts since 1982.

Symposium Goals and Objectives

The goal of the day was to create an action agenda relating to the preservation and development of heritage resources. The Action Agenda presented below will serve as the basis for initiating further dialogue with state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and local officials on ways to meet the challenges faced by resource advocates. Specific symposium objectives were:

- To engage session panelists and audience participants equally in the task of creating an action agenda
- To exchange and discuss ideas regarding tools and strategies
- To match specific, clearly articulated action items closely with specific Issues & Opportunities that were identified by panelists prior to the symposium

Symposium Format

Following opening remarks, an overview presentation of the Essex County Reconnaissance Survey, and a keynote presentation by Douglas Foy, Secretary of the Office for Commonwealth Development, attendees participated in two of the symposium's six resource specific focus sessions. These resource types were selected for in-depth discussion due to the frequency with which they appeared as landscapes of importance and concern to a majority of the communities participating in the Essex County Reconnaissance Survey:

- A. City and Town Centers**
- B. Managed Landscapes: Estates and Institutional Campuses**
- C. The Waters Edge I: Coastal Resources**
- D. Working Farms**
- E. Transportation Routes: Scenic Roads, Highways Former Rail Corridors**
- F. The Waters Edge II: Rivers and Ponds**

A moderator and panelists led each session. Discussion was guided by the Issues & Opportunities (see appendix) that were developed prior to the symposium by the panel and was designed to elicit action recommendations from the group. What follows is a synopsis of the discussions that occurred during these six sessions relative to the creation of an agenda for action.

Considered a “living document,” readers are requested to augment the current action agenda by submitting ideas for additional resources (web links to pertinent organizations, programs, laws, and published reports). Please send recommended links to Bill Steelman.

A. City and Town Centers

City and town centers in Massachusetts can range from a single civic building to bustling commercial centers, but each serves as the heart of a community. Central to defining community character, city and town centers offer unique challenges and opportunities for incorporating preservation and development into economic growth strategies. Other issues and opportunities that were identified that relate to city and town centers included: problems building consensus and the need to increase awareness about preservation tools. During the resulting discussion, some of the key action steps that were identified included:

1. Create a shared vision of the community by establishing an effective, inclusive process leading to an understanding and identification of the character defining attributes and features of the center of the community. Recommended resources:

- Town of Ipswich
- Environmental Protection Agency: Green Communities

2. Creatively apply existing preservation tools to encourage mixed use in town centers. Recommended resources:

- Team Haverhill
- MA Historical Commission: Publications

3. Develop a city and town center “business plan” based on sound guidelines and regional efforts while fostering leadership, civic engagement, and public education.

Recommended resources:

- MA Department of Housing and Community Development: Business Improvement Districts

4. Encourage the appropriate rehabilitation through promotion of federal and state tax credits. Recommended resources:

- MA Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit
- Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives

B. Managed Landscapes: Estates and Institutional Campuses

The HLI in Essex County identified managed landscapes ranging from coastal summer retreats with artfully designed grounds to sprawling institutional campuses. In many communities, residential, educational, religious, medical and recreational landscapes are central to local identity but are out of local control. Change involving large expanses of open space challenges communities to address hard issues of community character, conservation, development, appropriate planning tools, and funding.

Issues and opportunities relating to managed landscapes focused on the high cost of land and increasing pressures for development, but also explored complex legal issues and the need for proactive planning. During the resulting discussion, some of the essential action steps identified included:

1. Encourage local adoption of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to help fund protection efforts. Recommended resources:
 - Community Preservation Act

2. Proactively address potential land sales through inventory, mapping, and value assessments (natural, historic, economic, community). Recommended resources:
 - MA Department of Conservation and Recreation: Historic Landscape Preservation Initiative
 - Essex County Forum: A Guide for Creating a Municipal Open Space Inventory

3. Proactively understand and address landowner needs through both a public and private process. This may entail establishing local committees, designating private or nonprofit landowner liaisons, and conducting outreach forums on a range of pertinent subjects to increase awareness of conservation options. Recommended resources:
 - The Trustees of Reservations: Resource Library
 - The Trustees of Reservations: Techniques
 - The Trust for Public Land: Conservation Services
 - MA Executive Office of Environmental Affairs: Division of Conservation Services

4. Advocate for the legislative reform of state land use laws. Recommended resources:
 - Massachusetts Zoning Reform
 - Massachusetts Land Use Reform Act

5. Adopt appropriate local bylaws, such as the Great Estate bylaw utilized by Ipswich. Recommended resources:
 - Town of Ipswich Zoning Bylaw
 - Town of Stockbridge Estates Bylaw: Working Group

C. The Waters Edge I: Coastal Resources

Coastal heritage landscapes are the combination of exemplary natural resources – estuaries, beaches, marshland – and features that evolved from man’s accretions to these

resources – wharves, shipyards, navigational markers and recreational ways. Our innate desire to live in or have access to the coastal region poses challenges related to scenic values, private property rights, public access, and the health of a critically important ecosystem.

Issues identified by the panelists for discussion included environmental degradation, public access, greenfield developments, harbor development, and issues of technical assistance. Actions that were identified that can be taken to address some of these challenges include:

1. Verify, record and disseminate information on public ways, access, and parking. Promote utilization of the Chapter 91 process to insure public access. Recommended resources:

- Massachusetts Audubon: North Shore Conservation Advocacy Office

2. Use the Chapter 91 process and other legal tools to clarify and resolve issues of public/private development, particularly as they relate to preservation issues.

Recommended resources:

- General Laws of Massachusetts: Chapter 91 Waterways
- MA Department of Environmental Protection: Water and Wetlands
- MA Office of Coastal Zone Management

3. Increase educational opportunities for community leaders and residents about how development (good and bad) and conservation within the community directly impacts the quality of the coastal environment. Recommended resources:

- MA Public Access Board

4. Encourage proactive planning measures and utilization of zoning tools to control and direct appropriate growth and thereby reduce subsequent environmental degradation.

Recommended resources:

- MA Office for Commonwealth Development
- MA Office for Commonwealth Development: Smart Growth Toolkit
- Metropolitan Area Planning Council: Smart Growth Principals

D. Working Farms

Much of the Essex County landscape was once devoted to agriculture. From small family farms to large dairy productions, the working farm was once a common sight in every community. Surviving resources include farm complexes of house, barns, silos and fields as well as single purpose outbuildings. Stewards of an enduring historic and economic legacy, today's farmers struggle in the face of competitive markets, stringent regulations, disagreeable neighbors, and misunderstanding about what it takes to earn a living from the land.

Panelists created a list of Issues & Opportunities to help guide the discussion including education, economics, regulation and taxation. Many of these came back to the

promotion of the formation of Local Agricultural Commissions in each community. The resulting agenda that was developed included:

1. Encourage support for local farms through educational efforts about the benefits of buying locally grown products, its tie in to open space conservation, and promotion of local farms through websites, logos, etc. Recommended resources:

- BuyFresh.Org
- MA Department of Agriculture Resources

2. Agriculture should be treated as economic development - and promoted as such to planners and residents - and supported by local zoning. Recommended resources:

- Model Right to Farm Bylaw
- MA Department of Agricultural Resources: Farm Viability Enhancement Program
- MA Department of Agricultural Resources: Agricultural Business Training Program

3. Encourage creation of agricultural commissions to ensure farm issues are given voice in local planning and protection efforts. Promote adoption of the Community Preservation Act and use funds to protect agricultural landscapes. Recommended resources:

- Community Preservation Act
- MA Department of Agricultural Resources: Agricultural Commissions

4. Create or modify local, state, and federal financial incentives, such as the state's 61A program and the state/federal rehabilitation tax credits, to further benefited agricultural land protection. Recommended resources:

- The Pilgrim Resource Conservation Development Area Council, Inc.

E. Transportation Routes: Scenic Roads, Highways and Former Rail Corridors

Every community in Massachusetts has been shaped by transportation corridors and influenced over time by changing technologies. Scenic roads and their associated trees, stone walls, mile markers and view sheds are important in defining a sense of place. Historic highways/routes and surviving infrastructure (i.e. bridges) are also central to a community's character as are old railroad corridors. This category also includes those roads more slowly traveled, such as walking and equestrian trails. More than ribbons of asphalt and steel, these linear pathways of necessity and commerce possess intrinsic historic qualities worthy of preservation and enhancement.

Panelists assembled a range of issues for this session. Highway standards, zoning, policy, and education were identified as the major themes for discussion. Priority action items identified to address these issues include:

1. Improve design standards, including promotion of the upcoming, revised Massachusetts highway design manual and utilization of context sensitive design. Recommended resources:

- MassHighway: Project Development and Design Guidebook

2. Need to reform state zoning code to amend "approval not required" laws.

Recommended resources:

- Massachusetts Land Use Reform Act
- HistoricRoads.org
- Putnam Conservation Institute: ANRs and Ancient Ways Booklet

3. Investigate alternative uses to existing transportation corridors such as the conversion of former railroad rights-of-way into non-motorized, multi-use paths. Recommended resources:

- Trail and Greenways Clearinghouse

4. Increase the visibility and influence of the Massachusetts Highway Department's Task Force on Historic and Rural Roads and promote greater awareness of its Footprint Roads Pilot Program. Recommended resources:

- MA Highway Department: Footprint Roads Pilot Program
- Scenic Road Designations: Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40: Section 15C

F. The Waters Edge II: Rivers and Ponds

This session focused on two of the many natural resources that contribute to community character. Although rivers and ponds are the most common, other natural resources such as lakes, geological features, meadows, and woodlots can also play a major role in many heritage landscapes.

Panelists created a list of Issues & Challenges prior to the Symposium that the session moderator used to guide discussion. The issues related to Rivers and Ponds included water quality and quantity, habitat quality and biodiversity, awareness and education, funding, regulation and access. Actions that can be taken to address these issues include:

1. Improve water quality and quantity by promoting low-impact development, advocate for retrofitting existing structures to better handle stormwater runoff, and development of guidelines and training for appropriate methods of management of road salt run-off.

Recommended resources:

- MA Office for Commonwealth Development
- Smart Growth Toolkit Low Impact Development
- MA Riverways Program
- MA Department of Environmental Protection: Water and Wetlands

2. Promote habitat quality and biodiversity by linking these outcomes with other desired goals such as economic development and public access. Recommended resources:

- MA Department of Conservation and Recreation: Lakes and Ponds Program
- MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife: Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program

3. Advocate at the local and regional level for greater enforcement of existing regulations relating to public access, abandonment, illegal dumping and stormwater runoff.

Recommended resources:

- Ipswich River Watershed Association

4. Increase awareness and education about watershed protection and water cycle management through forums, field trips, hands-on learning, newspaper articles, and other means. Recommended resources:

- Saugus River Watershed Council
- Groundwork Lawrence
- Urban Ecology Institute

5. Restore state funding to water protection, management, and education agencies.

Recommended resources:

- Recommend a link

Concluding Remarks

In almost every session, the Community Preservation Act (CPA) was mentioned as a possible vehicle for addressing and solving some of the most challenging problems. Empowering local governments through stronger regulation and state technical support was echoed in many groups, with a need for strong leadership at all levels of government.

Finally, central to all discussions was the need to define each community and understand fully its characteristics and most valued qualities. By design, the Essex County Reconnaissance Inventory undertaken by the Essex National Heritage Commission and the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Heritage Landscape Inventory Program was an important first step toward the protection of important local landscapes.

Appendix

The following summary document containing prioritized lists of issues or opportunities applicable to the six heritage landscape types selected for in-depth discussion during The Landscape of Opportunity Symposium. They were developed prior to the symposium by the respective resource-specific panels as a means of directing discussion during their individual focus session. The lists were not intended to be exhaustive, but rather identify the most pertinent or critical issues of the day.

- List of Issues & Opportunities