

4. HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Provincetown is historic in both the many important events that have taken place here, but also in what remains, an all wooden nineteenth century seaport village. Consideration of the physical constraints imposed by water supply limitations and septage disposal notwithstanding, there is strong public support for controlling Provincetown's growth solely in the interest of preserving Town character. The 1988 Master Plan stressed this point and the 1995 Community Vision Project Survey confirmed the overwhelming consensus for preserving Provincetown's scenic, historic character. As the 1988 Master Plan states, "Provincetown's future is uniquely linked with its past because so many of the attractive features of the Town stem from its historic character." (I-5)

Distinctive in its isolated setting, surrounded by water on three sides with magnificent dunes and beaches, Provincetown also consists of a concentrated, urban downtown, the result of historic settlement patterns marked by tiny lots, narrow streets and small, historic buildings. The traditionally fishing-based economy having largely given way to tourism, downtown Commercial and Bradford Streets are filled with vacationers throughout the summer months. The architectural review guidelines currently in place will not preserve Provincetown's collection of historic buildings far into the future. This will be important to our future quality of life and our economy.

4.2 GOALS AND POLICIES

GOAL 1: To protect and preserve the important historic and cultural features of the landscape and built environment that are critical to the heritage and economy of Provincetown.

POLICY A: Visible exterior additions or alterations to a historic structure shall be consistent with the building's architectural style and shall not diminish its historic and architectural significance.

POLICY B: The distinguishing original qualities of the visible exterior of an historic building, structure, landscape or site and its setting shall be preserved. The destruction, removal or alteration of historic material or architectural features shall be avoided. The Provincetown Historical Commission (PHC) reviews projects to determine if they substantially alter or destroy the visible exterior integrity of the building or the site

(see the Cape Cod Commission's Guidelines for Referral of Historic Structures).

POLICY C: Where development is proposed on or adjacent to prehistoric or historic archaeological sites or sites with high archaeological sensitivity as identified by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) or the PHC, it shall be configured so as to maintain and enhance such resources where possible. A pre-development investigation of such sites shall be required before a final design proposal is submitted. This will minimize difficulties and expense should the site be of archaeological or historic importance.

POLICY D: Historic buildings that may be slated for demolition or relocation should be preserved on-site and reused or incorporated into the overall design of the project. Distinguishing original stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship of historic or aesthetic significance should be maintained unless the PHC determines another alternative to be historically appropriate.

POLICY E: The reuse of historic structures in the downtown area will have appropriate use for that particular building. New structures should be built of similar character, mass, proportion, and scale and the surrounding building fabric taken into account in the Historic District.

GOAL 2: To encourage redevelopment of existing structures as an alternative to new construction, and to ensure that future development and redevelopment respects the traditions and character of historic architecture and settlement patterns so as to protect and improve Provincetown's visual character.

Existing local zoning by-laws are consistent with many of the following standards. Nonetheless, inclusion of these standards reinforces regional and local objectives with respect to compatible design and reinforcement of community character. Applicable sections of the zoning by-laws that may require modification to meet these standards include the following:

Article I, Section 1320 of the Provincetown Zoning By-laws includes building height regulations, among other dimensional requirements; Article III, Sections 3050 and 3053 apply site plan review and design standards/landscaping requirements, respectively, to Commercial Business and Industrial Development; and Article 3, Section 3900, High Elevation Protection District, applies more restrictive height requirements and more detailed site plan and landscaping requirements to new construction and additions to all elevations above the 40' contour line. The scale by-law adds additional protection of the Town's character and historical integrity.

POLICY A: The height and scale of a new building or structure and any addition to an existing building shall be compatible and harmonious

with its site and existing surrounding buildings. The Town should continue to enforce its Building Scale by-law in order to ensure that new structures are harmonious with their surroundings and contribute to the historic development pattern of the Town.

POLICY B: Where proposed development and redevelopment is surrounded by buildings with distinctive architectural styles, building height and exterior materials shall be harmonious with the character of the surrounding area, and new construction shall not obscure views of existing historic structures from public ways. Where new buildings and additions are proposed, building mass and scale, roof shape, roof pitch, and proportions and relationships between doors and windows shall be harmonious among themselves and consistent with traditional Provincetown and Cape Cod architectural styles.

POLICY C: All new development shall successfully integrate into its surroundings in order to limit adverse visual impacts on the surrounding community. When new development is proposed adjacent to significant vistas, open landscapes, scenic roadways, historic districts, or individual historic structures, landscaped buffers shall be provided in order to limit visual impacts on these resources from the new development. Preservation of existing natural vegetation in these buffer areas is preferred.

POLICY D: Expansion or creation of strip development shall not be permitted. Redevelopment of existing strip development shall provide adequate buffers between parking areas and the street, and significant improvements to interior parking lot landscaping, as well as facade improvements and frontage buildings as necessary to enhance the visual character of the site.

POLICY E: Landscaping that integrates buildings with their environment, enhances architectural features and provides amenities for pedestrians shall be provided on-site by all new development.

POLICY F: All development shall implement landscape plans which address the functional aspects of landscaping, such as drainage, erosion prevention, wildlife enhancement, screening and buffering, wind barriers, provision of shade, energy conservation, sound absorption, dust abatement, and reduction of glare.

POLICY G: Exterior lighting in new development or redevelopment shall comply with standards including design, light source, total light cutoff, and foot-candle levels defined in the Cape Cod Commission's Exterior Lighting Design Standards, Technical Bulletin 95-001.

POLICY H: The installation of billboards, off-site advertising (excepting approved directional signs) internally lit signs and vending machines and flashing signs shall not be permitted.

POLICY I: All utilities for development including cable shall be placed underground except where the presence of natural features such as wetlands or archaeological resources prevents such placement.

POLICY J: Parking shall be located to the rear or the side of a building or commercial complex in order to promote traditional village design in commercial areas unless such location would have an adverse or detrimental impact on environmental or visual features on the site, or is completely infeasible. Recognizing the importance of the Harbor as a point of entry and the high visibility of the waterside of many buildings, parking areas should be designed and situated to have minimal impacts on views from the Harbor.

POLICY K: Open storage areas, exposed machinery, refuse and waste removal areas, service yards and exterior work areas, and parking lots shall be visually screened from roads and adjacent residential areas through fencing, stone walls or landscaping. Where landscaping is used as screening, it should be equally effective in summer and winter. Landscape screening should be installed at a height, density and depth that provides for the full desired effect within three years growing time. If plantings are not an alternative due to site limitations, the facilities shall be screened from public view with materials that are harmonious with the building.

POLICY L: The integrity of natural landforms and broad, open views of the landscape as seen from County or State designated scenic roads and Route 6 should be maintained.

POLICY M: Existing views to the shore from surrounding areas should be maintained wherever possible.

POLICY N: The planting of shade trees along roadways to improve the visual quality of the area is encouraged. Such trees should be tolerant of roadside conditions and a minimum of 3" caliper/diameter at breast height at the time of planting and should be of indigenous or historical type (i.e., elm or maple).

POLICY O: Parking lots should be designed to accommodate average usage (rather than peak day usage), have pervious surfaces where appropriate, and be planted with shade trees in the interior portions of the lot.

POLICY P: Landscape materials should be used which are suitable to the climate and location of the site.

POLICY Q: Distinguishing original features of a site such as trees of greater than 6" diameter, existing plantings and topography should be preserved where possible. Plantings on the street-facing and water-facing sides of buildings, window boxes and planters are encouraged. Benches or other seating and walkways within the development and linking to other buildings should be provided where appropriate.

POLICY R: Traditional building materials such as wood shingles and clapboards should be used for new construction and rehabilitation of existing structures.

POLICY S: In general, the size and color of all signs should be in scale and compatible with the surrounding buildings and street. When more than one sign is used, the graphics should be coordinated to present a unified image.

POLICY T: All exterior lighting should be part of the architectural and landscape design concept. Fixtures, standards and exposed accessories should be concealed or harmonious with other project design materials.

4.3 INVENTORY

A. Historic Resources

The "1993-1994 Comprehensive Survey Project Stage One," prepared for the Provincetown Historical Commission (PHC), lists known historic structures in Provincetown according to architectural type and significance. The survey concentrated on three areas of Town corresponding to the earliest periods of settlement: the West End, East End, and Town Center East. Collectively, the structures in these areas constitute the bulk of the National Register Historic District. "Roughly bounded by Provincetown Harbor and Bradford Street, running along Commercial Street", the district includes 1,830 properties, making it the second largest National Register District in the state (MHC Register, 1995). National Register designation gives the area recognition and, under the Cape Cod Commission Act, provides some protection from demolition and substantial alteration.

In addition to listing and describing examples of the impressive variety of historic architectural styles found in Provincetown, the building survey also cites fourteen "endangered" buildings; twelve of these structures are located on Commercial and Bradford streets and all are in the downtown area. The survey cites "neglect" as the most prevalent threat to these historic properties.

While not listed as "endangered," Provincetown's five identical firehouses (built between 1868 and 1872 and in service until 1991), are among the Town's most notable structures and are in need of upkeep. The Heritage Museum, a former church, is currently in a state of serious disrepair and has been targeted for restoration. Rose Wharf is another structure that raises preservation concerns; it dates from the 1850s and is the only remaining wharf of historic importance. Less obviously historic is the group of early twentieth century summer cottages at Beach Point, which represents a link to the beginnings of the local tourist economy.

Outside of the downtown area, significant historic resources include the dune shacks, lighthouses and shipwreck remains located within the National Seashore. The remains of a twentieth century fishing vessel in Provincetown Harbor has been partially documented. In general, resources in the National Seashore are not adequately inventoried or regulated and the dune shacks that are eligible for historic listing have not been listed by the National Seashore as of June 1997.

Historic District and Regulations

Using Cape Cod Commission guidelines for referral of historic structures, the Provincetown Historical Commission (PHC) reviews proposed alterations to structures listed on the National Register. Recommendations are then made to the local building inspector as to whether or not the proposal should be considered a Development of Regional Impact (DRI). The CCC guidelines under which the PHC operates are written for the entire Cape and are deliberately general, and therefore, are inadequate for preserving Provincetown's historic buildings and architectural heritage.

Local zoning includes height restrictions--a maximum of 2½ stories, with the actual height in feet varying according to roof type, as well as a scale by-law. Regulations applying to lighting and signage are also included in local zoning by-laws. All of these regulations help maintain community character.

B. Scenic Landscapes and Vistas

The primary attributes of Provincetown's scenic landscape are its 21-mile coastline, the adjacent salt marshes and the dunes which form the backdrop. Many of these features are located within the National Seashore but are visible from numerous vantage points.

The 1981 "Massachusetts Landscape Inventory" gave high rankings to a greater percentage of Provincetown (about three-quarters) than of any other Cape Town. The entire National Seashore holding in Provincetown was classified as "Distinctive" (the highest ranking) or "Noteworthy" (the second highest ranking).

C. Culturally Significant Landscapes

Urban landscapes are not included in DEM's "Massachusetts Landscape Inventory", but downtown Provincetown is certainly both scenically and culturally distinctive in its own right and is an important aspect of Provincetown's attraction to tourists and year-round residents.

D. Scenic Roads

Most of Provincetown's scenic roads are located in the National Seashore, the landscape dominated by dunes and other coastal features. While this fact alone ensures a high level of protection, tree-cutting planned in conjunction with repaving Race Point Road by the National Park Service and the Massachusetts Highway Department (MHD) sparked protests in the Fall of 1995. Many residents felt the

cutting would significantly undermine the tree canopy that contributes to the road's scenic character. The Route 6 corridor is scenic and should be respected in any development proposals for use of the Route 6 right-of-way.

4.4 ANALYSIS

While unique community character and impressive natural features represent the drawing power that fuels the local economy, ensuing development pressures pose a threat to the very qualities that make Provincetown a desirable place to live and visit. In a community with such historic and scenic character, represented by more than the sum of individual historic structures, over-development is particularly ominous.

The results of the Community Vision Survey provide the Provincetown Historical Commission with a clear mandate to retain the existing built environment, preserve community character and control growth. In response to the question "Is it important to preserve Provincetown's historic areas and qualities?," 91% of all respondents indicated it was "important" (the choices were "important," "not important," and "unsure/no opinion").

The "traditional architectural styles of buildings" were cited as "very important" by 68% of respondents and "somewhat important" by another 26%. Moreover, "historic buildings and sites in the downtown" were deemed "very important" by 73% of respondents and "somewhat important" by 21%.

In response to the question "should the Town develop design guidelines for new buildings and major alterations?" a total of 77% responded "yes," 45% "for all areas" and 32% "for historic areas." Only 14% responded "no" to the development of such design guidelines.

A. Threats to Historic Resources

Provincetown's historic character is embodied as much in its tight pattern of narrow streets and footpaths as in its buildings. Recognizing this historic settlement pattern, alterations to storefronts, front yards and other street-facing elements downtown have major aesthetic and community character impacts. The PHC finds that oversized, single-pane front windows on commercial buildings are particularly inappropriate in the downtown area and Title 5- and parking-related streetscape alterations compromise the relationships of houses to streets. Once known for magnificent gardens, Provincetown's downtown residences now, in many cases, have parking spaces and mounded septic systems in their front yards. (It should be noted that some fine gardens do currently exist, reflecting a continuing interest in

this aspect of Provincetown's legacy and character, despite the intrusions.)

The Provincetown Historical Commission has identified a number of threats to historic structures, and has considered sponsoring zoning by-laws or other regulations that would help control modifications and renovations that are inconsistent with the character of the Historic District and individual structures. These areas include second and third floor decks, synthetic siding, large expanses of glass in residential and commercial structures, sliding glass doors and raising the roof and ceiling heights of existing structures. In many cases, the PHC has found the regulations of the Cape Cod Commission inadequate to control these types of changes.

B. Protection of Historic Resources and Community Character

Since the Cape Cod Commission guidelines for referral of historic structures are general and not specific to Provincetown, they require significant interpretation by the PHC to tailor them to each application under review.

Reflecting widespread local interest in preserving and protecting historic buildings and sites (as reflected in the results of the Community Vision Project Survey), the PHC has requested the Provincetown Board of Selectmen to appoint a local historic district study committee, as is required under Massachusetts General Law to enact an enforceable historic district. A study committee must include realtors, lawyers and architects and must meet for one year or more and present a report on the validity of an historic district. The Board of Selectmen appointed the Historic District Study Committee in January of 1999. The Committee anticipates making a report to Town Meeting in 2001.

The PHC and the Historic District Study Committee can gain a better understanding of the nature of Provincetown's community character and how it is perceived by residents through the collection of data related to character-defining features and other information that helps form local design guidelines. Greater public outreach by the PHC will be necessary to explain the reasons behind regulations and the benefits of those regulations.

C. Vista and Landscape Preservation

Concerns expressed by the PHC over the loss of view corridors to the Harbor are echoed by the Community Vision Project Survey. "Views of the Harbor from Commercial Street" were considered "very important" by 78% of survey respondents. Clearly, this is an increasingly serious concern. Possible steps to improve or restore views include stronger enforcement of public access via historic rights-of-way and greater control over the type and amount of construction and activity in the Harbor area.

D. Preservation of Scenic Roads

Roadway scenery can be protected through various local measures, beginning with the designation of scenic roads. By-laws or guidelines can be enacted to regulate clearing, planting, signage, and utility placement, and to protect scenic features. The Town should inventory its scenic roads and pathways and consider measures for their future protection.

4.5 ACTIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

ACTION 1: Develop a local historic district, design guidelines and a design review process through zoning by-laws, overlay districts or site plan review by-laws (the Cape Cod Commission will defer to local standards in reviewing Developments of Regional Impact, per the Cape Cod Regional Policy Plan). Demolition delay by-laws should be considered to protect historic structures throughout the Town.

Once local design guidelines and a design review process are in place, the Cape Cod Commission will defer to local standards in reviewing Developments of Regional Impact. However, should a district smaller than the existing National Register district be established, any historic structures outside the new Local District would still be covered under Cape Cod Commission regulations. Any demolition of these structures or major alterations that might jeopardize their listing on the National Register could result in a referral to the Commission as a Development of Regional Impact or Discretionary referral.

ACTION 2: Continue to inventory historic resources and complete Form B surveys, and consider the nomination of historic sites and landscapes for State or National Historic Register listing. The Town should consider making discretionary referrals to the Cape Cod Commission for DRI review of projects affecting these structures or sites, regardless of their Register status. If a local historic district is in place, CCC review authority will be relinquished over structures within the new district. However, historic structures outside a new district would remain under the jurisdiction of the CCC.

ACTION 3: Identify scenic roadways and scenic vistas within the Town and establish local by-laws or guidelines to preserve scenic character. Inventory and map key scenic views. Measures could include the following:

- guidelines for clearing and planting
- rules for signs and utilities
- rules for fencing
- plan review procedures for key locations
- regulations or guidelines to preserve scenic views
- tree cutting guidelines

- tree planting programs
- guidelines for mitigating the impact of raised septic systems and front yard parking areas

ACTION 4: Continue the local awards program recognizing preservation, rehabilitation and development projects that are consistent with traditional character and design goals.

ACTION 5: Encourage and continue the planting program of indigenous and historic trees.

ACTION 6: Develop a by-law limiting land clearing and alteration of natural topography prior to development review. In addition, develop a landscape ordinance that protects existing trees and requires screening and landscaping of development from major roads.

ACTION 7: Adopt a by-law regulating the placement of utility structures such as power sub-stations, radio towers, high voltage lines, and other transmission structures.

ACTION 8: Where feasible, require the placement of new utility lines underground and actively encourage the undergrounding of existing lines and structures in locations where they detract from historic and cultural features, community character and scenic views.

ACTION 9: Revise site plan review guidelines and Commercial District dimensional requirements to discourage "strip" development and encourage the creation and reinforcement of streetscapes along Shank Painter Road and Conwell Street.