
Historic Preservation and Community Character

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5. Historic Preservation and Community Character

Overview

Sometimes it seems that the pull for a strong local economy conflicts with the desire to preserve the town's character. In fact, because two of this economy's strongest elements are its maritime industries and the people the town attracts, preservation of our natural resources is at the heart of assuring a strong economy. Because community character, natural resources and economic health are so interdependent, an increased commitment to the preservation of our natural assets is our best public policy.

- Friends of Chatham Waterways

As Chatham has evolved from a scattered settlement of English farmers and fishermen in the late 1600s to the haven for retirees and "destination" for tourists that it is almost 350 years later, it has somehow managed to maintain an amazing degree of its historic integrity. Community character is hard to define, but it is nourished by what we see around us, the beautiful vistas and the sites, buildings and structures that define Chatham and link us to our history. We have much to preserve - and to lose.

How to save the character of Chatham without trying to freeze the town into a museum is the biggest challenge that faces us today. Change has come slowly here, but the pace is picking up. Treasured elements of community character have survived through luck and love. The town's geographic isolation, Yankee conservatism, and a strong conservation ethic have combined for years to retard the devastation of community character that has occurred in so many places.

Community character is fragile. Other towns have seen it virtually disappear. Zoning laws, the Historic Business District Commission, the Historical Commission, the Conservation Commission, private organizations and vigilant citizens provide some protection. But the modern trend to "max out" - to push up and out, to fill in open space with more homes and shops, to tear down the old, to exploit every loophole in the law, is a major threat.

The purpose of this section is to identify those elements of community character which are threatened and to identify ways in which we can provide protection so that our present does not destroy our past and compromise our future.

Goals & Policies

5.1 Goal

Preservation and enhancement of the historical and cultural assets which are central to Chatham's heritage and character.

Policies

Encourage traditional patterns of development and compatibility with existing architecture.

1. Maintain and encourage traditional development patterns in the neighborhood centers designated under this Plan. (See Land Use Element.)

Amend bylaws and development guidelines (HP1) for Planning Board and other development review agencies to promote traditional village characteristics and low impact development in neighborhood centers including:

Site development designed for the comfort, safety and convenience of pedestrians.

Reduction of the dominance of the automobile through such measures as side or rear parking, landscaping, screening, access control, shared parking, and restrictions on uses which promote automobile traffic.

Buildings with characteristics such as scale, configuration and relationship to each other and the street which are compatible with surrounding development and with Cape Cod traditions.

A mix of uses traditional in New England villages, including small scale retail, public buildings, churches, schools, institutions, and residences.

Compact residential development including apartments and congregate living within the neighborhood centers and within close proximity.

Discourage the proliferation of businesses between neighborhood centers designated under this Plan. (See Land Use Element.)

Undertake public improvements in neighborhood centers to provide public greens and gathering areas, sidewalks, lighting, safe pedestrian crossings, access to public transportation, street furniture and shade trees.

Town-wide: Encourage development and redevelopment in keeping with the town's traditions and character.

Amend bylaws to allow traditional development patterns such as cluster development and mixed use development where appropriate. (HP2)

Consider zoning incentives, tax abatements and other mechanisms to encourage development and reconstruction that is compatible with existing and traditional patterns. (HP3)

Neighborhoods: Protect historic resources and the character of unique neighborhoods and streetscapes. (HP4)

Identify neighborhoods and streetscapes which are important to the preservation of Chatham's character. (See "The Historical Properties Survey" prepared by the Chatham Historical Commission.)

Identify, quantify and describe the characteristics of these neighborhoods and streetscapes, such characteristics to include building size, mass, setbacks, relationship to other buildings and the street.

Incorporate identified characteristics into guidelines and bylaws pertaining to the review of development in specific neighborhoods. (HP5)

Consider establishing local historic, critical planning concern, conservation and design overlay districts for the preservation of the character neighborhoods and streetscapes.

Encourage the formation of neighborhood associations to preserve the character of individual neighborhoods.

Explore options to provide design review for commercial development outside of the Historic Business District.

Protect and enhance the traditional rural character and scenic qualities of roadways.

Amend bylaws to require consideration of the impact of development and redevelopment on views and vistas in site plan and special permit application reviews. (HP6)

Explore mechanisms for preserving and restoring water views from public roads in residential area. (HP7)

Consider a bylaw to require review of roadway reconstruction plans to preserve rural characteristics by limiting roadway width, straightening and protecting and enhancing roadside vegetation, particularly trees. (HP8)

Include parcels of land along major roadways on priority lists and encourage their acquisition by the Land Bank or other public and private entities for the purpose of preserving open space. (HP9)

Maintain and re-open views on town properties where unmanaged vegetation has or threatens to obscure views; work with private property owners to promote similar efforts.

Strengthen development review to address the goal of this section to preserve and enhance the historical and cultural assets which are central to Chatham's heritage and character.

1. Strengthen consistency, coordination and cooperation among entities involved with historic preservation and development review. (HP10)

Continue efforts of the Community Development Department to provide streamlining and coordination mechanisms among town departments and agencies in regard to development affecting historic and scenic resources. (HP11)

Analyze existing development regulations and preservation mechanisms to ensure consistency and eliminate potential conflicts which undermine preservation efforts. (HP12)

Improve the function of the Historic Business District Commission. (HP13)

Revise written guidelines for development within the Historic Business District for use by developers in designing projects and by the HBDC in reviewing applications.

Clarify the powers and composition of the Commission.

Provide staff assistance to the Commission in reviewing applications and developing conditions for approval.

Require public notice for hearings on alterations to or demolition of buildings within the District.

Provide educational materials and sessions for boards and commissions involved in the review of development to ensure awareness of the inter-relationship of bylaws and the importance of preserving historic and community resources.

Review and revise bylaws to further the purposes of this element. (HP14)

Devise methods to address the regulatory gaps in protection to historic and cultural resources identified in this element. (HP15)

Expand the demolition delay bylaw to allow design review of new construction on sites where structures over 75 years old are fully or partially demolished. (HP16)

Establish design review standards ensuring appropriate and compatible style and scale of additions to historic buildings and preservation of the original distinguishing qualities of historic buildings. (HP17)

Include review of the moving of structures over 75 years old on the same site. (HP18)

Revise and update the sign bylaw. (HP19)

Protect the archeological and historical resources of the town.

Develop management programs for town-owned historical properties, including cemeteries. (HP20)

Continue efforts to provide protection to historic structures and sites and archeological sites. (HP21)

Develop educational materials for developers and the general public regarding the protection of archeological resources; encourage the reporting of all known sites to the Massachusetts Historical Commission. (HP22)

Continue efforts to identify and recognize historic and archeological resources. (HP23)

Continue to nominate appropriate structures and sites to the National and State Registers. (HP24)

Complete the Historic Properties Survey (HP25)

Seek funds to undertake professional surveys to identify archeological resources in areas likely to contain such sites. (HP26)

Work with public and private agencies and entities to identify measures for protection of archeological resources. (HP27)

Work with owners of historic properties to obtain agreements or voluntary easements to ensure preservation of recognized historic resources. (HP28)

Consider a local bylaw requiring Massachusetts Historical Commission review of sites bordering wetlands prior to development. (HP29)

Protect and manage open space and vegetation, particularly valuable trees, on public and private lands.

Town Forests and Street Trees:

Inventory and assess the health, condition, and longevity of town forests, including trees along streets, with the assistance of public agencies such as the Department of Environmental Management and the Agricultural Extension. (HP30)

Develop a management plan for trees on public lands and along public roads, including a program for periodically planting new trees. (HP31)

Ensure that bylaws protect valuable trees and require landscaping on new and redeveloped projects. (HP32)

Amend the Zoning Bylaw to increase landscaping requirements on new development and redevelopment projects in order to provide buffering of adjacent uses, screening of parking areas and beautification of parking areas. (HP32)

Consider bylaw provisions to protect mature valuable species of trees. (HP33)

Strengthen site plan review provisions of the Zoning Bylaw to allow the town to require site plan modifications to save valuable, mature trees. (HP34)

Allow flexibility in planting plans for new development in order to avoid conflicts between trees and utility lines and to avoid a regimented, urban appearance. (HP35)

Institute a public education program regarding tree planting, including suggestions on type of trees appropriate for Chatham's conditions. (HP36)

Open Space:

Maintain as open space town property which was acquired for conservation and passive recreation and acquire additional property to preserve green, undeveloped land. (HP37)

Continue acquisition of open space by the town and encourage acquisition by private entities. (HP38)

Improve the appearance of utilities, communication facilities and lighting.

Improve the appearance of utilities and communication facilities. (HP39)

Continue to require placement of utilities underground in new residential and commercial development. (HP40)

Work with utility companies during roadway reconstruction projects to improve the appearance of overhead utility lines and poles. (HP41)

Work with the Cape Cod Commission on Cape-wide standards for location of communication facilities. (HP42)

Work with the Cape Cod Commission on Cape-wide underground utility studies and efforts. (HP43)

Ensure that lighting on public streets and commercial and institutional development is adequate and in keeping with the rural character of the Cape. (HP44)

Inventory street lighting and undertake a program of modification and expansion of street lighting to provide appropriate lighting in and around neighborhood centers. (HP45)

Develop guidelines for use in site plan and special permit review to ensure that site lighting is not excessive or urban in character. (HP46)

Consider restrictions on sign lighting. (HP19)

Control noise in the community.

Include noise attenuation in site development review. (HP48)

Strengthen the review of potential noise generation in special permit and site plan reviews. (HP49)

Provide the Planning and Zoning Boards with information on noise generation and attenuation methods. (HP50)

Strengthen the requirement for solid buffers, such as fences, between commercial and residential areas and around noise generating areas such as dumpsters and compressors. (HP51)

Consider bylaws regulating the use of jet skis, dirt bikes, and other vehicles and devices which generate high noise levels; consider designating certain areas of town land for use of dirt bikes and banning them on others. (HP52)

Encourage and assist traditional industries important to the community's history and character such as maritime industries and fishing. (See also Economics Element).

Promote the continued vitality of the fishing industry.

1. Ensure that water quality meets requirements to sustain fin and shellfish industries. (HP53)

Continue programs for seeding and propagation of shellfish. (HP54)

Maintain active support for fishing and other maritime industries and state and federal legislators and agencies. (HP55)

Promote the continuation of a strong Coast Guard presence at Chatham Light, and the maintenance of the lifesaving station's historic identity. (HP56)

Continue to maintain and operate the Town Fish Pier and safe moorings and access for the small boat fishing fleet. (HP57)

Ensure that bylaws continue to allow fishing-related uses in all districts. (HP58)

