



MAINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
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PLANNING AN ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY IN YOUR COMMUNITY

I. SURVEY OVERVIEW

A. What is an architectural survey?

- A systematic record of the built environment within a specified geographic area and time frame.
- A method to understand trends in building and design
- A process that documents the life cycle of a town

B. Why undertake an architectural survey?

- To document the built environment of a town at a particular point in time.
- To identify the built environment from previous time periods
- To identify properties and landscapes that contribute to the character of the town.
- To identify properties or areas worth of preservation, either through owner encouragement, town ordinances, or financial support.
- To identify properties or districts eligible for listing in the National Register.
- To help prioritize and plan for town growth and development.

C. Who undertakes a survey?

- Towns, Historical Societies, MHPC
- Volunteers and Professionals
- CRM companies and MDOT prior to Federally funded projects, such as gas lines or road widening.

D. What can be recorded in a survey?

- Building or structures including houses, barns, farms, churches, public buildings schools, industrial and commercial structures
- Cemeteries
- Parks, commons or green spaces
- Bridges, dams, weirs, pounds
- Statues, markers, fountains

E. How is survey linked to the National Register?

- The information collected via an architectural survey forms the basis for determining the eligibility of a National Register of Historic Places historic district. The surveys record visual, structural and historical information that can be evaluated against the National Register criteria; they help to identify trends in styles and design, chart neighborhood evolution, and illuminate structures or residents of significant historical importance.

II. METHODOLOGY: DESIGNING THE SURVEY.

It is important to develop a clear plan of action and identify what is to be surveyed, by whom, for what purpose and how it will be done.

A. Define the goals of the survey.

- To establish or augment the historical record?

- For comprehensive plan or town planning?
- For anniversary or commemorations?
- To identify threatened properties or areas?
- To identify properties for nomination to the National Register?

B. Identify the geographical area for the survey.

- Should an entire town be surveyed? Neighborhood? County?
- If a large area is selected would it be best to look first at threatened resources?
- Can the survey be broken down into phases?
- Is there an already identified or potential historic district?
- Some surveys collect or update information on already identified or listed historic resources.

C. Focus on a time period.

- Most grant funded surveys collect information on all structures older than 50 years, but this standard should be specific to the goals of your project.

D. Decide on what level of research is needed.

It is recommended that the information collected and reported be consistent with other surveys to allow state wide comparisons. There are two basic levels of survey: the reconnaissance survey and the intensive survey. MHPC has developed forms that can be used with either level.

1. Reconnaissance survey

- This is a survey that takes a broad view and is used to define areas worthy of later, intensive survey.
- No need to gain access to interiors or rear of buildings
- The information collected is generally descriptive.
- Does not include substantial research
- a survey card is filled out for every structure over 50 years of age within the defined area.
- documentation of a building is accomplished using a set of pre-defined features on a standard form
- at least one photograph is taken of every property surveyed; additional photographs can be taken as necessary
- the surveyed properties are keyed to a tax map or topographic map

2. Intensive survey

- In an intensive survey, the goal is to document historic buildings, structures, sites, objects and potential districts in sufficient detail to permit their evaluation for and registration in the National Register.
- Usually focuses on smaller areas and includes substantial back ground research.
- Requires more communication with property owners, and may require access to properties.
- Involves the inspection of every property in the area being studied. If a historic district is being considered, it is important to record even non-historic properties.
- Usually involves archival research, including deeds and probate, print and visual sources.
- Research should include information on the history of the area, neighborhood, builders, owners and residents.

E. Determine who will conduct the survey

- Professional consultant, such as an architectural historian?
- Volunteers?
- Frequently the best approach is to have a combination of professionals and volunteers working under the sponsorship of a town, historic society, or other group.

Example: Hire a professional architectural historian to act as survey coordinator to work with the sponsoring organization and volunteers.

What might an Architectural Historian, serving as Survey Coordinator do?

- Train volunteers.
- Provide quality control.
- Coordinate forms, teams, geographic areas, photographs, and maps.
- Put together final report.
- Possibly oversee financial management of the project.
- Public presentations/public support.
- Interface with town officials and other concerned parties.

3. The role of the town or sponsoring group would include administrative functions, including:

- Funding / bill paying;
- Public notifications;
- Photocopying; and
- File processing

3. The role of the volunteers would include:

- Photography;
- Field recordation;
- Historic research; and
- Volunteers need to be trained so that a common language and understanding of features, style and methods are used for the survey.
- Volunteer usually do most of the field work .
- Volunteers may also do background research, publicity, community outreach or financial oversight of the project.

F. Put together a budget and identify funding sources.

- Identify local sources of money.
- Apply for grants.
- Fundraise.

G. Inform the public

- Write newspapers articles.
- Send letters to homeowners.
- Post information on local websites.
- Conduct public meetings, talks or lectures.
- Stress that the project is to gather historic information and is not about increasing taxes or levying government control.

H. What is the finished product?

- Survey forms: with photographs, keyed to a map. This is the raw data for future study.
- A report, booklet, tour, website, photo essay: whatever can be distilled from the raw data.
- Possible identification of resources that merit local or national recognition as a historic property or historic district.
- Be sure to determine where the information is to be kept, and in what form.

