

Town of Washington, New Hampshire

Master Plan 2015

7. CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT SITUATION:

Historic Background:

Washington, a rural town in southwestern New Hampshire, was first settled in 1768 and was incorporated and named in honor of General George Washington in December of 1776. The first census taken in Washington Township was in 1773, by Isaac Temple of Stoddard. At that time, the population was 132. Subsequent census records show the population increased to a high of 1,135 in 1830, when the Town's economy sustained a variety of small mills, a resident physician, a dentist, three churches and a hotel, in addition to 200 farms. The Town then maintained more than 50 miles of roads to provide transportation routes for these uses. There were 10 schools to provide educational opportunities for the children.

The Seventh Day Adventist faith had its origins in Washington in the 1840's, and from here spread throughout the world; the original church building still stands in the southwestern part of Washington. A prestigious academy (Tubbs Union Academy) was founded in Washington in 1849, and although short-lived, at one time had an enrollment of more than 100 students from all over New Hampshire and beyond.

Many sons and daughters of the Town have gone on to distinguished careers in a variety of fields. These include at least one United States Congressman, several college presidents, a number of college professors and quite a few doctors, lawyers, ministers and founders of major businesses. Most of these came from the mid-nineteenth century, when the population was higher than at any time before or until recent years. Some of Washington's distinguished citizens have been memorialized on the Town common: 12 young men who died in the Civil War, honored with a soldiers' monument, and Sylvanus Thayer, "the father of West Point." The Town library is named after Sarah Shedd, who worked in the Lowell Mills and gave her savings for the library.

The population of the Town decreased continually from 1830 until 1960 when it reached 162. The mills and businesses were gone by the beginning of the 20th century, and many farms were abandoned as people moved west. Washington changed from a diverse, nearly self-sufficient community to a predominantly rural residential town. Several large summer communities began on the shores of some of the lakes in Town. The many acres of land cleared for crops and pasture have returned to woodland, and many of the old roads have been abandoned or closed "subject to gates and bars." All but one of the schools were closed, as the diminishing population did not warrant so many, and transportation from outlying areas became easier.

After World War II the country began to grow anew, and Washington was no exception, although growth was slow to come to this area. Since 1960, the population has grown, but at a slower rate than the previous population boom in the 1800's. In 2010 the Town's year-round population was 1,123, and the Town had a total of 1,093 housing units.

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Over the years, organizations in the Town have sponsored a range of cultural activities for Town residents and the adjoining communities. These have been as varied as Old Home Days, sponsored by the Town, musical productions and plays presented in the Meeting House, community dinners put on by the Congregational Church, band concerts at the Gazebo sponsored by Parks and Recreation, lectures on historical themes given at the Historical Society and travelogues offered by Town members and sponsored by the Friends of the Library.

Two large volumes provide a history of the Town:

A History of Washington, New Hampshire 1768 – 1886, published in 1886 and reprinted in 1976.

Portrait of a Hill Town: A History of Washington, New Hampshire, 1876 – 1976, published in 1976.

SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY INPUT:

The Vision Statement for Washington's future encourages us to conserve our iconic historic structures, maintaining and preserving them for future residents, and find ways to expand their use by the community.

The analysis of the **2013 Community Survey** showed that 90.38% of those responding agreed that the Town should encourage historic preservation. Further, 62% agreed that there are historic sites or areas in Town that should be protected. Just under half of the respondents (44.37%) felt that there are adequate cultural opportunities/ events available in Town.

The **Community Survey** identified the following buildings or sites as ones that should be protected:

Town Common Buildings:

The Meeting House, 1787

Old School House, 1883

Congregational Church, 1840

East Washington Center Buildings:

Purlingbeck Grange, 1859

East Washington Baptist Church, 1878

East Washington School, 1849

Historical Society Museum and Barn

Shedd Free Library, 1881

The Seventh Day Adventist Church and site, 1842

Town cemeteries

Old school house and mill sites

Camp Morgan

Old animal pounds in Town Center and East Washington

Old growth forest (end of Bailey Road and Long Pond Road)

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The **2013 Community Survey** suggested the following opportunities or events that individuals would like to see happen in Town:

- Concerts/musical programs
- Community theater
- Adult education programs
- Art exhibits
- Community meals
- Multi-cultural events
- Film or film series

The **Community Workshop** held in June 2014 identified and summarized data from the survey:

STRENGTHS: Active historical society with barn, museum, & newsletter; quintessential Town centers/meetinghouse; Civil War Memorial; bandstand; Memorial Day event; Old Home Days; historic library; old cemetery upkeep; village store; old school house; Saturday farmers' market.

WEAKNESSES: Few funds for preservation; no ordinance to prevent demolition of historic buildings; unused upper level of Town Hall; old buildings not kept up; lack of publicity – print or on website – about historic sites/buildings; not many visitors; tendency to do large projects rather than think of doing things in small increments.

OPPORTUNITIES: Maintenance of historic buildings/sites; economic growth based on historic sites; use of old buildings by artisans; continue summer band concerts; promote events through the library or sponsor events; zoning (village areas or historic districts); signage to identify historic places or sites; Town-wide events to identify/promote history/old families; better communication about historic events and Town events.

The **Community Workshop** priorities included the following Cultural and Historical Resources priorities:

- Better communication and promotion regarding historic events and Town events;
- Maintenance of historic sites/buildings;
- Signage to identify historic places;
- Zoning (village areas);
- Town-wide events;
- Businesses that reflect the historic nature of the Town.

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GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Goal A: Preserve and protect Washington's village centers and historic sites.

Recommendations:

1. Explore designating historic or "Neighborhood Heritage" districts for Washington Village and East Washington Village.
2. Conduct an historic resources survey to develop an inventory of historic sites, structures, buildings and objects. Arrange for NH Division of Historical Resources to conduct a training workshop for surveying sites.
3. Improve signage to identify historic buildings and sites.
4. Establish funding within the Town budget for maintenance and restoration of town-owned historic sites.
5. Investigate sources of grant money such as: the Certified Local Government Program (a federal grant program), NH Pre-Disaster Planning Grants and the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance small grants program to assist in funding preservation planning.
6. Consider an ordinance to prevent demolition of historic buildings and work with private owners to encourage preservation.
7. Establish a volunteer Heritage Commission as an advisory and review board to protect historical and cultural resources.
8. Inform property owners with barns of the NH Preservation Alliance's Historic Barn Assessment Program.
9. List historic properties on the National Register of Historic Places and/or the NH Register of Historic Places, thereby opening access to federal and state preservation grants and tax benefits.
10. Ensure that historic sites/structures are identified in the Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Goal B: Continue and create events to identify and promote the Town's history.

Recommendations:

1. Collaborate with and support the activities of the Historical Society.
2. Continue Old Home Days.
3. Continue the Memorial Day remembrance event.
4. Identify and promote families with generational roots in Town.
5. Add a Town event/program connected to the "living history" event in Hillsboro.
6. Add or encourage the teaching of Town history to the Washington Elementary School curriculum.
7. Develop maps of historic areas/sites in Town for public information and distribution.
8. In collaboration with other Town commissions and committees consider creating trails in Town Forests that feature historic sites.

Goal C: Encourage economic growth based on Town history/historic sites.

Recommendations:

1. Encourage a restaurant or B&B that reflects the historic nature of the Town.
2. Use historic buildings as sites for artisan workshops/shops.
3. Hold a summer "fair" of work/events by local artisans.
4. Connect with the "living history" event in Hillsboro.
5. Develop self-guided walking tours of historic areas in Town.

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Goal D: Continue and expand cultural events for Town residents and visitors.

Recommendations:

1. Continue musical events at the Town bandstand (summer concert series).
2. Promote Historical Society lectures and events.
3. Encourage or establish a community theater group.
4. Hold a film showing or film festival (indoor or outdoor at Camp Morgan).
5. Improve communication (print and/or digital) about historic and Town events.

Goal E: Promote Washington's history, historic sites and cultural events.

Recommendations:

1. Encourage and coordinate communication from all Town organizations to promote historical, recreational, cultural and artistic events.
2. Share information in a creative and timely way through a variety of media and channels.
3. Establish a part-time communications position to promote our rich history, cultural events and Town artisans through a variety of media and channels.