I. THE DISTRICT

Introduction

Since 1972 the Bedford Landing-Waterfront Historic District has been protected by the provisions of the New Bedford City Code, Sections 2-150 through 2-157 which enacted the enabling legislation, Chapter 40C of the Massachusetts General Law. The New Bedford Historical Commission (NBHC) administers this legislation, which protects the district from misguided alterations and development. The mayor with the approval of the city council appoints this seven-member commission. It is this city commission that is responsible for all of the design review issues in the District.

New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park was created through the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996 (Section 511 - Public Law 104-333). The park preserves for the benefit and inspiration of the people of the United States certain districts, structures, and relics associated with the history of whaling and related social and economic themes in America. In order to ensure that the built environment of the park is maintained and developed according to The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties the park relies on the local historic district commission to regulate and review all proposed changes to the exterior of buildings, structures, and sites. The Park and District boundaries are contiguous.

History and Legislation of the Bedford Landing -Waterfront Historic District

The Bedford Landing-Waterfront Historic District, with its narrow streets and uniform alignment of buildings, is the remainder of New Bedford's nineteenth century whaling district and central commercial area. The streets are now lined with one-, two-, and three-story Federal style warehouses and residences, Greek Revival commercial and

institutional buildings, and late nineteenth century mercantile blocks. From the east-west streets there is still a view of New Bedford harbor and the Acushnet River. The national significance and integrity of the built environment of the District were key factors that led to the establishment of New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park.

It is this architectural integrity and historic setting which the community seeks to preserve by preventing insensitive alteration or destruction. Laws for the protection of architecturally historic areas were first adopted in Charleston, South Carolina in 1931. Massachusetts' first protective laws were proposed in 1955 and the first areas to be protected under Special Acts of the legislature were the Beacon Hill District in Boston and the Nantucket Historic District. These Acts developed to become the Historic Districts Act, Chapter 40C of the Massachusetts General Laws in 1960, further amended and strengthened in 1975 and 1983.

Commonly referred to simply as "Chapter 40C," this legislation allows communities throughout the Commonwealth to establish their own Historic Districts and their own Commissions to regulate any proposed changes to the visible exterior of buildings, structures, and sites within those Districts in order to preserve architectural integrity and historical value.

New Bedford established the Bedford Landing-Waterfront Historic District and the New Bedford Historical Commission in 1972 by an act of the New Bedford City Council. This legislation was, in part, a reaction to the urban renewal program that destroyed entire blocks of New Bedford's architectural heritage. New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park was established in 1996 with boundaries that included the District as well Route 18 and land to the north of Elm Street that included the parking garage and Standard Times Building. In 2001 by an act of the New Bedford City Council the boundaries of the District were modified to be contiguous with the boundaries of the Park.

Bedford Landing-Waterfront Historic District