



City of New Bedford

Department of Planning, Housing & Community Development

608 Pleasant St, New Bedford, Massachusetts 02740

Telephone: (508) 979.1500 Facsimile: (508) 979.1575

PATRICK J. SULLIVAN

DIRECTOR

STAFF REPORT

NEW BEDFORD HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEETING

November 2nd, 2015

40C DISTRICT ESTABLISHMENT

OVERVIEW: New Bedford currently has 16 National Register Districts and one Local Historic District (LHD), enabled under MGL Chapter 40C. There has been discussion of creating additional LHDs within the City, as other communities throughout the State often have several. The NBHC is currently being asked to consider designating **Mechanic's Lane and Seventh Street** as separate Local Historic Districts for several reasons: both areas retain architectural and historical significance; sustain integrity with a lack of intrusions; and both have several proponents from within their individual areas.

The two areas are relatively small in area and in the number of properties involved. Both proposed District areas have vacant lots which could be developed without any type of review and potentially alter the overall character and historical context of each location.

LHDs offer the strongest form of protection for the preservation of historic structures and retain the historic character of the prescribed area. Needless demolitions and inappropriate alterations can be permanently prevented in LHDs. New construction would also be reviewed and be sensitive to the historic character of the district.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Upon review of the materials presented, and consensus that the establishment of 40C Local Historic Districts would be beneficial to the two designated areas; staff recommends initiating the process by establishing the Local Historic District Study Committee and by directing staff to begin gathering the required data.

PROCESS FOR ESTABLISHING A LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT: SEE ATTACHED.

PROPOSED DISTRICT MAPS



Seventh Street



Mechanic's Lane



PROPOSED PROCESS FOR ESTABLISHING A LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT (LHD) MECHANIC'S LANE New Bedford, Massachusetts

SUMMARY

SIGNIFICANCE: Mechanic's Lane, named aptly for the laborers who resided there, is a distinctive concentration of working-class houses located within the County Street National Register District. Originally this narrow lane ran from Purchase Street west to County Street; but only the block within the district, between North Sixth and Eighth Street, remains intact. It contains dwellings of more modest scale where tradesmen and mechanics resided on the fringe of New Bedford's active and noisy center and in the shadow of downtown churches and public buildings. This is a dense neighborhood, which during antebellum times was populated by both blacks and whites, whose range of occupations—bakers, a stone cutter, shipwrights, housewrights, laborers, mariners, and several clerks, resided and walked to their places of work.

The majority of the houses on Mechanic's Lane were built between 1830 and 1860; during the height of the city's whaling boom. Although small in stature, they are exemplary examples of the Federal and Greek Revival styles of architecture popular in the early to mid nineteenth century. All of the buildings on Mechanic's Lane are contributing properties to the County Street National Register District and most retain original historic fabric with few intrusions within the lane.

In 2000, the City utilized a portion of a PWED grant to improve the streetscaping of this portion of Mechanic's Lane. Cobblestone streets, slate sidewalks and gas lamps provide this lane with the similar historic sense of place that exists in the Bedford Landing-Waterfront Local Historic District. The New Bedford Preservation Society has provided all of the property owners along the lane with Historic House Markers in order to identify the properties with their original owners and to increase public awareness of the rich cultural and architectural heritage that exists there.

PURPOSE: To preserve and protect the distinctive characteristics of an area significant to the history of New Bedford;
To maintain and improve the settings of this area;
To encourage new designs compatible with existing buildings in this area.

NEED: A resident of Mechanic's Lane initially brought forth the support for a LHD in December 2013. The New Bedford Preservation Society has also been a proponent due to the architectural and historical significance, and lack of intrusions in the proposed District.

INVOLVED PARTIES

The following individuals/groups would be involved in this initiative.

- New Bedford Historical Commission(NBHC)
- Department of Planning, Housing & Community Development (DPHCD)
- New Bedford Planning Board
- Mayor's Office
- City Solicitor
- Mechanic's Lane Residents/Property Owners
- Massachusetts Historical Commission(MHC)
- Ward Councilor
- City Council
- Local Historical Organizations



PROPOSED PROCESS FOR ESTABLISHING A LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT (LHD) SEVENTH STREET New Bedford, Massachusetts

SUMMARY

SIGNIFICANCE: Seventh Street is often referred to as “Abolitionist Row” due to its association with local nineteenth century abolitionist activities. This was an integrated neighborhood in which neighborhood residents, both black and white, worked together in abolitionism and fugitive assistance; a true local connection to the Underground Railroad.

This street is also noted as being part of an area referred to as “Behind the Mansions”, referencing a 2006 Neighborhood study conducted by prominent historian Kathryn Grover. Seventh Street is an area that represents a cross section of the city’s antebellum built environment and population that prospered and was associated with the whaling industry.

In architectural terms the area includes Federal, Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, and some early Italianate homes ranging from high to vernacular styles. Three National Historic landmarks, the Nathan & Polly Johnson House, the First Quaker Meeting House, and the Rotch Jones Duff House exist within the proposed LHD.

PURPOSE: To preserve and protect the distinctive characteristics of an area significant to the history of New Bedford;
To maintain and improve the settings of this area;
To encourage new designs compatible with existing buildings in this area.

NEED: Two significant properties were lost in the last decade, which led to broad discussion regarding enhanced awareness and protection for this area. The New Bedford Historical Society, the Rotch Jones Duff House, and local residents have been proponents due to the area’s architectural and historical significance, the recent losses, as well as the sustained integrity and lack of intrusions in the proposed District.

INVOLVED PARTIES

The following individuals/groups would be involved in this initiative.

- New Bedford Historical Commission(NBHC)
- Department of Planning, Housing & Community Development
- New Bedford Planning Board
- Mayor’s Office
- City Solicitor
- Seventh Street Residents/Property Owners
- Massachusetts Historical Commission(MHC)
- Ward Councilor Dana Ribeiro
- City Council
- Local Historical Organizations & Entities:
 - New Bedford Historical Society
 - Rotch Jones Duff House
 - New Bedford Friends Meeting
 - New Bedford Preservation Society
 - New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park
 - WHALE

The Historic Districts Act (MGL, C.40C) provides a specific procedure for the establishment of LHDs in Massachusetts. This process must be followed for a LHD to be valid. Successful establishment of the LHD will require several steps over an approximate 18 month time period:

- **INTERNAL**
 - Gather the proposed district information, proposed boundary, boundary justifications, base map, addresses, property owner contacts;
 - Establish the Local Historic District Study Committee-either existing NBHC, separate committee, or a mix of NBHC members and others;
 - Meet with MHC;
 - Prepare educational materials for residents, Planning Board and City Council.
- **EXTERNAL**
 - Meet with key, identified resident supporters;
 - Meet with all residents in small neighborhood meeting setting;
 - Gauge support and determine direction:
 - Begin execution, or
 - Build additional support, or
 - Hold off on the pursuit of a LHD at this time.
 - Review/update Ward Councilor and Mayor's Office.
- **EXECUTION**
 - Review existing Inventory Forms, update, and prepare additional Inventory Forms;
 - Develop Preliminary Study Report;
 - Schedule additional informational meetings with residents;
 - Develop language to amend existing Historic Districts Ordinance to establish and regulate the additional LHD with Solicitor's Office;
 - Submit Preliminary Study Report to MHC & City Planning Board for review and recommendations;
 - Hold required Public Hearing 60 days after submission of Preliminary Study Report;
 - Prepare Final Report, incorporating comments and recommendations from the Planning Board, MHC, and the community;
 - Submit amended Ordinance to NBHC for recommendation to City Council;
 - Submit Final Report with map and ordinance to City Council for adoption by two-thirds vote;
 - Presentation of proposed LHD at City Council;
 - If approved, send all relevant information to the Attorney General for approval within 30 days of adoption by City Council;
 - Record map of LHD with the Registry of Deeds;
 - Notify and send all relevant information to MHC for official State filing;
 - Establish membership representation from new LHD on the NBHC.