

# History and Heritage: Beyond “Neighborhood Character”

MWRC Subregional Meeting | November 20, 2025



# Who are we?



Lindsay Randall  
*Senior Regional Humanities Specialist*



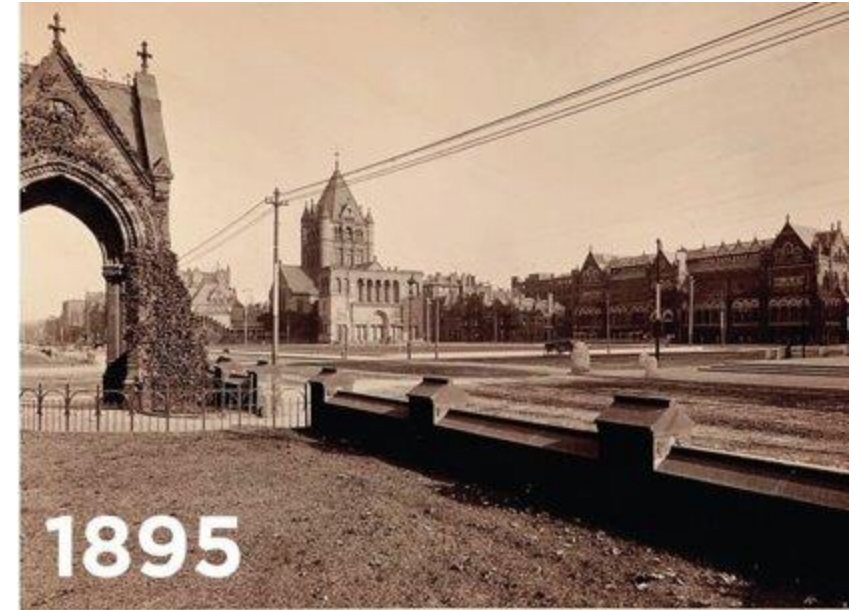
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*Senior Regional Land Use +  
Historic Preservation Planner*



# Historic Preservation 101

# What is historic preservation?

- A conversation with our past about our future
- A demonstration of community values and sense of identity
- A framework for managing change and facilitating belonging



# Who does historic preservation?

## Professionals

Archaeologists, architects, curators, historians, landscape architects, architectural historians, conservators, planners, engineers, public historians, and more!

## In Local Government

Town planner, preservation planner, librarian, historical commission, historic district commission, community preservation committee, DPW, and more!

# What is “historic?”

It depends...

Some considerations:

- Significance
- Integrity
- 50-year rule



# Preservation myths

- “Only buildings listed in the National Register are important.”
- “A building must be nationally significant to be listed in the National Register.”
- “Listing in the National Register will protect a building from demolition.”
- “You only say no.”
- “Are you going to tell me what color to paint my house?”
- “Historic preservation is just for white people.”



# Preservation is highly regulated...

Federal law establishes National Park Service (NPS) as authority



## *NPS oversees national program*

- Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places
- Issues standards and guidelines
- Administers historic tax credit
- Funds State Historic Preservation Offices
- Manages grants + runs Certified Local Government (CLG) Program



## *ACHP advises on policy*

- Oversees Section 106, which reviews impacts on historic sites
- Provides general policy guidance, mostly to federal government



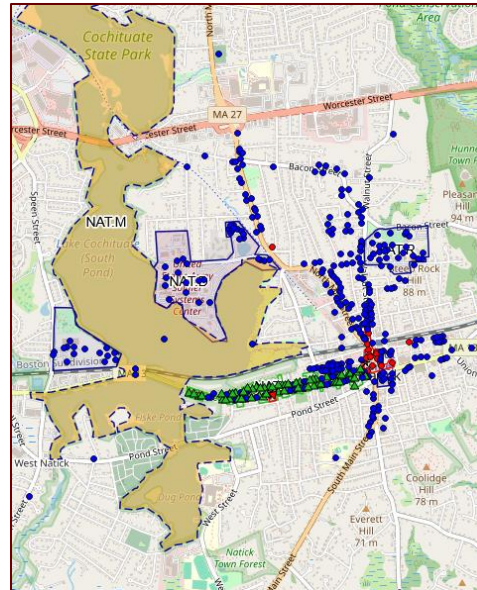
## *State Historic Preservation Offices regulate + enforce*

- Undertake Section 106 and other regulatory reviews
- Liaises between local governments and NPS
- Reviews National Register nominations and tax credit applications
- Offers grant funding
- Provides technical assistance through CLG Program
- Sometimes holds easements

# ...but most effective at the local level



Preservation plan



Historic resource survey



Local historic district



Demolition delay bylaw

# Public Humanities 101

# What are the humanities?

- “Disciplines that explore, interpret, and preserve the diversity of human cultures, ideas, practices and experiences, past and present” – NEH
- Public humanities invites all of us to participate in making meaning of our heritage, traditions, and history

## Examples of Humanities Disciplines

- History
- Language
- Archaeology
- Religion
- Literature

## Examples of Public Humanities Projects

- Oral history
- Public art
- Podcasts
- Historic sites
- Museum exhibits

# Who does public humanities?

## Professionals

Humanities scholars, cultural historians, folklorists, archivists, museum educators, community historians, oral historians, anthropologists, artists, librarians, planners, and more!

## In Local Government

Library staff, cultural councils, arts and culture planners, diversity and equity offices, historical commissions, public school educators, parks and recreation staff, Tradition Bearers, faith leaders, and more!

# Humanities planning

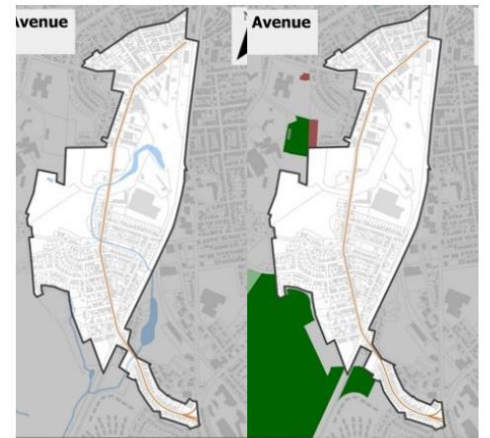
An approach that brings humanities values and methods into urban planning to **elevate the role of history, culture, and lived experience** in shaping the built environment with the goal to increase equity in planning practice

Before the river was filled, where we are now was the **“Fishing Place.”**

was where waves of immigrant communities settled their **homes;**

and where kids **skated** from one frozen pond to another.

## WHAT COULD WATER HAVE BROUGHT US?



Today, the corridor lacks core habitats or open space. Where will water bring us in the future?

# Humanities planning in practice

## Ground the Future in the Past

- Connect history, heritage, and culture to planning goals and strategies
- Promote equitable and restorative planning decisions tied to history and community practices
- Shape more inclusive planning language through historic narratives and storytelling

## Foster Belonging

- Expand the definition of historic preservation to center "sense of place"
- Use art and storytelling to improve historical justice in the built environment
- Balance preservation goals with other planning priorities through a humanities lens

# MAPC's Approach

# MAPC's history + heritage values

Tell the Full Story



Center People



Embrace Change



Guided by MetroCommon2050 and our Strategic Plan

# Interdisciplinary approach



# Types of history + heritage work we do

- Historic preservation plans
- Cultural plans
- Comprehensive plans
- Hazard mitigation plans
- Open space and recreation plans
- Zoning in historic areas
- Historical event commemoration
- Historic district guidelines



# Project spotlight

## Stoneham Historic Preservation Plan

- Town-wide assessment of history and heritage activities
- Includes brief historic context, existing conditions analysis, and suite of recommendations
- Funded by Town, MHC, and TAP



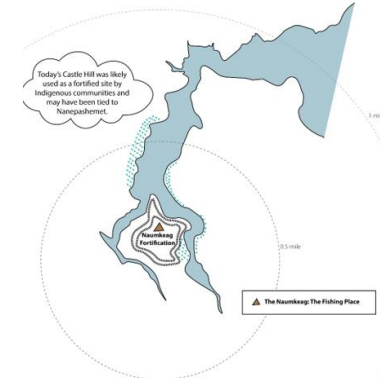
<https://mapc.ma/stonehampresplan>

# Project spotlight

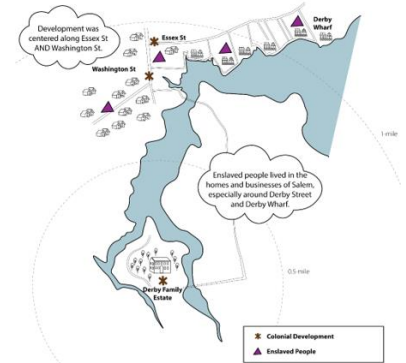
## Salem Jefferson Avenue Corridor Plan

- Used a humanities lens to guide the drafting of the Existing Conditions memo
  - Centered the South River and rights of nature
  - Used humanities to interpret the data and not treat existing conditions as neutral facts but outcomes of decisions

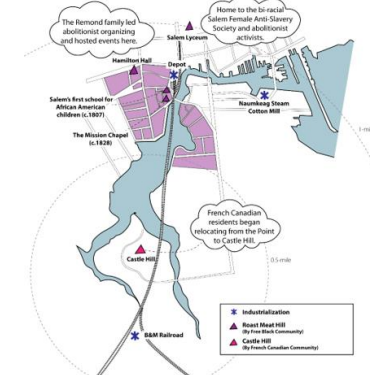
The Fishing Place (Precontact): Live with the Rhythm of River



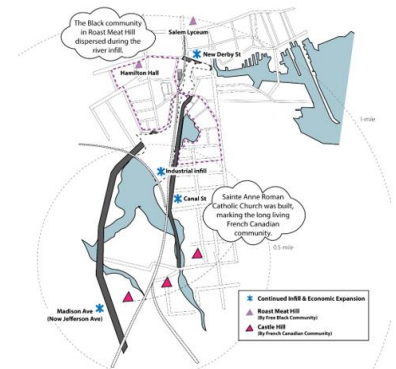
Slavery (1700s): The Forced River and People



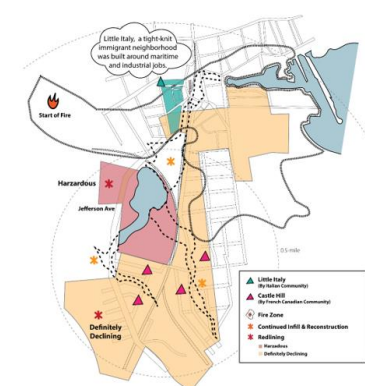
Industrialization (Early 1800s): Up and Down of the Industrial River



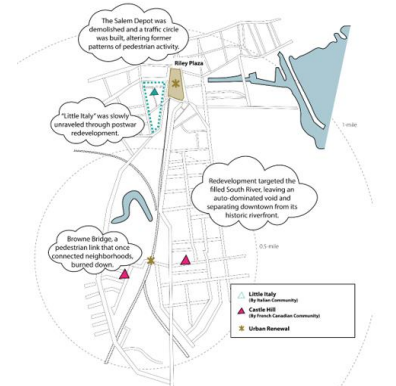
Industrialization (Late 1800s): Making Way for New Transit and Factories



Post-Fire Reconstruction (1900s): Unheeded Fire and Rebuilding



Urban Renewal (Late 1900s): Formalized Planning and Forgotten Origins



# Project spotlight

## Framingham Creative Space Placemaking Project

- Create an Arts and Culture Vision Plan
- Renew community use of Nevins Hall through creative placemaking
- Improve access and make municipal spaces more welcoming



# Backbone activities

## EMHCC

Regular webinars organized by MAPC in partnership with Preservation Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Historical Commission

<https://mapc.ma/EMHCC>

## Historic District Appeals

MAPC oversees the historic district appeals process for many cities and towns in our region

Wellesley is the only MetroWest community that directs appeals to MAPC

# Your Role

# MetroWest by the numbers

- 0/10 communities have a historic preservation plan
- 7/10 communities have a local historic district
- 7/10 communities have a demolition delay bylaw
- 8/10 communities have adopted the Community Preservation Act
- 1/9 communities are a Certified Local Government with the National Park Service (yay Framingham!)

**Every community regulates historic preservation in some way, through a local historic district, demolition delay, or both**

# Recent MetroWest activity

- **Ashland:** painted historic library (CPA funds)
- **Framingham:** multi-phase historic resource survey of South Framingham (MHC survey and planning grant)
- **Holliston:** historic resource survey of downtown commercial district (MHC survey and planning grant)
- **Marlborough:** Historical Commission provided recommendations as part of OSRP update
- **Natick:** completed Community Preservation Plan to administer CPA funds
- **Sherborn:** building a history center and museum
- **Southborough:** restored historic Town records (CPA funds)
- **Wayland:** archaeological monitoring (CPA funds)
- **Wellesley:** history center building rehab (CPA funds)
- **Weston:** historic resource survey of modern architecture (MHC survey and planning grant)

# Be part of the conversation!

- Invite your Historical Commission and/or Historic District Commission to be involved in community conversations about growth and development
- Use MACRIS to inform decision-making
- Consider developing a historic preservation plan for your community

## Routine Planning Processes

- Comprehensive/master plan
- Open space and recreation plan
- Housing production plan
- Hazard mitigation plan
- Zoning bylaw revisions

# Potential subregional opportunity?

- National Alliance of Preservation Commissions hosts a training for local commissions
- Over a dozen topics offered
- Cost ranges from \$1,000-\$9,000 depending on number of topics selected and if virtual v. in person
- Price covers 30 attendees
- MAPC could coordinate



# Thank you!

