

Town of Bristol Historic Resources Chapter

There is an immense but too often ignored relationship between community appearance and tourism. As Mark Twain once said, “We take stock of a city like we take stock of a man. The clothes or appearance are the externals by which we judge.”

Source: *Heritage Tourism Update*, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Winter 1993

Executive Summary

This chapter provides background about Bristol’s historic resources associated with community development and importance, but which also contribute greatly to its character and appearance. A brief discussion of the economic benefits of historic preservation is followed by an overview of past and current efforts to protect these resources and to educate the public about their contributions. The role of the Bristol Historic District Commission and their general areas of focus are noted, with a discussion of specific goals and recommendations that will help share the town’s rich history with future generations. The appendices include additional resources to support historic planning preservation in Bristol.

Introduction

Bristol has a varied and interesting history since its incorporation on June 24, 1819. Situated at the confluence of the Newfound and Pemigewasset Rivers, the town had ample water to power industry and easy access to water transportation. The river banks extending from the town center provided fertile land for farming which was a leading occupation for residents in the early years. The land also provided a vast deposit of fine, sandy clay like that used in Bristol, England to produce pottery and fine china. These soils were used to produce ‘Bristol bricks’ and were the source of the town’s name. In later years, with the advent of the Franklin to Bristol railroad line, the town was perfectly suited to lure tourists who enjoyed the local inn or rooms provided by local farmers and the unparalleled scenic beauty and recreational opportunities.

The rich architectural diversity of Bristol lies in its residential neighborhoods, town center, and rural landscapes, and the long span of its building history. Greek Revival and later Victorian and early 20th century architectural styles exist side by side on the same streets, while the area around Newfound Lake attests to the booming summer tourism and cottage developments that started in the late 19th century. Neighborhood streets, such as South Main, North Main, Summer, School and Central Square, offer a rich diversity of lifestyles, as well as architectural styles and scale. There are a great many structures in varying stages of use and condition along Bristol's streets. With ongoing repairs and restoration, these buildings will continue their productive use for years to come. A major goal of this plan is to preserve important elements of the past economically and, live in pleasant surroundings, comfortably and safely.

Bristol's Historical Development and Associated Resources

Bristol was originally part of the Territory of New Chester, which was granted in 1629 to John Mason. This immense land tract spanned from the current north border of Massachusetts to central New Hampshire. Prior to the first white settlers to New Chester, Native Americans lived along the waterways, their habitation is substantiated by the many artifacts found along the shores of Newfound Lake and the banks of the Newfound, Pemigewasset, and Smith Rivers. As Massachusetts settlement moved northward into New Hampshire, the Native Americans were pushed north into the Connecticut River Valley, Coos County and further into Canada. It is estimated that the last Native American war parties to visit the New Chester area were in the 1750s. In 1753, a fifty-man contingency from Chester purchased 30,000 acres west of the Pemigewasset River which became known as the Township of New Chester. The building of roads and bridges became an immediate focus and reason to assess taxes. No extant buildings are known to date from this early period of Bristol's development.

In 1788, New Chester was divided into two towns as the result of a petition which created the new town of Bridgewater. The creation of town pounds was voted and approved in 1790, but was not acted on until a subsequent vote was taken in 1794 in which Alexander Craig and Samuel Heath were commissioned to each build a 30' by 30' square pound of round logs for payment of \$6.50 and \$7.00 respectively. Several town meetings, including those held in 1793 and 1800, discussed the division of Bridgewater, with no action taken. But when revisited later in 1817 there were even more voters opposed. Some 30 years after the division of New Chester, two distinct villages came into existence – Hill village and Bridgewater village (now Bristol). Bridgewater relied on manufacturing and trade, was home to three blacksmith businesses, and had converted many acres of forest into productive agricultural lands. As the village prospered and grew, the villagers met to revisit the idea of a separate town. At one of these meetings, Captain James Minot suggested the name Bristol. The name was formalized when a successful June 24, 1819 petition created the town of Bristol, incorporating the northern portion of New Chester and the southern portion of Bridgewater.

The favored log cabins that the earliest settlers lived in gave way to wood-framed houses in the late 18th century. In 1783, the population of New Chester was estimated to be 363, but only 26 framed houses were known to exist. In 1904, it was estimated that no framed houses built before 1783 existed in Bristol, but a handful of buildings remained that were erected between 1785 and 1800. The oldest extant house form is the wood frame four or five bay cape associated with hill farms, mostly seen in the eastern side of the town. Today, two late 18th century taverns, the Kelly Tavern and the Sleeper Tavern still grace the Central Square area of town.

Bristol's early 19th century growth centered on the numerous and varied industries, including mills, tanneries, and those related to lumber and wood products, that took advantage of the town's numerous water sources. With the Franklin and Bristol Railroad construction through the town in 1848, the smaller industries were superseded by larger-scale ones, with as many as 22 industries along the Newfound River.

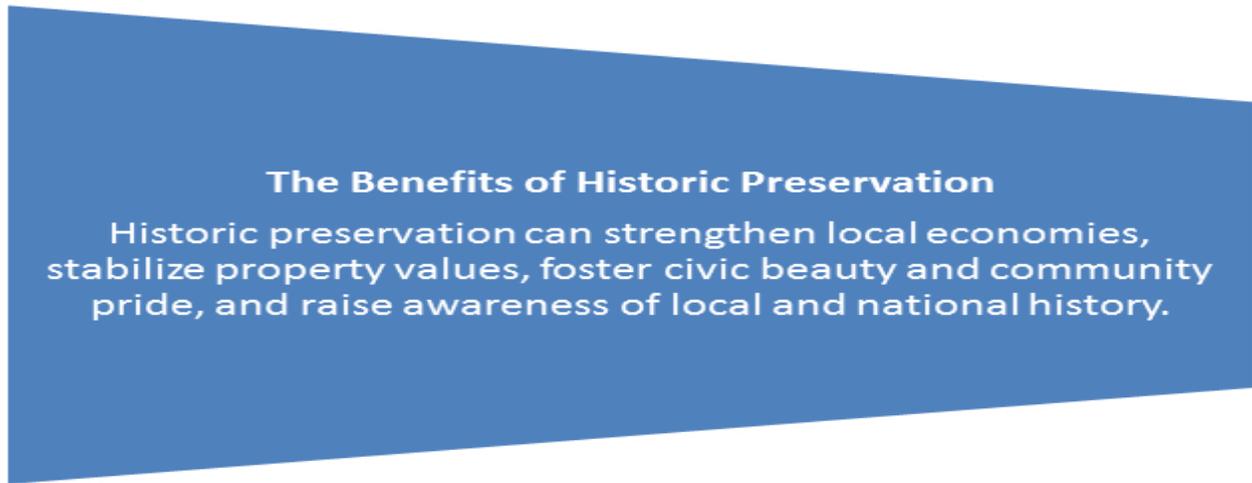
The first charter to build a central toll bridge in Bristol was granted by the legislature in 1812, but was contingent on the bridge being built within five years, which did not happen. In June 1820 reauthorization was granted, which led to the creation of a corporation, sale of stock and collection of donations totaling \$1,504 - the estimated cost of construction. In 1823, the bridge was built and while free at first, a toll was first charged in 1824 and a toll gate house was built. The bridge was replaced in 1836 by a new covered bridge with stone piers. Eventually the bridge came under town ownership, although it was described as a great expense, partially due to flooding that periodically affected the bridge footings.

Much the way bridges were integral to commerce and development; road construction also played a large role. Most of the streets near Central Square were laid out after the mid-19th century, including Union Street in 1850 and School Street in 1860, and about 17 side streets were constructed in the second half of the century. Other late 19th century improvements included the first concrete sidewalks, estimated to have been installed by the town in 1877. In 1898 a bicycle path was built from Central Square to the paper mills, and by 1904 it was reported that all principal streets in town had concrete sidewalks on one side of the road or both.

The date of July 4, 1861 marked the greatest fire ever experienced by the town of Bristol. The conflagration destroyed the entire west side of Central Square, and led to the creation of a fire precinct at the following town meeting. A four-inch water pipe was laid around Central Square, a force pump installed, and an inexpensive fire engine house was built. In later years, the town was petitioned to expand the precinct - adding capacity to protect the mill buildings. With this change came pay for firefighters. There were a series of pump upgrades over time and in 1886 the Bristol Aqueduct Company was created, which supplied water from Newfound Lake to 25 village fire hydrants rented by the town through an annual agreement. In 1896, an electric fire alarm system was installed in the village. Other utilities in 1889 included 50 street lights powered by locally generated electric power provided by what in later years would become the Bristol Electric Light Company.

Bristol's building in the second half of the 19th century also testifies to the many improvements in the town. By 1890, the vast majority of Bristol's population of 1,521 people lived in Bristol Village, the commercial and industrial hub of the town. All of the major architectural styles, or more modest versions or stylistic elements of them, are represented, including Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, and Queen Anne, on many of the village's streets. Institutional buildings include the National Register-listed 1884 Minot-Sleeper Library and the 1890 Queen Anne Methodist Church on North Main Street. Despite the growth fueled by the town's numerous industries in the 19th century, little evidence of it remains today.

Bristol's early 20th century chapter of development centered on another water source – the Newfound Lake. Summer tourism blossomed as early as the 1880s, aided by Bristol's excellent railroad and road system. Boarding houses, small hotels, cottages, cabins and auto courts were successively used and built to serve those who visited in the summer and for those who now choose to live near the lake year-round.



The Benefits of Historic Preservation

Historic preservation can strengthen local economies, stabilize property values, foster civic beauty and community pride, and raise awareness of local and national history.

Preservation's Economic Benefits

The benefits of historic preservation to community are widely recognized for its impacts not only on the economy in the form of jobs, increased tax revenue, and renewed building stock, but on a community's physical appearance, identity, and pride. While early historic preservation efforts typically focused on individual buildings, it has increasingly been the force behind wider-scale efforts in entire neighborhoods and communities.

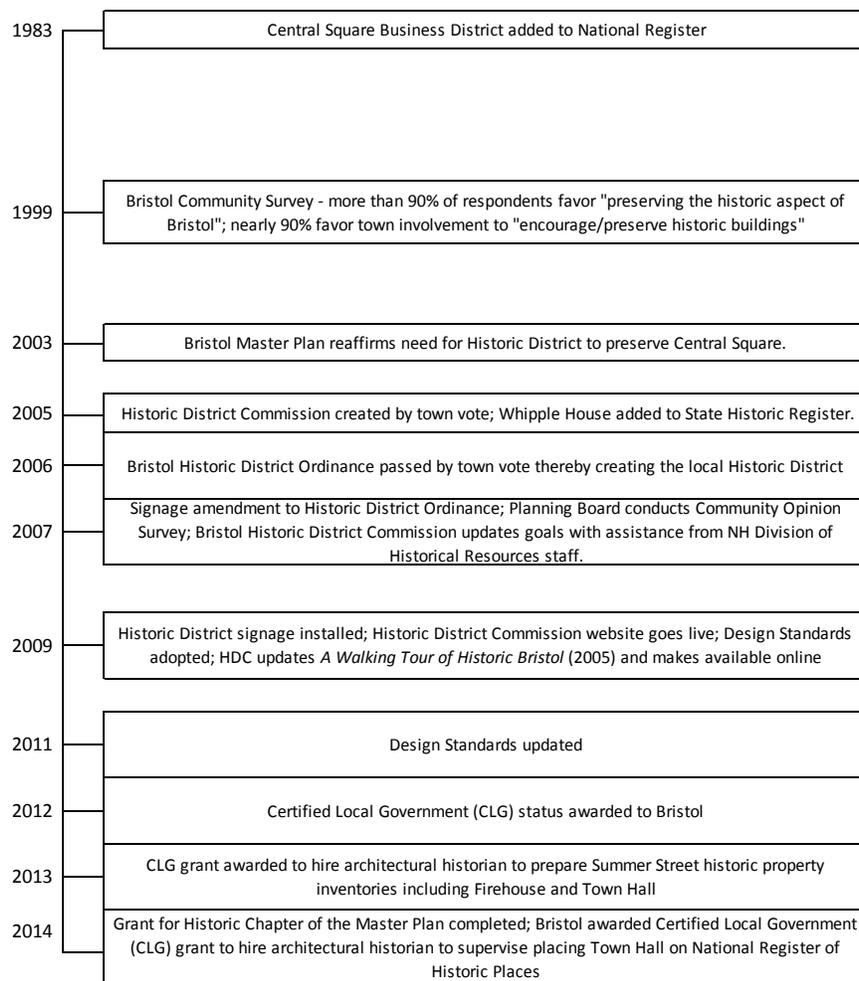
A significant number of economic studies have been undertaken across the US to assess the question "Does historic preservation pay?" The answer to this question is a resounding 'yes'—historic preservation yields significant benefits to the economy. There is broad agreement that the benefits of historic preservation outweigh the costs. More specifically, the costs of preservation are outweighed by the benefits—both economic and cultural—of a robust historic preservation sector.

A practical reason is reflected in the economics of new construction. Rapidly rising building costs can make the use and restoration of older buildings more economical in many cases and there is no doubt that retaining and reusing older buildings is more sustainable. It is impossible to match the character and quality of workmanship of an old building with new construction.

Past and Current Preservation Efforts

Much historic preservation work has been accomplished in Bristol over the past several decades. Figure 1 outlines notable advances since 1983 when the Central Square Business District was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Figure 1: Historic Preservation Efforts in Bristol 1983 - 2014



Bristol's Historic District Commission

In addition to administering the Historic District Ordinance, the Bristol Historic District Commission serves as an advisory body to the municipal government and to the land use boards (Planning Board, Zoning Board of Adjustment, and Conservation Commission). In that role, it becomes the coordinating body for municipal preservation activities.

The entire municipality, and not the Historic District Commission (HDC) alone, is designated as a Certified Local Government. Created by the 1980 amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act, the Certified Local Government (CLG) program requires that the Division of Historical Resources (DHR) designate at least ten percent of its annual Historic Preservation Fund to municipalities that have become Certified Local Governments. As one of 19 CLGs in New Hampshire, the town of Bristol is provided the opportunity to be directly involved in identifying, evaluating, protecting, promoting and enhancing the educational and economic value of local properties of historic, architectural and archeological significance. This responsibility is largely the role of the Bristol HDC.

Current interests and involvement of the Bristol Historic District Commission include: 1) organizing and consideration of expanding the town's historic resources inventory; 2) exploring opportunities for a more comprehensive demolition permitting process; and 3) enhancing communications and educational opportunities. Each of these programs requires time and resources to make progress and each program could be developed with an envisioned community-wide focus. The 2003 Bristol Master Plan recommended the creation of a Heritage Commission, which are intended have a town-wide scope and a range of activities that is determined by each municipality. This recommendation may be relevant today, when the HDC programs and recommendations for the future have a town-wide scope. Noteworthy is that Heritage Commissions can assume the role of the Historic District Commission and may provide broader choices for the functions of a municipal heritage group. One example of the benefit of such a commission is the creation of a non-lapsing Heritage Fund which a Heritage Commission could expend to acquire property and easements.

There is a long list of historic preservation tools and programs that includes topics such as: revitalization tax relief incentives, tax abatements, improving energy efficiency in historic buildings, creating historic easements and others. Several of these tools, related to long-term community goals, are described briefly where addressed in the specific recommendations section of this chapter. Also, the *Planning Tools* excerpt of the resource *Preserving Community Character: A Preservation Handbook for New Hampshire* is an excellent resource.

The three focus areas of the Bristol Historic District Commission are discussed in more detail below.

1) Prepare survey plan

Bristol's past survey efforts have included a 1983 survey, 1993 Town-wide survey, and a 2013 inventory of Summer Street. But it is recognized that much more of the town's resources need to be documented prior to evaluation and preservation efforts. A plan for the resources to be inventoried in the future is a priority for the town. An expanded historic resources inventory for Bristol should consider the following fundamental questions to guide the process:

- What elements of our built heritage do we want to preserve?
- Which neighborhoods or areas are experiencing development pressures or other threats, such as lack of maintenance?
- What has the community previously done to preserve and protect that heritage?

Figure 2 illustrates the time period and architectural style of buildings identified in the current Bristol historic resources inventory. The map in Appendix A illustrates the location of these and other state inventoried buildings.

Figure 2: Bristol Historic Structures by Architectural Style and Time Period

Style	Period	Number
Georgian Vernacular	1788	1
Vernacular	1799-1800s	2
Vernacular Federal	1800s	1
Victorian	1827	1
Greek Revival	1837-1860	5
Victorian Commercial	1848-1872	4
Vernacular Neoclassical	1850	1
Second Empire	pre-civil war	1
Italianate	1875	1
Gothic Vernacular	1884	1
Queen Anne	1889-1904	5
Dutch Colonial Revival	1928	1

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It should be noted that the historic resources inventory was created over a period of time and used differing methodologies. The most recent inventory was developed in 2013 by a certified architectural historian. Information about each property was documented according to format and content consistent with state inventory standards. The town should strive to have all inventoried properties in this format. In addition to the 2003 and 2013 local inventory efforts, there are paper files in the state inventory. The Historic District Commission has created electronic files for all records in the 2013 inventory and six state inventory properties. This information is accessible on the Historic District Commission website at: <http://www.bristolhdc.org/reports/>. The goal is to eventually have all inventoried properties in electronic format. A next step is to review the paper

records for Bristol housed at the NH Division of Historical Resources to determine if they can be useful for future survey or other historic preservation efforts.

A matrix of previously inventoried Bristol properties and their current designation status has been created for this plan (see Appendix B). The matrix should be refined and updated as new property information is available. For example, it appears there may be four properties inventoried in 2003 that do not contain the level of detail required by the state inventory guidelines. This information may need refinement, or may be the result of how information, such as the property address, was recorded. The current Bristol Historical Resources Inventory is limited primarily to properties of significance because of age or architectural style. There are undoubtedly a number of other sites in Bristol which are significant because of their historic or architectural character, quality and importance, and should be added in the future. The map in Appendix C illustrates concentrations of properties that are 50 or more years of age in Bristol. The map is useful in determining areas of town for future inventory work and potential neighborhood heritage districts. The map may also be useful in considering the potential for future development in historic ‘neighborhoods’ so land use practices may be reviewed for consistency.

Another source of guidance for survey efforts is contained in Appendix C of the New Hampshire Architectural Survey Manual. This manual, and the assistance that the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources can provide on an as-needed basis, is designed to aid in the organizational grouping of properties related in history by theme, place and time period. The contents include a broad list of historic contexts applicable to New Hampshire’s history. While some are specific to certain areas in the state, many are applicable statewide. Based on Bristol’s history, contexts that may apply include: furniture production; mineral mining; brick making for local and regional markets 1650-1920; mixed agriculture and the family farm 1630-present; boarding house tourism 1875-1920; public and private cemeteries and burials; and Native American Indian archeology. A review of these historic contexts in order to evaluate which are most important and relevant to the town may also provide direction for an expanded historic resources inventory.

Another important consideration in a survey plan is the types of resources that are important to the town. Such resources should include cemeteries, monuments, town pounds, railroad structures, stone walls, stone culverts, historic bridges, sites, markers, statues, scenic roads, and agricultural landscapes. A specific area of interest may be the early to mid-20th century resources that surround Newfound Lake.

2) Education and Outreach

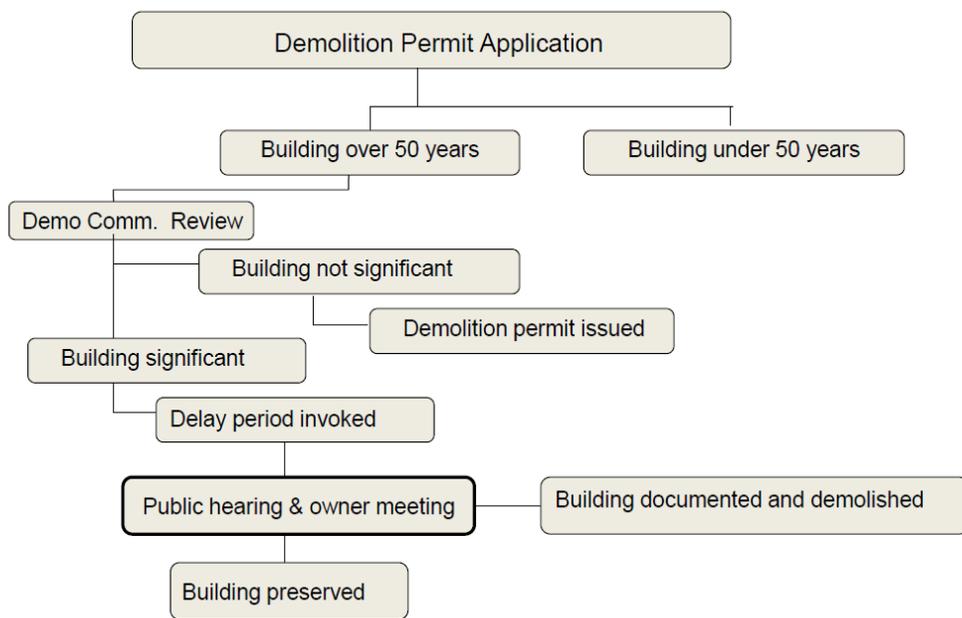
The sharing of information and resources is critical to an enhanced view of accomplishments and advancement of historic preservation goals. During the development of this chapter Historic District Commission (HDC) members discussed several potential avenues to promote outreach and education. These avenues included bolstering the HDC website content, insertion of more articles in the local newspaper, and use of community information sharing resources. Potential content areas

for additional information sharing include, but are not limited to: articles that explain successes such as the fund raising and cost savings efforts to preserve Town Hall, follow-up on topics of interest such as use of tax abatements for preservation projects supported by most 2013 community survey respondents, and any information about the historic significance of additional resources for consideration in an expanded historical resources inventory or National Register/State Register nomination efforts. Engaging residents in the development of historic contexts for Bristol may lead to the development of additional supporting information about specific resources that could be shared. Education and outreach may have the added benefit to pique the interest of other residents to volunteer for historic preservation activities and as members of the HDC.

3) Refine Demolition Permit Process with Demolition Delay Ordinance

Currently no formalized process is in place for the Bristol Historic District Commission (HDC) to be notified of building demolitions in the town or to have any role in reviews or delays of demolition for significant buildings. Beyond notification to the HDC, the process should consider the age of the building (historic or not) and a set criteria to aid in the determination of historic significance. Figure 3 outlines a process for demolition applications to be reviewed to assess historic significance. This process can be established in the town’s building code, as a separate ordinance, or as an amendment to the zoning ordinance. While a demolition delay ordinance does not necessarily prevent the demolition of a historic structure, it does provide an opportunity for assessment and dialog about the potential significance of the building and possible ways to retain the building. In some New Hampshire communities such an ordinance has led to the protection of a local resource that would have otherwise been destroyed.

Figure 3: Illustration of Demolition Delay Process that Considers Historic Structures



While the activities and goals discussed above are the most important areas of focus for the Bristol Historic District Commission, the following recommendations represent the breadth of next steps which the town should consider and implement in order to protect its historic resources.

Specific Future Recommendations

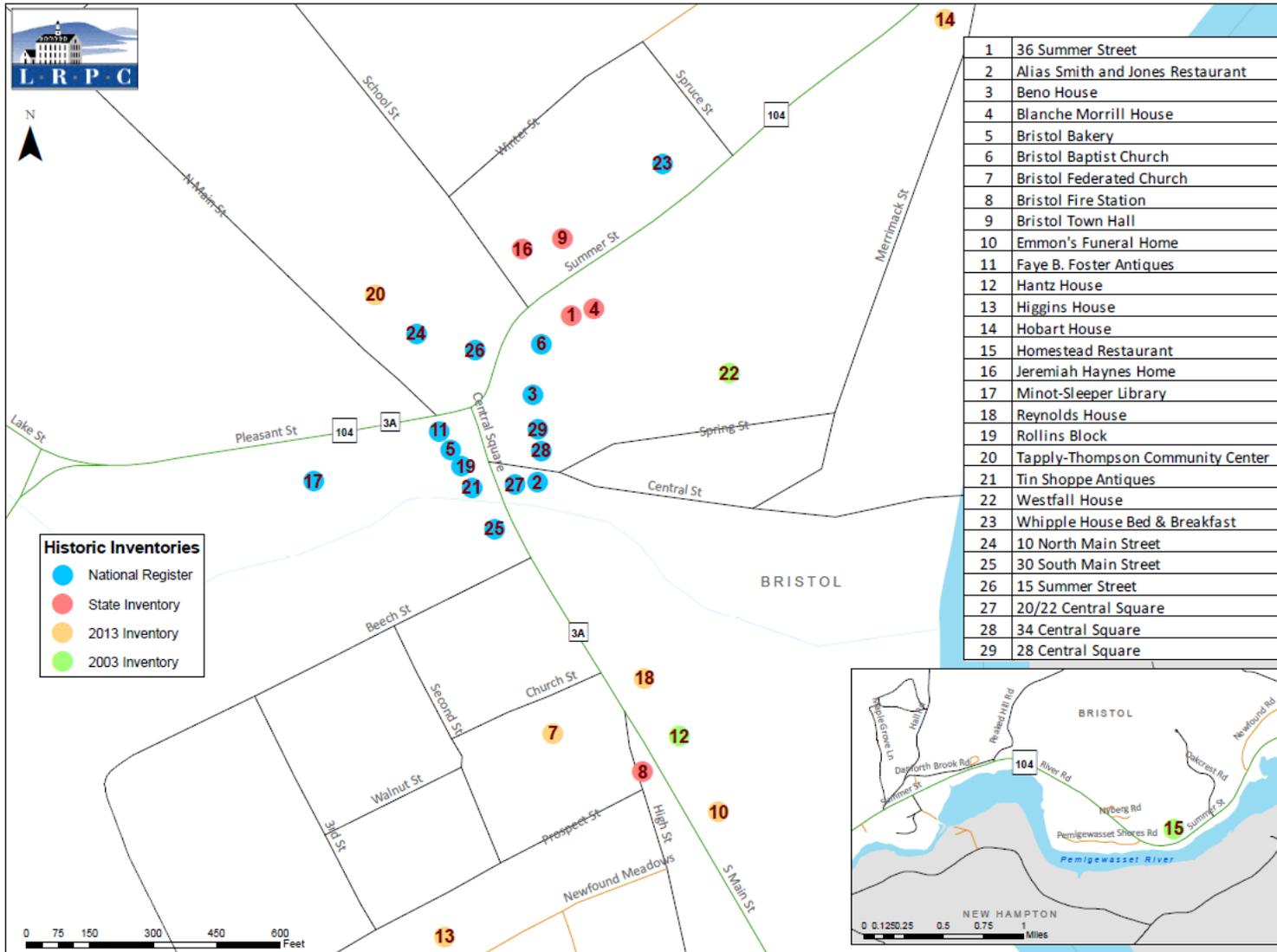
- Prepare survey plan and conduct a survey of either selected resources or a comprehensive community-wide survey of historic resources (buildings, structures and sites) as outlined in *Preserving Community Character: A Preservation Planning Handbook for New Hampshire*. NHDHR can provide inventory training for volunteers.
- Form a Heritage Commission – a recommendation from the 2003 Master Plan. Currently the town has the Historic District Commission with a dual purpose that includes administration of the Historic District Ordinance and advisor to other land use boards.
- Historic District Commission to continue work with the Board of Selectmen to establish a tax abatement process for the preservation of historic resources.
- Establish a town-wide Demolition Delay Review Ordinance.
- Review and update existing architectural standards. Last updated October 2011, the General Guidelines for Design provides standards for signs, exterior work and maintenance, and exterior amendments for structures in the Historic District.
- Review how historic preservation is addressed in the Bristol Site Plan Review regulations and the application checklist and work towards changes that are favorable towards historic preservation.
- Establish relationship with the press. The “Talk of the Town” may be an opportunity to post success stories in the Plymouth Record.

2013 Community Survey Results

Preservation appears to be highly valued by the survey respondents – more than 70 percent indicated they agree or strongly agree Bristol should preserve: farmland, open space land, and historic buildings. The survey results also convey resident views on how historic preservation could be accomplished. Outlined below is a summary of the responses to the survey question: *The Town of Bristol Master Plan includes the objective to preserve Bristol’s rural and historic character. At Town Meeting in 2005, the town voted in the Historic District Ordinance that established the current Historic District. With this in mind, do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements? The Town of Bristol should:*

- **Demolition:** 72 percent of respondents favor the addition of a demolition provision in the Historic District Ordinance to protect historic buildings in this district.
- **Tax Abatements:** 71 percent of respondents favor the use of tax abatements for improving or preserving historic properties.
- **Architectural Standards:** 81 percent of respondents favor the use of architectural standards for new commercial buildings that consider the town's rural and historic character.
- **Expand Historic District:** This statement produced a close split between respondents that agree or strongly agree (40.2%) and respondents that disagree or strongly disagree (43.3%). Noteworthy is this statement also produced the most 'no opinion' responses (16.4%) than any other statement in the particular question. Given the differences in responses and the comparably high number of respondents that did not have an opinion, additional information or education about the subject may be beneficial.

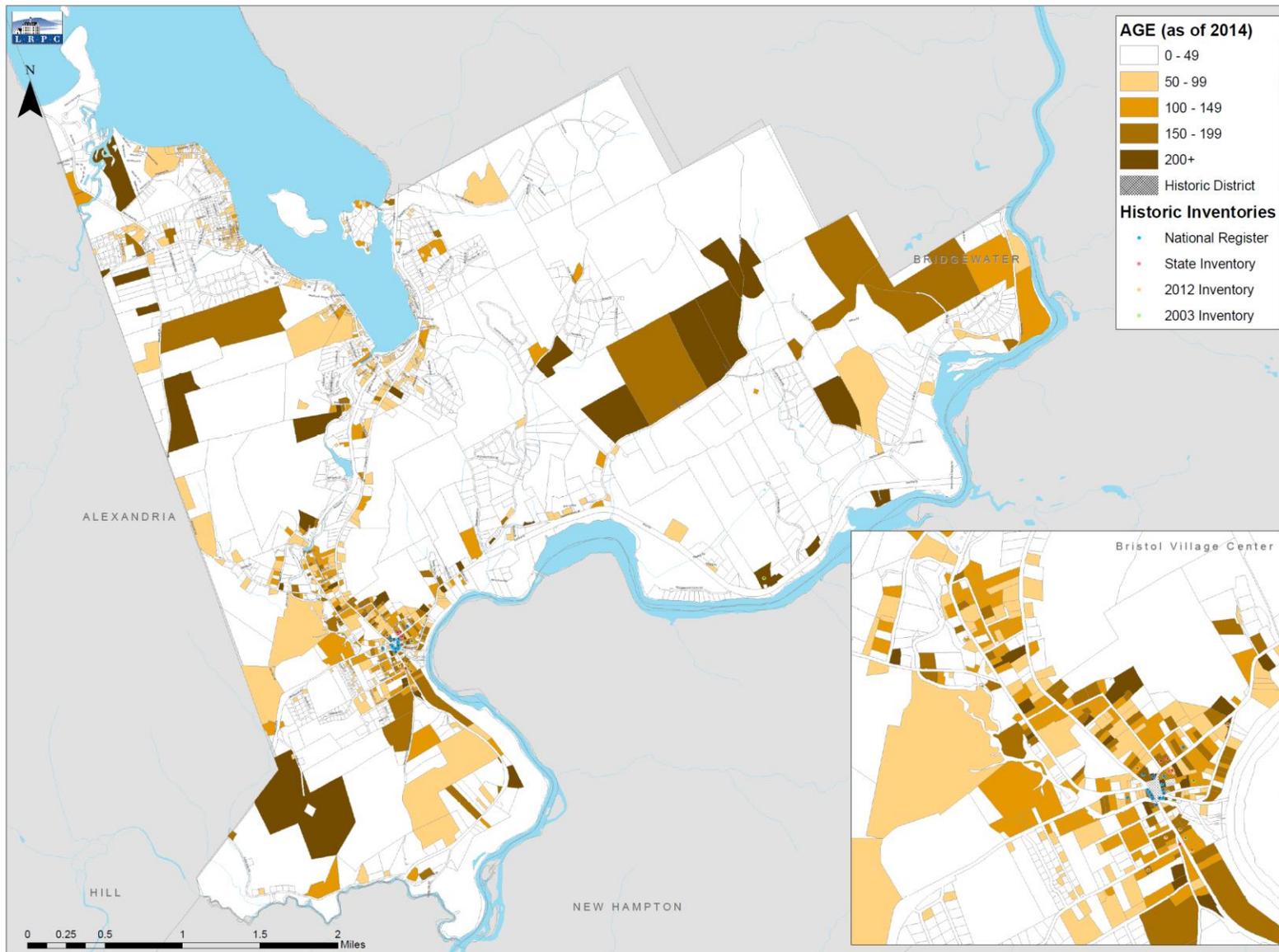
Appendix A: Map of Historic Properties identified in *Status of Bristol Historic Structures Inventory*



Appendix B: Status of Bristol Historic Structures Inventory

Property Name	AKA	AKA 2	Location	2003 Inventory (not to state standards)	2013 Inventory (state standard)	State Inventory	State Register	National Register
No Known Historic Name	36 Summer Street		36 Summer Street			✓		
Alias Smith and Jones Restaurant	Abel Block		24 and 26 Central Square	✓	✓			✓
Beno House	Levi Barlett House		42 Central Square	✓	✓			✓
Blanche Morrill House			44 Summer Street			✓		
Bristol Bakery	Cavis Block		8 Central Square	✓				✓
Bristol Baptist Church			20 Summer Street			✓		✓
Bristol Federated Church	First Congregational Church	Bristol United Church of Christ	15 Church Street	✓	✓			
Bristol Fire Station			15 High Street			✓		
Bristol Town Hall			45 Summer Street	✓	✓	✓		
Emmon's Funeral Home	Charles E. Mason House		115 South Main Street	✓	✓			
Faye B. Foster Antiques	White's Block		4 Central Square	✓	✓			✓
Hantz House	David Mason House		91 South Main Street	✓				
Higgins House	Prescott House		55 Prospect Street	✓	✓			
Hobart House	Morton House		150 Summer Street	✓	✓			
Homestead Restaurant	Emmons House		Route 104	✓				
Jeremiah Haynes Home			35 Summer Street			✓		
Minot-Sleeper Library			35 Pleasant Street	✓	✓			✓
Reynolds House	Currier House		81 South Main Street	✓	✓			
Rollins Block			12 Central Square	✓	✓			✓
Tapply-Thompson Community Center	Methodist Church		30 North Main Street	✓	✓			
Tin Shoppe Antiques			16-18 Central Square	✓	✓			✓
Westfall House	White Mansion		49 Spring Street	✓				
Whipple House Bed & Breakfast	Whipple House		75 Summer Street	✓	✓		✓	✓
Not Listed		TD Bank?	10 North Main Street					✓
Not Listed			30 South Main Street					✓
Not Listed			15 Summer Street					✓
Not Listed			20/22 Central Square					✓
Not Listed			34 Central Square					✓
Not Listed			28 Central Square					✓

Appendix C: Properties 50 Years of Age or Older in Bristol



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