Kingston — Small Steps Leading Toward Significant Change: Collaboration

— Virginia Morse (Chair, Historic District Commission) and Debra Powers (Chair, Heritage Commission)

Similar to many other small New Hampshire towns, the Town of Kingston has limited access to funds in order to achieve optimal preservation of its rich heritage. Yet the last few years have been an exciting time of historic preservation due to concerted efforts by various organizations and individuals to collaborate. When interest in and appreciation of historic properties began to grow, financial support from the town budget and through grants followed, and the number of volunteers began to increase – a slow but positive snowball.

Although the Kingston Planning Board has always been consistent in land use regulation and planning, the many other town boards and committees with a focus specifically on historic preservation were confusing to townspeople, who mixed up the roles of the historic district commission, the historical society, the museum committee, the Nichols Historical Library ad hoc committee, and the new heritage commission. Education, information, and collaboration were needed.

The small steps that have been taken year by year (since the mid-20th century) may not seem too exciting, but they have led to the effective partnerships that have brought about the successes we can now tally with pride. These steps include:

- Building respect for the historic district commission by running a monthly meeting that both complies with the town ordinances and is home-owner friendly
- Collaborating with the planning board to clarify and standardize the process for applications in the town's two historic districts
- Increasing public awareness about the historical treasures in town through a periodic newspaper column, "Kingston Chronicles," about town buildings and preservation efforts
- Gathering oral histories from older residents through the "Remember When" series
- Supporting memberships in state agencies and attendance at educational conferences and training programs to ensure well-informed leadership
- Enlisting the support of town officials such as the building inspector, staff in the Select Board's office, town clerk, and the planning board secretary to assure compliance with town ordinances on historic preservation
- Keeping communication open by posting agendas, minutes, and events on the town website

Through collaboration much has been achieved toward historic preservation and awareness: listings on the National Register of Historic Places (the Josiah Bartlett Homestead [also a National Historic Landmark], Sanborn Seminary, First Universalist Church "Church on the Plains," and the Nichols Memorial Library); application and award of preservation grants to maintain the historic Kingston Bandstand, the Nichols Memorial Library and the Josiah Bartlett Homestead; repurposing of historic properties; Certified Local Government (CLG) status for the town; participation in regional and state meetings (both as presenters and audience); historic site and property inventories; creation of a historic district walking tour pamphlet; creation of websites and a database, and many other activities that support and monitor preservation of historic properties and natural resources.

All successes are directly attributable to the collaboration of abovementioned groups and individuals. This wide population of likeminded people working together has created preservation progress. The supportive decisions made by voters proves that residents are coming to understand that preservation promotes not just a sense of community pride but also growth. In the upcoming months, these partnerships will continue with the establishment of the new museum in the Nichols Memorial Library building, restoration of the Kingston Bandstand, enhancement of the historic district walking tour, publication of a town brochure, audio and visual documentation of historic properties and places, repurposing of the Grace Daley House, and collaboration with the regional school board to repurpose Sanborn Seminary — quite a bit of achievement for a little town of 7,500 residents.