



NEW HAMPSHIRE DIVISION OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES

State of New Hampshire, Department of Cultural Resources
19 Pillsbury Street, Concord, NH 03301-3570
TDD Access Relay NH 1-800-735-2964
www.nh.gov/nhdhr

603-271-3483
603-271-3558
FAX 603-271-3433
preservation@dcr.nh.gov

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

EMILY PAULUS, PRESERVATION PLANNER

Public education and outreach is one of a Historic District Commission's most important – and often most neglected – jobs. In order to foster a positive public perception of historic preservation within the community, a commission must go beyond its regulatory role and conduct broad community outreach. The benefits of doing so are numerous and long-lasting. The better informed the public is about the commission's work and its importance, the better they will understand and the more supportive they will be. The more aware people are of their community's history, the greater appreciation they will have of it and its preservation. The greater the public outreach, the greater the public confidence in the expertise of the commission. The greater a commission's public support, the greater its political support will be. Educating the public can be a challenge, but not an insurmountable one. The effort must be proactive, and commission members must be willing to commit to more than just attending monthly meetings. Lack of time, personnel, and ideas can all stand in the way, but with a little effort, these challenges can be overcome. The following tips will help your Historic District Commission to become more than just a design review board.

- **Attend annual training events.** Before commissioners begin to consider educating their community and public officials, they must first educate themselves. In addition, all commissioners should be good spokespersons for preservation and be able to defend and make the case for historic preservation. Annual training can help commissioners stay apprised of new preservation methods and issues, and maintain their knowledge and expertise. Look for programs sponsored by the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, New Hampshire Preservation Alliance, and National Alliance of Preservation Commissions.
- **Build a good relationship with the realtors in your community.** Many realtors don't know or understand what local designation means or how it works, and some might have the perception that it makes a property less attractive to prospective buyers. Pay them a friendly visit or invite them to a commission meeting, and inform them of the benefits of being in a historic district. Give them a map showing the district boundaries and any regulations or design guidelines that apply.
- **Consider signage for the historic district.** A few attractive signs at the entrances to the district can let people know they are not just in any neighborhood. It can also help deter violations within the district.
- **Welcome newcomers** with a letter from the commission, and make sure they know where to go for copies of historic district maps, regulations, design guidelines, and applications.
- **Be a visible part of local government.** Attend town council or selectmen's meetings and keep informed on all of the issues and projects undertaken by the community. Testify at meetings and public hearings on the importance of integrating preservation into larger community planning and zoning issues.
- **Consider a preservation workshop series.** Host local or regional talks on various preservation issues, and invite experts to present. Consider partnering with a Main Street organization, chamber of commerce, or local businesses (such as the local hardware store).
- **Consider hosting guided walking tours of the historic district, or creating a self-guided walking tour brochure.**
- **Make sure technical assistance is available and accessible.** Create contractor lists and handouts for where to find recommended materials, and make them available online and at the building permit counter.
- **Create a website for the commission.** Include the ordinance, regulations, rules of procedure, design guidelines, applications and instructions, calendar of meetings, minutes from previous meetings, and educational materials.
- **Do an annual report.** This is a necessary part of educating elected officials about the work of the preservation commission. This is also an opportunity to give the elected officials credit for the accomplishments of the commission.
- **Make a slide show or PowerPoint presentation of positive projects** that have been successfully completed in the district, and emphasize the commission's role. Present the slide show to other land use boards and elected officials, and make it available to the public and local media.
- **Recognize good preservation work in the community – both large and small.** Start an awards program with the local non-profit preservation organization, or join one already in place.