

Chapter 6: Historic And Cultural Resources

INTRODUCTION

Thriving cultural environments and historic contexts are important components of the overall health of the Region. They promote the area's unique characteristics, broaden understanding of issues and cultures around the world, and contribute to the economic vitality and overall quality of life of the Region.

Planning for historic and cultural resources encompasses promoting their viability and use, and allows for the values of these resources to be taken into account as communities grow, develop and evolve in light of current economic, social and cultural conditions.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Settlement

Rutland County has a rich and dynamic cultural history. The Western Abenaki have been referred to as "the original Vermonters," though the tribal identity of the aboriginal inhabitants of Rutland County remains unclear. Across the Region, archeological sites supply information on the lives of these groups. Newcomers to the area emigrated from western Connecticut, Massachusetts and the Hudson River Valley in the mid 1700's. The French, traveling south from Canada, were also influential in the development of the Region. Welsh, Irish, Italian, Swedish and Polish immigrant populations grew with the stone and slate industries of the area.

Historic and Cultural Centers

The Region's villages have been centers of economic and social significance since the earliest settlers. Various types of residences correlate with the backgrounds and roles their inhabitants brought to the community; commercial and industrial structures trace an evolving economy ; and

meeting halls and social gathering places cite the cultural, religious and educational pursuits of the Region. Building materials, especially marble on institutional buildings and slate roofs on all types of structures, link back to the cultural identity of the Region. It is within these centers that cultural institutions are concentrated.

A handful of other features dot the landscape as well, including the many covered bridges, preserved land and historical artifacts that can be found at the site of the 1777 Battle of Hubbardton, the only land battle of the Revolutionary War to be fought entirely on Vermont soil.

Cultural Institutions

The Region is flush with cultural and



The Regional Profile provides a more detailed description of the Region's historic settlement patterns.



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Hubbardton was the site of the only Revolutionary War battle fought on Vermont soil.



FAST FACT

The Arts Alliance came together in 2004 to further the growth of cultural expression in the Region and pool resources to more effectively market all of the resources and opportunities they offer. Among their members:

- Crossroads Arts Council,
- Chaffee Center for Visual Arts
- The Carving Studio and Sculpture Center
- Killington Music Festival
- The Paramount Theater
- Actor's Repertory Theater
- Fair Haven Opera House
- Killington Arts Guild
- Castleton State College Fine Arts Center
- RutBusters
- Poultney Artists Guild
- Many other local artists

historic institutions. Museums, music festivals, galleries of local artists, libraries and organizations offering arts and culture education enhance the Region's culture. Within the past five years, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of organizations and institutions on the cultural scene. The work to become distinct components to the cultural landscape, and meet the regional community's needs—from young school children to the elderly.

The Region's 22 historical societies, as well as its many granges, preserve cultural and historical town traditions and educate the public about them. While area granges were originally formed to serve and improve their economic standing, farmers and their families are modernizing. Granges now serve as general community service organizations.

Outside of their literary and research offerings, the Region's libraries also offer community programs on a wide range of topics. Public libraries offer a breadth of community services such as lectures and speaker series, book discussion groups, children's activities, community meeting

spaces, on-line research capabilities, video and other film media as well as services not traditionally associated with libraries such as free film showings and musical events.

CURRENT UNMET NEEDS

Many skills of the area's earlier artisans, stone carvers and subsistence farmers are no longer central features of the Region's economy.

As the basic economy and culture of the Region evolves, the challenge will be to preserve valuable components of its past, while incorporating innovative ideas and new perspectives that address the expanding connections our communities have with the state, nation and world.

Loss of History/Understanding of the Region's past

Continuity in the story of the Region is easily lost. Historic structures are deteriorating as age and high maintenance costs overwhelm their owners' resources. Historical artifacts are lost through fire or lack of care. Local histories around the Region are often forgotten as the Region's older residents age and either move pass away.

Historical societies in the Region have argued that children now receive less historical and cultural education, in schools and elsewhere., than they used to. Organizations are struggling to find media that effectively capture the interest of this population.

Generally, the Region's historical societies are facing a declining number of active members. This is due in part to the number of members that are second home owners in the Region or live out of state, and in part to the challenges of relevance that all volunteer organizations face today.



The Paramount Theater in Rutland is a jewel among the Region's cultural resources

Lucas Somers

Introduction of new ideas and exploration of cultural identity

As the world becomes more accessible to the Region's residents, the desire for new experiences and broader cultural understanding is heightened. The Region's newer residents, many of whom have fresh perspectives and ideas for the Region, also drive the push for expanded cultural experiences. The Region's 21 public libraries are contributing to this as they expand their offerings to meet their users needs. Cultural institutions are struggling to provide experiences that would otherwise be unavailable to the community. As schools face cutbacks to arts programs, these institutions find themselves meeting those needs as well, often working out of their own limited budgets. As separate institutions, their marketing efforts to reach the general populations of the Region's diverse communities have been difficult.

Some of the Region's cultural institutions meet artistic and cultural demands from far outside the Rutland Region. For these institutions, especially ones that focus on bringing teachers and scholars to their facilities for extended periods of time, housing has been an extremely difficult piece of the equation. Lack of affordable short term housing options limits the ability to market classes and teaching positions to those currently living outside the Region.

Cultural organizations feel they can have a large affect on the declining population of citizens in their early adulthood. This trend affects the economic stability of the Region, as well as many other aspects of community vitality and can be addressed through a wide variety of means. A focus on the enhancement and expansion of cultural and historical resources, and on the associated increase in the quality of life available in the Region to this population, will go a long way in reversing this trend.

Marketing the Region's historic and cultural assets

While the Rutland Region is steeped in history and culture, it is not known for either. Organizations across the Region are working to "put Rutland on the map" as a stimulating place to visit and live.

FUTURE TRENDS

- The population is always shifting, growing, declining, aging. A record of the history and culture in which we now live needs to be maintained to ensure a continuous record of the area's culture, history and identity.
- Population transition to more second homeowners and others not historically and culturally tied to the area, will increase the importance of these resources for providing a continuous story of how the Region developed its unique identity and sense of place.
- Historic buildings are getting older. Many are in need of updated wiring and



Artist housing and housing for young people downtown is extremely important in providing the critical mass of users (of cultural opportunities) and support for general economic development.



FAST FACT

In 2002, the Commission completed an inventory of historic and cultural resources. The inventory included performing and visual arts venues, literary arts sites, historic sites including covered and historic bridges as well as museums and media resources across the region.



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The Carving Studio has an international component, with teachers and students backgrounds as varied as South America, Canada, and throughout New England.



FAST FACT

The National Register of Historic Places is the Nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. Authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Register is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect our historic and archeological resources.

other work to make them less vulnerable to fire and deterioration, work that is often more expensive than building a new structure.

- Towns will continue to face the challenge of integrating historical features with current needs and goals.
- Support for arts education in the schools is limited, and will most likely continue to be so.
- With each generation, globalization and the desire to understand greater global issues increases. Demand will grow for access to cultural resources that link Rutland to the greater world/society.
- As the Region continues to grow, new residents offer opportunities to expand the available cultural opportunities by supporting cultural experiences that may not currently be provided. Cultural institutions will play important roles in bringing old and new communities together.
- Historical societies will continue to find they need to develop new mechanisms to effectively connect with people
- Emphasis and support for the growth and protection of historic resources in Rutland City and elsewhere are necessary to build the Region's cultural and historical identity, as well as its

economic future.

- The creative economy will receive increased emphasis and support, and help further general revitalization efforts throughout the Region.

MEETING CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS

A greater appreciation of historic and cultural resources needs to be cultivated in both the public and private sectors. Preservation and promotion of historic and cultural resources should be multi-faceted—focusing on collaboration among businesses, the arts community, planners, and policy makers.

All organizations involved in protecting and promoting the Region's history and culture will need to come together to ensure that their energies are focused and effective in reaching the Region's residents and visitors. For example, the Historical Societies have realized the need to rely on new avenues to reach people. They now frequently use websites, community access television and other technological means to educate the public, instead of only relying on visitation to their Society offices and events.

The identification and publicity of



A LOT OF FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Towns can participate in the preservation of historic and cultural resources in a number of ways. These include:

- Encouraging compatible uses and development adjacent to historical districts and cultural resources in their Town Plans.
- Develop regulations that encourage the preservation

of historic & unique structures, and that allow for creative businesses. Historic districts and design review districts are options available to interested towns.

- Take historic, archeological and cultural resources into consideration when planning and designing public improvements like street widening, roadway reconstruction, utility

HOW TOWNS CAN PROMOTE HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES...

distribution systems, and lighting.

- Making use of the many grant programs that support historic preservation and community improvements. Among them are ones dedicated to transportation enhancement, scenic byways, barn preservation, and historic preservation.
- Becoming a Certified Local Government, Designated Village, or Designated Downtown. Each of these

programs offer access and priority ranking for various grant and may provide tax breaks for rehabilitation.

- Nomination of sites to State and Federal Historic Sites Registry.
- Support local libraries and schools and recognize the value of their locations within village and downtown centers.
- Address historic and cultural resources in Town Plans.

historical and cultural resources is key to their preservation and appreciation. While an inventory was recently completed, many historic structures are not listed on the National Historic Registry. Federal and state tax credits directly promote retrofits and restoration work for structures listed on this registry.

Promoting historical and cultural resources' role in marketing, tourism and economic development across the Region will aid in meeting the current and future needs identified in this plan. Our historic communities offer attractive places in which to shop, visit, work, and do business. Making the history of the Region relevant to our current population is another way to ensure continued interest in the historical record of the area.

Many communities across the nation are realizing that economic initiatives capitalizing on unique community assets and history, local culture and quality of life offered in our small communities can effectively meet a variety of historic preservation, cultural identity and economic development goals.

This phenomenon was recently studied and illustrated in a report by the Vermont Council on Rural Development. Termed the "Creative Economy" there is an effort underway statewide to encourage communities to examine their strengths and cultivate new innovation that builds upon Vermont's unique and authentic communities. Brandon and Poultney have had success with this type of effort. Fair Haven and Rutland are also getting initiatives underway.

Celebration of the Region's history and culture is another way to promote appreciation of these resources by the general public, town officials and regional organizations. Cultural and art programs offered to schools and communities are an important component of this effort. Regional arts organizations can increase their role in resource development and provide sustainable funding for coordination and materials.

RUTLAND RPC ACTIONS

- Participate in short and long-term efforts to promote economic development that use the Creative Economy
- Work to build the cultural identity of the Region through partnerships with established organizations.
- Encourage protection of unique identity of the Rutland Region through historic preservation efforts and the promotion of thoughtful new development.
- Support projects that employ adaptive reuse of pre-existing structures, especially when the structure has historic value.
- Work with towns to use Town Plans and GIS tools to identify and plan for these resources.
- Assist communities with village and downtown designation applications that support the revitalization of historic town centers.
- Develop stronger relationships with local libraries on local and regional planning issues



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Old buildings often outlive their original purposes. Adaptive Reuse is the process of using old buildings for new activities while retaining their historic features. An old factory may become an apartment building. A rundown church may find new life as a restaurant... or a restaurant may become a church. This type of reuse of our historic and culturally significant structures to meet present day commercial, industrial and residential needs ensures that these resources are continuously maintained and appreciated as a bridge between the Region's history and future.



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Eight covered bridges, like the Gorham bridge in Proctor, stand throughout the Region.

CASE STUDY: CULTURAL AND HISTORIC REVITALIZATION IN BRANDON

A stroll down Main Street in Brandon Vermont these days is a refreshing experience. On a Tuesday afternoon, lunch places are doing brisk business, park benches are occupied, and galleries are opened to the public.

Residential streets radiate outwards from this vibrant center, offering stately historic homes, tidy cottages, town homes, apartments, “fixer-uppers” and affordable housing.

The layout of the neighborhoods and their relationship to downtown directs residents towards the village on foot and bike. Within walking distance of the center of town live young families just starting out, elderly persons,



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Brandon’s revitalization efforts have been community-wide professionals, and Brandon’s needier families.

The downtown has progressed from many empty storefronts in the 1990’s to ever expanding business activity, renovations to historic properties and expanded retail space today.

Much of this new business activity has focused on the creative economic sector—bookstore and coffee shop, galleries, restaurants, entertainment and leisure activities. Artistic activities have served to build community as well. Brandon was the first community to begin the pig, birdhouse, rocking chair, fill-in-the-totem, craze.

These projects not only recognize local artistic talent publicly, they allow community members to participate in a town-wide event. The Brandon Artists Guild, a cooperatively owned gallery of local artists, is bursting at the seams. Interested artists are being turned away for lack of gallery space.

What has been the change in this town over the past 4 years? It didn’t show in the 2000 census data, which stated that Brandon lost more children under 18 years old than any other town in the Region in the previous ten years, where Brandon’s overall population dropped by 7.2%, and where median incomes ranked 20th out of the region’s 27 towns, and where 55% of Brandon’s



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New restaurants are part of Brandon’s more vibrant downtown

residents renting their home were in unaffordable living situations.

"It's a feeling," says Warren Kimble, a successful local artist and gallery owner. He added that he doesn't have enough fingers to count off the number of young, well educated families and couples that have moved into town in the past couple of years.

Kimble says that Brandon's success can be measured in its people, in the fact that almost all of the renovation projects occurring in the downtown are privately funded; in the fact that small business owners, artisans, and professionals are not being recruited to live in Brandon, but are moving in on their own volition; in the fact that a galvanizing project has been the restoration of the Baptist church steeple by a resident who was not even a member of the congregation; and in the fact that residents of Brandon are passionate about their town, and are willing to trade in big money opportunities elsewhere for the quality of life and supportive community networks that Brandon offers.

Brandon's renaissance has been organic in nature. It began with a community project that allowed people to begin working together, and did not lose steam. There was no strategic plan. People were willing to cooperate and communicate to complete important private and public projects.

One accepted saying in Brandon is that a community must support itself. Retail, services, and art must meet the needs of town residents. Visitors and tourist dollars are of course welcomed, but are seen as an added bonus, not the engine that keeps the town alive.



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"Brandon Rocks", the town's 2005 arts campaign, put locally designed rocking chairs throughout the town. This followed up previous celebrations on the themes of pigs and bird houses.



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One of the Town's galleries overlooks Neshobe Falls. Across the river is a newly designed park with a small shelter, benches, and views downstream.

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