Getting Started With Your Historic Building

This hand-out is designed as a "primer" for getting started with a preservation project. Whether you are new to preservation or a seasoned veteran, we hope the following 6-step process will enable you to be as effective as possible in your efforts to preserve a community landmark. The New Hampshire Preservation Alliance is happy to answer your questions or make referrals at any stage along the way. Contact our field service representative Nicole Flynn at nf@nhpreservation.org or 603-224-2281.

1. What's the Story?

Every old building has a story to tell, a story that will be repeated many, many times throughout the process of rehabilitation. If the story of your building is not written down, do this first. Record answers to these basic questions: When was it built? By whom? Who has owned it over the years? How has it been used? What has happened there? What are its special or unusual features? What changes to the physical structure have taken place over time and how do these relate to changes in use? Assemble an archive of historic photographs and clippings too.

Understanding the history and significance of your building will help you as you plan for its future needs and provide a basis for sharing your enthusiasm with others in your community.

To avoid duplicating previous work, first check to see if the building has already been listed to either the N.H. State Register of Historic Places or the National Register of Historic Places, the official federal listing of significant historic, architectural, and archaeological resources. Even if it isn't on either list, you might want to make an appointment to visit the N.H. Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR) in Concord and review their files for other information. They are located at 19 Pillsbury Street, 2nd floor, in Concord (603-271-3483).

Many people begin their research at their public library. For a directory of New Hampshire libraries, go to https://directory.nhlibraries.org/. Libraries often have written copies of any local *National Register* listings as well as resources on local history. Another place to gather information is your local historical society. A listing of New Hampshire historical societies is at http://www.historicalsocietiesnh.com. These locally-based, mostly non-profit organizations often have limited hours but may have information that will help you put together the history of the building, including written histories, historic photographs, newspaper articles and oral histories. If the building was ever owned by the municipality, then town reports are likely to have records pertaining to expenditures for the building.

The New Hampshire Historical Society Library at 30 Park Street in Concord is a source for published histories, manuscripts, files, photographs, maps, documents and more. Non-members pay a modest fee. The N.H. State Library is right next door at 20 Park Street, and has similar resources (no fee). You could combine research at these places with a visit to the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, a short drive away.

Once you have compiled the basic story, you may then want to take the next step of recording the information into a standardized format called a State Inventory Form. The staff at the NHDHR can assist if needed, reviewing your content and making suggestions for editorial changes. If the inventory form is complete and the property meets the State Register criteria, the NHDHR declares the property "eligible for listing to the State Register of Historic Places." If you wish to pursue this designation, you should know that final determination is made by the State Historical Resources Council, which meets only four times a year.

Inventory forms are often completed as part of various state and local planning processes such as environmental review for transportation projects, and through the efforts of town heritage or historical commissions. This is why it is worthwhile for property owners to first check the NHDHR files prior to beginning their own efforts. There may already be an Inventory Form for your building.

State Register listing (or a determination of eligibility) or National Register listing (or a determination of eligibility) is required for several types of grants: Conservation License Plate grants (also known as "Mooseplate" grants, the NH Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) and some grants from the NH Preservation Alliance.

Listing on the State Register of Historic Places is one of several ways to acknowledge a property's historical significance. Listing DOES NOT restrict what can be done with the property. A property may also qualify for the National Register of Historical Places or, in rare cases, for designation as a National Historic Landmark, both honorific programs that also do not control what owners can do with their property. The National Park Service manages these programs through each state's historic preservation office, in our case the N.H. Division of Historical Resources.

Some communities regulate preservation through local historic districts or other mechanisms to prevent demolition or otherwise manage changes to historic resources. Check with your town office or other municipal authority to be sure of any applicable designations and ordinances.

2. What's the Condition and How Should We Take Care of the Building?

Determining the overall condition of the building and setting priorities for repair should be the next step in the process. But it is also important to understand the “character-defining features” of the building so that as repairs or changes are made, the historic character is retained. In this process, what is original, what represents later changes, and what changes may have acquired historic importance in their own right are determined. Knowing this, you can better determine your preservation and maintenance strategy.

There are four primary approaches for the treatment of historic buildings; rehabilitation is the most common treatment because it allows for changes that reflect changing uses over time. For more about treatment options and how to implement them, review the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

Usually, a professional architect, sometimes working in conjunction with an engineer or preservation contractor, is brought in to do both the conditions assessment and identification of character-defining features. Plan to share your research, historic maps, photographs, or other documentation with these consultants. They will do a careful examination of the building and produce a report that includes existing conditions, recommended treatments and estimated costs. This work should be done by professionals who are familiar with historic construction methods and materials, understand the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, and can explain how their recommendations meet those Standards. Consultants should also be able to prioritize appropriate repairs to deteriorated areas and suggest phases for a project if that is needed to help with fundraising.

The New Hampshire Preservation Alliance provides referrals to help community projects connect with preservation professionals who can help do assessments. Both the NH Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) and the NH Preservation Alliance currently have grant programs to help fund this work.

Many preservation advocates will attest to the value of a good conditions assessment. The process of working with a preservation professional, learning the causes and interrelationships of building problems, and discovering how priorities are established is often the perfect catalyst to mobilize a building committee into action. The assessment report provides a framework for planning that can be consulted by anyone involved with the building in the future. It can form the basis for other fund-raising activities including grant applications and direct solicitations.

A conditions assessment may seem like a lot of effort and expense, especially if there are urgent needs for repair, but in the long run it will save time, money and effort. Doing without one can jeopardize future grant proposals and may lead to decisions that have to be reversed later. The conditions assessment is an essential road map to guide you along the most cost-effective route for rehabilitation while simultaneously preserving the historic character of the resource. A well-done report often makes the difference between success and failure.

How do you learn what constitutes appropriate preservation treatment? The National Park Service publishes a series of Preservation Briefs that contain valuable information on over 50 subjects, and they offer Technical Preservation Services web pages as well. The non-profit National Trust for Historic Preservation also has extensive information posted for free. For rehabilitation projects undertaken by faith-based organizations, Partners for Sacred Places serves as a clearinghouse.

The Preservation Alliance maintains a Directory of Preservation Professionals, Products and Services on our website.

3. How Will the Building be Used? Can an Old Building be Energy Efficient?

How the building will be used may affect your choice of treatment recommendations, though basics like a watertight roof and solid foundation will always be constant. Sometimes emergency repairs have to be done first, before you do any longer-term planning for how you intend to use the building.

Good rehabilitation practice would include identifying and preserving the character-defining features that give your building its uniqueness, as has been mentioned before, while also incorporating sensitive changes to make the building usable in the 21st century. Familiarize yourself with recommended preservation treatments and solutions since you are ultimately responsible for the choices made on your building. The National Park Service's Preservation Briefs can help you with specific topics and treatments such as roofing, masonry repairs, or sensitive additions. There are over 50 of these topic-specific briefs now available for free at www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm

Any change in building ownership or use or a major rehabilitation will require compliance with current building codes, including life safety issues and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Certain usage choices could dramatically affect the overall costs for the project. For instance, if you plan to use a town hall's second floor as public meeting space, you will most likely be required to provide elevator access and a sprinkler system. The architect who is doing your condition assessment may prepare his or her recommendations based on adapting the building for a desired new use, so it is very helpful to know in advance how you want the building to be used.

Anticipated use can also have a big impact on the budget. Financial considerations overlap with this step, and will be discussed in the next section. Consider at this stage things like how much income the rehabilitated building will generate. Can this income be used toward paying for construction costs or debt service? Will the budget and scope of the project have to be adjusted to meet projections of a capital campaign? Is the project well-positioned to receive grants and donations or receive town-appropriated funds?

If weatherization and energy efficiency are major concerns, you may also want to have an energy audit by a qualified professional; this will determine where the greatest heat loss is occurring and suggest remediation. Choose a contractor who has worked on historic buildings before and will propose solutions that respect the integrity of the building and follow careful standards for weatherization. Contractors who are familiar with the needs of historic buildings are listed in the Alliance's Directory.

We strongly discourage replacement of historic windows, especially as a first step. Not only are historic windows considered a vital character-defining feature of most buildings, but the payback period for new windows is often in the range of 60 years, and few replacement windows will last even half that long. There are many professionals who can re-tune old windows and increase efficiency comparable to new windows.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's weatherization advice is at https://forum.savingplaces.org/learn/issues/sustainability and https://savingplaces.org/stories/8-ways-to-green-your-historic-house.

Once you have gathered information about the building's condition, considered your usage needs and energy-efficiency improvements, you can develop a more detailed rehabilitation plan, scope of work, budget and timeframe. Having a document that breaks down a large project into smaller pieces can be essential to your fundraising plans. Many local groups decide to tackle their project in a series of smaller, more manageable phases rather than attempting to raise all the money and manage the whole project at once. Many grant applications will require such a plan. Some will also require compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.

4. How Do We Fund this Work?

Three documents form the basis of the work recommended in this section. A simple **financial statement** will be needed to show your organization's operating income and expenses, debts or liabilities, and any endowments or cash reserves. Even non-profit owners or municipalities should consider preparing such a statement. It should include debt service for a mortgage or loan that was part of the initial acquisition or rehabilitation of the building, and factor in such things as increases in utility costs or potential new rental income once the project is completed. Assistance with estimating operating costs and organizing financial statements is available from SCORE, the retired executives mentoring program and from NH economic development agencies.

You will need to develop a **funding plan,** a detailed chart of the various sources of income to fund your preservation plans. This will show the various sources or activities that will generate income, their time-frame, the financial goal for each segment, and the people in charge of that element. It is intended to be a consensus-based document and to instill accountability into your efforts.

These documents will furnish information for the **case statement**, a printed document to share with potential supporters that describes what you're trying to do and why, who will benefit, how much money it will take and where you plan to get that funding. Case statements can be simple or elaborate, but generally include a summary of the building's history and significance, how you envision the building will be used and by whom, and what the rehabilitated building will mean to the community. Recommendations of the conditions assessment report may also be included in the case statement, and photographs and charts generally illustrate the various sections.

At the beginning stage of fundraising, you should start by educating your board or committee members about the process of raising money, and set realistic expectations. Only when you feel confident that you have solid consensus regarding your vision for the building, the goals of your capital campaign and a sense of broad community support should you launch your fundraising effort. The Preservation Alliance's Field Service Representative could help you at this stage, or one of your volunteers could take the lead based on experience gained working on other capital campaign projects.

As you develop your fundraising plan, you will want to solicit gifts from all board members. By ensuring that all board members are donors, all board members will be persuasive as fund raisers—with a little coaching. Generally, capital campaigns begin with a silent or quiet phase of individual solicitation and giving at the leadership or major gifts level. Grant applications may be part of an early phase as well. A gift pyramid and names of potential donors should be assembled. Only with at least 60% of your overall goal in hand should you go public with your campaign and begin soliciting smaller contributions.

Typically, groups asking for donations are certified as tax-exempt, charitable organizations. Donors expect to receive a prompt thank-you letter showing that their gifts are tax deductible. The New Hampshire Department of Justice, Division of Charitable Trusts has good online instructions for the operation of non-profits and how to appropriately manage donations.

Grants typically provide about 15% of total dollars raised by charitable organization, a fact that may come as a surprise to many people. Grants usually require at least a 1:1 match, and that match can be used as an incentive for key gifts from individuals and businesses. Sources for grant research are the New Hampshire Center for Non Profits and the Foundation Directory housed in libraries in Concord and Plymouth. The New Hampshire Preservation Alliance also maintains a small list of grant sources and resources for preservation funding.

In New Hampshire, the best sources for preservation work are the Land and Community Heritage Investment program (LCHIP), and the NH Conservation License Plate or "Mooseplate" Program The latter makes modest grants to municipalities or other governmental bodies for preservation of publicly-owned resources. LCHIP funds non-profit projects as well.

Special events may also help you raise money and build visibility for your project. Auctions, dinners, raffles, special tours, and a host of other events can generate income for preservation work, but these activities can require a lot of volunteer hours and up-front expenditures.

As your preservation project progresses, you might want to take a road trip to meet others who have already accomplished what you are starting out on. It can be very helpful to find out what they did and what they learned in the process. The N.H. Preservation Alliance's field service staff can suggest these mentors for you.

Commercial projects (not non-profits) may find it helpful to consider utilizing rehabilitation tax credits or incentives. Federal tax credits of up to 20% of rehab costs are available for qualifying historic structures. The N.H. Division of Historical Resources administers the Federal Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credit, and assists in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.

State enabling legislation known as RSA 79-E, the downtown tax incentive, has been adopted in about two dozen cities and towns. This mechanism can keep a building's property tax assessment at the pre-rehab value for a period of five or more years.

5. What Does the Community Think?

It's not enough to map out your fund-raising ideas, prepare a succinct case statement and have a positive financial statement. What your community thinks matters a lot at this stage, and managing your communication and public relations is an essential part of the work of any non-profit capital campaign. (Commercial projects still have to effective PR, but they are less beholden to the community for positive support.)

Project advocates have to manage community opinion, build support, and deal with any obstacles in order to successfully complete a capital campaign. With honest feedback, you can and should address the concerns or adjust your plans. The goal is to build positive interest and consensus so that when you launch your fundraising campaign, you will not only have people who know about and support your plans throughout the community, but you will have eliminated negatives or unforeseen challenges. Ideally, opposition will be minimal or non-existent.

A **feasibility study** for a capital campaign is one way to test the viability of a major project and its ability to attract large gifts. A consultant is generally hired to carry out this quiet, one-on-one series of interviews with possible major donors and other influential members of your community.

A more general strategy might be to hold one or more information sessions for voters or constituents to hear about plans and get their questions answered—before any fundraising is begun. Comments and concerns can help you, as the project organizers, to revise your case study and financial plans for greater acceptance among potential supporters.

You may want to check with local officials to be sure your plans comply with local ordinances. A heads-up to selectmen or planning board members, building code department, local historic district commission or heritage commission members might all be useful.

You may also choose to share your plans with potential partners. Initial conversations should be general in nature, exploring common interests and assessing community need. These stakeholders or potential partners might include community clubs, neighbors, the historical society, library, or other non-profits.

Communicating small successes through local media is an excellent strategy. A well-written press release often is welcomed by a local weekly newspaper and will be run in its entirety. Add a clear photo if you have one, and include pictures of people as well as the building itself. An incremental PR plan would share good news at strategic points throughout your process, and well before any capital campaign is announced. You might do a press release about the conditions assessment report, or announce a grant award or major donation, or host a series of events to get people into your building and increase your base of potential support. Remember, do the necessary planning before asking for gifts of money. Too many campaigns falter or fail because of a lack of careful planning and promises that can't be met.

6. How Do we Create a Strong Leadership Team?

Managing a construction project takes a lot of time and expertise. So does developing and carrying out a capital campaign. And handling communications for these activities can feel like a full-time job as well. If existing staff or volunteers are asked to handle the increased work load, burnout and frustration will likely result. To avoid these undue burdens, additional help and new leaders should be recruited.

Consider organizing a separate team with assigned chairpersons for the big tasks: project management, fundraising, and communications and outreach. Identify resource people within the community who can help with in-kind and professional expertise or staff your various committees, and invite them to join you. Some of the skills you might be seeking are construction project manager, business project manager, fundraiser, grant writer, communications or marketing person, and various tradespeople.

You may also want to build the skill and knowledge of the members of your group by getting more training and education. Attend one of the Preservation Alliance's workshops. Board Source and the N.H. Center for Non-Profits offer resources to help non-profit boards with governance and fund-raising issues. There are lots of resources--books, website, and consultants--to help you manage a capital campaign.

Ready, Set, Go!

The process of completing a preservation project takes time, and we encourage you to be patient. Preservation work is often led by volunteers with little or no experience, learning at each step of the way, buoyed by passion and commitment to their goals. Yet everyone has limitations on the free time they have to devote to a project. There will be meetings to schedule and attend, contractors and consultants to accommodate, and day-to-day operational issues that must be dealt with. Sometimes the pace seems maddeningly slow. Remember, preservation takes time, and it's not uncommon for an effort to take 10 years or more from when concerns first surface to the final ribbon-cutting celebration!

There are lots of resources to help you along the way, and many helpful individuals who can provide you with guidance. Refer to the resources on the N.H. Preservation Alliance and the N. H. Division of Historical Resources websites.

We invite you to support our work.

The New Hampshire Preservation Alliance strengthens communities and stimulates local economies by encouraging the protection and revival of historic buildings and places.

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