

Concord Preservation Issues Goals—realized & unrealized

Text of Email from Electa Tritsch to Jeffrey Gonyeau and Joanne Gibson

November 10, 2017

Jeffrey and Joanne, hello -

First of all, I want to thank you Jeff, for plunking relevant sections of the Historic Resources Masterplan and the CLRP 2020 right in front of me. There were parts I had never paid suitable attention to, and others that I found daunting in their breadth of vision.

In response to your request to pinpoint 3 to 5 things that remain really important historic issues for Concord since those publications were done, my thoughts are not far different from what came out of the discussion that you and Joanne Gibson and I had recently. The comments below focus on historic preservation especially, rather than trying to connect all the dots between that and the myriad other issues with which you and the long range planning committee are wrestling.

In the broadest terms, Concord's most vital historic preservation concern centers around protection of this community's overall character as well as its varied manifestations in the town's neighborhoods. Three broad areas require additional or stepped-up attention from what has been done to date: historic landscape protection; archeological sites protection; protection of 20th century built environments.

The documents you shared during our discussion outline many specific issues and approaches, an impressive number of which have been or are being addressed now. Rather than repeating, I only offer a few additional comments. To elaborate on the three areas of concern I just listed:

Historic landscape protection

There is no such thing in Concord as a completely “natural” landscape. 3000 years of occupation and use for a wide variety of purposes has resulted in an environment shaped and studied by humans almost inch by inch. Barrett Farm is not a house; it is a large piece of arable land with a house on it. The history of Damon Mill involves a complex set of hydraulic engineering features that together, tell a story of West Concord’s social and economic development. Estabrook Woods is an environmental testament to a hundred years of local conservation efforts.

Historic landscape protection involves farmland, open space and natural resources as well as the built features that characterize them such as stone walls, dams, trails, old roads and orchards. These

landscapes and features are constantly challenged by an economy that defines land's "highest and best" use as being development for human habitation.

This will be the single most pressing historic preservation issue for Concord in the foreseeable future. It will require the attention of Town government, private organizations, and citizens, and a commitment to pay to protect these resources that cannot be replaced.

Archeological sites protection

This category must be understood to include historic sites as well as pre-contact features. Whatever features remain on Brister's Hill, of a mixed-race and economically disadvantaged 19th century community, are as much archeological sites as the riverside camp sites of Contact Period Musketaquid people. They share the importance of providing information about the Town's history and people that is not available on any printed page. They also share the same fragility and most of them are unidentified.

Mapping of all known and predicted archeological sites is an urgently needed first step toward producing a town-wide archeological sensitivity map available to appropriate personnel and researchers, and required for any project involving excavation. Further protection efforts must be adopted for selected sites, as needed.

Protection of 20th century built environments

Concord prides itself on its long history, and protects many of the structures identified with its most famous people and moments. The vast majority of Concord's residents however, live, work, study and play in 20th century buildings and landscapes. These are, almost exclusively, the environments that define neighborhood character. Whenever a building is demolished or upgraded in such a way as to be historically unrecognizable, the neighborhood character changes a bit until it eventually becomes a different entity altogether. Neighborhoods in all parts of town have seen this transformation begin over the past 4-5 years, including Bedford Road, Lowell Road, Sudbury Road and the adjoining streets east of Route 2. The most extensive changes are taking place within the late 19th-early 20th century residential "divisions" surrounding West Concord Center, and in mid-century Conantum, a ground-breaking planned community.

Many of the affected properties have no preservation protection at all, as they are not covered by the Town's Demolition Review Bylaw, which applies only to pre-1940 structures. The by-law itself is only minimally effective, since architects and developers have had sufficient experience with demolition delay to view it simply as "part of the permitting process" – one more irksome obstacle to wait out.

It is possible that introduction of the state's Neighborhood Conservation District designation to Concord might be extremely useful in these and other areas. The flexibility of the designation at the same time recommends it and makes it particularly difficult to install.

Finally, the overarching message I draw from all this is that none of it will improve without a large dose of historical consciousness-raising.

Everyone loves the landscape of Concord but most residents don't know it needs help and that they can help (town meeting appropriations, CLCT contributions, clean-up days on the SuAsCo).

I would guess that 90% of Concordians know that Musketaquid, Egg Rock, Squaw Sachem all relate to the town's founding, but have no idea that the local Nipmuc and Massachusetts clans actually had settlements here; or that the Battle Road in Minuteman National Park is riddled with archeological features of farmsteads that stretched its length since the 1600s.

Conantum's founding began with an MIT community planning professor's dream of an affordable place for college folk to live out in the country – it became a prototypic example of prefab construction, large irregular lots and almost a third of the whole reserved as common land.

This is where public relations becomes the first line of defense for preservation. The outlets are there: Town website; Concord Journal and wickedlocal.com; CCTV – our community access TV station (Ch. 8 especially); adult education classes/workshops; engagement with public & private school programming. This also includes better access and coordination of historical information for visitors- vital supporters for all of our historic sites.

Okay, that's enough. Hope some part of this is helpful. Electa

Electa Kane Tritsch, Chair

Concord Historical Commission

Chair, Concord Historical Commission