

CITY OF MEDFORD COMMUNITY-WIDE SURVEY PLAN

Medford, Middlesex County, Massachusetts

Acknowledgements

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Project History & Objectives

The Medford Historical Commission obtained grant support from the Massachusetts Historical Commission to prepare a survey plan in advance of undertaking extensive and long-overdue inventory work. Although Medford's commission has been active, its efforts have been focused on compliance, inquiries from the public and city agencies, demolition delay review (established 1992), and its two local historic districts (established in 1985). The Commission is operated by volunteers with no staff support from the city; its annual budget has been approximately \$500 for the last five years. A survey plan will allow the commission to begin expanding its role in managing Medford's historic resources. Medford is a city of over 55,000, with as many as 15,000 buildings, and a significant portion of these are over fifty years of age. The City measures just over eight square miles, with a population density of over 10,000 people and over 2,500 housing units per square mile. Sheer numbers make this a challenging effort.

The Medford Historical Commission has begun laying the groundwork for the effort ahead. The commission members are well-versed in Medford history and fully engaged in the preservation issues that

arise. The commission has established a predictable routine of public meetings, maintains systematic records, and has established effective partnerships with critical agencies in the city. The Historical Society is active and ambitious, and its library and website contain useful material on the City's history. City offices, including the library, community development, assessing, and engineering are poised to share their resources. Many of the critical sources for survey work have been assembled, including digital versions of most of the primary historic maps. The Commission already has a website with significant amounts of information about its efforts; adding the survey plan will help the community to better understand the historic landscape of Medford, as well as the survey and planning effort ahead.

In the spring of 2008, students in the Preservation Studies Program at Boston University undertook preliminary research on the historic landscapes of Medford and reconnaissance survey of the area south of the Mystic River. Students consulted a variety of primary sources, including a selection of the numerous historic maps and atlases that cover the city, censuses of population, and recorded plot plans, and researched selected themes in city and regional histories. This research provided an overview of the forces that shaped Medford's historic landscape, as well as outlining the key periods of development for that landscape.

While standard survey methodology works well to cover the exceptional and well-preserved components of this landscape, the common buildings which were constructed in large numbers and that have experienced some remodeling present a greater challenge. It will be useful to review how these resources might best be served, represented, planned for, and protected. With the support of the Mayor and funding from the Office of Community Development, the Medford Historical Commission proposes to undertake that critical building block of preservation planning, a truly comprehensive inventory of its rich historical resources.

Project Objectives

The purpose of the project was to conduct communitywide reconnaissance survey and to prepare a survey plan to guide the comprehensive inventory of the cultural resources of the City of Medford. The project provided the expertise of a professional cultural resource survey specialist (Neil Larson, Larson Fisher Associates, www.larsonfisher.com) to assist the Medford Historical Commission in developing a survey plan. Specific project goals include the following:

- To describe the historic landscapes of the City of Medford
- To identify and assess documentary materials concerning the history of the City of Medford
- To provide a preliminary identification and assessment of the nature and location of historic and cultural resources in the City of Medford, including previously undocumented or under-documented resources
- To identify selection criteria and priorities for comprehensive survey of the City of Medford
- To develop an action plan for implementing survey goals for the creation of a comprehensive inventory of the cultural and historic resources of the City of Medford.

Historical Background & Identification of Neighborhoods

Medford's historic population growth parallels that of many of the inner suburbs that form a dense ring around the city of Boston. Although sparsely settled in the 17th and 18th centuries, the Mystic River provided opportunities for employment beyond agriculture, shipbuilding and trade. In addition, the area was well-known for brick production as well as rum distilling and a variety of other service and manufacturing endeavors. Fueled by these growth opportunities, the town's population reached 5,000 in the middle of the 19th century, and by the 1880s had doubled to 10,000. The greatest expansion, however, came after Medford adopted city government in 1892; over the next two decades the population doubled again, and over the next three decades it tripled, reaching an all-time high of over 67,000 persons in 1945. To accommodate this growth, thousands of residences were constructed in the formerly rural landscape surrounding Medford Square and West Medford, and a very large proportion of the current city consists of residential neighborhoods created during this extraordinary boom. The City now includes over 22,000 households within a nearly equal number of housing units.



Medford includes surviving examples of historic resources from each period of its development, save the early years of the 17th century. Exceptional as well as more common examples can be found of the building forms and styles that were popular in eastern Massachusetts towns and cities over the last three centuries. Most of the city's earliest and agricultural landscapes have been built over, but several are preserved in the large open spaces of the Middlesex Fells; newer open spaces were created by parks and parkway lands. Early survey efforts have focused on the city's exceptional architectural landmarks, and, more recently, some of its inter-municipal sanitary and transportation infrastructure has been highlighted in regional recording and evaluating efforts. More extensive and numerous resources remain to be recorded. Core areas in East Medford and West Medford were the first to urbanize and retain significant plan and architectural features. As Medford continued to grow, with regional prosperity and improved transportation networks, neighborhoods of the rising Victorian middle class grew up north and west of Medford Square and around West Medford. Housing for the working classes developed peripheral to these better neighborhoods, near the manufacturing zones, and along transportation corridors.

The building booms of the late 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries produced large numbers of housing units as well as a number of small commercial nodes scattered across the expanding neighborhoods of east, west, north, and south Medford. Block upon block of single-family and two-family housing, as well as some three-deckers and apartment houses, all constructed during this hectic period, can be found in these areas.

More detailed historical overviews are contained in the neighborhood reconnaissance surveys appended to the end of this report. Medford's neighborhoods have been identified as follows (see map above).

1. Medford Square

Location: West of 93 and east of Winthrop Street.

Medford Square contains the central business district of the City, which dates back to the establishment of the commons in the early 18th century. The city's public buildings and many churches are located here. In 1855 the area where Salem, Riverside, Forest, High and Main streets merged contained the densest development in the entire town. The area also includes distinctive single-family houses on the hillside north of the commercial center. Medford Square had extended south across the Mystic River, but is now divided from South Medford by highways.

2. East Medford

Location: East of 93 and south of Fellsway West

Development in East Medford originated around a depot where the Medford Branch Railroad intersected Spring Street. Myrtle and Lawrence streets are depicted on the 1855 map with rows of small cottages already on Myrtle. Single- and two-family development spread to fill the space west of the depot reaching back to Park Street where a second depot was located on the eastern edge of Medford Square. Salem Street angles through the northern section of this early neighborhood and is a major commercial thoroughfare. More intensive multi-family housing was introduced to the eastern and northern sections of the neighborhood in the early 20th century.

3. West Medford

Location: South of Winthrop Street and east of Playsted Road.

West Medford contains an old 18th-century center at High and Winthrop streets, as well as a much-later suburban center centered at the depot of the old Boston & Lowell Railroad at High and Plaisted. There are numerous 18th- and early 19th-century houses along High Street, but the area between High and Winthrop streets is now characterized by late-19th and early 20th-century residential developments, many of which are distinguished by quality architecture. Sections south of High Street and close to the Mystic River have denser and more mixed development indicating its transition to more of a working class community. The area of West Medford between the railroad and the river (this is where the Middlesex Canal had been routed) has a history as an African American enclave.

4. Wellington

Location: East of Locust Street and following the north-south line that marks the change from very dense small lots and the larger ones; across the Fellsway to town boundary.

The numbered streets at the eastern limits of the City and south of the Medford Branch Railroad appear on the 1855 map of the city, but without any lots or buildings indicated. This area, along with three short streets south of Riverside –Locust, Linden and Hall—flank wetlands that became the source of clay for the Bay State Brick Manufacturing Company. Residential development, however, did not begin until the end of the 19th century and today is characterized by multi-family housing from that period.

5. Fulton Heights

Location: East of 93 and north of Fellsway West.

This hillside neighborhood was only sparsely developed into the 20th century. The older Malden Highlands neighborhood spilled over the town boundary, but it was not until Fellsway West was introduced that hillside woodlots were cleared and subdivided for development.

6. Brooks Estate

Location: West of Playsted to the Mystic Lakes.

This residential neighborhood was developed in stages in the 20th century reflecting West Medford's suburban growth.

The last two areas were excluded from more detailed examination undertaken in this survey as an expedient measure. Nevertheless, they are two areas that need to be addressed in the community-wide survey plan.

7. Middlesex Fells

Location: Open space in the north section of the town.

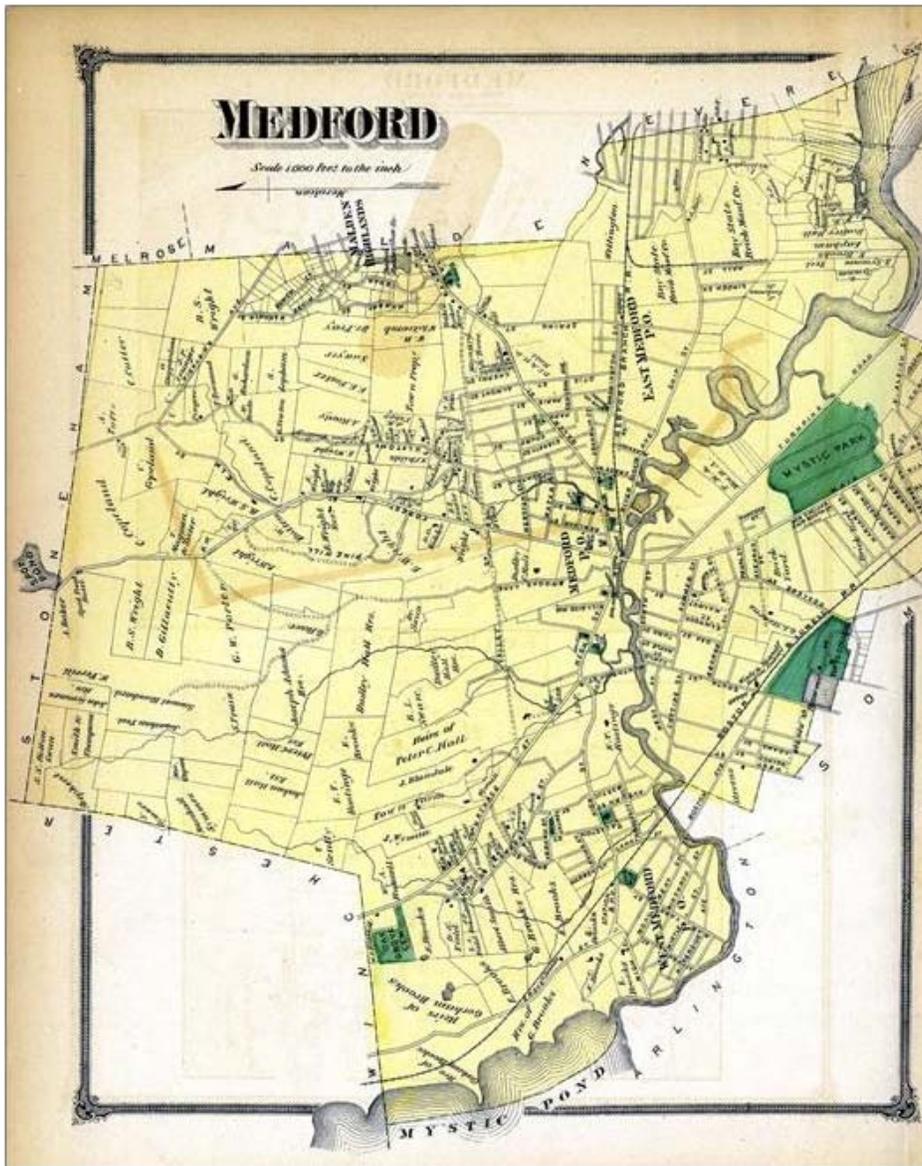
Middlesex Fells is a recognized state conservation area and, as such, tangential to a survey plan for historic neighborhoods. However, it is historically significant parkland that contains historic and archeological resources, which will be of concern to the Medford Historical Commission. The Fells should be kept on the list of the neighborhoods and be acknowledged in the survey priorities. The

historical commission will need to work with the state Department of Conservation & Recreation and the Friends of the Middlesex Fells Reservation to identify and record these resources.

8. South Medford

Location: South of Mystic River

South Medford has been the subject of a field study project for students in Boston University's New England Studies Program under the direction of Claire Dempsey. Since the results of this study were not available at the outset of this project, further planning assessments for this neighborhood have been deferred to a later time. At an appropriate time, an addendum will be attached to this report for this neighborhood.



Medford in 1875

Existing Inventory and National Register Documentation

There are 768 entries for Medford in the Massachusetts Historical Commission's survey inventory that include 688 buildings, 28 areas (three representing historic districts), 45 structures, six objects, and one cemetery. A count of documents currently in the Medford file of the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) has a substantially lower count for buildings (472), apparently as a result of the corridors listed on the National Register below as multi-property listings; this counting anomaly requires resolution. Of these 11 areas (containing a total of 219 buildings), 121 individual buildings (54 being amendments of existing forms) and the one burial ground were inventoried in an MHC-funded survey project in 1974. Typical of such early surveys, the inventory is probably comprehensive for 17th- and 18th-century properties, spotty for antebellum properties and very selective of late 19th and early 20th century properties. Since then many properties have been added to the inventory through a series of informal and systematic efforts, the most recent being park and parkway components of the MHC-sponsored survey and registration project covering the Metropolitan Park System of Greater Boston.

With the exception of the park system project, the principal focus of the inventory is on single-family residences, churches and other civic architectural landmarks. Late 19th- and 20th-century vernacular dwellings, single- and multi-family, and commercial buildings are largely excluded. By today's standards, most survey forms contain only cursory building data making them more identifiers than documentary records. Their principal advantage is as an entry on the MACRIS list, which affords certain protections to the buildings they represent. It is possible to greatly expand the level of historical documentation for the properties in the inventory, but it is more of a priority to add whole classes of architecture and historical contexts to the inventory to bring balance to the record. Uneven geographical coverage is another factor to address.

The 1974 survey resulted in the listing of two historic districts, the Hillside Avenue and Old Ship Street historic districts, and 14 individual properties on the National Register the following year. A lesser number of properties have been listed in the intervening 36 years. Today, the city contains the same two historic districts and a total of 23 individual properties listed on the National Register. Two properties, the Isaac Royall House on George Street and the Peter Tufts House on Riverside Avenue, were designated National Historic Landmarks decades ago. A more particular list of National Register and local designations follows.

National Historic Landmarks

- Isaac Royall House, 15 George St., 1692, 1737, 1750 (NHL)
- Peter Tufts House, 350 Riverside Ave., c. 1680 (NHL)

Historic Districts

- Hillside Avenue Historic District (NR 1975)
- Old Ship Street Historic District (NR 1975)
- Unitarian Universalist Church & Parsonage, 2 buildings, 141 & 147 High St. (MDF.P, NR 1975, HABS 1935)

Multiple Property Listings

- Water Supply System of Metropolitan Boston Thematic Resources (MDF.Q, NR 1990)
 - Middlesex Fells Reservoirs Historic District (MDF.R, NR 1990)
 - Mystic Lakes (MDF.S, NR 1990)

- The Metropolitan Park System of Greater Boston MPS, Medford Components (MFD.U, NR 2003-2007)
 - Middlesex Fells Parkway (MDF.X, NR 2003)
 - Fells Connector Parkways Historic District (MDF.Y, NR 2003)
 - Mystic Valley Parkway (MDF.AA, NR 2006)
 - Revere Beach Parkway (MDF.AB, NR 2007)
- Middlesex Canal Historic and Archeological District (MDF.V, NR 2009)

Individual listings

- Albree-Hall-Lawrence House, 35 Lawrence Rd., c. 1785 (NR 1976; HABS 1935)
- John B. Angier House, 129 High St., 1842 (NR 1975)
- Bigelow Block, cor. Forest & Salem sts, 1886 (NR 1975)
- Charles Brooks House, 309 High St., c. 1785 (NR 1975)
- Jonathan Brooks House, 2 Woburn St., c. 1781 (NR 1975)
- Shepherd Brooks, Estate, 275 Grove St., 1881 (NR 1975)
- Paul Curtis House / M. Delano House, 114 South St., 1839 (NR 1975)
- George P. Fernald House, 12 Rock Hill St., 1894 (NR 1976)
- Jonathan Fletcher House, 283 High St., c. 1835 (NR 1975)
- Grace Episcopal Church, 160 High St., 1868-1872 (NR 1972)
- Isaac Hall House, 43 High St., c. 1720 & c. 1790 (NR 1975)
- Lawrence Light Guard Armory, 90 High St., 1900-1902 (NR1975)
- Joseph K. Manning House, 35-37 Forest St., 1875 (NR 1988)
- John H. McGill House, 56 Vernon St., 1902 (NR 1980)
- Medford Main Post Office, 20 Forest St., 1937 (NR 1986)
- Edward Oakes House, 5 Sylvia Rd., 1729, moved from 460 Riverside Ave in 1977 (NR 1980)
- Old Medford High School, 22-24 Forest St., 1895, 1929, 1939 (NR 1983)
- Park Street Railroad Station, 20 Magoun Ave., 1894 (NR 1975)
- Richard Pinkham House, 24 Brooks Park, 1850 (NR 2007)
- Salem Street Burying Ground, Salem St., 1660-1880 (NR 1981)
- John Wade House / Pierce Tavern, 253 High St., 1784-1794 (NR 1975)
- Jonathan Wade House, 13 Bradlee Rd., 1683-1689 (NR 1975)

Determined Eligible for the National Register

- Dyer Building, 36 Salem St., 1915 (DOE for ITC 1986; Inventory Form No. MDF.78)
- Granary Building, 28-32 Main St., c. 1865 (DOE for Honor 1990; Inventory Form No. MDF.52)

Sixteen of the 23 individual properties and both historic districts were listed between 1972 and 1976, which associates them with the initial survey era. Clearly there is more National Register (and local designation) nominations to be made just among the properties and areas already inventoried, not to mention the vernacular resources yet to be surveyed.

Local Designations

In 1985 the city's historical commission designated Hillside Avenue Historic District and Marm Simonds Hill Historic District local historic districts. The former was listed on the National Register, the later has yet to be listed. No additional designations have been made.

Current Threats to Historic Resources

Medford is experiencing many of the threats to its historic resources that are experienced throughout the region and the Commonwealth. There are threats of tear-downs, demolition by neglect, and many buildings are undergoing physical alterations as property owners wrestle with increasing energy and maintenance costs. The City is a hub where many major inter-municipal and regional transportation routes intersect, and it soon may be a destination for a Green Line T extension. Medford is intensely developed and intensively used.

While it is difficult to predict the direction of change in an uncertain economy, there is little doubt that the historic fabric of the city place will suffer if better preservation planning cannot be undertaken. The survey plan is a first step for the Medford Historical Commission as it seeks to expand its efforts beyond its responsibilities as a Local District Commission and toward preservation planning for the City at large.



House in Wellington neighborhood with exterior features replaced.



Changes at intersection of High St. and Harvard Ave. in West Medford neighborhood.

General Recommendations & Survey Priorities

As the Medford Historical Commission prepares for a more comprehensive neighborhood approach to historic preservation planning, crafting an effective survey methodology becomes a critical first step. The buildings and other historic features that characterize the different neighborhoods need to be recorded and classified in objective terms such that properties are not selected based on pre-established qualitative architectural hierarchy, physical condition, or personal taste. Physical and design characteristics of properties throughout a neighborhood, and the entire City, should be recorded in a controlled descriptive system that will allow for comparative analysis within locales or City wide. Once compiled in a computer data base, lists of all churches or schools could be generated, for example, or buildings constructed before 1850, two-family houses on Otis Street or in East Medford, the stages of residential development in Brooks Estate, or the percentage of houses with original wood window sash in Medford Square. Using the city's geographical information system (GIS), maps can be generated to illustrate the location, concentration and distribution of properties exhibiting selected characteristics.

The City of Cambridge has set a standard for the comprehensive survey of historic resources on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis. Using paper forms in a pre-digital age, the Cambridge Historical Commission recorded information on every building in the city. The effort took many years to complete but now the commission has a base level of architectural data that allows them to particularize buildings within a broad range of vernacular building types and assess them in the context of a neighborhood's development. Comprehensive surveys take time and expand in stages. The first step will be to record the most essential and easiest obtained data (most of it visual) of the property. Once the base level information of a neighborhood is established, more intensive documentation and contextual overviews can be added to elaborate on particular property types, historical periods, or thematic groups, or to document historic districts.

As it progresses, the survey will be the source of valuable information that will provide the basis for the historical commission's oversight of the City's cultural resources and its decision-making, in regard to design review and demolition delay. The survey also is a preservation action in and of itself that will generate public awareness of Medford's history and expand appreciation for its buildings and neighborhoods. An on-going survey is an opportunity to keep historic resources in the public eye and develop a community conversation about their value. Each neighborhood, as well as Medford as a whole, will benefit from articulating their character-defining features and introducing architectural and preservation terms into the local vocabulary.

Thus, it is strongly recommended here that the Medford Historical Commission embark on a comprehensive survey project that will generate a digital data base in which the physical features of all the parcels in the city are eventually recorded. Age is of no importance as comprehensiveness is critical and at a certain point, recent buildings will become historic. More specific general recommendations continue below. Neighborhood-based recommendations are included in the neighborhood overviews elsewhere in this report.

1. Identify survey priorities and five-year plan, some suggested priorities follow:
 - a. Create data base “Medford Historic Resource Inventory” as described in Item 2 below, including “Neighborhood” and “Demolition Delay” classification
 - i. Select a neighborhood or part of a neighborhood as a prototype case to develop a data base model and work out bugs in the methodology for data collection, data entry and data function
 1. Plan project in consultation with the Massachusetts Historical Commission and apply for funding support
 2. Present project to Boston University’s American & New England Studies Program for consideration as a student class project
 - ii. Develop prioritized plan for application of prototype in other neighborhoods
 - b. Create a cultural resource base map using City’s Geographical Information System (GIS)
 - c. List all pre-1900 resources for demolition delay protection
 - d. List and map all known and potential archeological sites (do not publicize)
 - e. Document all Government, Educational and Religious properties, city-wide, using MHC Building Forms; add information to data base; create map using GIS
 - f. Survey all Commercial, Industrial and Transportation-related properties city-wide
 - i. Survey East Medford commercial district using MHC Area Form
 - ii. Survey Medford Square commercial district using MHC Area Form
 - iii. Survey West Medford commercial district using MHC Area Form
 - iv. Survey South Medford commercial district using MHC Area Form
 - v. Survey other commercial, industrial and transportation-related nodes and individual properties using MHC Area or Building Forms
 - vi. Add information to data base; create map using GIS
 - g. Evaluate surveyed properties and areas in c. and d. above and identify local landmarks and historic commercial districts for designation
 - h. Review neighborhood overviews from Medford Community-Wide Survey Plan, revise boundaries, if necessary, and identify and delineate smaller sub-areas based on more focused research into subdivision history.
 - i. Expand contexts
 - ii. Map integral sections and subdivisions
 1. 18th-century properties and areas
 2. Estates and 19th-century development tracts
 3. Railroad, industrial & commercial development
 4. Planned railroad and streetcar related suburban development
 5. 20th-century subdivisions
 - iii. Identify areas and individual properties for intensive survey, with special attention to properties depicted on 1855 and 1875 maps
 - i. Identify areas where historic resources are at risk and prioritize survey and local action.
 - i. Medford Square commercial district
 - ii. Haines Square commercial district, East Medford
 - iii. Mystic Avenue commercial district, South Medford
 - iv. Boston Avenue, West Medford and South Medford
 - v. Industrial buildings city-wide

- vi. Early 19th-century urban areas flanking I-93 on east side of Medford Square and west side of East Medford
 - vii. Alterations and renovations in East Medford
 - viii. Alterations and renovation in South Medford
 - ix. Green Line route, South Medford
2. Create a data base to record and manage information about Medford’s historic resources for survey and planning
- a. Obtain a copy of an existing parcel-level data base from city assessor; save it as a “Medford Historic Resource Inventory” (data base format to be determined by Medford Historical Commission in consultation with MHC)
 - b. Keep pertinent physical data concerning location (tax parcel number, street address, ward, etc.), land use/zoning, parcel size, and building characteristics (date built, stories, area, materials, etc.) and remove other time-sensitive data (owner, assessed value, etc.)
 - c. Add a category for “Neighborhood” and attach one of the following eight names to each parcel
 - i. Brooks Estate
 - ii. East Medford
 - iii. Fulton Heights
 - iv. Medford Square
 - v. Middlesex Fells
 - vi. South Medford
 - vii. Wellington
 - viii. West Medford
 - d. Add a category for “Demolition Delay” and using maps in the 1900 Atlas of Middlesex County, indicate all addresses with buildings
 - e. Add category for “Historic Function” and using assessor’s land use classifications indicate all addresses with at least the following functions (buildings that have changed function, e.g. a decommissioned fire house currently in a restaurant use, will need visual assessment in more particular surveys)
 - i. Government
 - ii. Education-related
 - iii. Religious
 - iv. Transportation-relate
 - v. Commercial
 - vi. Industrial
 - vii. Residential (single-family, two-family, multiple family, apartment)
 - f. Add category for “Historic Period” and establish periods based on historic maps; suggested periods are: (these periods can be filled in as survey progresses)
 - i. 1855 and earlier
 - ii. 1856 – 1875
 - iii. 1876 – 1889
 - iv. 1890 – 1900
 - v. 1901 – 1910
 - vi. 1911 - 1936

- vii. 1937 – 1960
 - g. Add categories for other useful property and building data, such as
 - i. Building type (open list)
 - ii. Height, plan, façade fenestration, roof type
 - iii. Construction method, exterior materials (original and current)
 - iv. Distinctive features: porches, window & roof-edge decoration
 - v. Alterations: siding, porches, windows, replacement sash
 - vi. Design style
- 3. Expand historical commission and increase support base
 - a. Increase membership; add members willing to take action on survey program
 - b. Build a volunteer base of local historians through historical society
 - c. Organize volunteer activities to further survey plan
 - d. Public outreach
 - i. Establish presence on-line
 - 1. Post neighborhood overviews and survey plan
 - 2. Provide links to historic maps (w/ library)
 - 3. Post general preservation guidelines with links to Secretary of Interior’s Standards and NPS technical literature
 - ii. Promote public programs and workshops (w/ historical society)
 - iii. Create “buzz” about historic buildings and neighborhoods, local architectural landmarks
 - e. Build support for historic preservation planning in city hall
- 4. Locate funding for survey projects
 - a. Obtain certification for Certified Local Government Program qualifying the City to apply for grant funding specific to this program
 - b. Present a multi-year plan to MHC and apply for grant support
 - i. Grants available from both state and CLG sources
 - ii. Annual awards to municipalities in \$15,000 to \$30,000 range
 - iii. Multi-year projects possible
 - c. Present a multi-year plan to City and secure commitment of general funding, matching funds for grants, and in-kind municipal support for survey projects
 - d. Work with historical society to raise funds and volunteer support for projects

