

# North Reading Historic District Commission

## DESIGN GUIDELINES - 2008



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## ***Background***

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Throughout Massachusetts, cities and towns face the needless destruction of their treasured historic resources. Village centers, neighborhoods and downtowns are often not very well protected, and through demolitions and insensitive alterations can easily disappear. However, many cities and towns in Massachusetts have taken steps to better protect their historic resources by establishing historic districts, provided for by Massachusetts General Law.

In a local historic district, before any exterior architectural feature that is visible from a public way is altered, the plans to carry out that alteration must first be approved by a local historic district commission. In this way, needless demolitions and alterations can be permanently prevented. North Reading is one of over 100 cities and towns in Massachusetts that have already recognized the value of historic districts, and has established one such district in the old center. An Historic District Commission, appointed by the Selectmen, oversees this area.

## ***Purpose of the North Reading Historic District Commission***

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1. To preserve and protect the distinctive characteristics of buildings and locations significant to the history of North Reading;
2. To oversee maintenance of the settings of those buildings;
3. To assure that new construction is compatible with the existing property and the historic nature of the neighboring property;
4. To assist affected property owners to ensure that their property will continue to reflect the past while meeting present needs;
5. To provide guidance and advice to property owners.

## ***Certificate Process***

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If a property owner residing within an historic district wishes to make exterior alterations, it is advisable to first discuss the project with the HDC by making an appointment through the Chairman. Should the Commission indicate a positive response, the next step is to secure an application from the Community Planning Office at Town Hall.

A short form for minor alterations or a longer form for substantial building additions is available. One of these applications must be presented to the Commission for action before a Building Permit can be issued.

Once the Commission has reviewed the application, the HDC will issue one of the following:

## **Certificate of Appropriateness**

If, after the review, the HDC finds that the proposed project complies with the Specific Design Guidelines which follow, a Certificate of Appropriateness shall be issued and the work may go forward.

## **Certificate of Non-Applicability**

A Certificate of Non-Applicability may be issued for work that does not require the above certificate, such as exact replica replacement of historic materials or work done not visible from a public way.

## **Certificate of Hardship**

If a property owner residing within an historic district wishes to make exterior alterations that would result in substantial hardship to the owner if approval should not be granted, the project must first be discussed with the HDC. An appointment must be made through the Chairman. If the proposed alterations do not derogate substantially from the intent and purposes of the District, the Commission may issue a Certificate of Hardship.

## **Designs Standards For Certificate Review**

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All changes to exterior structures require a building permit and subject to public view requires a certificate from the HDC. When reviewing applications, the HDC will be guided by the following general, design principles. (*Adapted from the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.*)

1. A property should be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal changes to the defining characteristics of the building, its site and environment.
2. The historic character of a property should be retained and preserved. Distinctive materials or alterations of features, spaces and spatial relationship that characterize a property should be maintained.
3. Changes to a property made subsequent to its original form may themselves have acquired historic significance. These should be retained and preserved.
4. Distinctive features, finishes and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property should be preserved.
5. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features should be substantiated for documentary evidence.
6. New additions, exterior alterations or related new construction that destroy historic material, features and spatial relationships that characterize the property should be avoided. New work should be differentiated from the old and should be compatible with historic materials, features, size, scale proportions and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.

7. New additions, and adjacent or related new construction which, if removed in the future, would impair the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment should be avoided.

## ***Specific Design Guidelines***

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### **Doors, stairs, steps, decks and porches:**

Wherever possible, existing doors, door openings, transoms and sidelights should be repaired, not replaced. Porches and porticoes, including ornamental details should be retained. Open porches should not be enclosed. Porch and entry steps should be replicated in kind. Railing/baluster design and spacing should retain original proportions.

### **Demolition and additions:**

All demolitions and additions affecting the exterior of the structure and visible from the public right of way MUST be reviewed by the Commission. Appropriateness of size, massing, scale, height and shape of the alteration in relation to the historic structure, other buildings in the area and land area will be considered.

### **Fences:**

Original fences should be maintained or replicated. New fences fronting the street are subject to HDC review, they should be located appropriately, and should not obstruct the view of the building from the street.

### **Landscaping:**

Major landscaping changes, including changes in grade, having significant impact on the overall appearance of the site must be reviewed by the Commission.

### **Masonry:**

Unpainted masonry should not be painted. Repointing should be appropriate in terms of type, color and aggregate and the width of the joint should not be altered. The height and original pattern of brickwork in chimneys should be maintained.

### **Roofs and gutters:**

Wood shingles and slate roofing should be repaired or replicated in style and color. Roof top HVAC and skylights should be placed out of view. Gutters should duplicate the molding profile of the original. Wood or copper gutters should be replaced with like material.

### **Signs:**

All permanent signs must comply with the Zoning By-law and be approved by the Historic District Commission. However, this requirement does not apply to portable, temporary signs such as those placed by contractors nor to banner signs placed on the Batchelder fence by non-profit organizations for no longer than 14 days.

**Shutters:**

Shutters and shutter hardware should be retained or replicated exactly in-kind and, if originally closing across the window, mounted to do so. Shutters may be removed for painting, provided the owner gives the HDC prior written notice that all shutters and their hardware will be properly reinstalled.

**Walls and trim:**

Trim and detailing should not be removed. Replacement wood siding or shingles should replicate the materials, dimension, detailing and patterns of the original. Artificial siding, including, but not limited to, vinyl, aluminum, asphalt, artificial brick and stone, should not be used.

**Windows:**

True divided-light windows must be retained or replicated, including the casing, size, number of panes and type of window.

The Historic District Commission reserves the right to amend these Guidelines. should any part be deemed invalid, illegal or unconstitutional, then that part shall be severed from the text with the remaining sections continuing to be in full force and effect.

## **Frequently Asked Questions concerning properties in an Historic District.**

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### **What changes to my property are reviewed by an Historic District Commission?**

Changes to exterior architectural features which are visible from a public way are reviewed. It is important to note that the ONLY changes which are visible from the public right of way are of concern to the HDC.

### **I want to paint my house a different color or plant new shrubs around my property?**

Paint colors, minor landscaping and maintenance are not reviewed.

### **What other things are not subject to review by the Commission?**

Any work done to the interior of the property.

Installation of storm windows provided there is no alteration to existing windows or frames.

Removable air conditioners.

### **If the neighbors already maintain the historic character of their properties, why do we need an historic district?**

By having an historic district, you can be assured that a NEW property owner will also maintain the historic character of your neighborhood.

### **If my house is included in the local historic district, does that mean that I have to restore it?**

The maintenance guidelines are not retroactive and apply only to any future, proposed changes.

### **Can I meet with the HDC before I apply for my Certificate of Appropriateness?**

Absolutely. In fact, the HDC encourages it. The Historic District Commission is made up of citizens like you who live locally and who care about the community. Their goal is to help you maintain the historic look and feel of your property so that it can be enjoyed by future generations. They can offer planning guidance and put you in touch with appropriate sources.

### **What if I cannot afford to do the work in the way that the HDC would like me to do it?**

1. The HDC can issue a Certificate of Hardship which would exempt an applicant from compliance with the Specific Design guidelines.
2. The HDC can work with you to devise an alternative, historically sympathetic solution that is less costly.

### **What will happen to the value of my property if it is included in an Historic District?**

Studies around the country suggest that property values stay the same or increase faster in a local historic district compared to similar, non-designated areas.

# North Reading Center Village Historic District

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North Reading is fortunate in having historically and architecturally significant properties dating back to the eighteenth century clustered in an identifiable grouping in the old center of the town, surrounded by an unusually large and beautiful Common.

The district was formally identified under Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40C, (The Historic District Act) and passed by town meeting on October 7, 1993, 112 in favor, 17 opposed. Illustrated are the nine properties in the North Reading Center Village Historic District.



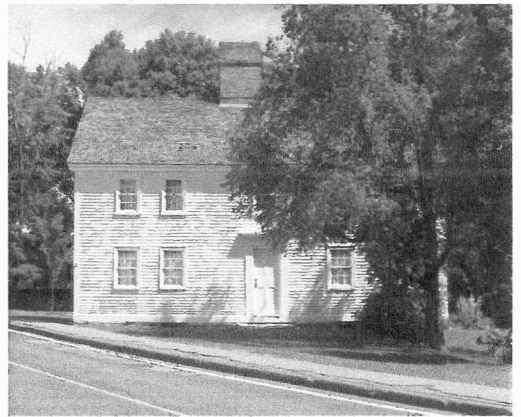
**Third Meeting House (1829)**



**The Damon Tavern (1817)**



**The Flint Memorial Library (1875)**



**The Reverend Daniel Putnam House (1730)**

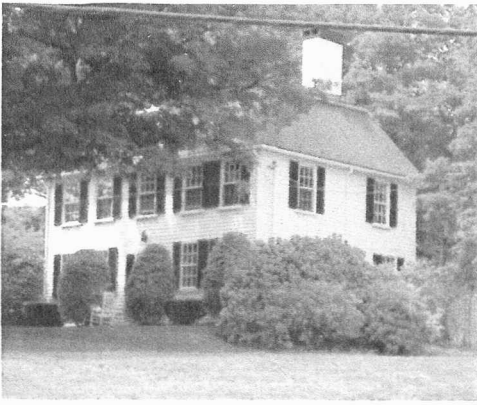


**The Police/Fire Station (1969/2007)**



**The McLean House (1818)**





**The Reverend Eliab Stone House (1761)**



**The Edwin Foster House (1838)**

## **L. D. Batchelder School**



**In 2007 the Batchelder School renovation project won a Massachusetts Historical Commission Preservation Award and the Commission had this to say about the project:**

*The restored L.D. Batchelder School is a local planning success story. The residents of North Reading, facing a growing student population, struggled for years over whether to construct a new school or update the historic Batchelder School. The Batchelder Elementary School was built adjacent to the town common in 1917.*

*After significant efforts by the Historic District Commission and the Elementary School Building Committee, a plan was approved in 2003 to enlarge and renovate the existing historic school building. The restoration was completed without state funding and represents a significant victory for historic preservation in the town.*

*The Colonial Revival L. D. Batchelder school building is part of the Center Village Historic District. The interior and exterior were restored and an unsympathetic 1950 addition was replaced with a new complementary renovation. The windows and doorways of the original school were restored and a new slate roof was installed. The Town of North Reading should be commended for its perseverance and creativity in preserving this historic school building while meeting the new demands of a growing community.*

*Photography by SteveDiFranza.*