



Getting Started With Your Old 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 questions and resources will help you better understand your project and work effectively to restore it for years of future use.

What's the Story?

Every old building has a story to tell, a story that will be repeated many, many times through the process of fixing up a building. Understanding the history and significance of your building will help you talk about it, share your enthusiasm with others in your community, and make plans for future steps.

The first place to start is your local public library (<http://pierce.state.nh.us/libdir/>). In addition to local history, many libraries keep copies of the *National Register of Historic Places* (the official federal listing of significant historic, architectural, and archaeological resources) for your community. If you can't find them there, they may also have copies in your town offices. Or look for it on-line (www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/nh/state.html).

Another place to gather information is from your local historical society (www.historicalsocietiesnh.org). Depending on your community, you may find a myriad of resources that will help you put together the history of the building, including local written histories, historic photographs, newspaper articles, oral histories and more.

If you are feeling ambitious, you could also take a trip to Concord. At the New Hampshire Historical Society Library (nhhistory.org/library.html) at 30 Park Street, you can find all kinds of written histories, out-of-print books, files, photographs, documents and more related to your town. Non-members are charged a modest fee. The NH State Library (www.nh.gov/nhsl) is right next door at 20 Park Street. South of downtown, you will find the State Historic Preservation Office, known as the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR) (www.nh.gov/nhdhr). An appointment to view their files is appreciated (271-3483). Here you'll find the complete paper records of the State and National Register as well as other research materials organized by town.

For many projects, the next step will be to compile the story into a standardized format called a State Inventory Form. The staff at the NH DHR then reviews the nomination and makes suggestions for editorial changes or additional research. If the property meets the State Register criteria and the inventory form is complete, 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 also completed as part of many state and local planning processes, such as environmental review for transportation projects, and through the efforts of town heritage or historical commissions. Property owners should check the NHDHR's files for previous research prior to beginning their own inventory efforts.

State Register listing (or a determination of eligibility) is required for several types of grants including Conservation License Plate grants (Mooseplate) (www.mooseplate.com) and the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) (www.LCHIP.org).

Listing on the State Register of Historic Places is one of several ways to acknowledge a property's historical significance. A property may also qualify for the National Register of Historical Places, be designated a National Historic Landmark, be part of a local historic district, or recognized in a local or regional master plan. The NHDHR has information about all these programs on its website (www.nh.gov/nhdhr).

What's the Condition?

Determining the condition of the building is the first step towards complete rehabilitation.

A good conditions assessment of a historic building is prepared by a professional who is familiar with the issues faced by old buildings, has a handle on historic materials and how they were used, and can estimate costs for and prioritize sympathetic repairs to deteriorated areas.

The New Hampshire Preservation Alliance helps connect people and community projects with preservation professionals who can help do assessments. Through Technical Assistance Fund mini-grants, and Preservation Assessment grants (funded through the NH Land and Community Heritage Investment Program), the Preservation Alliance can help defray the costs of doing an assessment. Please be in touch with one of our Field Service Representatives if you'd like to learn more. Guidelines and applications are on line at www.nhpreservation.org/html/grants.htm

What's the Plan?

Before a full treatment of the building can be articulated, you need to know what the plan for the building is. Will the church be used as a community center? Will the 19th century industrial building be used as an art studio? Will the historic store reopen as a store?

You should develop a short, no more than 1-page case statement about what you're trying to do and why. In it, you might want to include a photograph or two, something about the building's history, its importance, how you envision the building will be used and by whom, and what the rehabilitated building will mean to the community.

Contact those people who are or could be partners. Initial conversations should probably be about the project in general, exploring common interests, and building support. These stakeholders or potential partners might include select-board members, legislators, neighbors, historical society, local historic district commission or heritage commission, community clubs, the library, or residents at-large-- using whatever forum you can find to assemble interested people.

Identify resource people within the community who can help with in-kind and professional expertise and begin a conversation with them too. These contacts might formalize into actual subcommittees. Some of the skills you might be seeking are construction project manager, business project manager, fundraiser, grant writer, communications person, and various trades-people.

You may also want to attend one of the Preservation Alliance's conference, workshops, or Old House and Barn Expo. These will provide an opportunity to meet with other community groups from around New Hampshire who are involved in similar (or radically different!) projects, as well as staff and other professionals. You will invariably walk away newly charged with information and inspiration! Check the Events page of the Preservation Alliance's website (nhpreservation.org/html/events.htm).

What's the Treatment?

Knowing what you are going to do with the building determines the treatment of the building.

Good preservation includes preserving those character-defining features that give your building its uniqueness, while also incorporating sensitive changes that make the building usable in the 21st century. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, a set of national preservation standards, should be your guidelines for treatment.

<http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/rehabstandards.htm>

Individual Preservation Briefs can help you with specific topics and treatments.

<http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/presbhom.htm>

Getting a treatment plan and complete estimate of the work is very important, as is a plan for phasing the work over time. Having a document like this will break down an overwhelming project into smaller pieces and is essential for your fundraising plans. Many grant applications will require such a plan. The Alliance's Field Service Representatives can help you locate a preservation builder or architect to help you do the work, or you can search the Preservation Alliance's on-line Preservation Directory (www.nhpreservation.org/html/directory). Some of the "hot" preservation issues right now relate to weatherization and energy efficiency. Other important preservation topics are windows, siding, insulation and new additions to old buildings. We recommend that you familiarize yourself with recommended preservation treatments and solutions for these topics which invariably arise to some degree with most preservation projects.

Where's the Money?

The first step should be to meet with one of the Preservation Alliance's Field Service Representatives who can help explain how the complete fundraising picture might look -- money on hand, fundraising activities, a local campaign, grants, direct asking, and more.

In order to be eligible for most grant funding, you'll need to have gained non-profit status. The New Hampshire Department of Justice, Division of Charitable Trusts (www.doj.nh.gov) has good online instructions to get you started.

The New Hampshire Preservation Alliance maintains a list of grant sources and resources for preservation (nhpreservation.org/html/grants.htm). Other good resources are the New Hampshire Center for Non-Profits (www.nhnonprofits.org), and the Foundation Directories housed in libraries in Concord and Plymouth. Federal stimulus money may be available in the form of grants or loans as well.

If you are a municipality, or dealing with a publicly owned resource, you should consider the NH Conservation License Plate Program (Mooseplate) (www.mooseplate.org). The NH Division of Historical Resources (www.nh.gov/nhdhr) also administers the federal Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credit, which some buildings may qualify for. As you progress with your project plans, you might want to take a road trip to other New Hampshire communities to find out what they have done and how they put the project together.

Remember that grants will fund only a portion of your project (usually a 1:1 match is required) and that you will have to conduct your own fund-raising campaign to solicit individuals and businesses as well. You may also plan special events to raise money and build visibility for your project. Call the N.H. Preservation Alliance (224-2281) and one of our Field Service Representatives can advise you on the best strategies for your particular project.

Let's Get Started!

You might also want to check out the other resources on the NH Preservation Alliance website (<http://nhpreservation.org>), and the N.H. Division of Historical Resources website (www.nh.gov/nhdhr). Remember, our Field Service Representatives are always available to answer questions or help you meet your next challenge (<http://nhpreservation.org/html/fsprogram.htm>).

Special thanks to Preservation Trust of Vermont for permission to adapt their original version of this document for New Hampshire's preservation community.

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