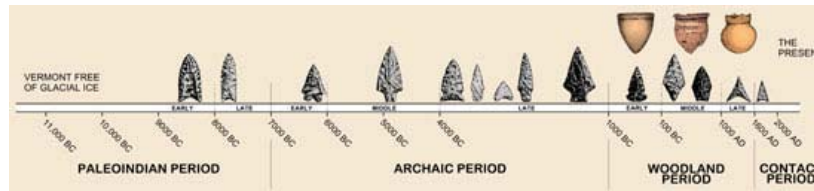


4.4 Historic Resources

Bennington’s historic structures, districts, and archaeological sites are important resources that provide residents with a sense of their heritage and a link with the past, promoting a sense of community identity and pride. Those same resources add to the aesthetic qualities of the Town and provide an interesting historical perspective that also makes the community attractive to tourists and to people and businesses seeking to relocate.

Details of some of the earliest human history of the Bennington area have been gleaned from archaeological sites excavated along the Walloomsac River. Careful inventories of prehistoric Native American sites adjacent to the river have revealed artifacts and evidence of 6000 years of human occupation and use of the area. These sites and others which are likely to contain materials from Native American and early colonial settlements should be protected from development that would destroy the artifacts. If development is to occur in these areas, professional archaeological investigations should be undertaken and any artifacts and findings should be documented and displayed in the area.



Native American artifacts uncovered in Bennington reveal a long history of settlement and activity in the Walloomsac Valley—U. Maine at Farmington Archaeology Research Center.

Bennington was chartered as a town in 1749 and evidence of its long history since that time exists in the layout of local roads, architectural styles of buildings identified with specific periods, and groups of buildings and structures in commercial, industrial, and residential districts. A comprehensive inventory is a necessary first step in understanding and protecting historic resources. Fortunately, several inventories and assessments of local historic resources have been completed. The most comprehensive is the Vermont Historic Sites and Structures Survey for the Town of Bennington which contains information on more than 3,000 properties in Bennington, Old Bennington, and North Bennington. Several historic districts and individual structures also have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places (Table 4-2).

Table 4-2. Sites in Bennington Included in the National Register of Historic Places

- Downtown Bennington Historic District
- Old Bennington Historic District
- North Bennington Historic District
- Furnace Grove Historic District
- Carrigan Lane District
- Ritchie Block
- Silk Road Covered Bridge
- Paper Mill Covered Bridge
- Henry Covered Bridge
- Bennington Railroad Station
- William Henry House
- Holden-Leonard Mill Complex
- Frederick Squire House
- U.S. Federal Building (current Bennington Police Station)
- Everett Mansion
- Park-McCullough House
- Cora B. Whitney School (converted to affordable housing)
- RAHC properties on South Street and Benmont Avenue



There is a concentration of important historic structures in the Downtown Historic District; the former Federal Building is in the foreground of this photograph looking up South Street.

Of particular interest and concern to the Town is the Downtown Bennington Historic District. This area includes a concentration of historic commercial, civic, and residential structures at the center of the community that, more than any other area, gives the Town its unique sense of place. A design review district (Map 3-4) has been established to ensure that the historic integrity of this important area remains intact.

Inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places may enable property owners to receive federal tax advantages for historically appropriate improvements. In addition, Bennington is a Certified Local Government (CLG) - under a program developed by the National Park Service to encourage preservation of locally important historic resources. As a CLG the Town is able to access certain funding and technical support resources that facilitate stated preservation goals. The Bennington Historic Preservation Commission was established in response to requirements of the CLG program and this Commission now oversees many historic preservation activities and programs in the community.

The Historic Preservation Commission has developed preservation guidelines to protect the character of historic districts that it has identified. Many of those guidelines and recommended actions are contained in its publication, Time and Place in Bennington, A Handbook for the Central Bennington Historic District. This document should be reviewed every few years to ensure that it remains current.

No single tool can ensure a successful historic preservation program. A combination of regulatory design controls, public funding for site and building improvements, and incentives for adaptive re-use of historic structures is necessary, and the Town supports each of these techniques to achieve its historic preservation objectives, which can be summarized as follows:

- Maintain the community's special historic and cultural heritage and preserve a sense of place and pride for the Town's residents;
- Maintain those historic and aesthetic qualities that are economic assets to the community and promote the economically viable reuse of historic structures;
- Require that the renovation and alteration of existing structures, and the construction of new structures, is done in a manner consistent with the character of the historic district in which they are located;
- Achieve overall visual compatibility within each district through careful attention to architectural, landscape, and site structure details;
- Save historic structures whenever possible.



Many of Bennington's historic structures are located along its waterways, such as the three covered bridges over the Walloomsac River.

The Town will continue to pursue funding opportunities that support these objectives. Recent historically appropriate streetscape improvements in the downtown funded through the Transportation Enhancements Program have been particularly effective in this regard. Development of historic properties in Bennington, or of any property in designated historic districts, shall comply with the Town's preservation guidelines and the applicable regulatory design standards.

4.5 Policies and Recommendations for Natural, Scenic, and Historic Resources

1. The Town should continue to work with conservation organizations and the Vermont Land Trust to preserve lands that contain productive agricultural soils and to support economically viable farming operations.
2. Land development in rural areas shall be designed to preserve as much prime agricultural soil as possible. Within the Urban Growth Area, preservation of agricultural soils is not required.
3. High elevation forest lands shall remain free from development and shall support appropriate uses as defined in the municipal zoning regulations. Conservation of important tracts of forest land through tax incentives or acquisition by conservation organizations or the Green Mountain National Forest is encouraged.
4. Surface water resources shall be protected through comprehensive watershed planning that includes erosion and storm water control and by maintaining undisturbed buffers between development and stream banks and shorelines.
5. The Town should seek opportunities to focus community interest toward and along waterways through development of linear parks, pathways, and safe and adequate public access and parking locations.
6. Development in regulatory floodplains shall be strictly regulated according to the municipal flood hazard area regulations.
7. The quality and quantity of groundwater resources used for residential, commercial, and industrial consumption shall be protected through strict adherence to state and local environmental and health regulations.
8. Development planning shall consider the need for future extraction of important deposits of earth resources. Earth resource extraction operations shall be conducted in a manner that does not harm the environment, the value of nearby properties, or future development of the site.
9. Air quality must be maintained by prohibiting discharges of unhealthy pollutants from industrial, commercial, or residential sources.
10. Critical fish and wildlife habitat areas and unique natural areas shall not be damaged by incompatible development. The Town should work with conservation organizations when opportunities arise to acquire such areas.
11. New development shall be sensitive to scenic resources and shall be planned in a manner that preserves the visual integrity of critical scenic elements and visual qualities.

12. The Town should work with conservation organizations to permanently protect important viewsheds through purchase of properties or scenic easements. The Town should continue to participate in and support local and state scenic roads programs.
13. Protect and enhance existing visual gateways to the community and downtown, and seek opportunities to establish new gateways at appropriate locations.
14. Strict adherence to design guidelines and standards for additions or alterations to historic properties and for any construction or building alterations within the Historic Bennington Design Review District is required.
15. The adaptive reuse of historic buildings, rather than their demolition and replacement, is required whenever such reuse is practical and appropriate. Historic structures shall be incorporated into site plans for new developments.
16. The Historic Preservation Commission shall continue to serve in an advisory role to the Planning Commission and the Development Review Board when regulations and development proposals affecting historic sites or districts are being considered.
17. Explore and pursue opportunities for funding and financial incentives - Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credits, CLG, National Trust, etc. - that will support historic preservation efforts by the Town and private property owners.
18. Support efforts by the Historic Preservation Commission, the Chamber of Commerce, the Better Bennington Corporation, and other organizations to increase awareness of historic resources through displays, walking tours, and other means.