

NEWS

Norwich: Historic and Sustainable

Norwich's newly appointed, advisory Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) has been hard at work, after its appointment by the Selectboard in April 2010. The goal of the Commission is to work to increase appreciation of Norwich's wealth of historic and cultural resources. These are essential to our unique sense of place and character, including preserving traditional settlement patterns, scenic resources and our unique rural character and always moving towards energy and economic sustainability.

HPC members are Nancy Hoggson (chair), Roger Blake, Bill Aldrich and myself, with Anne Silberfarb representing the Planning Commission and Phil Dechert, Town Planner, providing support. By creating this new Commission, Norwich is one of 14 Certified Local Governments (CLG), designated by the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation (VDHP). This makes the town eligible for federal and state preservation grants, while also benefiting from an excellent working relationship and technical assistance from VDHP.

Norwich's Commission believes that—

- Norwich's iconic town center results from 250 years of town settlement, construction, and preservation of distinctive homes, public buildings, places of worship and commercial buildings. Our town center is the focal point for the broader town made special by its rural character and scenic resources.
- Long-time residents have protected these qualities while more recent residents have chosen to live in Norwich, in part, because of its sense of place and character. These qualities thus contribute to Norwich's strong property values and its vigorous town center.
- Good stewardship supports our local and regional economy with the use of local products and services in maintaining historic properties.



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norwich,_Vermont

- Using and re-using historic buildings with appropriate retrofitting saves energy and thus contributes to sustainability.
- Preserving and using historic structures is a natural complement to land conservation and essential to protecting our rural character.

To date, the Commission has—

- Joined with the Norwich Business Council to organize the February 11 coffee and informational meeting hosted by the Norwich Inn. All commercial property owners in the Designated Village Center were invited to learn more about the state tax credits and pro-active maintenance of historic properties. Chris Cochran from VDHP and Ann Cousins, Preservation Trust of Vermont, gave presentations.
- Provided information to property owners and potential developers regarding the detrimental effects of vinyl siding on the environment and local purchasing and on tax credits available for substantial rehabilitations of historic commercial buildings.
- Completed a detailed grant proposal and budget to VDHP for funding for a walking tour brochure focusing on our historic village center. This easy-to-use brochure, with map, historic photos and engaging text, will be available at key Norwich locations and selected Vermont Welcome Centers.

- Met with representatives of the Beaver Meadow Association about assistance in undertaking a condition assessment of the historic Beaver Meadow School House. The Association and long-time resident Elsie Sniffen restored the beautiful Beaver Meadow Chapel in the 1990s. Similar assistance was offered to the stewards of the historic Root District School House on Union Village Road.
- Submitted suggestions to the Town regarding the draft Town Plan of Norwich.

There will be an opportunity to become an active member on this new Commission in the spring, and we hope that other residents who recognize the importance of historic preservation will consider applying.

Peter Brink is a Norwich resident and a Board member of Preservation Trust of Vermont. He is the former Senior Vice-President, Programs, National Trust for Historic Preservation.

