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HISTORIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

KEY ISSUES

CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND PRESERVATION

THREATS TO HISTORIC RESOURCES

HISTORIC PROPERTIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

The history of Belfast has been shaped by the natural resources that supported the local and regional economy, including farming, fishing, forestry, commerce, and shipbuilding. Downtown Belfast is noted for its historical architecture. As a result of the fire in 1865 in which nearly the entire downtown was destroyed, an ordinance was passed prohibiting the construction of wooden buildings in the area. The resulting “brick” downtown has survived with little change. Downtown is a historic district, as are several residential areas with gracious homes of former ship owners and prosperous merchants. Historic resources, such as old homes, graveyards, mill sites, and old stone walls, are a valuable part of the City’s heritage. These resources establish community character and make Belfast unique. These resources help to create a feeling of community pride, encouraging us to preserve the best of our past. This chapter outlines the City’s history, identifies the known prehistoric and historic resources, and recommends steps for their protection.

KEY ISSUES

Belfast has a designated Historic District and individual historic buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Much of the area located inside the Route One by-pass includes many historic homes, and the street grid pattern reflects early traditional city development and planning. The In-Town Design Review Ordinance provisions (Chapter 80) that were enacted in 2001 and updated in 2018 require, or strongly encourage, proposed new development and renovations of existing buildings to be compatible with existing [historic] development, and to positively contribute to the character of the community. Design standards are identified in the Ordinance. These provisions also prohibit or strongly discourage the demolition or removal of existing "noteworthy" structures that have helped to shape and create the present character of the city.

Land use standards in shoreland zones (Chapter 82, Article III) require that for approval a project must be deemed to not adversely impact archaeological and historic resources as designated in the Belfast Comprehensive Plan. To help in this evaluation is the requirement (Chapter 82, Article V) that proposed development on or adjacent to sites listed on or eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, be submitted to the Maine Historic Preservation Commission for review and comment and that the City must consider that review before deciding on the application.

In site plan review (Chapter 90, Article II), the code enforcement office must consider the following criteria during project review, “Aesthetic, cultural and natural values. The proposed development will not have an undue adverse effect on the scenic or natural beauty of the area, aesthetics, historic sites, archeological sites, significant wildlife habitat identified by the state department of inland fisheries and wildlife or the city as rare and irreplaceable natural areas or

any public rights for physical or visual access to the shoreline.” A similar provision is also found in the state-mandated subdivision review criteria (Title 30-A MRSA 4404) and is enforced through subdivision ordinance provisions.

CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

Most significant historic resources are in good to fair condition. Several residences that are located in the Historic District are in disrepair and warrant renovation. The City, in 2011, worked with Our Town Belfast (Belfast Main Street program) to make property owners aware of historic preservation tax credits (Federal and State) to reduce the costs to redevelop old buildings for new uses and maintain their historical appeal. To date, no property owner has chosen to use these tax credits.

The Belfast Historical Society and Museum is an active historical society in Belfast and receives revenue from grants and member dues. The City also contributes to the operation. The Society’s public outreach includes informational presentations, walking tours of the downtown and the adjacent historic neighborhoods, the Museum in the Streets program, and collections available for research. The Society also has assisted City government on the range-way project and several of its members serve on the In-town Design Review Committee.

See the map titled Archaeological Resources for the general location of areas sensitive for prehistoric archaeology and for the one-kilometer areas within which a prehistoric or historic archaeological site is located. See the map titled Historic District (Downtown) for the Belfast National Register Historic District. Cemeteries are a cultural resource providing insight into the history of the community. Belfast’s principal cemeteries are shown on the Public Facilities Map.

This summary is from the Belfast Historical Society and Museum and has been edited:

In the spring of 1770 Scots-Irish families from Londonderry, New Hampshire settled Belfast. Legend has it that the name Belfast, after the Northern Ireland city, was chosen by a coin toss. Fear of British attack led these original proprietors to abandon the settlement during the American Revolution, but they returned in the 1780s to build a vibrant, prosperous outpost that would become the market center for the outlying area.

Abundant timber, a gently sloping waterfront, and proximity to varied agriculture gave rise to shipbuilding and maritime commerce, with fortunes made in both. Hundreds of wooden sailing ships were built by local shipyards and, during the 19th century, as much as 30% of the male population was employed in the maritime trades.

In 1868, construction began on the Belfast and Moosehead Lake Railroad, which connected Belfast to the Maine Central Railroad at Burnham Junction. Belfast merchants sold a variety of goods and steamship operators who provided transportation between coastal towns advertised “shopping excursions” to Belfast. Prosperous shipbuilders and merchants constructed the architecturally significant houses that dominate our residential neighborhoods today. Two

disastrous fires consumed much of the downtown area in 1865 and 1873, but merchants rebuilt with brick, creating a pleasing and long-lasting commercial district. The Belfast Historic Districts, residential and commercial, are included on the National Register of Historic Places.

The city's prosperity, built on shipbuilding and commerce in such unglamorous cargoes as hay, ice, apples, and fertilizer, began to fade as the 20th century unfolded. A four-story shoe factory dominated the industrial area, and Belfast became a blue-collar town. By the 1950s poultry, sardine and potato companies had set up processing plants along the waterfront. Belfast called itself the "Broiler Capital of the World" and each July, thousands came to eat barbequed chicken on Broiler Day.

In 1962 Route 1, which had come straight through downtown via High Street, was rerouted around the city and across a new bridge. Some saw the rerouting as the death knell for a once-vibrant shire town, but in hindsight, the bypass preserved the city's heart and soul and in the 1980s a rebirth began. Public and private investment restored some of the past luster. The arts flourished, the railroad was briefly revived for tourist excursions, and the stately houses and commercial buildings were restored. In the early 1990s, USA Today named Belfast as one of America's "culturally cool" communities. Today, Belfast is that rare combination of quiet small town with an active social and cultural life that is attractive to residents and visitors alike.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission has identified the following properties and districts as being listed on the National Register of Historic Places:

Name	Location
James P. White House	1 Church Street
Masonic Temple	High Street
First Church of Belfast	Church Street
Hayford Block	47 Church Street
Belfast Historic District	

Source: Maine Historic Preservation Commission

A number of other buildings and sites have been identified as having historic value, including: Tide Water Grist Mill on Route 1, Little River Inn (1796) on Route 1, Wales Miller (1800) on Marsh Road, Otis (1800) on City Point Road, First Sawmill (1770) on Kaler Road, Pattershall (1800) on West Swanville Road, Harvey Way (1800) on Waldo Avenue Extension, R.R. Thompson House on Miller Street, Quimby House on Miller Street, Brewster House on Northport Avenue, M.L. Slugg House on Condon Street, Parsonage "Hearthside" on Old Searsport Avenue, and Stephenson Tavern.

According to the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC), three prehistoric sites (numbers 40.2, 41.52, and 41.53) are located along the northeast shore of Passagassawaukeag Estuary/Bay. See the map titled Archaeological Resources.

Insert photo

There are nine historic archaeological sites in Belfast identified by MHPC.

ID	Name	Type	Date
ME 034-001	"S.T. Co. No. 5"	Wreck, Barge	23-Nov-24
ME 034-002	Minister's Point Battery	Military, Battery	1863
ME 034-003	Little River Battery	Military, Battery	c. 1863
ME 034-004	"E.S. Wilson"	Wreck, Schooner	1900
ME 034-005	"Mary Elizabeth"	Wreck, Schooner	1869
ME 034-006	"Maine"	Wreck, Schooner	1869
ME 034-007	C.P. Carter Shipyard	Shipyard	1841-c. 1899
ME 034-008	"Ida L. Small"	Wreck, Schooner	Jan 2, 1870
ME 034-009	Joseph Kaler Brickyard	Brickyard	1859
ME 034-010	C.P. Carter Shipyard Shipwreck	Wreck, Ship	Potentially associated with Carter Shipyard

Source: Maine Historic Preservation Commission

HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND PRESERVATION

The Belfast Historical Society and Museum (10 Market Street) is dedicated to the collection, conservation, preservation, and interpretation of artifacts relevant to Belfast history. The collections include vintage photographs, maps, postcards, interpretive displays and an extensive research archives and library. Monthly informative programs are held April through October and include guest speakers, slideshows, and discussions, and the Society regularly conducts informative walking tours of the downtown and adjacent residential areas. The Belfast Historical Society & Museum is a member of The New England Museum Association, Maine Archives and Museums and a contributing member to the Maine Memory Network.

THREATS TO HISTORIC RESOURCES

The renovations of historic buildings may or may not be done in a historically sensitive manner. This threat is more likely for buildings that are privately owned and when those renovations are funded privately without guidance or oversight from state or federal agencies. City codes, particularly Chapter 80, In-town Design Review, encourage but do not mandate historically sensitive renovations. With the goal of encouraging the renovation and reuse of historic structures, demolition permits are required before historic structures can be razed (Chapter 80). Prehistoric sites along shorelines are subject to coastal erosion and with sea rise, may become submerged.

HISTORIC PROPERTIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Historic properties will be vulnerable now and in the near future to the impacts of climate change, including increased storms, erosion, high winds, and wildlife. Community members, municipal officials, planners, preservationists, scientists, and visionaries need to prioritize protection of historic properties and districts. Historic buildings in Belfast that could be vulnerable to climate change impacts in the form of sea level rise include Masonic Temple and First Church of Belfast.

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) has established a webpage to assist entities throughout the state with planning for the effects of climate change on historic properties and cultural resources through the process of identification, adaption, resiliency, and mitigation. MHPC has developed this web application so that as communities, regions, officials, and citizens create plans to deal with changing climate, museums or archives within the subject areas can be identified, evaluated, and their futures contemplated.