

# 10 | Cultural & Historic Resources

## 10.A OVERVIEW

Waitsfield residents have long had an interest in preserving the town's rich social and cultural history, including its historic sites and structures. The Waitsfield Historical Society, a volunteer organization with over 100 members, is committed to preserving and celebrating local history. The society, housed at the town-owned General Wait House, sponsors a variety of special events and educational programs. Long-term plans for the General Wait House include renovating the attached barns to house a three-season historic museum and meeting space.

The 1987 Rural Resource Protection project resulted in the Mad River Valley Resource Protection Plan, which identified the Mad River Valley's historic and archaeological resources as a major element of rural character, along with scenic resources, agricultural and open land, and river and trail resources. The project also led to the founding of the Mad River Valley Rural Resource Commission, the first multi-town certified local government created under the National Historic Preservation Act. The Commission is made up of representatives from the three Mad River Valley towns and staffed by the Mad River Valley Planning District.

The commission's mission is to advocate for the protection of historic resources that contribute to the area's rural character, to assist towns in protecting these resources, and to provide educational opportunities. The commission has since worked to update initial sites and structures surveys and compile oral and video histories, and most recently completed an inventory of the Mad River Valley's historic barns.

## 10.B SETTLEMENT PATTERN

Waitsfield's historic development is written on the local landscape. The town's historic settlement pattern of clustered villages surrounded by an open river valley and forested uplands has been well-established since the 19th century. The town's agrarian heritage and rural character have been maintained largely through the preservation of its working landscape. Waitsfield's villages and smaller hamlets developed at a scale and density that is pedestrian friendly, with clearly defined streetscapes and public spaces,

prominent public buildings, and a variety of goods, services and employment opportunities.

Waitsfield's traditional settlement pattern contributes significantly to the town's scenic character. The town is blessed with one of the most extraordinary scenic landscapes in Vermont. Encompassing a pleasant blend of rolling meadows, wooded hills, a meandering river, and striking historic structures, the town's landscape is a source of pride to residents and an important attraction to visitors. Historic settlements, open farm fields, forested hillsides and ridge lines, and tree-lined roads are all important scenic resources.

The preservation of the town's historic and scenic character is important for a variety of reasons: to promote tourism, to preserve the agricultural land base, to enhance recreational opportunities, and to protect important natural and cultural landscape features. Careful site selection and design, and more detailed cultural, environmental and/or visual impact assessments where appropriate, can minimize adverse impacts to the town's cultural and scenic landscape and resources, and its rural character.



## 10.C ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

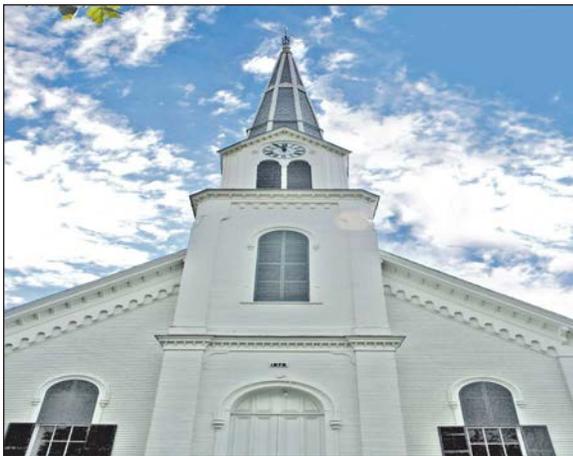
Knowledge about the town's distant past is limited. Buried archaeological sites are often uncovered only when disturbed by site development work. As a result, these important sources of information about the town's past are not readily identifiable, but can be easily destroyed through subsequent development.

An initial assessment of the Mad River Valley's archaeological potential in 1990 investigated two

previously reported prehistoric sites and five new historic sites. It was concluded that numerous sites likely exist in the Mad River Valley, including buried riverine and scattered upland prehistoric sites, historic homesteads, and industrial mill sites along the Mad River and its tributaries. Areas more likely to contain archeological resource include:

- ◆ Level, undisturbed, well-drained soils near water bodies or other strategic resources;
- ◆ High terraces (700+ feet above msl) bordering ancient Lake Vermont shorelines;
- ◆ Locations adjacent to major river confluences;
- ◆ Known mill sites; and
- ◆ Sites of structures that are no longer standing, as identified from historic maps.

Also of historic significance, though not well-documented, are other cultural landscape features, including: stone walls, fences and corner posts or witness trees that once marked field and property boundaries; foundations and cellar holes; quarry sites, old road beds; and other visible remnants of past land use and occupation. Such features, if identified on subdivision and site development plans, can be documented, incorporated in subdivision and site design, and protected where appropriate. For development within highly sensitive areas, further archaeological assessments may be necessary.



## 10.D HISTORIC SITES AND STRUCTURES

Waitsfield has a wealth of historic resources that includes hundreds of documented historic sites and structures, and others that have yet to be identified or catalogued. Some of the town's most historic structures, including its two covered bridges and the Joslin Round Barn, have been accepted for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (see Map 7 in Appendix B). Inclusion on the National Register places no restrictions on the use of property, but is typically a source of pride for property owners.

The Vermont State Register of Historic Places includes the historic districts discussed below, as well as 78 other historic structures located throughout town. A structure must be at least fifty 50 years old and retain its historic integrity to be eligible for listing on state and national registers. Most structures identified in the state's inventory are historic homes, but several farm complexes, school houses, and public buildings were also listed.

The Rural Resource Commission completed a barn inventory identifying 74 barns of historic significance in Waitsfield. These buildings help culturally and visually define the town's agrarian heritage. Many barns included on the state survey, however, are no longer actively used for agricultural purposes, and as such there is little economic incentive for their maintenance. There are several examples in town of barns which have been successfully converted to non-agricultural use, while retaining their historic integrity including: the Joslin Round Barn, which houses the Green Mountain Cultural Center; and the Skinner Barn which is used for performing arts. Such adaptive reuses, as allowed under the town's land use regulations, may help preserve these historic structures.

## 10.E HISTORIC DISTRICTS

The State Register of Historic Places includes three districts in Waitsfield: the Waitsfield Village Historic District, Mad River Valley Rural Resource District, and the Waitsfield Commons Historic District. All three of the town's historic districts are also listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and are shown on Map 7 in Appendix B.

The Waitsfield Village Historic District encompasses approximately 75 acres and 71 structures within its boundaries including historic homes, stores, public buildings, barns and outbuildings. Contributing



structures date from 1790 to 1930. The district's predominant architectural style is Greek Revival, but other styles are also represented. Prominent buildings include the Waitsfield Federated Church, the Joslin Memorial Library, the General Wait House, and the Bridge Street Market Place. The district also includes, near its center, the Great Eddy Covered Bridge, which is the oldest continually used covered bridge in Vermont.

While the historic character of the village is largely intact, contemporary buildings dominate the northern part of the district. Efforts are ongoing to ensure that new development within this district is more compatible with its historic architecture and character. The Mad River Valley Health Center is an example of such effort and its intended result.

The Mad River Valley Rural Historic District, listed on the National Register in 1994, stretches four miles and incorporates roughly 2,000 acres along Route 100 in Waitsfield and Moretown. The district includes a collection of well-preserved historic farmsteads representing the agricultural history of Vermont. Most structures date from the early- to mid-1800s, although there are a number of late-19th century barns. Land along the river has been farmed since the Mad River Valley was first settled in the 1790s. Farming has kept the valley bottom open, in sharp contrast to the forested mountain slopes to the east and west.

The Waitsfield Common Historic District was the first settlement in The Valley by those of European descent and is an example of an 18th century hilltop settlement. The district contains five vernacular Federal-period houses dating from 1793 to 1810, an 1810 farmstead, a cemetery dating from 1793, and a 1798 public common (divided into two parcels by town roads). Though the area has changed somewhat over the years, it remains largely intact and could serve as a model for new compact residential developments.

## 10.F SCENIC RESOURCES

As mentioned above, Waitsfield's traditional settlement patterns and associated rural landscape is the community's greatest aesthetic resource. This landscape consists of several key features, however, that have been identified as distinct scenic resources in a variety of studies and public opinion surveys over the past 20 years, including the 1988 Rural Resource Protection Plan and several community surveys. It is the protection of each of these distinct features that will ensure the preservation of Waitsfield's scenic landscape and, by extension, much of its rural character. These features include:

- ◆ Open farmland and meadows, which often serve as the foreground for expansive views;
- ◆ Forested knolls, steep mountain-sides and ridge lines which provide the unbroken background for most distant views, most significantly land above an elevation of 1,500 feet and lower hill-sides and forested knobs that rise steeply to the east of the Mad River (between the river and the Waitsfield Common/East Warren plateau) and are highly visible from Route 100;
- ◆ The historic context of development, including compact villages surrounded by open land and the relationship of clustered farm buildings (of mixed scale and massing) surrounded by farmland;
- ◆ Scenic roads, especially those of a scale and character that discourage high speed travel while offering a pleasant walking and recreational environment;
- ◆ The Mad River and adjacent riparian land and floodplain;
- ◆ Individual buildings which, because of their scale, character or historic significance, such as a large barn, serve as a visual and cultural focal point in the landscape; and
- ◆ The night sky, which despite increasing light pollution associated with commercial development in Irasville and scattered residential development, still provides a magnificent view of the stars.

## 10.G CULTURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

The 2009 public opinion survey reconfirmed findings from earlier surveys — that there is a great deal of local support for preserving the town's rural character, including its traditional settlement patterns, and



historic, scenic and recreational resources. There are a variety of regulatory and non-regulatory options available to encourage, or in some cases require, the protection of local cultural resources.

In recent years the town has pursued a number of these options, including the establishment of a local conservation fund for the purchase of land and interests in land (e.g., the Scrag Mountain and Wu Ledges municipal forests, Maple Avenue Farm multiple-property conservation project, and the Lareau Swim Hole), a local tax stabilization program for land kept in agriculture, and, additional regulatory protections and provisions.

- ◆ The town's land use regulations include a Historic Waitsfield Village Overlay District, the purpose of which is to maintain the historic character of the Waitsfield Village Historic District as listed on the National Register. The regulations provide standards and a required review process for exterior alterations. Also, the proposed demolition of any contributing structure must meet associated review standards intended to require the documentation and/or preservation of historic structures within the district.
- ◆ Listing on the National Register may afford some protection in the review of federally and/or state funded development projects, and also ensures that property owners are eligible for available state and federal assistance, including preservation grants and tax credits.
- ◆ Additional state assistance is available for historic properties within designated villages under Vermont's Downtown Program and Waitsfield has obtained designation for Waitsfield Village.
- ◆ Village Center Designation was obtained in 2007 that applies to Historic Waitsfield Village

and provides a number of benefits to owners of historic properties and extra consideration for grant applications.

- ◆ The Mad River Watershed Conservation Partnership also promotes land conservation as a means of preserving The Valley's rural character.
- ◆ The Mad River Valley Rural Resource Commission is also an entity available for protecting local cultural resources.



## 10.H GOAL

- 10.H-1 Identify, protect and preserve Waitsfield's cultural landscape and resources, including its traditional settlement pattern, historic built environment, and scenic features.

## 10.I POLICIES

- 10.I-1 Site and design development to be consistent with Waitsfield's traditional settlement pattern, including historic densities and scales of development, local road networks, and streetscapes, particularly within designated historic districts.
- 10.I-2 Site and design development to avoid adverse impacts to Waitsfield's historic sites and structures, and historic architectural styles should be considered when developing within designated historic districts.
- 10.I-3 Preserve the integrity of historic buildings to the extent feasible while allowing for on-going use and

- maintenance. Adaptive reuse shall be allowed where appropriate, including the re-use of historic barns, to preserve structures that no longer serve their original function.
- 10.I-4 Document any building listed on the state historic sites and structures survey prior to demolition (to identify and record significant historic and architectural details, preferably in consultation with the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation or a qualified historic preservationist) Copies of the documentation should be provided to the Waitsfield Historical Society for safekeeping.
- 10.I-5 Site and/or cluster development to avoid undue adverse visual impacts to scenic resources, including open fields, steep hillsides and ridge lines, as viewed from public vantage points. Screening, buffer areas and/or landscaping may be required where appropriate to minimize visual impacts.
- 10.I-6 Design development to maintain and/or enhance the appearance of properties as viewed from off-site. To this end, the town shall require all development, other than single family homes on existing lots, to comply with site design and landscaping standards under the town's zoning regulations.
- 10.I-7 Site and design renewable energy generation and telecommunication facilities and utility line extensions in a manner that avoids impacts to cultural and scenic features, and shall not be located within the Forest Reserve District at elevations of 1,700' and above. In no case shall telecommunications towers be lighted or exceed an elevation of 10 feet higher than the nearest forest canopy.
- 10.I-8 Locate utilities serving development underground, unless the Development Review Board finds that requiring utilities to be placed underground is not necessary due to presence of above-ground utilities serving nearby contiguous properties and that the requirement would place an unfair financial burden on the applicant.
- 10.I-9 Protect and maintain those scenic features within the rights-of-way of designated scenic roads, including but not necessarily limited to road width, surfacing materials, bordering trees, walls and fences in accordance with an adopted municipal scenic road maintenance program.
- 10.I-10 Maintain and/or re-establish tree canopies along public roads in accordance with an adopted tree planting program, and along new roads as required under local land use regulations.
- 10.I-11 Protect visual access to the night sky through the careful design and control of lighting to prevent glare and minimize sky glow. Lighting shall be carefully designed to avoid new light pollution (e.g., glare, sky glow), and reduce existing light pollution, through the use of appropriate techniques, including cut-off fixtures, down-casting, and limiting levels of illumination.
- 10.I-12 Design signs to be harmonious with the historic character and pedestrian scale of the town's village centers, consistent with traffic safety, and to avoid roadside clutter or interference with the enjoyment of the rural landscape outside of the village centers.
- 10.I-13 Continue to support the efforts of the Waitsfield Historical Society, and the Rural Resource Commission, to work with local property owners to identify, protect and promote Waitsfield's resources, including its historic sites and structures.
- 10.I-14 Promote private use of available historic preservation assistance programs (e.g., Historic Preservation Tax Credits, Barn Again grant program).
- 10.I-15 Encourage incentive and assistance programs and other non-regulatory means of cultural and scenic resource protection where feasible, in accordance with adopted resource protection plans.

## 10.J TASKS

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- 10.J-1 Continue to inventory, catalogue and map Waitsfield's historic and scenic features. [Rural Resource Commission\*, Waitsfield Historical Society\*]
- 10.J-2 Update land use regulations as needed to further protect Waitsfield's historic and scenic resources, including the adoption of conservation and "residential hamlet" subdivision design standards, and consideration of adopting additional historic and/or design review overlay districts to protect the town's traditional settlement pattern, cultural resources, and scenic landscape (see Chapter 12). [Planning Commission, Conservation Commission, Selectboard]
- 10.J-3 Adopt specific lighting standards under the town's zoning regulations and, at the same time, conduct public informational meetings to educate the public regarding strategies to avoid light pollution. [Planning Commission, Selectboard]
- 10.J-4 Update the town's tree planting and maintenance program, particularly as needed to re-establish tree canopies along public roads and rights-of-way. Implement the Waitsfield Street Tree Master Plan. [Tree Board, Selectboard]
- 10.J-5 Seek funding as needed for the redevelopment of the town's historic properties, including Waitsfield's historic public buildings. [Rural Resource Commission\*, Selectboard, Library Commission, Historical Society\*]
- 10.J-6 Seek funding as needed to conserve significant rural resources, through the purchase of land or interests in land (e.g., conservation easements, development rights). [Conservation Commission, Selectboard, Mad River Watershed Conservation Partnership\*]
- 10.J-7 Develop a plan for renovating the Wait House barns for public and cultural purposes. [Selectboard, Waitsfield Historical Society\*]
- 10.J-8 Promote private use of available historic preservation assistance programs (e.g., Historic Preservation Tax Credits, Barn Again grant program). [Rural Resource Commission\*, Historical Society\*]
- 10.J-9 Explore the establishment of a "Town Green" in Irasville to serve as a center for community events and outdoor gatherings (see Map 9). [Planning Commission]