

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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## SURVEY OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS FAQs

### **1. Why does Bedford have a Survey of Historic Buildings?**

In March, 2003, the Town of Bedford enacted a Historic Building Preservation Law in accordance with Section 96-a of the General Municipal Law of the State of New York. In that Law, it was “declared to be the public policy of this Town to engage in a program of historic building preservation.” The Law defines Historic Buildings as structures 1) built before the year 1900; or 2) listed on the National Register of Historic Buildings; or 3) constructed after the year 1900 and listed on the Survey of Historic Buildings prepared by the Town. In accordance with this law, the Town has engaged Steward Preservation Services, an independent consulting firm specializing in historic structure surveys, to prepare a Survey of Historic Buildings in the Town of Bedford, to be adopted by the Town Board.

### **2. What changes are being proposed in the Survey?**

Starting with an existing Survey of historic properties identified by the Town’s Historic Building Preservation Commission (HBPC), Steward Preservation Services canvassed the Town for historic structures, removing some properties and adding others. Detailed Historic Resource Inventory Forms have been prepared for every property on the Survey, including narrative descriptions of structures and known or estimated dates of construction, as well as descriptions of significance. Based on Steward Preservation Service’s report, the HBPC is recommending that the Town’s historic properties be divided into three classifications subject to different levels of review, only two of which will require reviews by the HBPC for permits.

### **3. How can I find out if my property is included on the draft Survey, or what my proposed classification is?**

A summary spreadsheet of the draft Survey of Historic Buildings with each historic property identified by street address and proposed classification is available on the Historic Building Preservation Commission page on the Town’s website. The complete draft Survey is on file at the Office of the Historic Building Preservation Commission at 425 Cherry Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor (914.666.4434), where you may obtain a detailed Property Report, including a Historic Resource Inventory Form with photographs and narrative description, for your individual property. For the sake of privacy, Historic Resource Inventory Forms will not be posted to the website.

### **4. Are barns and outbuildings included on the Survey?**

Properties on the draft Survey are identified by street address as well as tax ID number. In instances where there are multiple structures associated with a single address or tax ID number, it is possible that not all will be historic. Furthermore, in some instances, properties have been included due to the historic nature of an outbuilding or barn, as opposed to the principal structure. Homeowners may request a consultation with the HBPC to determine which specific structures on a property are considered historic.

**5. If I purchase a house that is included on the Survey, will I be required to undertake construction or restoration?**

No construction or restoration is required by the preservation law, unless the building or its historical features has been allowed to deteriorate to the point that they are at risk of destruction through neglect, as defined by Chapter 71, Article V of the Town Code, "Neglect of Historic Property."

## CLASSIFICATIONS OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS FAQs

**1. Why is the HBPC proposing classifications for Historic Buildings, and what are they?**

The HBPC is proposing to create classifications for Historic Buildings in order to reduce the overall number of properties subject to permitting review and to offer a more streamlined process for those properties requiring review, including the possibility of requesting an Expedited Determination based on a project's scope of work and the property's classification. Three classifications are being proposed for properties included on the draft Survey: **Individually Significant, Contributing, and Other Historic Resources**. Proposed alterations to properties classified as Individually Significant or Contributing would be subject to review by the HBPC. Properties classified as Other Historic Resources would not be subject to HBPC review; however, owners of these properties will be encouraged to take advantage of a free, no-obligation consultation with the HBPC to learn more about their property and to review possible options for retaining defining historic features while meeting goals of alternation or expansion.

**2. What does it mean if my property has been proposed for classification as Individually Significant?**

Under the proposed classification system, Individually Significant properties are the most important historic resources in the Town of Bedford. Properties constructed prior to 1900 that are substantially intact have been proposed for classification as Individually Significant, as well as a limited number of outstanding twentieth-century properties that are considered to be distinctive representations of an important period in the history of Bedford or distinctive representations of an architectural style. According to the proposed streamlined review procedures, owners of Individually Significant properties will be able to request an Expedited Determination for work that does not involve demolition of historic fabric, or for additions that do not impact the structure's historic character.

**3. What does it mean if my property has been proposed for classification as Contributing?**

Under the proposed classification system, Contributing properties are historic resources that are not significant enough to be designated Individually Significant, but that nevertheless make a distinctive contribution to the overall historic and visual character of the Town of Bedford by virtue of the historic nature of the road

or neighborhood where they are located. According to the proposed streamlined review procedures, owners of Contributing properties may request an Expedited Determination for work that does not involve significant demolition of historic fabric and that is not visible from the public way.

**4. What does it mean if my property has been proposed for classification as an Other Historic Resource?**

Under the proposed classification system, Other Historic Resources are *unregulated* properties of lesser architectural or historic significance, or where historic features and fabric have been compromised, but which nonetheless contribute to the historic character of the Town. Under this system, owners of these properties would be entitled to voluntary, no-charge consultations with the HBPC, but *not required* to obtain HBPC approval for any alteration, addition or demolition.

**5. What should I do if I think the description for my property includes inaccurate information, or if I don't agree with the proposed classification for my property?**

Descriptions of significance and dates in the draft Survey are based on visual assessments of architectural characteristics combined with information from the Town's Assessor's and Historian's files, as well as information from property owners and other sources. In order to ensure the accuracy of the Survey, the HBPC welcomes further information about the history of any properties included on it. Owners wishing to provide additional information about the history of their property, or to request a review of their property's classification or inclusion on the Survey, are invited to submit a [Historic Resource Review Request](#) which will be available on the HBPC webpage on the Town website and at the HBPC Office. Please note that the HBPC may require a site visit to review a request for change of classification.

**6. My property has been identified as contributing to a historic and scenic road or historic neighborhood. What are the historic roads and neighborhoods in Bedford, and why are they significant?**

The intact nature of many of Bedford's historic roads and neighborhoods is one of its defining characteristics. Residents and visitors alike appreciate a natural and architectural environment in many areas of the Town that has remained substantially intact over one, two, or more centuries. The combination of unpaved roads, open views, stone walls, historic houses and smaller structures create an environment of historic and natural beauty that is truly unique, but also quite varied from one area of the Town to another. In compiling the draft Survey, a number of buildings were recognized as contributing to the historic character of these distinctive roads and neighborhoods. A list of historic roads and neighborhoods referenced in the Survey that are documented on historic maps and have substantially retained their historic character and features may be found on the HBPC [webpage](#).

## PERMITTING PROCESS FAQs

### **1. If my house is classified as Individually Significant, would I be able to make changes or additions to it?**

Under this proposal, homeowners would be able to make changes to Individually Significant or Contributing properties, as long as they do not substantially compromise the historic character of the property, just as is currently the case for properties listed on the existing Survey. Applications for minor changes would be eligible for Expedited Determinations, whereas projects that are more significant in scope would continue to require a full review by the HBPC, including a site visit by the full Commission (scheduled on a monthly basis) and in most cases a Public Hearing. The HBPC strives to work with homeowners to help them accomplish their goals while preserving the historic character of their properties.

### **2. How do I obtain approval to make changes to a property that is included on the Survey?**

All owners of property in the Town of Bedford are advised to contact the Building Department as a first priority when contemplating any type of construction, demolition, repair, or renovation, including sheds and other accessory structures. For properties on the Survey of Historic Buildings, the Building Inspector refers the application to the HBPC, and the HBPC Office informs the property owners of their application options. Owners of Individually Significant and Contributing properties would be required to file an application with the HBPC; however, under the proposed new procedures they would have the option of requesting an Expedited Determination for minor work. Current procedures would continue to apply for significant alterations to Individually Significant or Contributing properties, that is, they would require a full review, including a site walk with the full Commission and in most cases a Public Hearing. Property owners filing Building Permit applications for alterations to Other Historic Resources would not be required to file an application with the HBPC, but will be notified that they are eligible for a free advisory consultation if they so desire.

### **3. What is an Expedited Determination?**

Under this proposed new procedure, an Expedited Determination would be a fast-track application process for property owners wanting to make minor changes to Individually Significant or Contributing properties. For eligible projects, a site walk would be scheduled shortly after receipt of the application for an Expedited Determination, and a decision would be made within seven days of the site walk, eliminating the need for the property owner to wait for the next regularly scheduled monthly HBPC meeting.

### **4. What fees are associated with applications for work on Historic Properties?**

The Town of Bedford requires a \$75 fee for all Building Permit applications. There is an additional \$50 fee for the HBPC application, plus a \$300 escrow fee for expenses incurred by the Town for retaining an outside Consultant as needed. The \$300

escrow fee will be returned if a Consultant is not needed. Under these proposed new procedures, the \$300 escrow fee would be waived for Expedited Determination applications.

**5. What guidelines does the HBPC use when considering an application for work on a Historic Building?**

The HBPC uses the United States Secretary of the Interior's Standards to evaluate applications for alterations and additions to Historic Buildings, including the repair and replacement of historic materials. These standards, published by the National Park Service, are used by local preservation commissions and State Historic Preservation Offices across the country.

**6. Is it possible to consult with the HBPC in the early stages of a project, without filing a formal application?**

Yes, property owners and architects are encouraged to request a Conference with the HBPC for an early-stage conceptual review.

**7. Will I be required to submit an application to the HBPC if I am only making changes to the interior of a Historic Property?**

No. The HBPC only reviews alterations to the exteriors of Historic Properties; however, you will still need to obtain any necessary Building Permits from the Building Department.

**8. Do I need approval for landscape changes to a Historic Property?**

No, however, the HBPC urges property owners to preserve historic dry-laid stone walls whenever possible. Dry-laid stone walls are a defining feature of the Town's historic landscape. Links to further information on the history and preservation of stone walls can be found on the Planning Department [webpage](#). Otherwise, property owners should bear in mind that landscape changes may be subject to review by other Town agencies, if wetlands, steep slopes, or setbacks are involved.