



## CHAPTER 7 – LAND CONSERVATION AND TRAILS

Land conservation has been an important community initiative in Lenox during the late twentieth century. Significant areas of land have been permanently preserved as open space by local and regional non-profit organizations, by the Commonwealth, and by the Town. These areas include land on the mountains that frame the east and west boundaries of Lenox, the Housatonic River corridor, and wetlands and stream courses. The 2013/2015 *Open Space and Recreation Plan* assesses the natural landscape in Lenox and identifies priorities for future conservation action.

Land conservation helps preserve historic resources. The purpose of this chapter is to frame historic preservation in terms of landscape and landscape character with appreciation of how the landscape has changed over time through different periods of the Town's historical development.

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### CULTURAL LANDSCAPE APPROACH

Lenox is an evolving cultural landscape. Chapter 2 of this plan describes how Lenox's landscape has changed during each period of the Town's historical development and notes the types of historic building and landscape resources that are associated with each period. Individual historic resources were constructed within larger landscape contexts and community patterns of use. Association with those contexts and patterns helps enrich the meaning and significance of individual resources and provide a broader and deeper perspective regarding the Town as a whole.

Changes in the landscape can be complex and are comprised of layers built one upon another over time. These layers of change may be difficult to perceive and are often taken for granted. Landscape changes can be read through visual clues such as remnant features, plant communities, and landforms. When combined with documentary evidence like historic maps, historic photographs, and site histories, the visual clues become more pronounced and provide real physical evidence of past history and use.

The foundation for understanding an evolving cultural landscape is the existing natural landscape—the geology, landforms, soils, drainage patterns, ecology, and plant communities that have evolved over long periods of time and that provide the the basic geography and setting upon which cultural changes were later imposed. Chapter 2 discusses the natural history of Lenox and the Berkshires as an essential background to the understanding of changes in historic times. Cultural changes to the landscape are a direct result of uses that take advantage of available natural conditions for human benefit. Persisting natural conditions and the regenerative capacity of native and introduced plant communities have an important impact on what landscapes have become today once past uses have been abandoned.



***Lenox's natural landscape is the foundation for understanding its evolving cultural landscape.***

As discussed in Chapter 2, the most dramatic change to Lenox's landscape occurred between 1750 and 1850 during which time the pre-settlement native landscape was completely deforested and transformed into a domesticated agricultural landscape. This transformation constituted a dramatic disruption and alteration in the ecology of many different areas of the Town. The patterns of roads and farmsteads in Lenox existing today are remnants of this period and included individual historic resources such as farm houses, barns, stone walls, field patterns, farm lanes and other resources. Water powered mills located along streams in the Town were an important economic and visual feature of the landscape but evidence of their existence has since almost completely disappeared. Surviving industrial archeological sites, such as mill sites, are significant in understanding and interpreting the relationship between agriculture and early industry in Lenox.

Between 1870 and 1910, Lenox's Cottage Era initiated the next major transformation of the landscape as wealthy summer residents purchased farms and created the Great Estates, primarily in the southern portion of the Town. High points in the landscape were selected for the the construction of mansions from

which the magnificent views of the mountains to the south could be enjoyed (unimpeded by the trees that had been removed for farming and industry over the previous century). Often, these locations were the same places where farmsteads had been sited. Former agricultural field patterns were altered, merged, and recombined to the purposes of the pastoral recreational landscape. The northern and eastern portions of Lenox were less subject to Cottage Era change, as the landforms there did not provide the same magnificent views and were thus less desirable for the construction of summer mansions.

Since the early twentieth century, Lenox's landscape has filled in with trees as the steep-sloped mountains have been allowed to succeed to second growth forest and the valley landscape has become suburbanized. The open vistas created by the agricultural transformation and taken advantage of during the Cottage Era are today only visible from a few select locations. Today's community landscape preferences as demonstrated in the Town's planning and bylaws (see Chapter 3) trend toward open space preservation and ecological health while accommodating suburban residential and commercial development. Nevertheless, the layers of change remaining from the Agricultural and Cottage Eras are still evident in the landscape and are central to the Town's character and appeal.

**This preservation plan encourages a cultural landscape approach to historic preservation in Lenox, emphasizing the relationship of historic buildings and other features to their surrounding landscape contexts.**



***In the early and mid-nineteenth century, this pond near Undermountain Road was an open pit for the mining of iron ore for Lenox Furnace.***

This preservation plan encourages a cultural landscape approach to historic preservation in Lenox, emphasizing the relationship of historic buildings and other features to their surrounding landscape contexts. The plan promotes appreciation of landscape and *community character* as a means through which the Town's cultural landscape will be recognized. Historic resources are character defining features of the landscape. The identification, recognition, and



preservation of historic building and landscape resources strengthens landscape and community character and enhances Lenox's identity.

**7.1 Use a cultural landscape approach in assessing Lenox's identity and historic character. For each of the Town's landscape areas (see Chapters 2 and 5), identify the character defining features of the landscape—including buildings—and work toward their preservation and enhancement.**

**7.2 Use a cultural landscape approach in preparation of the new Master Plan for Lenox.**

In the practice of historic preservation, cultural landscapes are defined as:

*Geographic areas including both natural and cultural resources associated with a historic event or activity, or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values. (NPS 2015, Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes).*

There are four general types of cultural landscapes, not mutually exclusive: historic sites, historic designed landscapes, historic vernacular landscapes, and ethnographic landscapes. As a whole, Lenox is a *historic vernacular landscape* with multiple layers of changes superimposed over each other over time, as discussed above. Within Lenox, there are also discrete *historic sites* and *historic designed landscapes*, such as the Great Estates, parks, and cemeteries, which are discussed further in the following section of this chapter on Heritage Landscapes.



***Abandoned former roadway, now woodland.***

Over the past thirty or forty years, historic preservation has taken an increasingly broader perspective in moving away from a concentration upon historic buildings as isolated objects toward a more holistic appreciation of buildings and related historic resources in their landscape context. The Town's recognition of Lenox Village as National Register Historic District and local historic district is part of that broader perspective.

The National Park Service has led the recognition and study of cultural landscapes in the United States and has developed methodologies and guidelines for their identification, assessment, and treatment. These methodologies and guidelines can be useful in helping us to understand Lenox's landscapes as they have evolved

over time. They provide a set of best practices that can help us recognize and preserve character defining features of the landscape significant to the Town's character and identity.

In general, the identification and analysis of cultural landscape characteristics and features include the landscape's:

- Spatial organization and land patterns,
- Views and vistas,
- Topography,
- Natural systems and features,
- Vegetation,
- Circulation,
- Land use,
- Buildings and structures,
- Small-scale features, and
- Other special considerations.

Many of these attributes are discussed in Chapter 2 of this plan. Lenox's overall geology, landforms, drainage patterns, and ecology provide the foundational setting for the landscape and are instrumental in the characteristics determining spatial patterns, topography, natural systems and features, and vegetation. Lenox's road networks and land divisions create large-scaled patterns related to circulation and land use.

The National Park Service has developed *Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* (<https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/landscape-guidelines/index.htm>) which discuss the principles outlined above and how to apply the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* (discussed in Chapter 4) to landscapes.



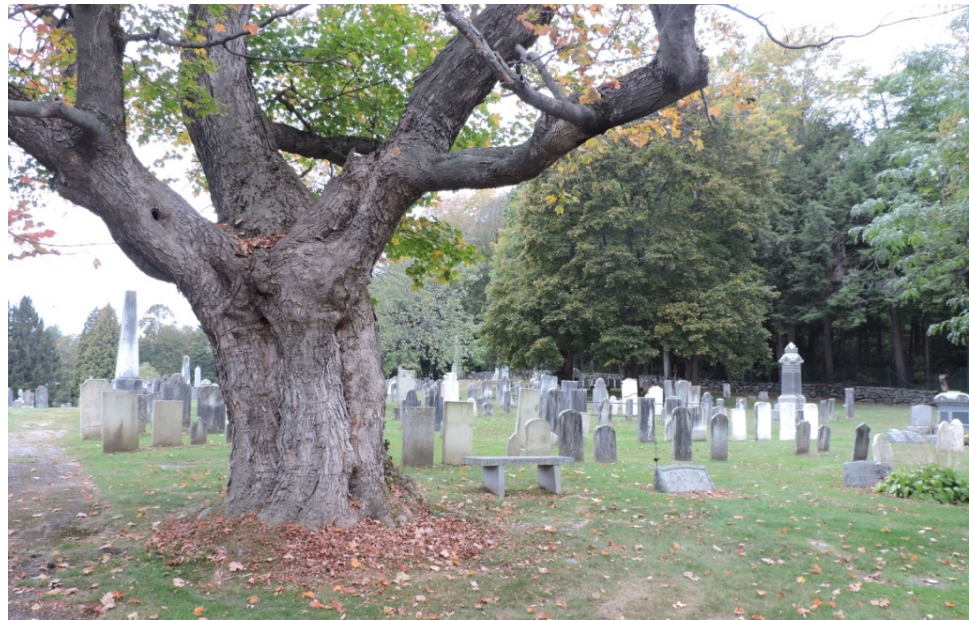
***Small-scale landscape feature along a popular road for walkers. The sign reads, "Yes! You can sit here."***



Buildings and structures are associated with each period of the Town's development and often have particular relationships to larger landscape patterns, such as the layout and patterns of farmsteads, or of the Great Estates, or the growth of Lenox Village or Lenox Dale. Examples of small-scale features are park sculptures, cemetery headstones, historic signs, or the historic light standards installed along Village streets.

In community planning, growth management, new development, interpretation, the development of bylaws, land conservation, and other activities, individual features in the landscape should never be viewed in isolation, but in relationship to the landscape as a whole. Each situation may vary, and some features may often be more important than others. Overall, it is the arrangement and the interrelationship of these character defining features that is most critical to consider. Landscape features should always be assessed as they relate to a neighborhood or a property as a whole.

*(Actions of the Town boards, commissions, and committees with leadership from the Historical Commission and Planning Board.)*



***Church on the Hill Cemetery, a premier Heritage Landscape in Lenox.***

## HERITAGE LANDSCAPES

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has developed a program for the identification of Heritage Landscapes, specific landscape areas within a community of distinctive quality and significance. Based upon the concepts and methodologies of cultural landscapes, the DCR's Heritage Landscape Inventory Program tends to focus on identifying landscape areas of high integrity, such as historic cemeteries, parks, and town greens.

The Heritage Landscape program is viewed as a subset of the Town's larger and more complex townwide cultural landscape. As discussed above, the townwide cultural landscape has many overlapping layers of change and can be messy,

complex, and difficult to read. Heritage Landscapes, by contrast, tend to be distinct, notable, and easy to identify. Like many historic buildings, they have clear identities and retain their integrity to the period and purpose of their creation.

Some potential Heritage Landscapes in Lenox are obvious, but others might be less so. They might include:

- Church on the Hill Cemetery (already an individually listed site on the National Register of Historic Places in conjunction with the Church),
- Other historic cemeteries (St. Ann's Cemetery, Mountain View Cemetery, New Lenox Cemetery, others?),
- Lilac Park (historic designed landscape – Lenox Village),
- Edith Wharton Park (part of a Great Estates landscape)
- Kennedy Park (historic remnant/archeological landscape related to its former resort use),
- Housatonic River between Woods Pond and Lenox Dale (historic industrial/archeological landscape), and
- The Great Estates (individually or as a group/district – see recommendations in Chapter 8).

Purposes for the identification of Heritage Landscapes are to (1) increase public recognition and awareness of the landscapes and their associations with Town history and character; (2) consideration of these landscapes and sites in Town planning initiatives; (3) preservation of the landscapes through the identification of management issues and appropriate treatment strategies; and (4) interpretive potential.



***Entrance gate to St. Ann's Cemetery (left) and entrance pilaster and wall (right) at a driveway to the site of the former Hotel Aspinwall, now Kennedy Park.***

Over the long term, Lenox should establish an inventory of key Heritage Landscapes within the Town, similar to the existing historic resource inventory for buildings and structures. Heritage Landscape inventories have been undertaken in many towns in eastern Massachusetts that can provide models for the initiative, and DCR has developed guidelines for the methodology.

**7.3 Undertake a reconnaissance survey of potential Heritage Landscapes in Lenox using methodologies outlined by the Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Program. Identify Heritage Landscapes that may be threatened for potential preservation action.**

**7.4 Over time, develop a more detailed inventory of identified Heritage Landscapes similar to that existing for historic buildings. Include the consideration of Heritage Landscapes in planning and historic preservation initiatives.**

The reconnaissance survey should be a broad-based listing of landscapes of distinctive character within Lenox. It is suggested that they be organized by period and type. A spreadsheet can be used to record basic locational and thematic information and to organize the listings by type. Individual files can be created for each landscape with photographs, historical background, and descriptive information similar to those prepared for historic buildings.

More intensive inventory work with respect to individual Heritage Landscapes can be taken over time but should be taken on an expedited basis if management issues and threats are identified. Intensive inventory work would include the identification of character defining features and attributes as outlined in methodologies for cultural landscapes. Once identified, appropriate management and treatment techniques for each type of feature or attribute can be identified. Intensive level survey work should follow Massachusetts Historical Commission survey methodology and use MHC inventory forms.



***Historic railroad bridge over the Housatonic River in Lenox Dale related to the Town's industrial heritage.***

Features, attributes, issues, and techniques related to more obvious sites such as historic cemeteries and designed parks may be readily identifiable. Landscapes such as Kennedy Park and the industrial river corridor in Lenox Dale may require more in-depth study, as they involve lost features and archeological sites.



Methodologies for the study and treatment of historic landscapes are available from a variety of sources, especially the National Park Service, Massachusetts Historical Commission, and non-profit cultural landscape organizations.

Over the long term, the Town's inventory of Heritage Landscapes should be maintained similar to that maintained for historic buildings and preservation issues should be identified and addressed.

*(Actions of the Historical Commission with support from the Planning Board.)*

## CONSERVATION LANDS

A significant amount of landscape area has been conserved within Lenox through the direct acquisition of land and the application/acquisition of conservation restrictions. For decades, a primary focus of land conservation efforts has been on Lenox Mountain along the western border of the Town and along the Housatonic River corridor and October Mountain along the eastern border.

Organizations prominent in land conservation efforts have included the Berkshire Natural Resources Council (Lenox Mountain), Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary (Mass Audubon, Lenox Mountain), Town of Lenox (Lenox Mountain and Kennedy Park), Lenox Land Trust, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (MassDCR, (October Mountain State Park), and Massachusetts Division of Fish and Wildlife (George Darey Wildlife Management Area). Housatonic Heritage (Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area) and the Housatonic Valley Association. These organizations have support conservation initiatives in Lenox and, together, have had a substantial impact on the Town's quality of life. Additionally, a number of non-profit cultural sites such as The Mount participate in land conservation efforts, often in partnership with the local and regional land trusts.



***View of Parsons Marsh from Undermountain Road.***

The scope and context for land conservation in Lenox is outlined in the Town's 2013/2015 *Open Space and Recreation Plan*. The regional leadership of the Berkshire Natural Resources Council has been instrumental in the conservation of large areas of Lenox Mountain. Town involvement in land conservation has

stemmed historically from the need to protect lands associated with reservoirs supplying public water to Lenox Village and townwide.

Lenox and its non-profit partners continue to conserve properties in key areas of the Town. Recent conservation initiatives in the vicinity of Parsons Marsh have been particularly noteworthy.

### **7.5 Support land conservation efforts that help preserve and connect historic landscapes and landscape resources.**

The *Open Space and Recreation Plan* identifies priorities for future conservation action which include (A) continued identification and protection of environmentally significant and sensitive areas, (B) conservation of stream corridors and associated wetlands throughout the Town, and (C) creation of landscape linkages east-west across Lenox and the Marble Valley connecting Lenox Mountain with the Housatonic River and October Mountain.

Land conservation is a means through which historic resources can be preserved and is an important tool supporting a landscape approach to historic preservation. While the primary impetus for many land conservation initiatives has been based on ecological and environmental values, cultural and historic landscape values are important as well. Historic preservation and land conservation are related in three important ways:

1. Most conserved properties have historic resources on them. This is particularly the case for former agricultural landscapes that have succeeded to woodlands, as in Lenox. Remnant landscape features, and sometimes entire complexes—such as Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary—are present within these landscapes. When land is conserved, the historic resources on the property are preserved as well. As discussed earlier in the chapter, a landscape’s story can be read through its remnant historic resources, patterns of former land use, and plant communities.
2. Land conservation can be used explicitly to preserve historic properties, such as Kennedy Park and the Post Farm in Lenox.
3. In places where organizations and financial resources are limited, partnerships between historic preservation and land conservation interests can address multiple community goals.

Land conservation and historic preservation interests should work together in creating Lenox’s townwide open space system. In some cases, historic preservation should be a driving factor in land conservation initiatives.

*(Action of land conservation entities and committees with support from the Historical Commission and Planning Board.)*

**Land conservation is a mean through which historic resources can be preserved and is an important tool supporting a landscape approach to historic preservation.**



**Conservation sign at Parsons Marsh Reserve.**

### **7.6 Incorporate historical and cultural values into the criteria used to assess and prioritize land for conservation initiatives.**

Historical and cultural values should be considered when properties are being evaluated for protection. Existing condition assessments for conservation lands should include the identification of historic building and landscape features. Treatment plans should include the preservation of historic features. Where land conservation organizations are not able to contribute resources to historic preservation treatments, creative preservation partnerships should be sought to provide the information, experience, and management capabilities needed.

*(Action of land conservation organizations in partnership with historic preservation interests.)*

### **7.7 Support specific projects enhancing community open space, providing trail linkages, and supporting historic interpretive sites.**

Several of Lenox's leading historic and cultural institutions have developed plans for land conservation, open space, and trails through innovative partnerships. During preparation of this preservation plan, two significant projects have been discussed that combine land conservation and historic preservation and should be actively supported by preservation/conservation partners.

- The Mount, Edith Wharton's 1901 historic house and property, is working with private and non-profit partners and the Towns of Lenox and Lee to create a unified area of conserved open space knitting together several large adjacent properties and connecting The Mount to Edith Wharton Park on Laurel Lake.

A publicly accessible trail system on the combined properties will be an important open space amenity for the two towns and a destination for Lenox's townwide trail network. The vacant historic house on the park property could be used by The Mount as a residence for visiting writers or other programmatic use, bringing together public and private interests that enrich the towns' cultural offerings.

**Historical and cultural values should be considered when properties are being evaluated for protection.**



The Berkshire Natural Resources Council is collaborating with The Mount and the various partners both on conservation and trail design aspects of the project.



***Illustrative plan of conserved lands and trail network linking The Mount, Edith Wharton Park, and adjacent private lands in Lenox and Lee. (source: The Mount)***

- A property at the intersection of Housatonic Street and Crystal Street owned by the Berkshire Scenic Railway Museum is available for creation of a park that will provide visibility and access to Lenox Depot (the museum and future scenic railroad stop), Woods Pond, the Housatonic River, and trails linking to October Mountain.

An existing vacant non-historic industrial building on the property will be demolished to make the project possible. The resulting Woods

Pond/railroad park will create an amenity with both conservation and historic preservation values.

Such projects significantly enhance the character of the Town, are closely associated with historic preservation, have rich interpretive potential, and provide recreational opportunities that directly support The Creative Economy economic strategy outlined in Chapter 5. Additional projects can be identified and should be part of the Town's long-term program of partnerships and community enhancement.

*(Action of the Town in partnership with non-profit partners.)*



***The building on the left next to the Lenox Depot will be removed creating a park providing access to the trail network at Wood's Pond (right).***

## TOWNWIDE TRAIL NETWORK

Lenox is in the process of developing a townwide trail network that appears to have broad public support. Funds for the preparation of a trails plan for Lenox were approved at Town Meeting. The proposed trail network will link with regional trail networks on Lenox Mountain/Yokun Ridge on the west side of Lenox and the Housatonic River and October Mountain on the east side of Lenox. Important design questions include the best ways to provide linkages to Lenox Village, Lenox Dale, historic and cultural sites, suburban neighborhoods, and open space throughout the Town.

The regional trail network is known as the High Road and is spearheaded by the Berkshire Natural Resources Council, which owns much of the conserved land the trail traverses. In Lenox, the Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary manages much of the existing trail network on Lenox Mountain/Yokun Ridge that links with Kennedy Park and the vicinity of Parson's Marsh.

**7.8 Participate in and support development of a townwide trail network in Lenox.**

**7.9 Use the trail to link the regional trail network to Lenox Village, Lenox Dale, New Lenox, and historic and cultural attractions.**

**7.10 Use the trail network as an interpretive venue, presenting the historic landscape to residents and visitors.**



The proposed trail network supports historic preservation interests by showcasing the historic landscape and providing linkages to historic sites. The Town's portion of the trail network must cross the Marble Valley, linking the Housatonic River with Lenox Mountain. The trail should be used to link the various centers of the community, including Lenox Village, Lenox Dale, and New Lenox. The trail should connect to key historic and cultural sites such as Ventfort Hall, Shakespeare and Company, and The Mount as well as other privately owned but publicly accessible Great Estates such as Cranwell and Blantyre. Community Preservation Act funding can be used as an important funding source in combination with other grants for phased implementation of the trail network.

Open space associated with future new subdivision and land development projects could help establish connections and link neighborhoods to the network. The trail network will be an important recreational amenity for both residents and visitors. It should be enhanced with interpretation telling the stories of the Town and the sites it connects in accordance with a townwide interpretive program as outlined in Chapter 9.

*(Actions of the Town in partnership with non-profit partners.)*



***Scenic and historic roadway adjacent to Edith Wharton Park.***