



## CHAPTER 1 – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Lenox is located in the heart of the Berkshires of western Massachusetts and, along with its immediate neighbors Lee and Stockbridge, is known for its natural beauty, cultural amenities, and quality of life. Lenox has undertaken preparation of a Historic Preservation Plan that examines the role of historic and cultural resources in the Town and how those resources can be preserved and enhanced as Lenox continues to grow and evolve.

The Historic Preservation Plan for Lenox reviews the types of historic resources that were developed during various periods of the Town's evolution, the degree to which they remain and contribute to the life of the Town, and how public and private actions can contribute positively to their preservation.

The plan takes a landscape approach, looking at landscape patterns and features—including but not limited to buildings—with an eye to understanding how landscape context has changed over time and continues to be a primary determinant of Town character. The plan identifies a broad range of tools and activities that influence historic resources and landscape character, including those traditional to the field of historic preservation but also those related to other disciplines and interests.

To that end, the process of developing the Historic Preservation Plan involved reaching out to a variety of stakeholders in Lenox to engage them in discussions about how historic resources relate to their interests. Focus groups were organized around four principle topics:

- History and Historic Preservation – individuals and organizations that study and research the history of Lenox and/or are involved in activities seeking their preservation;
- Town Committees and Commissions – residents engaged in Town governance as volunteers, serving on various committees and commissions whose interests and activities may touch on or relate to historic resources and landscape character;

- Lenox Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals – whose members are specifically engaged in planning for and reviewing development and physical change within Lenox; and
- Cultural Attractions and Heritage Businesses – that are the economic base of the Town, occupy and maintain many of the Town’s premier historic resources, and recognize the importance of historic character to Lenox’s appeal and quality of life.

The most active participation and enthusiastic support for the preservation plan came from the Town’s cultural attractions, who were eager to engage with each other and the Town in collaborative endeavors to make Lenox a better place to live and work. Their enthusiasm helped shape the plan’s strategies and are a key to its successful implementation.

The Historic Preservation Plan for Lenox was funded through a grant provided by the Massachusetts Historical Commission, whose staff provided guidance and support throughout the project. The plan was a project of the Lenox Historical Commission and the Town’s Land Use Department and was coordinated by a Steering Committee made up of Historical Commission members and others with historic preservation interests.

## FOUNDATION OF THE PLAN

Strategies for promoting historic preservation in the plan were founded upon three considerations that are reflected in Chapters 2 through 4 of the preservation plan: (1) understanding of the **types of historic resources** in Lenox and the degree to which they have been identified, recognized, and preserved; (2) the **planning context** for the Town—how change is occurring, its impact on historic resources, and how it can be used to further preservation interests over time; and (3) **preservation approach**—what is historic preservation, what are its principles, and how can they be applied to the range of activities and initiatives that shape change in Lenox.

In examining Lenox’s history and how change has occurred over time, eight historic contexts have been identified through the work of local historians, each with its own set of historic resources that have influenced the Town’s landscape and character. They include:

- **Native Landscape and Pre-Settlement (11,700 BP-1750)** – the landforms and ecology of the landscape that provide the setting, context, and natural resources influencing the Town’s cultural development;
- **Agricultural Development and County Seat (1750-1870)** – the period during which Lenox was primarily an agricultural community and during which its primary landscape patterns—roads, boundaries, land uses, and many types of agricultural buildings and landscape features—were established;
- **Early Industry (1783-1877)** – part of the agricultural landscape, the mills, iron works, and other industries supporting the regional farm economy and dependent upon water power, wagon transport, and local natural resources;

- **County Seat – Lenox Becomes a Shire Town (1784-1868)** – the influence of Lenox’s designation as a county seat, attracting lawyers and prominent families and setting the stage for profound changes later in the century;
- **Arrival of Culture and Beginnings of a Summer Resort (1821-1870)** – how educated and affluent individuals and families were drawn to Lenox for its culture and beauty and began to shape its image and identity;
- **The Cottage Era (1870-1930)** – the profound impact of The Gilded Age on Lenox and its surroundings as wealthy and influential families from Boston, New York, and elsewhere used Lenox as a seasonal retreat and dramatically reshaped its landscape and economy through construction of ever more extravagant mansions and estates;
- **Mid-Twentieth Century Transition (1930-1970)** – transition, reinvention, and change as The Gilded Age was eclipsed, the extravagant seasonal estates were no longer economically sustainable and seeking new uses, and Lenox became a suburban enclave to Pittsfield, the Berkshire’s industrial center;
- **Cultural Attraction and Suburbanization (1970-Present)** – the Town’s present context with a focus on heritage tourism as the basis of the regional economy and a place attracting affluent middle class retirees as second home buyers, supplementing the local full time resident population.

Each of these periods or contexts had its own set of historic building and landscape resources and impacted the Lenox landscape in dramatically different ways. The result was a layering of resources and conditions that give Lenox its distinctive character today and enrich local quality of life. Planning and growth management in Lenox takes advantage of these resources in guiding and implementing future change.

### Preservation Approach

The preservation approach for Lenox’s Historic Preservation Plan is to be as broad as possible in considering what historic assets are; the roles they play in the community; and the ways in which they can be recognized, preserved, and enhanced. We will strengthen partnerships and use whatever tools are available to achieve our goals of community enhancement through historic preservation.

The preservation plan emphasizes the central role that heritage, historic buildings, and landscapes play in the Town’s quality of life. It recognizes the natural and cultural landscape as the context in which individual resources exist and how assets are inter-related. In short, we view the Town’s entire landscape as significant—a product of human interactions with the environment—and we focus upon the historic attributes of community character townwide as valued by residents and visitors.

With this in mind, eight broad goals have been identified that together express the ways in which historic preservation can be incorporated into the strategies and initiatives shaping Lenox’s future:

- GOAL 1:** Make historic preservation and community character central to Lenox's quality of life.
- GOAL 2:** Use Lenox's historical identity as a core element of the Town's economic development strategy.
- GOAL 3:** Make Lenox's historic preservation program a model of best practices.
- GOAL 4:** Fully integrate historic preservation into Town programs and processes.
- GOAL 5:** Use planning and growth management as a means of enhancing community character and strengthening preservation of historic resources over time.
- GOAL 6:** Strengthen the relationships between historic preservation and land conservation, environment, and sustainability.
- GOAL 7:** Heighten public appreciation of Lenox's history and historic resources through storytelling and other means.
- GOAL 8:** Make full use of programs available for historic preservation and community enhancement.

To achieve these goals, it is important that preservation principles be incorporated into the plan and into the actions of public and private entities. Summarized in the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*, preservation principles have developed and honed over decades of experience. They emphasize the identification, preservation, and appropriate treatment of the authentic character defining features of the historic resources. The Standards, discussed in Chapter 4 of the preservation plan, are a series of "best practices" for planning and preservation that can inform decision making about future change.

Applying these principles, the Historic Preservation Plan for Lenox outlines strategies and actions under the following topics, discussed further below.

- Lenox's economic strategy,
- Planning, land use, and growth management,
- Land conservation and recreation,
- Traditional historic preservation programming, and
- Interpretation and public outreach.



## THE CREATIVE ECONOMY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Lenox is a leading center of the region's creative community as evidenced through the range and quality of cultural organizations and attractions located within the Town. The creative economy yields substantial economic and quality of life benefits to Lenox through cultural heritage tourism—heritage visitors who come to Lenox for its cultural amenities, natural beauty, fine lodging and restaurants, and community character.



*The Mount, home of renowned American author Edith Wharton, is among Lenox's premier cultural attractions.*

Heritage visitors are among the most desirable leisure and tourism travelers—they tend to stay longer and spend more. They want to experience authentic places. Historic preservation is an essential strategy in establishing the authenticity and sense of place that heritage visitors value.

Lenox can continue to strengthen its economy by embracing the idea of The Creative Economy and taking measures that support heritage and community character through historic preservation. Recommendations include:

- **Using *The Creative Economy* as the principal concept in developing and refining the economic strategy for Lenox.**
- **Recognizing the central role of historic buildings and character in the Lenox economy.**
- **Continuing to market Lenox's cultural attractions and quality of life.**
- **Supporting Lenox's cultural institutions and attractions as central to the Town's economy, character, and well-being.**
- **Establishing a Cultural District in accordance with the program requirements of the Massachusetts Cultural Council as a vehicle for the collaboration and promotion of cultural attractions.**
- **Using the master planning process to create a forum for heritage businesses for discussion of business interests and community character townwide.**





*Heritage businesses adaptively reusing historic buildings and promoting their historic character are appealing to visitors and central to the Town's economy.*

- Preparing a townwide wayfinding plan that identifies sites to be included, locations for signage, and a system of graphically appealing sign types.
- Using the master planning process to identify the physical goals and needs of each of Lenox's different landscape areas to strengthen and enhance character and sense of place.

Placing heritage tourism and historic preservation interests at the center of Lenox's economic development strategy will underscore the wisdom of applying historic preservation principles to every Town initiative.



*Shakespeare and Company is one of several creative attractions that provide vitality, quality, and vibrancy to Lenox.*

## PLANNING AND LAND USE

Planning is critical to the potential future preservation and treatment of historic resources in Lenox. Through a variety of different planning documents, Town policies and procedures are established that influence how historic resources are treated as development and change take place.

To preserve the historic building and landscape resources that are central to Lenox's identity, historic preservation values and methodologies must be incorporated into the Town's planning policies and documents in as many ways as possible.



***Second homes purchased for the enjoyment of Lenox's cultural, historic, natural, and lifestyle amenities are a large part of the market for new subdivisions.***

Central to planning in Lenox is the role of the Planning Board, which is responsible for leading planning initiatives that affect growth management and protect and enhance community character. Additionally, the Planning Board reviews proposed subdivision projects and can advise the Zoning Board of Appeals on land development applications. The Planning Board is currently undertaking preparation of a new Master Plan for Lenox which should be a vehicle through which historic preservation principles are recognized and applied to future growth management.

This preservation plan suggests that the Planning Board be considered the design review entity for all new development submissions in Lenox, serving in an advisory capacity to the Zoning Board, Select Board, and other committees and commissions.

Through quality planning and design, character defining features will be identified, preserved, and incorporated into new development projects, preserving and adaptively reusing historic building and landscape resources. Supporting this concept, the preservation plans recommends:

- **Incorporate the Historic Preservation Plan into the new Master Plan for Lenox as a supporting Historic Preservation Element. Incorporate the vision,**

goals, guiding principles, and recommendations of the Historic Preservation Plan into the various elements of the Master Plan.

- State clearly that it is Town policy that historic building and landscape resources should be preserved, appropriately treated, and incorporated into new land development projects as future development occurs.
- Specifically address master planning for each of the distinctive landscape areas within Lenox. Identify their character defining features, including historic building and landscape resources. Develop Town policies and planning guidelines that enhance the distinctive character and potential of each landscape.



*Planning for new development should incorporate the adaptive reuse of existing historic buildings and landscape features into their designs such as these examples in Lenox.*

- Following completion of the Master Plan, update the Town's Zoning Bylaw and Rules and Regulations Governing the Subdivision of Land to strengthen historic preservation provisions.
- Use the Special Permit process and bylaw provisions related to C-1A/C-3A, Estate Preservation, Open Space, and Gateway Overlay zoning to encourage the preservation and appropriate treatment of historic buildings and their landscape contexts.
- Build public support for the adoption of a demolition delay bylaw and scenic roads bylaw that will support the preservation of historic resources.
- Work with the Lenox building code officials on appropriate levels of mitigation for historic buildings that enhance public safety while preserving historic character and integrity.

Historic preservation interests and principles should be incorporated into Lenox's planning documents, bylaws, and project review processes in as many ways as possible.



## LAND CONSERVATION AND TRAILS

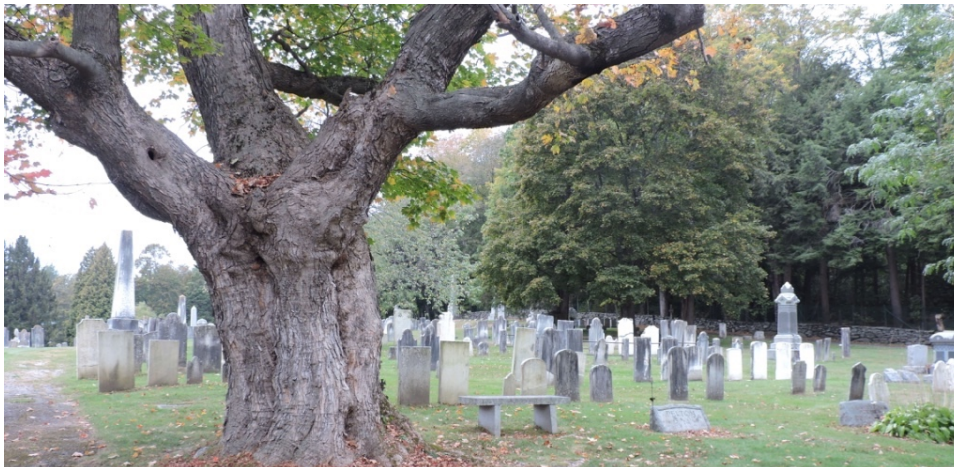
Land conservation has been an important community initiative in Lenox and supports historic preservation by preserving historic landscapes and the historic resources that are present on conserved lands. Land conservation and historic preservation are complementary activities with a common philosophy and perspective.

The 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.



***Lenox's natural landscape is the foundation for understanding its evolving cultural landscape. Natural and cultural features are inextricably intertwined.***

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, significance, and integrity. Lenox can use the methodologies established through the DCR program to identify and preserve its special places.



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

More broadly, 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.

Several of Lenox's leading historic and cultural institutions have developed plans for land conservation, open space, and trails through innovative partnerships. Similarly, Lenox is in the process of developing a townwide trail network that has broad public support. The trail system will link historic villages centers, historic sites, and conserved natural landscapes. Such public/private initiatives can incorporate historic preservation interests and be used to build public awareness and support for conservation and historic preservation.

Conservation/preservation recommendations include:

- **Use a cultural landscape approach in assessing Lenox's identity and historic character. For each of the Town's landscape areas, identify the character defining features of the landscape—including buildings—and work toward their preservation and enhancement.**
- **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.**
- **Support land conservation efforts that help preserve and connect historic landscapes and landscape resources.**
- **Incorporate historical and cultural values into the criteria used to assess and prioritize land for conservation initiatives.**
- **Support specific projects enhancing community open space, providing trail linkages, and supporting historic interpretive sites.**
- **Participate in and support development of a townwide trail network in Lenox. Use the trail to link the regional trail network to Lenox Village, Lenox Dale, New Lenox, and historic and cultural attractions.**

Land conservation and historic preservation are mutually supportive, can be combined in interesting ways, have broad community support, and enhance community character.



*Historic resources are found throughout Lenox's cultural landscape. Some have been neglected and overgrown, but remain to be discovered.*

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM**

Though not presented first, discussion of Lenox's local historic preservation program is the heart of the Historic Preservation Plan. The local historic preservation program is responsible for identifying and documenting historic resources and working with all of the other Town entities in their preservation and appropriate treatment.

Chapter 8 of the plan reviews measures specific to historic preservation in Lenox, including the identification and recognition of historic resources, role and responsibilities of the Historical Commission, administration of the Lenox Village Historic District, and stewardship of historic properties owned or managed by the Town.

The most important historic preservation activity happens at the local level, where local residents, officials, and volunteers know their communities, histories, and historic resources best. Local government plays a critical role in the identification of resources and in providing protections through the administration of routine governmental regulatory and planning processes. A key goal is to fully integrate historic preservation values and considerations into every aspect of Town programs and processes.

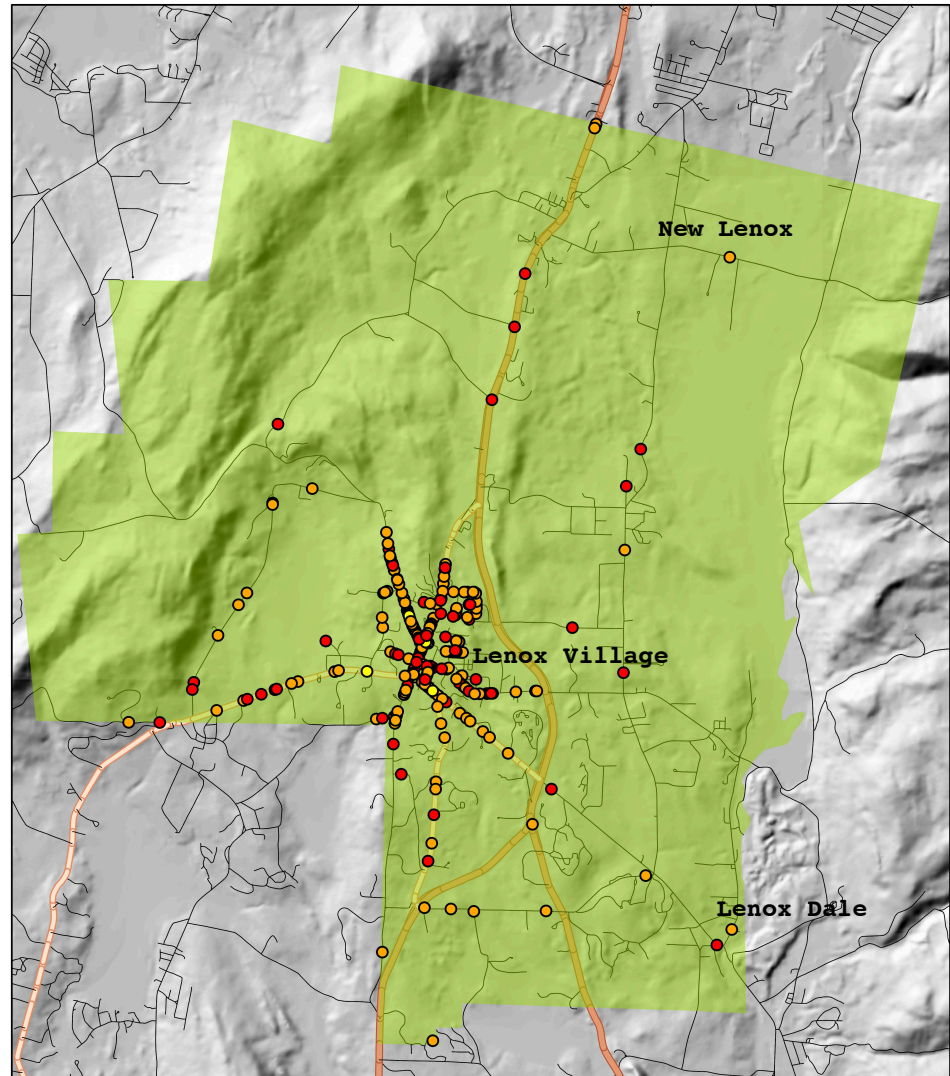
### **Historical Commission**

The Lenox Historical Commission is responsible for leading and orchestrating the local historic preservation program for the Town. It should participate actively in Town governance and be integral to Town activities, policies, and programs. As an advisory body, the Historical Commission should make sure that other Town entities have the information and guidance they need to make informed decisions about actions that may have an impact upon historic buildings, structures, landscapes, and sites.

Lenox's Historical Commission has had a strong group of volunteers, appointed by the Select Board, with interest in history, historic preservation, and community character. However, the Town's volunteer corps and staff have limited capacity and time such that the tasks being undertaken by boards, commission, and committees must be organized, prioritized, and targeted to what can reasonably and realistically be achieved. Historical Commission members should be expected to participate in the monitoring of historic resource issues and conditions, to be engaged in Town affairs, and to be effective ambassadors and advocates for preservation and the appropriate treatment of Lenox's historic resources.

The Town's historic resource inventory is an essential historic preservation tool in support of community planning in Lenox. Lenox's historic resource inventory should continue to be upgraded and improved as an ongoing priority.

Past inventories focused on resources in and around Lenox Village and included most of the Cottage Era resources in the southern portion of the Town. A number of resources in the eastern and northern portions of Lenox were not included, many of which relate to Lenox's early nineteenth century agricultural era. Lenox Dale has also not surveyed, with only a few key buildings included in the existing inventory. These significant gaps in the Town's inventory should be addressed.



#### Legend

Historical Resources      Lenox Town Boundary

● Pre-1860

● 1861 - 1920

● Post 1921

● No date available

Routes

— Roads

— State Route

— US Highway



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0 0.25 0.5 1 1.5 2 Miles

***Map of inventoried historic resources in Lenox. Historic resources in the east and north of the Town as well as in Lenox Dale have yet to be inventoried.***

In the short term, approval of the recently submitted National Register Historic District nomination for Lenox Village should be completed. In the future, following completion of the inventory work outlined above, the preparation of National Register Historic District nominations for Lenox Dale and for Cottage Era resources should be considered.





*Many of the historic resources that have not been inventoried are related to Lenox's early-to-mid-19<sup>th</sup> century agricultural era.*

Recommendations include:

- **Organize the Lenox Historical Commission to take responsibility for the overall leadership and coordination of the Town's historic preservation program as outlined in this preservation plan.**
- **Continue to inventory and improve documentation on historic resources in Lenox. Maintain physical and digital files with survey information and photographs for each historic property in Lenox. Make available and integrate the Town's historic resource inventory into Town planning documents and Geographic Information System by lot number.**
- **As a long term project, continue to upgrade older survey forms in the Town's historic resource inventory in accordance with the standards established for survey forms for Lenox Village in 2011/12.**
- **As a short term priority, undertake a reconnaissance survey of historic resources in the eastern and northern portions of Lenox to identify resources that have not previously been inventoried. Create files with photographs for each resource and link the reconnaissance survey to the Town's GIS database. Prepare MHC survey forms for each resource as a longer term project.**
- **As a short-to-mid-term priority project, undertake a comprehensive inventory of historic resources in Lenox Dale by qualified professional consultant.**
- **As a short term priority, complete the approval process for the National Register Historic District nomination for Lenox Village by the Massachusetts Historical Commission and National Park Service.**
- **Undertake a systematic, long term program of monitoring the condition of historic resources throughout Lenox.**

- **Provide information, guidance, and advice to the Select Board and other Town boards, commissions, and committees on issues related to historic preservation and community character.**



***Historic residentially scaled and adaptively reused commercial buildings along Church Street.***

### **Historic District Commission**

The Historic District Commission in Lenox reviews proposed construction projects, improvements, and new signage requiring building permits within the Lenox Historic District. Differences of opinion have existed in the review of some projects, pitting the need for flexibility for business uses against the preservation of historic buildings and building fabric. Both perspectives are important, and they need not be in conflict. These difficulties should be addressed by providing assistance, support, and training to Commission members.

- **Retain a professional historic preservation consultant to assist the Historic District Commission in the review of projects involving changes to historically significant buildings within the Lenox Village local historic district.**
- **Provide periodic workshops on historic preservation principles and treatments to members of the Historic District Commission and property owners.**
- **The Town of Lenox should be a model for the stewardship of its historic buildings and landscapes. Incorporate historic preservation principles, processes, and conservation treatments into capital planning projects, site management, and site maintenance.**

In summary, townwide, the Lenox Historical Commission must maintain a proactive stance in taking responsibility for the leadership of historic preservation initiatives in Lenox. In undertaking this task, the Historical Commission must have members who are willing and able to be active participants in Town affairs.

## INTERPRETATION AND OUTREACH

Lenox history and character are central to the Town's appeal to heritage visitors and to the concept of The Creative Economy discussed in Chapter 5. The authenticity and complete experience that heritage visitors seek includes an interest in learning about the places they are visiting. In Lenox such experiences are available at attractions such as The Mount, Ventfort Hall, Pleasant Valley Nature Center, Lenox Historical Society, and others.

Place-based interpretation and storytelling is a way to engage visitors with a richer, in-depth experience that reinforces Lenox's identity and quality of life. It supports historic preservation by highlighting historic buildings and landscapes, encouraging their recognition and appreciation, and building support for their stewardship and care.



*Attractions such as Ventfort Hall are experienced in interpretive presentation.*

Interpretation of Lenox and its partner sites can be coordinated and developed into a townwide program and network that educates visitors and residents while providing rewarding experiences that they will find engaging and that will encourage them to stay and to return. Recommendations for a townwide interpretive presentation include:

- **Continue to undertake research on Lenox history, places, and people.**
- **Make research results and stories available online, through publications, and through interpretation in Lenox.**
- **Plan and implement a townwide interpretive program building on and coordinating with the existing interpretation presented by the Town's historic sites, cultural attractions, and heritage businesses.**
- **Present the townwide interpretive presentation online and through a limited family of published materials.**
- **Support the programming of Lenox's historic sites and cultural attractions as part of a townwide interpretive presentation.**

A townwide interpretative program for Lenox should be an initiative of the proposed Lenox Cultural District, including potential use of state Cultural District Program grant funding.



## PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priorities for implementation of strategies and actions outlined in the preservation plan include:

1. Incorporate historic preservation principles into Town policy and planning in as many ways as possible as outlined in recommendations of the Historic Preservation Plan.
2. Organize the Lenox Historical Commission to take responsibility for the overall leadership and coordination of the Town's historic preservation program as outlined in the preservation plan.
3. Continue to inventory and improve documentation on historic resources in Lenox. Maintain physical and digital files with survey information and photographs for each historic property in Lenox. Make available and integrate the Town's historic resource inventory into Town planning documents and Geographic Information System by lot number.
4. Undertake a reconnaissance survey of historic resources in the eastern and northern portions of Lenox to identify resources that have not previously been inventoried, and undertake a comprehensive inventory of historic resources in Lenox Dale.
5. Update the Town's Zoning Bylaw and Rules and Regulations Governing the Subdivision of Land to strengthen historic preservation provisions.
6. Recognize the central role of historic buildings and character in the Lenox economy. Support Lenox's cultural institutions and attractions as central to the Town's economy, character, and well-being.
7. Be a model for the stewardship of its historic buildings and landscapes.

