CHAPTER 9

Cultural, Historical & Natural Heritage Resources

Newburyport is a city vibrant with history and a picturesque downtown, with the beautiful Merrimac River as a backdrop and the Atlantic Ocean on its doorstep. The City has a rich cultural environment, and numerous historically significant structures located both within the National Register Historic District and elsewhere throughout the City. It is home to a broad range of cultural, historical and natural heritage resources and amenities. These resources are a source of great community pride, and they help make the smallest City in Massachusetts an extremely desirable place to live, work and visit.

The spirit of volunteerism, long in evidence among the Clipper City's many cultural, historical and natural heritage organizations, is alive and well in the 21st Century. Volunteers of all ages flock to organizations such as the Anna Jacques Hospital, the Newburyport Art Association, the Friends of the Library and dozens of others to create a unique fabric of community service that benefits the City in a number of ways.

The overall theme of this chapter of the City's Master Plan is to explore ways to strengthen, enhance, and promote the City's many cultural, historical and natural heritage resources so that individuals and families, whether residents or visitors, are able to enjoy the many attractions the City has to offer.

A number of key themes surface in this chapter: expanding cultural opportunities for individuals and families off all ages and abilities; enhancing historical resources and events for residents and visitors; conserving and preserving the natural areas that are a key element in the City's natural heritage; and establishing ethical standards for financial and environmental sustainability around our cultural, historical and natural resources.

Through the Goals, Objectives and Actions included in this chapter, the City seeks to celebrate the impact that culture, history and the natural environment have on the community's overall quality of life. Preserving, supporting and enhancing cultural and historical initiatives and programs will further enrich the aesthetic, intellectual and civic growth of residents and visitors, and offer the capacity to explore new perspectives, modes of expression and shared experiences.

Section A: Cultural Resources

Visual and Performing Arts

Vibrant and diversified visual and performing arts programs are vital ingredients for any community in establishing a forum for expression, communication, exploration, imagination and cultural and historical understanding. Research shows that people of all ages benefit from participating in visual and performing arts programs and events. They serve to encourage Civic engagement, connect people more deeply to the world around them and open them to new ways of seeing it. Visual and performing arts programs create the foundation to strengthen social bonds and promote unity. They are essential to the overall health and quality of life of Newburyport's residents.

A seaside community like Newburyport naturally draws artists to its picturesque shores. This presents many opportunities for artists to share and collaborate among themselves, as well as for the larger community to be immersed in the artistic world. Organizations and venues within the City, like the Newburyport Art Association and the Firehouse Center for Performing Arts, foster an environment of support and opportunity for the community's artists, both those that create visual art and those that seek to perform.

Downtown Newburyport Cultural District. In late 2013, Newburyport became the 19th community in the Commonwealth to receive a cultural district designation from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. The downtown district is anchored by a vibrant historic waterfront and bounded by the Merrimack River, Federal Street, High Street and Winter Street. It is characterized by blocks of mixed-use buildings featuring a highly functional urban design, unique cultural destinations, numerous arts-oriented retail businesses and desirable public amenities. Within its boundaries is an active riverfront and park, a visually coherent downtown commercial area formed by an extensive and well-preserved collection of historic buildings and a popular new rail trail, which will be further extended into the district.

The Downtown Newburyport Cultural District seeks to:

- Design and implement a distinctive brand for the district that highlights Newburyport's cultural life;
- Create economic opportunities for cultural organizations and local businesses by:
    - Increasing the vitality, sustainability and use of public, private and non-profit resources, and
    - Facilitating the contribution of local businesses; and
- Provide increased opportunities for artists, organizations and visitors to foster their art and cultural experiences.

Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism encompasses all of the activities that are focused on an area's arts and culture, historical and natural heritage resources. It is the fastest growing division of the travel industry. According to the Massachusetts Cultural Council's ("MCC") Report, "cultural tourists spend $62 more per day and $200 more per trip than other travelers." In total, Massachusetts' cultural tourists generate approximately $15.6 billion in direct spending on cultural events and exhibits, an additional $963 million in State and local taxes and support 128,800 jobs in a variety of industries.

Firehouse Center for the Arts
Photo by Kate Newhall-Smith

The average cultural tourist visits multiple destinations during a visit to a community and stays approximately one half-day longer at each destination. Newburyport, with its newly created Downtown Cultural District, *should* be the cultural tourist's first stop when visiting Massachusetts. The City offers the cultural tourist a diverse wealth of activities including wildlife sanctuaries, public parks, performing arts, visual arts, heritage walking tours, museums and abundant recreational activities that would satisfy every discerning taste.

In addition to the cultural resources listed in **Table CR-1** below, there are several annual events that provide opportunities for both residents and visitors to learn about and celebrate the City's culture and heritage, including: Yankee Homecoming, The Literary Festival, The Chamber Music Festival, the Chamber of Commerce's Spring Fest, Fall Fest, Oktoberfest and Riverfront Festival, the Documentary Film Festival, the friends of the Library's Great Old Book Sales, the Eagle Festival, the New Works Festival, the Greek Festival, the Earth Port Film Festival, the Field of Honor, Winter Carnival, and Newburyport Preservation Week.

Table CR-1: Existing Cultural Resources

Name	Description	Ownership/ Management
Connor Summers, Indigo, Lepore, Minutia Gallery, Valerie's Gallery, Walsingham Gallery	Art galleries predominantly showcasing local and regional artists using various mediums including, acrylic, charcoal, photography, craftsmanship, etc.	Private
Firehouse Center for the Arts	191-seat theater and cultural center that offers national, regional and local live performances at affordable prices.	Non-Profit
Newburyport Arts Association	With over 600 artist members from the region, the Association exhibits work in open, juried, invitational, featured artist and interest group shows and offers studio classes and workshops for all ages – nearly 40 exhibitions per year. In addition to the three interior galleries, soon an outdoor Community Sculpture Garden will be opening offering new exhibition and education opportunities.	Non-Profit
Artist's Playground	Studio space for artists, dance, yoga, acting and music	Private
Actor's Studio of Newburyport	50-seat theater offering classes and performances	Non-Profit
The Screening Room	Small, local movie theater	Private
Various Events on the Waterfront	Local organizations, the City, the Chamber of Commerce, etc. all host and sponsor movies, concerts and other events along the waterfront throughout the Spring, Summer and Fall seasons. These events are often open to both the community-at-large and visitors.	Private, Public and Non-Profit

Section B: Natural Heritage

Preserving Natural Habitat

While preserving natural habitat is crucial to the health of all living things, preserving natural habitat for educational and recreational opportunities contributes strongly to the culture and economics of any community. According to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, approximately 1.4 million (24%) Massachusetts residents are bird watchers. They have contributed roughly $560 million to the Commonwealth's economy. According to the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, approximately 200,000 fishing licenses are granted in Massachusetts annually; freshwater angling alone contributes half a billion dollars to the Massachusetts economy.

Boardwalk at Sunset
Photo by Geordie Vining

Newburyport's geographical location and open spaces identify the City as a premiere destination for those who enjoy nature. The City is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean on the east, the Great Marsh on the east and south, the Artichoke River and Artichoke Reservoir on the west, and the Merrimack River on the north.

Entrance to rail trail from High Street
Photo by Geordie Vining

Open spaces are located throughout the community with large tracts of land preserved, including a portion of the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge (U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service), Maudslay State Park (the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs), the City Forest, a section of the Common Pasture (both owned by the City of Newburyport), and Joppa Flats Wildlife Sanctuary (Massachusetts Audubon Society). Together, these open spaces and water resources create a variety of natural habitats, including sandy beach, coastal wetlands, estuaries, fields and grasslands, and mixed deciduous and coniferous woodlands.

Resident amenities and tourist attractions that depend on and take advantage of Newburyport's natural resources include a network of parks, the waterfront and boardwalk, marinas, the Clipper City Rail Trail and Harbor Walk, and Plum Island beaches. The waters at the mouth of the Merrimack River are well-known for productive surf casting. Plum Island, the northern end of which belongs to Newburyport, is an internationally known, year-round birding site. The Merrimack River in Newburyport is one of the most productive areas in New England for viewing bald eagles, especially in winter.

Essex National Heritage Area

Newburyport is located within the Essex National Heritage Area, designated by the U.S. Congress in 1996 to recognize the quantity and quality of the region's historical, cultural and natural resources. These resources are categorized according to three nationally significant historical themes: Early Settlement (17th century), the Maritime Era (18th century) and the Industrial Revolution (19th century). Incorporating all of Essex County, the region contains 34 cities and towns with a total resident population of approximately 750,000.

Common Pasture
Photo by Geordie Vining

Curzon Mill
Photo by Geordie Vining

Table CR-2: Existing Natural Heritage Resources

Name	Description	Ownership/Management
Clipper City Rail Trail	A 1.1 mile multi-use pathway running between the MBTA commuter rail station and the waterfront at the Route 1 bridge over the Merrimack River. There are plans to extend the trail along the riverfront and loop back to the train station.	Municipal
Merrimack River Harbor	Traditionally associated with ship-building, today it provides recreational boating opportunities	Multiple Federal and State jurisdictions
Plum Island's Beaches	Barrier beach habitat that provides recreational opportunities	Beaches are municipally-managed
Maudslay State Park	The former Moseley family estate features 19th century gardens and plantings, rolling meadows, towering pines, and one of the largest naturally-occurring stands of mountain laurel in the state.	Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
The Common Pasture	a large shallow "saucer" landform with farming fields, wet meadows and pastures	A mix of private and public ownership
Plum Island Basin	Between Plum Island and downtown Newburyport, the Basin encompasses many beautiful salt marshes, including low-lying river islands and Joppa Flats.	Multiple Federal and State jurisdictions
Kettle Holes at Bartlet Mall (the Frog Pond) and March's Hill	Shallow, sediment-filled bodies of water formed by retreating glaciers or draining floodwaters	Municipal
Moseley Woods Park	16-acre park with hiking trials, picnic areas and playground	Municipal
The Little River	Tributary of the Parker River is rich with wildlife, large mammals, salamanders, boblinks and meadowlarks	Multiple Federal and State jurisdictions
Joppa Flats/Plum Island Turnpike	An area historically known for clamming with picturesque views over the Merrimack River.	Municipal

Name	Description	Ownership/Management
Mass Audubon's Joppa Flats Education Center	Offers unique educational opportunities for people of all ages; visitors can explore the region's habitats through guided tours, marine touch tanks, art exhibits, drop-in programs, and interpretive displays	Massachusetts Audubon Society
Curzon Mill Area	Curzon Mill Road is a naturally scenic road with the land located off of it important for wildlife habitat and watershed protection, in addition to providing opportunities for passive recreation.	Combination of public and private ownership
The Artichoke Reservoir	A major drinking-water source, the Artichoke's forested and marshy banks also offer valuable habitat. Some residents enjoy fishing off bridges across the Artichoke.	Municipal
City Forest	This upland site off of Hale Street is primarily conservation land, featuring wetlands and large outcrops of bedrock among rolling forested hills.	Municipal, Conservation Commission
Moseley Woods	This regional park on the Merrimack River offers picnic areas, a playground, an open field, and wooded area with hiking trails. It also includes a pavilion, a composting bathroom facility and parking areas.	Municipal
Ferry Road Area	This naturally scenic road with land located off of it that is permanently protected as they surround public drinking wells within two high-yield aquifers.	Combination of public and private ownership
The Parker River	Part of the Great Marsh ecosystem, the river supports a wide range of local and migratory birds. The beaches and marshes along the river also have historic importance for clamming, fishing, duck hunting, and salt-hay farming.	Multiple Federal and State jurisdictions
Parker River National Wildlife Refuge	Although outside of Newburyport's borders, this refuge is only accessible by land through Newburyport and the Plum Island Turnpike. It was established to provide feeding, resting, and nesting habitat for migratory birds.	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Section C: Historical Resources

Architecture and the Built Environment

Newburyport's earliest habitation included summer encampments by Native Americans who came for clamming, fishing, and regional festivals along the banks of the Merrimack River. Newburyport's early permanent English settlements can be compared with those of such other historic seaports as Salem, Marblehead, or Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The City separated from the more agrarian Old Newbury in the year 1764 as its character came to be more defined by the needs and values of prosperous maritime traders.

Bartlet Mall's Frog Pond with the Superior Courthouse
Photo by Bill Lane

Historic Newburyport High School

Just as the city's social, political, and economic character was shaped by maritime trade in the last half of the 18th Century and the first half of the 19th Century, so were its architecture and land-use patterns. Those patterns largely persisted as the era of sailing ships and small harbors ended and Newburyport entered a long period of decline, which stretched through the Depression and into the 1960s. Efforts began in the 1960s to restore the deteriorated downtown. Amendments to the urban renewal plan in the early 1970s jump-started the preservation of Federalist Era buildings. This trend-setting, restoration-oriented version of urban renewal nurtured Newburyport's current success as an attractive place to live, work and play. Additionally, the renewal saved many of the City's extensive colonial and federal-era streetscapes, which are now part of the very large National Register Historic District.

National Register Historic District

Newburyport contains a National Register District, which spans much of the South End, through the Downtown and follows the river westward to the City's "Three Roads" intersection (Storey Avenue, Ferry Road and Moseley Avenue). It includes over 2,500 properties and includes portions of the South End, Downtown, and North End. The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Administered by the Secretary of the Interior and maintained by the National Park Service

Custom House Museum
Photo by: Essex National Heritage Area

through the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the list includes individual buildings, sites, structures, objects and districts that have been determined either to be locally, regionally or nationally significant as they relate to American history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture. Listing does not guarantee protection, which is the prerogative of the local community or property owner.

Local Historic District

Established by a two-thirds majority of the City Council and administered by a local historic district commission, local historic districts are special areas within a community where distinctive characteristics of buildings and places are preserved and protected. Newburyport adopted one local historic district in 2007 –the Fruit Street Historic District. Exploration of establishing a second local historic district that would have included the downtown and the High Street corridor culminated in a failed vote to adopt in late 2012.

Archives and Historical Documents

The Newburyport Public Library is home to the Archival Center, which is a central repository for a variety of documents focused on genealogy and local history, primarily that of Essex County with additional material covering New England. The Center receives documents and catalogues them so that researchers are able to locate areas of interest via subject, author or title. The library also has a microfilm collection that includes most issues of The Newburyport Daily News from 1773 to the present, as well as Essex County probate records and other materials. Online resources include Ancestry, Heritage Quest and American Ancestors. One of the collection's more idiosyncratic sections consists of hundreds of pamphlet files, each containing unique material related to the history of Newburyport. The Center has both an extensive historic photograph collection and a more recent photo collection focusing on the years 1964–2000. The center is funded by the City as part of the library's budget, but it welcomes donations towards its upkeep.

Cushing House Museum
Photo from Essex National Heritage Area

The Museum of Old Newbury houses many historical documents that are available for review by the public (free for members, fee for non-members). The collection includes both primary and secondary source materials that address family genealogies, Newburyport's maritime heritage, local businesses and industries, landmarks, buildings, cemeteries, and more. Resources available for research use include local history books, ship logs, maps, photographs, genealogy books, diaries, and ledgers. The collection is particularly strong in the genealogies of Newbury's first settlers due to extensive research into town, church and census records conducted by Mary Adams Rolfe in the early 20th century. Ms. Rolfe's original notes are bound and available for research.

The Clerk's Office in Newburyport City Hall is the main repository for all city-oriented records, including City Council actions, minutes and decisions of the various City Boards and Commissions, election records and documents, local ordinances, and birth and death certificates.

Existing Historic Resources

In addition to the many properties listed as contributory to the National Register Historic District, the City of Newburyport contains many historic resources of note, as listed in **Table CR-3** below.

Table CR-3: Existing Historic Resources

Name	Description	Ownership/Management
Powder House	Built in 1822, it stands as an intact example of an early nineteenth century powder house and illustrates integrity of design, setting, materials, and craftsmanship. It possesses significance for its association with the civic and military history of the City.	City has a 99-year lease with the Commonwealth
Curzon Grist Mill	Dating back to the early 1700s, the mill was the center of attention, slowly growing with shops and local residents. Today the mill is used as a residence.	Private
Fruit Street Local Historic District	Adopted in 2007, this district is comprised of 18 residential properties and governed by the Fruit Street Historic District Commission	Privately-owned parcels

Name	Description	Ownership/Management
Newburyport Historic District	Listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the State Register of Historic Places in 1984, the District is roughly bounded by the Merrimack River, Plummer Avenue, Marlboro, Parker, State and High Streets and comprises more than 2,500 properties.	Privately-owned parcels
Archival Center	The collection's strengths include town and city records, photographs from the 1840s to present, diaries, maps and plans, local newspapers (print and microfilm), New England town histories and a large collection of genealogical material. The Center's genealogical collection extends beyond the local area to New England, Ohio, South Carolina, Canada and Europe, with a particular emphasis on the early migration period.	Municipal
Historic Wharves	Discovery of Coombs and Bartlet wharves along the Merrimack River prompted local efforts to preserve wharves and add interpretive signage along the future rail trail.	"Ownership" of the wharves is determined by the property owner of where the wharves were discovered.
Belleville Congregational, Central Congregational, Congregation Ahavas Achim, FRS Unitarian Universalist, Greek Orthodox Annunciation, Immaculate Conception, Old South Church, People's United Methodist Church,St. Paul's Episcopal	The majority of the City's places of worship are located within historically-significant structures that play a role in both the City's architecture and its history.	Private religious institutions

Name	Description	Ownership/Management
Clipper Heritage Trail	Website providing self-guided walking tours, downloadable maps and brochures, and smartphone tours of Newburyport's history.	Sponsored by the City, funded through grants and managed by volunteer efforts.
Custom House Maritime Museum	Built in 1835 and designed by Robert Mills, architect of the Washington Monument and U.S. Treasury Building, it was constructed to facilitate growing overseas trade and tax collection of imported goods on the waterfront. Today it houses a unique collection of maritime art, model clipper ships, displays of famous shipwrecks, and the history of the Coast Guard	Non-Profit
Newburyport Preservation Trust	The Trust is a non-profit membership organization that brings together people from Newburyport and beyond who value the preservation of the City's period architecture, neighborhood ambiance, heritage landscapes, and authentic historic character.	Non-Profit
Museum of Old Newbury	The Museum preserves and interprets the history of "Old Newbury, "which includes Newbury, Newburyport, and West Newbury, from settlement to the present. The 1808 brick, Federal mansion houses the Historical Society of Old Newbury's headquarters. The home features architectural elements typical of the period, including symmetrical design, hipped roof, double-hung sash windows, louvered shutters, and the fanlight window over its front door. The house has served as a single- and two-family home, and its grounds include a carriage house, garden, orchard and privy.	Non-Profit
Perkins Engraving Plant	Built in 1808-9 by brothers Jacob and Abraham Perkins for use as a printing and engraving plant, the building has undergone a significant restoration and is now managed by the Historical Society of Old Newbury.	Non-Profit

Name	Description	Ownership/Management
William Lloyd Garrison Statue	Garrison was a leader in the abolitionist movement and editor of the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*. He was also a prominent voice for the woman suffrage movement. His statue sits in Brown Square at the corner of Green and Pleasant Streets.	Municipal
Newburyport Superior Courthouse	Designed by Charles Bulfinch and completed in 1805, the building was first used to house town meetings with a girls' school located in the lower rooms. In June 1834, the property was conveyed to the County of Essex and has since been operated as a courthouse.	Property is owned by the City of Newburyport. Courthouse is operated by the State.

Section D: Newburyport's Cultural, Historical & Natural Heritage Resource Goals

The Goals listed below aim to expand opportunities for residents and visitors to learn about, interact with, and enjoy Newburyport's arts, culture, history and natural heritage. Taken together, the goals work to preserve the City's historic and cultural resources; to protect linkages between the City's history and contemporary life; to enhance the community's self-appreciation; to strengthen the sense of community; to educate the City's youth; and to protect Newburyport's special character. The accompanying Objectives and Actions, as found in **Chapter 14: Plan Implementation & Monitoring**, seek to integrate the importance of protecting and enhancing cultural and historical resources into comprehensive planning processes and everyday planning activities of the various City permitting boards and commissions, so as to enhance the visual, cultural and architectural character and local neighborhood quality of life.

Goal CR-1: Expand existing arts education opportunities for school age children, adults, children and adults with special needs, and seniors across the visual and performing arts.

As municipal and school budgets continue to be stressed arts education is often targeted first when budget cuts need to be made. The actions associated with this goal aim to refocus elected officials, City and school department staff on the importance of arts education within the school systems and also for the City's senior community. In addition to securing consistent funding for arts programming, collaborations and partnerships, may also serve to accomplish this goal.

Goal CR-2: Increase awareness of Newburyport as a destination for arts, tourism and cultural affairs.

Marketing Newburyport as a cultural destination is critical to support and sustain the City's economic future. Tourist dollars will contribute to the necessary maintenance of its historic infrastructure, the viability of downtown businesses and the conservation of its beaches, parks and waterways. In order to achieve the goal of becoming a local, national and even international cultural destination, it is incumbent upon the Office of Arts, Tourism and Cultural Affairs to work closely with City departments and the community's arts and heritage organizations to create lasting and meaningful partnerships focused on Newburyport's cultural assets.

Goal CR-3: Support a rich variety of cultural opportunities and activities for all groups and individuals in the City.

The actions within this goal focus primarily on securing funding, whether through expanding the municipal budget, forming public/private partnerships, or seeking grant funding, to support cultural opportunities for all segments of the Newburyport population. A very important component of this goal is to guarantee that opportunities are open to individuals of all abilities through ensuring that all venues and events are physical and economically accessible.

Goal CR-4: Promote the preservation, appreciation, and sustainable use of Newburyport's natural resources for residents and visitors.

Similar to the goals found in much of Chapter 8: Natural Resources, Open Space & Recreation, this goal is comprised of objectives and actions focused on preserving Newburyport's natural heritage areas, scenic vistas, and areas of wildlife habitat that play an important role in the cultural tourism and economic engine of the City. Like the other goals in this chapter, finding alternative funding sources like forming partnerships and seeking grants, is highlighted.

Goal CR-5: Promote and support an increased level of preservation to protect Newburyport's historic built environment for future generations.

There are two objectives listed for this goal, each with a distinct approach to accomplishing it. The first objective centers on the City's regulatory powers, ordinances and enforcement; expanding and enhancing the historic preservation regulations to protect Newburyport's architecture. The second objective seeks to find creative ways to encourage preservation, whether through creating incentives for homeowners to preserve their homes, utilizing state and federal programs for preservation, and/or creating inventories of historic properties to increase community awareness of the historic resources located throughout the City.

Goal CR-6: Promote and protect Newburyport Public Library's Archival Center resources.

The City's Archival Center serves as a central repository for a plethora of materials focused on Newburyport's history. The purpose of this Goal is to raise awareness of this community resource, support it financially, encourage its expansion and also safeguard the documents so that Newburyport's written and photographic history is safely preserved for future generations.