

10.0 ARTS, CULTURE, & HISTORIC PRESERVATION

10.1 CULTURAL AND HISTORIC AREAS

Lowell's historical past has been captured in many reuse and revitalization projects around the city as local, state, and federal officials attempt to preserve and recreate the significant historical past of Lowell. Lowell, the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, played an important role in the economic success of the region over a century ago. As a result of this development, the unique mechanization techniques, and company town environment, many historical areas around the city have been preserved so that the present population can appreciate the innovations of the past. Most of these resources are located around the river and canal system of downtown Lowell where industry harnessed the power of the Merrimack River. As mentioned earlier, Lowell has numerous sections of the city that are protected with a National Register of Historic Places designation. Other reminders of the past can be found in the various neighborhoods where company housing was constructed to house the influx of immigrants seeking employment. The homes of Belvidere, where the mill owners resided, also attest to the economic prosperity generated by the mill complexes. Many of the single-family homes have been preserved in their original form. Another cultural resource that still exists is the lock and canals system that supplied the mill power. Riverboat tours conducted by the National Park Service enable visitors to experience the technological marvels of the past century.

10.2 DOWNTOWN LOWELL ARTISTS DISTRICT

Created in December 1998, the Artist Overlay District part of the City Zoning Ordinance allowing artists to both live and work in the same space (live/work space). A Special Permit is required from the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) for Artist Live/Work Space.

- The Artist Overlay District was established with the intent and purpose of encouraging artists to both live and work in the downtown area, thereby promoting a venue for and encouraging further concentration of art, cultural and entertainment attractions in the downtown.
- As a zoning overlay district the rights of the underlying zone remain intact.
- The Special Permit applies to the use of a building or part of a building as artist live work space and addresses access, parking, loading, noise, and the intent and purpose of the Zoning Ordinance.
- Development Specifications and code requirements made necessary by a particular type of art use, such as welding, painting, etc., are addressed through building codes and regulations during a separate application for building permits and occupancy permits.
- The district encompasses the entire downtown area from Middlesex Street along Thorndike Street and Dutton Street to the Merrimack River, along the Concord River to the Middlesex Community College and back along Central Street to Middlesex Street.
- The Boott Mills, Massachusetts Mills, Appleton Mills, CMAA and Canal Place are in the district.
- The Zoning Ordinance defines an artist as:
 - "A person regularly engaged in and who derives a substantial portion of his/her annual income from art or creative work either written, composed, created or executed for a "one of a kind, limited production," exclusive of any piece or performance created or executed for industry oriented distribution or related production.
- Tenant and condominium associations will also have the ability to control occupancy through their own rules and bylaws.

Since its creation, dozens of artist living and studio spaces have been created in several prominent buildings in downtown Lowell. The success of the initial projects and a continuing demand for

this type of specialized housing suggests that additional artist live/work space is likely to be created in the coming years.

10.3 HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Lowell has proven that historic preservation and urban economic development can work hand-in-hand for the betterment of a community. Urban divestment and decline was a familiar sight in America's older cities in the mid-twentieth century. Lowell was no exception to this phenomena as the collapse of Lowell's once-thriving textile industry in the 1920s and 1930s resulted in empty mill buildings and a decaying central business district. During the 1950s and 1960s, federal urban renewal funding became available to Lowell. Unfortunately, these efforts did not stimulate economic renewal and resulted in the demolition of some of the city's most significant millyards and tore apart several ethnic neighborhoods.

However, some in the community saw the city's history as a means to its revitalization. In the early 1970s, city planning efforts began to focus on preservation as a core element of its revitalization strategy. The establishment of the Lowell Heritage State Park in 1974 added credibility to Lowell's efforts to establish a National Park in the city. The first Historic District Commission and two local design review districts were created downtown by the City in the 1970s. Much of the downtown, millyards, and canal system were placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The City invested in pedestrian improvements downtown that reinforced the area's 19th century flavor and provided design assistance for owners of historic properties. Finally, Lowell National Historical Park was established in 1978 in a federal law that also established the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission, which during its existence assisted with much of the historically sensitive building rehabilitation that took place between 1979 and 1995.

For the past quarter century, the Lowell National Historical Park (LNHP) and the City of Lowell have served as stewards of Lowell's historic and cultural resources, systematically assisting in the rehabilitation of its many historic downtown buildings so that they once again contribute to the city's character and economy. The LNHP has played a leadership role in making historic preservation the theme of the community's economic development program. The City's comprehensive economic development program likewise, has been dedicated to fostering community pride in its industrial and working heritage and providing new hope for and commitment to its economic future. In doing so, the LNHP and City in concert with a host of public and private partners have created a vibrant living, learning, and working environment that respectively preserves and tells the story of the industrial revolution in Lowell.

The City's numerous historic districts contain a critical mass of structures from the nineteenth century when Lowell was America's textile capital. Lowell contains a total of 13 districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places and 16 individually-listed National Register properties scattered throughout the community in the downtown and neighborhoods. Lowell has the fifth highest number of properties in Massachusetts included on the state's inventory of historic resources. The Lowell Canal System, which provided the framework that shaped the entire development of Lowell, is listed as a National Historic Landmark and is also been designated a Civil and Mechanical Engineering Landmark. Efforts are currently underway to seek World Heritage Site designation for the canal system. Also included in the city are two local architectural and design review districts. Lowell's physical resources include the original 5.6 mile power canal system, major cotton textile millyards, and evolutionary streetscapes of commercial and residential structures.

The LNHP and City have been part of an active partnership that has been responsible for the rehabilitation of over 250 structures downtown and the creation of extensive public programs to preserve and interpret the city's cultural resources. Several major mill complexes have been successfully renovated into housing and office space. Aluminum and stucco facades have been removed from downtown buildings revealing attractive 19th century commercial storefronts. The banks of Lowell's canals have been largely reclaimed providing areas of recreational enjoyment and interpretation of the city's rich history. Streetscape improvements including brick pavement, granite pavers, and period lighting and benches grace the downtown, enhancing the 19th century urban character of the city.

Strengthening and expanding historic preservation review and regulations in Lowell was a requirement of the federal law creating Lowell National Historical Park in order to ensure community actions would not be inconsistent with the preservation goals of the Park. Since the establishment of the Lowell Historic Board in 1983, over 1,600 permits have been issued within the Downtown Lowell Historic District indicating an extraordinary level of change within the downtown.

Extensive public programming, interpretive and educational programs, waysides, and public art add to the vibrancy of the city and reinforce Lowell's history and culture. Waysides and public art help to weave together the significant areas, vistas, and structures along the Canalway and throughout the downtown historic district. Cultural events such as the Lowell Folk Festival, Boardinghouse Park Summer Music Series, and Winterfest encourage the community to celebrate its rich heritage while participating both as actors and audience in the midst of Lowell's most historic buildings and sites.

Lowell's revitalization is a tribute to the highly successful public/private partnerships that have been a central ingredient in every project undertaken by the City. The Lowell Heritage State Park played a key role in preserving Lowell's history by securing the recreational and air rights to the canal system as well as much of the right-of-way needed to develop the Canalway. The Lowell Historic Preservation Commission, the Park's former sister agency, also played a pivotal role in the city's impressive revival. The Commission provided over \$5 million in preservation grants and loans for façade rehabilitation during its 17-year tenure. This investment generated over \$50 million in private investment in 63 nationally significant historic structures. The Commission set the standard for high quality rehabilitation and restoration within the downtown historic district and creatively invested its cultural funding to help bring the district alive.

Within Lowell's neighborhoods an active historic home marker and brochure program has been established by the Lowell Historic Board. Other efforts have included survey and identification of historic resources and National Register listings as well as technical assistance and outreach to homeowners regarding preservation. The City has been instrumental in the preservation and rehabilitation of historic landscapes including Tyler Park and Rogers Fort Hill Park through partnerships with various state grant sources.

Very little could have been accomplished in Lowell without the consistent support of the community's business and governmental leadership. Effective leadership through the years was delivered by seven city managers; numerous city council members; Lowell's bankers; and officials from the nonprofit banking consortium, the Lowell Development and Financial Corporation. Of critical importance has been the advocacy and support of the Lowell Plan, Inc., the community's prominent business advocacy organization. Together, these entities have been responsible for implementing the urban cultural park vision.

For its efforts, Lowell was recognized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of America's Dozen Distinctive Destinations in 2000. Lowell has succeeded where many other communities have failed in reclaiming the attributes that make communities special places. One important lesson Lowell has learned is that insistence upon quality rehabilitation and historic integrity can pay off. Through this practice, Lowell has set a standard and model of excellence that other communities have sought to follow. The Lowell model emerged out of a clear vision and has been kept alive through multi-agency support and commitment to promoting quality of life issues in the city. This vision and commitment will ensure the continued focus over the coming years necessary to complete and maintain the accomplishment of the city's reclamation of its historic and cultural resources.

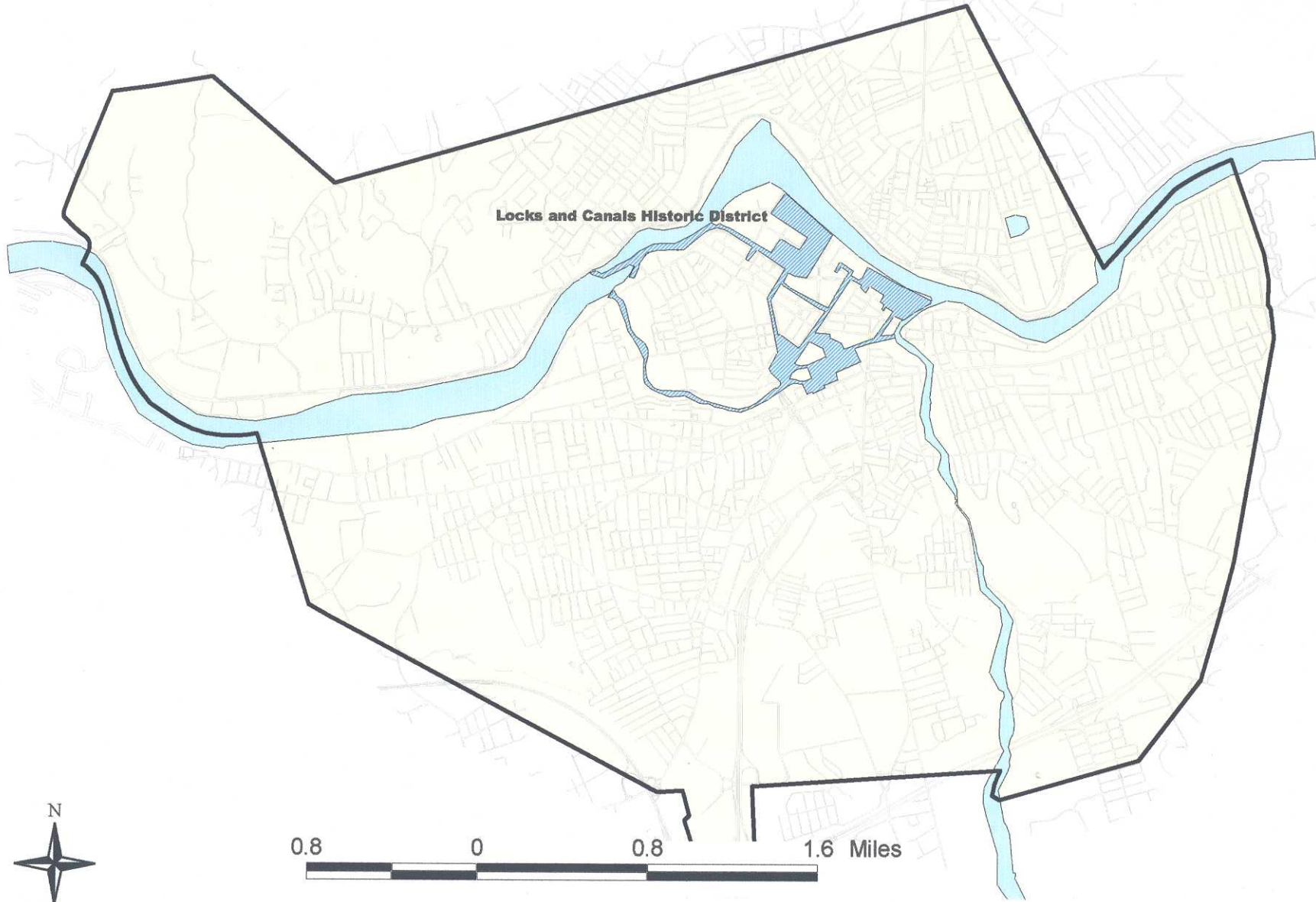
10.4 MUSEUMS, THEATERS, AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Lowell offers performances, an award-winning theater, outstanding historic sites, and a number of notable museums. The cultural richness includes the world's largest textile museum, the American Textile History Museum, the New England Quilt Museum, the Children's Museum of Lowell, the Brush Art Gallery, and the Whistler House Museum of Art. The Lowell National Historical Park includes the Boott Cotton Mills Museum and the Tsongas Industrial History Center among its attractions.

Performing Arts are showcased at the Merrimack Repertory Theater and the touring shows hosted at the Lowell Memorial Auditorium and the Paul E. Tsongas Arena. In the Summer, live entertainment can be heard at the Boardinghouse Park concert series. UMass Lowell's College of Fine Arts also offers top-notch concerts and a popular children's performance series.

Lowell also plays host to a number of annual festivals. The most prominent of these is the Lowell Folk Festival, the nation's largest free folk festival. Other major events include the Southeast Asian Water Festival and the City of Lowell's Winterfest.

The recently established Cultural Organization of Lowell (COOL) serves as a focal point for the promotion of arts and culture in Lowell. COOL provides a common voice for the various organizations and institutions in Lowell's cultural community.

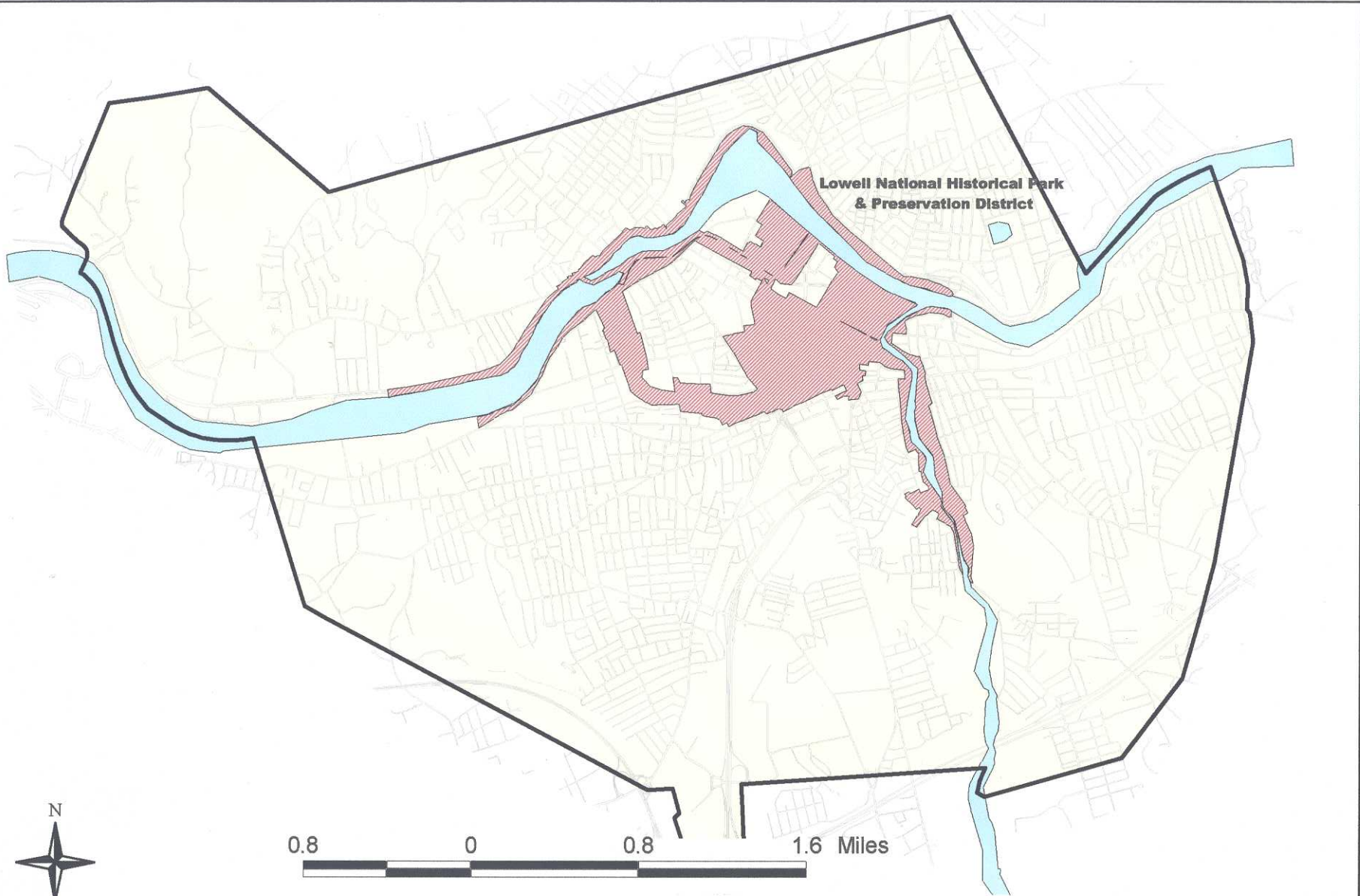


\\cityhall-A2GIS\data\$arcview\arcprojects\comprehensive_plan\historic.apr



National Historic Landmarks
LOWELL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
January 2002 Existing Conditions





**Lowell National Historical Park
& Preservation District**

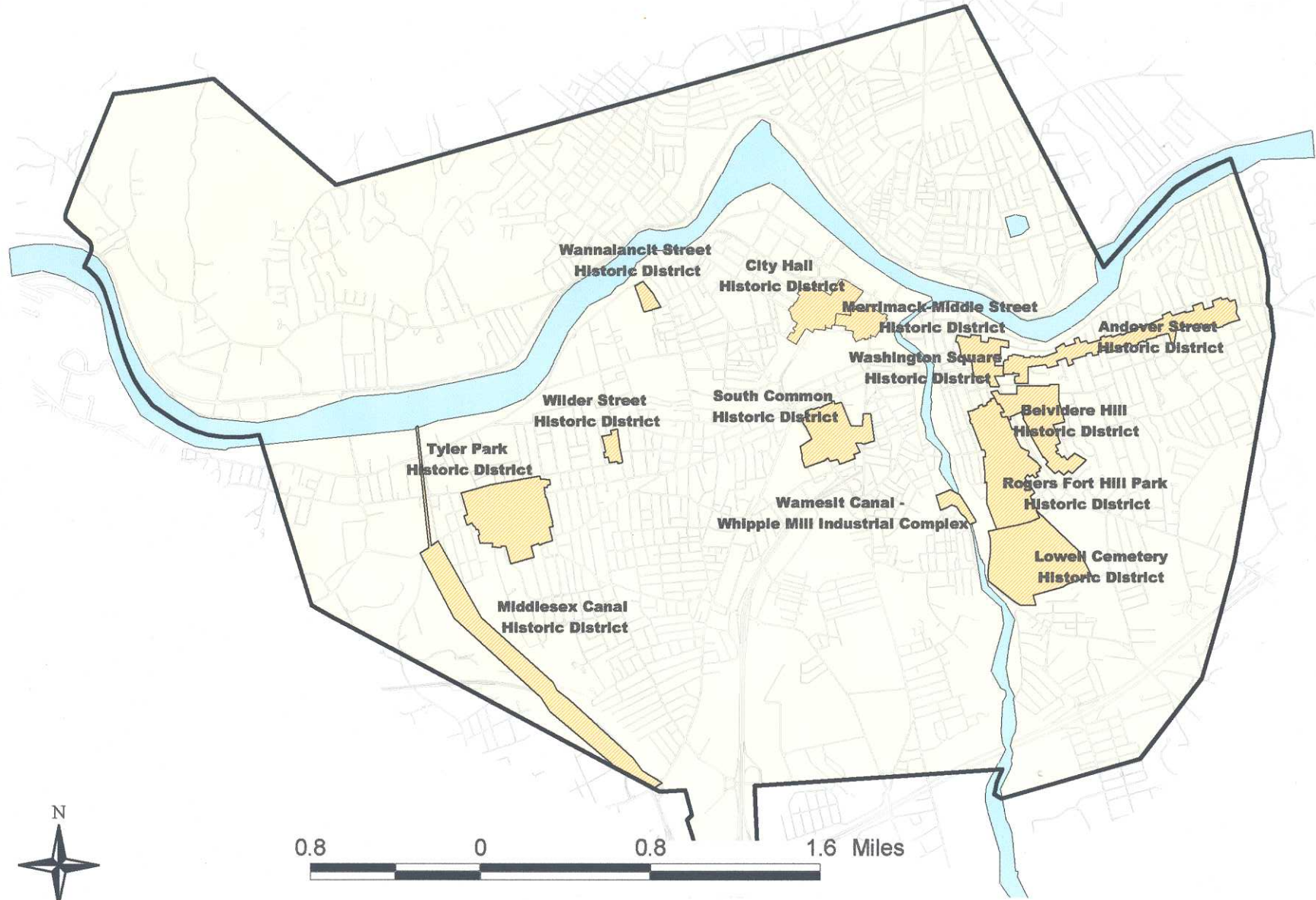


\\cityhall-A2GIS\data\$arcview\arcprojects\comprehensive_plan\historic.apr



Lowell National Historical Park & Preservation District
 National Register of Historic Places
 State Register of Historic Places
LOWELL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
 January 2002 Existing Conditions



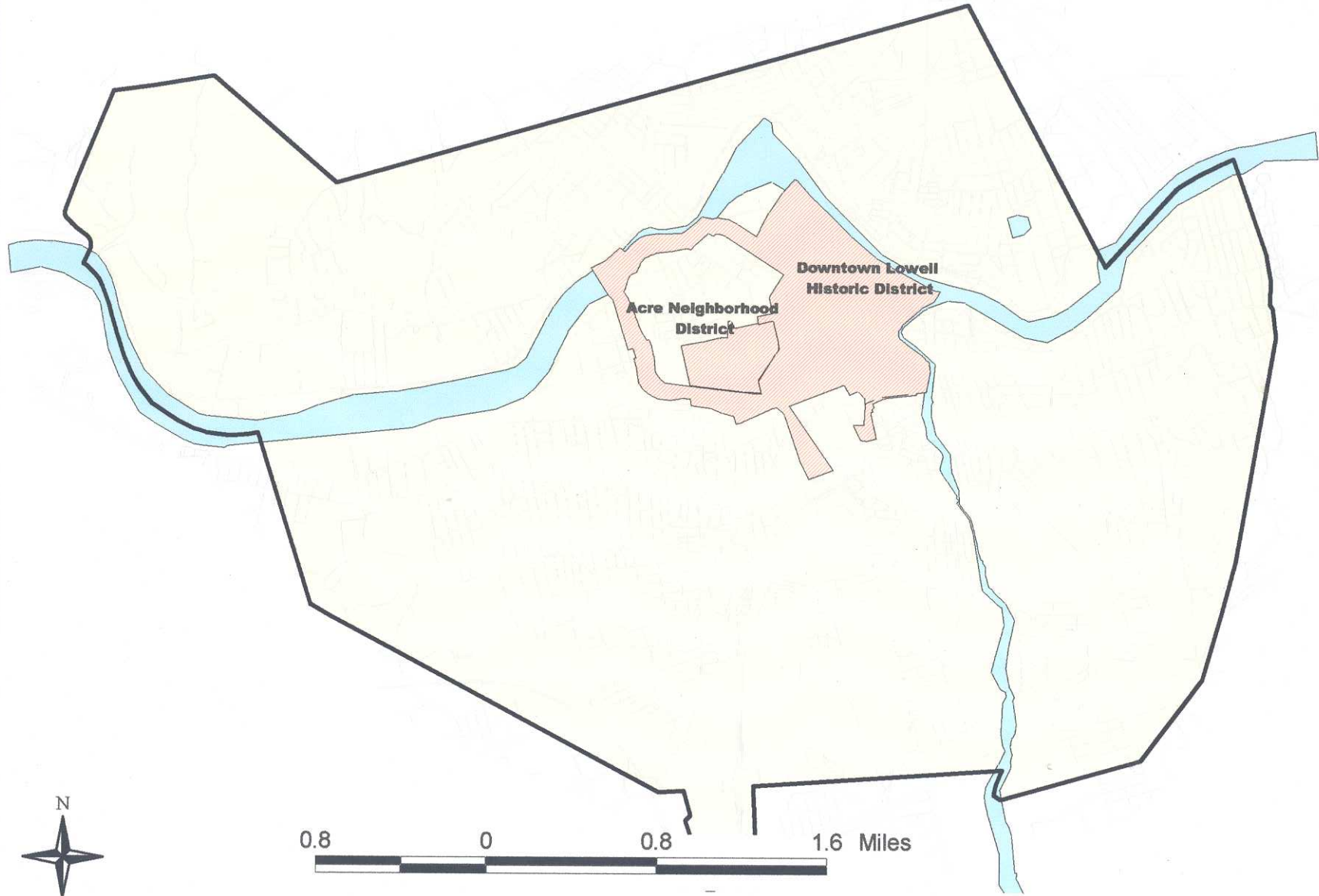


\\cityhall-A2GIS\data\$arcview\arcprojects\comprehensive_plan\historic.apr



Historic Districts
 National Register of Historic Places
 State Register of Historic Places
LOWELL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
 January 2002 Existing Conditions



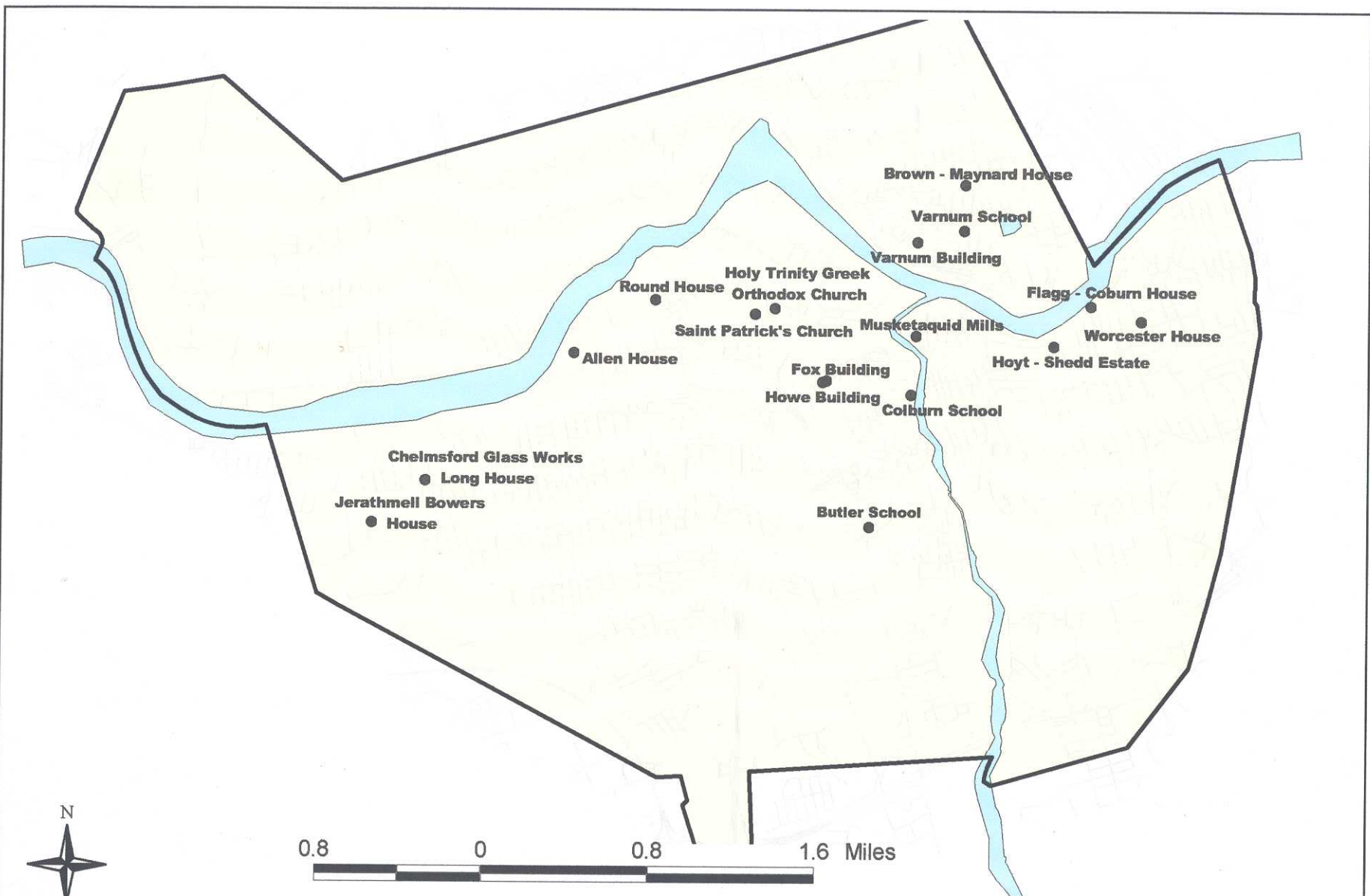


\\cityhall-A2GIS\data\$arcview\arcprojects\comprehensive_plan\historic.apr



Design Review Districts
Established pursuant to Lowell Historic District Act
Chapter 566, Acts of 1983
LOWELL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
January 2002 Existing Conditions





\\cityhall-A2GIS\data\$arcview\arcprojects\comprehensive_plan\historic.apr



Individual Designations
National Register of Historic Places
State Register of Historic Places
LOWELL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
January 2002 Existing Conditions

