

Yorktown Comprehensive Plan

Draft Technical Memorandum: Historic and Scenic Resources

HISTORIC RESOURCES

Key Observations

There is a strong historic preservation ethic within the community. Some residents consider themselves to be “tenants in place.” Historic resources contribute to community pride. Yorktown has a Landmarks Preservation Committee that identifies and protects properties of historic significance throughout the community. There are also several longstanding families tied to the community, contributing to a historic sense of community.

Yorktown has a great diversity of historic resources and significant landmarks. These resources range from national historic sites and trails to regionally significant resources such as the Croton Reservoir and Aqueduct to locally significant resources such as stone walls, cemeteries and farms.

Yorktown has excellent potential for Heritage Tourism. Tourism based on the historic resources and character of the town can enhance these resources. There is a wealth of historic resources in Yorktown and also significant opportunities for interpretation of resources such as the Washington-Rochambeau Trail and the Westchester County African American Heritage Trail. Growth pressures have increased the need for more historic preservation protection strategies and tools. The Town must find ways to protect historic resources while maintaining economic vitality.

The Town of Yorktown retains a considerable level of historic integrity and quality of resources. The historic character is still recognizable.

Preliminary Short and Long Term Recommendations

Short Term

1. Become a **Certified Local Government (CLG)**. Established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the CLG program encourages and strengthens local preservation activities. Currently only approximately 30 communities in New York State are certified. Certified communities receive greater funding amounts for preservation projects such as inventories. The NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Bureau administers this Program, provides technical assistance and administers the CLG sub-grant program, distributes funds for preservation projects.

To participate in the CLG program, the Field Services Bureau has to certify that the local government has enacted historic preservation laws and appointed a review commission that meets state and federal standards. Yorktown would need to revise its preservation membership requirements for the Landmarks Preservation Committee. The CLG coordinators at the Field Services Bureau will provide guidance and review throughout this process.

The benefits of becoming a CLG include:

- Eligibility to apply for specifically earmarked grants administered by the Field Service Bureau
- Technical preservation assistance and legal advice as well as training opportunities from the Field Services Bureau
- Direct involvement in identifying and nominating properties to the New York State and National Registers of Historic Places
- Membership in a nationwide network of communities with access to a wide range of technical preservation information

1. A **central repository** should be established for all the Town’s historical documents. Resources would include, but not be limited to, the records of the Yorktown Historical Society, the records of the Yorktown Landmarks Preservation Committee, the photographic and cartographic resources currently stored in the Town Archives. A “Town Room” could be designed within the Town Museum to house this collection which would make it accessible to researchers and local students for educational purposes. The repository would trace the history of the community and provide a centralized location for future documents.
2. With the centralization of historical records, Yorktown should appoint a **Town Historian**. This individual could lead research for the Landmarks Preservation Committee and others and serve as archivist for the central repository. The position could be a full-time position either on a volunteer basis or possibly grant-funded. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) provides grants for such positions.

variety of programs such as Learning Opportunities Grants and National Leadership Grants for Library-Museum or the training of one of the Hart Library's reference librarians to extend that position or the hiring of a librarian with

3. The Town of Yorktown should have a **Historic Structures Inventory** completed by an outside consultant or other professional. The inventory should include the location, significance, architectural or historical features and the context of the community. The inventory would ideally identify those structures most threatened and in need of immediate action. The Department of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Field Services Bureau could offer assistance with data organization and interpretation of data. The Field Services Bureau has an Inventory Form but does not require its use. The "Inventory Form" used by the Yorktown Landmarks Preservation Committee could be used for this project with modifications. This inventory would be initially based on the List of Historic Resources prepared for this project but would be expanded.
4. A **Stone Wall Inventory** should be completed by an outside consultant or other qualified professional. The consultant should establish appropriate criteria to use in identifying these resources but the inventory could contain three sub-sections that would be:
 - a. *Original/ Historic stone walls.* The inventory should identify all historic stone walls, determine an approximate date of construction and provide a description of their condition. This can include remnant or partial walls.
 - b. *Rebuilt/Restored stone walls.* These should be identified by their original construction dates and technique and the date of restoration.
 - c. *Modern walls that follow historic landscape patterns such as property boundaries and roadsides.* These can either be re-creations of lost walls or new walls that follow earlier patterns and construction techniques.
1. Establish a **Demolition Delay By-law.** A demolition delay bylaw is created through local legislation to provide an alternative to demolition. The bylaw would provide a requirement for all historic resources that request a demolition permit to go to the Preservation Committee. If found to be a significant resource, the Committee can invoke a delay to explore other options for finding funding for rehabilitation. A usual delay period is from 3-6 months. If after the chosen period of time no other options applicant may be issued a demolition permit. This legislation only provides a delay; it cannot be a means to deny a permit. A permit can be found. In circumstances of a threat to public safety, certain buildings or structures can be issued an immediate demolition permit. This is up to the discretion of the Town Building Inspector.
7. The Yorktown Landmarks Preservation Committee should continue to review and comment on projects of historic significance. **Review process.** The Committee should address the impact of development projects on, or in close proximity to, historic and archeological resources. Criteria should be developed that provides for sensitive and compatible development to historic resources. This would include, but not be limited to, the suitable reuse of historic buildings, the requirement of design compatibility with the historic character and fabric of the resource involved, and the use of buffer zones to protect potential sites and resources.

Long Term

1. Once the historic resources in Yorktown have been identified, **National Register nominations** for historic districts, buildings, structures and landscapes should be completed. Nominations to the National Register of Historic Places are prepared by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Nomination forms are prepared either by the staff of the SHPO or by private individuals. The criteria for evaluation is described as "the quality of significance in American history, architecture, engineering, and culture that are embodied in structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association."
 - a. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
 - b. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
 - c. That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information in prehistory or history."

Generally the criteria for the State Register is similar to the above but the significance is on the Statewide level versus the local level.

Potential historic **districts** in Yorktown which may be eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places should include:

National Register

1. The *First Presbyterian District* is notable for its associations with the Revolutionary War and the resources throughout the area. These include the First Presbyterian Church and Cemetery, The Lee-Tully House, the Congregation Cemetery, Strang House, Lee House/Hyatt's Tavern, the Rev. Sackett House and the Dr. Ebenezer White House.
2. The *Croton Heights District* is also notable for its association with events surrounding the Revolutionary War and the first planned residential area in Yorktown. Significant resources in this district include the Davenport House and the Croton Heights Bridge.

State Register

The *Shrub Oak District* due to its historic streetscape and community character. Notable resources in this district include the John C. Hart Memorial Library, Willow Brook Lodge, Mrs. Stark's Tourist Home and the Shrub Oak Cemetery.

The establishment of local historic districts is also a viable tool for the preservation of community character. Different local districts have the teeth necessary to protect resources through the local government. Not all structures or buildings are to be historic but would be included if they affect the atmosphere and historic quality of the area. Further information on historic districts can be found from the National Trust for Historic Preservation Information Series No. 58, 1992, "Maintaining and Establishing a Local Historic District". The State of New York also has a bill pending that would restrict speed limits in historic districts, another advantage to the establishment of local historic districts in Yorktown.

Potential **buildings, structures and landscapes** eligible for inclusion on the National and/or State Register:

National Significance

First Presbyterian Church and Cemetery (Revolutionary War)
 St. George's Church (association with John LaFarge, Sr. and Christopher G. LaFarge, Architect)
 Davenport House (Revolutionary War)
 Chadeayne Homestead (Revolutionary War)
 Fryer's Nursery/ Hunt's Tavern (Revolutionary War)
 Westfield Farm Tower on the grounds of the Field Mansion and Estate (used for Civil Defense during WWII and designed by Cross & Cross Architects)
 Croton Lake Gatehouse Bridge "B" (significant for construction technique)
 East Yard Cemetery (association with African-American history)
 Purdy's Cemetery (as an underground burial chamber if still intact)

State and/or Local Significance

First Baptist/ Community Church and Cemetery (pre-revolutionary war period and association with making of the Town of Yorktown)
 John C. Hart Memorial Library (association with Town history)
 Field Home/ Holy Comforter (association with Town history)
 Holland Sporting Club- formerly Rock Hill Lodge (association with Town history)
 Hilltop/Hanover Farm (rural historic landscape, agricultural)
 Field Mansion and Estate (designed by Cross & Cross Architects, NY)
 Beaver Conference Center (association with Town History)
 Ansonia Lodge (association with Mohegan Lake Boys School)
 Hyatt/Merck House (association with Sparkle Lake development)
 Community Church Cemetery (pre-Revolutionary graves)

*Historic resources described within districts can also be nominated on an individual basis.

The National Park Service offers significant technical information to guide the evaluation and nomination of historic resources to the National Register of Historic Places (NRH). Specifically useful to the Town of Yorktown would be NRB No. 41, "Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Ruins and Remains" and NRB No. 30, "Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes".

2. Procure **conservation easements** for privately owned sites that contain critical historic and open space resources. A conservation easement is a restriction placed on a piece of property to protect the natural or man-made resources from development such as residential or commercial. The easement is typically described in terms of the resource it protects (e.g., agricultural, forest, historic, scenic or open space easements). An easement is either voluntarily sold or donated, and is a legally binding agreement.

Historic sites that should be considered for this type of protective tool include the Crow Hill earthworks, the Fort Hill and Indian Hill. Conservation easements can also be used for historic resources such as the Yorktown military site.

3. Develop a long-term **protection strategy for stone walls**. Options for protection include:
 - a. Scenic road designation will protect any walls that are within the right-of-way. Restrictive provisions regarding landscape features can be written into the scenic road bylaw.
 - b. Identify and protect historic stone walls as individual landmarks with restrictions on demolition and/or reconstruction.
 - c. Protect on an as-needed basis through Site Plan review. If a project under review contains a historic stone wall, the Committee should have the ability to recommend measures for its preservation and/or reconstruction.
4. Yorktown should establish **Heritage Tourism** as long term preservation strategy. This would include encouraging the development of historic buildings in Yorktown as restaurants, B & B's, art galleries, and cultural facilities such as house museums or non-profit organizations. Heritage tourism is an important tool for the preservation and enhancement of the historic resources located throughout Yorktown. The resources described above are one example as are the resources that relate to the Revolutionary War such as the Pines Bridge, the Washington/Rochambeau trail and the Revolutionary War era resources in Yorktown provide a unique opportunity to provide linkages with historic resources within the local region and interstate.

The State of Connecticut is currently developing legislation that protects the Trail throughout the state. According to the State of Connecticut, "the development of a tourism route along the Revolutionary Road is a linkage that by proxy will allow the state to share the heritage of the other states along the route." This could be a critical partnership for Yorktown in order to develop and create an economic opportunity through its historic and cultural resources.

Westchester County is also developing an historic linkage through the development of an African American Heritage Trail. The program is to "preserve and interpret the legacy and contributions that people of African descent have made to the history and identity". The trail is a system of linked historic sites that chronicle the history of the African American community in Westchester County.

The Town of Yorktown has several historic resources, identified by Linda Kiederer, president of the Yorktown Historic Society, linked to this trail system. They include:

First Presbyterian Church.

1740-1799 Revolutionary War: monument dedicated to members of the all-black regiment from Rhode Island

1800-1899 Baptized, married and buried local black families

The East Yard Cemetery

Contains the graves of free blacks and at least one black veteran of the Civil War

Ebenezer White House

Home of famous Revolutionary War doctor who owned slaves then freed them and ultimately left one his slaves

Davenport House

This is the site of the Revolutionary War skirmish that killed 40 members of the all-black Rhode Island

Colonel Christopher Greene. Richard Davenport freed his slaves in 1800.

SCENIC RESOURCES

Key Observations

Through the topography and natural features of its landscape, Yorktown has a valuable scenic beauty and retains its character. The protection of open space while allowing moderate growth has been beneficial.

Yorktown has a strong commitment to Open Space and contains significant amounts of Town, New York City, and State land. These open space resources provide the foundations for a local and regional greenway network.

Yorktown needs to provide protection strategies for wetland buffer areas, farmland and scenic roads. Critical view corridors are identified and marked for priority designation.

Preliminary Short and Long-term Recommendations

Short Term

1. The Town should have a **Scenic Roads Inventory** completed by an outside consultant or a qualified professional to identify and assess all roads within Yorktown that have significant scenic value and integrity. Typical landscape features in the inventory include, among others; landform, water features, building clusters, natural features such as forests or bays, buildings, walls or trees, spatial patterns, vistas or overlooks, and visual intrusions such as billboards or junkyards. The determination of significance include magnitude, distinctiveness, intactness, opportunity and preference.

Potential Scenic roads in Yorktown identified as part of this project include:

- Baptist Church Road
- Croton Dam Road
- Hanover Street
- Hunterbrook Road
- Portions of Rt. 118
- Spring Valley Road
- Evergreen Street
- Stoney Street

These roads all contain a high level of significant scenic resources including stone walls, historic buildings and trees and views.

1. Establish a system for **Scenic Road Designation and Protection**. There are two options for scenic road designation. The NYS Scenic Roads Program as authorized by Article 49 of the Environmental Conservation Law provides for the designation of scenic roads. The goals of the program are to “protect, preserve and enhance the natural and man-made beauty of New York State; to provide appreciation of the state’s scenic, ecological, cultural, and historical attributes; and provide economic benefits by promoting scenic resources.”

The responsibility for nominating scenic roads lies with interested local citizens and Town officials. The criteria for nomination include the scenic value of the road, the regional attributes defined as “distinctive cultural, historic and landform features of the region”, and the need for local support. Once a scenic road is designated, projects that will have an impact must be reviewed and may require the implementation of measures to avoid and mitigate such impacts.

The second option for the protection of scenic roads, which can be in addition to the State designation, is through local zoning law. Zoning law can be modified to provide for increased setbacks, expanded lot widths, lower buildings heights, screening, and other measures. These are most easily utilized through the creation of a “**scenic overlay district**” that includes all areas visible from the road. They can also be included in a Scenic Resource Protection Plan or similar bylaw that is part of the local code. A similar resolution in 1997 that is an excellent reference. Used together the two options provide a significant protection of their unique resources. Scenic road designation in Yorktown would aid with the protection of historic stone walls and other cultural features.

A potential funding source for scenic road identification and designation is the National Scenic Byways Program, administered by the Federal Highway Administration. TEA-21 funds are available on a competitive grant basis. TEA-21 funds can be used for a variety of purposes, such as corridor management planning, byway promotion, scenic easements and billboard removal.

Additional information regarding scenic road designation and the nomination process is available through a variety of sources. For more information, contact the National Scenic Area Services Bureau. Helpful publications include:

Preserving New York State Scenic Roads: A Guide to Designation, NYS DEM

Scenic Roads in New York State, USDOT, Federal Highway Admin. 1990.

The Protection of America's Scenic Byways, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Information Series No.

2. The **Farmland Protection District** should be expanded to include other potentially developable farmland such as Turkey Mountain Reservation, Cat Hill and east from Mohansic Golf Club toward Mohansic Lake. Other significant agricultural resources can be protected through the NYS Farmer's Protection Act of 1996. This act offers provisions that will encourage the rehabilitation of historic barns and the preservation of farmland.
4. Procure **scenic conservation easements** and /or consider the use of a **scenic overlay zone** for priority views and Turkey Mountain Reservation, Cat Hill and east from Mohansic Golf Club toward Mohansic Lake. Other views to be preserved include fields and meadows should be preserved as well. Trails should be maintained to certain key vistas if they are inadequate. Trails along water resources that will provide visual access to significant water features. The protection of a view or vista includes contributing components that make the view or vista a significant resource. Procurement options for scenic easements include funds through the Yorktown Land Trust or the Landmarks Preservation Committee, the use of transfer-of-development credits or donations.
5. Establish **priority scenic roads, views and trails** that provide linear linkages for a local and regional greenway system. The system would include the North County bike trail, the extensive hiking trails within the community and bridle trails. The system should provide coordination for the development of the system.

Long Term

1. The Town of Yorktown should continue to encourage **open space and cluster development** and review all development. The utilization of **Site Plan Review** can be an important tool to directing where and how development should take place and what should be protected. Design review for projects can include the control of elements such as signage, overhead utilities, height, and setbacks. These elements will be discussed in more detail regarding downtown hamlet development in the Business and Economic Development Plan.
2. Have a **Tree and Forest Management Plan** completed by an outside professional and ultimately develop a **Tree Preservation and Planting Program**. This is an important tool for the protection and management of the critical forested portions of the open space resources owned by the Town. An implementation of the Plan could be a Tree Preservation and Planting Program or Ordinance. This would provide restrictions on the removal of significant trees and design guidance and review for any new plantings within critical resource areas. For example, this would be useful for protecting resources such as the beech trees that line Evergreen Street which are a remnant of the Amawalk Nursery.
3. Expand local **beautification programs** and **maintenance strategies** for scenic resources including but not limited to local volunteer groups such as garden clubs and Boy and Girl Scouts, for landscape planting and maintenance and management of scenic resource areas.