

Community Archeology

Working with Local Governments

Local governments in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts have great flexibility in establishing archeological programs tailored to their particular needs and desires by drawing on local interests, resources, and talent; and by seeking advice from professional and responsible avocational archeologists. Because the majority of construction projects that jeopardize historic and archeological resources in Massachusetts are only reviewed by local agencies, communities must take the initiative in historic preservation planning. Not all communities choose to exercise local historic preservation review authority over specific projects. In fact, the most successful local archeology programs also embrace pro-active preservation planning activities that emphasize broad and long-term identification and preservation goals and public educational initiatives to foster a local preservation constituency.

Each town in Massachusetts is authorized under state enabling legislation (Mass. General Laws Chapter 40C) to establish a local historical commission (LHC). LHCs maintain inventories of historic and archeological properties and advise local governing boards and agencies about historic preservation. The LHCs are, in majority, staffed by volunteer citizens who are appointed by the town's board of selectmen, mayor, or city council (depending on the organization of the local government). A few large cities, such as Boston, Cambridge,

Somerville, and Lowell, have a paid professional historic preservation staff. Only Boston has a City Archeologist on staff.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission's (MHC) assistance to LHCs includes giving advice on integrating preservation planning within local governments through the development of local historic preservation review by-laws; providing grants-in-aid for the preparation of model guidance documents,¹ preservation plans, and archeological sensitivity maps; encouraging civic volunteerism through local archeology projects; developing a bibliography on archeology and historic preservation planning;² and fostering public outreach and educational efforts through workshops and conferences, and coordinating events and publicity for Massachusetts Archaeology Week.

Results

Twelve towns and cities in Massachusetts have decided to include archeology in their local governments in various ways, resulting in a diversity of regulatory review and planning programs [see list p. 6]. Some towns allow LHC review of subdivision approvals, wetlands permits, gravel pit permits, or local historic district reviews. In addition, many of these towns have published archeological preservation plans, or have incorporated archeology into their historic preservation plans.

As a result of local regulatory review for archeology, many archeological surveys and a few data recovery excavations have been conducted. Site preservation has also occurred in open space areas of numerous subdivisions. Many acres of land with archeological sites have been acquired for conservation, preservation, and passive recreation by towns and land trusts through private donations, and by using local, state, and federal land conservation funds.³ The statewide inventory of archeological sites and collections has also been supplemented through local research efforts. Public education efforts and publicity have reached thousands of residents.

The chiefly volunteer structure of LHCs and public misperceptions about archeology and development projects can pose problems. Like other volunteer organizations, problems occur when key members depart or when enthusiasm wanes. Often, while LHCs are enthusiastic about archeology, there is little or no professional expertise.

Local archeology programs capture the interest of community members. Students and intern Alexka Chan from the "We Dig the Harbor Islands" community archeology program for Boston public school students, Summer 1997. Courtesy Ellen P. Berkland, Boston City Archeologist.



Consequently, LHCs rely heavily on the State Archeologist for technical expertise to initially review and comment on proposed projects, and then to review, consult, and comment on archeological investigation proposals, results, reports, and recommendations.

Local governments also have to respond to public constituencies who are wary of too much government interference; or the relatively high cost of archeology for private land owners with modest construction budgets; project delays and 11th-hour crises caused by poor planning or late notification;

and fears that archeological discoveries will prohibit construction altogether. One member of a local historical commission recently told us, "We don't want to be regulators, we want to do archeology!" Although easily discouraged by negative experiences with local regulatory review, interested volunteers seemingly thrive on discovering new details about the archeology of their towns, and learning new skills.

More active local groups engage in a variety of tasks, such as examining private artifact collections, reporting site information, visiting and

Local Archeology Programs and Preservation Plans in Massachusetts

Barnstable—Local Historical Commission (LHC) comments on subdivisions and wetlands permits throughout the town and assists Sandy Neck governing board in management of archeological resources (Sandy Neck is a large archeological district owned by town, listed in National Register [NR]). Town-wide archeological sensitivity map and preservation plan prepared.

Boston—City Archeologist on staff of Environment Department (Boston Landmarks Commission) runs educational programs, operates laboratory and curation facility; Local Landmark designation can be made on archeological sites (e.g., City Square, Charlestown). City archeological plan identifies priority areas for survey and protection.

Brewster—Brewster Conservation Commission wetlands permit by-law includes archeological sites in legal definition of protected resources. Archeological sensitivity map of town prepared. Wetlands permit applications for projects in sensitive areas submitted to Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) for review and comment.

Chilmark—A town-wide sensitivity map and preservation plan are in preparation.

Falmouth—A town-wide sensitivity map and preservation plan have been prepared, identifying priority areas for survey and protection.

Marion—A town-wide sensitivity map and preservation plan are in preparation.

Medfield—Medfield Archaeology Advisory Committee (MAAC) is a component of LHC. Recent town-wide archeological sen-

sitivity map and plan completed; recommends adoption of local ordinance (by-law) directing all local boards to seek comments of MAAC on projects in archeologically sensitive zones. Previous "demolition delay" ordinance for archeological sites was not effective measure—resulted in 11th hour, difficult negotiations with land owners—no longer being implemented. MAAC continues extensive volunteer training and activities including survey, excavation, collections inventory, curation, and public education.

Middleborough—Gravel borrow permit and subdivision applications are submitted to LHC for comment, using town-wide archeological sensitivity maps.

Northborough—Subdivision applications require submission of information to MHC for archeological review and comment.

Salem—A city-wide archeological sensitivity map and plan identifies priority areas for survey and protection. Winter Island Historic and Archeological District listed in NR.

Wayland—First town in Massachusetts to establish archeological component (Wayland Archaeology Group [WARG]) within the LHC. Town-wide reconnaissance surveys and archeological sensitivity maps prepared. WARG comments to local boards on impacts to archeological sites. WARG volunteers conducting data recovery program at town sand pit site.

Westborough—LHC very interested in archeological resources, comments on project impacts, advocates for archeological surveys. LHC nominated Cedar Swamp Archeological District to NR.

Media relations and public education during site tours, Paddy's Alley, Central Artery/Tunnel Project, Boston, MA. Photo courtesy Massachusetts Historical Commission, Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

inspecting sites, and nominating sites to the National Register; these activities are more typical of preservation planning than environmental review. Support and patient guidance on our part will go far to foster the growth and well-being of an interested cadre of local citizens, who typically also have other jobs and responsibilities.

Is More Control Better? Not Necessarily!

Instead of more "control," consider better ways of "doing business" by blending pro-active planning and public education into the regulatory mix. Each community should develop an archeological preservation plan, as it does for historic resources. Local archeological preservation plans can be funded through Survey and Planning (S&P) grants from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). MHC has awarded S&P grants to eight towns (Barnstable, Boston, Chilmark, Falmouth, Marion, Medfield, Salem, and Wayland—see listing p.6) to produce archeological preservation planning reports with recommendations for each town's local archeology program, catered to the unique characteristics of each particular locality. With an S&P grant, in accordance with National Park Service guidelines, professional archeologists prepare a plan that typically includes the results of a town-wide reconnaissance survey identifying known prehistoric and historic site locations and archeologically sensitive areas on town maps using professionally accepted predictive models. The LHC's copy of archeological site and sensitivity maps are not a public record under state law (Mass. General Laws Chapter 40C), and are

Archeological field school, Robert Treat Paine, Jr. House, Waltham, MA (NR/NHL). Photo by T.C. Fitzgerald, courtesy Massachusetts Historical Commission, Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth.



excluded from Freedom of Information demands by looters. But, LHCs can share this critical archeological information with the owners of significant sites and with local review authorities. Archeological sensitivity maps are a critical component of a local review program, defining which areas are subject to local regulatory attention. The maps must be accurate, preferably based on local zoning maps as well as USGS quadrangle maps. Meaningful and accurate archeological sensitivity maps help landowners, developers, engineers, and town permitting authorities better anticipate which project areas may involve archeological impact review. Local regulatory controls must be clear-cut, time-sensitive, predictable, defensible from legal challenge, and respectful of private property and due process rights.

Preservation planning for archeological sites is most successful when done pro-actively, rather than through regulatory review of proposed construction projects. Important archeological sites identified by a town reconnaissance survey can be targeted for preservation. LHCs can assist town conservation commissions by including archeological sites in open space plans and on a list of acquisition priorities by the town or a conservation organization such as land trust or The Archeological Conservancy.⁴ LHCs can advocate for town planning boards to adopt cluster zoning options for subdivision developments to protect sites within open space areas.^{5, 6}

Public educational initiatives are a critical component of any local archeology program. To increase the number of active members of LHCs involved in local archeology programs, basic archeological skills and knowledge can be acquired through reading, coursework, and field and laboratory training. The close involvement of professional and responsible avocational archeologists in basic archeological training and technical assistance to



LHCs are crucial. Adept media relations, publicity efforts, and programs geared to the general public broaden the constituency of support for local preservation efforts—always an important consideration in local politics.

In summary, local archeological review programs offer opportunities and challenges in developing and fostering a local review process that will be managed properly and embraced by local citizens. As unique as each community is, no single set of regulatory controls will be universally practical. Rather, each town should be encouraged to establish a local archeology program by choosing from a variety of regulatory, planning, and educational tools that meet their particular circumstances and interests.

Notes

- 1 Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District, *Protecting Historic Resources: A Guide for Local Government Action*, (Taunton: SERPEDD, 1984).
- 2 Edward L. Bell, *A Bibliography on Archaeology and Historic Preservation for Local Historical Commissions* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Commission, 1997).

- 3 Brona G. Simon, "The Carrot Not the Stick: Strategies for Protecting Archaeological Sites on Private Property," *Cultural Resource Management Archaeological Research, Preservation Planning, and Public Education in the Northeastern United States*, edited by J.E. Kerber (Westport: Bergin and Garvey, 1994), p. 191-208.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Susan L. Henry, *Protecting Archeological Sites on Private Lands*, National Park Service, Preservation Planning Branch, Interagency Resources Division, Washington, DC, 1993.

References

"Archeological Site Conservation on Private Property". In CRM 18(3):35-39, special issue, *Archeology and the Public*, edited by D. Poirier and N. Bellantoni, National Park Service, Washington, DC, 1995.

Brona G. Simon is State Archeologist and Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, and Edward L. Bell is Senior Archeologist at the Massachusetts Historical Commission, Boston, MA.

