

**New Jersey Highlands Council  
Cultural and Historic Resources  
Technical Advisory Committee  
Meeting Summary  
2 August 2005**

**Summary:**

The first meeting of the Cultural and Historic Resources Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was held on August 2, 2005, in the office of the New Jersey Highlands Council in Chester, New Jersey. Notice of the meeting was provided to the public on the Highlands Council's web site. Laura Szwak, Land Preservation and Grants Coordinator for the Highlands Council, served as moderator and point of contact for the Committee. Other Council staff representatives in attendance were Chuck Gallagher, Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Kim Ball Kaiser, and Liz Maziarz. Participants included Bob Barth, Cate Liveck, Howard Green, Dorothy Guzzo, Marion Harris, Chad Leinaweaver, Edward Lenik, Karl and Lucy Meyer, Brian Morrell, Kathy Murphy, Shaun VanDoren.

The group agreed that **identifying the resources** was a vital first step towards preserving the Highlands' historic, archaeological and culturally important areas. Drafting a comprehensive survey was considered to be the mechanism for achieving this first step. Issues relating to the development of such a study were identified and discussed.

**Problems**

- Due to a lack of finances and personnel resources, municipalities have trouble identifying their local historical sites and features.
- The historical surveys that do exist are often outdated. It was recommended that these surveys be updated at least once every ten years.
- No uniform criteria exist that determine historical and cultural value. Existing and future surveys undertaken by different towns or groups may employ inconsistent standards, which make a comprehensive survey using these individual ones difficult to produce.
- Identifying sites of historic significance on private property can be difficult. Landowners can be hostile to preservation efforts and may go so far as to hide historic sites on land for which they have other, usually development-related, plans.
- A comprehensive historic survey of the Highlands would be an ambitious undertaking, but useful. A survey for Salem County was \$300,000.
- Identifying sites could result in their destruction for two reasons. First, looters will learn where valuable areas and artifacts are located. Second, the process of confirming the historical and cultural value of a site may result in irreparable disturbance by digging and excavating activities.
- Viewsheds and vistas are important components of the cultural landscape and should be assembled by the Highlands Council. These features are not typically included on surveys but Salem County has included them in their survey.

## Solutions

- Funding and other incentives could be made available to municipalities to conduct up-to-date, adequate historic preservation elements for their master plans. This would make ‘filling in the blanks’ in a regional survey much less difficult. Examples of such incentives can be found on the website of the New Jersey Historic Trust: <http://www.njht.org/>.
- A narrative of Highlands history as illustrated through the sites identified in the survey would be an important and educational resource and complement to the survey. Consulting academic researcher(s) might be appropriate. Identify themes that shaped the historic landscape and development of the Highlands.
- The methodology and guidelines for drafting a survey exist and can be found on the website of the State Historic Preservation Office: <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo/>.
- A formula for calculating the cultural and historical value of a site should be developed in cooperation with other agencies.
- Conduct a survey that results in an inventory of the communities with historic preservation ordinances.

Strategies and issues concerning the **general promotion of historic preservation** were considered as well:

- Use the TDR (transfer of development rights) program to promote historic preservation.
  1. A ‘sending’ site that contains a historic or cultural resource could be granted additional TDR credits based on the value of the resource. Chuck Gallagher pointed out that the first TDR program was initiated to preserve New York City’s historic Grand Central Station—an approach that could be employed in the Highlands.
  2. Adaptive reuse of historic structures, such as barns and homesteads, could be encouraged by issuing TDR credits for adaptive development.
  3. In order to mitigate the pressure on historic areas in the TDR receiving areas (Highlands planning zone), resources in these areas should be identified with as much speed and accuracy as the resources in the preservation core. Historic preservation efforts should be ‘blind to the line’.
- Adaptive reuse could be pursued through easement purchases. Historic homes or structures could be held or maintained by a historic preservation agency with the surrounding land retained for private uses such as farming.
- Currently, no tax credits are available for historic preservation. A tax incentive program should be explored.
- Local historic preservation ordinances that govern the treatment and use of sites deemed to be ‘historic’ should be established.
- Regional bodies (such as the Highlands Council) could play important roles in local preservation efforts, especially where local governments are either unwilling or unable to do so themselves.

- The historic and cultural features most at-risk are often not recognized. Certain intersections and cultural landscapes, like ‘rural downtown’ areas, should be identified and given greater consideration during the preservation process.
- A listing on historic registers does not protect a site or structure if it is on private property unless there is a local ordinance. The group reiterated the need for historic preservation ordinances.

**Partnerships** among government, private, and non-profit agencies were recommended to accomplish activities mentioned above:

- Warren County’s effort to preserve the Morris Canal is noteworthy in that it has enlisted the services of the local and regional historical community. Working in conjunction with this already established partnership is desirable.
- The State Bureau of Mines has particularly good resources and knowledge of historic areas as well as an interest in preserving old mine shafts.
- The efforts of different TAC’s are often oriented around similar goals. Cooperation and information-sharing between the members in different committees could allow for effective coordination and consistency in their respective recommendations, giving more force to their input.
- Links between the interests of historic preservation, community development, and ecotourism have been researched and are available through the State DEP’s economic benefits of parks study and a Heritage Tourism Report conducted by Michigan State University.
- Establishing partnerships would help to minimize areas of conflict among agencies. Coordination in the planning and implementation of the preservation process might reduce the number of instances where one resource is sacrificed to the benefit of the other. Examples include the razing of historic structures on preserved open space or farmland and the destruction of historic bridges in favor of wider, higher-capacity spans. Farmland preservation could add incentives to retain dairy barns rather than get rid of them. Fish & Game gets rid of structures because of state rules that limit hunting to within a certain distance from structures.
- Consider innovative ideas, such as antennas/cell “towers” within cupolas, as an example, to help pay for preservation and/or maintenance of publicly owned historic structures. These are not necessarily obtrusive or detrimental to the historic character of the structure.
- Counties own most of the area’s bridges, and counties are not necessarily preservation oriented. Local communities usually want to preserve their historic bridges. Somerset & Morris do a nice job of preserving bridges.
- Link Historic Preservation with Eco-tourism TAC.

The participants identified **short-term goals** that summarize the Committee’s initial recommendations for the upcoming Regional Master Plan:

- Create a comprehensive Highlands historic and cultural inventory.
  1. Pursuant to this end, research and identify potential funding sources.

2. Contract professionals and agencies to produce the necessary GIS maps, narratives, and identification procedures to be used in the inventory.
- Establish and circulate a newsletter that covers regional issues associated with historic and cultural preservation.
  - Craft a story (or series of stories) about the Highlands, interweaving the landscape and how it shaped human settlement patterns. Include in this story(ies) reliance on natural resources and features and the diversity of the people who settled, and continue to settle in the Highlands. A part of the story needs to discuss and track the ethnic backgrounds of settlers of the Highlands as well as the workers, ie. the people who built the canals. NJ is an ethnically diverse state and the story of the Highlands should recognize and celebrate this diversity.
  - The SHPO offered to provide a summary of the historic, cultural, and archaeological resources that exist in the Highlands, as identified currently, as well as the amount of protection these features currently enjoy. The SHPO is compiling all the information they have about the Highlands region and will deliver this information to the Highlands Council by Oct. 1.

The Highlands Council would like to thank everyone who participated in this opening meeting of the Cultural and Historic Resources TAC. We greatly appreciate any follow-up comments and questions about this summary report. Please contact Laura Szwak via email: [laura.szwak@highlands.state.nj.us](mailto:laura.szwak@highlands.state.nj.us). Notice of future meetings will be provided to the public on the Highlands Council website, [www.highlands.state.nj.us](http://www.highlands.state.nj.us), and via email to Committee participants.