



2. HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

New Shoreham 2016 Draft Comprehensive Plan

VISION

Block Island's collection of historic buildings, archeological sites, and magnificent landscapes will remain unspoiled for this and future generations. The Town will support efforts to preserve the island's rich history and to offer cultural enrichment opportunities for its residents and visitors.

HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Historic District Commission Guidelines

<http://new-shoreham.com/docs/HDC%20Guidelines%20Revised%20Version%2011-15-2010.pdf>

Historic Landscapes of Rhode Island. Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission. 2001.

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, *Historic and Architectural Resources of Block Island*, Rhode Island, Providence, 1991.

Trueman, Rebecca. *Landscape pattern and change through integration of remote sensing and stonewall feature identification*. MS Thesis. University of Rhode Island. Kingston, RI. 2015.

OVERVIEW

With its historic lighthouses, vintage hotels, Victorian homes and farmhouses set on rolling lands lined with stone walls, Block Island has a stunning array of cultural features and historic sites. Together these sites define the island, provide the basis for its quality of life, serve as the source of pride for residents and provide recreation and leisure activities for island visitors. The following chapter identifies Block Island's historic and cultural resources, describes why they are significant, and looks to provide policies and actions to ensure the protection, preservation and enhancement of those resources.

Together with its natural resources, the island's cultural and historic resources are the underpinnings of the local tourism economy and as such they must be preserved and enhanced in order for the island to remain economically healthy.

Historic and cultural resources offer residents and visitors the opportunity to learn about their heritage and the history of Block Island and the nation. These cultural and historic resources also serve as major tourist attractions. Their preservation and enhancement is critical in maintaining the island's appeal to visitors and to the local economy. For all these reasons, it is a priority of the town to protect these historic sites and scenic landscapes and to sustain the quality of life and special character of the island.

THE FOUNDING OF BLOCK ISLAND

In 1524, Giovanni da Verrazzano was the first European to report the existence of the island. The name Block Island comes from Adrian Block, one of the first European explorers to discover Block Island in 1614. Sixteen families from the colony of Massachusetts settled on Block Island in 1661 and in 1664, the island became part of the colony of Rhode Island. In 1672, the Town of New Shoreham was incorporated, named for Shoreham in Sussex County, England.

Prior to European settlement the island was referred to as Manissess (translated to the Little God's Island) by the Narragansett Indians.

Historic & Cultural Inventories

The following section inventories and describes the significant historic and cultural sites of Block Island. See Map HCI Historic & Cultural Resources for locations of historic sites on Block Island.

National Register of Historic Places

Authorized by the *National Historic Preservation Act* of 1966 and administered through the National Park Service, the National Register of Historic Places is the nation's official list of historic sites worthy of preservation. It is a tool for preserving historic properties as listed properties are given special consideration when the federal government is planning or giving aid to projects. Listing on the National Register also gives private citizens and public officials credibility when attempting to protect these resources. Listing does not however prevent the owner from altering, managing or disposing of the property.

Current sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places for Block Island represent the island's long and diverse history as a Native American, farming, maritime, and resort community. Archeological and historic districts, two lighthouses, a government building, a farmhouse, and a hotel combine to tell the story of a unique place.

THERE ARE TWO NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS ON BLOCK ISLAND.

1. GREAT SALT POND ARCHEOLOGIC DISTRICT

The shores of the Great Salt Pond have a long history of human use, as it once was a primary area of residence by Native Americans both before and after contact with Europeans. Due to its significance, the area was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1990 and is referred to as the Great Salt Pond Archeological District.

2. OLD HARBOR HISTORIC DISTRICT

Lacking a natural harbor, it wasn't until the breakwater was built in 1873 that Block Island became a resort destination. Old Harbor's significance lies in its transformation from a landing site for an early

agrarian and fishing community to one of the most popular resorts in America. Today this dense walkable 19th century village remains defined against its surrounding rural countryside of farm cottages and vacation homes.

FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER, THE OLD HARBOR HISTORIC DISTRICT INCLUDES ALL PROPERTY WITH A 2,000 FOOT RADIUS FROM THE VILLAGE SQUARE SET AT THE INTERSECTION OF WATER STREET, HIGH STREET, AND SPRING STREET.

IN ADDITION TO THE TWO NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS ON BLOCK ISLAND, THERE ARE FIVE NATIONAL REGISTER SITES.

1. U.S. WEATHER BUREAU STATION

SETTING: Beach Avenue overlooking Old Harbor to the southeast and New Harbor to the northwest

SIGNIFICANCE: Built by the Department of Agriculture in 1903, the Neoclassical block house served as the meteorological observatory and observer's residence for 46 years. The former U.S. Weather Bureau Station was strategically positioned so that displayed signal flags could be visible from both Old and New Harbors. A new station was created at the recently-completed Block Island Airport in 1950 and the former U.S. Weather Bureau Station is today a private seasonal residence with its logs and records in the possession of the Block Island Historical Society.

2. HYGIEA HOUSE

SETTING: On a narrow neck between Trim's Pond and Harbor Pond, Hygeia House is located on a small knoll on Beach Avenue and faces south overlooking Harbor Pond

Constructed in 1885 as the Seaside House, the structure was moved 150 yards south in 1907 to its current site associated with the name Hygeia Hotel Annex and underwent significant renovations. It is a large, clapboarded, wood-frame hotel building with a high mansard roof and wrap-around porch. Hygeia House is a good example of the small hotels that were an important part of the development and culture of Block Island. Constructed during the heyday of Block Island's resort development, the history of Hygeia House reflects some important patterns of the island's history as a vacation destination.

3. PELEG CHAMPLIN HOUSE

SETTING: Western side of the island on Rodman Pond Lane

SIGNIFICANCE: The Peleg Champlin House is a fine example of Block Island's vernacular architecture and one of the best-preserved houses from the Federal era on the island. The boundary of this national register site is approximately 3 acres and includes the private residence, barn and a portion of the original farmland. It is a simple, shingled, story-and-a-half, gabled-roofed, center-chimney house built circa 1820. The property with its 19th century barn overlooks Block Island Sound and is surrounded by rolling open fields defined by stone walls. Little is known of Peleg Champlin but by all estimations he

had a long and prosperous career as a farmer and he and his family were described as well-to-do and highly esteemed citizens.

The final two national register sites on Block Island are lighthouses.

LIGHTHOUSES

Located in the center of historic shipping lanes for vessels traveling north or west from New York City to New England, Block Island was recognized as an extremely dangerous location for mariners running aground on its shoals. It was not until 1829, however, that the effort was made to safeguard mariners with Congressional appropriation of funds and subsequent construction of a light at the northern tip of Block Island.

The need for a navigational aid on the south coast of Block Island remained and grew considerably during the 19th century due to an increase in maritime traffic and the development of the steamship and recreational passenger transport. In 1856 monies appropriated to build a lighthouse at the southeast coast of Block Island were instead used to relocate and reconstruct the North Light.

Disasters including the 1858 sinking of the steamship Palmetto motivated Block Island resident Nicholas Ball to mount an extensive campaign to alleviate the maritime hazards through improved navigation around the island. Ball's efforts ultimately led to the construction of the Southeast Lighthouse in 1875 atop Mohegan Bluffs and also to Block Island's emergence as a steamship resort. The attractiveness of the lighthouse made it immediately popular and spurred a visit from the then President Ulysses S. Grant.

Today the island's two lighthouses are major points of interests drawing many visitors. Appearing regularly in photography and publications, they have become symbols of Block Island and the larger region.

4. NORTH LIGHT

SETTING: Sandy Point, the northern extremity of Block Island, approximately five miles from Old Harbor

SIGNIFICANCE:

North light is a granite lighthouse with iron tower and is the older of the two lighthouses on Block Island. The current lighthouse is built on the site of three former lighthouses which had been rendered useless following storms or shifting sands.

STATION ESTABLISHED: 1829

PRESENT LIGHTHOUSE BUILT: 1867

AUTOMATED: 1956

LIGHT DEACTIVATED: 1973

LIGHT REACTIVATED WITH ACRYLIC LENS: 1989

RELIGHTED WITH FRESNEL LENS AS A PRIVATE AID TO NAVIGATION IN OCTOBER 2010.

In 1973, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acquired Block Island North Light and 28 surrounding acres. While the property remained an important refuge for wildlife, including home to many species of birds, little attention was paid to the lighthouse. As a result, the North Light deteriorated from a lack of maintenance and was subject to vandalism. In 1984, the Fish and Wildlife Service sold the lighthouse and two acres of land to the Town of New Shoreham for \$1 in exchange for an easement over the entire 28 acres to ensure it remain a wildlife refuge. The Town and the North Light Commission spearheaded the restoration of the lighthouse, using a combination of federal, state, local and private dollars. Major upgrades including restoration of the iron tower and roof have been completed. The original Fresnel lens was returned to the North Light during the restoration. A ceremony to relight the North Light as a private aid to navigation took place in October of 2010. The North Light Commission has the responsibility of maintaining the lighthouse and much of this work is done by the volunteer members themselves. The first floor of the North Light includes a museum and exhibit and is open to the public for self-guided tours during the summer five days a week. The exhibits include lifesaving apparatus, an array of Fresnel lenses, lanterns and buoys. The North Light Commission would like to pursue National Landmark District designation of the North Light along with its surrounding lands of former lighthouses, in order to advance preservation efforts.

5. SOUTHEAST LIGHTHOUSE

SETTING: Mohegan Bluffs, Southeastern section of Block Island

SIGNIFICANCE: The Southeast Lighthouse is listed as a National Historic Landmark, as well as being listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Southeast Light was one of only two lighthouses in the nation of similar style and design built by the Light House Board and the only one which remains today (The Cleveland Light Station in Ohio was demolished in the early 20th century). Built during a high point of architectural sophistication for the Light House Board, it is a superb example of Victorian Gothic architecture. The Southeast Light is one of only 12 lighthouses in the United States with a functioning first-order Fresnel lens.

STATION ESTABLISHED: 1875

PRESENT LIGHTHOUSE BUILT: 1875

DEACTIVATED: 1990

RELIGHTED: 1994

CONSTRUCTION MATERIAL: BRICK

HEIGHT OF TOWER: 52 FEET

HEIGHT OF FOCAL PLANE: 261 FEET

The lighthouse, once over 300 feet from the edge of the bluff was in the 1990's only 55 feet from the edge due to erosion. The National Trust for Historic Preservation listed it as one of America's 11 most endangered structures of historic significance. A group of volunteers, the Block Island Southeast Lighthouse Foundation, raised approximately \$2 million in federal and private dollars to fund the relocate of the lighthouse. In August 1993, historic structure was moved to its present location about 300 feet from the bluff.

Additional Historic Structures Inventories

A report published in 1991 by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, *Historic and Architectural Resources of Block Island, Rhode Island*, lists nearly 150 buildings of historic significance on Block Island.

With the assistance of grant funding, significant efforts were made in 2008 to inventory all historically significant structures on Block Island outside the boundaries of the Historic District Overlay. The work was conducted by Pamela Gasner of the Block Island Historical Society. Additional funding and work is needed to assist in completing the inventory and to expand the effort to include scenic roads and landscapes.

Additional Town-Owned Historic Properties

COAST GUARD STATION

Located just inside the entrance to New Harbor, the Coast Guard building and the adjacent boathouse were built in 1935. In 1988, the Coast Guard ended year-round operations at the Block Island Coast Guard Station and limited them to the summer months only. In 1996, the station's buildings were given to the Town of New Shoreham with the stipulation that quarters be kept for the Coastguardsmen on duty during the summer. The buildings currently are in need of significant repair and restoration. The Town is currently exploring reuse options for the buildings.

THE BLOCK ISLAND SCHOOL

The Block Island School, constructed in 1933, replaced five one-room schoolhouses on the island.

THE TOWN OF NEW SHOREHAM HISTORIC MARKERS

Markers which represent and describe significant historical events and the history of Block Island include the Trustrum Dodge & Harbor Pond markers near The Beachead restaurant, the marker in front of the Surf Hotel, Settler's Rock at Sandy Point, and the Indian Cemetery on Center Road. In 1896, the Women's Christian Temperance Union erected the statue of Rebecca, which stands in the center of town.

SEARLES MANSION WALLS AND PIERS

The Edward and Mary Frances Hopkins Searles' 'Dream House', also named 'White Hall', was constructed between 1880-1890, and designed in the English Mannerist-style by English-born Architect Henry Vaughn. Only the foundations of this once magnificent house and retaining walls of the garden terrace remain along with the entrance gate 'tower' and several stone and brick piers along the drive, including a lone brick pier at the Southeast property corner.

Other noteworthy privately-owned historic properties on Block Island include the Spring House Hotel, The Surf Hotel, Beacon Hill Tower, and the World War II submarine observation towers of which three remain. The Spring House Hotel, built in 1854, is the oldest hotel on the Island and is still open to the public.

LANDSCAPES

The visual landscape on Block Island is a resource worthy of its own recognition and protection. As stated on page 17 of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission's publication *Historic and Architectural Resources of Block Island*,

ON BLOCK ISLAND, MORE THAN IN MOST PLACES, THE ENTIRE ASSEMBLAGE OF HISTORIC AND NATURAL FEATURES HAS GREAT BEAUTY AND SIGNIFICANCE. ISOLATED BUILDINGS AND NATURAL FEATURES CAN BE SINGLED OUT, IDENTIFIED AND TREATED AS REMARKABLE, BUT THIS APPROACH WILL MISS THE MOST EXCEPTIONAL ASPECT OF BLOCK ISLAND – THAT THE ENTIRE ENVIRONMENT IS A VIVID HISTORIC LANDSCAPE OF GREAT APPEAL.

Another publication of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, *Historic Landscapes of Rhode Island*, highlights the following historic landscape on Block Island.

WEST SIDE ROAD

LEWIS-DICKENS FARM

A rare and intact 200-acre farm. The house and outbuildings are typical mid-nineteenth-century structures, but the expansive agricultural landscape of the high plateau of gently rolling grasslands divided by low stone walls is extraordinary. In 1982, The Nature Conservancy with partners purchased 141 acres of the farm to preserve it in perpetuity as open space.

Other notable historic landscapes include: the Win Dodge foundations, Rodman's Hollow, Turnip Farm, Hodge Property, and the island's historic cemeteries.

Stonewalls

A recent study utilizing GIS and aerial imagery estimates that there are over 160 miles of stonewalls on Block Island (Trueman, Rebecca, MS Thesis URI 2015). The study identified and compared stonewalls existing in 1900 and 2011. Matching stonewalls between the two years totaled 122 miles. Stonewalls removed between 1900 and 2011 totaled 95 miles of wall. Stonewalls built between 1900 and 2011 totaled 41 miles of which 43% were built parallel and within 10 meters of roads on the island. The 2011 stonewall dataset produced by this study is included on Map HC 1.

Additional regulations may be necessary to ensure protection of the remaining historic stonewalls on Block Island. Regulations should focus on protecting those historic stonewalls which are located within public view, along roads, and serve as boundary walls. Provisions could require that any alteration, relocation, or removal of historic stonewalls must first obtain approval of the Town and that new

stonewalls be constructed using the methods and material of historic stonewalls found on Block Island. Several Rhode Island communities have stonewall ordinances which could serve as a model.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL FUTURE THREATS TO HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Current and potential future threats to the island's historic and cultural resources include:

Lack of Formal Recognition or Protection

Some of the island's most important historic resources have no form of recognition or protection.

Demolition by Neglect

Demolition by neglect is a term used to describe a situation in which a property owner intentionally allows a historic property to suffer severe deterioration, potentially beyond the point of repair. Property owners may use this kind of long-term neglect to circumvent historic preservation regulations. It may sometimes also happen when a property owner abandons a historic property.

Development and Redevelopment

Development not in keeping with the scale and character of the vernacular of Block Island could have negative impacts on the setting of historic sites or scenic landscapes. The traditional setting and surrounding landscape of a historic site is often as culturally significant and substantially enhances the enjoyment of that resource. As a popular tourism and second home destination, residential development pressures exist. Without proper regulatory measures in place inappropriate development could threaten the island's historic and scenic landscapes. Open space conservation efforts also will go a long way in mitigating negative impacts of development on the island's scenic landscapes.

Natural Hazards & Sea-Level Rise

Some of the island's most significant historic structures are located within areas susceptible to inundation due to sea-level rise and storm surge including the North Light.

Fire Risks

Historic structures are also at a higher risk for fire damage due to older electrical systems and threat of arson.

Invasive Species and Vegetation Growth

Invasive species along with the normal growth of trees and shrubs can have a significant impact on historic landscapes, rural character and coastal views. Efforts should be made to identify the locations in which vegetation management should be pursued in order to protect scenic landscapes. Property owners, easement holders and the Town should work together to identify practical solutions including regular mowing to control vegetation growth and invasive species.

EXISTING LOCAL PROGRAMS RELATED TO THE MANAGEMENT OF HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

The Town has already adopted many regulatory measures to protect historic and cultural resources including:

Historic District Zoning and Guidelines

Block Island enacted historic district zoning in 1982. The Historic Overlay zoning district covers the village and the two harbors, including all or most of the commercial and mixed use zones, as well as Residential C (See Map LU2 Zoning). Within the overlay zone, all building alterations and construction, as well as sign applications, must be reviewed and approved by the Historic District Commission (HDC). The Commission relies on the Secretary of Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties in their review. The HDC also relies on local guidelines in evaluating applications for new construction, restoration, rehabilitation within the boundaries of the historic district. The current boundary of the historic district overlay should be reevaluated as there are properties within the district which are not historic and other properties along the peripheries of the district which are historic.

Voluntary Inclusion in Historic District Zoning

The town also has an ordinance to allow property owners to voluntarily place their property within the historic district overlay zone and subject to the rules and regulations administered by the Historic District Commission. This process involves a zoning petition, public hearing and zoning amendment. At this time, two properties have pursued this voluntary inclusion and subsequent protection.

Demolition Delay Ordinance

The Town has in place a Demolition Delay Ordinance which requires review and delay of the proposed demolition of buildings on the island, with the intent to protect historic buildings and encourage their adaptive reuse.

Maintenance Standards / Avoiding Demolition through Owner Neglect Ordinance

The Town also has in place regulations to avoid a situation where a property owner defers maintenance beyond repair on a historic structure resulting in a request for demolition. The current "Avoiding demolition through owner neglect" section of the zoning ordinance provides the town with the authority to make the repairs directly and to charge back the owner by placing a lien on the property. However, the town may need to evaluate whether it is effective and efficient enough to address the issue or if increased monitoring or enforcement is needed.

Massing and Size Restrictions for New Construction

Local regulations controlling massing, scale and size of structures were recently enacted to protect scenic landscapes and traditional architectural values of the island. The zoning regulations establish specific maximums for wall plane, building plane, building footprint and building volume. The town will

continue efforts to discourage tear-downs of original homes and construction of homes out of character with the traditional vernacular of the island.

Private Resources for Historic Preservation

Preservation Easement Program

A historic preservation easement is a legal agreement that ensures the historic and architectural qualities of a property will not be destroyed. Several regional non-profit organizations including Preserve RI offer historic easement programs as a means to protect historic properties and landscapes in perpetuity, ensuring that subsequent owners follow its terms. This is an important tool to encourage on Block Island because many structures of historic interest are located throughout Block Island and not just within the boundaries of the Historic District.

Goals, Policies & Implementation Actions

GOAL HCI: Safeguard the heritage of the town by preserving districts and other structures of historic or architectural value which reflect elements of Block Island's cultural, social, economic, political, and architectural history.

POLICY	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	TIMEFRAME
HCI.A. Support efforts to identify and recognize historic and cultural resources	HCI.A.1. Seek National Register and National Historic Landmark designation of significant properties and explore designation of the island as a whole	Historic District Commission; Historic Society	Ongoing
	HCI.A.2. Seek National Register Landmark <u>District</u> designation for the North Light	North Light Commission	Short-term
	HCI.A.3. Complete survey of historic structures and sites beyond the boundaries of the Historic District	Historic Society	Long-term
	HCI.A.4. Conduct an island-wide inventory of scenic roads and landscapes	Historic Society	Long-term
HCI.B. Proactively ensure the safeguarding of historically significant structures and sites from natural hazards and the impacts of climate change including sea-level rise	HC.I.B.1. Document and photograph high tides and storm flooding impacts, bluff erosion, etc. in the vicinity of historically significant structures	Planning Board: Building, Zoning, Land Use and Planning; Town Manager	Ongoing
HCI.C. Protect and enhance the island's Historic District	HCI.C.1. Encourage property owners to voluntarily add their property to the Historic District	Historic District Commission; Town Council	Ongoing
	HCI.C.2. Evaluate the current boundaries of the Historic District	Historic District Commission; Town Council	Short-term
	HCI.C.3. Increase monitoring and enforcement efforts of neglected historic properties	Building, Zoning, Land Use and Planning	Ongoing

GOAL HC2: PRESERVE HISTORIC AND SCENIC LANDSCAPES

<u>POLICY</u>	<u>ACTION</u>	<u>RESPONSIBLE PARTY</u>	<u>TIMEFRAME</u>
HC2.A. Protect the rural character and coastal views of the island’s scenic landscapes	HC2.A.1. Work with partners to identify and implement solutions to control vegetation growth and invasive species	Building, Zoning, Land Use and Planning; Land Trust; Town Council	Medium-term; Ongoing
HC2.B. Ensure that new development is sensitive to the look and feel of the island and is not disruptive to the special character of the place	HC2.B.1. Review local regulations to ensure that the scenic and rural character of roads are protected and that development is concealed to the extent possible from public travelways and vantage points	Building, Zoning, Land Use and Planning; Planning Board	Short-term
HC2.C. Protect the island’s historic hand-built stonewalls	HC2.C.1 Adopt a stonewall ordinance that ensures protection of stonewalls at public vantage points	Planning Board; Town Council	Long-term

GOAL HC3: SHARE THE ISLAND’S HISTORY AND SUPPORT CULTURAL ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES

<u>POLICY</u>	<u>ACTION</u>	<u>RESPONSIBLE PARTY</u>	<u>TIMEFRAME</u>
HC3.A. Promote the use of historic sites for the education and pleasure of the community and its visitors		Town Council; Town Manager Tourism Council; Historic Society	Ongoing
HC3.B. Promote and enhance Block Island’s identity as a destination of cultural and historic assets		Town Council; Town Manager; Tourism Council; Historic Society	Ongoing

Timeframes: Short-term (1-3 years); Medium-term (4-6 years); Long-term (7-10 years)