

Town of



AMHERST

Massachusetts

TOWN HALL  
4 Boltwood Avenue  
Amherst, MA 01002-2351

NORTH PROSPECT-LINCOLN-  
SUNSET LHD STUDY COMMITTEE  
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April 28, 2016

Dear Property Owner,

The North Prospect-Lincoln-Sunset Local Historic District Study Committee wants your input. As you may or may not know, due to strong interest generated by residents, a proposed Local Historic District (LHD) that includes much of the area between North Pleasant Street, Sunset Avenue, Fearing and Amity Streets is currently under consideration. Since December 2014, a Study Committee has been researching and documenting properties, including yours, throughout the neighborhood for the possible creation of an LHD.

The North Prospect-Lincoln-Sunset area is one of the oldest in town. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, thanks to the good work and tremendous efforts of the Historical Commission, much of the neighborhood currently under consideration was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in the Lincoln-Sunset and the Prospect-Gaylord National Register Districts. Our proposed LHD encompasses slightly over 200 properties, many of which are architectural gems, spanning the late 1700's to the early 1900's in a spectacular blend of intact examples of Colonial Revival, Craftsman, Queen Anne, Italianate, Neoclassical, Gothic Revival, Four Square and Victorian styles.

In addition to its architectural significance, the proposed North Prospect-Lincoln-Sunset LHD reflects and encapsulates Amherst's intellectual, social and economic development between the Civil War and the Great Depression eras. Of the eight stops on the UMass online walking literary tour of Amherst, developed by the Historical Commission and UMass, four are within the proposed LHD borders. Pulitzer-prize winning poet Robert Frost and biographer Ray Stannard Baker, early feminist Mary Heaton Vorse and beloved children's writer Norton Juster ("The Phantom Tollbooth") penned many of their classics in the neighborhood. Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court Harlan Fiske Stone and author Eugene Field ("Wynken, Blynken and Nod") roamed its gracious, leafy streets as boys. Cosby Avenue, Paige, McClellan and Beston Streets were among the first racially mixed blocks in all of New England. Many of Amherst's oldest names – Boltwood, Goodwin, Jones, Hastings, Dickinson – made their homes in our neighborhood.

So what is a Local Historic District (LHD) and what are its benefits? Unlike a national designation, LHDs offer real, tangible forms of protection for the preservation of historic structures and communities. There are more than 200 LHDs in over 120 towns and cities across Massachusetts. They can be as small as a single property or include hundreds of them. The Provincetown LHD contains almost 1,000 properties. The average LHD is around 100 properties. The entire island of Nantucket is an LHD. Amherst has one – the Dickinson LHD – 39 properties situated in the vicinity of the Dickinson Museum, which encompasses the entire Dickinson National Register District.

In an LHD, proposed changes to exterior architectural features visible from a public way are reviewed by a locally appointed Historic District Commission. There is no review of interior features. A variety of

exterior features are usually exempt from review, such as paint color, air-conditioning units, and storm doors. It doesn't mandate maintenance of properties. And it does not prevent development or rental conversions.

So what does an LHD do? An LHD prevents demolition of noteworthy structures without adequate review or means of recourse. It ensures that renovations and new structures are in keeping with the prevailing, existing architectural character and standards of the immediate neighborhood. According to a publication on LHDs by the Massachusetts Historical Commission, property values in LHDs stay the same or increase at a faster rate than those in similar, non-LHD areas, another very real benefit to the neighborhood and town at large.

Designating an LHD is a long and involved process, requiring approval by the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the Amherst Select Board and Planning Board, a two-thirds majority vote at Town Meeting, and approval by the state's Attorney General. The monthly meetings of the Study Committee are open to the public. The process involves open hearings, at which affected property owners can voice their concerns and questions. For further information, see the enclosed FAQs.

We have also enclosed a brief survey. Please take a few minutes to express your thoughts on the prospect of an LHD and return it to the Study Committee by Thursday, May 12<sup>th</sup> in the envelope provided, or complete the form online on the town website: <http://www.amherstma.gov/FormCenter/Committee-Forms-3/North-ProspectLincolnSunset-LHD-Study-Co-123>. We are also enclosing a draft of the inventory form being compiled about your property (it's a working document, so kindly excuse any internal notes). Please review this form and provide corrections as well as copies of photographs, documents and any additional information you might want to share and wish to have included. You can also contact Nate Malloy, staff liaison to the committee, by email ([malloyn@amherstma.gov](mailto:malloyn@amherstma.gov)) or phone (413)259-3322.

Thank you for your time. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

North Prospect-Lincoln-Sunset LHD Study Committee  
Steve Bloom, Chair  
Suzannah Fabing, Vice Chair  
Maurianne Adams  
William Gillen  
Philip Shaver  
Ann Sutliff  
Ed Wilfert

Enclosure:

- FAQs
- Survey
- Map of proposed district
- Draft inventory form
- Return envelope

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:**

### **Isn't my house already in a historic district?**

Much of the neighborhood is already listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Prospect-Gaylord and Lincoln-Sunset National Register Districts. However, the National Register is primarily an honorary designation, offering only minimal protection if construction uses state or federal funds. By adopting a Local Historic District, the historic and architectural character of our neighborhood would be much better protected.

### **How is an LHD created?**

If there is strong interest in an LHD within a neighborhood, the town Select Board appoints a Study Committee to investigate the local district designation further. The Study Committee holds public meetings, seeks public input, researches the history of the area and prepares a report on its findings. The final step is the addition of the new LHD to the 2012 historic district bylaw (that is part of the Town's General Bylaws) by a two-thirds majority at Town Meeting.

### **If my house is included in the LHD, does that mean I have to make it look more historic?**

No, you can maintain the current look of your house as long as you would like. An LHD only reviews proposed changes to exterior architectural features. Routine maintenance of your property is exempt from review.

### **What features are subject to review by an LHD Commission?**

Exterior architectural features visible from a public way are reviewed. Interior changes, landscaping, maintenance and exterior features not visible from a public way are not reviewed. Other exemptions are also included in the bylaw.

### **Who are members of the LHD Commission?**

A local bylaw describes specifically how the Select Board appoints members to the LHD Commission, which usually consists of local architects, historians, realtors and some residents and property owners from within the district.

### **Does this mean that I can't paint my house any color I want?**

No. You can paint your house any color you choose.

**If my house were located in an LHD and I were constructing an addition that is visible from a public way, what would I have to do?**

Before acquiring the building permit for your addition, you would have to fill out an application to the LHD Commission. The Commission would then hold a public hearing and review the proposed plans to make sure that changes are in keeping with the existing character of the LHD. If the addition is deemed appropriate, the LHD Commission will issue a certificate. You would then present the certificate to the Building Inspector to get your building permit. If the addition is not found appropriate, the Commission would explain and make recommendations regarding how your project could be modified.

**How does an LHD affect my property values?**

Studies around the country and the state suggest that property values stay the same or increase faster in LHDs, compared to similar, non-designated areas.

**If my neighbors and I already maintain the historic character of our properties, why do we need an LHD?**

By having an LHD, you can be assured that any new property owner across the street or next door also maintains the historic character of the neighborhood.

**North Prospect-Lincoln-Sunset LHD Study Committee Questionnaire**

*Please fill out the survey below. Feel free to add comments. We value your input.*

Name (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

House Address (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Do you think your neighborhood is historically significant?**

YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_

**2. Do you think the character of your neighborhood should be preserved?**

YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_

**3. Are you concerned about recent demolitions and changes to the neighborhood?**

YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_

**4. Overall, do you support the idea of an LHD in your neighborhood?**

YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_ NOT SURE\_\_\_

**5. According to existing state law, routine maintenance, repair, landscaping and changes not visible from a public way are exempt from review. What other features should be exempt?**

**6. Please include other comments, questions or concerns you have in the space below:**

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please use the enclosed envelope to send to:*

**Nathaniel Malloy, Planning Department  
Town Hall, 4 Boltwood Avenue  
Amherst, MA 01002**

***Please return by May 12, 2016. The results will be compiled and released to the public at a meeting on Thursday, May 26 at 7 pm in the Town Room, Town Hall.***