

7.0 HISTORIC AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION

7.1. Introduction

Cranston offers a rich architectural and community history. Historic structures, districts, cemeteries, and landscapes are important aspects of what makes the City unique. Historic and cultural resources provide a physical link to the past, and they also help to shape the identity of a community. An understanding of where a community came from—its heritage—is essential to plan for what it will become. The tangible evidence that represent this heritage tell us a story about the way that people lived, their values, and how the built environment changed over time. A sense of the past anchors us and helps to inform our collective vision for the future. This aesthetic translates to enjoyment and desirability that can benefit the property owners, businesses, and the residents of Cranston.

This section discusses Cranston's historic and cultural resources, and current historic preservation initiatives. It includes the following discussions:

- Recommendations from prior comprehensive plans and their current status.
- Existing conditions, including discussion of historic commissions, local historic districts and nationally designated properties, and historic landscapes.
- Historic preservation planning and education.
- Challenges and opportunities.

7.2. Recommendations from Prior Comprehensive Plans

Several actions from the 1992 and the 2010 comprehensive plans were implemented to protect Cranston's historic and cultural resources. The 1992 Comprehensive Plan focused on improving education about and awareness of historic resources through actions that focused on four themes.

1. Promoting traditional preservation techniques through
 - Surveys and inventories
 - Nominating properties to the nation register of historic places.
 - Creating and empowering local historic districts
 - Incorporating preservation tools within City guidelines and programs such as tax incentives, demolition delay ordinances and economic incentive programs for historic properties.
2. Addressing threats to Specific Historic Resources
3. Integrating Historic Preservation with the Comprehensive Plan
4. Providing education and citizen awareness

The 2010 Comprehensive Plan followed the four themes established in 1992 and addressed some specific areas in its examination and evaluation of Cranston's Historic and Cultural Preservation.

Traditional Preservation Techniques:

1. Creating and empowering local historic districts: The 2010 plan recommended that the following areas/neighborhoods be designated and adapted as Local Historic Districts.
 - Pawtuxet Village Historic District
 - Edgewood/Taft Estate Historic District
 - Norwood Avenue Historic District
2. Surveys and Inventories: The 2010 plan recommended an update and expansion of the Survey of Historic Properties, and they recommended that this survey also include prehistoric and historic archaeological assessments of historic properties.
3. Incorporating preservation tools within City resources: The 2010 recommended the creation of an Historic Resource Task Force.

Addressing Threats to Historic Resources

1. The 2010 plan recommended educating and encouraging private property owners regarding the value of their historic resources so that the historic value of the sites is not compromised.

Providing Education and Citizen Awareness

1. The 2010 plan proposed an education program to increase awareness of the benefits of Local Historic District designation as well as a broader program that provides residents of the City with information about historic preservation.
2. Distribute information and guidance on Preservation to residents and provide information for visitors using various media.

The Table showing the “Accomplishments of the 1992 Comprehensive Plan” has value in being repeated here with the addition of a column noting the Accomplishments of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan as this provides a starting point for future recommendations.

Table 7.2.1. List of Historic and Cultural Resources			
Action	1992 Actions	1992 Accomplishments and Changes	2010 Accomplishments and Changes (to be filled in via review with City)
Survey, Inventory and Traditional Preservation Techniques			
HP-1	Update and expand the survey of the historic properties on a Citywide basis.	This action was not accomplished.	
HP-2	Work with private property owners to encourage preservation of known archeological and historic sites on their land.	The Cranston HDC accomplished this in the Oak Lawn Historic District. In non-Local Historic Districts and non-historic areas, a few sites were preserved including	

Table 7.2.1. List of Historic and Cultural Resources

Action	1992 Actions	1992 Accomplishments and Changes	2010 Accomplishments and Changes (to be filled in via review with City)
		portions of the Sockanosset Boys Training School.	
HP-3	Nominate eligible individual properties and districts to the National Register of Historic Places and the State Register.	The Norwood Avenue and the former Taft Estate / Edgewood Historic District was nominated and designated on the Federal and State Historic Registers.	
HP-4	Continue to establish local historic zoning overlay districts for areas and begin designation of individual structures.	The Pawtuxet Village Historic District was proposed in 1993 but not designated. Three other individual districts have been added: Joy Homestead, the Turgeon House and the Westcott House.	
HP-5	Identify and implement appropriate economic incentive programs to encourage historic preservation and rehabilitation.	A local tax credit ordinance was drafted in 1993, but it was not passed by the City Council.	
HP-6	Create a system for archeological review of development projects.	This action was implemented by using the State database. The Plan Commission requires Phase I analysis for all projects in identified 20-acre cells where roadway or other facilities will be dedicated to the public.	
HP-7	Expand the role of the Historic District Commission, as the primary historic preservation body in Cranston.	The HDC has expanded its role by reviewing and approving several projects that had potential impacts to historic properties including Pawtuxet Traffic Calming and Sockanosset Crossing (Chapel View).	
HP-8	Develop mechanisms for coordination of the activities of the Historic District Commission with other City boards and agencies through the City Planning Commission.	New subdivision regulations that require all master plans to be reviewed by several agencies were approved in 1996. The Plan Commission has the option to send proposals with historic resources to the HDC for review.	

Table 7.2.1. List of Historic and Cultural Resources			
Action	1992 Actions	1992 Accomplishments and Changes	2010 Accomplishments and Changes (to be filled in via review with City)
HP-9	Initiate study committee(s) for identified threatened historic properties.	This action was not accomplished.	
Historic Preservation Planning and Development Policies			
HP-10	Enact a demolition ordinance imposing a waiting period before demolition of historic buildings, in order to provide an opportunity to consider alternatives to demolition.	This action was not accomplished.	
HP-11	Adopt design review and procedural guidelines to implement historic district zoning in designated areas.	Design review and procedural guidelines were adopted.	
HP-12	Incorporate historic preservation concerns into actions and policies adopted pursuant to other elements of the Comprehensive Plan.	This action was completed.	
Education and Citizen Awareness			
HP-13	Develop and implement an expanded public education and awareness program.	An informational program flyer was created for select 3rd and 4th grades in the City school system.	

7.3.Existing Conditions

Existing conditions, in this section, include discussion of historic commissions, local historic districts and nationally designated properties, and historic landscapes.

7.3.1 Historic Commissions

Cranston has two historic commissions, the Historic District Commission (HDC) and the Historical Cemeteries Commission (HCC).

The Historic District Commission reviews changes to properties located in locally designated historic districts. The HDC also submits proposals to create additional local historic districts and provides opinions on State and National Register nominations. A Procedures and Standards Guidebook for Historic Rehabilitation has been developed to guide residents, professionals and Commission members on appropriate design and preservation approaches. Development proposals for properties within a historic district require the property owner to file an application form with the HDC, who will review the proposed scope of work for conformance with the rehabilitation standards and may approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the project. There are seven members on the HDC who are appointed for 3-year staggered terms. Members must be residents of Cranston, have an interest in historic preservation and prefer to have some knowledge or experience relating to the field.

The Historical Cemeteries Commission, established by the City Council, is comprised of volunteers who are appointed by the City. They are charged with locating, assessing, documenting, and providing signage for Cranston's historic cemeteries. The documentation includes physical location, GPS coordinates, cemetery description and condition and gravestone information in photographic, electronic, and hard copy format. This data is consistent with the methods used by the Rhode Island Historical Cemeteries Commission. Currently there are 2 active members and 2 alternate members serving on this commission as well as one representative from the Cranston Historical Society.

In addition to the Historic District Commission and the Historical Cemeteries Commission, the Cranston Historical Society operates as a non-profit organization independent of City government jurisdiction. This group was formed in 1949 and its articles of incorporation state:

The purpose of the Society shall be to revive and maintain a lively interest in the history of Cranston; to collect, store and on occasion exhibit books, papers, photographs and other incunabula relative to early Cranston; to foster in minds and heart of Cranston residents an appreciation and respect for the founs of the City in which they live and to work for the establishment of a museum in which those objects may be stored.

The Cranston Historical Society meets regularly at their headquarters in the Governor Sprague Mansion which they saved through a preservation effort in 1966. The Cranston Historical Society is also a part of the Western Rhode Island Civil Historical Society.

7.3.2 Local Historic Districts

A Local Historic District is a formally designated area with a concentration of buildings, structures, sites, and spaces that relate to one another historically, architecturally, and/or culturally. In Cranston, these districts are enacted by ordinance as special zoning areas, created to assist in the preservation of historic buildings and the preservation of the community special sense of place. There are a number of sites and areas in Cranston designated as local historic districts, including the Oaklawn Village Historic District and Pawtuxet Village Historic District. The City monitors and guides development activity in its historic districts through the Historic District Commission (HDC).

7.3.3 Nationally Designated Historic and Cultural Resources

The National Register of Historic Places is the federal government's official list of properties that are significant in American history and deemed worthy of preservation. National Register properties include individual buildings, historic districts, historic landscapes, and archaeological sites. Rhode Island properties listed in the National Register include colonial houses, farms, Victorian neighborhoods, factory villages, diners, monuments, military bases, seacoast villages, suburban neighborhoods, and cemeteries.

The following is a list of Cranston's historic and cultural resources that are designated on the National Register of Historic Places. The resources in bold have also been designated local historic districts.

.....

Table 7.3.1. List of Historic and Cultural Resources		
Name	Location	Date Listed on National Register
Arad Wood House	407 Pontiac Avenue	8/3/88
Arkwright Bridge	Hill Street	12/12/78
Edgewood Historic District – Aberdeen Plat	Berwick Lane, Chiswick, Road, Sefton Drive, Strathmore Place, Strathmore Road,	11/22/16
Edgewood Historic District – Anstis Greene Estate Plats	Anstis St, Birchfield Rd, Bluff Ave, Broad St, Hall Place, Kensington Rd, King Ave, Marion Ave, Narragansett Blvd, Rosewood Ave, Swift Street	8/3/15
Edgewood Historic District – Arnold Farm Plat	Arnold, Albert, Columbia Aves; parts of Broad St, Pawtuxet Ave, Narragansett Blvd	9/10/10
Edgewood Historic District – Salley Greene Homestead Plats	Fairview Avenue, Glen Avenue, Harbour Terrace, Hudson Place, Massasoit Avenue, and portions of Broad Street and Narragansett Boulevard	11/22/16
Edgewood Historic District – Shaw Plat	Shaw Ave., Marion Ave., portions of Broad Street and Narragansett Blvd.	3/27/13
Edgewood Historic District -Taft Estate Plat	Broad Street, Windsor Road, Circuit Drive, Narragansett Bay	10/24/03
Edgewood Yacht Club	3 Shaw Avenue	2/23/89
Furnace Hill Brook Historic and Archaeological District	Phenix Avenue and Hope Road	3/8/78 and 8/6/80
Governor Sprague Mansion /William Sprague House	1351 Cranston Street	2/18/71
Joy Homestead/Job Joy House	156 Scituate Avenue	12/12/78
Knightsville Meeting House /Knightsville-Franklin Congregational Church	67 Phenix Avenue	3/8/78
Lippitt Hill Historic District	Burlingame and Hope Roads and Lippitt Avenue Hope Road	3/2/89
Lippitt Hill Historic School District		
Nathan Westcott House	150 Scituate Avenue	1/5/89
Niles Westcott House/Westcote	101 Mountain Laurel Drive	8/3/88
Norwood Avenue Historic District	Norwood Avenue	4/26/02
Oak Lawn Village Historic District	Wilbur Avenue from Natick Road to Oaklawn Avenue	11/25/77
Pawtuxet Village Historic District	near Pawtuxet Cove	4/24/73
Potter Remington House	571 Natick Avenue	12/12/78
Rhodes-on-the-Pawtuxet Ballroom and Gazebo	Rhodes Place	12/12/78
Sheldon House	458 Scituate Avenue	1/5/89
Thomas Fenner House	43 Stony Acre Drive	3/2/90

7.3.4 Historic Landscapes and Cemeteries

Cranston contains several significant cultural landscapes, including historic cemeteries. An inventory of historic landscapes throughout the state has been published by the Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission in their 2001 monograph *Historic Landscapes of Rhode Island*, and the Rhode Island Historical Cemeteries website provides additional details on the state's cemeteries and gravesites.

The historic landscapes and cemeteries in the City of Cranston are as follows:

Table 7.3.2 List of Historic Landscapes and Cemeteries		
Facility Name	Location	Significance
Oakland Cemetery	1569 Broad Street	Platted in 1848 by Cushing and Walling Engineers
St Ann's Roman Catholic Cemetery	Cranston Street	Former Randall Family burial plot purchased by Diocese of Providence in 1850
Dean Parkway	A residential roadway/parkway from Oaklawn Avenue to Sockanosset Hill.	A 1910 donation from John M. Dean to the Metropolitan District Commission. Designed by Olmsted Brothers and included in their 1906 Metropolitan District Plan.
Dyer Nursery and Farm/Pocasset Cemetery	417 Dyer Avenue	Rural Cemetery overlooking Dyer's Pond and historic Cranston Printworks. Started as Dyer Nursery it was platted in 1876 as Pocasset Cemetery by Niles Schubarth. Included in the 1906 Olmsted Brothers Metropolitan District Plan.
Hope Road Streetscape	Pippin Orchard Road area	Scenic woodlands near historic Lippitt Hill Farm
Lippitt Hill Farm	1231 Hope Road	Early agricultural landscape
State Institution Cemetery #2	Intersection of Pontiac Ave. and Knight St.	RI Historical Cemetery #61 used from 1933-1940.
State Institution Cemetery #3	East side of Pontiac Ave.	No longer extant. Graves were moved to State Institution Cemetery #2 to provide construction for the Cranston Industrial Park.
Ralph Winsor Residence	44 Marden Street	Ca 1935 for residence. Winsor deigned terraced gardens from house to Fenner's Pond.
Bethany Lutheran Swedish Cemetery	Hamilton Road/ Howland Road	First burial was 1961.
Peck Hill Road Streetscape	Intersection of Peck Hill Road, Plainfield Pike, and Pippin Orchard Road	Agricultural land use with corner store, 4 farms and one residence
Knight Farm	166 Scituate Road	Cited as one of the best extant complexes in western Cranston.

Table 7.3.2 List of Historic Landscapes and Cemeteries		
Facility Name	Location	Significance
Seven Mile Road Streetscape	Seven Mile Road	Designated scenic road with views of the Scituate hills.
State Farm Cemetery	Route 37	Original 3.4-acre cemetery for the state institutions for residents who were not claimed by their families.

7.4 Historic Preservation Planning and Education

Preservation planning is a proactive way to provide for the protection of a community’s historic resources and character. The preservation component of a comprehensive plan recognizes the importance of local heritage and the historic built and natural environment and provides a roadmap for future preservation endeavors.

The goals of a preservation plan as outlined by the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions should:

- Identify and articulate community preservation goals.
- Inform current and future property owners about the local preservation ordinances so as to eliminate confusion during application and review processes.
- Educate the public about the community’s history and heritage.
- Create an agenda for future preservation work.
- Create a way to measure preservation’s progress.

Cranston has an active Historic District Commission and historical society to help carry forward the city’s preservation goals, which should be pursued in conjunction with the City Planning Department and the Town Council.

Preservation planning should also aim to strengthen the community’s understanding of preservation policies. Educating the public about preservation is important because an informed public can better understand the benefits of regulations for historic resources and support the city’s preservation planning functions. In particular, the neighborhood around Pawtuxet Village and other historic areas are being considered for Local Historic District Designation, and residents should be engaged in a community-driven preservation planning process.

Concerns within historic districts commonly revolve around out-of-scale and out-of-character new development that is inconsistent with the historic building patterns. Specifically, issues with incompatible building setbacks, height, and lot coverage are often at the core of what threatens a neighborhood’s unique historic character. Oversight of development activity can be addressed through the establishment of Local Historic Overlay Districts and the assurance that the Historic District Commission has a strong role in the review of proposed projects.

7.5 Challenges and Opportunities

7.5.1.1 Challenges

Momentum for Progress

While Cranston has implemented important historic preservation initiatives in recent years, several recommendations from the 1992 and 2010 Plan have not yet been accomplished. Progress is still needed on several action items, including updating surveys, standards, and policies to better support and inform decision-making by the Historic Preservation Commission, and enhancing capacity for community awareness and involvement in preservation planning efforts.

At-Risk Historic Neighborhoods

The City enjoys the existence of several historic districts, however there are still many noteworthy historic neighborhoods in Cranston that are not locally designated. These areas are slowly losing their architectural character, due to development pressure and lack of oversight by the Historic Preservation Commission. The 2010 Plan identified several neighborhoods that would benefit from local historic district status to better preserve their historic resources and character for the future, including:

- Edgewood Historic District - The Taft Estates
- The Norwood Avenue Historic District
- Rolfe Street Commercial District
- Cranston Print Works District

Visibility of Historic Buildings and Landscapes

It is challenging to rally support for resources that we cannot see. Many archaeological sites, historic buildings, and historic landscapes are obscured by new buildings or lost in their surrounds. Establishing the presence of these valuable resources is an ongoing challenge to ensure community awareness.

Public Awareness of Preservation Benefits

There is currently limited capacity to conduct outreach and education around historic preservation efforts in Cranston. There is a need to create better public awareness around the benefits of preservation planning, including how local historic districts and the Historic Preservation Commission act as important safeguards for community heritage. Similarly, owners within existing historic districts should be better informed about the purpose and function of local preservation policies and procedures.

7.5.1.2 Opportunities

Establish and Strengthen Local Historic Districts

The Historic District Commission should work closely with the Planning Department and Planning Board to explore the designation of new local historic districts to expand protections to other neighborhoods worthy of preservation. Priority should be placed on the potential areas identified in the 2010 Plan (Edgewood / Taft Estates, Norwood Avenue Historic District, Rolfe Street Commercial District, and Cranston Print Works District).

Update and Expand the Survey of Historic Properties

Views on the importance of historic properties change with time. A periodic Citywide survey of historic resources is critical to ensure a complete inventory of historic properties and should be

continually updated in accordance with current community values. The Citywide historic inventory update should also include a prehistoric and historic archeological assessment. This work should be coordinated with the RI Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission, the Cranston Historical Society and the RI Historical Cemeteries organization.

Create a Historic Resource Task Force

The establishment of an historic resource task force would provide the City with a group that focuses on assessing the existing demands of the tourist markets and identifying options to capitalize on these demands by promoting the City’s historic resources. The task force should identify the measures needed to ensure that tourism does not adversely affect the historic resources. The task force should coordinate their work with the City Planning Commission, the Historic District Commission, the Historical Cemeteries Commission, and the Conservation Commission.

Conduct Outreach to Local Historic District Property Owners

Enhanced outreach to historic property owners within local districts will help increase awareness of the implications and ultimate benefits of Local Historic District designations. This education program could focus on helping residents of areas with historic district potential to become more aware of the historic value of their districts and how their historic resources can help to create a unique local identity for their neighborhoods. This program can easily be implemented through the Cranston Public Library system.

Develop a Historic Preservation Education Program

Information and guidance on preservation can be distributed through an historic preservation education program. Such a program would help residents understand how historic resources contribute towards their community’s unique identity. This information can be disseminated through various media such as online, through newspapers, and via brochures in schools and libraries. The information should help people understand what affects the historic character of a place and how those places with unique historic character can be protected. There is a wealth of existing resources that can be tapped into for an education and awareness program. These resources include the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, the Historic Preservation Education Foundation, and The Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission.

The 2010 Comprehensive Plan provided a table outlining a list of actions and responsible parties. This list should be updated for 2024, noting which actions have been completed.

Table 7.5.1. Summary of the Proposed Actions and Responsibilities for this Plan			
Item	2010 Action	Responsibility	Status (work with City to add updates)
Survey, Inventory and Traditional Preservation Techniques			
HP-1	Nominate eligible individual properties and districts to the National Register of Historic Places, and the State Register.	Planning Department, Historic District Commission	
HP-2	Continue to establish local historic overlay districts for areas and begin designation of individual structures such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make Pawtuxet Village a Local Historic District. • Make Edgewood / Taft Estate Historic District a Local Historic District. • Make Norwood Avenue Historic 	City Council, Planning Commission, Planning Department, Historic District Commission	

	<p>District a Local Historic District.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make Rolfe Street Commercial District a Local Historic District 		
HP-3	Continue to identify and implement appropriate economic incentive programs to encourage historic preservation and rehabilitation.	City Council, Planning Commission, Planning Department, Historic District Commission	
HP-4	Continue to include archeological review of development projects according to the state database.	Planning Commission, Planning Department, Historic District Commission	
Item	2010 Action	Responsibility	Status (work with City to add updates)
HP-5	Continue to update and expand the survey of the historic properties on a Citywide basis.	Planning Department, Historic District Commission	
HP-6	Continue to work with private property owners to encourage preservation of known archeological and historic sites on their land.	Planning Department, Historic District Commission	
HP-7	Continue the role of the Historic Commission as the principal City agency for historic preservation.	City Council, Historic District Commission	
Historic Preservation Planning and Development Policies			
HP-8	Create a task force to look at the options and demands of tourism focused on the historic resources of the City.	Planning Department, Historic District Commission, Economic Development	
HP-9	Establish study committee(s) for identified threatened historic properties to include representation from district and property when possible.	City Council, Planning Department Historic District Commission	
HP-10	Enact a demolition ordinance imposing a waiting period before demolition of historic buildings in order to provide an opportunity to consider alternatives to demolition.	City Council, Planning Commission, Planning Department, Historic District Commission	
HP-11	Continue to implement design review and procedural guidelines for historic district zoning in designated areas.	Planning Department and the Historic District Commission	
HP-12	Survey accurate locations of historic cemeteries using GPS and submit the coordinate data to the City's IT department in order to map the cemeteries on GIS maps with plat and lot information.	Historic Cemetery Commission and the City IT Department	
Education and Citizen Awareness			
HP-13	The Historic Commission should target specific areas such as Pawtuxet Village to educate the neighborhood about the benefits of a Local Historic District designation.	Planning Department, the Historic District Commission, Public Libraries	
HP-14	Assist residents and City administration to understand and appreciate the importance of preserving historic buildings and places.	Planning Department, the Historic District Commission, Public Libraries	
HP-15	Distribute information and guidance on preservation, based on the Secretary of Interiors Standards of Preservation, for public and private use.	Planning Department, the Historic District Commission, Public Libraries	

Resources:

.....

- RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission: <https://preservation.ri.gov/>
- Cranston Historical Society: https://www.rihs.org/directory_item/cranston-historical-society/
- The Western Rhode Island Civic Historical Society: <http://www.westernrihistory.org/history-of-cranston-historical-society/>
- RI Historical Cemeteries: <https://rihistoriccemeteries.org/newsearchcemetery.aspx>