INTRODUCTION

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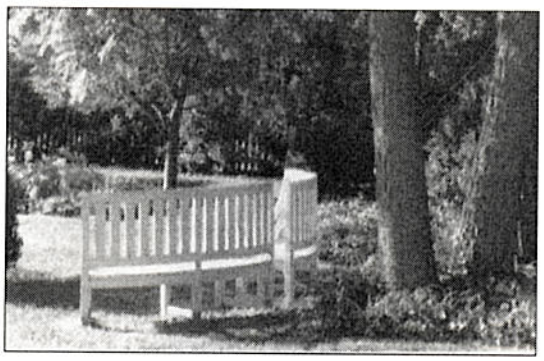
The citizens of Easton have long been interested in preserving their historical and architectural heritage. In 1920's members of the Talbot County Garden Club began civic beautification projects that developed into preservation of the Courthouse Square and nearby areas. Beginning after World War II, a growing interest in preserving the appearance of the Town's oldest sections began to take hold. By the late 1970's, Easton's Historic District Commission was created by amendment to the town's zoning ordinance to:

> "enhance the quality of life and to safeguard the historical and cultural heritage of Easton by preserving sites, structures, or districts which reflect elements of cultural, social, economic, political, archeological, or architectural history; to strengthen the local economy; to stabilize and improve property values of such sites, structures, or districts; to foster civic beauty; and to promote the preservation and appreciation of such sites, structures, and districts for the education and welfare of the residents of Easton and Talbot County."

In addition to the various preservation efforts of the Commission, other groups and individuals have been active to preserving and enhancing Easton's historic areas. Early efforts of both the Talbot County Historical Society and Historic Easton, Inc. centered around the successful rescue of several threatened buildings. In 1991, the historic Avalon Theater was restored as a performing arts center for Easton. In 1996, Easton became one of the first communities in Maryland be selected to participate in the state's Main Street program.

The Easton Historic Districts Design Guidelines build upon these efforts. Based on the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, they are intended to assist owners of historic properties, architects, builders, members of the Historic Districts Commission and others to understand appropriate treatment of historic sites, structures and districts in Easton. They give all involved a common basis to discuss the appropriateness of proposed changes. By following these guidelines, everyone involved will be better equipped enhance and safeguard the historical and cultural heritage of Easton.



PURPOSE OF THE DESIGN GUIDELINES

Design guidelines are created by communities concerned with the appearance of their buildings and how that appearance contributes to economic health and civic pride. Over 2,200 cities, towns and counties across the country have adopted design guidelines as part of their historic preservation efforts. Design guidelines address the protection and enhancement of existing buildings as well as compatible new construction within the designated areas. Most design guidelines also address how the landscape and elements in the landscape such as roads, sidewalks, parking areas, public spaces and the like should be protected or enhanced to contribute to the overall quality of the district. All design guidelines should provide a basis for objective decisions about the appropriateness of proposed changes to the built environment and the historic landscape within designated districts.

The *Easton Historic Districts Design Guidelines* have been created to assist owners and tenants of historic buildings to maintain, preserve and enhance the character of their properties. These guidelines have also been created to assist architects, engineers, contractors and others to plan and implement projects that preserve and enhance the character of the historic districts.

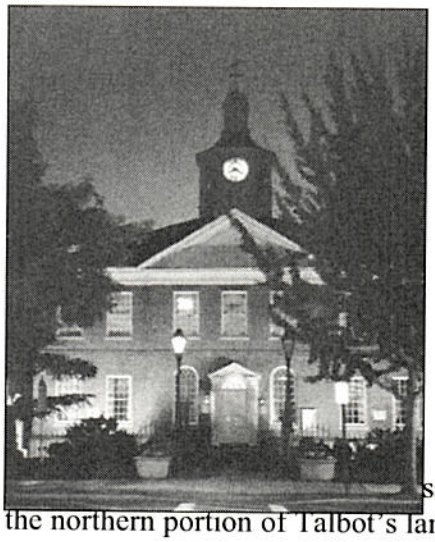
EASTON'S HISTORY AND HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Three distinct elements came together to shape the course of Easton's creation: the Chesapeake Bay and its geography, the rule of law and the endurance of a religious institution. These same three elements remain a force and continue to shape Easton's future and its unique community character.

The first inhabitants of this portion of the Delmarva Peninsula were certainly the Native American peoples who knew well the inherent advantages of this land. It is likely that the first Europeans to see these lands were Spanish or Italian merchant explorers. It is also very likely that French trappers and traders were among the first immigrant inhabitants plying their nomadic trade on the Eastern Shore prior to the first English settlements.

The first such documented contact was made by Captain John Smith and a small survey and exploration party who ventured up the "Chisapeack" from Jamestown during the spring and summer of 1608. The Eastern Shore's first permanent English settlement took hold during the summer of 1631, three years in advance of the Calvert's settlement in St. Mary's, when Captain William Claiborne established a permanent settlement on Kent Island.

In the wake of the expanding population in the colony, English settlements gradually spread up the Bay. By 1661, just three decades after Claiborne's settlement, the creation of Talbot County was underway. In the following decades, as the population spread, it became evident that a more centrally located seat of government and a system of regional courthouses was required to firmly exert the laws of the Colonial authority. During this time the colonial government was relocated north, ending up in Annapolis. In 1679 Talbot County's first courthouse was located in York, then a small town on Skipton Creek.



ssembly created Queen Anne's County utilizing the northern portion of Talbot's lands, public sentiment became vehement that the

York Courthouse was too distant to serve the needs of Talbot's citizens. The Maryland General Assembly responded to public pressure and in 1707 commissioned a court to be located in Oxford. This action also proved unsatisfactory. In 1709 the Assembly designated Oxford as the permanent home for Talbot County's court. Again the Assembly yielded to public pressure and in 1710 decreed that a 2-acre tract of land in the vicinity of Pitt's bridge be purchased for a permanent courthouse site. After the purchase for 5,000 pounds of tobacco, Philemon Hemsley was contracted to construct a brick court building and a jailhouse, stocks, pillory and whipping post. Hemsley completed his contract in 1712 and the first meeting of the court occurred that June. This initiative saw the first significant expansion in the immediate area in nearly 30 years; but was only the beginning of what was to come.

The Talbot Court House complex joined another significant building that had been standing near the headwaters of the Tred Avon River, the substantial Third Haven Quaker Meeting house. The Third Haven Meeting house was begun in 1682 and completed during a span of 2 years. Quakers have been a consistent presence in the area since at least 1660 when the Betty's Cove Meeting was founded; records of Third Haven Meeting date back to 1676. The business of the Court now brought even more people to the Quaker's meeting site now less than a mile away,

As the business of the Talbot Court grew so did the permanent population in the area. One of the first residents was in fact Philemon Hemsley who purchased a lot and built a dwelling house adjacent to the Courthouse complex. Between 1712 and 1750 the settlement known as Talbot Court House remained small; four families lived in the vicinity and all supplies were purchased elsewhere as there were no shopkeepers among the residents. However, the business of the court made access and transportation routes a must. Roads to several water landings were cut and a new ferry service was initiated.

During the next quarter century growth must have been consistent and the development around the Courthouse began to take shape. Gradually the name

for the settlement evolved from "Talbot Court House" to what was known locally as simply "Talbot". To avoid probable confusion between the town and the county, the addition of "Town" or "-ton" appeared to come into use.

By the late 1780's the community was of apparently sufficient size to warrant codifying the settlement and resolving the issue of its name. By the end of the Revolutionary War, citizens were petitioning for incorporation of the town and the State constitution mandated that the General Court of the State would have two locations to meet, at the state capitol in Annapolis and at the Talbot County Court. In 1786 the Legislature directed the formal creation of the Town (still called Talbot) naming Commissioners and empowering them as a municipal authority. The resulting survey laid out a road grid and the 118 original lots. Two years later the Legislature decreed that the General Court of the State for the Eastern Shore would be maintained at its current site and that the town would be called Easton. This decree, in addition to the locating of a treasurer and land office in conjunction with the Court, certainly confirmed that Easton was the Eastern Shore's most prominent and influential town.

This new status, as well as the expansion of the Court's judicial functions, prompted the construction of a new Courthouse building, of a stature befitting the town's new leadership role. The new Court was opened in 1794, built at a cost of $3000 and designed by prominent architect Cornelius West. The majority of the costs were borne by the state, since a significant portion of the Court's business would be affairs of the state.

This significant governmental activity also marked the beginning of the interest of local citizens to improve their own dwellings and places of business. These classically inspired private and public buildings set the tone for the sense of community that Easton tends to foster today.

From these colonial and Federal era roots sprang the collection of buildings and sites that make up modern Easton and create the core of the Town's historic resources. The Third Haven Meeting continues on the same site today carrying forwards its tradition of community in what is believed to be the oldest standing structure in the State of Maryland. Many of Easton's Federal-era landmarks have survived fire and other threats to become benchmarks within the community. But the wealth of historic resources that comprise Easton's historic districts are far more diverse in style, type and context. As transportation improved throughout the peninsula and across the Bay, Easton's fortunes prospered through the good times and struggled during crises.

Three significant fires during the 19th century forced the renewal of portions of the downtown business and commercial district. In the wake of each fire the resultant rebuilding brought more layers to the mix of styles and types of building in Easton's core. Economic difficulties and national events such as the World Wars also shaped Easton's building patterns. The diversity of Easton's economy as well as its position as a seat of government often helped to soften the impact of such events. Its position also meant that as recovery began, it often started here and lasted longest here as well. What is not often found in communities is the will to save these storefronts from the previous generation. The wealth of variety that exists in Easton's commercial core is unique and deserves to be appreciated.

These economic and growth cycles can often be read in the residential and institutional building of an area. From the richness and diversity of dwelling types spanning both the vernacular and the high style, the period from after the Civil War through the First World War was vigorous. Walking several blocks along any of the major north-south streets reveals a rich mixture Victorian-era revival styles mixed with early twentieth century four-squares, cottage and bungalow styles and Colonial-revival styles that richen the fabric. The residential areas to the east also exhibit an evolution within their vernacular forms. From the earliest transverse gabled side-passage or hall-parlor plan houses through the transition of the small gable-front homes to the gradual inclusion of a small projecting bay, these smaller homes reflect the same influences and gradual change of taste. Often these homes bring about the most direct reflection of a community's tastes, not unlike the comparison of artistic expression by native craftspeople and artisans to the trained art of academic artists. It is this intertwining of the two levels of architecture that bring a depth of expression to Easton's historic core.

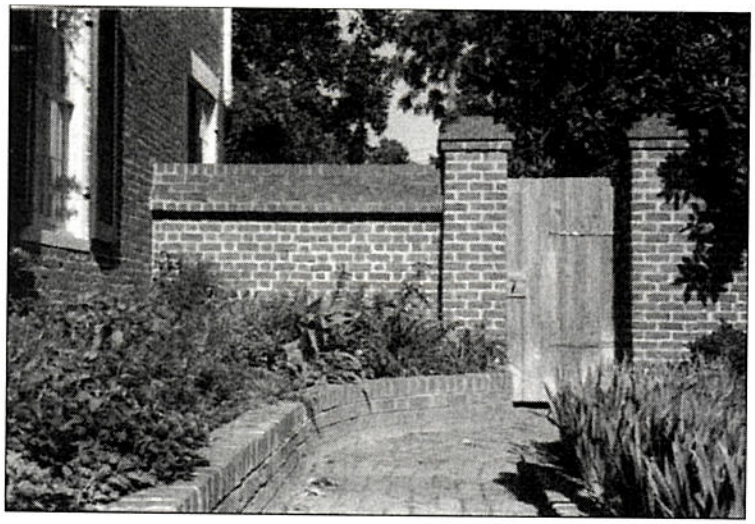
What also sets Easton apart is the continuity of building styles into the twentieth century. As the Great Depression and World War II left their imprint on this community the results continued the gradual transition of style including fine examples of the mid-century picturesque types employing high-quality materials and craftsmanship that served to further enhance their surroundings. If the journey along one of those main residential streets continued towards Idlewild Park, one would be gently lead towards the middle of the twentieth rather than abruptly abandoned there.

EASTON'S HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Easton's Historic District Commission arises directly from a series of community-based preservation initiatives that have served this community well since at least the first quarter of the Twentieth century.

Among the first groups to advance the cause of protecting Easton's historic core was the Talbot County Garden Club. Club members undertook planting and beautification projects that continued from the 1920's through into mid-century. As the pent-up business boom began to explode after the Depression and World War II, the Garden Club took on another role, albeit perhaps a natural extension of their civic projects. As downtown business began to "improve and modernize", Club members convinced owners to make improvements that were sympathetic to the architecture of the buildings and that reinforced the streetscape character. With volunteer expertise from architect Dr. H. Chandlee Foreman, members were able to convince several key businesses to follow this general plan, setting into motion the foundation of Easton's modern preservation ethic. One of the first merchants to set this example was Shannahan and Wrightson Hardware, followed by the Easton National Bank, the Tidewater Inn and then the Chesapeake and Potomac (C&P) Telephone Company.

These initiatives, in combination with the significant potential for change presented by the construction of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in 1952, prompted Easton to proactively manage expected future growth by enacting one of the first planning and zoning ordinances in Maryland



As in many smaller towns, pressure to provide for public services, including parking, became a rallying point for two key non-profits to further the cause of preservation. In 1956 the Talbot County Historical Society purchased its

headquarters building to prevent acquisition of the property for a parking lot. This first purchase began the Society's expansion into its current downtown campus of historic buildings. A decade and a half later Historic Easton, Inc. began the first of its efforts to conserve downtown's history. The group took up the efforts of Anne Lockhart to preserve four mid-nineteenth century frame buildings known as the Langsdale Houses. Between 1972 and 1979 Historic Easton successfully saved three of the four buildings, relocating two onto Bay Street and renovating a third. The group has also been responsible for several other preservation initiatives, including the survey of the core downtown historic resources, preparation and nomination of the Town's National Register Historic District as well as numerous advocacy and outreach efforts. Also springing from the group's efforts is the local Easton Historic Preservation District administered by the Easton Historic District Commission.

Between 1978 and 1979 the town's Planning and Zoning Ordinance was amended to include protections for the local historic district, creating the commission to review applications and codify the application process. The commission is charged with overseeing "the preservation of sites, structures, and districts of historical, archeological, or architectural significance together with their appurtenances and environmental settings" as part of its public purpose and in the public's best interest. The Easton Historic District Commission is to achieve this mission via five main goals:

- To enhance the quality of life and safeguard the historical and cultural heritage of Easton
- To strengthen the local economy
- To stabilize and improve property values for such sites, structures, or districts
- To foster civic beauty
- To promote the preservation and appreciation of such sites, structures and districts for the education and welfare of the residents of Easton and Talbot County.

The ordinance sets forth the Commission as a seven-member, volunteer panel appointed by the Mayor and Council of Easton for a three-year term. Commission members are required to have professional training, practical

experience or demonstrated special interest in one of several fields related to preservation, architecture, history, archeology, museum fields or anthropology. At least two members must have formal professional training and meet United States Department of the Interior professional proficiency standards. A majority of Commission members must be Easton residents; for non-resident membership an individual must contribute special professional or academic qualifications. There are two officer positions, Chairperson and Vice Chairperson, elected from the Commission membership. Commission members may be re-appointed by the Mayor and Council and Commission officers may be re-elected. The commission meets in regular public meetings at the Town offices and the Commission is authorized to utilize any needed resources of the Town of Easton to perform its duties.

Among the specific powers and duties of the Easton Historic District Commission is the authorization to conduct needed survey, studies and the like to ensure that all appropriate sites, districts and structures are protected. The Commission may designate the Maryland Historical Trust to research and recommend potential sites, structures, buildings or districts for inclusion under the ordinance. To assist the Commission in fulfilling its primary task of protecting Easton's varied historic resources, it is authorized to create rehabilitation and new construction guidelines such as this document. In appropriate cases, the Commission may accept easements or other types of gifts or donations to carry out its public duties. Additionally, the Commission is authorized to define its operational rules as well as to take broader action, as necessary, to fulfill its public mission, goals and duties.

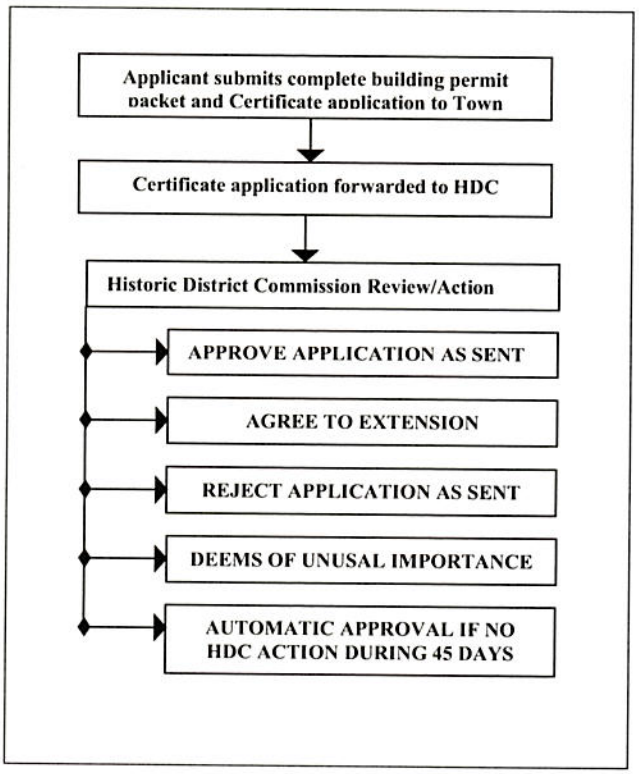
As part of its overall mission, the Historic District Commission may also seek to create new districts or expand current districts, as well as designate specific landmarks after appropriate study. The Commission submits its recommendation to the Mayor and Town Council for consideration and action. Currently, the Easton Historic District Commission is responsible for overseeing two local historic districts. The first is a smaller district surrounding the old Third Haven Meeting House and the second is a broader area known as the "Old Easton District". This district is approximately bounded by Aurora Street, Brook Lane, Harrison Street, Washington Street, Gravel and New Alleys, Brewer's and Turners Lanes and North and Dover Streets. There is also a small section of this district in the area of Bay and Washington Streets.

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

Currently property owners or occupants within the Easton Historic Districts desiring to undertake any exterior work that would result in a visible change to a

structure, site or building that can be seen from a public right-of-way, must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Commission. This Certificate is in addition to any required construction, grading, demolition or other applicable permit. To streamline the process and to ensure that all needed municipal reviews are undertaken, the application for all permits are grouped as a single package. The applicant is responsible for submitting all needed application information in addition to the appropriate fees. A Certificate is necessary before any work may begin on the proposed project. Routine maintenance that does not alter the building's exterior or other visual characteristics of resources within Easton's Historic Districts does not require a permit.

Once complete permit and Certificate documents have been submitted, a hearing before the Historic District Commission is scheduled. The Commission must review the request within forty-five days from submission. Typically, the commission will either approve or decline a request. The Commission and the applicant may also mutually agree to extend the application period to refine the proposal or answer additional questions. If there is no action or decision reported back on a Certificate application within forty-five days, it is automatically approved.

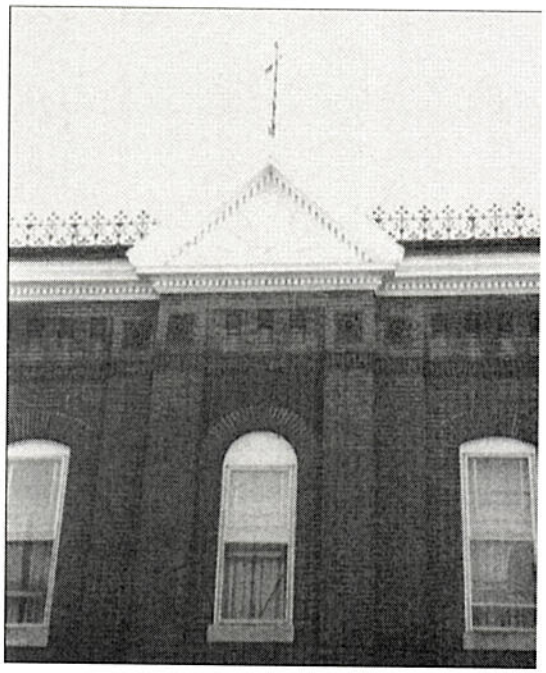


The Commission may also find that the building, site or structure that is the subject of an application request is of unusual importance to the Town, State or the nation. As a result of that finding, the Commission members, in conjunction

with the applicant, will try to develop an economically feasible plan to preserve the resource. If the Commission determines that the proposed project will materially impair the resource, they may reject the application for the Certificate of Appropriateness. This finding of unusual importance also provides a ninety-day period for the Commission and the applicant to explore viable means of preserving the historic resource.

The Commission may approve construction, alteration, moving or demolition plans of significant historic resources when certain conditions are met. The Commission must find that one of three conditions exist: the Town or a majority of its citizens would be denied a major improvement or benefit without the approval, or that it is not in best interests of the Town or a majority of its citizens to withhold approval or that the retention of the resource causes undue financial hardship to the owner.

The applicant has the right to withdraw an application from action by the Commission at any point during the review period. Decisions of the Easton Historic District Commission may be appealed within thirty days of the decision. The Board of Zoning Appeals hears the first appeal; further appeals may be taken before the Circuit Court of Talbot County. Failure to comply with Commission decisions or other violations of the ordinance shall be treated as a Municipal infraction and penalized accordingly. Each day that a violation occurs shall be penalized as a separate offense.



The Commission is also charged with preventing demolition by neglect of buildings, structures and sites under their purview. The Commission shall instruct the Zoning Inspector to serve written notice to the property owner or owners,

tenant or other party responsible for the property's maintenance after appropriate documentation of decay or neglect. The written notice shall outline the problems and conditions, provide a thirty-day period for repairs to begin and a reasonable period for work to be completed. The recipient of the notice will be advised of their right to request a hearing within ten days to receive an explanation of the need for the citations within the repair notice. Such hearing must be held after at least a thirty-day notice period and the Commission must send written notification of the hearing to the property owner or owners as well as any interested citizens or organizations. If the hearing determines that that corrective steps are needed the Zoning Inspector may present a Final Notice for compliance. In the event of property owner's failure to comply with the repair notices and the Final Notice, the Commission is empowered to request the Zoning Inspector to take legal action.

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION

The *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* were originally created in 1976 to determine the appropriateness of proposed changes to income-producing National Register buildings whose owners wished to take advantage of beneficial federal tax considerations. Since then they have become the basis for the majority of locally created design guidelines for historic districts. Revised in 1983 and again in 1992, the current *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* are:

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.

2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.

3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.

4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.

5. Distinctive features, finishes and construction techniques or examples or craftsmanship that characterize a historic building shall be preserved.

6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. When the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive

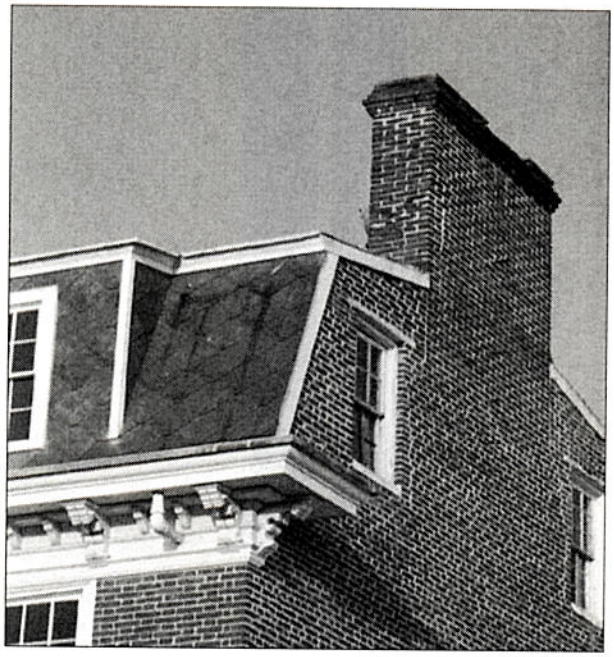
feature, the new features shall match the old in design, color, texture and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.

7. Chemical and physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.

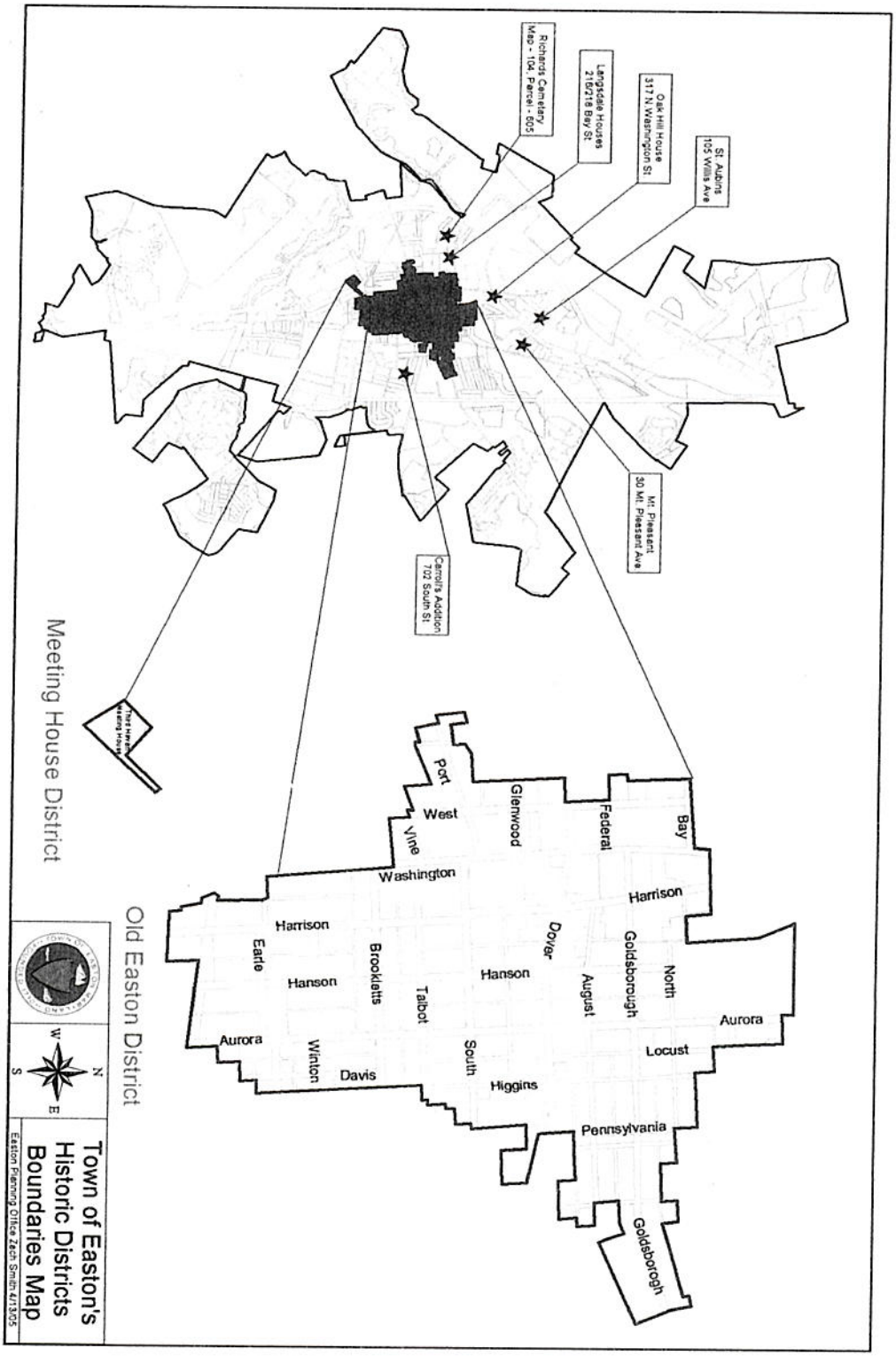
8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.

9. New additions, exterior alterations or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize a property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

10. New additions or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.



MAP OF EASTON'S HISTORIC DISTRICTS


St. Aubins
105 Willis Ave
Oak Hill House
317 N Washington St.
Langsdale Houses
216/218 Bay St.
Richards Cemetery
Map - 104, Parcel - 605
Mt. Pleasant
30 Mt. Pleasant Ave
Carroll's Addition
702 South St
Meeting House District
Old Easton District
Port
West
Vine
Washington
Glenwood
Federal
Bay
Harrison
Harrison
Earle
Hanson
Brooklyn
Talbot
Hanson
Dover
August
Goldsborough
North
Aurora
Aurora
Winton
Davis
South
Higgins
Locust
Pennsylvania
Goldsborough
Town of Easton's
Historic Districts
Boundaries Map
Easton Planning Office Zach Smith 4/13/05

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