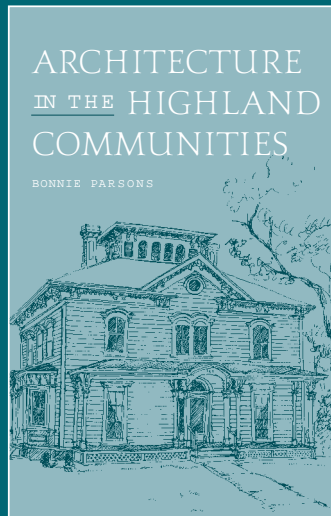


NEW RESOURCE

Architecture in the Highland Communities

As you drive through the Highlands, you've undoubtedly noticed those special houses and buildings that stand out for their architectural beauty. Now you can learn about the specific features that contribute to their character and trace the historical trends that influenced their construction with the help of HCI's new publication, *Architecture in the Highland Communities*. Written by historic preservation



planner Bonnie Parsons, the guide describes features of architectural styles through the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries as they were interpreted in the Highland Communities, and is illustrated with many fine local examples. For a full-color paper copy, please contact Jane Christensen, jchristensen@ttor.org or 413/268-8219, and provide a mailing address and \$5 per copy. Your local library, town hall, and historical commission will have a copy of the guide, or it can be downloaded from our website at www.highlandcommunities.org.



THE HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE REGION

Ashfield	Conway	Huntington	Peru
Becket	Cummington	Leyden	Plainfield
Blandford	Florida	Middlefield	Rowe
Buckland	Goshen	Monroe	Russell
Charlemont	Granville	Monterey	Sandisfield
Chester	Hawley	Montgomery	Savoy
Chesterfield	Heath	New Marlborough	Shelburne
Colrain	Hinsdale	Otis	Tolland
			Tyringham
			Washington
			Westhampton
			Williamsburg
			Windsor
			Worthington

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Howard Mason, Russell



Few people have been as involved in land use and environmental issues in the Highlands as long as Howard Mason. When he first moved to Russell in the 1950s, people asked him why he would want to live "at the ends of the earth." Since then the Highlands have certainly changed, and Howard has seen much of the development occur.

As a professional forester and member of Russell's Planning Board and Conservation Commission, he is integrally involved in all development in the town. Howard worked for Peck Lumber for over 30 years, where he managed forests and assessed the potential of woodlots throughout the hill-towns until his retirement in 1982. The Forestry Commission and the Tree Farm Committee, formed to recognize good forest management practices, now draw on his expertise.

His concern over diminishing forests and open spaces sparked his involvement in the Jacob's Ladder Trail Advisory Committee, Russell's Forestry Commission and the Tree Farm Committee. When he was younger, he enjoyed whitewater canoeing and hiking, and was chair of the Westfield Whitewater races for several years. Of the many activities he's been involved with since he first drove through the hilltowns 50 years ago, he says his true vocation is "trying to protect the area and have things develop in a reasonable way."

HCI SALUTES ALL OF THE REGION'S VOLUNTEERS. TO NOMINATE SOMEONE FOR OUR VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT, CONTACT US AT 413/268-8219.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, OR TO JOIN OUR MAILING LIST, CONTACT US AT:

HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE (HCI)

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THE HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE
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HIGHLAND HAPPENINGS

VOLUME 4

ISSUE 1

WINTER 2005



Supporting
community efforts to
conserve the distinctive
natural and cultural
landscapes of the



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SANDISFIELD



© T. TOR

HAWLEY



© W. SWETSER

FLORIDA

BUCKLAND

Highlands region
of Massachusetts

HIGHLAND HAPPENINGS

A NEWSLETTER OF THE HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE (HCI)



Providing a Voice for the Farming Community

‘Rural character’ is a highly-valued feature of the Highlands, and though it is a hard term to define, most people would agree that active farms are an essential component. Supporting agriculture is a top priority for many communities, but town officials often don’t know how their decisions will influence local farmers. An increasingly popular method for providing a voice for the farming community is through a town agricultural commission.

A town agricultural commission is an appointed committee made up primarily of farmers who work with their community to promote the benefits of agriculture. Pioneered in the southeastern communities of Massachusetts where development is threatening the few remaining farms, agricultural commissions are growing as an effective means of supporting existing farms and raising residents’ awareness about the benefits of a viable local agricultural economy.

Twelve Massachusetts towns have formed agricultural commissions in the last two years, including the towns of Hatfield, Hadley, and Whately. Some activities that agriculture commissions have undertaken include conducting inventories of farmland, providing information, training and advocacy for farmers, mediating farm issues, and helping to advance

farmland protection. “Our Agricultural Commission provided a formal framework for people to get together and brainstorm ideas to support local farms”, says Bob Wagner, chair of the Hatfield Agricultural Commission. Creating outreach materials like a farm stand map and a “Living Near a Farm” brochure are other common ways of getting the community more involved in and supportive of local farms.

Because Agricultural Commissions are voluntary and have no statutory responsibilities, their mission and activities can be tailored to the specific character and needs of each community. For example, the Hatfield Agricultural Commission is working on an outreach brochure and an agricultural art exhibit, and has been asked by the Board of Selectman to get involved in agriculture-related issues. The Commission weighed in on creating a separate water rate for agricultural properties, and successfully worked on a Right to Farm Bylaw for the town. Though Ag Commissions themselves have no regulatory authority, they can provide feedback to the Planning Board or the Conservation Commission on proposed projects that have an impact on agriculture.

An added benefit of agricultural commissions is an extra point on a town’s application to the Commonwealth Capital Fund, the consolidated grant application for many important sources of state grants to municipalities.

(Continued on page 2)



**AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONS
GIVE A VOICE TO THE FARMING
COMMUNITY IN TOWN AFFAIRS.**

© D. FEET

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HCI has recently awarded a small grant to Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) to help farmers and other interested individuals form agricultural commissions in their towns. 🌿

SEE OUR EVENTS SECTION FOR INFORMATION ABOUT UPCOMING INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT CISA AT 1-877/965-7100, OR ANNIE@BUYLOCALFOOD.COM.

Fundraising in a Small Town: Lessons from the Field

SUBMITTED BY ASHFIELD RESIDENT AND HCI STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBER JUDY HAUPT

“Going once, going twice....and sold to...”, and so went the nearly two-hour auction to benefit Ashfield’s precious Town Common. These 4.5 acres are the heart and soul of Ashfield, and after the town decided to purchase it, determining how to raise half of the \$200,000 purchase price was left to the appointed Town Center Land Use Study Committee.

Committee member Ann Browning, an Ashfield resident for just 5 years, has undertaken the nitty-gritty of this fundraiser and shared the details of the Committee’s various endeavors. The first step was sending a letter soliciting outright donations or pledges to over 900 property owners and renters, as well as people with a past association with Ashfield. From that initial mailing, close to \$44,000 was either pledged or donated. In October, a special booth was set up at Ashfield’s annual Fall Festival to raise visitor awareness about the project. Donation cans were at every exhibitor’s booth and donations were solicited at the parking area. Approximately \$3,500 was raised in this fashion.

In November, an auction featuring more than 80 donations from Ashfield crafters and businesses was held. Despite a

relatively small turnout, more than \$5,000 was raised, with participants bidding on everything from earrings to a ski week in Vail, Colorado.

Because many of Ashfield’s residents were adamant about permanently preserving a portion of the 4.5 acre parcel as open space, a conservation restriction is in its final stages. More donations are expected after the CR is in place.

Local organizations have been very helpful in this effort. A Highland Communities Initiative small grant has been instrumental in lowering the expenses of the mailings and professional survey. Also, many hours of volunteer time from the Franklin Land Trust, which will hold the conservation restriction, have gone into this monumental effort.

Unfortunately, another funding source is not available to Ashfield for this project. Three years ago Ashfield voted down the Community Preservation Act. If the CPA had been in effect, it would have supplied a substantial portion of the cost for the Town Common. At the time of the CPA vote, the town did not want to force a perceived tax burden on large landowners and farmers, or those who were otherwise financially strapped. Despite exemptions for low-income property owners, the CPA, which would have amounted to an average of a \$40 surcharge for most households, was voted down. However, it’s not too late for Ashfield and every other Highland town to reconsider taking advantage of this valuable funding opportunity!

To date, over \$58,000 has been raised from 125 donors towards the Town Common project. Whether or not the town can reach the goal of \$100,000 for this purchase remains to be seen, but thanks to the generosity of many people, we are well on our way. 🌿

CREATIVE AND WIDESPREAD FUNDRAISING EFFORTS IN ASHFIELD SUPPORTED THE PRESERVATION OF THE TOWN COMMON.

Keeping the Highlands Green with Grass-fed Beef

These days, beef eaters are paying more attention to the quality and source of their steak. For many, concerns go beyond those of BSE, or “mad cow disease.” Increasing numbers of people are also interested in the environment in which the animals are raised, the content of their feed, and their impacts on the land. Obtaining this information is not easy, but with the help of the New England Livestock Alliance (NELA), consumers are better able to connect with farmers who produce top quality, grass-fed beef.

NELA is a non-profit cooperative that promotes the production and sale of grass-fed beef. It works to ensure that farmers who raise such cattle receive the price they deserve. “It takes extra attention, but it’s worth it,” says NELA staffer Bryan Pettrucci. According to Pettrucci, the demand for grass fed beef is growing tremendously, and NELA is actively seeking additional suppliers in the Highlands, where the rolling hills are particularly well-suited for grazing cattle.

NELA buys livestock from farmers who can certify that their stock has been raised following the Alliance’s practices, and resells it across the country. NELA markets two different types of grass-fed beef—one that is entirely grass-fed and raised without antibiotics, and another is finished on grain and allows for the use of therapeutic antibiotics.

Grass-fed beef has several benefits to consumers. Meat from grass-fed animals contains high levels of healthy Omega-3 fatty acids that are absent in feed-lot animals. With NELA’s rigorous record-keeping system, it’s possible to trace back

GRASS-FED BEEF HAS BENEFITS FOR FARMERS, CONSUMERS, AND THE ENVIRONMENT.



any individual cut of meat to the farm it came from—another advantage over the typical beef found in the grocery store. And then there’s the feel-good factor: consumers of grass-fed beef know that they are supporting their neighbors’ efforts to preserve a local economy of working farms.

NELA also provides technical assistance to farmers, including breeding and forage management strategies. They recommend a management-intensive grazing approach that keeps the animals frequently moving to new pasture. This method allows the land to recuperate and the animals to benefit from a steady supply of fresh grass. Many say it even makes the meat tastier. 🌿

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT NELA’S PROGRAMS, REQUIREMENTS, AND PRODUCTS ARE AVAILABLE ON THEIR WEBSITE AT WWW.NEHBC.ORG/NELA.HTML. CONSUMERS CAN CONNECT WITH SOURCES OF GRASS-FED BEEF BY CALLING THE ALLIANCE AT 413/443-8356.

U P C O M I N G E V E N T S

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONS INFORMATIONAL MEETING

February 16 | Location and time TBD
February 23 | Location and time TBD
March 3 | Location and time TBD
Call CISA at 1-877/965-7100.

CONSERVING LAND AND HABITAT: THE MIGHTY MOOSE SLIDESHOW AND LAND CONSERVATION OPTIONS PRESENTATION

February 17 | Goshen Town Hall | 7–9PM
Free.

ZONING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

February 24 | Stanton Hall, Huntington | 7–9PM
\$5 per person, pre-registration required.

MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION COMMISSIONS ANNUAL CONFERENCE*

March 5 | Holy Cross, Worcester
Visit maccweb.org.

MASSACHUSETTS LAND TRUST COALITION CONFERENCE*

March 19 | Worcester
Call 978/840-4446 x1929.

CITIZEN PLANNER TRAINING COLLABORATIVE CONFERENCE*

March 19 | Worcester
Visit umass.edu/masscptc.

ARCHITECTURAL BUS TOUR OF THE HIGHLANDS

April 9
\$20 per person, pre-registration required.

STONE BY STONE: THE HISTORY OF STONE WALLS LECTURE AND FIELD WALK

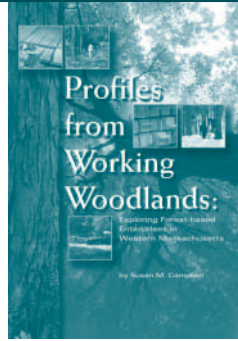
April 16 | Sandisfield
\$15 per person, pre-registration required.

*Scholarships Available through HCI. Contact us for more information.

For more information on these events, please visit www.highlandcommunities.org or call 413/258-8219.

New Book Highlights Local Forest Businesses

The Massachusetts Woodlands Institute (MWI), a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting forest conservation and enhancement, has recently published a book entitled *Profiles from Working Woodlands: Exploring Forest-based Enterprises in Western Massachusetts*. Beginning with an essay on how and why small forest-based businesses are an effective conservation strategy for our region's woodlands, the book uses numerous existing businesses to illustrate the many ways that the forest can support family livelihoods. It also discusses the potential for strengthening the local forest economy by adding value to wood, recreational opportunities, and understory crops, and marketing them to local niche markets. 🌿



FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO ORDER A COPY, VISIT THE MWI WEBSITE AT WWW.MASSWOODLANDSINSTITUTE.ORG OR CALL 413/397-8800. COST: \$15.

Got a Zoning Question? We'll Give You an Answer!

Do you have a nagging question about your zoning bylaw, or a section that you just don't understand? Come to the HCI Zoning Question and Answer Session on February 24 and get answers from the experts. Bob Ritchie, Assistant Attorney General, and Glen Garber, Center for Rural Massachusetts staffer and professional planner, will offer legal and planning perspectives on your zoning questions. The workshop will be held at Stanton Hall in Huntington from 7-9 PM and costs \$5 per person. Please pre-register with your questions or general topics of interest by calling 413/268-8219 or emailing jchristensen@ttor.org. 🌿

Funding for Facilitators Available

Is there a lightning rod issue dividing your town? Rather than let the issue fester, consider holding a community conversation with the help of a professional facilitator. These meetings are open to the community at large, and create an environment in which people can feel comfortable openly voicing their concerns and opinions. The goal of such an event is to build understanding, not necessarily to reach a solution, but

much can be accomplished during this type of open dialogue. This year, HCI is providing funding for communities to hire a facilitator to conduct these types of meetings. If you are interested in holding a community conversation with the help of a facilitator, please contact Wendy Sweetser at 413/268-8219. 🌿

Video Resources

If you're looking for something to watch on one of these cold winter nights, consider borrowing one of the videos HCI has available. *Planning the Future of the Farm*, a recording of a workshop HCI held last November, contains valuable information about estate and property taxes, agricultural preservation restrictions, and methods of passing the farm onto the next generation. We also offer *Saving Place*, a video about how to "manage growth in rural New England while identifying and protecting community character." If you'd like to organize a group screening or share this information with your local cable access station, give us a call! 🌿

HCI SMALL GRANT AWARDS

- Funded by a \$5,000 grant, the Cummington Planning Board held a series of successful neighborhood meetings to solicit residents' opinions for an update of its Open Space and Recreation Plan.
- The Heath Historical Commission used a \$5,000 grant to research and prepare documents needed to nominate its Town Center, "one of the best-preserved colonial town centers in the state," to the National Register of Historic Places.
- A grant of \$3,500 allowed Ashfield's Town Center Committee to fund a survey of town center land as part of a community effort to purchase this property.
- A grant of \$5,000 will assist Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) with its efforts to create Agricultural Commissions in Highland towns.
- The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission will use a \$2,000 grant to assist the Town of Savoy in work on open space preservation and right-to-farm bylaws.