

HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN  
ELEMENT  
TOWNSHIP OF BERNARDS  
SOMERSET COUNTY

Adopted

April 4, 2006

Prepared by:

**Bernards Township Planning Board**

With assistance from Banisch Associates, Inc.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Bernards Township is endowed with historic buildings, structures and districts that remind us of the important role this region played in the revolutionary war. The historic farmsteads that surrounded the crossroads settlements at Basking Ridge and Liberty Corner serve as reminders of the lifestyles of those early settlers and their descendants.

As Bernards faces the challenges of a new century, the town's historic resources will likely come under attack in some quarters. While the preservation of historic sites and districts serves to promote the value of surrounding properties, many of these sites have the potential for significantly more development. When the real estate development opportunity afforded by the township zoning is sufficiently attractive, historic buildings will come under threat. The purpose of this historic preservation plan is to identify existing historic and cultural resources as listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places and set forth the criteria that is used to evaluate such resources and may be applied to potentially historically significant resources found within Bernards Township.

## **STATUTORY AUTHORIZATION**

The Municipal Land Use Law (NJSA 40:55D-1 et. seq.) enables the Planning Board to adopt a historic preservation plan element as part of the municipal master plan. According to NJSA 40:55D-28b (10) "a historic preservation plan element: (a) indicating the location and significance of historic sites and historic districts; (b) identifying the standards used to assess worthiness for historic site or district identification; and (c) analyzing the impact of each component and element of the master plan on the preservation of historic sites and districts.

## **LOCATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORIC SITES AND HISTORIC DISTRICTS**

Designated Historic Sites And Districts - A number of historic sites and historic districts in Bernards Township have been listed on the New Jersey and National Register of Historic Places. The State and National Register listing for Bernards Township is provided in Table 1 below. The listing is compiled and maintained by the NJDEP Division of Parks and Forestry, Historic Preservation Office and identifies the general location of sites and districts within the Township.

Listing on the State and/or Federal Register of Historic Places provides protection against destruction of historic resources when state or federal government funding is involved. However, listing on historic registers does not preclude the destruction or substantial alteration of historic resources when no government funds are involved.

The DEP provides the following explanation of the historic places, sites and districts that are listed on the Register:

“The listings for the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places listings include properties and historic districts in New Jersey for which a formal action was taken by the State Historic Preservation Officer or designee. The listings are current through the end of 2002, and the HPO will update these listings on a periodic basis to reflect ongoing additions and corrections.”

**TABLE 1**  
**NJ DEP - Historic Preservation Office**  
**New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places**  
**Last Update: 11/21/2005**

***Bernards Township, Somerset County NJ***

**The Academy (ID#2467)**

15 West Oak Street  
SR: 11/25/1975  
NR: 7/21/1976 (NR Reference #: 76001185)

**Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead (ID#4200)**

450 King George Road  
COE: 5/14/2001  
SR: 6/9/2003  
NR: 5/5/2004 (NR Reference #: 03000868)  
(Referred to in COE as "Reverend Samuel Kennedy Parsonage Farmstead")

**Alward House (ID#2468)**

40 Mount Airy Road  
SR: 2/5/1986  
NR: 3/13/1986 (NR Reference #: 86000388)

**Liberty Corner Historic District (ID#2473)**

Church Street, Lyons Road, and Valley Road  
SR: 8/16/1991  
NR: 10/11/1991 (NR Reference #: 91001477)

**Basking Ridge Historic District (ID#2469)**

North & South Finley and North & South Maple avenues; Lewis, West, Craig & Oak streets  
DOE: 8/18/1994  
(DOE/Owner Objection)

**Lyons Railroad Station (ID#2474)**

Lyons Road  
SR: 3/17/1984  
NR: 6/22/1984 (NR Reference #: 84002805)  
(Thematic Nomination of Operating Passenger Railroad Stations)

**Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church (ID#2470)**

6 East Oak Street  
SR: 10/24/1974  
NR: 12/31/1974 (NR Reference #: 74001190)

**Lord Stirling Manor Site (ID#2475)**

96 Lord Stirling Road  
SR: 12/1/1976  
NR: 5/22/1978 (NR Reference #: 78001795)

**Coffee House (ID#2471)**

214 North Maple Avenue  
SR: 3/28/1977  
NR: 11/7/1977 (NR Reference #: 77000906)

**Veterans Administration Complex (ID#2476)**

Knollcroft Road north of Valley Road  
SHPO Opinion: 6/12/1980  
DOE: 11/26/1980

**Franklin Corners Historic District (ID#2472)**

Hardscrabble and Childs roads  
SR: 12/12/1974  
NR: 5/12/1975 (NR Reference #: 75001159)

The State Historic Preservation Office provides the following glossary for the abbreviations and terminology used in these listings:

**COE:** A Certification of Eligibility is issued by the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Officer. For properties not already listed on the New Jersey Register of

Historic Places, a COE satisfies a prerequisite to apply for funds from the New Jersey Historic Trust, as well as several county preservation funding programs.

**DOE:** A Determination of Eligibility is issued by the Keeper of the National Register, National Park Service, Department of Interior. It is a formal certification that a property is eligible for registration.

**Local Certified Historic District:** Although not necessarily listed in the Registers, Local Certified Historic Districts have been recognized by the National Park Service as 1) meeting the criteria for registration, and 2) governed by a state or local statute or ordinance that protects the historic resources of the district.

**MPDF:** A Multiple Property Documentation Form is the core of a Multiple Property Submission, the format currently used to register groups of properties that are related by historical association or theme, but are not contiguous and need not be nominated all at the same time. A Multiple Property Documentation Form contains the historic contexts, and the background historical, geographical, and architectural information about the group of properties being nominated, and is accompanied by one or more Registration Forms that describe specific properties. Together, the MPDF and its associated Registration Forms comprise a Multiple Property Submission.

**MPS:** A Multiple Property Submission is the name given to the current format for nominating groups of properties related by historical association or theme, but which are not contiguous and need not be nominated all at the same time. In 1986, this format replaced the previously used Thematic and Multiple Resource Area (TRA/MRA) formats. A MPS consists of a Multiple Property Documentation Form and its associated Registration Forms. In the following lists, properties registered as part of a Multiple Property Submission indicate the name of the MPS of which it was a part.

**MRA:** Multiple Resource Area refers to a format used in the 1980s to register groups of properties related by historical association or theme. This format was replaced by the MPS in 1986.

**NHL:** National Historic Landmark refers to a designation by the National Park Service that a property has national significance. Properties designated NHLs are automatically listed in the National Register.

**NR:** This abbreviation indicates that a property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

**NR Reference #:** This number is provided for properties which have been included in the National Register Information System (NRIS) database, which is available online from the National Park Service.

**See Main Entry / Filed Location:** An entry followed by this text indicates a property or district that is in more than one county or municipality and refers to the main entry. The main entry provides a list of the additional counties and municipalities in which the property is located ("Also located in") and indicates the filing location at the HPO.

**SHPO Opinion:** This is an opinion of eligibility issued by the State Historic Preservation Officer. It is in response to a federally funded activity that will have an effect on historic properties not listed on the National Register.

**SI&A #:** Bridges with SHPO opinions may also have a Structure Inventory and Appraisal Number which indicates bridges that are part of the Federal Bridge Inspection Program.

**SR:** This abbreviation indicates that a property is listed on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places (State Register).

**Thematic Nomination (TRA):** Thematic Nominations were prepared for groups of properties all related under a common theme or a single property type. This format was replaced by the MPS in 1986.

## **STANDARDS USED TO ASSESS WORTHINESS**

The standards used to assess worthiness for historic site or district identification are listed below and may be used to encourage additional designations to the Historic Register. The Bernards Township State and National Historic Register sites and districts were listed on the State's inventory after review and formal action by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) based upon a nomination to the register, or on information provided on a particular site or district. These listings are based upon eligibility criteria that the SHPO uses to evaluate historic resources.

According to the SHPO website, "The listings itemize the buildings, structures, sites, objects, and districts listed on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places (SR) and the National Register of Historic Places (NR). They also include resources that have received Certifications of Eligibility (COE), opinions of eligibility from the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO Opinion), or Determinations of Eligibility (DOE) from the Keeper of the National Register. *These properties and historic districts all meet the New Jersey and National Register criteria for significance in American history, archaeology, architecture, engineering or culture, and possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.* Properties that have been entered on the New Jersey and/or National Registers of Historic Places are listed by their historic names, which may be different from their current names. Properties that have SHPO Opinions or DOE's are listed by their historic name, when known."

The criteria for evaluation of a site, building, structure or object as to whether it should be listed is provided by the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service National Register, History and Education. This evaluation criteria is reproduced below, and was used as the basis for evaluating the Bernards Township Historic Register resources that are listed on the Register.

## NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- A.** That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B.** That are associated with the lives of significant persons in or past; or
- C.** That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D.** That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

### Criteria Considerations

Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the National Register. However, such properties *will qualify* if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or if they fall within the following categories:

- a.** A religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance; or
- b.** A building or structure removed from its original location but which is primarily significant for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event; or
- c.** A birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no appropriate site or building associated with his or her productive life; or
- d.** A cemetery that derives its primary importance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events; or
- e.** A reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived; or
- f.** A property primarily commemorative in intent if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own exceptional significance; or
- g.** A property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance.

## **EVALUATION OF IMPACT OF OTHER MASTER PLAN ELEMENTS**

The provisions of other master plan elements can have direct bearing on the preservation of historic sites and districts. Proposals for future land use, circulation or community facilities can directly affect these resources. As required by statute, the impact of other components and elements of the master plan on the preservation of historic sites and districts are addressed below.

### Goals and Objectives

Key Master Plan policies and recommendations affecting historic sites and districts may be found in the goals and objectives in the Bernards Township 2003 Master Plan. These goals and objectives acknowledge the importance of Bernards' historic places and sites and their contribution to the Township's identity as a historic community and the quality of life enjoyed by Bernards' residents.

Historic Preservation-related Goals and Objectives from the February 2003 Master Plan:

7. To maintain the mixed use character and protect the unique quality and character of the villages of Basking Ridge and Liberty Corner.
8. To promote the preservation of the Township's historic sites and districts.

### Historic Preservation Objectives

1. The distinctive character of the historic villages of Basking Ridge, Franklin Corners and Liberty Corner should be maintained.
2. Coordinate the identification and preservation of historic areas, historic sites, landscapes, archeological sites and scenic corridors within the municipality, and maintain a municipal central repository of data collected.
3. Encourage and promote the protection of historic and other cultural resources.
4. Promote the adaptive reuse of historic structures in ways that respect architectural and historic integrity.
5. Encourage the preservation of historic buildings and structures.
6. Promote and encourage these historic preservation objectives through a combination of strategies: encourage private, voluntary initiatives; administer and enforce existing design guidelines and requirements; and utilize Township and other funds, where appropriate.

### General Objectives

In addition to the Township's goals and objectives articulated in the Master Plan discussed above, the Master Plan also cited the legislated purposes of the Municipal Land Use Law which have been adopted as general Township planning objectives (page 8), including the following purpose:

“10. To promote the conservation of historic sites and districts, open space, energy resources and valuable natural resources in the State and to prevent urban sprawl and degradation of the environment through improper use of land.”

### Land Use Plan

Bernards Township’s Land Use Plan calls attention to the importance of conserving community character, both within and beyond the limits of the Township’s historic districts. Key recommendations of the land use plan call for scrutiny of bulk and intensity standards that can precipitate change in historic districts and structures.

The Land Use plan discusses a series of planning considerations and policy statements related to managing growth and change in the context of preserving historic character:

- “. . . The rural character that pervades the edges of Bernards Township, which includes scenic vistas, wooded hillsides, agricultural fields, expansive floodplains and historic settlements, is highly susceptible to degradation. . . .”
- Regulatory techniques such as Floor Area Ratio, that may be “useful in protecting the character of historic villages or residential neighborhoods, by preventing the introduction of large buildings, which frequently disregard historic architectural styles, village form or neighborhood scale.”
- “The scale and character of historic villages is also a major concern, and Liberty Corner and Basking Ridge stand as testimonials to the historic past of Bernards Township. These mixed-use village areas have a fabric, which is susceptible to damage by the removal and replacement of older and smaller buildings with new larger buildings. Yet, in many cases, prevailing zoning standards permit a building envelope, based on setbacks, coverage and other standards, which can accommodate substantially more development than the historic forms. Strategies should be directed at preventing the removal of older homes or other buildings that play a key role in the streetscape and unique character of these historic areas.”
- “A principal objective of this land use plan is that the highly prized community character and quality of life be protected and maintained, throughout Bernards Township, whether in newly constructed or older suburban neighborhoods, historic settlements or rural portions of the Township. Protecting these features will likely require a combination of regulatory techniques, including carefully crafted strategies to protect and enhance these assets.”

### Conservation Plan

The Conservation Plan acknowledges the following recommendation in relation to the conservation of valuable historic resources:

- “Basking Ridge and Liberty Corner are areas which exhibit distinct character with respect to historically significant elements. The building, inter-relationship of buildings and relationship to the street, landscaping, signs, lighting and pedestrian orientation all contribute to this character. The Township should consider design standards which would regulate potential demolition and future construction in a manner that maintains the integrity of these areas.”

### Circulation Plan

The Circulation Plan references recommendations from the Somerset County Scenic Corridor and Roadway Study pertaining to maintaining scenic assets:

- Master plans should coordinate circulation; conservation and historic preservation plan policies with scenic resource protection goals.
- Zoning ordinances can provide "scenic zones" based upon the boundaries of the "view shed" observed from a scenic corridor or roadway. Standards for such zones would provide for development that minimizes visual intrusion on the landscape.

### Community Facilities Plan Element

Bernards Township has been a partner in historic preservation in development of the municipal complex at the former estate of John Jacob Astor. While conversion for municipal use has involved some alterations to the historic mansion and grounds, the substantial open space setting of the mansion has largely been retained, with an entry sequence reminiscent of earlier times.

The Community Facilities Plan notes that “the Hendershot house occupied by the Health Department may require expansion, due to population/service level increases not only in Bernards Township but also in the communities served via interlocal shared service agreements (seven municipalities).” This may provide the opportunity for a historically or context-sensitive architectural addition that reinforces, rather than detracts from the historic character of this section of Basking Ridge.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Establish a Historic Preservation Advisory Committee.

The Township Committee should adopt an ordinance to establish a Historic Preservation Advisory Committee. The Committee should be assigned the following responsibilities:

- (a) Advisory role to the Planning Board and the Board of Adjustment on applications before these Boards; and to the Township Committee on matters that may be referred to the Advisory Committee including historical elements in proposed projects, similar to the role of the Open Space Advisory Committee and the Agricultural Advisory Committee;
- (b) Advocate for preservation activities in the Township.
- (c) Develop recommendations for ordinance proposals for historic preservation.
- (d) Explore the potential for financial and other incentives.

The purpose of the Committee should be to advise and advocate rather than control or exercise approval powers. The Committee is not intended to be vested with authority to regulate changes to the exterior or interior of a structure. The Committee will, however, regularly review and provide advice regarding proposed exterior site alterations in connection with land use decisions by the Planning Board and the Board of Adjustment.

## **SUMMARY**

This Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Municipal Land Use Law statutory criteria authorizing the Planning Board to adopt a Historic Preservation Plan, indicating the location and significance of historic sites and historic districts; the standards used to assess worthiness for historic site or district identification; and the relationship of components and elements of the master plan on the preservation of historic sites and districts.

The historic sites and districts within Bernards Township exhibit a cultural richness which contributes to the quality of life and community values within Bernards Township. Protection of these resources serves to enhance the value of all real estate within their sphere of influence. They also provide a permanent reminder of the scale and character of this place in an earlier time. This historic preservation plan acknowledges the importance of these resources and concludes that the other plan elements of the Bernards Township Master Plan, and specifically including the Land Use Plan Element, substantially advance the objectives of preserving and protecting historic sites and districts in Bernards Township.