

CHAPTER 8:

HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES



Preserve historic and cultural resources to enhance Ridgefield's character and sense of community

OVERVIEW

Preservation of cultural resources, such as historic or significant buildings and sites can:

- provide a sense of identity and stability,
- preserve community character, and
- instill pride in Ridgefield's historical heritage.

An important facet of Ridgefield's character is the ability to blend historic architecture and landscapes with contemporary buildings. The Town should continue to protect historic buildings and features while ensuring that modern development is compatible and complementary to nearby historic resources.



Photo 18: Thomas Hawley House

What do Historic Designations Mean?

Listing on the National and State registers generally provides recognition and some limited protection measures.

The National and State Register designations affect activities involving Federal and / or State funding and may prevent unreasonable destruction of important historic resources.

Pursuant to the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act, citizens can intervene in the proposed demolition of structures listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Local historic district designations afford the highest level of protection. The local historic district commission is given the authority to regulate the construction and demolition of structures and the alteration of architectural features. In cases where materials in support of a local historic district designation were submitted to the State, but ultimately a local historic district was not created, the district is still listed as a State district.

Village Districts, as enabled by the State and adopted by the Town, also promote the preservation of historic buildings and streetscapes. It allows Ridgefield to protect areas that have distinctive character, landscape and historic structures. Within these areas, the Planning and Zoning Commission adopted regulations governing such matters.

HISTORIC RESOURCES IN RIDGEFIELD

Ridgefield is home to a number of recognized historic resources, as shown on the map and in the following table (the letter corresponds with the location of the resource on map). “National” means the National Register of Historic Places; “State” refers to the State Register of Historic Places; and “Local” means it is a local historic district.

Districts	National	State	Local
A. Ridgefield Center Historic District	✓	✓	
B. Weir Farm Historic District	✓	✓	
C. West Mountain Historic District	✓	✓	
D. Titicus Historic District	*	✓	
E. Ridgebury		✓	
F. Ridgefield Historic District #1		✓	✓
G. Ridgefield Historic District #2		✓	✓

*Determined to be eligible for National Register should property owners desire the designation.

Places	National	State
H. Keeler Tavern	✓	✓
I. Gov. Lounsbury House “Grovelawn”	✓	✓
J. Cain, Hugh, Fulling Mill and Elias Glover Woolen Mill Archeological Site	✓	✓
K. Branchville Railroad Tenement	✓	✓
L. Thomas Hyatt House	✓	✓
M. Lewis June House	✓	✓
N. Benedict House and Shop	✓	✓
O. Rochambeau March Route	✓	✓
P. Ridgebury Congregational Church	✓	✓
Q. Old Ridgefield Playhouse		✓
R. Frederic Remington House (also a National Historic Landmark)	✓	✓
S. Stephen Olmstead House		✓

Historic American Building Survey

- Frederic Remington House (see R above)
- T. Thomas Hawley House

Other Locally Recognized Historic Resources (not mapped)

- North Main Street Area
- Ridgebury Area
- Peter Parley Schoolhouse
- Cass Gilbert Fountain

Southeast, NY

Character Resources Plan

Ridgefield, CT

302
53

Danbury

121

North Salem, NY

53

Redding

Lewisboro, NY

35



Legend

-  Historic Resource or District (see page 8-2)
-  National Historic District
-  Local Historic District
-  State Historic District
-  Scenic Roads
-  Water

124

4,000

Feet

57
Weston

Wilton

33

107

C

102

R

A

D

L

M

116

O

E

P

I

Q

T

H

N

F

G

S

102

33

J

7

K

B

PRESERVING HISTORIC RESOURCES

The Town and historic preservation allies have taken a number of steps to protect historic resources. Identifying such assets is the first step toward preservation. Ridgefield is fortunate that the *Ridgefield Historic Architectural Resources Survey* was completed in 1979 and updated in 2006 with a supporting computer database. The Ridgefield Design Council published *About Ridgefield – What We Were – What We Are* in 2002, which provides a wealth of information about historic neighborhoods and styles of architecture in Ridgefield.

Additional measures and organizations help to protect Ridgefield's historic resources, including:

- Planning and Zoning regulations were updated to support preservation by allowing flexibility in building and lot requirements and allowing adaptive reuse of buildings in certain areas.
- Districts exist to protect historic features, including two local historic districts and a Village District. The Historic District Commission is charged with preserving the historic character of the two local historic districts. The Village District requires architectural review by a Village District consultant.
- In 2001 the Ridgefield Historical Society was established in part to “identify historic sites and structures to promote their preservation and restoration.”
- Other local organizations and individuals are involved in historic preservation including the Keeler Tavern Preservation Society, the Historic District Commission, and the Town Historian. Their efforts should be encouraged.

The strongest protection for historic resources is ownership by the Town or another entity with an interest in historic preservation. However it is not practical for organizations to purchase all historic buildings and many of these structures are desirable as private residences or for business purposes.

The Town currently has limited ability to preserve privately owned historic structures that are not designated as local historic districts or places. Owners may find that older structures are difficult to adapt to meet modern needs or that maintenance can be expensive. Options to preserve privately owned historic structures range from incentives (tax relief, zoning exceptions) to giving the Town the ability to seek alternatives when demolition is proposed.

The Town already offers some incentives through its zoning regulations (flexibility to exceed certain dimensional requirements) and by allowing adaptive reuse along Route 7 and a small section of Main Street. The Town may wish to allow adaptive reuse in other parts of Ridgefield, as appropriate. Some communities offer tax

incentives or additional zoning relief to owners of historic buildings. The Town should continue to evaluate options for increasing the reuse of historic buildings.

Many communities are not aware that a historic resource is threatened until a demolition permit is sought, but there are tools to encourage preservation. Ridgefield has not adopted a Demolition Delay, which can require a waiting period of up to 180 days before a landowner can tear down a building with historic merit. This window of time can allow alternatives to be explored.

In any case, the Town should focus on ensuring that adequate incentives are in place to encourage the continued use of historic structures.

Available funding for maintaining publically-owned historic resources and, in some cases, purchasing buildings that might provide some public benefit is important. Funding options might include setting aside a certain amount annually in the Town's budget or seeking funds through Ridgefield's status as a Certified Local Government.

Finally, the continued promotion of Ridgefield's historic resources is important. The Museum in the Streets program, in particular, makes it easy for residents and visitors to get a glimpse into Ridgefield's past and showcases historic resources. Appreciation of local historic resources can lead to greater support for protection efforts.

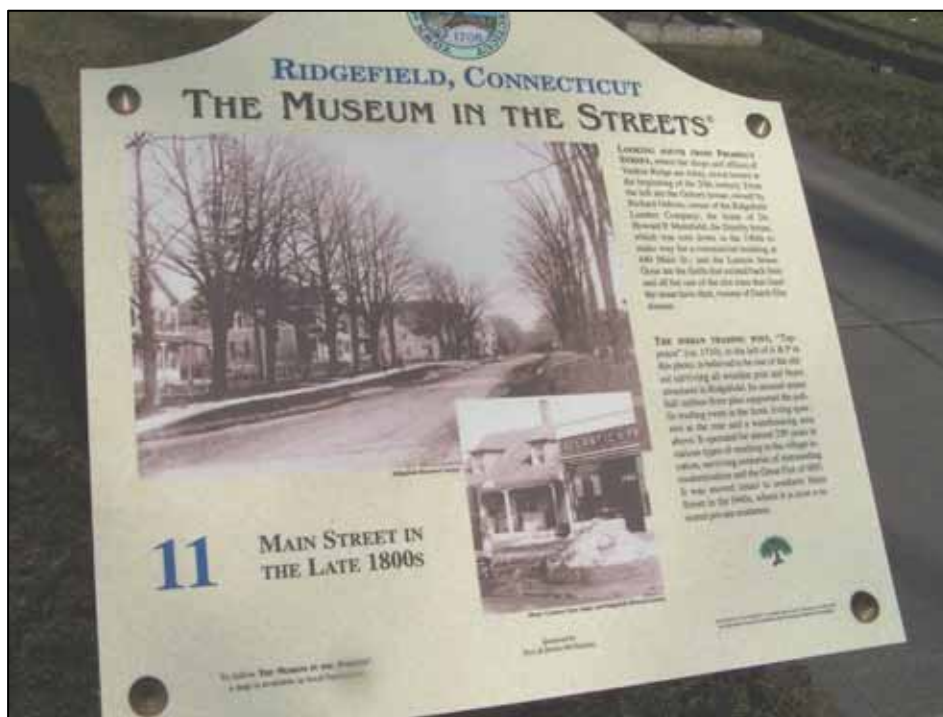


Photo 19: Museum in the Streets plaque.

HISTORIC RESOURCE PRESERVATION STRATEGIES

Protect Historic Resources

1. Preserve endangered and important historic properties through local organizations and agencies such as the Ridgefield Historical Society and the Historic District Commission.
2. Consider additional incentives to encourage preservation of privately owned historic buildings.
3. Encourage funding for local historic preservation.
4. As specific preservation projects arise, seek funding through the Certified Local Government program.
5. Identify additional potential historic areas and sites.

Maintain and Adopt Appropriate Regulations

6. Consider adopting a demolition delay ordinance to allow time for identification, review, and preservation of significant historic resources.
7. Maintain the Architectural Advisory Committee to ensure the architectural compatibility of proposed building improvements in historic areas.
8. Consider expanding adaptive reuse to additional areas in Town.
9. Continue to provide flexibility in zoning regulations (dimensional requirements) to preserve historical buildings.
10. Continue to establish local historic district(s) that preserve the character and essential elements of an area and that are supported by a majority of the district's residents.

Promote Historic Preservation Efforts

11. Encourage efforts to collect, maintain, and coordinate local historic information.
12. Continue to encourage awareness of historic buildings and districts through the use of appropriate signage and displays.
13. Promote awareness of State and Federal government programs that provide tax credits and incentives for rehabilitating historic buildings.