

10. Historic Resources

Introduction

With several national historic districts and over 1,000 inventoried historical sites, East Hartford's contribution to historic preservation, and the history of Connecticut by extension, is clear. The continued preservation of East Hartford's historic and cultural heritage as part of future planning and development efforts benefits the Town in several ways: preserving and enhancing community character; improving community image; and aiding in economic development efforts, especially when promoting or marketing the Town's unique qualities and characteristics.

Historic Resources Goals

- Preserve the Town's historic resources to enhance quality of life and promote economic development, including updating data and resources to reflect current best practices and provide the necessary tools for effective preservation.
- Within designated historic districts, upgrade the public realm (sidewalks, signage, and streetlights) to present a cohesive district identity and enhance conditions for pedestrians.
- Enhance the visibility of historic districts and sites through repair/replacement of historical markers and publicizing such resources on the Town's website and other publications.

Existing Historic Districts and Sites

As shown in Figure 1, there are four National Register of Historic Places districts in East Hartford: the Garvan-Carroll Historic District; the Central Avenue-Center Cemetery Historic District; the Downtown Main Street Historic District; and the Naubuc Avenue-Broad Street Historic District. There is also a Local Historic District known as the Naubuc District which includes a portion of Naubuc Avenue and a few structures on Broad Street.

While both National Register historic districts and local historic districts are listed on the State Register of Historic Places, they differ in structure and the reviews required. A National Register district is established through the State Historic Preservation Office and National Park Service as formal recognition of an area with historical, architectural, or cultural significance. Property alterations only require review if there is State or Federal involvement.

A local historic district offers greater protection and involvement from the community. Within these districts, property owners must obtain a "Certificate of Appropriateness" from the Historic District Commission before alteration of an exterior architectural feature that is visible from the public right-of-way. Under Connecticut statutes, any interested group of residents may ask a municipal government to appoint a committee to study the possibility for a local historic district and to prepare a report of the historically and architecturally significant properties in the proposed district. The report is submitted to the municipal planning and zoning commission and the State Historic Preservation Office for comment, and a public hearing is scheduled. A local district cannot be established without a referendum of property owners. Two-thirds of the property owners within the proposed district must support the designation or it is not permitted. If the referendum is passed, it must go on to the municipal government for approval.

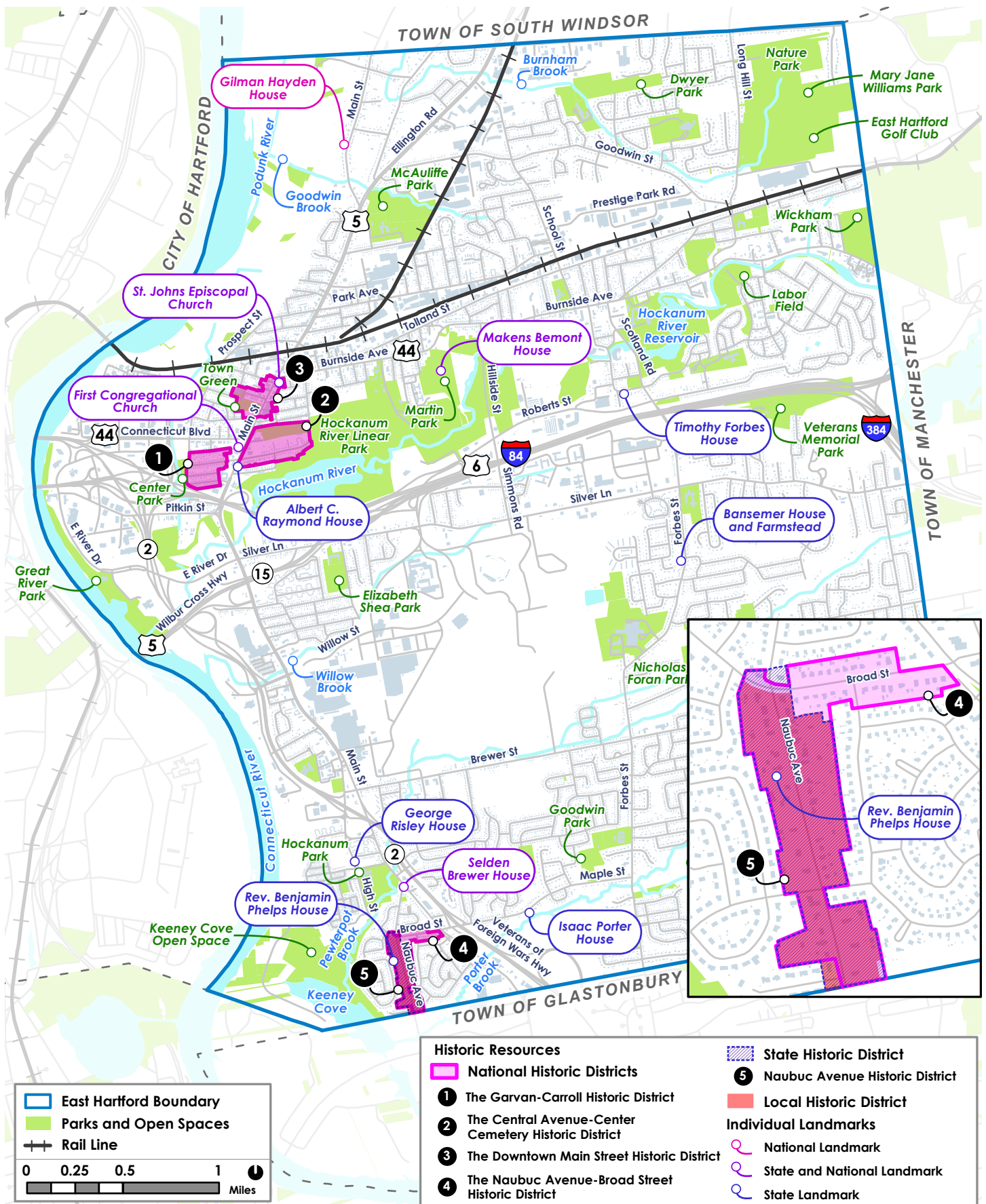


Figure 20: Historic and Cultural Resources

In addition to these districts, the Town has several individual sites listed on the National Register:



First Congregational Church (837 Main Street)
Source: BFJ Planning



St. John's Episcopal Church (1160 Main Street)
Source: BFJ Planning



Brewer House (165 Main Street)
Source: BFJ Planning



Makens Bemont House (307 Burnside Avenue)
Source: BFJ Planning



Gilman-Hayden House (1871 Main Street)
Source: BFJ Planning

East Hartford has over 1,100 structures inventoried and recorded with the State of Connecticut through a “Historic Resources Inventory.” The 2014 POCD recommended updating this inventory, and the Historic District Commission has seconded this recommendation, by expressing interest in seeking grant funding for the inventory’s maintenance. Regularly maintaining and updating the Town’s inventory of historic structures can help identify the highest priority sites for potential designation, and has the potential to help ensure the preservation of the Town’s history.

Table 1: Individually Listed State Register of Historic Places Sites in East Hartford

Historic Resource	Address
Rev. Benjamin Phelps House	159 Naubuc Avenue
Albert C. Raymond House	784 Main Street
St. John's Episcopal Church	1160-1180 Main Street
Selden Brewer House	165 Main Street (moved from original location)
Timothy Forbes House	135 Forbes Street
George Risley House	236 High Street
Isaac Porter House	165 Maple Street
Makens Bemont House	307 Burnside Avenue (in Martin Park)
First Congregational Church	837 Main Street
Bansemer House and Farmstead	589 Forbes Street

Source: CT State Historic Preservation Office, 2024

In September 2023, the Burnside Paper Mill, currently home to a brewery, was added to the State Register; however, this site is not listed on the Connecticut Cultural Resource Information System (ConnCRIS) digital mapping platform.

Issues and Opportunities

Support improvements in the local historic district for greater public access and awareness

The community engagement process garnered public feedback and commentary on East Hartford's wealth of historic resources, including calls for infrastructure improvements in historic districts, preservation of additional historic buildings and districts, and increasing awareness of historical sites. The Naubuc Avenue-Broad Street Historic District has been cited as needing sidewalks, to increase the walkability and overall cohesiveness of the district. Pedestrian improvement measures should also consider traffic calming strategies. There are also opportunities to visually distinguish the district from other areas in Town through urban design techniques and interventions, such as the addition of decorative street signage and streetlights.

The Historic District Commission has expressed interest in updating design guidelines to incorporate current best practices, including sustainability measures such as solar infrastructure. The current guidelines were developed decades ago and do not contemplate rooftop solar panels or similar green strategies, which constitute the bulk of the Commission's reviews today.

Expand and better recognize East Hartford's designated historical assets

There is an opportunity to recognize and preserve a broader diversity of historic resources in East Hartford, such as agricultural and industrial buildings. To inform such work, the Town should update the Historic Resources Inventory on file with the State. East Hartford is home to numerous historic barns, but very few have received official designation. Unfortunately, many are rapidly deteriorating, as they are often in backyards, making proper preservation difficult to regulate. Another opportunity is the 2014 POCD recommendation that the Town consider seeking National Register designation for "The Mills at Burnside" district, which would encompass former and operating mills along the Hockanum River on portions of Church and Forbes Streets. This district has not been designated, but there remains an opportunity to link the architecture, history, archaeology, and culture of the mills with the Hockanum River Linear Park. Such a link could combine local history with recreational opportunities by connecting the potential district to the Town's greenway network.

Lastly, many historical markers have been damaged or removed and need replacement, to ensure that these resources are visible to the community. While East Hartford's dedication to preserving its rich history is clear, the need to make critical updates to its historical resources is even clearer.