

The Central Bennington Historic District

Under Vermont State law (the Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act), zoning regulations may establish local historic districts which include structures and areas of historic and architectural significance.

In 1987, the Town of Bennington established an Historic Preservation Commission to advise and assist the Bennington Planning Commission on historic preservation issues. Part of the Historic Preservation Commission's work is to study the feasibility of designating local historic districts, and to develop preservation guidelines which promote and protect the historic character of these areas. After careful study, the Historic Preservation Commission developed the concept of a Central Bennington Historic District, whose boundaries generally follow the flow of the Walloomsac River on the north, Union Street on the east and south, and North Street on the West. The district and its boundaries are shown in the map on page 6.

The Central Bennington Historic District includes roughly twelve city blocks representing the core of Bennington's urban history from the 1700s through the present day. The diverse building types found in the district are living evidence of the residential, commercial, institutional and industrial patterns which have given rise to Bennington's history as a thriving industrial community and regional commercial center.

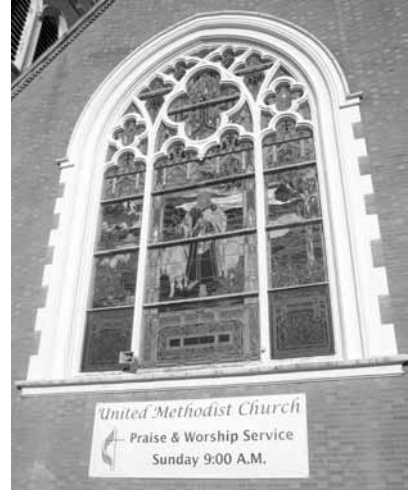
The district boundaries reflect Bennington's location at the intersection of the main north-south and east-west thoroughfares through the state, as well as the importance of the Walloomsac River, the source of water power which fueled the town's industrial base in textile and other mills. Represented in the Central Bennington Historic District are both vernacular and high-style examples of a variety of architectural styles, including Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate, Queen Anne, Second Empire, and Colonial Revival. The houses, stores, churches, warehouses, and factories in the district reflect the periods of Bennington's history, and they create much of the town's distinctive visual quality and sense of place. Particular parts of the district have individual identities and use patterns, expressing their roles within Bennington's overall development. Some, like parts of Pleasant, North and South Streets, include factory buildings from several periods. Union Street and some of the smaller streets around it include houses for workers at various levels. Pleasant and Elm Streets include substantial houses built for factory owners, merchants, and professionals. Much of Main, North and South Streets are commercial, with stores and public buildings in a range of styles. Architectural detail, building mass, siting, and other factors combine to make the district a prime example of the sense of place and history that sets Bennington apart from other Vermont towns.

Establishing the historic district ensures that central Bennington's buildings and streetscapes will keep their integrity in the years to come. The historic preservation guidelines developed for the district protect its special character, and at the same time promote the growth and good new construction needed to carry Bennington's sense of quality into the future. The guidelines allow informed decisions to be made in repairing and altering existing buildings, in demolishing buildings which do not contribute to the character of the district, and in designing new buildings within the district. In the Central Bennington Historic District, preservation, planning, and zoning can join to reinforce the best of existing character and to ensure wise future growth for Bennington's core.

Photos: The former Vermont National Bank on Putnam Square (top); the Bennington Brush Company building on North Street (middle); view outside 620 Main Street (bottom).



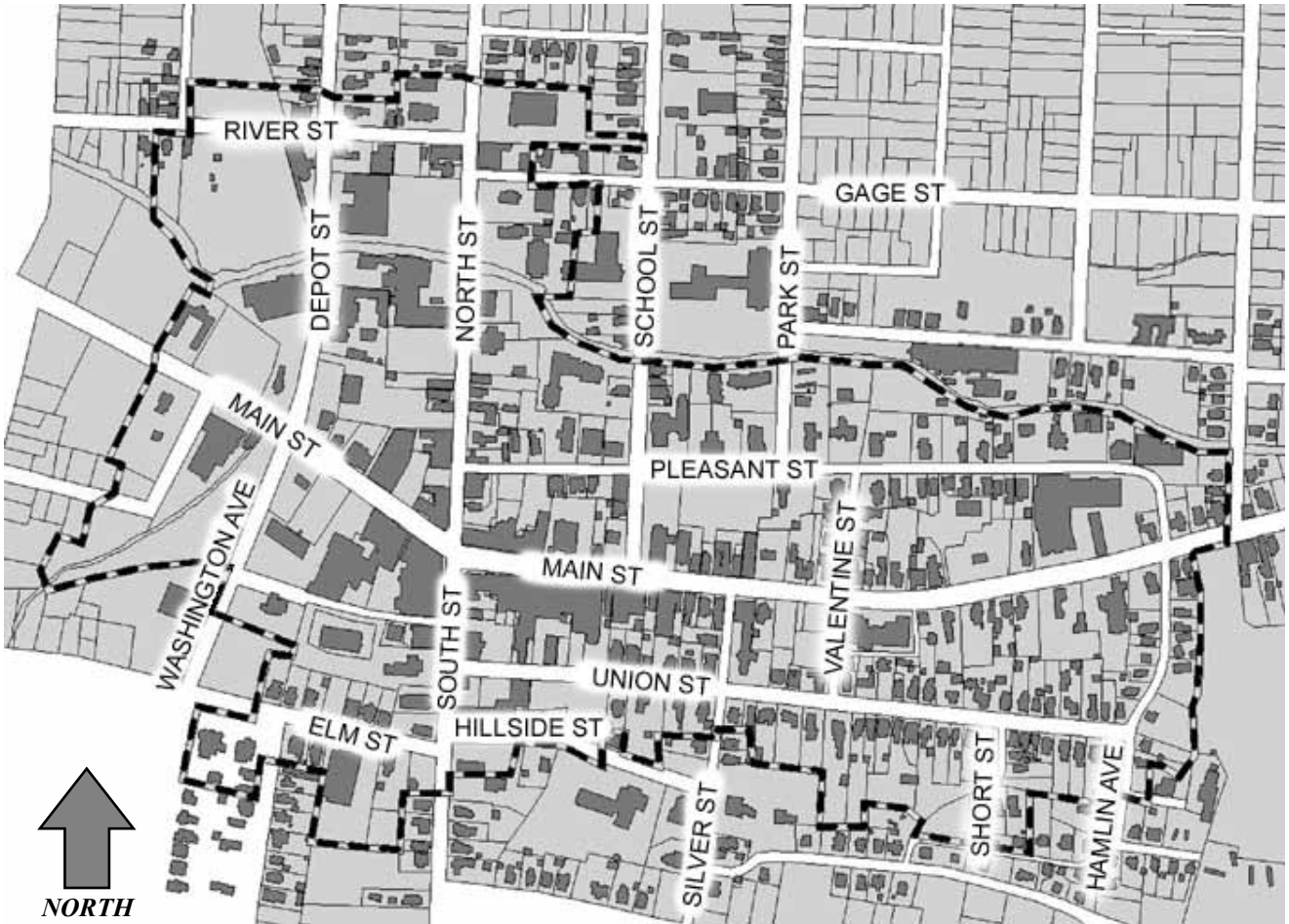
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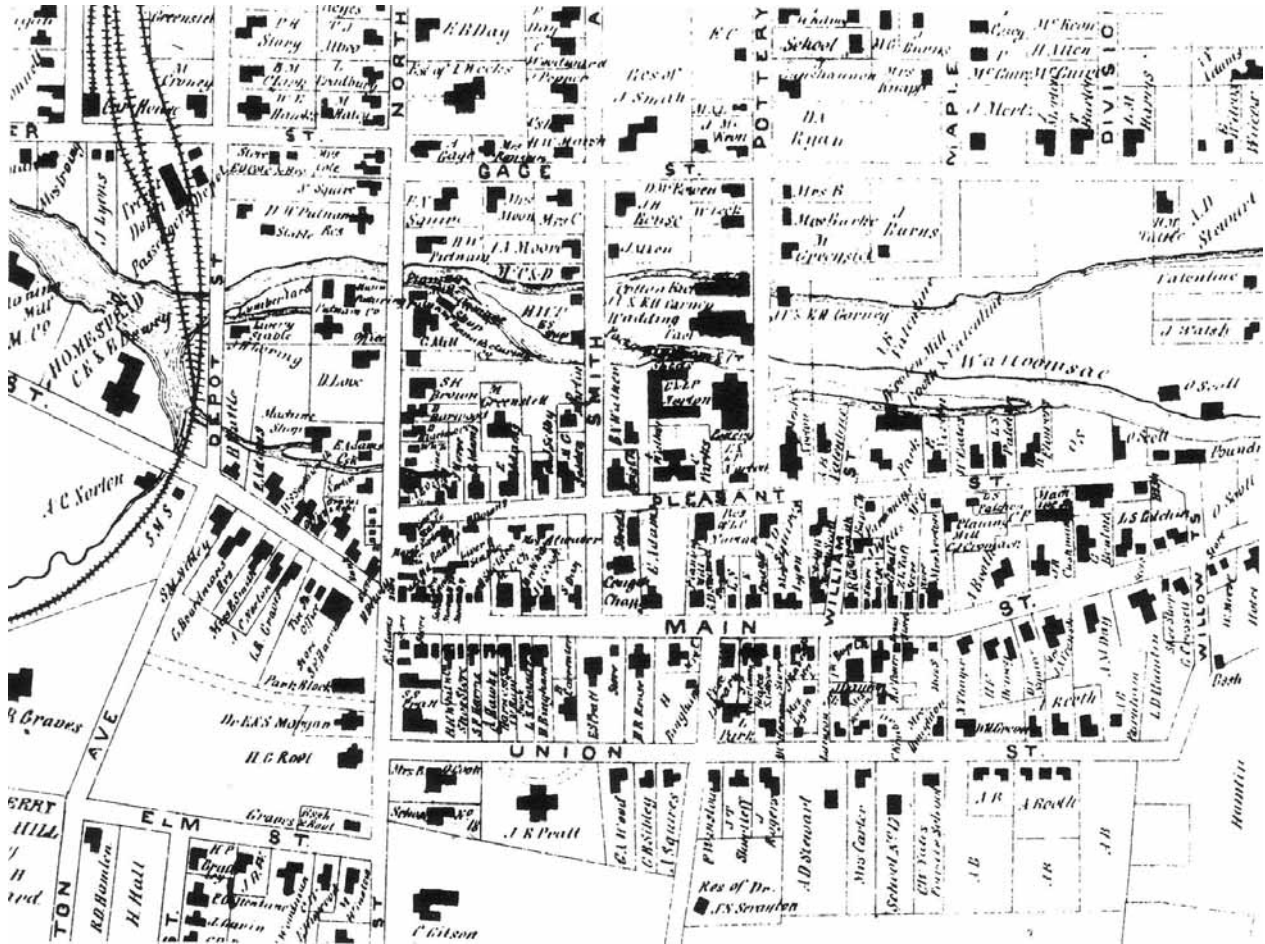
Map showing boundaries of the Historic Central Bennington Design Review District

(Note: Some buildings within the district boundaries may not be indicated individually on the map.)



The Historic Central Bennington Design Review District

Detail from 1869 F.W. Beers Atlas of Bennington County



The map shows the streets and buildings within the Central Bennington Historic District as they existed in 1869. By this date, Bennington had expanded substantially beyond the earlier settlement which began up the hill and to the west, in Old Bennington. In contrast to the village character of Old Bennington, central Bennington developed a denser, more urban character, and became the town's residential, commercial and industrial center by the mid to late 1800s.

Comparing the 1869 map and the modern historic district map will show that the basic street pattern and many individual buildings have survived to the present day in central Bennington. Other buildings have been demolished and replaced by later structures at various nineteenth and twentieth century dates. While no longer extant above ground, many of the buildings shown on the 1869 map still remain as archaeological sites beneath modern lawns and pavement.