

Town of Sheffield  
Ashley Falls Historic District Commission

# Handbook & Design Guidelines

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## PREFACE

The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) is the agency charged with advising all Historical Commissions and Historic District Commissions in the Commonwealth. Their Handbook makes the following recommendation:

“Design review guidelines are appreciated by both commission members and applicants. Through text and images, design review guidelines set forth the types of projects a commission is likely to find appropriate and the types of projects a commission is likely to deny. For commission members, design review guidelines can greatly aid the commission through difficult decision-making. Design guidelines are also greatly appreciated by property owners, developers, contractors, and architects. ... Design review guidelines tailored to your community are strongly recommended.”

Early in the summer of 2020, the Ashley Falls Historic District Commission embarked on the development of a handbook that would contain design review guidelines specific to the Ashley Falls Historic District and explain how these guidelines applied to property in the District. The objectives of this handbook are twofold: (1) to assist owners and residents with a guide regarding what is expected, and the process that the Commission uses; (2) to provide the Commissioners with a framework for reviewing projects and determining their appropriateness to the character of the District.

In developing this handbook, we have drawn from and are indebted to design guidelines developed by many other local historical districts in Massachusetts. They, together with the MHC, provided us with models for the overall framework of this handbook, and assisted us with the specifics of what should be included. Many of the handbooks from other districts were prepared by professional consultants; others, like ours, by volunteer members of historic district commissions.

The parts of the handbook are outlined in the Table of Contents. If you intend to undertake a project that involves a modification not treated in the handbook, we encourage you to contact the Commission for guidance. If you are in any doubt about whether you require a Certificate from the Commission, it is better to ask. As a general rule, if what you are planning to do involves something built, the Commission should be consulted; if it involves something planted, there is no need to consult.

We hope that you find this handbook a useful tool, and we invite your comments. If there are things you would like to see included in future editions, if there are areas where you believe

there are better solutions than those proposed, or if you find mistakes – please let us know. We can be reached at [AFHDCcommission@gmail.com](mailto:AFHDCcommission@gmail.com), or by mail at Ashley Falls Historic District Commission, Town of Sheffield, 21 Depot Square, Sheffield MA 01257.

Our thanks to the following for their participation in creating these Guidelines:

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1987, thanks to the initiative of a group of residents from “downtown” Ashley Falls, the Town of Sheffield established the Ashley Falls Historic District Commission. Established under M.G.L. Chapter 40C, Local Historic District Commissions are the authority responsible for regulatory design review within designated local historic districts. Local historic district commissions review applications for changes to exterior architectural features visible from a public way, and have the ability to prevent inappropriate alterations and demolitions within local historic districts.

The Ashley Falls Historic District is anchored by the Ashley Falls green, and includes properties on Ashley Falls Road, Bull Hill Road, Clayton Road, East Main Street, Rannapo Road, School Street, and Weatogue Road. Not all properties on these public ways fall within the Historic District. A map of the district, showing what properties are included in the Historic District, can be found in this publication. The district is rich in houses that span from the colonial period to the Civil War and beyond. Many of Ashley Falls’ historic structures are included in the district.

The history of Ashley Falls is intimately bound up with that of Sheffield. The first non-native settlers, few in number, crossed the Taconic range from the Hudson River valley in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and established homesteads in the Housatonic River valley. Significant settlement, however, began only in the 1730s, and came from the east rather than the west. Settlers from Westfield crossed the Berkshire range and established farms on both sides of the Housatonic from the Connecticut border as far north as what is today Great Barrington. This settlement, which from its earliest included European and African settlers, both free and enslaved, became the town of Sheffield.

Ashley Falls, on the east side of the Housatonic, soon emerged as the southern locus of a cluster of homes within Sheffield township. Col. John Ashley, who had surveyed the area even before serious settlement began, realized the potential for economic development by damming the Konkapot River. There, he built a mill for grinding the readily available ores found in nearby Salisbury, CT and he was soon producing iron at a forge adjacent to his mill. Those buildings still stand. The Ashley family would expand this enterprise into a small industrial center which came to include a grist mill, a saw mill, a cider mill and a fulling mill. About ten houses from before the War of 1812 survive in the village in two clusters, one around the village green, and one near Rannapo Road and Cooper Hill Road.

With the need for workers, the village grew. Undoubtedly, homes of mill hands and laborers stretched along the main road to the north and south of the mills, but most of these no longer survive. In the three decades following the end of the War of 1812, the village continued to grow along Ashley Falls Road, and in 1841 the Methodist church was built, the sign of a maturing community.

The coming of the railroad to Sheffield and Ashley Falls in 1842 further accelerated settlement. Ashley Falls Road was populated with modest homes and small stores, as was East Main Street. When the Civil War broke out in 1861, most of the structures along both Ashley Falls Road and East Main Street as far as School Street were in place. It is this “downtown” area, together with the homes along Rannapo Road, that give Ashley Falls its special character.

“Preserving and protecting the distinctive characteristics of the buildings and places significant in the history of Ashley Falls or significant for their architecture” are the cornerstones of the Commission’s mission laid down in our bylaw. In addition, the Commission works to maintain and improve “the settings for such buildings and places,” and assure that new development fits integrally into the fabric of the district. It is not only preserving details of specific structures, but also the character of the village as a whole. The Commission recognizes that the village is dynamic, and that property owners want to improve, expand, reduce, and alter their properties. We hope these guidelines will assist them in that process, while keeping the village intact.

These design guidelines go hand in hand with other Commission documents and resources, including:

- Sheffield By-law Chapter 121: HISTORIC DISTRICTS AND COMMISSIONS
- Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40C: Massachusetts Historic Districts Act
- The AFHDC Application for a Certificate, with its instructions on the steps needed whenever you undertake changes to your property that affect exterior architectural features
- The maps of the Historic District

All of these can be found at the AFHDC website <https://www.sheffieldma.gov/ashley-falls-historic-district-commission>.

Perhaps most importantly, if you wish to make changes to exterior architectural features of your property, early contact with the Commission is strongly advised. Almost all changes require a certificate from the Commission, including many of those listed under the Limitations section of the bylaw. For many changes, granting of permission is a simple and quick process. The Commission is eager and willing to help you in any way that it can and encourages you to contact us with any questions that you may have.

## THE APPLICATION PROCESS

If your property lies within the Ashley Falls Historic District, before you can do any demolition, construction, alteration, replacement of windows, fencing, paving, change of paint color, or other work on your buildings or grounds that is visible from a public way (excluding landscaping), with few exceptions you must apply for and receive a Certificate from the Ashley Falls Historic District Commission. You must do so regardless of whether or not the changes are excluded from review by the bylaw, and whether you require a building or other permit to carry out the work.

Projects undertaken by owners of property in the Ashley Falls Historic District can vary from the simplest and most mundane, to major construction and renovation projects. To help both the Commission and potential applicants, we have determined that projects governed by Massachusetts General Law 40C, and Sheffield bylaw §121 Part 1 (Ashley Falls Historic District Commission) fall into three broad categories:

- a) minor and routine repairs (e.g., replacing small areas of siding or small paint repairs that don't change the color). Such projects must be brought to the attention of the Commission, but do not require a formal application process.
- b) larger projects and repairs that do not result in any obvious change. Such projects are excluded from review by the Commission under §121-12 B but require a certificate of non-applicability. They include:
  - 1) Ordinary repair, maintenance, or replacement of any exterior feature which does not result in change of design, material, or exterior appearance thereof.
  - (4) Architectural features not subject to public view from an elevation of five (5) feet from public ways within the district when deciduous foliage is off.
  - (7) Painting a house the same color or colors.
  - (10) Replacement of roofing materials, provided that the appearance of the new material is substantially similar to the existing in color and texture.
  - (11) Resurfacing of sidewalks, terraces, driveways or parking areas if the appearance of the new material is substantially similar to the old in texture and color.

In such cases, the Commission Chair may determine that an application for a Certificate of Non-applicability is appropriate and, after consultation with and agreement by another member of the Commission, the Chair may issue a certificate. The Chair may also refer the decision to the entire Commission for a vote at its next meeting, which must be held within fourteen days of receipt of the application.

In addition, the Commission appreciates being notified of other kinds of work listed in §121-12 B so that it does not need to make inquiries when it sees contractor vehicles on your property.

All other projects, including but not limited to those which would entail alterations or new construction, require an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness (or in rare instances, a Certificate of Hardship). When contemplating a project that falls into this category, you may wish to consult informally with the Commission about how to proceed. We will work with you to smooth the process and make it as efficient as possible.

The three important things to bear in mind regarding a Certificate of Appropriateness are that the actual steps are mandated by the bylaw, that the Commission is bound by these steps, and that the process is designed in all cases to allow for comment from your neighbors about your plans. Consequently, the process can take time, and advanced planning on these projects is strongly urged.

The formal application process begins with the submission of an application for a certificate.

The application form can be found at

[www.sheffieldma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf3806/f/uploads/afhdc\\_application\\_2020-07-09\\_0.pdf](http://www.sheffieldma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf3806/f/uploads/afhdc_application_2020-07-09_0.pdf).

That application must contain all of the information needed by the Commission in order to make an informed decision. The amount of information will vary with the project, and the Commission determines what information it feels is necessary, within reason.

Upon receipt of a complete application, the Commission must determine within fourteen days if the application requires approval by the Commission. In most cases, this is a pro forma step. The Commission then gives at least fourteen days' notice of a public hearing on the application. After the public hearing, the Commission must make a determination on the application within sixty days. In some instances, a public hearing can be waived, but all adjoining property owners must still be contacted and given time to respond to the application.

If the application is approved, all other town agencies that require proof of a certificate being issued are contacted by the Commission, and a notice of approval is sent to the applicant and filed with the Town Clerk. If it is disapproved, the reasons for such must be recorded in the records of the Commission and a copy sent to the applicant.

There are provisions for allowing changes to the application, as well as an appeal process specified in the bylaw. There are also provisions for enforcement of decisions of the Commission and penalties for non-compliance.

The Ashley Falls Historic District by-law can be found on our website [www.sheffieldma.gov/ashley-falls-historic-district-commission](http://www.sheffieldma.gov/ashley-falls-historic-district-commission), or obtained from the Town Clerk.

When applying for a Certificate, please use the AFHDC application form. The form, accompanying documentation, and other information needed for the Commission to make its determination should be emailed to [AFHDCCommission@gmail.com](mailto:AFHDCCommission@gmail.com). If you wish to submit your application on paper, please mail five copies to the Ashley Falls Historic District Commission, Town of Sheffield, 21 Depot Square, Sheffield MA 01257. Please note that if your project involves new construction (including additions), you must contact the Commission so that we can provide you with the application form for a Certificate of Appropriateness (New Construction), which will apprise you of the documentation required for a complete application.

**The Ashley Falls Historic District Commission is eager to help make the application process as easy and transparent as possible, and to assure that you have filed for the appropriate certificate. We urge you to contact us with any questions or requests for assistance by email at [AFHDCCommission@gmail.com](mailto:AFHDCCommission@gmail.com).** Advance consultation with the Commission can help avoid later delays. If you wish to talk with the Commission, please send your phone number to the Commission's email address and one of the Commissioners will contact you promptly.

## GENERAL DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

### Historic Context Considerations

The Commission seeks to have changes to existing structures and new construction in the District be harmonious with its immediate historic environment, and to have those changes reflect the character and traditions of the immediate area and the district. The Commission encourages excellence in design that is compatible with the styles, periods, and materials represented in the district, and most importantly, with its historic structures.

The most critical contextual factors to consider in any alterations, additions, or new construction are *setting* or *location*, *style* or *design*, *size*, *scale*, *massing* of the proposed project, and *materials* to be used.

**Setting** or **location** refers to the where the structure is located on the lot. Minimum requirements for setting are dictated by the Town of Sheffield’s Zoning Bylaw. The Historic District Commission may, however, impose setback and height requirements which are more restrictive than those found in the Zoning Bylaw, if the context of the surrounding structures suggests that such are appropriate. Specifically, the front yard setback of neighboring structures should be maintained to preserve the “street wall” that is already in existence. The Commission does not have the authority to dictate a less restrictive set back than the Zoning bylaw – only a more restrictive set back in order to preserve the streetscape.

The **style** or **design** is expressed in the character-defining features that make up each architectural style. The combination of features that represent particular styles and periods of development should be recognized in existing buildings so that these features can be preserved. New construction should be designed to fit harmoniously into its surroundings.

**Size** refers to the volume of a structure created by its height, width, and depth. It also relates to the size of the individual elements of a structure such as windows, doors, chimneys, and the presence of decorative trim or other architectural elements such as porches, bays, etc. The size of new construction and the elements of the building should be appropriate to neighboring structures and should relate to the prevailing periods of development and architectural types of the surrounding structures. We encourage designs that are similar in size to neighboring buildings. Size is dictated in part by the Town of Sheffield’s Zoning Bylaw. The Historic District Commission, however, may impose size requirements which are more restrictive than those found in the Zoning Bylaw, if the Commission determines that the context of the adjacent structures suggests that such requirements are appropriate.

**Scale** refers to the proportions, balance, and relationship of the parts to the whole. The scale of a structure is a primary consideration in determining whether a building is compatible with its setting and appropriate to neighboring structures. Usually, the pattern of existing buildings along a street line is basic to establishing scale.

**Massing** refers to the shape of the building, the way in which the parts become the whole, and how the secondary parts such as wings, ells, garages, or barns, each with its own distinctive but related form, are arranged in relationship to the main block. New construction should be informed by the surrounding properties. The impact of overall size can be controlled by the way in which the massing is developed and distributed over the site. A street's rhythm is often influenced by its characteristic roof forms, so roof styles become an important element in new designs and additions.

**Materials** used in new construction should be compatible with the District as a whole, and to the type of building in the District. Paint color choices can also be considered under materials. In general, paint colors should be chosen from historical color charts and cards that are available from most major paint suppliers (see p. 21 below).

## **Demolition**

Historic buildings are irreplaceable community assets. Demolition of any historic building or structure, or any part of an historic building, should be carefully considered. For purposes of this section, any building or structure built before 1910 is considered an historic building.

The demolition of historic buildings in the Town of Sheffield is governed by the Sheffield Demolition Delay Bylaw, administered by the Sheffield Historical Commission. Demolition of buildings in the Ashley Falls Historic District (AFHD) however, is excluded from that Bylaw and regulated by the AFHD Commission.

The demolition or removal of any building in the AFHD requires a Certificate of Appropriateness as well as a demolition permit from the Building Inspector. The Commission will issue a Certificate only if the building or structure to be demolished has been determined by the Commission to have no significant historic merit or is determined to be beyond repair. For buildings or structures built before 1800, an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish based upon structural instability or deterioration must be accompanied by a technical report prepared by an architect or engineer registered in Massachusetts detailing the nature and extent of the problems and an estimate of the cost to correct them.

Any demolition, full or partial, of a later addition to an historic building, that is not architecturally or historically significant, may be permissible and is subject to review on a case-by-case basis. Where demolition of later additions is permitted, the applicant should provide plans for restoration of the building as it appeared prior to the addition. No demolition shall be approved until the plan for the reuse of the space has been reviewed and approved.

If a building in the AFHD constitutes a hazard to the public safety, as determined by the Building Inspector or the Board of Health, which hazard cannot be eliminated by economic means available to the owner, including sale of the building or structure on its present site to any purchaser willing to preserve it, the Commission will issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for its demolition.

Where a new structure will replace one to be demolished or removed, approval of the new structure is required as a condition of granting a certificate of demolition or removal. In addition to plans and specifications, the applicant shall submit a timetable and such guarantees and assurances for the completion and replacement as the Commission may require.

### **Alterations and Additions**

The Commission seeks alterations and additions that are harmonious with the characteristic massing and architectural features of the original structure or environment, that respect the main character-defining elements of the original structure, and that are harmonious with the immediate environment. We recommend that alterations to existing structures be consistent with the design of the original structure and any later architectural additions. We discourage alteration or removal of characteristic architectural features, including architecturally significant additions. We encourage, whenever possible, restoration of original features, and we recommend that new materials match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture, and other visual qualities.

We recommend that incidental site structures and fixtures, such as outbuildings, fences, lighting, signs, utilities and paved surfaces be consistent with the characteristic scale and style of the environs.

We recommend that parking and related traffic areas, wherever possible, be appropriately concealed or screened from public view, and that the visual impact of large parking areas should be softened through the use of traditional paving materials and suitable landscaping.

### **New Construction**

New construction must exhibit particular sensitivity to the character of the surrounding built environment. The Commission does not suggest that new construction reproduce that which is found in the original historic structures within the District, but rather that new construction not

detract from the character of the place. New construction should reflect the era of its birth, as the older structures do theirs, while maintaining a sensitivity to the scale, proportioning, and materials of these “respected elders.” The Commission does not look with favor on “historical” reproductions not common to the main periods and styles represented in the District or the area. Such serve only to diminish the value of authentic examples within the District.

### **Outbuildings**

Outbuildings are afforded the same protection as principal buildings, including the type of doors, garage doors, building windows, and trim. Likewise, they also require a Certificate from the AFHDC to be built or demolished.

Designs for new outbuildings should reflect the style and especially the roof line of the principal building, or the vernacular of the AFHD. Alternatively, outbuildings may be designed as a visual counterpoint to the principal structure. Garages, the principal outbuilding in the AFHD, should not be attached to the principal structure.

New Outbuildings should be placed to as to minimize their visual impact.

## **ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES**

Minimum requirements for specific architectural features discussed below may be governed by Massachusetts General Laws, including but not limited to building codes and fire codes. In such cases, the Massachusetts General Laws' minimums must be met. When requirements set below impose greater control than is imposed by Massachusetts General Laws or other Sheffield bylaws, these requirements must be met.

### **Chimneys**

Chimneys should be maintained to their original height, form and design. Original decorative elements should be maintained. If a new chimney is constructed, it should match in style and material an existing chimney in the case of an addition or alteration to an existing structure, or if no existing chimneys exist or for new construction, it should match chimneys on neighboring structures.

The use of other than brick chimneys is highly discouraged. If unavoidable, they should be situated as to have minimum impact on the view from the public roadway.

### **Decks**

Deck additions should be limited to the first floor and should be located as much as possible out of public view. Any deck proposed should be visually integrated with the main building.

### **Doors**

Replacement of historic doors is discouraged. We encourage the repair of existing historic doors. New doors should seek to replicate the original design. Doors and entrances in new construction should be consistent with existing doors and entrances in the District.

### **Dormers**

The addition of new dormers or removal/alteration to existing dormers on an existing architecturally significant roof surface is discouraged. If added, dormers should relate to roof forms on the existing structure or on neighboring structures. If shed dormers are used, they should be clearly subordinate to the primary roof form and best used on broad low hung roofs. Flush dormers that are continuous with a wall below should not be used. All dormers should be predominantly windows.

## **Driveways**

The treatment of driveways is included in the definition of “exterior architectural features” and requires a Certificate of Appropriateness from the AFHDC. The following qualities are evaluated to determine the appropriateness of driveways:

- *Size*
- *Location*
- *Visibility of parked vehicles*
- *Paving materials*
- *Lighting*

Driveways should be surfaced with materials compatible with the historic setting. The preferred driveway surface material is packed gravel. Other textured paving materials which simulate packed gravel and contrast with the adjoining roadway to provide a visual break in both texture and color are acceptable.

## **Fences and Stone Walls**

Fences and walls are significant architectural features that create a setting for a property, complement the structure, and enhance the streetscape. The erection and removal of all fences requires a Certificate from the AFHDC. The application must include a plot plan of the property showing the precise proposed location. In addition, applicants should consult the applicable Sheffield Bylaws for other requirements regarding fencing.

### **Fence materials**

Existing historic stone walls, iron fences and wood fences should be preserved wherever possible. Restoration of existing historic fences and walls is always preferred to replacement.

New fences should be built of wood or painted iron. Plastic, vinyl, lattice, brick, concrete block, light gauge metal, and chain link fences are not appropriate. Split rail and stockade fences are generally acceptable. Where stone walls are reset or built new, they should follow the traditional drywall techniques used in original construction. Landscaping should be considered to relieve the visual impact of long fences. Plantings are not subject to review by the Historic District Commission but can be required in some instances.

### **Front yard fences**

Front yard fences, and fences parallel to a public way, should not obscure the view of the house. New front yard fences and fences in the front portion of side yards should be historically

appropriate in design and construction, and open in character so as not to create visual barriers and should align with neighboring fences if possible. A fence in the front yard should be adjacent to the sidewalk or road. New fences should not exceed 42 inches in height and should be natural wood (gray) or painted white in color.

#### Side and back yard privacy fences

Privacy fences are widely used in the Historic District to demarcate property boundary lines. Where such fences are not visible from a public way, the Commission will issue a Certificate of Nonapplicability. When they are minimally visible from a public way and do not significantly obscure visibility of structures on the property, Certificates of Appropriateness will be issued. Privacy fences should not exceed 6 feet in height and should not be painted to draw attention to them. Landscaping should be considered in combination with fencing to relieve the visual impact of a long fence, or instead of a built fence.

#### Fire Escapes

Fire escapes in new construction must comply with all existing fire and building codes. In addition, they should be concealed from public view.

If added to existing structures, fire escapes should be designed to have a minimal impact on the appearance and integrity of the building and should reflect the detail and finish of the main structure. The Commission, as part of the approval, may require vegetative screening.

#### Foundations

If new construction or an addition to an existing structure calls for high foundations with other than minimum concrete exposure, a material veneer will be required on these surfaces. The material used should relate to existing visible foundation materials on the existing structure, or on nearby historic structures.

The AFHDC may, on a case-by-case basis, allow foundation wall exposures in new construction or additions to remain un-veneered. The commission might require landscape planting to screen un-veneered foundation exposures.

Repairs and routine maintenance of any masonry surface, such as re-pointing and replacement of masonry elements should match the original. Grout material and color, the tooling style of grout, and color and type of masonry should all be consistent with the existing materials.

### **Garage, Barn and Shed Doors**

Garage, barn, and shed doors that are visible from a public way should be built of wood. Metal or fiberglass doors are not historically acceptable in most instances.

### **Gutters and Downspouts**

Gutter systems, including downspouts, will be approved if their scale, contour, and detail are found to be compatible with the style of the building. They should be as unobtrusive as possible. Wood, copper and painted aluminum gutters are considered acceptable, depending upon the age of the building. Gutter systems, when painted, should match the color of the trim on the building. Downspouts should not obstruct the view of the corner wall elements of the structure. Spillways to direct water from downspouts away from the foundation should be of natural materials and integrated with landscaping – visible plastic will ordinarily not be approved. Unpainted, mill-finished aluminum is generally not appropriate for flashing, gutters, or downspouts in the Historic District.

Gutters are inappropriate if constructed of short sections, heavy connectors and prominent end caps, all of which are incongruous with the appearance of the historic precedent. Attachments such as visible hanging straps or brackets should be concealed as much as possible.

### **Handicapped Access**

The commission recognizes that barrier free access to private residences is sometimes necessary. Since the nature of accessibility is unique in its complexity, the Commission reviews proposals on a case-by-case basis. The Commission will work with the property owner to find a solution that incorporates the desired goals of accessibility, preservation, and reducing visual impact of necessary accommodation. Where access must be added to a historic structure, it should be made as discrete as possible by reflecting characteristic details of the main building.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board Regulations, all buildings open to the public must be handicapped accessible. In an historic building, care must be taken to create entrances that comply with the Act and regulations, while causing the least impact on the building's historic character and façade. Materials used for ramps or new entrances should be compatible with the original building and should be designed to reflect the building's architectural character.

## **Lighting**

The AFHD is characterized by a minimal amount of exterior lighting. Exterior lighting for traffic safety and security should be limited to the extent possible and feasible. All aspects of new exterior lighting in the District, public and private, including design, size, placement, materials, and color of fixtures, as well as the color, intensity, and directionality of the light itself, must be approved by the AFHDC. The AFHDC will not approve any new lighting without seeing all the technical details and dimensions (cut sheets) of the proposed fixtures and any poles or posts on which they will be mounted. Site plans and/or building-elevation drawings must be submitted showing numbers and exact locations of fixtures. All applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and the AFHDC will work with applicants to arrive at a solution consistent and in compliance with all building and life safety code requirements.

When required, exterior lighting should be kept at low levels, discreetly designed to harmonize with the structure or landscaping and shielded to prevent glare or overspill of the light off the property. Illumination of building facades is considered inappropriate.

Where original or historic exterior light fixtures remain, they should be repaired and maintained rather than replaced. Where replacement is required due to deterioration and/or concerns over life-safety or building code compliance, replacement should match the original in material, design, and location as closely as possible.

The AFHDC will consider the lighting recommendations for residential properties set forth by the Dark Sky Model Lighting Ordinance, Section V ([www.darksky.org/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/16\\_MLO\\_FINAL\\_JUNE2011.PDF](http://www.darksky.org/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/16_MLO_FINAL_JUNE2011.PDF)) when reviewing an application pertaining to exterior lighting. In addition, the following will also be considered:

- The style and materials of light fixtures which when visible from the public way should be appropriate to the historic character of the district.
- Angled or directed lighting should not spill light onto adjacent properties.
- Moving or flashing lights of any sort are prohibited with the exception of temporary low-lumen seasonal decorative lighting.
- Exterior lighting called for by the building code, and security lighting, if necessary, should be mounted as inconspicuously as possible, and preferably not on a façade visible from a public way.

- If walkway or driveway lighting is necessary, foot lights are preferable to post-mounted lighting. When used, consideration should be given to concealing the lighting source with landscaping elements such as shrubbery.
- Lighting for walkways and parking lots connected to commercial buildings should be on poles that are as short as allowed by statute, should only be bright enough to ensure public safety, and should be shielded if necessary, to prevent light spillage onto adjacent properties.
- Exterior lighting should be extinguished by 10:00PM unless required for traffic regulation or public safety.
- For information on the Illumination of signage, please refer to the Signage section.

### **Masonry structures**

While there is some historic masonry construction in the Town of Sheffield, there are no major historic masonry structures in the AFHD. The introduction of further major masonry structures in the AFHD is discouraged.

### **Mailboxes**

The AFHDC does not regulate the height, size, and placement of mailboxes. This is the responsibility of the Sheffield Postmaster or Postmistress. The Town of Sheffield may also restrict the placement of mailboxes in certain circumstances.

Traditional barrel-vaulted mailboxes on wooden or painted metal posts will be issued a Certificate of Nonapplicability. Other, custom built mailboxes require a Certificate of Appropriateness.

### **Modern Equipment**

Modern equipment includes (but is not limited to) things such as utility meters, HVAC equipment, mechanical and plumbing vents, ducts, fans, antennas, satellite dishes, propane and other tanks, dumpsters, cellular towers, and transformers. None of these were part of the historic fabric of the AFHD.

Modern equipment should, in general, be as small and inconspicuous as possible. All modern equipment should be installed in locations that create the least disturbance to the historic appearance of the building, involve the least possible structural alteration, and are screened,

hidden, painted to blend with the building, or otherwise shielded from public view to the greatest extent possible. Modern equipment placed on the ground should be sited in the rear of the building. If visible from the public way, it should be screened by vegetation, or approved walls or fences. Front yard locations will usually not be approved. Utility meters should not be installed on the front façade and should be screened if possible. Electrical wires and other cables should be placed as discretely as possible, away from the public view. Roof-mounted equipment such as television antennas and satellite dishes detract from the appearance of historic structures and should be hidden as much as possible from public view. They should not be on the front slope of the roof, or the slope facing the village green in the downtown area.

The installation of most modern equipment requires an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness or Nonapplicability. Applications to the Commission for approval of modern equipment shall specify the location, dimensions, and describe outward appearance of all such equipment. Installation technicians or their supervisors must follow and adhere to the approved Certificate. If it is necessary to deviate from the Certificate, the utility company or the homeowner must request an amendment in writing from the Commission.

Air conditioners installed in existing openings, are exempt from review by the Commission, but a location on the side or rear of the structure is preferred. If installed seasonally, there is no need to inform the Commission. If the installation is more permanent, it must be reviewed to ensure that no character defining features are damaged or obscured, and a Certificate of Nonapplicability is required.

Dumpsters installed temporarily are permitted but should not be placed in the front yard. Dumpsters that are installed regularly, such as in establishments serving food, must be in the rear of the building and not visible from a public way.

Cellular towers and transformers, which can usually be located elsewhere, are inappropriate to the AFHD, and will not be granted a certificate.

## **Paint**

Owners are encouraged to recognize that color selection for painting their property is a decision that greatly impacts their neighbors and the neighborhood. Color schemes should be appropriate for the style and period of the building and compatible with the district as a whole. The Commission can point owners to resources that can assist them in determining appropriate color schemes.

Minor paint repairs do not require Commission approval.

Repainting an entire house or a significant portion thereof in the existing color requires an application for a Certificate of Nonapplicability.

Changing the existing color of a house, or in the case of new construction determining the color scheme a house is to be painted, requires an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness. For additions, the paint color should be compatible with the existing building.

Opaque stains are acceptable alternatives to paint. Painting of non-wood surfaces such as brick and stone is generally discouraged.

**WARNING:** Many older structures were painted with lead-based paints, which have been determined to be harmful to health. For further information, contact the Sheffield Board of Health or the MA Department of Environmental Protection.

### **Parking areas**

The size, location and materials used in parking areas can dramatically affect the setting of an historic building. The construction and alteration of parking areas, including the type of paving materials used, is included in the definition of “exterior architectural features” and requires a Certificate of Appropriateness from the AFHDC. If previously approved parking area or parking areas historically present are to be renewed or repaved with the same material in substantially the same color, a Certificate of Nonapplicability is required.

Front yards and front entry walkways should not be converted to parking areas. Parked vehicles should not dominate the view of the property from the public street, way or place, as doing so detracts from the historic district. The Commission generally will not approve the paving or resurfacing of front or side yards to accommodate increased parking. Existing trees should not be removed to expand parking areas. Sensitivity to the surrounding landscape is important. Landscaping can greatly enhance the appearance of a yard and may be considered when proposing additions to or alterations of parking areas.

Parking areas should be surfaced with materials compatible with the historic setting. The preferred parking area surface material is packed gravel. For larger parking areas, other textured materials such as brick pavers, granite paving blocks or cobblestone should be considered. If asphalt is proposed, one of the surface treatments available to gain the appearance of a gravel or pea stone surface should be used. Poured concrete may be

acceptable if largely out of view from the public way. Stamped asphalt, poured concrete, concrete made to simulate other material, concrete pavers and asphalt made to simulate brick or stone are generally not appropriate.

Parking lot sidewalks should be gravel, brick or granite.

### **Play Structures, Pools, Sheds and Other Structures**

The Commission has jurisdiction over permanent play structures, pools, sheds, and other structures visible from the public way. Every effort should be made to minimize their view. The scale of the structure should not overwhelm the site, and natural materials such as wood are preferred. Muted earth tones are recommended for painted structures and awnings. Sheds, gazebos and other structures should compliment the house in architectural style and materials. A Certificate of Appropriateness is required for all of these items.

### **Porches**

Removal of a porch requires a Certificate from the AFHDC. Unless removal of a porch is historically correct, we recommend against removing them because the entranceway could be stripped of its primary characteristics. The reconstruction of a lost porch is strongly encouraged and should be based on historic precedence for the style of the building.

All porch additions should be compatible with the style and detail of the building. Depending on the style, a new porch roof pitch may reflect the main roof form of the building or may appear flat. Porch additions to building types which traditionally did not have any porches should be limited to the rear of the building where possible. Enclosing an existing porch is generally inappropriate. Screening in of a traditionally open porch requires the prior approval of the Historic District Commission.

### **Public Improvements**

The Ashley Falls Historic District Commission must review and approve alterations or additions to the publicly owned components of the Historic District, including sidewalks, signage, lighting fixtures, and street furniture such as benches and trash receptacles. While many public improvements are governed by other regulatory requirements, the Commission retains authority over the appearance of such improvements. The choice of sidewalk material, including curbstones, the design and lumens of lighting fixtures, and the material, design and

location of benches and trash receptacles should reinforce the historic character of the District. Where possible, methods and materials of public improvements should be guided by historical documentation. MGL 40c allows in-kind replacement of existing components.

## **Roofs**

The AFHDC encourages the replacement of roofing materials with materials similar to those currently in place. For those willing to go to the expense of using historically correct materials (e.g. slate or wood) replacement would generally be considered appropriate.

Additions to existing structures shall use a roofing material that reflects the existing structure's roof. Roofing material on new construction should conform to roofing material on adjacent structures. The use of metal roofs on secondary structures is permitted.

In general, an appropriate roof form design will reflect the characteristic roof forms of nearby structures. Its also important that the roof form and pitch for an addition be similar but clearly secondary to the main existing roof form.

## **Septic Systems**

The size and location of septic systems is the responsibility of the Sheffield Board of Health. Septic mounds are considered structures and are subject to review by the AFHDC. When such systems require septic tank caps, lids or other aboveground infrastructure, owners or their contractors should contact the AFHDC to determine if an application for a certificate from the Commission is required.

## **Shutters and Awnings**

For new construction and/or additions, the appropriateness of shutters will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- *Style* – Shutters should be consistent with the style of the house.
- *Size* – Paired shutters should flank a single window and be sized so that the pair of shutters are equal to the width of the window frame.
- *Installation* – All shutters are to be installed in a manner that imitates a hinged shutter.

Awnings – Consult the Commission.

## **Siding**

Additions and alterations to existing structures should use building materials original to the structure. On a case-by-case basis, the AFHDC will consider approving siding products that replicate the look of the original material in appearance and texture.

New construction should incorporate building materials traditional to the neighborhood. The use of natural rather than composite or imitation siding materials is encouraged.

## **Signage**

Signage in the Ashley Falls Historic District should contribute to and complement the architectural character and detail of the buildings it fronts. The provisions of Sheffield Zoning Bylaw Section 6.2 serve as minimum requirements for all signs in the Historic District. The AFHDC may impose further restrictions. A Certificate of Appropriateness issued by the AFHDC is required for all signs in the Historic District, including Special Permits issued by the Planning Board under Sheffield Zoning Bylaw Section 6.2.5.2.

Signage should be appropriate and consistent with traditional placement locations, and should reflect the design, scale, size, and proportions of the building and the streetscape. Proposed signage should not conceal significant architectural building features or details. Signs with a design, method of support, and typeface based in historic precedent are preferred. In general, signs should be constructed of wood, and kept small and simple in their design. Both wall-mounted or post-mounted signs will be considered if appropriately sited and/or placed with regard to the building's exterior. External lighting is discouraged. If used, it should be concealed from view with plantings or similar devices, and carefully controlled to illuminate only the surface of the sign with minimal brightness and glare.

Neon signs, internally lit signs, colored accent lighting, and the use of aggressive colors or logos detract from the historic character of the Historic District and are inappropriate and will not be approved. Vehicles displaying signs painted on or otherwise permanently attached to them should not be routinely parked where they can easily be seen from the public way. Political signs, banners, and flags may be displayed two months before an election. They should be removed within seven days of the election.

## **Skylights**

Skylights were rarely used in domestic historic structures in New England. When used, usually a single skylight was installed, predominantly for ventilation. It would be located at the ridge pole, as close to the center of the roof as possible, and on the rear slope or least visible slope of the roof. Consequently, the Commission considers skylights as inappropriate and discourages their use in the AFHD. When proposed, they will be reviewed on an individual basis, and the number of units, together with their location and placement, size, scale, prominence, materials and design will be the factors taken into consideration.

Skylights should be placed on the rear slope, or on roof slopes with the least visibility to the street. They should never appear on the façade that faces the principle public way, and for buildings in the downtown area, preferably not on the façade facing the village green. Locating skylights higher on the roof generally makes them less visible, and smaller skylights are encouraged.

Skylights should be used sparingly, should not dominate the roof slope, and should be in scale with the structure. They should be flat, low profile units. Frames should be painted to blend with the roof color and be non-reflective. Bubble skylights, if used, are only permitted on roofs not visible from a public way.

If it is possible to document the prior existence of a skylight, the Commission will consider its restoration. Such restoration would require that the new skylight be the same or as close as possible to the same size and location as the original skylight.

The creation of living spaces in areas not originally intended as such, especially in the primary structure on a property, is not considered justification for the destruction of architectural integrity by the installation of skylights.

## **Solar panels**

Solar panels shall be installed in locations which create the least disturbance to the historical appearance of the building, which involve the minimum alteration to its structural integrity, and should not permanently change any architectural feature.

Installation shall consider the proportions, balance and scale of a property to determine the least intrusive location. Installation shall have negligible visual impact upon the site as a whole. Preferably, solar energy systems shall be installed on a rear ell, subordinate wing, secondary

massings, within an existing skylight, on accessory outbuildings, or on the ground. If a solar energy system is placed on the ground, it shall be positioned in a limited or no-visibility location in a secondary area of the property. On buildings, they shall be set back on a flat surface or placed behind an existing architectural feature (parapet, dormer, chimney, etc.), whenever possible. Solar energy systems shall not be installed on the roof of primary elevation of a building unless other options have been explored and eliminated.

A minimum of 2 feet of roof surface should be visible surrounding the collector array. Framing, piping, insulation, etc. should match the roof surface. Collectors should be mounted to match the roof slope (parallel to roof and no more than 3 inches above the roof surface). Piping, cables, etc. should be concealed from view.

### **Storefronts**

There are currently few commercial enterprises in the Ashley Falls Historic District. This was not always the case. Commercial establishments were present in the AFHD in the past, and Sheffield's zoning by-law has designated part of the AFHD as "village center," which allows for commercial use of properties. Such properties, however, are governed by the AFHD by-law, and subject to the following considerations.

#### **A. Historic Storefronts**

Historically or architecturally significant storefronts should be preserved or restored to the greatest extent possible, regardless of the current use of the structure. Preservation and restoration should include material and design of windows, doors, and storefront surround detail.

#### **B. Non-Historic Storefronts**

Alterations to existing non-historic storefronts shall use design and materials that are compatible with the immediate historic context of the District as a whole. If the alteration is part of a residential style building, reference should be made to historic storefront alterations in historic residential style buildings.

#### **C. New Storefronts**

The addition of new storefronts in historic façades is generally discouraged. If permitted, new storefronts shall be designed in a manner that retains the character-defining features of the

building as originally designed, or as altered if such alteration has gained architectural or historical significance. The new storefront shall also use design and materials that are compatible with the immediate historic context and the District as a whole.

#### D. Commercial Signage

See “Signage”

### **Terraces and Landscaping**

The AFHD is sited on the flood plain created by the Housatonic River, and the landscape is essentially flat. Historically, buildings did little to alter the topography, and new construction is expected to preserve the existing topography to the fullest extent possible. The construction of terraces, cuts, mounds, and other features that alter the landscape will not be approved unless required for health or safety purposes (e.g., septic mounds). If terraces are needed, they should use stone or stone clad retaining walls constructed in a manner consistent with the section on Fences and Walls. Concrete and treated wood timbers are generally not appropriate materials for a visible retaining wall.

Most other landscaping is exempted from review by the Commission. The Commission does not generally expect owners to consult with it when making changes to plantings. The Commission would recommend, however, that landscaping to the street side of the property be kept consistent with Ashley Falls’ rural New England heritage which is generally understated and low in height. Tall hedges and shrubs should not be allowed to overgrow structures or interrupt the public vista along the street. The Commission also suggests that native trees, plants and flowers be given preference over other varieties (exotics) and encourages the preservation of mature trees.

Plantings which have been made a necessary condition to the granting of a Certificate of Appropriateness, (such as a vegetative screening required in approving an air conditioning unit), must be maintained. Their removal or material alteration is subject to review and approval by the Commission.

It should be noted that large areas of the Historic District are covered by sensitive landscapes, wetlands, and natural features such as large trees, watercourses, habitats of rare or endangered species, and similar community assets. These should be preserved. The Sheffield Conservation Commission should be consulted before undertaking any significant alterations to the landscape.

## **Trim and Ornamentation**

Original existing trim and ornament should be preserved or repaired in keeping with the original design. Replacement “in-kind” of lost or damaged trim and ornament is encouraged. Trim and ornamentation on additions should display the characteristic use of trim and ornamentation on the existing structure, albeit in a more simplified and secondary fashion. Trim on new buildings should be in keeping with existing trim in the AFHD.

## **Walkways, Steps, Stairways, and Railings**

Walkways of brick or stone are appropriate in most cases. Gravel or pea stone walkways may also be appropriate. Asphalt and concrete, including those simulating other materials are not appropriate.

Stairways, steps, and railings are important features of entryways and porches. When possible, original features and detailing should be retained. Repairs should be in the same or similar design and material. If existing features are not original, it is desirable that their replacement be appropriate to the style of the building in design and materials. Railing/baluster and column design and spacing should be historically appropriate and repairs should maintain the original proportions when possible. If a new railing design is proposed, a scale drawing illustrating the new design in its context must be provided.

## **Windows**

Windows are one of the most distinctive character-defining features of a building, critical in establishing the scale and rhythm of the facade. They are also among the structure’s parts most vulnerable both to physical deterioration and to heating/cooling loss. Maintenance and repair of original, historical windows can be prohibitively expensive, and recent improvements in building technology have yielded products that are significantly more energy efficient than those originally installed during the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Consequently, many owners have been and will continue to be tempted to consider replacement.

The AFHDC recognizes that with respect to windows, differing situations call for a range of responses. A general principle, however, is that repair and maintenance of historic windows, combined with storm windows to increase energy efficiency, is always preferable to replacement, and replacement sashes and hardware within the original frames is preferred to

total replacement.<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the installation of storm windows will always be granted a Certificate of Nonapplicability. When possible, storm window frames should match or approximate the color of the window trim.

The AFHD contains a small number of houses built before 1800, and even these contain later additions and renovations. In those that preserve original 18<sup>th</sup> century fenestrations, all efforts should be made to retain them. The addition of storm windows to increase energy efficiency is the recommended approach. While the use of storm windows is always preferable, the use of modern windows in the post-1800 parts of the structure, or in other buildings in the AFHD, is permitted.

The most common window type within the district is the double hung unit, historically with true divided lights. This configuration is preferred to the more modern awning or casement types, unless the building code requirements dictate the use of the latter. Wood windows are preferred, but vinyl and aluminum-clad and metal-framed windows may be approved on a case-by-case basis. The number of lights within a window should be consistent with or approximate the original units if present. Typical replacement windows are 6/6 or 2/2, rarely numbering less than two per sash in older structures.

Exterior muntins are required, must not be flat, and must be permanently affixed. The muntin thickness and profile of replacement windows should approximate those of original historic windows. Also, the proportions of the frame to the sash should be preserved.

Only clear-paned, non-tinted glass shall be used (except to replace original stained glass). Mirrored and tinted heat-reflective glass are not appropriate.

Where original or architecturally appropriate windows have been replaced by windows of a different pattern, the Commission encourages the restoration of the appropriate window patterns.

In new construction or additions, the size, proportion, type and rhythm of windows should conform to those nearby in the district and appropriate to the style of construction. Use of storm windows in new construction is discouraged.

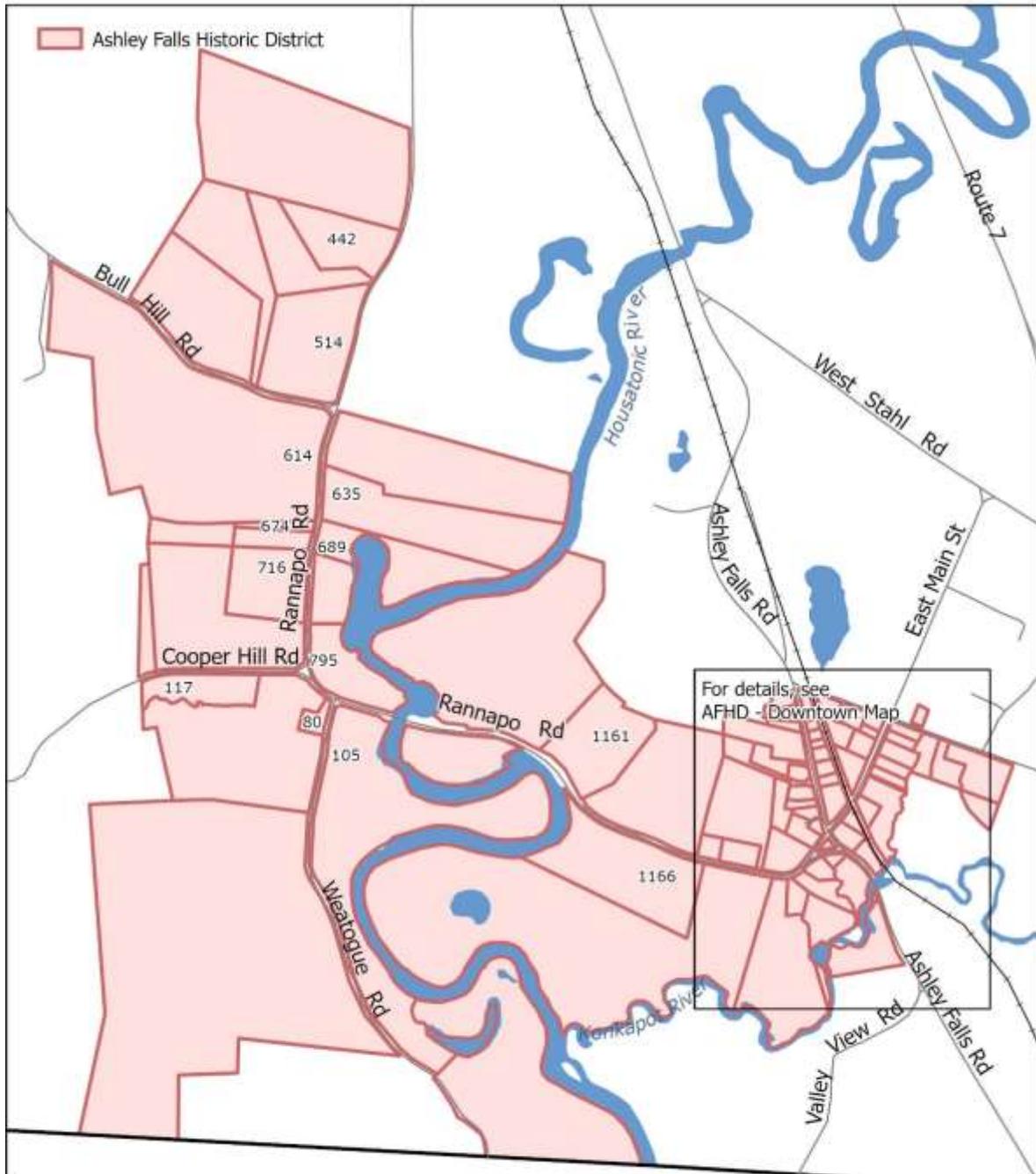
Twentieth century windows, including sliding glass doors, prefabricated picture windows, bay window units and horizontal tilt-out windows, etc. have little similarity to older windows found on historic buildings within the district and are therefore discouraged.

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<sup>1</sup> Studies have demonstrated that a properly maintained historic window combined with a good storm window will provide equal or better energy efficiency than a modern replacement window.

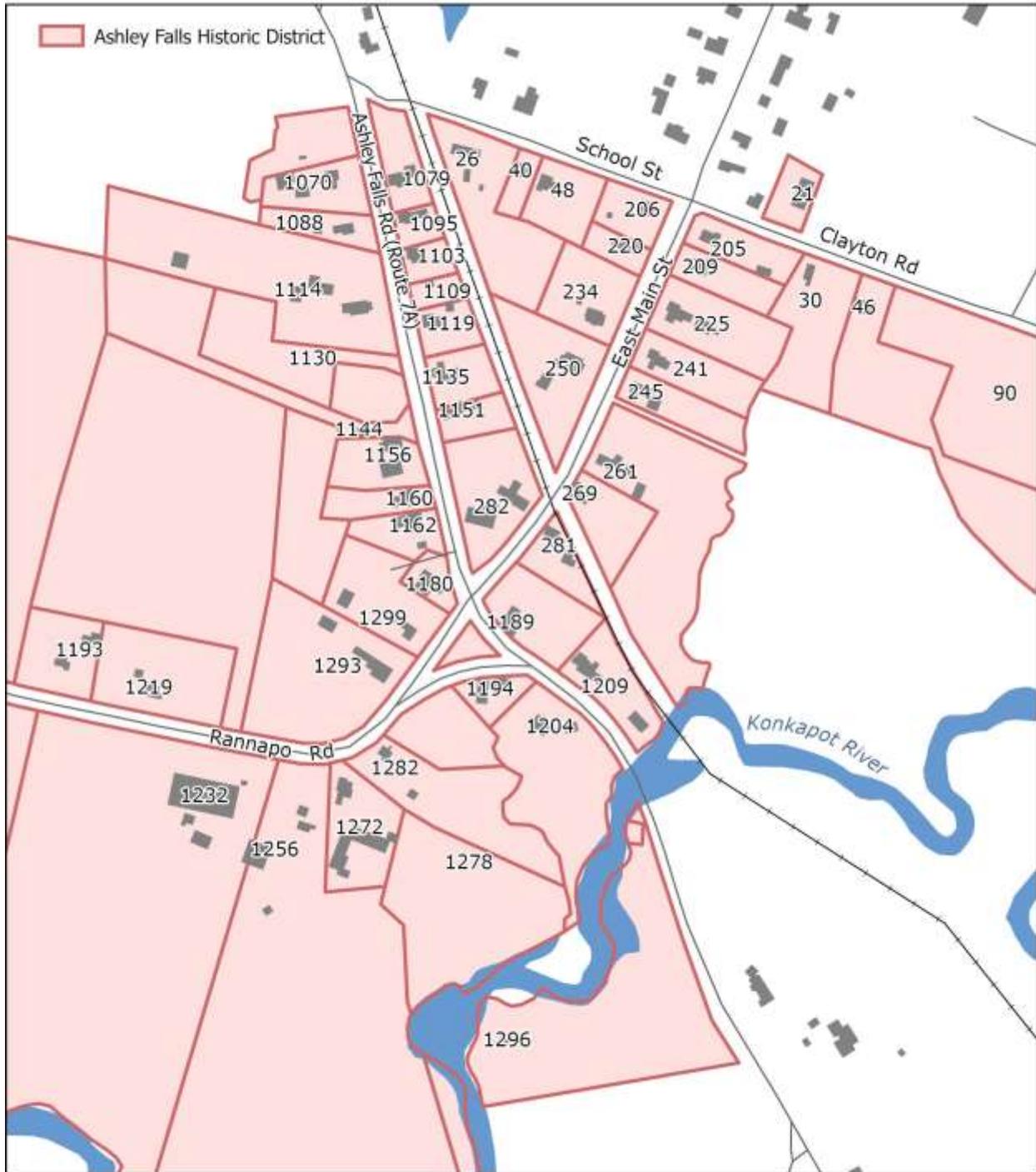
# HISTORIC DISTRICT MAP

## Ashley Falls Historic District



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# Ashley Falls Historic District - Downtown



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