Following the principles of Context Sensitive Solutions, the design approach for projects in historic districts should incorporate an understanding of the physical features that define and contribute to the significance of the district. This approach involves both preservation, to the extent possible, of existing historic resources, and design of new features compatible with the historic character of the project area.

In order to avoid creating a false sense of history, the project design must reference the documented historic context of the specific time and place. Knowledge of site-specific context is achieved through focused research that includes detailed documentation and analysis of historic maps, local records, period illustrations, and historic photographs. This process will provide project designers with the necessary background to guide project development toward a context sensitive design.

This guidance is to be used by the New York State Education Department (SED) Cultural Resource Survey Program when proposing an eligible architectural district or individual properties with large tracts of land. It can also be applied when requested by the Regional Cultural Resource Coordinator (CRC) for a known eligible or listed district.

Research Objectives:

- Identify and support contributing/ non-contributing features.
- Document the evolution of the historic district with historic maps and photographs.
- What did the town look like at the turn of the century, in the 1920’s and 1950’s?
- Observe the town today. What historic features remain?
- What historic features have been lost?
- What historic features define the streetscape?
- Consider spatial relationships - open space, setback & density of buildings, scale.
- Describe the changes in setting, roadside features and streetscape elements.
- Determine & identify period(s) of significance for proposed district.
- Take photographs to compare current and historic streetscape views from same location.

Potential Sources:

- Maps – Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, DOT As-Built plans, Historic Maps and Atlases in chronological sequence (i.e change over time)
- Images - Postcards, Photographs, Newspapers, Lithographs, Birds Eye Views, 19th century maps with inset views of prominent buildings and structures
- Documents – City/ Village Council or Board minutes, Ordinances, Newspapers

Elements of Historic Setting:

- Street Widening/ Narrowing
- Traffic Islands
- Street Width, Alignment and Intersection Configuration
- Building Setback and Density
- Surface Treatments - brick, cobblestone, bluestone, pavers
- Trees – planting scheme, species
- Curb Lines - extension, parking areas, curb material
- Street Lights - types, locations
- Street Furniture - benches, fountains, monuments, statues, clocks
- Traffic Islands
- Fences/ Walls - construction and material type, location
- Open Spaces - spatial relationship
- Walkways/ Crosswalks/ Sidewalks
- Boulevards, Planted Medians
- Driveways, Alleys
- Traffic Signals
- Signs and Street Markers
- Dates and Names Stamped in Concrete
- Awnings

Form B:

In accordance with the SED Work Scope, Historic Setting Analysis will be incorporated in the development of proposed National Register eligible districts identified through cultural resource surveys. In addition, the CRC may request this analysis for known eligible or listed districts by completing the Form B. The project description should identify specific elements proposed by the project (traffic calming devices, intersection improvements, tree removal or planting, parking, curbs and sidewalks, bike/ pedestrian accommodations, lighting, etc.).

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