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Introduction

1.1 Introduction & Background

The Point Neighborhood in Salem represents a fascinating historical and architectural period in the city's history. Settled as early as the 1850s, the neighborhood, historically known as Stage Point, was totally leveled in a devastating 1914 fire. The rebuilding of the neighborhood, largely accomplished in three years from 1914-1917, was the focus of a governor-appointed commission that was established days after the fire. The neighborhood's distinctive architecture is an important aspect of Salem's architectural heritage that deserves recognition, appreciation, and advocacy, and financial and technical assistance as described in the recommended components contained in this preservation plan.

The ultimate purpose of the preservation plan is to preserve the area's historic physical character in a manner that is practical, useful, and beneficial for those who live and own property in the neighborhood. The plan also intends to involve others in Salem who can be partners in advocacy and educational efforts. Recommendations in the plan include programs and advice on how to prevent neglect and demolition of buildings and to increase awareness of the area and the types of programs that could be beneficial to this purpose.

The City of Salem (City) contracted Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB) to prepare a historic resources survey and preservation plan for the city's Point Neighborhood (Study Area). The location and boundaries of the Study Area are shown in Figure 1, Appendix A. The major purpose of the historic resources survey was to update and more thoroughly document the older architecture in the neighborhood, especially those buildings not previously inventoried that post date the 1914 Salem fire that completely destroyed the former buildings in the neighborhood. The updated and expanded inventory also provides the basis for a formal assessment of the eligibility of the

neighborhood for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a district, and for the establishment of boundaries for the district. The documentation in the updated inventory can be readily adapted to form the basis of a National Register of Historic Places nomination for the neighborhood. The preservation plan was formulated in response to concerns and suggestions of the neighborhood and other interested residents and advocates and the current conditions of the study area. The plan is anticipated to provide recommended tools and programs to help preserve the historic architectural character of the neighborhood.

1.1.1 Scope of Work

The work performed by VHB was completed in four phases that began in March 2006 and were completed in September 2006. Each phase built upon the previous phase to supplement and inform the effort.

Phase I - Phase I tasks involved the initial compilation and analysis of baseline information about the neighborhood's history, architecture, and socio-economic information that was largely gained from the City, Massachusetts Historical Commission, other agencies, and area individuals, and through reconnaissance fieldwork.

The reconnaissance fieldwork conducted in this phase yielded not only the approach to documentation, but also furthered the understanding of the types of architecture present in the neighborhood. Digital photographs for use in meetings and the final plan were also taken in this phase.

Discussions were held with some stakeholders, although a proposed walking or driving tour with several representatives was not undertaken. Preparations for a public meeting specified in Phase II was also completed in Phase I. Deliverables included a report detailing the efforts of this phase of work; a preliminary bibliography; and digital photographs.

Phase II - This phase entailed research to identify and understand existing mechanisms and programs that either help or hinder preservation in the neighborhood; intensive field work and research on the history of the area; preparation of substantial outlines of the forms and plan; and a public meeting that was held on April 6, 2006.

The goals for the meeting were to help meeting attendees understand the historical significance and architectural development of the neighborhood and to understand the basic concepts of the types of preservation mechanisms that might work best for the neighborhood. The meeting format consisted of a Powerpoint presentation with an initial brief overview of the project's purpose, methodology and outcome; preliminary



findings about the Point's cultural resources, and to describe and explain types of preservation tools available and how they might work in the neighborhood.

The meeting was turned into a more open format, facilitated by VHB staff, for attendees to view boards presenting certain issues and asking for comment or questions from those attending the meeting. Results of the meeting are presented in Chapter 2 in the section entitled "Community Concerns".

Phase III - Work in Phase III culminated in a draft preservation plan that includes a detailed action plan and completion of a draft Area Form and National Register assessment, both of which were subject to review by the City, stakeholders, and MHC prior to finalization. The second public meeting, held on August 2, 2006, presented preliminary plan recommendations and provided answers to questions posed about the recommendations. Attendees at the meeting, many of them property owners, approved the recommendations and supported the National Register nomination recommendation and proposed boundaries in particular. Issues surrounding the proposed redevelopment of the former St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church Parish Complex were discussed, although a separate public meeting regarding this development was held the same week.

Phase IV - Phase IV tasks involved finalizing both the Plan and the MHC Area Form and National Register evaluation, in response to comments received from stakeholders and from a second public meeting held in the third phase. A Survey Report that summarized methodology, included a street index of properties, and suggested further study recommendations was also prepared. Both the survey report and the preservation plan include a map showing proposed historic district boundaries.



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Neighborhood Description and History

2.1 Physical Description

The Point Neighborhood bounds are generally defined as Lafayette Street (Route 1A-Route 114) on the west; the south side of Peabody Street on the north; Salem Harbor on the east side; and Chase and Leavitt Street roughly forming the southern boundary (Figure 1, Appendix A) and includes approximately 295 properties. The neighborhood is just south of Salem's central business district; a small commercial district composed of multi-story brick buildings forms the northern entry into the neighborhood. The neighborhood contains mostly multi-family residential buildings from 1914-1917, but also encompasses the early 20th century industrial buildings of the former Naumkeag Steam Cotton Mills Company, now Shetland Industrial Park; the parish complex of the former St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church; a small number of light industrial buildings and commercial establishments; and a small city park.

2.1.1 Neighborhood History

The Point Neighborhood's history and architecture represent a fascinating story of community rebirth. Formerly an area filled largely with wood frame three and four-story tenements crowded on narrow streets, the Point Neighborhood was completely destroyed in the famous June 25, 1914 Salem fire. The Salem Rebuilding Commission (SRC), a group of Salem citizens appointed by Governor David Walsh days after the fire, oversaw the reconstruction of the neighborhood over a three-year period from 1914-1917. During this brief period of time, the area was largely rebuilt with apartment buildings, single and two-family dwellings, and commercial edifices of fire-proof construction that met relatively stringent building regulations established by the



Commission. Most of the extant buildings in the neighborhood date from this initial rebuilding effort, although another wave of construction occurred in the 1920s as the city and the United States as a whole experienced an expanding economy and accelerated building boom. The neighborhood and city's largest employer, the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company removed their operations to South Carolina in 1953, which was a significant loss to the entire community.

From its earliest settlement in the 1850s, the neighborhood was Salem's port of entry for its newest immigrants. French Canadians composed the neighborhood's earliest group, followed by people from Russia, Poland, and Greece in the early 20th century. By the mid-20th century, the neighborhood was becoming home to first generation immigrants from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico; today the area is largely inhabited by their descendants as well as newer arrivals from these and other Latin American countries.

A far more detailed and comprehensive history of the neighborhood's development can be found in the Area Form prepared in association with this Plan (Appendix B). The information presented in the Area Form is worth a careful reading for those interested in the area's history and for understanding the important historical significance this area represents.

2.1.2 Architectural Character

Representative images of the neighborhood's architectural character are in Appendix C. The Point Neighborhood is a nearly intact neighborhood that largely developed between 1915 and 1930, after a devastating fire on June 25, 1914. The fire leveled the area from the fire's point of origin near the Peabody town line west of the neighborhood to Salem Harbor. The area's narrow inaccessible streets and densely built-up wood frame tenements, especially their combustible roof coverings, were considered the cause for the fire's spread for over one mile to its stop at the waterside. A short time before the fire, the City had established a City Plan Commission and had made steps towards adopting a new building code, actions which assisted the rapid establishment of the Salem Rebuilding Commission and revised building code enactment within weeks of the fire. Many of the French-Canadian residents of the area chose to rebuild, usually on the same parcel they had owned before the fire. Although the City and the Commission considered the idea of providing substantial architectural assistance to residents, the idea was abandoned in favor of allowing individuals to choose their own architects or builders. The Commission provided sample architectural plans and built two demonstration houses on Winthrop Street west of the neighborhood to illustrate good design and building practices for affordable multi-family housing. Both of these houses are still extant. A detailed report by the Secretary of the Salem Rebuilding Trust, an adjunct of the Commission, confirmed that residents and owners reviewed and, in some cases, used the sample plans. Architects from



Boston and Salem were employed to produce architectural drawings for many buildings. Architects included several Salem architects: George H. Fanning, Arthur Marchand, Arthur Rosenstein, and Leopold and Alfred Audet. The Boston architectural firm of Kilham & Hopkins was responsible for the design of several of the buildings commissioned by the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Co., including some of their employee housing in the neighborhood.

Although individuals made their own choices about architectural style and building type, the neighborhood exhibits a cohesive appearance through similarity in scale and height of buildings, architectural styles and decorative elements, setbacks, and building materials. Some of these elements were regulated by the Commission's building guidelines, such as the height of two-family and apartment dwellings and their setbacks and footprint size on the parcel. The stipulation for fire-proof materials resulted in granite or concrete masonry blocks for foundations and slate shingles for roofs. While a number of brick or stuccoed buildings are present in the neighborhood, especially on Ward and Peabody Streets, wood frame buildings actually predominate on most streets. Most of the buildings are representative of one or a mix of the popular architectural styles of the time, especially Colonial Revival, Neo-Classical or Craftsman styles. Decorative details are relatively modest; most of the masonry buildings exhibit contrasting brick elements or variety of coursing or corbelling and classical motifs rendered in concrete or stone.

While individuals erected most buildings, the neighborhood contains a distinctive group of employee housing built by the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company soon after the fire. This series of stuccoed four-family houses on Prince Place and Dow Street in the center of the neighborhood are the only instance of a clustered group of identical residences built by the same owner. Brick apartment buildings on Peabody and Ward Street were developed by a small number of Salem-based developers. Groups of identical buildings, for example on Pingree Street near Lynch Street, hint at either the same developer or at least the use of the same architect, but further research would need to be conducted to confirm the observation.

The neighborhood is populated by duplex, multi-family and apartment dwellings, although a small number of single-family residences are also present. As stipulated in the building regulations, no apartment building was allowed to be over five stories in height and two-family residences could not be more than two stories. Most of the smaller residences have hip or gable roofs with dormers, while the apartment buildings seen throughout the neighborhood have flat or modestly pitched shed roofs. Wood porches are a common feature on most dwellings, including the large apartment buildings that feature multi-story wood porches on side or rear elevations. The majority of masonry buildings are in the north section of the neighborhood, notably on Ward, Peabody and Harbor Streets, and along Congress Street and Lafayette Street,



where many of the larger brick apartment buildings were constructed. But almost every street within the neighborhood contains masonry buildings.

The neighborhood's rebuilding efforts in the 1910s and 1920s focused on replacing residential stock along with a small number of business blocks, some of the latter combined with housing units above. Only two industrial facilities were rebuilt in the neighborhood: the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company's facilities next to Salem Harbor and the South River and a small brick bakery building at Leavitt and Pingree Streets now occupied by Harbor Sweets, a candy manufacturing company. The Naumkeag complex contains an impressive collection of single and multi-story reinforced concrete buildings that dominate the east side. A large multi-story parking garage dominates the central part of the complex, but otherwise the buildings remain relatively unaltered, except for changes in window and door openings. One of two religious complexes built in the Study Area (the 1890 Sanborn map showed a Methodist Episcopal Church at the northeast corner of Lafayette and Harbor Streets), the former St. Joseph Roman Catholic parish complex was the only one rebuilt after the fire. The 1949-1950 church building, an early example in Salem of the Modern Movement of architecture, and its 1917 brick rectory front on Lafayette Street, while the 1962 convent and 1921 elementary school building face Harbor Street. The loss of the St. Joseph High School building at the corner of Lafayette and Dow Streets has left a large surface parking lot in the south and east side of the parish complex. Mary Jane Lee Park at the corner of Palmer and Prince Streets is the only city park within the neighborhood. A small triangular park, known as Lafayette Park, is just west of the St. Joseph complex and Palmer Cove Playground lies south of Congress and Leavitt Streets.

The diversity and geographic mixture of building types in the Point Neighborhood is the result of the Salem Fire of 1914, which destroyed all but two buildings in the neighborhood, and the regulatory control of the Salem Rebuilding Commission (SRC) in the years immediately following the fire. More than 70 % of the existing buildings in the Point were constructed in the three-year period (1914-1917) following the fire under the supervision of the SRC. An additional 20% of buildings were constructed between 1920 and 1930. The SRC instituted a building code for the burned areas of Salem designed to make new buildings safer and more healthful for residents. Before the Salem Fire, the Point was a heavily developed area of inexpensive, wood-frame, multi-family housing that catered to recent immigrant populations and workers in the adjacent Naumkeag mill and nearby tanneries and shoe factories. The building code instituted after the fire carefully regulated the size and character of multi-family housing with the intent of minimizing fire danger in buildings housing large numbers of people. The code specified that any building housing more than two families and more than 2 ½-stories high be of exterior masonry construction and have an incombustible roof material. Houses under 2 ½-stories in height and housing up to four families could be of wood frame construction, but required interior fire stopping



between units and stories, such as partitions between each unit filled solid with brick or concrete and/or fire walls at end and between each stacked unit (SRC, 1917). Combination commercial and residential buildings were required to be of fireproof construction or exterior masonry construction and a maximum of four stories. Other universal building requirements apparent in the Point include a 5-story height cap and a maximum of 85% lot coverage. The SRC building code effectively eliminated the wood-frame three-decker or four-decker tenement form, common in industrial worker housing in New England, from the Point Neighborhood. In doing so, the SRC was following mounting public sentiment against the housing form in the early 20th century. Reform-minded architects and industrial interests viewed the three-decker as unhealthy because of the close quarters, lack of air and sunlight inside the units, and the danger of fire. In 1913, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts passed the Tenement Housing Reform Act, which allowed cities and towns to forbid the construction of frame apartments over two stories high (Candee 1985:69).

Property owners in the Point Neighborhood largely rebuilt following the Salem Fire, and the diversity of forms, styles, and materials in the Point reflects the owners' individual choices. The destruction in the Point Neighborhood caused by the Salem Fire provided a clean slate for redevelopment, but overall, property owners erected buildings similar to those from before the fire, albeit according to the SRC building code. The Point remained a neighborhood of affordable, multi-family housing oriented toward a working class population. Landlords living elsewhere in Salem or surrounding communities or people of modest means who benefited from the additional income of one or more rental units owned most of the multi-family properties in the Point. Despite encouragement from the SRC to build dwellings or homes with fireproof exterior materials, most property owners opted for more economical wood frame buildings. Sixty percent of the existing buildings in the Point built after 1914 are wood frame construction with wood cladding. The remaining buildings are wood or steel frame buildings with masonry veneers or load-bearing masonry buildings. The most popular architectural styles in the Point Neighborhood regardless of building form or materials are Second Renaissance Revival and Colonial Revival.

Typical building alterations within the neighborhood include window and door replacements, artificial siding, and removal of original elements, such as porches, and replacement with new elements. Few buildings or structures have been demolished, reinforcing the distinct impression of the area's historic density, even after the 1914 fire. Congress Street exhibits the highest degree of surface parking lots or open areas, a situation exacerbated by the corridor's broad width, although many of these open areas were already present by the 1950s. A small number of parking lots and open areas are found throughout the neighborhood.



2.1.3 Character Defining Features

Character defining features are the elements of a building, structure, or area that are readily identifiable as the distinctive physical elements that define and contribute to the property's character and significance. Identification and classification of such features can help people become aware of what is important to maintain and preserve.

Definition of these features is also of great benefit in the creation of voluntary design guidelines, should the community affirmatively decide upon them, and are the basis for a proposed manual that can assist building owners with sensible maintenance measures.

The Point Neighborhood's character defining features can be seen in the height, massing, construction materials, and details prevalent in the neighborhood. Unlike most areas that grew more organically over a longer period of time, the Point Neighborhood's character defining features largely result from the building code created by the Salem Rebuilding Commission to ensure that the new buildings would be fireproof. It is also unusual that so many buildings in the neighborhood were erected in a narrow span of time, roughly three years, which also results in a physical uniformity and design cohesiveness not seen in most neighborhoods in the city.

Typical height of 2 to 4 stories. The SRC's building code for new construction included a 5-story cap on building height (for second class buildings only; the other building classes were limited to 4 stories), with specific story caps on unit size. Today, with the exception of the St. Joseph's Church building and one of the Shetland Park industrial buildings, no structures are over four stories high.

Use of wood clapboard siding, concrete block, or brick. The SRC required the use of noncombustible materials for exterior sheathing. The majority of buildings are sided with wood clapboard or were constructed of brick or brick veneer. A small number are of concrete block, both decorative or in a rusticated pattern. It should be noted that a number of buildings have received new artificial siding, either aluminum or vinyl, over the past few decades. These newer siding materials, though somewhat common, is not considered a character-defining feature as they are not original materials used in the neighborhood.

Concrete block or granite foundations. To meet the SRC requirements for fireproof materials, concrete block and granite was chosen for most new buildings' foundations. In addition, the foundation blocks were to be infilled with mortar to prevent spread of fire, and are seen throughout the neighborhood

Flat, hip, or gable roofs. Most of the larger buildings, especially the larger multi-family unit buildings and commercial buildings, are covered with a flat roof. Most of the two-family, two-story buildings have hip or gable roofs, the latter are mostly front gable.



Slate roof shingles. SRC regulations specified slate as the preferred roof covering, although tile, terra cotta, metal or other equally incombustible materials could be used. The noncombustible nature of roof coverings was considered especially important due to the knowledge that it was wood shingle coverings of most roofs that hastened the spread of the fire. Today, many buildings retain slate shingles, a material that can last well over one hundred years if shingle fastenings and roof flashing are maintained.

Dormer windows. Dormer windows, particularly hipped dormers, on more than one roof slope are a common element in the Point Neighborhood. Many of the buildings' roofs feature individual or grouped dormers.

Classical detailing. While ornate detailing is not common in the Point Neighborhood, many buildings exhibit decorative classical details. These details include keystones above the windows, splayed lintels, and cast stone detailing, including panels with decorative motifs. Other details include stringcourses, interior cornices on commercial buildings, cornices with dentils, and rusticated patterns of brick and concrete block.

Wood front porches. Front porches in the neighborhood are displayed in several forms, ranging from a small front porch, or stoop, to a full width front porch. Wraparound porches are present in a few instances.

Wood multi-story porches. Multi-story porches are also a common element in the Point Neighborhood, most commonly seen on the side or rear of larger multi-unit family buildings. A few of the porches have been enclosed, but for the most part, the porches remain open and retain their simple wood railings and balusters.

Wood window sash. Most original wood sash that remains in the neighborhood is 1/1 double hung sash, although more recent replacement sash is also seen.

Small lot size. More than half of the properties in the Point Neighborhood occupy lot sizes that are less than 1/10 of an acre in size. The lots reflect the subdivision pattern that existed before the 1914 fire, which was largely untouched by the SRC, although certain streets were widened as a result of the rebuilding effort.

Minimal to no setback from sidewalk/Consistent building density on lots. Most, if not all, of the buildings in the Point Neighborhood are set close to the street with little to no setback from the sidewalk. The SRC regulations specified that buildings could not occupy more than 75 percent of the lot, unless they were built on a corner lot, in which case 80 percent of the lot could be covered by the building.



Tree placement and tree types. Shade trees were added to the neighborhood after the fire to replace those that had burned, although the number of trees was increased by 50%. Sugar maples, Norway maples, elms, and sycamores were the most popular species of trees planted in the neighborhood, mainly at the outer edge of the sidewalk next to the street. Based on their size, some existing trees in the neighborhood date from this initial period of planting, although others are products of more recent planting episodes.