

# The Stone Walls of Bedford

## 1. Threats to Their Survival

### a. Active Threats. Loss of walls and stones from walls due to:

Removal of stones by homeowner -- for use elsewhere or to dismantle the wall.

Theft of stones by persons other than homeowner.

Replacement of old dry walls with veneered or mortared structures.

Removal of walls during road widening.

Road maintenance practices:

--Undercutting of walls during road cleaning and scraping.

--Removal (rather than replacement) of stones that fall into the road.

--Widening of drainage ditches

Electric and telephone line maintenance practices:

--Damage to walls from falling branches and equipment and from heavy equipment resting on walls.

### b. Passive Threats. Loss of walls and stones from walls due to:

Frost heaves.

Vibrations from heavy trucks.

Vine and brush growth and trees falling on walls.

Poor construction.

Deer dislodging stones when they jump over walls.

Homeowner neglect:

--Out of sight, out of mind. Many walls lie outside a homeowner's current functional fencing and are, therefore, not a concern.

--Wall building is expensive. Many homeowners can't afford to completely rebuild an old wall and don't know they have other options.

--Homeowners lack information about the historic and aesthetic value of stone walls.

--Homeowners lack information on how to go about building or repairing walls.

## 2. What Can We Do To Preserve Them?

### a. Examples from other towns and places:

In Stonington, CT, “no road which has been designated as a scenic road shall be altered by widening of the right-of-way, paving, changes of grade, straightening, removal of stone walls and removal of mature trees, except for good cause determined by the Planning and Zoning Commission.”

In Chilmark, MA., “No moving, removing or otherwise altering an existing stone wall shall be allowed, other than for one driveway, in which case the stones from the opening wall shall be utilized on the property. Stone walls may be repaired.”

In Dublin, NH, “No person shall deface, alter the location of, or remove any stone wall which was made for the purpose of marking the boundaries of, or which borders any road in the Town of Dublin, except upon written consent of the Board of Selectmen.”

In Fayette County, KY, The Stone Fence Action Match Program provides matching monies for the renovation of historic stone fences located along the public right-of-way. Currently there is \$40,000 budgeted for this project. The program provides assistance in the form of a dollar-for-dollar matching grant with a maximum of \$5000 per project.

In Lexington, KY, the *Dry Stone Conservancy* provides information, educational materials and limited technical assistance to homeowners, as well as job training to develop professional drystone masons.

Tennessee passed a resolution in May, 2000 “strongly encouraging the Tennessee Historical Society to document stone walls worthy of preservation and to develop criteria for their protection and preservation, including standards for moving and rebuilding such walls when other alternatives are not available.”

New Hampshire has a bill stating that, “No person shall negligently dig or carry away any stone, ore, gravel, clay, sand, turf, or mold which is on the land of another person, or aid in such actions without the permission of that person or the person’s agent.”

b. Thoughts of some of our Bedford Officials:

In an informal conversation, Gary Hays, our Superintendent of Highways, said he was “100% for stone walls” and that he tries very hard not to widen the roads he is responsible for and, thereby, undercut walls. Though stone walls are the homeowners’ responsibility, he thinks it would be possible for his maintenance men to put stones that have fallen out of walls and into the road back in the vicinity of the wall (when there was no possibility of injury to his men). This would be instead of the current policy of hauling those stones off to the crusher. It would cut down on costs, when and if homeowners repair their walls, and keep the look of the walls closer to the original. He should, though, have a way of forcing homeowners whose walls repeatedly fall into the road into taking responsibility.

In another informal conversation, Jeffrey Osterman, Director of Planning, said that the planning board currently encourages the preservation of stone walls by limiting the number of driveway cuts allowed for developments and by drawing subdivision lines to correspond to existing stone walls. He would be in favor of some kind of ordinance that addresses the stealing and removal of stone walls and the development of educational materials (brochures and/or videos) showing what to look for in stone walls and the different styles of walls typical of the area.

Simon Skolnick of the Conservation Board would be happy to include information about wall building and repair in the Conservation Board’s newsletter.

### **3. Possible Preservation Measures:**

- a. Make materials available to homeowners telling of the historic significance of walls and explaining what to look for in a wall. These materials – brochures, newsletters, videos, and/or website, would encourage homeowners to build walls in styles appropriate to the area while acknowledging that variation in walls has always existed.
- b. Make a list of reliable contractors and wall builders available to homeowners.
- c. Encourage homeowners to “pick up their walls,” a far less expensive approach than wallbuilding but one that may last for years.
- d. Have Wall Days similar to BRLA’s Trail Days when key walls are “picked up.”
- e. Appointment of a Wall Advisory Board, similar to the existing Tree Advisory Board, to oversee questions about walls.
- f. Recreate the position of Wall Watcher or Fence Viewer in the Town of Bedford
- g. Pass a resolution recognizing the historic and aesthetic importance of stone walls and follow it up with guidelines to telephone, power, cable, and road crews about how the town would like its walls treated.
- h. Pass an ordinance prohibiting the removal of stone walls bordering a road and limiting the number of cuts in a wall that developers can make.
- i. Provide matching funds for maintaining and rebuilding walls.
- j. Pass an ordinance requiring property owners to pick up walls that are in danger of falling into a road.
- k. Designate certain roads in the town as scenic roads, thereby acquiring the ability to protect historic features along those roads.

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