



Town of Sudbury

Historical Commission

Flynn Building
278 Old Sudbury Road
Sudbury, MA 01776
978-639-3387
Fax: 978-639-3314

historical@sudbury.ma.us

www.sudbury.ma.us/historicalcommission

MINUTES

April 6, 2026 AT 9:00 AM
Site Visit Carding Mill

Members present: Chris Hagger, Chris Durall, William Andreas, Steven Greene,

Staff Present: Adam Burney, Director of Planning and Community Development, Lori Capone, Conservation Coordinator, Beth Perry, Planning and Zoning Coordinator

Others Present: Dave Henkels, Conservation Commission, Ken Holtz, Conservation Commission, Griff Noble, Historic Districts Commission, Taryn Trexler, Historic Districts Commission, Chris Durall, Historical Commission

The discussion focused on the current condition, history, and future possibilities for the Carding Mill Pond conservation building, including its long-term disuse, vandalism issues, and the need for dam restoration. Participants also reviewed the building's architectural significance, the status of the water wheel, potential reuse concepts, and constraints around public access and site maintenance.

Building Condition and Current Use

- The structure was originally used as an apartment and work/storage space, but the apartment portion has not been maintained.
- The conservation department currently uses part of the building for projects and storage.
- Because of liability concerns related to the urban dam, vandalism, and break-ins, the building has been kept closed to the public.
- There is no parking, and police regularly contact staff when vehicles are left by the gate.
- The building is described as in overall good condition except in places, with deteriorated doors, light coming through where wood is missing, and ongoing issues with hornets in summer.

Historical Background

- The building is a former mill structure originally disassembled in New Hampshire and reassembled at this site in the 1920s by Henry Ford.
- Ford used it as an industrial school for boys at the campus.
- Henry Ford and Thomas Edison were close friends. Thomas Edison and Harvey Firestone admired the Carding Mill building during Henry Ford's ownership. As a result, he

constructed a laboratory building on his Ft. Myers, Florida campus (which is open to the public) based on a similar design.

Architectural and Structural Observations

- The building was highlighted as architecturally significant, especially its exposed beams, tall basement, stonework, lintels, slate roof, and overall construction quality.
- The basement was specifically noted as having impressive height and structural details, though it is dirty and full of spiders.
- Participants pointed out massive column-like tree trunks and stonework in the Carding Mill basement and the basement wall which was part of the constructed dam.
- Some original mill beams are still visible and are believed to have come from the original New Hampshire mill.

Water Wheel and Power History

- A fabricated water wheel was built in the 1980s by the MacNeill family who owned and lived on the land surrounding Carding Mill in order to duplicate Henry Ford's intended wheel.
- The wheel cost about \$30,000 at the time and was meant to be connected to the building, but that connection never happened.
- The original Ford concept was to use water power to generate electricity and run the machinery, though the system was never fully operational.

Dam and Restoration Concerns

- The site includes an earthen dam with a spillway and a second spillway, both of which are not functioning properly.
- Trees growing on the dam are a major problem and would need to be removed.
- Restoration would likely require removing trees and root systems and rebuilding voids created by roots.
- It was noted that the current assessment is more in-depth than prior periodic assessments because it is intended to evaluate actual repair options.
- The group expects a report to determine the best path forward and the funding needed.

Preservation, Funding, and Future Use

- CPC funds were reportedly sought in 2015 for a report and repairs, but insufficient funding was allocated.
- Earlier discussions with town officials and others generated interest in preserving the building, but no major follow-through occurred.
- Another possible use discussed was storage rental for the Wayside Inn, which still appears to have some interest in the space.
- Public access remains limited due to the lack of parking, the need to open and close gates, and ongoing land-use and maintenance constraints.

- The site also faces invasive species issues in the pond, though after years of treatment, kayaking may be possible for much of the year.

Closing Observations

The tour emphasized the building's historical importance, unusual construction, and deteriorating but still significant condition. The overall tone was one of concern about preservation paired with interest in finding a practical long-term use and securing the funding needed for repairs and restoration.