

New Bedford Mayor's proposal to establish new historic districts approved by City Council

"New Districts Celebrate City's Role in the Abolition Movement and 19th-century Trades."

The City of New Bedford is home to two new historic districts, with the City's Council's recent approval of a proposal submitted by Mayor Jon Mitchell to establish Abolition Row and Mechanics Lane as Historic Districts in the City.

The City previously had one local historic district, the Bedford Landing – Waterfront Historic District, which was established in 1971 and which shares its boundaries with the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park.

The proposed Abolition Row Historic District comprises a unique and cohesive group of residential properties along Seventh Street, representing the City's significant role in the Abolition Movement. The proposed Mechanic's Lane Local Historic District, named after a small alleyway that is the center of the district, is a small cohesive group of mainly residential properties that were built in the early to mid-nineteenth century that housed tradesmen and craftsmen who were commonly referred to as "mechanics." The lane runs along the back of the First Baptist Church, a historic landmark whose restoration is nearly complete.

In 2016, the Historical Commission was approached by several residents along Seventh Street and Mechanics Lane asking for the possibility of exploring the creation of new Local Historical Districts. The Historical Commission and Planning Department met with neighbors several times, and the result

was a proposal that reflected their input, as well as feedback from the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the New Bedford Planning Board.

The City values its heritage and has a long record of establishing preservation policies to help maintain and enhance the City's unique character. New Bedford is home to seven National Historic Landmarks (three of them are located within the proposed Abolition Row District,) and currently has 15 National Register Districts ranging in diversity from parks and textile mill complexes to industrial power plants and residential neighborhoods.

"I want to applaud the work of the Historic Commission and residents who came together to help design and advocate for the new Districts in collaboration with my Administration and the Council," said Mayor Mitchell. "The designation of the Abolition Row and Mechanic's Lane Historic Districts will ensure that these unique and cohesive group of properties are recognized for their historic and architectural significance and are protected from potential alterations that could undermine the area's historical character."

"New Bedford's single local historic district, the Bedford Landing District, whose borders are contiguous with the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, was established in 1971," said Diana Henry, Chair of the New Bedford Historical Commission. "Therefore, after a half-century, the designation of two new Districts as a result of a grassroots effort initiated by neighborhood residents is an endeavor to be celebrated. The Historical Commission looks forward to collaborating with the new District property owners in the continued preservation and recognition of their unique properties and their contribution to what makes New Bedford special."-City of New Bedford.