

North Wilmot Union Meetinghouse

Resource owned by North Wilmot Union Meeting House Society

P.O. Box 85, Wilmot, NH 03287

Contact: Ann Davis, president, 603-526-6960; woodswithoutgile@tds.net

LCHIP Stewardship plan - Document 1.5

I. The Resource: North Wilmot Union Meetinghouse:

A. History and significance:

When the structure was built in 1829, it was known as the North Union Meeting House. People from five denominations - Congregational, Christian Baptist, Freewill Baptist, Methodist, and Universalist - sold pews to raise funds to build the structure at the top of Tewksbury Hill.

The meeting house was the hub of a hill-farm community known as Fowlertown, which was located in North Wilmot and the northeast corner of Springfield, N.H. In the 1840s and 1850s, using the number of homesteads as the basis, the estimated population of Fowlertown was 150 to 300 people.

Although a few homes have persisted, most of what now remains of Fowlertown's homesteads are cellar holes; more than 50 have been found.

The North Wilmot Union Meetinghouse is the oldest church structure in Wilmot. It is the only building in town that is on the National Register of Historic Places. An image of the building is on the seal of the Town of Wilmot.

B. When the meeting house was built & when it was modified:

The denominations hired Josiah Stearns, a master carpenter, to build the North Union Meeting House.

During the winter, it proved difficult to attend services at the church. In 1849, the members voted to move the meeting house one-half mile north and down the hill to its current site at the intersection of North Wilmot, Tewksbury, Piper Pond, and Breezy Hill roads. In 1850 the members paid Josiah Stearns \$400 to move the structure. He used many teams of oxen (depending on the account, the number of teams ranged from 20 to 30). Local tradition notes that several barrels of rum helped to facilitate the process. The structure probably was moved in late summer after grain and hay had been harvested from the fields.

Modifications to the interior reflect changes in how the congregations worshiped. The meeting house had box pews and a choir loft. These were removed after the Civil War. It was heated by two wood stoves in the sanctuary.

Early in the 20th century, the congregations made several significant changes to allow the sanctuary to also be used for community events. They removed the pews and wood stoves; built a dais on the west end of the building; installed a level floor in the sanctuary; and built a rustic kitchen on the lower level. The building was wired for electricity. A furnace and ducts were installed on the lower level. Grates, installed in the floor, allowed heat to flow into the sanctuary. The sanctuary, now unencumbered by stationary pews, was used for plays, concerts, suppers, and similar activities. A closet filled with books provided a lending library for local residents.

In 1915 the horse sheds were constructed behind the meeting house.

In the 1980s, the electricity was disconnected. The furnace, which hadn't functioned for decades, and its asbestos-covered ducts, were removed in April 2021.

C. Features that define the historic character of the meeting house:

The exterior of the church, which has late Federalist architectural details, remains virtually unchanged from 1829.

As stated in the National Register of Historic Places application: "In comparison with many of the country churches found in neighboring communities, the North Wilmot meeting house is distinguished by several sophisticated details, more commonly found on larger, more ambitious religious buildings including its Palladian window, front pavilion, and especially its Tuscan pilasters. The transitional Federal-Greek Revival elements, which characterize the meeting house, also make it somewhat unique in the region. The simple clapboard religious structure is notable for its Federal and Greek Revival style detailing as well as its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association."

The building does not have heat, electricity, or plumbing. This restricts the use of the structure to late spring through early fall. It also simplifies maintenance.

II. **Ownership and governance:**

A. Who owns the meeting house? Who is responsible for maintaining it?

The North Wilmot Union Meeting House Society (NWUMHS) owns and maintains the historic North Wilmot Church.

B. Are stewardship duties shared among different organizations? No.

C. How long has the organization been the steward for the structure?

Since 1984.

D. How does the church fit in with the operations of the NWUMHS?

The NWUMHS is a registered with the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. Its purpose is to own and maintain the church. The meeting house society also works to preserve and promote the church's history and traditions by scheduling educational programs, summer services, and other events that inform the public about its importance and role in the community.

The NWUMHS is governed by bylaws that were written in 1984 and updated in 2019. The all-volunteer board meets at least three times a year. It does not employ staff. The board hires professional contractors to address any projects beyond its skills. For larger projects, the board develops a request for proposal and seeks bids.

III. **Legal obligations:**

A. Are there any existing preservation easements of LCHIP stewardship agreements (from previous grants) that are in effect?

No. This is the first LCHIP grant the NWUMHS has received.

B. Do any local boards or commissions have jurisdiction over the meeting house?

No.

- C. If the NWUMHS leases the church, what legal obligation binds the organization to stay in compliance with the lease?

The meeting house is not leased to an outside organization.

IV. Regular monitoring & inspections:

- A. How often is the condition of the property evaluated?

In the spring the board inspects the building and develops a list of projects for the year. It also is inspected after any significant weather event.

- B. Who does the monitoring & inspecting?

Members of the board review the condition of the structure. As needed, the board seeks advice from experienced contractors.

- C. What documents does the NWUMHS use for the inspections?

The board uses the maintenance plan as a checklist. It also uses the Historic Building Assessment, completed in 2020, as a reference for a list of projects and how to prioritize them.

- D. How are the findings recorded? Where are the records kept?

Projects are added to the maintenance plan in the spring; when completed, projects are noted in the plan. Areas that require repair are photographed and described. Photographs are taken during work and at the end of the project. An end-of-year report documents projects completed in the previous 12 months. It includes photographs, description of the work, the materials used, the cost, and names of contractors.

The treasurer maintains the records of this work.

- E. How do regular inspections help planning for the future?

Regular inspections ensure that the board is aware of the structure's immediate and future maintenance needs.

V. Regular maintenance and upkeep:

- A. How is regular maintenance & upkeep planned for, executed, and paid for?

The annual budget includes a line item for maintenance. In a normal year these consist primarily of replacing broken panes of glass and touching up exterior paint.

- B. Who supervises, executes, and inspects the work? To what extent does the NWUMHS use in-house staff, external contractors, and/or volunteers to get work done?

Members of the board supervise and inspect work done at the meeting house. Several board members live in 19th century houses and/or have experience with maintaining large structures. One board member assisted with the restoration of another church in Wilmot. For work beyond their ability, the board hires contractors with experience working on old and/or historic structures.

C. To what extent are people who do this work briefed about, and familiar with, best practices for historic preservation?

The board includes the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation as an addendum to its requests for proposals. It requires contractors who work on the meeting house to follow these standards.

VI. Educating users about the need to preserve the meeting house:

A. Who uses the meeting house?

The board schedules ecumenical services, programs, and other events each summer. These events are promoted and advertised.

B. Is it used by outside groups?

The meeting house is available to the public for private events such as weddings, memorial services, family reunions, and similar celebrations. Counselors and campers from Camp Wilmot, a summer camp one mile away from the church, use it for services and other gatherings during the summer.

C. How are users informed of the significance of the meeting house and the need to preserve it?

A short history of the church is included in the bulletin distributed at summer services. Information also is available on the organization's website, northwilmotchurch.org. Background about the church and the NWUMHS also is included in every press release submitted to local publications, in an article published in the town of Wilmot's annual report, on posters displayed twice a year in the window of the Wilmot Post Office, and in a display at the church. Information about the meeting house also is included in annual appeal and thank-you letters.

D. Does the NWUMHS have written agreements with outside users that include policies concerning the responsible use of the meeting house?

The board provides those who use the building with checklist. A board member always is on hand to open and close the building for those who use it. Any issues/questions about use that arise, are addressed at that time.

Once the interior is refurbished during Phase 2 of the work at the meeting house, the board will need formal guidelines in place for use of the building.

VII. Taxes or in-lieu of taxes payments:

A. Does the NWUMHS need to pay taxes or make any in-lieu-of-taxes payments?

The town of Wilmot does not require the NWUMHS to pay property tax on the meeting house and grounds because it is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization.

VIII. Insurance:

A. What type of insurance and what levels of insurance does the NWUMHS have?

1. The NWUMHS has \$1 million in Commercial General Liability with Church Mutual Insurance Co. of Merrill, WI.

2. The NWUMHS has \$395,000 (\$2,500 deductible); 90 percent of building value. Insured for agreed value at actual cash value, the amount it would cost to repair or replace the structure with like, kind, and quality, less depreciation. Contents are insured for \$60,000.
3. The NWUMHS also has Management Protection Liability (board insurance) with coverage of \$250,000.
4. The NWUMHS does not have paid staff; it does not pay workers comp insurance.

B. Who in the NWUMHS reviews insurance? How often is it reviewed?

1. The treasurer is responsible for reviewing the insurance policy. It is reviewed each fall prior to the renewal date in December. In 2020, the insurance was marketed for cost and coverage.

IX. Funding:

A. How is money allocated for the stewardship of the North Wilmot Union Meetinghouse? How are funds budgeted for needed expenses?

During its nearly 40-year history of owning the North Wilmot Union Meetinghouse, the NWUMHS held fundraising events or asked board members and members of the community to help pay for significant projects. This ad hoc system was adequate and ensured that work such as installing a new roof, repairing the bell tower, removing a non-functioning furnace, etc. was addressed in a timely manner. Thrifty management ensured sufficient reserve funds.

In 2020, however, the NWUMHS board decided to formalize its approach to fundraising. It established an annual appeal to pay for routine maintenance, insurance, summer programs, fundraising, and other costs associated with owning and maintaining the meeting house. The fiscal year is July 1 to June 30. Each year the board develops a budget that includes anticipated costs including maintenance, insurance, programs, administrative costs, and various fees.

B. Does the NWUMHS have a dedicated stream of revenue that can be used to pay for maintaining the building?

Yes, see above.

C. Does the NWUMHS have a way of paying for unexpected repairs?

Yes. In 2021 the board established a Capital Reserve Fund to address projects beyond the scope of routine maintenance. This fund also can be used for emergency or unanticipated repairs.