SENIOR MANAGING EDITOR ALAN WHITE
METRO EDITOR GRETCHEN PUTNAM
(978) 946-2000

Local

▸ **North Andover**

Neighborhood seeks historic protection

BY DAVIN WILFRID
STAFF WRITER

NORTH ANDOVER — Some residents of the Machine Shop Village section of town are seeking protections for their neighborhood to preserve its unique historic character.

"It's a way to keep the neighborhood the way it is," said Liz Fennessy, a North Andover native who moved to Elm Street in 2002.

Most of Machine Shop Village was built in the late 1800s to provide homes for workers at the nearby Davis & Furber mills. In May, a neighborhood group successfully lobbied Town Meeting for $250,000 from the Community Preservation Act to upgrade streets and sidewalks and add historical markers.

Now, Fennessy and others are surveying nearly 300 of their neighbors about the possibility of designating Machine Shop Village either a Local Historic District or a Neighborhood Conservation District. The survey is also available online at the town's Web site, www.townofnorthandover.com.

The neighborhood is recognized by the National Register of Historic Districts, but not by local government. The district spans the area bordered by Main, Water, Clarendon and Pleasant streets.

Fennessy said the two kinds of historic districts are different only in the degrees of protection offered to the neighborhood. Local historic districts generally have stricter rules governing what changes residents can make to their houses.

The benefit of adopting historical protection, Fennessy said, is that neighbors can keep a close eye on possible threats to the unique charm of the village. Additions, replacement siding and anything that alters the facade of any house or business would need approval from a board appointed by the neighborhood.

Robert D. Stevens, a board member of the Old Center Historic District Commission, said the designation has given that neighborhood near the Old Town Common more leverage in dealing with developers who might want to put out-of-character housing there.

"Oh, much more," he said. "It's designed to be helpful to prevent atrocities and disasters."

But oversight means restrictions, and neighborhood leaders do say that historical protection comes at a price. Neighbors would have an extra layer of red tape to cut through for significant home-improvement projects, and some changes would be banned.

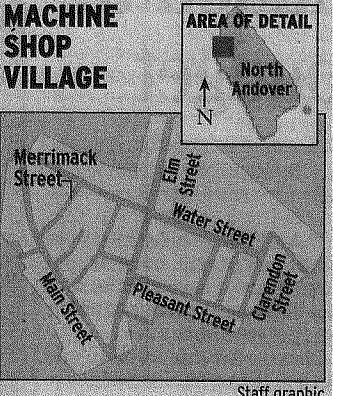
"Protection is a double-edged sword," Fennessy said. "It also means you can't do everything you want to."

Donald Elliott, a Main Street resident who lives in a historic house within the district's borders, said the price is worth it.

"There's only a few of these types of villages left in New England," he said.

Neighborhood leaders will likely have public meeting on the idea in early January. They may petition Town Meeting fo historical designation in May 2006.

MACHINE SHOP VILLAGE



Staff graphic