



Environmental Work in the Transportation Sector

CAREER PROFILE

NAME: Kaitlin O'Shea

TITLE: Preservation Planner

DEGREE: Historic Preservation

COMPANY: Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB)

VHB is an American civil engineering consulting and design firm with offices throughout the country. Founded in 1978, the company primarily focuses on transportation and land development, working on a variety of transportation civil engineering projects in the Northeast and along the East Coast of the United States.

VHB "aspires for a sustainable world in all that (they) do. It is inherent to who (they are) and (their) generational company philosophy—founded on stewardship. "VHB helps their clients take action to improve health and well being, contribute to economic vitality, and promote environmental stewardship."

Source: www.vhb.com/Pages/home.aspx

Q. What is your current role at the organization?

A. I am a preservation planner. I help our projects comply with regulations. So, in the preservation field, it is my job to review projects and to determine if there are historic resources in the project and whether or not those resources will be adversely affected

by the project's proposed scope of work. And if the resources are affected, can we avoid adversely affecting the resources? And if not, can we mitigate the adverse affect? To determine that, I work with our project managers, engineers, and clients to make sure that the projects aren't negatively affecting historic resources—it could be to bridges, to streetscapes, to landscapes, to individual buildings, to parks, to cemeteries. It is hard to have a project in Vermont that does involve historic resources.

Q. How did you get to this point in your career? Any key points along that pathway?

A. My undergraduate and graduate degrees are in historic preservation. I went to the University of Vermont (UVM) for graduate school and the University of Mary Washington for undergraduate. But I had never heard of the term 'historic preservation' until I was looking at colleges. Because I like history, I like writing, it just

clicked. So I started researching which colleges had historic preservation, and only about seven had undergrad programs, so I found out more about it and just loved it.

As to what I do now (project review or regulatory review), I did not anticipate ever doing that because I used to think that Section 106 regulations, and laws were so boring. But here I am now, doing that work, and I really love it. I got here because I went to graduate school at UVM. During that time, I got an internship with VTTrans doing regulatory review and I loved it. I was there for five years. Then I transitioned into the private sector. It was unanticipated, but it turned out to be great.

Q. Were there any experiences that helped to best prepare you for the work that you do?

A. My job before coming to UVM was in oral history. I worked for the Cultural Resources Management Program of the U.S. Army



on Fort Bragg as a civilian contractor. My job was a three-year project documenting a former Rockefeller estate that the army had purchased. Because it was historically significant and federal dollars were used to acquire the property, it had to be documented. It was just an amazing experience and an entirely different branch of historic preservation than where I am now.

As for UVM, the program is three semesters. It's not all that long but enough to get to know Vermont a little bit and understand what your options are.

At VTrans, I started as a preservation monitor for the Lake Champlain Bridge Project, which is the bridge between

Addison and Crown Point. It was demolished (blown up) in 2009. I was working to help construct a new bridge on the Vermont side. I essentially had to keep the contractors in line and make sure that they were following the Programmatic Agreement between the Vermont Agency of Transportation, the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. After, I stayed on as an intern at VTrans and then became the historic preservation specialist there.

I love transportation because you can see it happen. You know that resources are being protected and that the work you did mattered --and it was gratifying to see over the years the projects that we developed.

It touched everybody. No matter what you do, you can't get away from a transportation project because you drive, you walk, you travel downtown.

Q: What does a day in the life of your position look like?

A: Sometimes, I'm in the office all day writing review letters. But before you get to that point, you often have to be on site and review the project, meet with the client and understand what is going on, and take photographs. I could be writing a Section 106 memo or I could be doing something more like photo documentation. I could be attending client meetings or an internal meeting. Because of the regulations we follow, it is a process. That way, everyone follows the rules, is held accountable, and knows what is expected of them.

Q: What skills have you gained in the work? Are these unique or transferable to other disciplines?

A: Well, thinking of oral history—that was a lot of talking to people, listening to people, following through on a conversation, making phone calls. I am an excellent typist because I transcribed hundreds of hours of interview time. But in transportation, just learning how to look at plans, read them, understand them, and translate them to people who might be looking at them, are all important. I learned to

be comfortable going into a meeting where you might be the only female and getting used to that. I really learned how to walk into a room and be as comfortable as you can be, depending on your experience. And then, there's writing proposals and documents, that's another skill set.

Q. What do you enjoy most about your job?

A. I really enjoy being in the field because I like to see what is going on in Vermont and exploring the state. I love getting to travel to a site and photo-document the resource, or look at plans or look at the site. It is really hard to review a project without seeing it. Somebody else could take photos for me, but I am not really going to understand it unless I go there.

Q. What are some of the challenges you have faced in the work? How did you overcome them?

A. Because of project budget, I don't always get to go to a site, so I don't like that part. I think the challenging part of being a consultant is the fact of billable hours and estimating how long you think it is going to take you. Sometimes you are told to cut down a budget, which means cutting down your hours even though you know that it is going to take longer. What I do requires thought and time to process the effects of something, or the historic significance, and you can't really



charge a line item for 'thinking.'

Another hard part is clients who would rather ask for forgiveness than follow the rules the first time. And then I have to explain to the Division for Historic Preservation what happened or help a client justify what they did even when you might not have agreed with what they have done. I am here to help clients navigate and learn the historic preservation review process.

Q. What are some of your own personal characteristics and values that make you a good fit for this type of work?

A. I understand that people want to get a project done. Over the years I have learned that they don't necessarily want to follow the rules because it can be a long process, not because they don't care about the resources. But if you take your process back to the regulations, and take an analytical approach, you can

show the client what they have to do.

Q. What is something that you want people to know about the work that you do?

A. I guess to know that it matters is really important. Any of the work that we do touches everyone even though they might not see it. In a place like Vermont, we like to keep Vermont looking like Vermont. You might think that adding more trees in a village landscape on a transportation project seems excessive or ridiculous, but if you compare before and after of projects it is the things that you won't notice until you look for it. The work that we do helps people really enjoy their surroundings. Sometimes it's the things like, you wouldn't know we were there reviewing a project, until we weren't. You don't know what you have until it's gone. So we try to help you miss the fact that we were there essentially. It is fun and its important work. ➔

Overview of Position as it Relates to Transportation

“Go to the heart of any thriving community and you will discover the special place reserved there for historic resources and for the public transportation that enhances access to them. During the past two decades, Americans have rediscovered and embraced the historic elements of their cities and neighborhoods, and in recent years have shifted the focus of conservation efforts from individually important buildings and districts to the traditional forms, transportation choices, and street designs that make city centers and residential areas walkable and workable for businesses and residents. Cities and towns that have replenished and revitalized critical public transportation links in their downtowns and nearby neighborhoods are also extending their efforts to work with regional agencies and adjacent communities to capture the benefits of public transportation and preserve historic urban designs throughout metropolitan areas.”

Source: www.planning.dot.gov/documents/casestudy/cities/returning_city.htm

Preservation Planners

Historic preservation has been a federal concern since 1906 when the Antiquities Act provided for the protection of historic and prehistoric remains and monuments on federal lands. Since that time, Congress has made historic preservation a responsibility of every federal agency, enacting multiple laws that extend the consideration of our nation’s historic and archaeological resources to properties beyond federal lands and reflect the importance the American people attach to safeguarding and maintaining the places that embody our nation’s rich heritage.



As a Preservation Planner at VHB, Kaitlin assists clients in historic resource assessments and compliance with the regulatory processes for Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act, and Vermont’s Section 248, Act 250, and 22 VSA 14. Kaitlin specializes in regulatory review for transportation, hydropower, solar, and land development projects. In addition, her works includes National Register nominations, photo-documentation, historic surveys, historical research, historic properties management plans, and historic site assessments.

Source: www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_topics/historic_preservation.aspx

Cultural Resources

“Today, the work of thousands of preservationists, both professionals and volunteers, is guided by the vision of the future in which communities make historic places a vital part of daily life. In the course of doing so, they have made preservation one of the most effective tools for revitalizing communities of all kinds and sizes.”

— Holt, 1997

About VHB

VHB is an environmental consulting firm focused on making a positive impact on its surrounding communities, making the most out of opportunities to grow personally and professionally, while build a network of lifelong colleagues. VHB is known for collaborating across disciplines to develop and implement effective strategies, problem-solving techniques and solutions through, “a combination of technical and personal skills to help build a successful consulting team.”

Source: www.vhb.com/Pages/Trends/Students-and-New-College-Grads.aspx

Overview of General Skills and Requirements

Preservation is a growing area and has been for the last few decades as environmental sciences and activism develops. Becoming a preservation planner requires a bachelor's or master's degree in historic preservation, cultural preservation, archaeology or a related field. One of the main causes for which environmental professionals and activists fight, is preservation of existing landscapes. Historic preservationists have the skills to do this work professionally, with contractors and companies as their clients, so that historically significant and influential architecture and landscapes are impacted as little as possible. In general, historical preservationists are working with landscapes that may have environmental significance for the local ecology or for the wider environmental biology. However, they may have cultural significance, such as modern importance to local communities, or archaeological significance in its wider context. These types of landscape tend to be allocated as State Parks or National Parks but not in all cases. It is the job of the Preservation Planner to preserve and

enhance landscapes as they are by ensuring that clients are following federal rules and regulations to impose the least amount of impact on a historically significant landscape or architecture.

No landscape is pristine or complete wilderness and any geography is the result of thousands of years of both natural and human influence. These influencing factors often create unique landscapes that are worthy of preservation, even if they are not deemed important enough for legislative protection. Preservation Planners plan and implement elements that impact the least change on a landscape - either for cultural value or for something less quantifiable such as aesthetics.

Source: www.environmentalscience.org/career/preservation-planner

Type of Planning Projects Carried Out at VHB

MIDDLEBURY RAIL AND BRIDGE PROJECT

During this project VTrans is working with the Town of Middlebury to replace [two nearly 100 year old bridges](#) in the center of Middlebury with a tunnel. The two bridges are about 300 feet apart. Analysis was done to see if rehabilitating all or part of the bridges was possible, but this option was not deemed viable. The new structure will provide new green space and connect two existing parks. It will also allow for modernization of the rail line for freight and the eventual addition of passenger rail service.

PRESERVATION PLANNING

In her preservation planning position at VHB, Kaitlin works with government agencies, municipalities, private developers, architects, energy companies, institutions, individuals, and non-profit organizations to provide a wide range of [historic preservation services](#). These include historic resource surveys and documentation reports, regulatory review and compliance, preservation planning and incentives, and public education and outreach.

GLOSSARY

- ▶ **Section 106 Regulations** – of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, requires each federal agency to identify and assess the effects their actions will have on historic resources.
- ▶ **Historic Preservation** – endeavoring to preserve, conserve, and protect buildings, objects, landscapes, or other artifacts of historical significance.
- ▶ **Antiquities Act** – passed in 1906, this law gives the President of the United States the authority to create national monuments from federal lands to protect significant natural, cultural, or scientific features.

Key Skills

- ▶ **Reading Comprehension** – Reading work-related information.
- ▶ **Complex Problem Solving** – Noticing a problem and figuring out the best way to solve it.
- ▶ **Critical Thinking** – Thinking about the pros and cons of different ways to solve a problem.
- ▶ **Active Listening** – Listening to others, not interrupting, and asking good questions.
- ▶ **Judgment and Decision Making** – Thinking about the pros and cons of different options and picking the best one.
- ▶ **Coordination** – Changing what is done based on other people's actions.
- ▶ **Active Learning** – Figuring out how to use new ideas or things.
- ▶ **Systems Evaluation** – Measuring how well a system is working and how to improve it.
- ▶ **Systems Analysis** – Figuring out how a system should work and how changes in the future will affect it.
- ▶ **Time Management** – Managing your time and the time of other people.
- ▶ **Monitoring** – Keeping track of how well people and/or groups are doing in order to make improvements.

Abilities Needed for Success

- ▶ **Written Comprehension** – Reading and understanding what is written.
- ▶ **Oral Expression** – Effective spoken communication.
- ▶ **Written Expression** – Effective communication in written form.
- ▶ **Deductive Reasoning** – Using rules to solve problems.
- ▶ **Inductive Reasoning** – Making general rules or coming up with answers from lots of detailed information.
- ▶ **Oral Comprehension** – Listening and understanding what people say.
- ▶ **Problem Sensitivity** – Noticing when problems happen.
- ▶ **Fluency of Ideas** – Coming up with lots of ideas.
- ▶ **Near Vision** – Seeing details up close.
- ▶ **Originality** – Creating new and original ideas.
- ▶ **Information Ordering** – Ordering or arranging things.
- ▶ **Visualization** – Imagining how something will look after it is moved around or changed.



This material is based upon work supported by the Federal Highway Administration under Agreement No. DTFH6114H00025 & DTFH6116H00030. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the Author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the Federal Highway Administration.