



City of Somerville
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

7 MARCH 2023 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Eric Parkes	Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Robin Kelly	Vice Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Ryan Falvey	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Dick Bauer	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Denis (DJ) Chagnon	Alt. Member	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Sarah White (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning), Wendy Sczechowicz (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:47pm and adjourned at 8:44pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: Alteration to Local Historic District Property (LHD)
HPC.ALT 2022.77 – 56 Bow Street

The applicant team explained that they would like to replace an existing window with another window, noting that it will not get any wider, but it will get deeper. The current window is vinyl, and they wish to replace it in-kind to create a safer means of egress. The applicant team noted that you will barely see the window from the street, especially because they plan to put a brick surround to conceal the window well.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony. No one indicated they wished to speak. Chair Parkes closed public comment.

The Commission and applicant team discussed the location of the existing window, how other windows on the property have a railing around them but this one will have a brick surround, the benefits to having another means of egress, how all of the current basement windows are vinyl, and since technically the window is not exactly in-kind due to it being deeper, the Commission could require the applicant to replace the vinyl window with a wood window. However, due to the circumstances, the Commission did not feel it necessary to do so, as there is minimal concern.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Falvey, the Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the request for alterations.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: Determination of Historic Significance (Step 1)
HPC.DMO 2022.49 – 80 Professor's Row

The applicant team noted that the building is not owned by Tufts University and argued that it is not historically significant. They stated that the building is in disrepair and is not habitable. The team described the alterations

that have been made since the building's construction and how the character of the original building is no longer present.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony.

Rocko DeRico, Director of Governmental Relations for Tufts University (14 Capen St, Medford) – stated that the building is over 100 years old and is historically significant, as it sits in the center of campus and directly across from the Tufts President's home. He stated that it is in disrepair, but only due to owner neglect. He noted that Tufts is opposed to the demolition and requested that the Commission place an 18-month delay on the demolition. He also noted that there are numerous restrictions on the property's deed, including a use restriction, a right of first offer, and a right to purchase. Mr. DeRico reviewed how Tufts has been negotiating in good faith with the owner, and that Tufts intends to purchase the property. He noted that this property sits inside the Tufts University zoning district and Tufts plans to purchase the property to house undergraduate students, a mutual goal of Tufts and the City of Somerville. He stated how Tufts could successfully redevelop the property, where a third party or another owner could not.

Ron Cavallo (70 Victoria St) – stated that it is the function of the Commission to preserve properties of this kind. He argued that the building has historic significance and should be preserved.

Chair Parkes closed public testimony.

Chair Parkes reviewed the demolition review process.

The Commission discussed the historic significance of the property, citing historical ownership, articles on the building's history, and its ties to Tufts University. The Commission discussed how the grounds and the rest of the site contribute to Professor's Row. The Commission also discussed the alterations made to the building, noting that they did not modify the building so drastically that the original character can no longer be seen.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Chagnon, the Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to determine the property historically significant.

HPC Findings:

- Property contributes significantly to the streetscape
- Retains its original form and massing of the circa 1859 building
- Historic aspects of the people who lived there, notably a Tufts University professor and how it contributes to the history of Tufts University
- Historic aspects of 100 years that the fraternity occupied the building

Following a motion by Member Chagnon, seconded by Member Bauer, the Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to adopt the above findings.

RESULT:	HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT
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PUBLIC HEARING: Determination of Historic Significance (Step 1)
HPC.DMO 2023.01– 53 Chester Street

The applicant team argued that the house is not historically significant and is a hodge podge of many alterations made over time, listing many of them. They stated that they do not believe that this house contributes to the streetscape as it has been heavily altered over the years and has been used as a rental.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony.

The applicant team stated, during the public comment period, about their plan to put something respectful that complies with the zoning ordinance and contributes to the Davis Square neighborhood on this site. Staff reminded the Commission and the applicant team that if the applicant team wishes to speak further about the project, they must wait until after public testimony closes.

Ron Cavallo (70 Victoria St) – stated that not allowing a demolition permit would be a disgrace and a disservice to the city. He stated that condominium conversions and small development is way down. Mr. Cavallo expressed his concern regarding the economic policies that he considers to be damaging to the city, such as infrastructure and the idea that the city will be a net-zero city by 2050. He stated that the only way we will reach these goals is if structures like this are torn down and replaced with modern structures. He said that this structure has no value to the city, and he fully supported the demolition of this building and the expansion of the tax base.

Chair Parkes closed public testimony.

The Commission and Staff discussed the history of the property, when certain alterations were made, and how the property is not historically significant due to its heavy modifications and lack of streetscape contribution. The Commission did note that some of the modifications are old enough to carry some independent significance themselves and they also discussed the people that were known to have lived in the house.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Falvey, the Commission voted (1-4), with Member Bauer voting in the affirmative, to determine the property historically significant.

HPC Findings:

- Building does not reflect a good enough example of its architectural style
- Does not contribute to the streetscape
- Not associated with any persons or events of historic significance

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Chagnon, the Commission voted (4-0-1), with Member Bauer abstaining, to adopt the above findings.

RESULT:

NOT HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT

OTHER BUSINESS: CPA – Adams Magoun House

Staff stated the CPC is asking why the building is historically significant and looking for guidance from the Commission. Member Bauer provided background into why the CPC was looking for guidance from the Commission. Staff noted that the CPC is looking for what makes this property so unique, such as this is one of the last eighteenth century structures remaining in the city, built around 1783, and is very much intact and retains its original character, both externally and internally. Staff reviewed some of the other unique historical aspects of the building. Staff and the Commission discussed the other eighteenth century buildings in the city and the relationship between this building and other historic buildings in the area. The Commission reviewed the points on why the building is historically significant and unique.

Staff asked the Commission if they could work on the exact text to be reviewed by the Commission to ensure it captures what was discussed. Once reviewed, Staff will distribute the information to the CPC on the Commission's behalf.

Following a motion by Member Chagnon, seconded by Member Bauer, the Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to ask Staff to provide a letter on behalf of the Commission in support of funding.

Member Chagnon stepped away from the meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS: CPA – Elizabeth Peabody House

Staff stated that a letter of support is needed for a grant. The Commission agreed that it is okay for Staff to move forward with efforts to draft a letter of support on behalf of the Commission. The Commission discussed the collaborative relationship between the Commission and the building, their efforts to restore the historic character of the building, and the location of the building in the city. Member Bauer added that the CPC generally asks applicants to find additional sources of funding so that the CPC is not the sole source of funding, which is precisely what the Elizabeth Peabody House is doing.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Bauer, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to ask Staff to provide a letter on behalf of the Commission in support of funding.

OTHER BUSINESS: CPC Update

The Commission discussed an HPC member to replace Member Bauer as the Commission's liaison to the CPC, as Member Bauer was only filling in on an interim basis, but the CPC needs a permanent replacement for Member Bingham. Chair Parkes agreed to replace Member Bauer at the end of this funding cycle.

Following a motion by Member Bauer, seconded by Vice Chair Kelly, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to nominate Chair Parkes as the HPC designee on the CPC effective May 2023.

Member Chagnon returned to the meeting.

Member Bauer gave a report on the funding decisions made by the CPC, including housing, open spaces, and historic projects.

OTHER BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Member Bauer, seconded by Vice Chair Kelly, the Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the 15 November 2022 meeting minutes, with the edits discussed.

OTHER BUSINESS: Draft Rules of Policy & Procedure

The Commission expressed reservations regarding the current draft of the Rules of Policy & Procedure document and did not think a vote should be taken tonight on adopting the document. The Commission reviewed several items that need more attention to ensure they are indicating what they are intending to. Staff asked that the Commission provide their comments as soon as they can, so that Staff can continue to work on the draft document.

The Commission and Staff quickly discussed the timeframe for new members joining the HPC.

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. To review a full recording, please contact the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division at planning@somervillema.gov.