



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

2 MAY 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: Wendy Sczechowicz (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning), Raisa Saniat (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:46pm and adjourned at 9:15pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: Determination of Historic Significance (Step 1)
HPC.DMO 2023.05 – 23 Glenwood Rd

The applicant team explained that the house has had extensive alterations, vinyl siding, vinyl windows, doors, new roof, a front porch addition, that have masked the original structure of the home, as well as a large bay window and a second story addition. They also noted that the overall massing has been overwhelmingly distorted over the years, so the applicant team is requesting that the house be deemed not historically significant.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony.

Courtney Koslow (11 Glenwood Rd) – noted that the neighborhood provided a letter to the HPC stating that their street of beautiful mansards are collectively valuable historically. She disagreed with the applicant team that the massing has been overwhelmingly distorted and noted that this house is a beautiful representation of this period of time. She noted that losing a mansard like this would alter the streetscape. She does not have any issues with adding additional housing opportunities in the neighborhood, but there is no reason to knock this building down to do so; there have been other examples in the city where historic homes have been preserved and additional units have been added.

Pearl Emmonds (30 Glenwood Rd) – believes that the mansards on this street are a part of an early subdivision and are from the mid-1800s and should be preserved. She noted that these homes could be altered to add more units without losing the mid-1800's historic identity.

Amy Stein (24 Glenwood Rd) – noted that the house has maintained its mansard shape and pointed out that the mansards are an overwhelming part of the beauty of the street. The houses are so historic, unique, and old. Someone else on the street is doing an entire gut-renovation without ruining the mansard shape of the house. She stated that the extensions that have been made to the house were done in the 1910's to early 1920's, so those are also historic. The integrity of the street and shape of the house should be preserved.

Ron Cavallo (70 Victoria Street) – recognized the neighbor's opinions on the house yet stated that small developments are essentially being denied and we should be thinking about the economic viability of the community. He felt that this building should be preserved, however he would like it revitalized and modernized by

conforming to new energy codes. The plan for this building should include additional units to make economic sense, but still keeping the historic massing and form of the structure.

Finnian Moore Gerety (24 Glenwood Rd) – stated that to assess the historic significance of this house, it must be done in the context of the 15 others on the street; this is the oldest in-tact Victorian-era subdivisions and the largest array of matching mansard houses in the city. There could be a domino effect if one is allowed to be demolished. He also noted the historic association between Horace Partridge and William Nickerson and many of the mansards on the street and the neighborhood. He also stated that the front porch addition was added to almost all of the mansards on the street and they do not take away from the original massing and form. He felt that this house should be found historically significant and should be preferably preserved.

Sara Lennox (38 Ames St) – stated that she especially loves the architectural coherence in this neighborhood; the mansards on Glenwood Rd and the single-family Victorians built in the 1890's on Ames St. This aspect of the history of Somerville is very significant and is what makes the city great. This house is on a double lot, which half of appears to be empty, and if that empty portion of the lot was to be developed into affordable housing for people that want to live in a historic district of the city, that would be fantastic. To demolish the building just to put up expensive apartments or condos, is not in the best interest of the neighborhood or the city.

Chair Parkes closed public testimony.

The Commission discussed the public comments presented, both written and oral, and requested that Staff share Figure 2 from the Staff Memo for the Commission's discussion and deliberation.

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

HPC Findings:

- It contributes to the streetscape; 15 similar mansards on the street
- It maintains its original form and massing
- It has associations with significant historic persons; Horace Partridge and William Nickerson

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

RESULT:

HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT

PUBLIC HEARING: Determination of Historic Significance (Step 1)
HPC.DMO 2023.02 - 236 Pearl St

The applicant team presented the project on the commercial building; many alterations have occurred, it's hard to say that the original massing of the building can be recognized, and the original exterior of the building no longer exists. The team reviewed some of the changes made to the building over time, including the removal of a floor, addition of vinyl siding, and various rooflines. Staff shared a photo of the building from the Staff Memo. The applicant team stated that the building does not meet the criteria for historic association or significance as it no longer retains its original massing or integrity.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony.

Ron Cavallo (70 Victoria St) – stated that this is a perfect example of a building with no value, historically or architecturally. He noted that he remains concerned that the majority of the small developers have left the city

and the city's ability to implement their goal of being net-zero by 2050. The fact that small development and condo conversations have basically come to a halt is greatly concerning, especially since the city is in dire need of infrastructure improvements. He strongly supported the demolition of this structure.

Chair Parkes closed public testimony.

The Commission spoke about how it has become a hodge podge of additions and materials over time and how nothing in the architecture reflects any historical significance.

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

HPC Findings:

- Lacks historic integrity
- Not associated with any historic architecture or people
- Does not contribute to the streetscape

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

RESULT:

NOT HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT

PUBLIC HEARING: Determination of Historic Significance (Step 1) **HPC.DMO 2023.03 – 234 Pearl St**

The applicant team presented the project, stating that there is nothing unique about this structure and it was significantly altered multiple times. They team reviewed some of the changes made to the property over time, including vinyl windows and doors, front porch trim and railings, vinyl siding, and how the original trim/cornice has been removed. It has also been changed from a one-family to a two-family house. They do not believe that this house meets the criteria for historic association or significance as it no longer retains its original massing or integrity.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony.

Ron Cavallo (70 Victoria St) – stated that this structure is completely unremarkable, and the loss of the structure would be an important & significant economic improvement for the city. He remains very concerned about the small developers leaving the city and how that has had a negative impact on the local economy and the local banks. He shared his concern that condo conversions are down, about the revenue that the city generates on taxation, and about overreaching by this Commission in the past. He stated that he is pro-development for several reasons. There is an opportunity to demolish this structure and the adjacent structure to add value to the community. He noted that he believes that Somerville is the most anti-development city on the East Coast. He shared his concern about the city's systems which are degrading, overall anti-development, and an absurd desire to reach the 2050 goals which is virtually impossible. He reiterated that he is very concerned about the city and how it is being run, especially the economics of the city. He fully supported the demolition of this structure.

Steven Nutter (24 Maple Ave)– supported the demolition of the building and the adjacent building. He is a member of the Gilman Square Neighborhood Association, but he was not representing them directly. This development will be integral to the success of Gilman Square as it will be the first major development in a long time. He stated that the developer and the architect have worked in Gilman Square before and will bring something of value to the Square.

Chair Parkes closed public testimony.

The Commission discussed if the property contributes to the neighborhood/streetscape and overall feel of the area, how there is a row of four architecturally similar (front gabled, 2.5 story) but not identical houses on the same side of the street and some on the other side of the street, and if this property truly meets the threshold for historic significance.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Bauer, the Commission voted (3-2), with Members Chagnon and Falvey dissenting, to determine the property historic significant.

HPC Findings:

- The structure retains the original form visible from the street
- It contributes to the streetscape
- The form and massing are substantially intact, even though some details have been removed

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Bauer, the Commission voted (3-0-2), with Members Chagnon and Falvey abstaining, to adopt the above findings.

RESULT:

HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT

PUBLIC HEARING: Determination of Historic Significance (Step 1) **HPC.DMO 2023.07 – 325 Alewife Brook Parkway**

The applicant stated that the Staff Memo provided all the information needed for this project.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony.

Ron Cavallo (70 Victoria St) – stated that it is absurd that this structure is before this Commission and fully supported the demolition of this structure. He reiterated that he believes that this city is the most anti-development city in the state and on the East Coast. He stated that as far as he can tell, this Commission has two functions – to preserve properties of significance and to control most of the development in the city. He expressed his disgust with how the city is being run and the anti-development policies in the city. He continued to express his disgust with how the city is being run. He would like to see this structure come down, as it would be a benefit to the city.

Chair Parkes closed public testimony.

The Commission agreed that there is not enough merit to have historic significance.

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

HPC Findings:

- Lacks sufficient amount of original integrity
- Does not contribute to the streetscape
- Not associated to any historic architecture or people

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

PUBLIC HEARING: Determination of Preferably Preserved (Step 2)
HPC.DMO 2022.49 – 80 Professor’s Row

The applicant team explained that they have provided a report from a structural engineer as well as the engineer’s resume that proves that he is an expert in this field. The team also noted that the Inspectional Services Division (ISD) has posted a notice on the building that states that it is dangerous and is unsafe for occupancy. The engineer then reviewed the findings of the report. The Commission and engineer discussed if the building is repairable.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony.

Ron Cavallo (70 Victoria St) – stated that this is a complex situation. The structure is deemed as potentially unsafe, but this is the type of building that the Commission should consider preserving due to its architectural merit. This is a truly beautiful building, but it is very problematic to try to fix a structure with so many structural issues. This building may have reached the end of its useful life.

Rocco DeRico (Tufts University) – stated that Tufts University opposes the demolition of this property. Tufts has been negotiating in good faith with the owners of the property and there are numerous restrictions on the property’s deed, including a use restriction, a right of first offer, and a right to purchase; Tufts can act on any of these restrictions at any time. Tufts University intends to purchase this property and their goal is to use this property to house more Tufts students – which is what was done to similar properties on Professor’s Row. He requested that Commission not issue a demo permit on this property to allow Tufts time to negotiate and acquire the property.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony.

The Commission discussed how the applicant team has owned the property for approximately 100 years, that anyone can restore a building to be structurally sound with enough effort and money, how the people that are requesting to demolish the building are the people who allowed the building to deteriorate to this level, how they might be okay with the rear portion of the building being demolished but would like to see the main massing preserved, and if Tufts University would like to acquire the property and preserve it then the Commission can assume that the building would not only be preferably preserved, but it would actually be preserved.

The applicant team stated that they have been in contact with Tufts University regarding the sale of the property, but they have not yet come to an agreement. Their intention is to develop student housing with a club component. They reiterated that they truly believe that the building is beyond disrepair and cannot be saved.

Staff clarified that the Commission’s decision can only be made based on the findings and cannot take into consideration the potential sale or the unsafe conditions.

The Commission reiterated that although it would be a huge effort, they would like to see this structure preserved.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Bauer, the Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to determine the property preferably preserved.

HPC Findings:

- Retains its historic integrity
- It contributes to the streetscape

- It has been a fraternity house for approximately 100 years
- It is importantly associated with Tufts University as a whole

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

RESULT:	PREFERABLY PRESERVED
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Member Chagnon stepped away from the meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Falvey, the Commission voted (3-0-1), with Member Bauer abstaining, to approve the 7 February 2023 meeting minutes.

Member Chagnon rejoined the meeting.

The Commission asked what they need to do to complete the Code of Conduct forms. Staff confirmed that the Commission members just need to read and sign the forms and send them to Staff so that they can send them to the Mayor's office.

Staff noted that the updated Rules of Policy & Procedure will be discussed at the 6 June 2023 HPC meeting. Staff also noted that HPC elections will also be held at the 6 June 2023 meeting, as well as a discussion regarding if the Commission would like to continue with two meetings per month.

OTHER BUSINESS: CPC Update

The Commission received an update on the CPC by Chair Parkes and Member Bauer. They spoke about the allocation of funds for the three categories that receive CPC funds – historic preservation, open space and recreation, and affordable housing.

They also discussed the Adams-Magoun House and how if the property is sold within 50 years, the money received from the CPC would be returned to the city.

A constituent questioned if the constructed fence at the Grace Baptist Church was the same as the approved fence; Staff confirmed that they would look into this and report back at the next meeting.

Staff updated the Commission on Staff-Level Approvals. The Commission asked about 28 Warren Ave; Staff confirmed that it was a Staff-Level window replacement. The Commission inquired about the roof and the structure over the porch; Staff confirmed that they will reach out to the applicant and ISD for more information.

The Commission asked Staff to reach out to the Legal Department regarding how to handle disruptive behavior or comments during public testimony; Staff confirmed that they will follow up. The Commission referenced the recent court case "Barron vs. Kolenda".

The Commission raised concerns regarding how to address applications that are at 46-48% demolition which are just barely under the 50% demolition requirement and how buildings are being lost to these applications. Staff noted that this ongoing issue and what measures can be done to remedy the problem has been raised with ISD. The Commission asked what the ramifications or violations are that the applicants receive; Staff responded that ISD will issue a stop work order and other strategies are being discussed. The Commission asked that Staff consider that this may negatively impact the neighborhood, more than the developer, due to the property just sitting there deteriorating. It would also be helpful to consider who the applicants are and whether they are “repeat offenders” and if there is a way the city can be more cautious.

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.