



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

16 JULY 2024 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on Zoom.

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>Absent</i>	
Denis (DJ) Chagnon	Alt. Member	<i>Present</i>	
Denise Price	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Dan Coughlin	Member	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Sarah White (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Madison Anthony (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Stephen Cary (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:48pm and adjourned at 8:54pm.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:
Alterations to Local Historic District (LHD) Properties
HP24-000020 – 76 Highland Avenue

Chair Parkes recused himself from this item. Vice Chair Kelly sat in as Acting Chair.

The applicant explained that they recently purchased this property and would like to make it more livable. The suggestion is to remove a chimney in the back of the property to make the two buildings on the property more connected and potentially add an additional bathroom.

Vice Chair Kelly opened public testimony. Seeing none, Vice Chair Kelly closed the public testimony.

The Commission noted that the chimneys are called out on the historic record as being part of what gives the building its character. This chimney very prominent from the public way, as it is located on the Putnam Street side of the building at the rear. The chimney is quite visible, in the context of the rest of the property, and does have quite a visual impact. There was discussion regarding the possibility to remove the chimney on the interior, while leaving the exterior intact as a decorative element of the property. There was agreement that the charm of the chimney in question should be maintained.

Following a motion by Member Chagnon, seconded by Member Price, the Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to deny the Certificate of Appropriateness for removal of the chimney.

Following a motion by Member Chagnon, seconded by Member Falvey, the Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to adopt the following findings:

- the rear chimney appears to be original to the structure and contributes to the overall architectural merit and character of the structure
- the chimney is prominent from the Putnam Street side of the property
- it would be detrimental if it were removed

RESULT:

DENIED

Chair Parkes retook his seat.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS:
Alterations to Local Historic District (LHD) Properties
HP24-000049 – 33 Bow Street**

Members Price and Coughlin recused themselves from this item.

The applicant team explained that the placard on the building indicates that The Richmond, as the building was formerly known, has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the US Department of the Interior. It was constructed in 1892 in the Queen Anne style, with wood frame construction. It is currently a four-story mixed-use building, comprised of 18 units of affordable housing and one commercial unit at the ground level. The proposal is to replace the windows, storefronts, and exterior doors. The design intent is to keep the character as it has been. The existing wood windows are to be replaced with new simulated divided light wood windows with internal spacers and trapezoidal muntins. The light patterns of the existing new windows shall match the existing window units. The existing wood windows are single pane glass with surface applied aluminum storm window systems, which are not historically accurate. The exterior of the window frames are deteriorated, and the window sashes are visibly deteriorated in many locations. The proposal includes to replace the existing doors with new doors. The new doors shall have vision panels to match where the existing doors have vision panels. The existing wooden doors are to be replaced with new solid wood doors with matching profiles. Regearing the storefront system, the proposal is to replace all existing storefront system openings with new insulated unit storefront systems, including custom and infill panels to match the existing architectural details. The applicant team explained that the existing storefront is not original, as the original pictures show it to be brick.

The Commission discussed the muntins on each window and making sure that the new ones are consistent. The applicant's line drawings may need to be corrected to show the accurate muntin sizes.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony.

Aaron Weber (32 Summit Avenue) – noted that historical issues are not the only ones in play. The SomerVision 2040 Plan emphasizes the importance of maintaining and preserving affordable housing in the community, and the Somerville Climate Forward Plan emphasizes the importance of increasing the environmental efficiency of the existing housing stock. The proposed changes should be approved as basic maintenance and upgrades for a building of this type.

Li Liu (76 Highland Avenue) – asked that the Commission consider comments as to how to maintain the historical aspects of buildings, while also considering affordability of materials.

Susan Ayres (30 Summit Avenue) – asked if there is a list of approved windows to be considered for historic properties. In this way, applicants could review the list of pre-approved windows prior to an application, saving everyone a lot of time and money.

Seeing no additional comments, Chair Parkes closed the public testimony.

The Commission explained that its guidelines demonstrate that historical windows should be maintained, but also note acceptable alternatives, if needed. The applicant's window and door proposals seem reasonable.

The Commission asked about the shift in material and sheen for the proposed aluminum storefront and if it will feel more metallic than the existing. The applicant team suggested creating an infill panel on the storefront that will create a low luster sheen.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Falvey, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the project as presented, with 2-over-2 windows to be used, where the plans show 4-over-4.

RESULT:

APPROVED

Members Price and Coughlin retook their seats.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:
Determinations of Historic Significance (Step 1 in the Demolition Review Process)
HP24-000045 – 33 Vinal Avenue

The applicant team explained that the building is in rough shape. It contains a mansard style construction that matched with the existing streetscape. The plan will be to replicate this style, if the building is demolished and reconstructed.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony.

Susan Ayres (30 Summit Avenue) – expressed concern regarding the scope of the proposed project. She shares a 10' retaining wall with this property, with a foundation nearby.

Susan Bottari (38 Vinal Avenue) – expressed concern regarding the scope of the proposed project. This building has intricate historical designs that she would like to see preserved. It is unclear what the disruption to the neighborhood will be from this project.

Aaron Weber (32 Summit Avenue) – stated that there are many historic buildings in this area, though he is not overly concerned with that aspect of this project. He would like to make sure the applicant remains in contact with the neighbors regarding details of the project moving forward.

Seeing no additional comments, Chair Parkes closed the public testimony.

The Commission stated that, with the exception of the second story addition to the left, it seems that the building retains its original form and massing. This building speaks to the other houses in the neighborhood that are mansard Second Empire and stick style. This is an interesting example which pulls those two styles of the neighborhood together. The scale and massing of this particular home feels similar in relation to the rest of the streetscape around it. The building has a charming scale to it, and it would be a shame to see it replaced with something different. This structure catches one's eye when walking by.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Chagnon, the Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to find the property Historically Significant.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Falvey, the Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to adopt the following findings:

- this is a unique building that reflects the mansard Second Empire and stick styles of the neighborhood
- the building predominately retains its original form and massing
- the building's contribution to the overall streetscape is important

RESULT:

HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT

PUBLIC HEARINGS:
Determinations of Historic Significance (Step 1 in the Demolition Review Process)
HP24-000047 – 60 Bonair Street

The applicant team explained that the proposal is not to demolish the entire building, but to change over 50% of the façade in order to comply with the 2022 MBTA Communities Act zoning. The goal is to lengthen the building on the left side and shorten the building in the rear, which will lead to over 51% of the façade being touched.

Staff noted that the application will need to be amended to reflect this information.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony. Seeing none, Chair Parkes closed the public testimony.

The Commission stated that this house is part of a particular vintage. The building retains its original form and massing, and location on the lot. The proportions, roof design, and angles are mirrored in many adjacent properties. The fenestration appears to be in original locations, even though the windows and doors have been changed. The building retains its cornice returns and front gable with returns.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Chagnon, the Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to find the property Historically Significant.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Falvey, the Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to adopt the following findings:

- the original form of the building is intact
- this is part of a pair of similar structures, side-by-side
- this building is typical of the streetscape for the time period

RESULT:	HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT
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OTHER BUSINESS: Somernova

The Commission explained that there is a proposal by the owner of Somernova to consider changing the zoning for this particular area. Part of the proposal is to change the zoning for the American Tube Works complex, which has long been eyed for a potential Historic District, as it is quite prominent. This could change the allowable uses in this area and other dimensional items.

Staff noted that the written public comment period for the hearing between the Land Use Committee of the City Council and the Planning Board on this zoning topic is open until August.

The Commission agreed to review a potential Historic District for the structures in this area.

OTHER BUSINESS: 224-226 Pearl Street

Staff explained that the condo association representative for this building asked about making this a Local Historic District (LHD). The association voted that it would like to become an LHD.

Following a motion by Member Chagnon, seconded by Vice Chair Kelly, the Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to pursue a Local Historic District for 224-226 Pearl Street.

OTHER BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Chagnon, the Commission voted (5-0-1), with Member Falvey abstaining, to approve the 4 June 2024 meeting minutes.

OTHER BUSINESS: CPC Update

The Commission heard a CPC update. Staff explained that there may be a ballot measure this fall that would propose an increase in the CPA surcharge in Somerville from 1.5% tax assessment to 3%. This change would significantly increase the ability to provide funds for affordable housing, and to bring historic buildings up to modern standards. The City Council recently voted for this to be a ballot measure.

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 historic@somervillema.gov.