



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

4 FEBRUARY 2025 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>Absent</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: Madison Anthony (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Lexie Payne (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Andrew Graminski (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Kit Luster (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:48pm and adjourned at 8:58pm.

PUBLIC HEARINGS – ALTERATIONS TO LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT (LHD) PROPERTIES
HP24-000005 – 25 Atherton St

The applicant team explained there are 12 unit owners at this property that are interested in obtaining electric vehicles but have no place to charge them. It was determined that eight charging stations, some of which will be dual, are needed for this request. The charging stations are proposed to be black pedestals with white charging blocks. The applicant team stated that the distribution cabinet and transformer will be placed in a corner to the left of the main entrance and hidden by landscaping.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony.

Nicholas Linsky (25 Atherton Street) – stated that he is one of those interested in the charging stations. There would be a hardship if he obtained an electric vehicle and had nowhere to charge it at his home.

Baij Joshi (170 Central Street) – stated that he has no complaints regarding the charging stations, though he believes hybrid vehicles are better than electric vehicles.

Seeing no additional comments, Chair Parkes closed public testimony.

The Commission stated that the EV chargers will be unobtrusive and blend in well with the surroundings. These could easily be removed in the future, if needed. The transformer and distribution cabinet are minimally visible but there was a suggestion to paint them to further blend in. The applicant team agreed to look into this.

The Commission asked if there may be additional chargers added in the future. The applicant team stated that there may be more interest in the future. Additional chargers could likely be linked off the proposed system. Eversource is paying for the trenching for the proposed project. The Commission suggested sizing the distribution cabinet for a potential full buildout. The applicant team stated that this is being done.

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

**PUBLIC HEARINGS – ALTERATIONS TO LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT (LHD) PROPERTIES
HP24-000055 – 170 Central Street**

The applicant team explained that the proposal includes replacing the siding, trim, and slate roof. The windows will remain for now. The intention is to outfit the existing building with new materials. There is a lot of existing deterioration and rot on the building, and there were some repairs previously completed. The applicant team stated that the roof and siding of the building are in terrible shape. Some of the brackets are okay and the intention is to preserve these wherever possible. The applicant plans to find matching trim boards and band molding and recreate most of the items out of AZEK. It will likely be impossible to replace the entire roof in slate, so the proposal is to replace the roof with a recycled, sustainable slate-like product.

The Commission asked if the only items on the house proposed to be preserved are the brackets, woodwork, and the balustrade and columns at the low front porch. The applicant team confirmed and noted that the front porch materials are not original to the structure.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony.

Raymond Parsons (166 Central St) – stated that he believes the applicant should be able to renovate the house as it is in poor condition.

Seeing no additional comments, Chair Parkes closed public testimony.

The Commission stated that the guidelines do not allow for the use of any synthetic materials on exterior renovations. Those guidelines are old, and the Commission has a precedent for allowing, in a discretionary way, various synthetic materials. The Commission discussed that the portions of the house that the applicant team is considering preserving seem to be in okay shape and would be very difficult to replicate. A large proportion of the items proposed for replacement are deteriorated to the point where they likely could not be repaired and reused. Some of the crown molding does not seem to be in particularly bad shape and is proposed for replacement with AZEK.

The Commission asked if a slate roof expert has been consulted regarding what it might take to preserve the roof. The applicant team explained that the roof was originally a slate roof. Slate expands and contracts in the winter and can easily crack. The existing roof is in rough shape and would need to be stripped down to the base and rebuilt. The roof is a mixture of slate, 3-tab shingle, and another type of shingle. The team stated that a slate roof company has not visited the site.

The Commission stated that the guidelines are clear that, whenever possible, the applicant should preserve the existing materials. When those areas are damaged beyond repair, they need to be replaced with the same material. More information is needed on the synthetic materials proposed for each area.

The applicant team stated that they have received two estimates from slate roof companies, and they do not have the funds to replace it in this manner. They suggested submitting samples of the quoin and window trims with the proposed synthetic materials. The Commission stated that projects proposing to use in-kind materials are often handled administratively. Staff noted that, in that case, every dimension, detail, and profile, must be exactly the same as what is existing. The applicant would then have to show photographic proof at the end of the project. The Commission encouraged the applicant to look into milling and repairing any pieces of trim possible.

The applicant team asked about being able to start this work in March. Staff stated that the Commission needs more specific information before any work would be approved. The applicant team would have to work quickly to

provide this information in order to get on the following agendas. The Commission advised the applicant team that they could proceed more quickly by seeking Staff approval for repairs and replacements in-kind. Using wood would speed up this process, as this would only require Staff-Level review for in-kind materials.

The applicant team stated that emergency repairs need to be started on the house immediately and that they would then come back to the Commission for future items. The Commission stated that it could not proceed with approving synthetic materials in some areas of the house without additional information and details at this time. Staff suggested temporarily securing the areas of the house, such as with tarps, that require emergency repairs.

The applicant team noted that this property is not on the National Register of Historical Places. They stated that they believe a mistake was made, potentially by the Building Department. The Commission explained that the property has ties to the history of the development of the telephone, and strong associations with the early development of Winter Hill. Staff explained that this property was designated as a Local Historic District. Once it was given that designation, it was automatically added to the State list.

The applicant team stated that they did not believe some of the items on the house would be able to be reproduced in wood. AZEK would be a better and more reliable material in the long-term. It is unclear how the homeowner will be able to afford replicating all of the detailed items on the house using wood, which will not last for as long as synthetic materials. The applicant team also noted that the Minimum Maintenance Standards Ordinance states that nothing in the Ordinance shall be construed to prohibit a property owner from installing replacement siding, and nothing in the Ordinance shall be construed to require a property to be renovated or restored to original conditions. Staff explained that the design guidelines are very specific. When an owner is seeking to change out a material type, an application will have to come before the Commission. Regarding the Minimum Maintenance Ordinance, one could argue, with the current state of the building, that the owner has not engaged in minimum maintenance.

The applicant team stated that they believe the Building Department previously approved a Building Permit for this property. Staff confirmed that there is not currently an approved Building Permit. The applicant team stated that they have documents stating otherwise. The Commission noted that receipt of a Building Permit would require signoff from the Staff of this Commission. The applicant team stated that this was supposed to be approved as an emergency repair.

The applicant team asked if there is a government grant through the City to restore this house. Staff stated that Somerville has a Community Preservation Act, which is a grant program through which funds can be applied for, including by private homeowners, for open space and recreation, affordable housing, or historic preservation projects. There is a regular cycle of applications reviewed for the CPA funds. The Commission explained that the application cycle for this year has already been completed. Additional applications will not be reviewed until around October/November. Staff noted that emergency funding can be applied for off-cycle, but this would need to be discussed with the CPA Manager.

The Commission recommended continuing this item with the intention of the applicant team submitting additional information.

Following a motion by Member Chagnon, seconded by Member Coughlin, the Commission voted unanimously (5-0), to continue this hearing to 18 March 2025, at request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

OTHER BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

The Commission agreed to review this item at a future meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS: CPC Update

The Commission discussed that the CPC is in the process of receiving additional information on a few projects to determine funding. The CPC is working to determine how to reach out to new applicants for the next cycle.

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.