



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

21 OCTOBER 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>Present</i>	
Ryan Falvey	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Dick Bauer	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Denis (DJ) Chagnon	Alt. Member	<i>Present</i>	
Denise Price	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Dan Coughlin	Member	<i>Absent</i>	

City staff present: Madison Anthony (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Alvaro Esparza (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Sarah White (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Lexie Payne (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Kit Luster (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Roberta Cameron (Preservation Act Manager)

The meeting was called to order at 6:49pm and adjourned at 9:53pm.

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT (CPA) APPLICATION
59 Cross Street (Advisory Review)

Roberta Cameron, CPA Manager, explained that the advisory review is intended for the Commission to give advice to the applicant regarding what standards the project will need to meet for historic preservation purposes. This will allow the applicants to plan their application and budget accordingly in order to meet the standards for permitting in the future.

The applicant team explained that the proposed CPC grant for work on this building is highly focused on a very achievable scope of work. This is not another extension to the current grants in place.

The Commission had no questions at this time for the applicant.

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT (CPA) APPLICATION
Somerville Museum Collection Conservation
(Designation of Historical Significance for CPA-
funding purposes)

Roberta Cameron, CPA Manager, explained that the Somerville Museum is seeking a determination of Historic Significance for some artifacts they are requesting CPA funding to preserve.

The applicant team reviewed the artifacts proposed for preservation.

The Commission asked about the Derby Desk Company desk, as there does not seem to be a clear provenance for the Museum. The Museum could potentially find a Derby Desk that is more intact than to spend the funds to restore this item. The applicant team explained that this is a matter of cost. They noted that many of the items in

the Museum do not have a clear provenance. Some Commissioners noted that grant funds are available for restoring the existing desk, but there are not funds available to purchase a more intact desk. The historic guidelines to determine significance of artifacts include if it embodies distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of creation. This item meets that standard. It seems to fit enough of the historic scope to be considered significant. Other Commissioners stated that it does not seem to be appropriate to spend historic grant funds for an item without a true provenance. The applicant team stated that this item represents the Derby Desk type enough to make the connection. This desk does not appear to have been altered much.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Bauer, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to deem the items within the proposal, aside from the Derby Desk, Historically Significant for CPA funding purposes.

Following a motion by Member Chagnon, seconded by Vice Chair Kelly, the Commission voted (3-0-1), with Vice Chair Kelly abstaining, to deem the Derby Desk Historically Significant for CPA funding purposes.

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT (CPA) APPLICATIONS

Elizabeth Peabody House (Advisory Review)

The applicant team explained that the request is for funds to stabilize the second floor and restore it to its original intended use, in order to provide a future multifunction community benefit from the space.

The Commission had no questions at this time for the applicant.

PUBLIC HEARINGS – ALTERATIONS TO LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT (LHD) PROPERTIES

HP25-000076 – 76 Highland Avenue

The Commission noted that this item needs to be continued to the 18 November 2025 meeting, as it was previously continued to the 4 November 2025 meeting, and that meeting will no longer be occurring.

Following a motion by Member Chagnon, seconded by Vice Chair Kelly, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to continue the hearing to 18 November 2025.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARINGS – ALTERATIONS TO LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT (LHD) PROPERTIES

HP25-000071 – 36 Beacon Street

The applicant team explained that there were five or six code violations in place when the property was purchased. One of these was the need to construct a rear egress stair out the back of the property to replace an internal ladder, which was not deemed to be to code. This was originally reviewed and approved by the Commission in 2020 but, at the time, funds were not available to complete the project. The current proposal includes the same design, but with updated materials of the newel posts, balusters, and handrails. The staircase will continue the white vinyl skirt on the porch which will be made of pressure treated framed lumber, painted white. The deck will be Trex decking. The initial approval included wooden posts, black spindle balusters, and wooden handrails. The current proposal seeks to change some of these elements to vinyl, largely due to maintenance concerns, availability of products, and ease of construction. The balusters are proposed to be either vinyl or black spindle. The newel posts are proposed to be white vinyl, and the handrails are proposed to be vinyl or painted wood.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony. Seeing no comments, Chair Parkes closed public testimony.

The Commission discussed that the main body of the building is historic, but the proposed work is against a 1960's vinyl-clad addition. For new additions, the goal is that the work does not disrupt the essential form and integrity of the property, and be compatible in size, scale, material, and character of the property and its environment. This proposal is confined to the rear of the house. If it were removed in the future, the basic form and integrity of the historic property would remain intact. Vinyl materials would likely not detract in this location.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Bauer, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the requested material change, including all three materials as presented.

Vice Chair Kelly withdrew her previous motion.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Bauer, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to provide a Certificate of Appropriateness allowing the property owner to use vinyl, wood, or black metal materials in the construction of the railings, balusters, handrails, porch, and stairs for the rear egress.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARINGS – ALTERATIONS TO LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT (LHD) PROPERTIES HP25-000022 – 46 Mount Vernon Street

The applicant team explained that the proposal is to add more space to the existing home by demolishing the rear mudroom which has a deck on top, and all of the decks outside in order to construct a two-story addition in the rear to serve as a bedroom and a dining room. A deck is also proposed to the side of the home to serve as a second means of egress for the second unit on the third floor.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony. Seeing no comments, Chair Parkes closed public testimony.

The Commission asked about installing sprinklers for the top floor instead of constructing stairs as a second means of egress. The addition off the back is fairly innocuous, but the proposed stairs seem to be overwhelming on the right side of the building. There was a suggestion for a spiral staircase or different materials for this structure. There was agreement that the Commission did not feel comfortable with the stairs projecting off the house, as proposed. The Commission asked the applicant to reconsider the design.

Following a motion by Member Chagnon, seconded by Vice Chair Kelly, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to continue the hearing to 2 December 2025, at request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARINGS – DETERMINATIONS OF HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE (STEP 1 IN THE DEMOLITION REVIEW PROCESS) HP25-000077 – 62 Elmwood Street

The applicant team explained that the proposed demolition is less than 60% of the structure. He is looking to complete an already started project from a previous contractor. The roof is proposed to be removed and replaced with a mansard roof.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony.

Lynn Richard (9 Harrison Street and member of the Planning Board) – stated that she thought this was a full demolition. It is not clear how this is only a 60% demolition, as stated by the applicant. She is against the demolition of this structure. There is an importance of maintaining the architectural integrity of Somerville's housing stock.

Seeing no additional comments, Chair Parkes closed public testimony.

The Commission noted an interest in the social history of the property, especially given the long string of African American residents of the property. The structure seems a bit different, architecturally, from the other houses on the street. The house is narrower and smaller than those in the general area. It does not contribute to the rhythm and pattern of the street. The Commission discussed that interpretive signage could be installed noting the social history of the property. Staff explained that this could be agreed to with the applicant as part of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) which would then be recorded at the Registry of Deeds. The applicant team agreed that this could be a condition of approval.

Following a motion by Member Chagnon, seconded by Vice Chair Kelly, the Commission voted (1-3), with Member Bauer in favor, to find the property Historically Significant.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Chagnon, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the following findings:

- The property does not contribute significantly to the rhythm of the streetscape.
- The form of the structure has been altered through multiple additions and no longer retains its original massing.
- The structure is not associated with a specific historic architectural style.
- The property has a significant social history having been lived in and owned by many African American Somerville residents.
- The applicant has offered to provide signage to reflect the social history of the property.
- The applicant has agreed to codify the commitment to install interpretive signage in a recorded Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Registry of Deeds.

Following a motion by Member Chagnon, seconded by Vice Chair Kelly, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to accept the proposed condition of approval, that the applicant will enter into an MOA to install historic interpretive signage by the time the Certificate of Occupancy is issued.

RESULT:

NOT HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT WITH CONDITIONS

**PUBLIC HEARINGS – DETERMINATIONS OF PREFERABLY PRESERVED
(STEP 2 IN THE DEMOLITION REVIEW PROCESS)
HP25-000056 – 10 Sargent Avenue**

The applicant team explained that there does not seem to be any general historical association or significance to the property. The existing building is a two and a half-story front gable, Italianate structure. This is a fairly common building type in the area. The structure is in rough condition and there have been many alterations to it over the years, including aluminum windows, aluminum siding, removal of eave brackets, etc. The main concern of the Commission seemed to be the overall look of the proposed design from the street. The house directly across from 10 Sargent Ave was more recently renovated in a way that breaks up the streetscape. The applicant team stated

that the demolition of 10 Sargent would not be very detrimental to the neighborhood, as it stands now. If the demolition is allowed, the new structure would follow the existing streetscape.

The applicant team reviewed the proposed design. Some of the notable features of the existing structure include the gable roof, which coordinates with the rhythm of the street. The street is made up of a number of gable roof buildings, all of which have different style porches, bays, and façade detailing. Most of the detailing on 10 Sargent has been stripped. The proposed building would contain three dwelling units, with a gable roof facing the street. The driveway would remain on the same side as it currently exists, but with pervious pavers. Currently, the site is mainly paved in asphalt, except for a small landscape area. A backyard cottage is proposed to add additional housing units to the City. There would be three units in the main house, vertically stacked, and a fourth unit in the cottage. The building is proposed to have a two-story bay, in a square style, with a front porch for the second floor. The new structure is proposed to have dormers, set far back from the front façade, leaving a 3.5' edge from the main massing of the rear. The proposed materials will be in keeping with the streetscape while also providing a fresh look, including lap siding in traditional colors. On the bay, white siding is proposed with an accent color of burnt orange. The proposed windows are a bit different than the style on the street, but they contribute to the style of the proposed building. The parking will be concealed under the second floor area.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony. Seeing no comments, Chair Parkes closed public testimony.

The Commission noted that the building retains much of its original massing and form but, compared to many of the neighboring houses, does not retain its detailing. The proposed building does a good job at respecting the rhythm of the streetscape. There was agreement that the building could be deemed Not Preferably Preserved, with conditions that the new structure include a front-facing gable roof and dormers in keeping with the streetscape.

Following a motion by Member Chagnon, seconded by Vice Chair Kelly, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to find the property Not Preferably Preserved, with conditions that the new structure include a front-facing gable roof and dormers in keeping with the streetscape, substantially similar to the plans presented and subject to review by Staff.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Chagnon, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the following findings:

- The existing structure is not importantly associated with any notable people, events, history, etc.
- While the building retains its original massing, much of the detailing and nuance of it is gone.
- The existing structure is not a particularly strong example of an architectural style.
- The structure's primary contribution is in its form and massing, and the proposed replacement structure echoes those aspects to a sufficient level.

RESULT:

NOT PREFERABLY PRESERVED WITH CONDITIONS

**PUBLIC HEARINGS – DETERMINATIONS OF PREFERABLY PRESERVED
(STEP 2 IN THE DEMOLITION REVIEW PROCESS)
HP25-000063 – 15 Oak Street**

The Commission heard this and the following agenda item concurrently.

The applicant team explained that the proposal is to demolish the structures at both 15 and 17 Oak Street. The properties currently contain two units on either side, and the proposal is to build new structures, with four units on each side, for a total of eight units, to help create badly needed housing in the City. The 15 Oak Street property is only 30' wide, which is too narrow for any of the building types that could be built in this district. As part of the proposal, one of the lot lines will be moved to allow for at least the minimum 34' width on each side. There is no

existing rhythm to the streetscape in this area. If the lots were merged, only four units would be allowed on the lot. The existing structure has been altered over the years, including a large two-story 1960s-era rear addition, a shed roof in the rear addition, faux-stone siding, a concrete foundation, and replacement windows. The applicant team stated that the other structures on the street are common building types. The property in question does not match others around it, as it is sideways and asymmetrical. The request is for a finding of Not Preferably Preserved with the proposed conditions as shown in the Staff Memo. This would allow for redevelopment of the site in a more sensible building layout, creating two symmetrical lots.

Chair Parkes opened public testimony. Seeing no comments, Chair Parkes closed public testimony.

The Commission discussed that the immediate neighborhood is a mix of home vintages and styles. The basic architectural form of this property is intact, despite the changes made to it over the years. The applicant team displayed the proposed design for the backyard cottage. The main house would be a standard triple decker style, as seen elsewhere in Somerville.

Some members of the Commission discussed that there seems to be too much of the structure intact to determine it to be Not Preferably Preserved.

Following a motion by Member Chagnon, seconded by Vice Chair Kelly, the Commission voted (1-2-1), with Member Bauer in favor and Member Chagnon abstaining, to find the building at 15 Oak Street Preferably Preserved.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Chagnon, the Commission voted (3-0-1), with Member Bauer abstaining, to approve the following findings for 15 Oak Street and 17 Oak Street:

- The building does not contribute to the streetscape.
- The building is not importantly associated with an architectural style or person.
- The building does not retain sufficient integrity.

RESULT:

NOT PREFERABLY PRESERVED

**PUBLIC HEARINGS – DETERMINATIONS OF PREFERABLY PRESERVED
(STEP 2 IN THE DEMOLITION REVIEW PROCESS)
HP25-000064 – 17 Oak Street**

This item was heard concurrently with the previous agenda item.

Following a motion by Member Chagnon, seconded by Vice Chair Kelly, the Commission voted (1-3), with Member Bauer in favor, to find the building at 17 Oak Street Preferably Preserved.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Kelly, seconded by Member Chagnon, the Commission voted (3-0-1), with Member Bauer abstaining, to approve the following findings for 15 Oak Street and 17 Oak Street:

- The building does not contribute to the streetscape.
- The building is not importantly associated with an architectural style or person.
- The building does not retain sufficient integrity.

RESULT:

NOT PREFERABLY PRESERVED

OTHER BUSINESS: CPC Update

The CPC will meet tomorrow for its annual presentation of projects by applicants.

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.