

City of Somerville

Review of Multiple-Member
Bodies



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Legislation: Review of Multiple-Member Bodies (MMBs)

Code of Ordinances: Part II, Chapter 2, Article V

Section 2-186. – Review of multiple-member bodies.

- (a) No later than the second regular City Council meeting in April 2026, and every ten years subsequently, the mayor and the City Council shall convene a committee for the review of multiple-member bodies, pursuant to § 8-6 of the City Charter.
- (b) The review committee shall consist of:
 - (1) the mayor or their designee;
 - (2) the president of the City Council or their designee;
 - (3) the city clerk;
 - (4) a resident of the city appointed by the mayor; and,
 - (5) a resident of the city appointed by the City Council.
- (c) The committee **shall provide a report** and submit it to the City Council no later than the first meeting in December in the calendar year in which the committee was convened. The report shall include:
 - (1) **an assessment of the functions and relevancies of the city’s current multiple-member bodies;**
 - (2) **a review of activities of multiple-member bodies from recent years;**
 - (3) the ability of the city to fill appointments to the body; and,
 - (4) **recommendations for combining, terminating, or establishing new multiple-member bodies.**
- (d) The City Council shall vote on the included recommendations, in the form of a resolution, no later than ninety days after submission of the committee’s report.

Multiple-Member Bodies in Somerville

Overview

There are 38 active boards, commissions, and committees in the City of Somerville

Types of
Bodies

- Adjudicatory
- Advisory
- Ad Hoc

Establishment

- Local Ordinance
- MGL

Adjudicatory Bodies

Definition

- Neutral officials who, after the presentation of evidence or argument, render a judgement affecting a party's interests in a particular matter.

Bodies

- Affordable Housing Trust
- Biosafety Committee
- Board of Assessors
- Board of Health
- Community Preservation Committee
- Conservation Commission
- Condominium Review Board
- Ethics Commission
- Housing Authority
- Historic Preservation Commission
- Licensing Commission
- Municipal Job Creation & Retention Board of Trustees
- Planning Board
- Redevelopment Authority
- Retirement Board
- Traffic Commission
- Urban Design Commission
- Zoning Board of Appeals

Advisory Bodies

Definition

- Organization composed of appointed members whose primary purpose is to provide advice, study critical issues, and facilitate communication between elected officials and the community. They do not have the authority to make decisions or implement policies directly but serve to inform or consult on matters that affect the community.

Bodies

- Arts Council Board
- Bicycle Advisory Committee
- Board of Library Trustees
- Climate Action Commission
- Commission for Persons with Disabilities
- Commission for Women
- Council on Aging
- Election Commission
- Fair Housing Commission
- Human Rights Commission
- Memorialization Committee
- Municipal Compensation Advisory Board
- Municipal Scholarship Committee
- Police Chief Selection Committee
- Traffic Board*
- Urban Forestry Committee
- Veterans' Commission
- Wage Theft Advisory Committee

Ad Hoc Bodies

Definition

- A body appointed to work on a particular subject or problem. Ceases to exist upon completion of its charge.

Bodies

- Anti-Displacement Task Force
- Appointments Advisory Committee
- Armory Advisory Committee
- Children's Cabinet
- Gilman Square Civic Advisory Committee
- Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee
- Safe Consumption Site Task Force
- Winter/Brown School Construction Advisory Group
- Winter Hill School Building Committee
- Winter Hill Urban Renewal Committee
- 90 Washington St. Civic Advisory Committee

Massachusetts General Law (MGL)

Required by MGL

- Either has state jurisdiction or is required in the city
- Bodies marked by * are required because of the City's distinct characteristics

Bodies

- [Board of Assessors](#)
- [Board of Health](#)
- [Board of Library Trustees](#)*
- [Housing Authority](#)*
- [Licensing Commission](#)*
- [Planning Board](#)*
- [Redevelopment Authority](#)*
- [Retirement Board](#)
- [Zoning Board of Appeals](#)*

Somerville Ordinance – MGL Accepted

Definition

- These bodies originate from MGL
- The city chose to adopt state legislation to establish these bodies
- Bodies marked by * are legislated ONLY through MGL
- All other bodies have legislation in both MGL and the Code of Ordinances

Established by MGL

- [Affordable Housing Trust](#)
- [Arts Council Board](#)*
- [Commission for Persons with Disabilities](#)*
- [Conservation Commission](#)*
- [Municipal Scholarship Committee](#)*
- [Veterans Commission](#)

Somerville Ordinance – Established by Ordinance

Established by local ordinance

- [Bicycle Advisory Committee](#)
- [Biosafety Committee](#)
- [Climate Action Commission](#)
- [Community Preservation Committee](#)
- [Condominium Review Board](#)
- [Council on Aging](#)
- [Election Commission](#)
- [Ethics Commission](#)
- [Fair Housing Commission](#)
- [Historic Preservation Commission](#)
- [Human Rights Commission](#)
- [Memorialization Committee](#)
- [Municipal Compensation Advisory Board](#)
- [Municipal Job Creation and Retention Fund*](#)
- [Traffic Board](#)
- [Traffic Commission](#)
- [Urban Design Commission](#)
- [Urban Forestry Committee](#)
- [Wage Theft Advisory Committee](#)
- [Women's Commission](#)

Review Considerations

Review Considerations

Create

New body to address gaps in the city.

Re-instate bodies that are on hold.

Combine

Multiple-member bodies that fulfill the same purpose as other multiple-member bodies.

Amend

Limit OR expand the scope of powers.

Re-assess composition or meeting structure.

Explicitly define relationship between body and the city.

Dissolve

Bodies that haven't met in years (Inactive).

Bodies that no longer serve the needs of the city (Defunct).

Bodies that fulfill the same responsibilities as city departments (Redundant).

Which Bodies are Subject to Review?

MGL - Mandatory

The City must establish certain bodies if they;

- Fall under state jurisdiction
- Are required due to the city's characteristics

Not subject to review.

MGL – Accepted

Bodies that are established *only* through MGL.

- Powers specified through an ordinance.*
- Significant changes to purpose, duties, or powers → Home Rule Petition.

CoO – Local Ordinance

Bodies created through ordinance or executive order.

- Fair game – city made the rules, city can change the rules.
- Can be created, consolidated, amended, or terminated.

Evaluation Process and Criteria

Background Research

- Enabling legislation (City or Zoning Ordinance, MGL)
- Governing documents (e.g., Rules of Policy and Procedure, bylaws)
- City website
 - Board or Commission page
 - Agendas, Minutes & More
- Legistar

Interview Questions and Goals

Questions Addressed

- Purpose
- Current Work
- Alignment to City Goals (Commissioner Questionnaire)
- Community Engagement
- Overlaps & Gaps
- Collaboration with City Staff
- Additional Information

Interview Grouping

- Multiple-member bodies were divided into 12 groups, determined by similarities in:
 1. Work
 2. Function
- Groups were split evenly between interviewers
- Most interviews were conducted in these groupings

Interview Group Examples

Related Work: Group 1

- Planning Board
- Urban Design Commission
- Zoning Board of Appeals
- Historic Preservation Commission

Similar Functions: Group 11

- Arts Council Board
- Board of Library Trustees
- Council on Aging
- Bicycle Advisory Committee

Interview Strategy

Liaison Interviews

- Conducted on Zoom
- Scheduled through City calendar

Commissioner Interviews

- Conducted via Microsoft Forms
- Contact provided by liaison

Data

Data Collection

- Liaison Interviews
 - Zoom interviews were recorded
 - Audio transcripts were downloaded and reviewed
 - Interviewer notes supplement transcripts
- Commissioner Questionnaire
 - Will provide recorded responses for review

Data Analysis

Quantitative

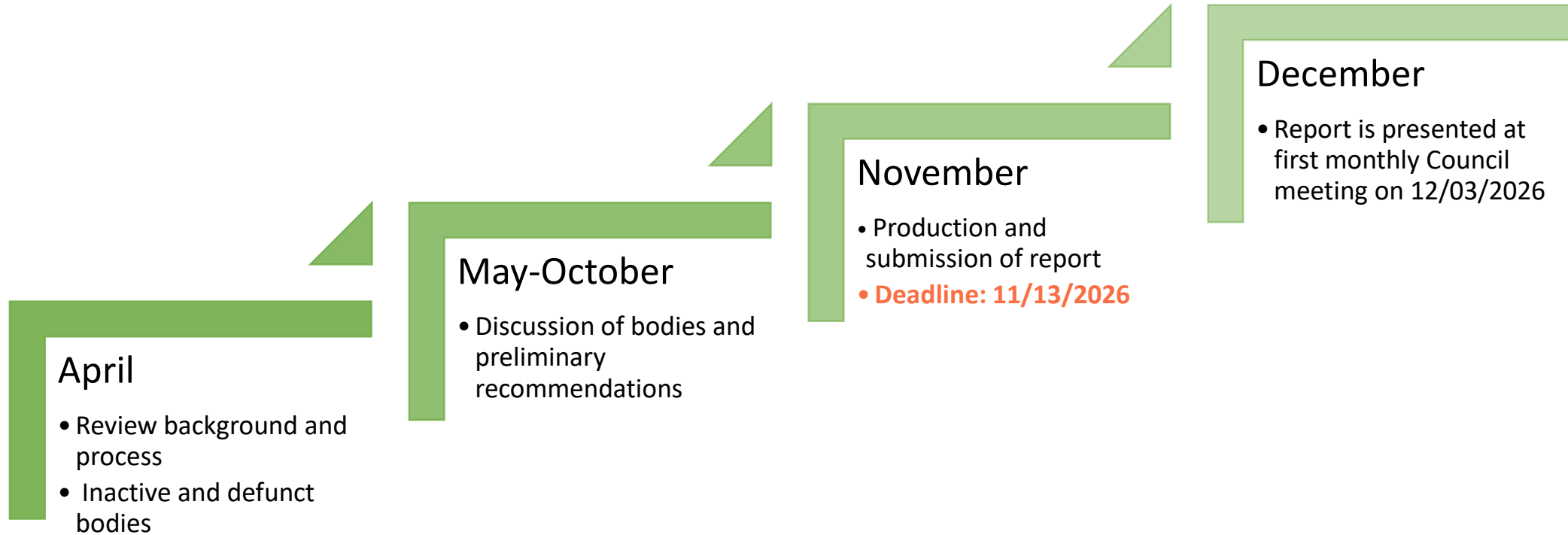
- Numerical values assigned to:
 - Yes or No questions
 - A, B, C questions
 - Likert scale
- Responses assessed within groups

Qualitative

- Direct comparison to enabling legislation
- Qualitative Coding
 - What's working, what is not
 - Duplicated work efforts
 - Quantifying qualitative responses, establishing frequency

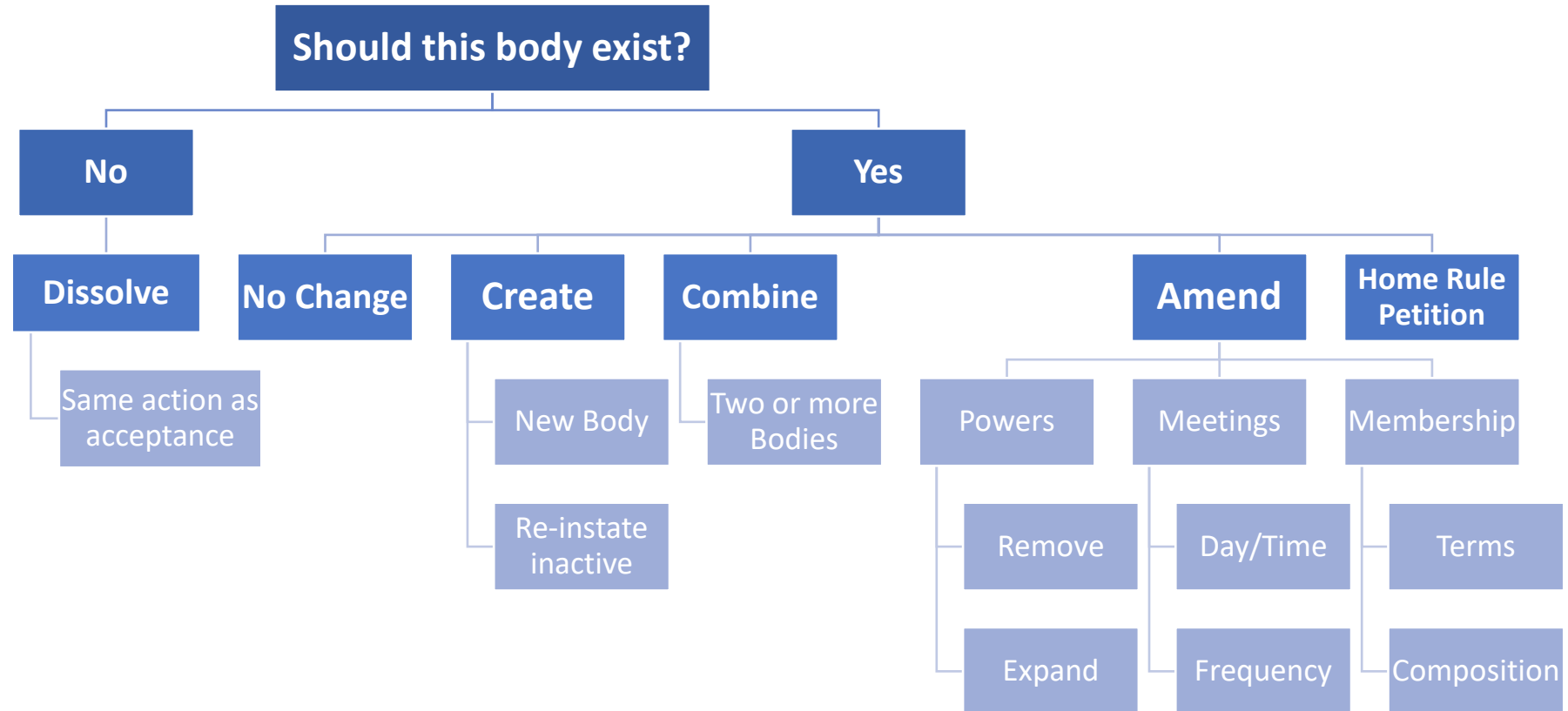
Committee Timeline

Timeline: First Meeting → Report Submission



Preliminary Findings

Potential Recommendations



AIDS Commission

Background

Enabling Legislation: [Ordinance](#)

Established: November 14, 1990

Purpose: Educate and mobilize the public, make policy recommendations, and create programs to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Members: 13 -21.

Duties:

- Assess impact of HIV/AIDS
- Develop recommendations and propose policies to the city, public, and private agencies.
- Initiate and coordinate enactment of legislation.
- Raise money for commission use.
- Hold relevant state/national organization membership.
- Conduct public programs and media events at and through the city.

Findings

Defunct - Purpose

- Commission was originally established to confront the “serious concern regarding the growing impact of the [HIV/AIDS] epidemic on the community and City of Somerville and all of its residents.”
- HIV/AIDS is no longer considered an epidemic.
- Massachusetts ranks 44th in the nation for HIV diagnoses. There is little to no data on the prevalence of the disease in Somerville.

Defunct - Existence

- No current members, last data indicated that there were 9 members.
- No data on last meeting.
- No data on recent OR past activity from the body.

Gang Advisory Board

Background

Enabling Legislation: [MGL Act](#)

Established: August 26, 2004

Purpose: Advise the Mayor, City Council, and Police Department on actions to mitigate and respond to criminal gang activity in the city.

Members: 7

Duties:

- Confer with the chief of police to implement the Gang Ordinance.
- Provide recommendations on police personnel training, including issues arising from public complaints.
- Make recommendations to the Mayor on policies and procedures to address gang issues.

Findings

Defunct - Purpose

- In a 2020 Somerville Times article, Senior Crime Analyst Meredith Willis reported that gang activity numbers in the city are shrinking.
- Somerville PD's crime report data from 2017-2025 indicates that over 60% of criminal activity in the city is non-violent property crime.
- For the past 6 years, Somerville has opted to implement restorative justice programs to mitigate gang violence and gang activity amongst high-risk youth.

Defunct - Existence

- No record of recent meetings.
- Last appointment to the Board was made over a decade ago – the year of its inception.

Multicultural Affairs Commission

Background

Enabling Legislation: [Ordinance](#)

Establishment: September 22, 2005

Purpose: Compile and distribute information regarding interracial and intergroup relationships, be a voice for underrepresented people in city government.

Duties:

- Strive to eliminate sources of interracial friction and unequal treatment of minority groups in housing, recreation, education, law enforcement, etc.
- Promote amicable relations among racial, cultural, and other groups in the city.
- Aid in the coordination of private organizations concerned about these relations.

Findings

Defunct - Purpose

- Outdated language
- Much of the Commission's duties were redirected to City staff. New departments were created to offer a more comprehensive approach.
 1. *SomerViva: Office of Immigrants Affairs (SOIA)*
 - Founded, in part, to address both inequality and inequity.
 2. *Department of Racial & Social Justice*
 - Works to identify and dismantle systemic racism and social disparities through accessibility, community engagement, and policy development.
- In 2021, the SomerVision Committee formulated a multi-step update to the City's comprehensive plan, centering equity and inclusivity in housing, infrastructure, public space, education, and more.

Defunct - Existence

- Last recorded meeting – April 24, 2008
- Last appointment to Commission was made over a decade ago.

Municipal Athletics Facilities Commission

Background

Enabling Legislation: [Ordinance](#)

Establishment: April 12, 2007

Members: 5

Duties:

- Devise and direct policy initiatives relative to the implementation of the management and operations agreement entered into by the State Department of Conservation and Recreation and the city, dated September 8, 2006, and any successor agreements to **operate, manage, maintain, and staff the Dilboy Memorial Stadium... and any other facility designated by the mayor with the approval of the City Council.**
- Devise policies relative to the **management, funding, control, issuance of permits, authorization of concessions, and leasing or permitting** of the Dilboy Memorial Stadium and any other facility designated by the mayor with the approval of the city council, and create cost structures for such activities...

Funding:

- The commission will establish and maintain a revolving account and/or enterprise fund... such account shall be used solely for the purpose of offsetting municipal operating costs of the Dilboy Memorial Stadium and any other facility...

Findings

Defunct - Purpose

- **Operation:** The George Dilboy Stadium is operated by the City of Somerville Parks and Recreation Department ([source](#)).
- **Maintenance:** The Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for the preparation, maintenance, and improvements to fields and recreational facilities ([source](#)).
- **Permitting:** The Parks and Recreation Department manages permitting for Dilboy Stadium and other recreational facilities, including concessions ([source](#)).
- **Funding:**
 - The Parks and Recreation Department interacts with the Mayor for the purpose of program approval, budgeting, expenditure, and grant assistance ([source](#)).
 - Dilboy Stadium generates revenue through rentals and permits which are reinvested into the facility's maintenance, staffing, and capital improvements ([source](#)).

Defunct - Existence

- No record of recent meetings.
- Last appointment to Commission was made over 15 years ago.

Recreation and Youth Commission

Background

Enabling Legislation: [Ordinance](#), [MGL](#)

Establishment: June 26, 2003

Purpose: Create a curriculum that encourages community awareness in the City's young people ([source](#)).

Members: 10

Duties:

- ...may use suitable land or buildings already owned by [the city], for the purposes of a public playground or recreation centre, and may conduct and **promote recreation, play, sport and physical education...** ([MGL](#))

Powers:

- ...except as to the making of appropriations, the powers conferred by this section shall be exercised by the board of park commissioners, or by the school committee, or by the planning board, or by a playground or recreation commission... or may be distributed among...any two or more of them... ([MGL](#))

Findings

Defunct - Purpose

- **Promote recreation, physical activity:** The Parks and Recreation Department exists to enrich the lives of residents by identifying, recruiting, improving, and providing recreational services and programs for youth and adults in the City of Somerville. It operates year-round programs throughout the city's public facilities, playgrounds, schoolyards, athletic fields and various other locations to promote positive and healthy activities ([source](#)).
- **Promote sport:** The Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for the establishment, coordination and/or implementation of community sports programs for all boys and girls as well as adults, including working with the city's youth leagues ([source](#)).

Defunct - Existence

- Last recorded meeting – May 1, 2017 (Recreation Commission)
- Last appointment to Commission was made over 20 years ago.

PILOT Advisory Task Force

Background

Enabling Legislation: [Ordinance](#)

Establishment: May 27, 2021

Purpose: The goal of the task force is to **make recommendations** for a more equitable and consistent PILOT program compensating the city for lost revenue resulting from the portion of the city's land area that is tax exempt and reducing the subsidy of service provision to tax exempt properties by owners of taxable properties.

Duties:

- ...**produce and file** with the city clerk, the mayor, and city council **formal recommendations** in relation with:
 - A standard level of contributions in programs and payments to be met;
 - A methodology for valuing community benefits;
 - The valuation and revaluation of property owned by tax exempt institutions;
 - Guidelines for the provisions to be included in PILOT agreements; and
 - Legislative changes needed at the state and local levels.

Findings

Defunct - Purpose

- **Recommendations:** Report and recommendations of the PILOT Advisory Task Force were conveyed to the City Council on May 22, 2025. Find the report attached to Legistar [File #: 25-1004](#).

Defunct - Existence

- Last recorded meeting – 05/12/2025
- Work complete in Spring 2025.

Next Meeting

Meeting Prep

- Bodies to Review
 - Group 1
 - [Planning Board](#)
 - [Urban Design Commission](#)
 - [Zoning Board of Appeals](#)
 - [Historic Preservation Commission](#)
- Action Items
 - Review enabling legislation ahead of next meeting