

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
HISTORICAL COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF WORCESTER**

**April 1, 2021**

**CITY HALL\***

**Commission Members Participating:** Devon Kurtz, Vice-Chair  
Diane Long, Clerk  
Randolph Bloom  
Tomi Stefani  
Janet Theerman  
Erika Helnarski, Alternate

**Commission Members Not Participating:** Mark Wamback, Chair

**Staff Members Participating:** Michelle Johnstone, Division of Planning & Regulatory Services  
Stephen Rolle, Division of Planning & Regulatory Services

\*Pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor’s March 23, 2020 Order, as amended, imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting was conducted through remote participation. The meeting was livestreamed from the City of Worcester website and is available for streaming online. Public participation was facilitated through a call-in number, 415-655-0001 (Access Code: 1608081191#), and link (<https://cow.webex.com/meet/historicalcommissionwebex>), which were publicized on the posted meeting agenda and during the video broadcast.

---

**CALL COMMISSION TO ORDER**

The Commission was called to order by Vice-Chair Devon Kurtz at 5:33 PM.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**March 18, 2021:** Held until the April 15, 2021 meeting.

---

**NEW BUSINESS**

None

**COMMUNICATIONS**

- A. Request from Epsilon Associates for updated letters of support for Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit allocations for the Commerce Building at 340 Main Street, the Worcester County Institution for Savings at 365 Main Street, and Walker Shoe Factory at 28 Water Street.

On a motion by Commissioner Kurtz and seconded by Commissioner Stefani, the Commission voted 6-0 to issue updated letters.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

- A. Approval of 2022 Historical Commission meeting schedule.

On a motion by Commissioner Kurtz and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 6-0 to approve the 2022 Historical Commission meeting schedule.

B. Discussion on the creation of potential new Local Historic District(s).

Ms. Johnstone gave a brief overview of local historic districts, including the benefits of them and the authority granted to the Commission in terms of proposed work within local historic districts. She explained that the Commission currently has purview over any work proposed to visible portions of property in local historic districts, but that in many communities, Commissions elect to exclude specific things from their purview, including window air conditioner units, paint color, storm doors and windows, etc. She went on to explain the difference between local and national historic districts. Next, she presented a flow chart of the steps that would need to be taken to establish a Local Historic District, stating that the first step would be for the Commission to vote to initiate a study.

Ms. Johnstone stated that City staff conducted fieldwork of the area including and surrounding Becker College, which has been discussed as a potential new local historic district. She presented slides that showed the properties currently inventoried in the area, as well as photographs from the field survey. She invited the Commission to discuss whether or not they wished to initiate a study of the area.

Commissioner Kurtz voiced his support of initiating a study of the area as a potential local historic district.

Commissioner Bloom agreed with Commissioner Kurtz. He also stated in the past, he has been approached by residents nearby to Becker College about the steps necessary to create a local historic district, so he believes there may be some interest.

Commissioner Bloom asked Ms. Johnstone when the Commission should discuss exempting some items from the Commission's review. Ms. Johnstone stated that the Commission could start discussing those things at the current meeting, and could talk about it more going forward. Ms. Johnstone stated that she, along with Deb Packard from Preservation Worcester, attended a virtual seminar put on by the MHC regarding local historic districts, where the MHC recommended that Commissions exempt reversible things such as paint color from their review. Commissioner Bloom stated that he would be concerned about the inclusion of paint color in the Commission's purview, since that tends to attract a very negative response from homeowners.

Mr. Rolle recommended that the Commission not spend a whole lot of time talking about the specifics at this point, as the Commission first needs to determine whether or not to initiate a study.

Commissioner Kurtz asked what the Commission's next steps would be.

Ms. Johnstone stated that the very first step would be for the Commission to vote to, or not to, initiate a study of the Becker College area. Then, the next step would be to meet with the MHC, followed by the preparation of the study report.

Commissioner Long stated that she is in favor of initiating the study.

Commissioner Bloom noted the significance of the decision of the Commission regarding initiating a study, especially given the possibility of the impending closure of Becker College. He stated that the Commission would need to move quickly and carefully.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 6-0 to initiate a study of the Becker College area as a potential local historic district.

Next, Ms. Johnstone presented design review guidelines materials to the Commission. She stated that design review guidelines would be made available to home and building owners to use as reference, and they would also be used by the Commission in their decision-making process, noting that a set of guidelines will aid in transparency. She noted that she will complete them by category and provide completed categories to the Commission ahead of a scheduled meeting for review so that they can be discussed during meeting time.

Ms. Johnstone presented the categories that she plans on creating guidelines for and asked for input from the Commission on additional categories that they may need guidance on.

Commissioner Bloom stated that he would like to see guidance on fences. Ms. Johnstone stated that she would add that to the list as well.

Commissioner Stefani asked if the Commission has purview over sidewalks. Mr. Rolle stated that he is not sure of whether public infrastructure is exempt, but that if the Commission does have purview, staff would work on establishing a set of guidelines for those types of things.

Mr. Rolle stated that an advantage of going topic by topic will give the Commission an opportunity to work on them and get comfortable with them over several months. He stated that at this point, a vote on these guidelines will establish a policy of the Commission, which would essentially be a very strong suggestion. Once there is a complete set of guidelines, the Commission could vote to adopt the guidelines as a rule that could be used as a definitive requirement.

Ms. Johnstone presented a set of guidelines pertaining to wall claddings on wood-frame buildings. Wall claddings included were clapboards, shingles, stucco, and board and batten.

Commissioner Bloom asked if this guideline would become a hard and fast rule once voted on. Ms. Johnstone stated that at this point, the guidelines would act as a strong suggestion. Additionally, even once the guidelines are voted as a rule, the Commission will still have leeway given that a range of options is included, and that the Commission could still issue a Certificate of Hardship.

#### *Public Comment*

Deborah Packard of Preservation Worcester congratulated Ms. Johnstone on getting started on design review guidelines. She stated that it seems like the guidelines seem like a great tool for the Commission and for anybody else. She asked if gutters were included. Ms. Johnstone stated that they were not, but that she would add that as a category.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 6-0 to close public comment.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 6-0 to approve the design review category of wall claddings as written and discussed as a policy of the Commission.

#### C. Discussion on revisions to the City's Building Demolition Delay Ordinance.

Held until the April 15, 2021 meeting.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Commissioner Kurtz and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the meeting was adjourned at 6:07 PM.