

MEETING MINUTES

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

October 10, 2018

Commissioner Sullivan called the meeting to order at 1:10 pm. Acting as Chairman on behalf of Secretary Galvin, he welcomed the Commissioners. Commissioner Sullivan next addressed the audience, thanking them for attending.

Commissioner Sullivan next addressed the first item on the agenda, **approval of the September 12, 2018 meeting minutes**. He called for a MOTION TO ACCEPT the minutes. A MOTION was made by Commissioner McDowell and SECONDED by Commissioner DeWitt. Hearing no questions, the chair moved the motion. The motion CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Commissioner Sullivan then turned to the next item on the agenda, the Landmark Study Report for the **Boston CITGO Sign in Boston**, first calling for any recusals. Commissioner Cosco said he would recuse himself from discussion and voting on **Boston CITGO Sign in Boston**. Commissioner Sullivan then turned the meeting over to the Director of Local Government Programs, Chris Skelly.

At this point in the meeting, Commissioner Cosco recused himself due to the appearance of a conflict and left the room. Mr. Skelly presented the study report and distributed a copy of the presentation slides. A copy of the slides is on file with these minutes. The **Boston CITGO Sign in Boston** is a large, illuminated sign mounted to a steel truss structure located atop 660 Beacon Street in Boston.

The sign faces slightly northeast-to southwest, and it can be seen clearly from the major arteries of Beacon Street, Commonwealth Avenue, Brookline Street, Storrow Drive, Memorial Drive, as well as from the Charles River and home plate at Fenway Park. The sign has been used informally by the public as a wayfinding marker since its construction in 1965. Mr. Skelly explained the animation sequence of the lights, the dimming of the lights during the energy crisis and the switch from neon to LEDs. He also provided background on other spectacular signs found throughout the country.

By 1982, the Boston sign was the last of about six Citgo signs that once stood in American cities. In March of that year, local residents who wanted the sign preserved as a symbol of roadside culture submitted a petition to the Boston Landmarks Commission to designate the sign a Boston Landmark. Meanwhile, the company decided to dismantle the sign because of high maintenance costs and the price of refurbishing it. In November 1982, workers began hoisting materials by crane to the roof of the building to prepare for the month-long task of dismantling the massive electronic billboard piece by piece. The Boston Landmarks Commission responded by issuing a cease and desist order and invoking 90-day emergency powers. A hearing was set for January 11, 1983. The Boston Landmarks Commission voted against designating the Citgo sign a Boston landmark at a hearing held on January 25, 1983.

The sign was recently recognized for its contribution to the visual complexity of the night skyline when it was ranked number ten in a list of Greater Boston's 50 Best Works of Public Art.

Since its appearance in 1965 the sign has been an important presence in the eyes and lives of Bostonians. The sign is a landmark in the literal sense that it marks the location of Kenmore Square. The sign also turns up in several novels set in Boston. The sign is an essential icon of two of Boston's signature sports: the Boston Marathon and Red Sox baseball.

The Boston Landmarks Commission's interest in designating the Citgo Sign as a Boston Landmark is a proactive planning measure. The staff of the Boston Landmarks Commission recommends that the specified exterior features of the Citgo sign on the roof of 660 Beacon Street be designated a Landmark under Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975, as amended. The boundaries shall correspond to the assessor's parcel number; however, the building at 660 Beacon Street on which the sign is mounted is not designated as a Landmark.

Mr. Skelly said that MHC staff recommends acknowledging receipt of the Landmark Study Report for the Citgo Sign and providing the following advisory recommendations and comments: The Massachusetts Historical Commission encourages the Local Landmark designation of the Citgo Sign.

Commissioner Sullivan asked for comments in two sections, first questions of fact, then comments.

Commissioner Friary asked whether the designation would have any effect on the ability of the sign's owner to adopt improvements of technology, lighting, etc.. Mr. Skelly said those will be excluded as long as the colors remain the same.

Commissioner McDowell asked if the current owner was in favor of the designation. Mr. Skelly said he had received nothing official; he added that media reports suggest there are some concerns about the designation.

Commissioner Pride asked who owns the sign. Mr. Skelly said Related Beal Company owns the building. Commissioner Friary asked if the sign itself is actually owned by Citgo. Mr. Skelly said it is owned by Citgo with another company. The structure is maintained by an additional company.

Commissioner Friary asked if it was something else before it was City Service—was it Jenney Gasoline? Commissioner DeWitt said there was a gasoline sign on top of the Buckminster Hotel. Mr. Skelly said there was another spectacular sign on another building in Kendall Square. He showed the powerpoint slide that included the Citgo Sign and White Fuel Sign.

Commissioner Pride asked whether, if this passes as a landmark and Beal Companies no longer wanted to maintain it in future, what would happen? What's the responsibility of the owner? Mr. Skelly explained that landmark designation would mean that prior to any changes to the sign itself, the proposed changes would have to go before the Boston Landmarks Commission, just as with any other landmark.

Commissioner DeWitt asked about the cost of electricity before the switch to LED. Mr. Skelly said there was a savings of \$18,000 annually when the sign was switched to LED.

Commissioner Sullivan then asked for comments from Commissioners. Commissioner DeWitt said there should be a reference to Arthur Krim in the report—without him, there probably would not be a Citgo sign today.

Commissioner DeWitt said he had heard that there was a separate discussion of sight lines that had been deferred. Mr. Skelly explained that a larger protection area had been considered but was not part of the current recommendation. Commissioner DeWitt asked whether the Commission could add language in the motion that a visual/sightline protection area be included around the sign. Commissioner DeWitt also noted that further down the block, also proposed for demolition, is a historic building designed by Arthur Vinal.

Commissioner Sullivan said yes, the motion could be expanded. Commissioner Sullivan called for further questions or comments from the commission. Hearing none, he then asked for questions or comments from the public. Hearing none, Commissioner Sullivan called for a **MOTION** to acknowledge receipt of the Preliminary Study Report for the **Boston Citgo Sign in Boston**, and to provide the advisory comments that the Massachusetts Historical Commission encourages the city of Boston to establish the Citgo Sign as a Landmark. Commissioner DeWitt Moved the motion and proposed an amendment to the **MOTION** to further encourage the establishment of a visual sightline protection area. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Crissman. Commissioner Sullivan asked for further questions or comments. Hearing none, he moved the motion. The motion **CARRIED** with one recusal and nine in favor. Commissioner Cosco returned back into the room.

Commissioner Sullivan then turned to the item on the agenda, the **Massachusetts Preservation Project Fund (MPPF) Grants highlights**.

Commissioner Sullivan then recognized Paul Holtz, Co-Director of the Grants Division. Mr. Holtz presented a PowerPoint presentation highlighting recently completed by the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Funded projects throughout Massachusetts. Images showing before, during and after photos were shared for the following projects.

East Blackstone Friends Meetinghouse – East Blackstone

Church of the Covenant – Back Bay/Boston

Bank Street Armory – Fall River

Ventfort Hall – Lenox

Drake House – Leominster

Oliver-Sproat House – Middleborough

Spencer-Pierce-Little House – Newbury

Pilgrim Hall Museum – Plymouth

House of Seven Gables – Salem

Memory Statue and Memorial Monument – Sherborn

Whately Town House – Whately

New Bedford Whaling Museum – New Bedford

Commissioner Sullivan thanked Mr. Holtz for his presentation, and then turned to the next item on the agenda, the **Executive Director's Report**. Executive Director Brona Simon began by saying the federal survey and planning grant cycle has begun. She noted that MHC is required to pass through ten percent of its federal funding to certified local governments. She mentioned that this year the MHC will be able to consider applications from local historical commissions and other eligible organizations. Ms. Simon stated that pre-applications will be selected to apply for full applications by the Commission at the December 12th Commission Meeting.

Ms. Simon asked Commissioner Sullivan to request volunteers for the Survey and Planning subcommittee which will meet on the morning of December 12th. Commissioner Friary, Commissioner DeWitt, and Commissioner McDowell volunteered. Commissioner Sullivan thanked the commissioners for volunteering.

Ms. Simon then said that currently there are no pressing items for the November 14th meeting and that it may be cancelled. She stated that the December 12th meeting will have a full agenda of National Register nominations as well as the survey and planning pre-applications to be voted on.

This completed the Executive Director's report.

Hearing no further discussion, Commissioner Sullivan called for a MOTION to adjourn. A MOTION was made by Commissioner DeWitt and SECONDED by Commissioner Friary. The meeting adjourned at 2:25 pm.

Commissioners Present

CHARLES SULLIVAN

DENNIS DEWITT

DONALD FRIARY

CAITLIN EMERY AVENIA

SUANNA SELBY CROWLEY

MICHAEL MCDOWELL

JONATHAN COSCO

ANN PRIDE

BARBARA LEVY

JIM CRISSMAN

Staff Present

BRONA SIMON

ROSS DEKLE

BETSY FRIEDBERG

PAUL HOLTZ

NANCY MAIDA

PETER STOTT

SHARI PERRY-WALLACE

ROBIN OSTEN

SHIRLEY BROWN

CHRIS SKELLY

A TRUE COPY ATTEST

Respectfully submitted,
Shirley Brown

