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Secretary of the Commonwealth

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**FRANCIS STREET-FENWOOD ROAD HISTORIC DISTRICT, BOSTON
(FENWAY/LONGWOOD), APPROVED FOR NOMINATION TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF
HISTORIC PLACES**

Secretary of the Commonwealth William F. Galvin is pleased to announce that the Massachusetts Historical Commission approved the Francis Street-Fenwood Road Historic District, located in the Fenway and Longwood neighborhoods of Boston, for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places at its March meeting. The nomination will be submitted to the National Register of Historic Places at the National Park Service in Washington, DC, for final consideration and designation.

“The Massachusetts Historical Commission is dedicated to preserving the Commonwealth’s rich historic, architectural, archaeological, and cultural resources,” Secretary Galvin said. “Inclusion of Boston’s Francis Street-Fenwood Road Historic District in the National Register will help to preserve a significant and cohesive collection of historic buildings that represent the evolution of the Fenway area from marshland into a premier public park and developable land.”

The Francis Street-Fenwood Road Historic District is a well-preserved example of high-quality, middle-class housing constructed in Boston at the turn of the 20th century. The district represents a period of tremendous population and economic growth in late 19th- and early 20th-century Boston, and the resulting transformation of the Fenway area from marshland into a public park and new developable land.

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Bordered by Huntington Avenue, the Longwood Medical area, and the Mission Park housing complex, the district retains fine examples of multi-family residential, commercial, and institutional buildings in the Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, and Classical Revival styles. This collection of buildings displays the work of several local architects, ranging from the prominent Boston firm of Wheelwright and Haven, which was known for its civic and institutional work, to smaller-scale architects who specialized in speculative housing in the Roxbury and Jamaica Plain sections of Boston, and in adjacent Brookline.

Huntington Avenue was extended to Francis Street in 1882, and an electric streetcar line operated between downtown Boston and Brookline by 1891. In 1897, an ambitious developer named Jeremiah Spillane bought the large, undeveloped tract of land framed by Francis Street, Huntington Avenue, and Brookline Avenue that contains most of the present Francis Street-Fenwood Road district. He quickly laid out streets and lots, and was directly responsible for the construction of 20 houses in the present district. By 1906, virtually all the residential lots in this district had been developed with two- and three-family, wood-frame houses, along with a fine commercial block and a distinguished elementary school building, both on Huntington Avenue.

Freestanding houses form the remarkable residential core of this district, complemented by a handful of modest apartment buildings, such as the Avalon Chambers and Apartments at 777-779 Huntington Avenue, and the Harmon Block, with mixed commercial and residential uses, at 733-747 Huntington Avenue. The district also includes the Farragut School on the corner of Huntington Avenue and Fenwood Road, designed by Wheelwright & Haven and constructed in 1903. The Farragut School epitomized a new, progressive era in educational methods and architecture that arose during the beginning of the 20th century, and demonstrates architect Edmund Wheelwright's principals of school architecture, which he published just two years earlier in 1901.

The two- and three-family dwellings in the Francis Street-Fenwood Road district were well built, stylish, convenient, and affordable. Through the 1960s, the neighborhood was predominantly home to white-collar and skilled blue-collar workers, typically of Irish and German/Eastern European backgrounds, including immigrants and first-generation Americans.

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Fifty years ago, a more diverse range of ethnic groups began to appear in the neighborhood. At about the same time, the adjacent medical institutions began building monumental new facilities. To protect affordable housing in the neighborhood, the Roxbury Tenants of Harvard Association was created, accomplishing the construction of the Mission Park housing complex just to the south of the district, as well as the extraordinary preservation of the existing housing stock within the district.

In 2001, six buildings from an adjacent block were moved onto empty lots in the district to allow for construction of a new medical facility. The moved buildings share the history and architectural character seen throughout the district. Roxbury Tenants of Harvard now owns almost all of the buildings in the Francis Street-Fenwood Road Historic District, and is using state and federal historic rehabilitation tax credits to restore the exteriors and interiors of 17 of the district's buildings.

The Francis Street-Fenwood Road Historic District is one of six historic resources around the Commonwealth approved for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places by the Massachusetts Historical Commission at this meeting.

Secretary Galvin serves as Chairman of the 17-member board, which meets regularly and considers historic resources eligible for the National Register four times a year.

The National Register is the nation's official listing of significant historic resources. In Massachusetts, there are more than 70,000 properties listed in the National Register. The Massachusetts Historical Commission has been administering the National Register of Historic Places program in Massachusetts since 1966.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission is the office of the State Historic Preservation Officer and the State Archaeologist. It was established in 1963 to identify, evaluate, and protect important historical and archaeological assets of the Commonwealth. Visit our website to learn more about the Commission's programs (www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc).

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