

MEETING MINUTES
MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
November 13, 2024

The Commission meeting was held remotely in a Zoom meeting starting at 1:00 PM.

Chairman Rosenberry called the meeting to order at 1:03 pm. On behalf of Secretary Galvin, he welcomed the Commissioners. Chairman Rosenberry next addressed the visitors, thanking them for attending. For those individuals who may not have attended commission meetings in the past, Chairman Rosenberry explained the structure of the meeting and when in the process the visitors could address the commission. Chairman Rosenberry then took attendance to determine that a quorum was met.

The Chairman turned to the first item on the agenda, the **approval of the September 11, 2024 meeting minutes**. He asked if any Commissioners had any alterations or corrections to the September minutes. Hearing no questions or comments, the chair called for a vote to accept the minutes. The vote CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Chairman Rosenberry then turned to the next item on the agenda, the Local Historic District Preliminary Study Reports, first calling for any recusals. Hearing none, he turned the meeting over to Jennifer Doherty, Local Government Programs Coordinator. Ms. Doherty presented the study reports with a PowerPoint presentation. A copy of the presentation is on file with these minutes.

Ashland Center Historic District, Ashland

Ms. Doherty first presented the **Ashland Center Historic District in Ashland**. The Town of Ashland is proposing to establish their first local historic district, which would cover the main downtown area. MHC received one letter in opposition to the district, from an Ashland resident who does not own property in the district.

The proposed district would protect 44 parcels primarily fronting along Main Street from the Sudbury River south to Summer Street.

Ashland does not currently have any local historic districts. The only previously-designated property in the area of the proposed Ashland Center Historic District is Ashland Town Hall, which was individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2004. The only other designated properties in the entire town are dams located in the Hopkinton and Ashland state parks, listed in the National Register in 1990 as part of a thematic nomination of the Water Supply System of Greater Boston.

The proposed district represents the core of historic commercial and institutional buildings at Ashland Center. It is surrounded by residential development dating to the mid-19th century. And while there is some additional commercial development to the west along Union Street, or Route 135, it is primarily late 20th century shopping plazas.

The proposed Ashland Center Local Historic District includes a range of building ages and styles, from the late 18th century through to new construction. Nearly all of the buildings in the district today are commercial or institutional buildings. The district is anchored at its north end by the Ashland Historical Society's ca. 1748 house and a late 19th century mill complex featuring somewhat unusual granite buildings with mansard roofs.

Other major institutional buildings include Town Hall, a fire station, senior housing, the public library, and a post office.

The district includes four large late 18th or early 19th century brick dwellings that have taken on new uses over the years. The previous slide showed one, which has a single-story commercial block appended to the front. Here in the upper left is John Stone's Tavern, a popular restaurant, and at the lower right, the Rev. James McIntire House, which has a large addition that provides subsidized senior housing. The middle structure is still residential.

Some of the more architecturally interesting structures in the district include the 1887 Richardsonian Romanesque Boston & Albany Railroad Station and the 1939 Moderne style Post Office.

With access to falls in the Sudbury River, Ashland Center developed as an industrial village in the early 19th century. The arrival of the railroad in 1834, connecting the town to Boston and Worcester, spurred even more development.

With Ashland's incorporation in 1846 from parts of Framingham, Holliston and Hopkinton, Ashland Center became the true government and institutional center of Ashland, with Town Hall constructed here shortly after incorporation. Other public buildings followed in the early 20th century, such as a fire station, library, and post office.

At the north end of Main Street, in the post-Civil War years the Dwight Printing Company opened a large cloth printing and dye works factory. The large granite mill buildings still mark the north entrance to Ashland Center.

Through the end of the 20th century, some houses were replaced by modest one-story commercial structures, adding to the commercial nature of the center.

Ashland Center has seen increasing development pressures in recent years. In 2019, an historic house was demolished and replaced by a large three-story mixed-use structure. And in early 2024, the property owner of the Dwight Mill buildings notified MassHousing that they intend to pursue a 40B developing at the north end of Main Street. This proposed project would demolish part of the late 19th and early 20th century mill complex and construct a new five-story building on the site with 250 residential units and 390 parking spaces. While a local historic district cannot prevent a 40B development, it can protect the character of the surrounding historic structures.

MHC staff recommends acknowledging receipt of the Preliminary Study Report for the Ashland Center Historic District and providing the following advisory recommendations and comments:

The Massachusetts Historical Commission encourages the Town of Ashland to establish the Ashland Center Historic District.

Daniel Withington House, Boston (Dorchester)

Ms. Doherty then presented the Daniel Withington House in Boston (Dorchester). The City of Boston proposed landmarking the Daniel Withington House in Dorchester. The petition for this landmark was accepted by the Boston Landmarks Commission on December 12, 2023, and the BLC voted at their meeting last night to landmark the building.

The house is located at 19 Ashland Street in Dorchester. Notably the main façade faces south, away from Ashland Street.

The Withington House and the surrounding area were listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2002 as the Harrison Square Historic District. Nearby, the Dorchester Pottery Works was designated a local landmark in 1980 and individually listed in the National Register in 1985.

Further to the west, the Field's Corner Municipal Building was listed individually in the National Register in 1981.

Across Dorchester Bay, the Savin Hill neighborhood was listed in the National Register in 2003.

The surrounding area includes a number of large single- and two-family houses from the late 19th century, when Dorchester was a suburban area for Boston's elite residents. A number of nearby residences retain a high degree of architectural integrity and range in style from late Greek Revival and Italianate to more Romantic styles such as Second Empire, Stick, and Shingle.

The Daniel Withington House is believed to have been constructed around 1804 on land Daniel Withington acquired in 1790. The house is a Federal style brick building, two stories tall and five bays wide with a side gable roof. The centered entry door features sidelights which have since been blocked, and a glass fanlight above the door. The windows are modern one-over-one sash and feature no trim or elaboration.

The house was expanded by a rear ell likely in the third quarter of the 19th century. It featured a set of double Italianate doors on the north elevation, and a set of exterior stairs on the west elevation. The rear ell was demolished and replaced in 2024, after these pictures were taken.

Although constructed as a single-family house, the building was split into multiple apartments in the 20th century.

Substantial work has taken place at the site since the study report was first prepared and the house was photographed. These images were taken last month, showing the alterations to the Withington House and new construction behind and to the side of it.

The Daniel Withington House is one of the few remaining early 19th century houses in Dorchester's Harrison Square neighborhood. Withington was born in Dorchester in 1762 and married Anna Wheeler in 1785. The couple had 11 children. Withington acquired the land that the Withington House stands on in

1790. However, due to the building's orientation south towards a road that was laid out in 1804, it is likely the building was constructed shortly thereafter.

While Withington was initially employed as a cordwainer, around the time the house was constructed he was listed in sources as a brickmaker. So it is possible that he formed the bricks to construct the Withington House, but no sources have been found to confirm this.

Withington owned the property into the 1840s when it was taken to settle debts and sold to Edward King in 1842. King and his brother, Franklin King, were real estate speculators who began to carve up the Withington property and the surrounding neighborhood, developing a suburban residential neighborhood for Boston's elite residents. However, the Withingtons were granted a life estate and lived at the property until Daniel Withington's death in 1847 and Anna Withington's death in 1854.

After an intervening owner subdivided the lot of the Withington House down to its present size, Widow Sarah K. Safford acquired the property in 1868. She had the two-story ell added to the rear of the house and used it as a rental property through the end of the 19th century. This transition to a more tenant-based ownership system was part of a larger shift in demographics in the neighborhood in the late 19th and early 20th century. Early 20th century owners and residents were largely immigrant and blue collar workers in the mining and building trades.

The Withington House was owned by the Bigelow family from 1936 until 2018. They did some minor work to the property and maintained it as a two-family dwelling.

The property was acquired by an LLC in 2020. There were two proposals in 2021 to redevelop the Withington House site for additional housing. The first would have demolished the house entirely and replaced it with eight units. The second, shown here, would retain the front part of the house and added two more units to the rear, with four additional units on the other side of the lot.

The current property owner received permits earlier this year to take the house from two to three units with garage parking in the rear, and construct a new four-unit residential building on the west side of the lot. The work was reviewed and approved by the BLC in 2023, and is now substantially complete.

As noted earlier, at last night's BLC meeting that commission voted to landmark the building.

As it is one of the earliest buildings remaining in the Harrison Square neighborhood of Dorchester, and it retains significant intact Federal-style architecture, BLC staff recommends that the Daniel Withington House be designated a Boston Landmark.

Ms. Doherty noted that City staff chose to keep their recommendation to landmark the property as there are only two other brick houses of the period remaining in Dorchester.

MHC staff recommends acknowledging receipt of the Landmark Study Report for the Daniel Withington House.

Town Hall Local Historic District, Duxbury

Ms. Doherty then presented the Town Hall Local Historic District in Duxbury. The Town of Duxbury is proposing to establish their fifteenth local historic district, a single property district protecting Duxbury's Old Town Hall.

The district would protect part of a Town-owned parcel at 878 Tremont Street in Duxbury. The district's boundary would be drawn to protect the Old Town Hall and a World War I monument. Other buildings on the parcel include Duxbury's modern Town Hall and a DPW complex. These will not be included in the local historic district.

There are several designated properties in the area of the proposed Town Hall Local Historic District. The building is the lynchpin of the Old Town Hall Historic District, listed in the National Register in 2021. It includes the old and new town halls, several monuments, First Parish Church to the south of Old Town Hall, and Mayflower Cemetery beyond that. First Parish Church is also a local historic district, designated by the Town in 2011.

To the north is the Bradford Local Historic District, also designated in 2011, and to the east the Surplus Street Local Historic District, designated in 2019. Even further east is the large Old Shipbuilder's Historic District, listed in the National Register in 1986.

Duxbury's Old Town Hall is located on a heavily tree-lined state route. As noted it sits between two other institutional buildings, First Parish Church to the south and the new Town Hall to the north. Behind the two town halls is a modern DPW complex. Across the street is a family burial plot for the Smith family, marked by a

tomb entrance. Outside of the three institutional buildings, no other buildings are visible from the road.

Duxbury's Old Town Hall was constructed in 1840. It is a Greek Revival building designed by local architect Whittemore Peterson. The building is one-and-a-half stories tall with an end gable roof. A recessed center portico, fluted Doric columns, and full cornice return across the front of the building give it the appearance of a Greek temple, a popular reference point for local government buildings in the early republic.

Whittemore Peterson was an architect during the first half of the 19th century, and in addition to Duxbury's Old Town Hall, has six other entries in MACRIS: three houses in Duxbury, and churches in Norton, Pembroke, and Plympton. However, the study report and the National Register nomination note that he is believed to have designed over 70 churches.

The construction of Duxbury's Old Town Hall was the direct result of the 1833 separation of church and state in Massachusetts. In 1839, the residents of Duxbury voted to acquire a parcel of land directly next to their current meetinghouse, First Parish Church, in order to construct their new town hall to handle official town business now separated from the church. The building was constructed the following year, with the first Town Meeting held in what was then the new Town Hall in August of 1840. Old Town Hall continued to serve as a hub of municipal business until 1927, when town offices were moved out and Town Meeting was held elsewhere. The building continues to be used by local community groups and as a public meeting space. A New Town Hall was constructed immediately north of the Old Town Hall in 1974-1975. It replicates the design of a school that used to stand on the site, and is substantially similar to the architecture of the Old Town Hall.

MHC staff recommends acknowledging receipt of the Preliminary Study Report for the Town Hall Local Historic District and providing the following advisory recommendations and comments:

The Massachusetts Historical Commission encourages the Town of Duxbury to establish the Town Hall Historic District.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission encourages the protection of additional significant historic resources through a larger district or additional local historic districts.

Ms. Doherty then gave an update regarding a proposed local historic district that the commission recently reviewed. The City of Worcester had proposed a single-property local historic district to protect the Ransom and Mary Taylor Estate at 36 Butler Street, presented to the commission in March of this year. The owner wanted to redevelop the site for housing and sought to demolish the house; the Worcester Historical Commission imposed a one-year demolition delay. During the delay period, the WHC worked with the owner on demolition alternatives while also pursuing the local historic district designation. Ultimately, the City and owner executed a term preservation agreement that allows the WHC to review and approve changes to the site for 30 years. It also acknowledges that the building might be moved on the site to make redevelopment easier. So while the City is no longer pursuing a local historic district here, the building will still be preserved.

Chairman Rosenberry thanked Ms. Doherty, and then began the voting:

Chairman Rosenberry then called for a MOTION TO ACCEPT the MHC staff recommendations on the Landmark Study Report for the **Ashland Center Historic District in Ashland**. A MOTION was made by Commissioner Friary and SECONDED by Commissioner DeWitt. The Chair called for questions or comments from the commission. The chairman recognized Commissioner DeWitt, who said that he has been observing this area for 30 years, sadly seeing some losses, and was aware of the wonderful mill complex and the dam across the street. He state that one can only hope for the best when dealing with 40B, and it takes knowledgeable town staff to deal with the design review when 40B is involved. But it is worth having the district nonetheless. The railroad line is one of the earliest in the United States, and the station came directly out of Richardson's office shortly after he died, so it could be treated as a Richardson station. Despite of all the issues, he thinks it is a district worth having. The Chair thanked Commissioner DeWitt. The Chair called for any other questions or comments from the commission. Hearing none, he called for any questions or comments from the public. Hearing none, he moved the motion. The motion CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Chairman Rosenberry then called for a MOTION TO ACCEPT the MHC staff recommendations on the Landmark Study Report for the **Daniel Withington House in Boston**. A MOTION was made by Commissioner McCurdy and

SECONDED by Commissioner Friary. The Chair called for questions or comments from the commission. The Chair recognized Commissioner DeWitt, who said he was hard pressed to understand what we are dealing with here. The house has lost its original dormers, it has lost its 138-year-old ell, it has had a rather grotesque addition made to it, and it looks like the front door with its fan light that was there is now missing. It is certainly not one's idea of what a landmark would be in Boston. He is not sure of what to make of all this, and perhaps someone can explain why it is becoming a landmark at this point. Commissioner Ceccacci stated that she also has some questions, as there appeared to be no photographs of its current condition, especially of the main façade or what the plans are.

The Chair asked for and other questions or comments from the commission, and then recognized Ms. Doherty, who elaborated more on her conversation with the BLC Staff. The house was originally proposed to be demolished, and that was when neighbors initiated the local landmark process. They were initially pursuing a separate process under Boston's Special Act legislation to create an architectural conservational district, but then switched to a landmark process for legislative reasons. She noted the BLC staff chose to recommend to the BLC that the property be landmarked because they believed that it is a rare example of brick construction in the city and in Dorchester remaining from the period, and the BLC did vote unanimously to landmark it. When BLC is going through the landmark process, they do not have any kind of legal design review requirement until the property is actually landmarked. The property owner did come in for an advisory review with BLC staff, and the new addition is the result of that work. At their meeting the previous night, BLC members did note some issues with the property as built today, such as that the dormers are much larger than those that were included in the plans. But those are issues for Boston's Inspectional Services Division and the Planning Department to work out, as the property was not yet under BLC jurisdiction. Overall, this is why MHC staff's recommendation is just to accept the Study Report.

The Chair thanked Ms. Doherty, and then called for any other questions or comments from the commission. He then recognized Commissioner Sullivan who said he thinks this is a regrettable situation that could have been cured if Boston had interim jurisdiction while landmarks are being studied, as Cambridge does and as he believes other towns have adopted also. It is unfortunate how this turned out, but it is still an important historic resource, and he does not blame Boston for trying to protect what is left of it. So he would support voting to support the BLC's

action. The Chair thanked Commissioner Sullivan. He called for any questions or comments from the commission. Hearing none, he called for questions or comments from the public. Hearing none, he moved the motion. The motion CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Chairman Rosenberry then called for a MOTION TO ACCEPT the MHC staff recommendations on the **Town Hall Local Historic District in Duxbury**. A MOTION was made by Commissioner Sullivan and SECONDED by Commissioner DeWitt. The Chair called for questions or comments from the commission. Hearing none, he called for questions or comments from the public. Hearing none, he moved the motion. The motion CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

This concluded the voting. Chairman Rosenberry then turned to the next item on the agenda, **Preview of the December 11, 2024 National Register Nominations**, and recognized Ben Haley, National Register Director, who informed the commission that there would be five nominations on the agenda for the December 11 meeting, and additional documentation for an additional property being presented as a courtesy. Copies of the nominations will be sent to the Commissioners about two weeks prior to the meeting. The five nominations are: the East End Historic District in Bolton; the Travelers Club in Bourne; the Blanchard Plat Historic District in Brockton; the Monsignor James Coyle High School in Taunton; and the George E. Keith Company Factory Number 8 in Weymouth. The additional documentation will be for the Clinton A.M.E. Zion Church in Great Barrington, perhaps best known for its associations with W.E.B. Du Bois.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Haley for the preview of the National Register agenda for December, and he then turned to the next item on the agenda, the **Executive Director's Report**. He then recognized Brona Simon, Executive Director.

Ms. Simon began by reminding the commissioners that the Survey and Planning Grant invitations to submit full applications will be voted on at the Commission's December 11th meeting. She indicated that commissioner volunteers will be needed to serve on the Survey and Planning Grant subcommittee for a subcommittee meeting in the morning of December 11th before the full commission meeting to review the pre-application with MHC staff. The December 11th subcommittee and

full commission meetings will be virtual meetings. Commissioners DeWitt, McDowell, and Wheeler volunteered to serve on the Survey and Planning subcommittee. The subcommittee will report its recommendations to the full commission meeting in the afternoon for votes on the recommended invitations to submit full applications.

That concluded the Executive Director's report.

The Chairman then asked if any Commissioners had any other new business. Hearing none, he called for a MOTION to adjourn. A MOTION was made by Commissioner DeWitt and SECONDED by Commissioner Friary. The MOTION CARRIED, and the meeting adjourned at 1:39pm.

Commissioners Present

John Rosenberry

Dennis DeWitt

Susan Ceccacci

Donald Friary

Ryan Wheeler

Mark Wilson

James McCurdy

Heather Wilson

Michael McDowell

Charles Sullivan

Ashley Stolba

Staff Present

Brona Simon

Jennifer Doherty

Michael Steinitz

Ben Haley

Elizabeth Sherva

Peter Stott

Paul Holtz

Nancy Alexson

Shari Perry-Wallace

Liz King

Robin Forham

A TRUE COPY ATTEST

Respectfully submitted,

Shirley Brown