

Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

2025-11-18

7:00 PM

Online, Town Hall, 472 Main St, Acton, MA 01720

Present: David Honn (DH), David Shoemaker (DS), Anita Rogers (AR), Zach Taillefer (ZT), Art Leavens (AL), Barbara Rhines (BR) (Acton Cultural Resources Coordinator), Fran Arsenault (FA) joins.

Absent:

Opening:

DH opened the meeting at 7:03 pm. DH read the “remote meeting notice” due to COVID-19.

1. Regular Business.

- A. Citizen's Concerns – David Martin joins. Will offer thoughts on Solar Regulations. Markus from 82 River is online.
- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – 28 October Minutes. DS moved their adoption, seconded by AR, AR, DH, DS, ZT in favor. (AL abstains as absent from that meeting.) Approved.
- C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet / Chair Updates:

Outstanding and Completed COAs/CNAs/Denials

- --14 Newtown Road #2535 CNA (DH) DONE
- --285 Arlington Street #2530 (DH) DONE
- --278 Arlington Street #2538 roof CNA (DH)
- --54 School Street Fire 2 #2539 roof CNA (DH)
- --39 School Street #2537 windows – 12/9/2025 meeting
 - May be mostly reglazing, may not be in the HDC domain
- --85 River Street 32540 solar – PH 12/9/2025
- --Demolition by Neglect
- --Upgrading Historic District signs
 - CPC funds could be used, but must be in by Monday
 - FA to investigate, and will update DS
- --Location for Minutemen monument
- --New Historic Districts
- --Single Building Historic Districts
- --Historic District Construction Funding Sources

2. New/Special Business or other applicable agenda

A. 7:15 PM Solar Guidelines PH (cont.) AL: In 2024, MGL Ch. 21N was enacted, establishing statewide greenhouse emissions limits and sublimits in reaction to the threat posed by climate change and requiring HDCs to give substantial weight to that threat when ruling on applications for COAs. HDC responded by changes to the HDC rules and regulations. It was noted that the Town has not yet updated Bylaw P in that regard. In April 2025, the HDC turned to updating its Solar Guidelines to reflect Ch. 21N's mandate, and, after several sessions, the proposed amendments to those Guidelines are here for public comment and HDC final consideration and, if appropriate, approval. BH shares the draft Guidelines. AL reviews the changes (deletions, quotes, and additions). ZT: Discussion that the 'governing way' should be consistently used; and historical features (2a) are only to be considered if they are visible from the governing way. DS/AR: In 2(d), simplify from 'color' simply to 'contrast'. AR: In 3b(2) is "the surrounding community" only what is visible from the governing way? If so, is 3b(2) of any value? AL: HDC jurisdiction, and thus these Guidelines, apply to solar installations only if visible from the governing way. But in exercising that jurisdiction, the HDC has the charge to look at how a proposed installation fits in the surrounding community. DH: We evaluate both on the individual property and the District as a whole. Should cover this. Community is defined by the District. DS: Only for 6" above the ground. AL: "[S]urrounding community" as used in 3b(2) is meant to apply to the community surrounding the property in question, not the entire District. Bylaw P8, which sets forth the criteria for HDC determinations, explicitly provides that the Commission shall take into consideration "buildings and structures in the surrounding area," that is, how does it fit in the neighborhood. Public comment: David Martin joins. DM: Consider changing "panel" to "collector" – solar shingles should be covered by the document. Replacement of installed equipment: "Like kind" is an onerous requirement, due to the rapid change in the technology. Prefer 'substantially the same in color and dimension'. AL: Believes this issue is covered by Bylaw P, Section 9.2.1, excluding from HDC jurisdiction replacement of an exterior feature that does not involve a change in outward appearance. Under the Guidelines, the replacement of a similar element would require an application but most of those applications would be a CNA, as a decision by the Chair. The HDC would like the application process to remain in place. This should not be an onerous process. DM: thinks that this is an additional threshold, compared with repointing the chimney, that is not reasonable or warranted. DH: Have had trouble with 'similar'. The CNA process has been developed and refined to deal with this. DM: the procedure should be the same for solar panels and other elements, to be consistent with the legislature. Next, would like solar collectors on roof surfaces that directly front on the governing street to be considered as acceptable in the future. AL: Looked at samples DM offered in his email to the HDC and looked at DM's house, which has solar shingles and which DM offered as an example. The guidelines can be changed if appropriate in the future, but, while impressive, the examples raised to date do not meet HDC criteria for historic homes directly fronting their governing way. DM: Believes it is not consistent with Ch. 21N to say, categorically, it is not acceptable. The guidelines appear to say 'no'. Lastly, 'shade' is very little different from color. Blending

is the notion to stress. DH: Collector vs. Panel – what is used by the Secretary of the Interior use? AL: Legislature uses ‘solar energy system’, which is appropriately general. DM: Likes ‘collector’ rather than panel. DH: ensure there is a date associated with the HDC’s consideration of these rules. ZT: Can we add something about solar energy systems which do not appear to be covered by these rules, encouraging potential applicants to approach the HDC? AL: likes the idea, but does not want to create language from the floor. DH: can delay and modify, or expect to iterate after voting. AL: Similarly, DM is correct that “solar panel” as defined in the Guidelines is overly broad, but we use that definition to include a number of related aspects to roof-top installations; “solar energy system” is the legislatively chosen term, which is applicable for the broad scope, explicitly including solar collectors. We could refine the definition of “solar panel,” perhaps eliminating it altogether, but that definition includes aspects of solar roof-top installations that we would need to address somewhere in the Guidelines. DS: There are many elements that are associated with a Solar Energy System over which the HDC has jurisdiction. AL: too many changes to edit from the floor. DH: Again, prefer to consider these Guidelines and be ready to make further changes when needed. DH: Moves to adopt these rules. AR: second. DH, AR, ZT, AL, DS agree.

- B. 8:17 PM 17 Woodbury Lane review of electrical box and conduit; fiber optic cable; and septic vents. Thomas Begin (TB), Assistant Town Manager, joins. TB: will relocate electrical conduit and meter. Shares image. 2” conduit was required for the electrical needs. The utility sets the size of the equipment. Plantings are under consideration to hide the lower equipment (meter and feed into the building). DH: Do something asymmetrical and minimal. AR: Are the shutters the correct height and correctly placed? TB: a fiber connection will be lower than the electrical. DH: A conduit for the fiber may not be necessary. Shows photo of home as an example. HDC happy with painting the fiber to match. BH shares photo of vent pipes in the yard. TB describes the building given its size and restrictions. The vent stacks were required given the requirements. BR: The compact size of the system establishes the need. DH: Painting would help as a dark green. More Arbor Vitae could help, and plantings in general. One could consider a topiary to distract and disguise, potentially via a competition. TB will pursue these suggestions.
- C. 8:13 PM 53 River Street update. Thomas Begin Assistant Town Manager, joins; construction has remobilized, with a compromise that will provide paths for the winter and arrange some construction elements. In the spring, the construction crew will return to finish surfaces, install signs, and do planting. The drainage basin will be realized. ‘Rounding the bend’. Funding was identified to help with procuring trees.
- D. 8:30 PM 3 School Street discussion. DH: Fire station/Civil Defense building; bought by Alex Mota, with goal to make a single-family dwelling. Alex Mota (AM) joins. AM: Would like to add a front porch, remove garage doors. Thinks to replace windows, roofing shingles. Hopes to introduce a driveway on the right side. Plans to bring a design to the HDC soon. A shared driveway with the next building. A reduction in setback requirement may be needed. DH: The HDC could support an appeal to the ZBA for this change. AR: wonders about a porch wraparound from the right. DH: concerns about curb cuts; any retaining wall. DS: Interested in hearing about the history of the building and how it relates to the evolution that may be proposed. ZT: Not opposed to a porch. Comparison with other existing buildings indicate an historical precedent. Need to know what constraints come from the town. DH: Brackets rather than posts may be possible. AL: Likes the idea of the porch, with echoes of

25/27 School. DS: Likes the idea. AR: Likes it. Would like to see a plot plan. A range of windows could be approved. Planting on the hillside close to the bridge would be good. Could look at drawings before there is an application. AM: looking also at 13 School St. Will return with more detailed plans/drawings in January.

E. 9:00 PM 82 River Street framing review. DH, an abutter, is recused. AR takes over as Chair. Sousa, Property Owner and Applicant, joins. AR: touching base on the drawings; has questions about the structure needing expertise. The architect will respond. AR sees inconsistencies with the framing plan and the appearance; we cannot vote with the remaining difficulties in the design. AR, DS, AL, ZT agree. The December 9 meeting may be a chance to resolve the issues.
DH returns and takes the Chair.

F. 9:30 PM Amendment request for 30 Windsor Avenue #2346. Ron Regan (RR), Owner, joins. RR: Some adjustment from previous drawings is to be discussed. Fewer windows will be swapped out. A roof vent over the porch is proposed for the kitchen. DH asks about dates; an extension of date with some minor changes are needed. DH requests a list of changes; AR notes it is mostly reductions in scope and marking up drawings will be the most effective way to move forward. DH expects to be able to approve this given the nature and scale of changes that are proposed. DH moves that we approve the changes proposed. AL Seconds. AR, AL, ZT, DS, DH all approve.

G. 9:45 PM Application #2536 39 School Street gutters. Owner/Applicant not present. DH: Feedback earlier given on initial thoughts. Resubmitted with half-round gutters and round downspouts. AL, ZT, DS, AR: Looks fine. DH: some 'splash blocks' may be advisable. AR proposes to eliminate the small gutter and downspout over doors. For the governing way, the HDC finds the additional visual burden unattractive and unnecessary functionally. AL will write it up. The gutter color should match the fascia color. Downspouts to match house color. Remove gutter and downspout on School street; add a diverter. Remove gutter and downspout from River street as well. Discussion about whether we have jurisdiction over matches in color (while we do not have jurisdiction over color in isolation). The Bylaw excludes color of paint and of materials used on roofs from HDC jurisdiction, but that exclusion does not apply to the color of unpainted materials attached to the building, such as the gutters and downspouts in this case. DH: Moves to require per our discussion. AL, AR, ZT, DH, DS approves.

3. Consent Items

None

1. Adjournment

At 22:00 DH moves to adjourn the meeting, AR seconds, several times. DS, AR, AL, DH, ZT all approve.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting.

- All relevant Applications and Documents, in Docushare