

# HARVARD HISTORICAL COMMISSION

13 AYER ROAD • HARVARD, MASSACHUSETTS 01451



*The Harvard Historical Commission is chartered "...to preserve and protect the historic assets of Harvard, its buildings, structures, places, sites, and surrounding settings of historical or architectural significance."*

Following are the **minutes** for a meeting of the Harvard Historical Commission, including public hearings, held via Zoom on, Wednesday, **August 2, 2023 at 7:00 pm.**

Submitted by George Triantaris (Chair) and Seth Trotz (Secretary)

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, An Act Making Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2023 to Provide for Supplementing Certain Existing Appropriations and for Certain Other Activities and Projects, and signed into law on March 29, 2023, this meeting will be conducted via remote participation. Interested individuals can listen in and participate by phone and/or online by following the link and phone number below.

## **MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

George Triantaris (Chair)  
Pam Marston (Vice Chair)  
Seth Trotz (Secretary)  
Richard Cabelus  
Steve Nigzus  
Rebecca Sewall  
Wendy Cote

## **MEMBERS IN ABSENTIA:**

Marijke Vallaeys

## **AUDIENCE:**

No public attendees.

## **TOPICS:**

## **CALL TO ORDER:**

**7:00 pm**

## **REVIEW/APPROVE MINUTES OF LAST MEETING:**

Review minutes of May 3 2023, June 7 2023, and July 5 2023 meetings

Minutes of the March and April meetings were approved unanimously (with Wendy abstaining from votes on meetings prior to her swearing in).

## **PUBLIC HEARINGS:**

## **NON-APPLICABLE APPLICATIONS:**

- 1 Still River Rd:** The chair began with a discussion of an application that had come in to replace or repair the rubber roof at the General Store. He indicated that he visited the location and assessed that the roof is not visible from the street and is not even significantly visible from the adjacent hill. Based on this determination, the chair provided them an exempt, not applicable, certificate.

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## **ONGOING APPLICATIONS:**

## **NEW APPLICATIONS:**

## **ON-GOING BUSINESS:**

1. Project currently on hold:  
Town Center lighting and power lines (GT)

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

### **Heat pump installation as a town-wide ongoing issue:**

Steve N. had a discussion with Jeff Hayes regarding the permitting process for heat pump installation. Electricians are currently required to apply for permits but this process does not include a requirement to go before the historic commission, first, for buildings located in the historic districts. Jeff is currently investigating to see if the town can modify the online form to require historic commission approval for buildings in the historic districts.

Wendy C. restated a point she made at the prior meeting on this topic, at the chair's request. She noted that many towns have zoning codes that restrict the location, setbacks, noise, etc. for installation of heat pump equipment but she was surprised to learn that the town of Harvard does not have such a restriction.

Richard Cabelus noted that the planning commission, on which he sits, recently had their annual planning meeting and confirmed that the current zoning rules did not have any such restrictions. This could be a topic for discussion by that group. He also noted that there is a long-standing desire to establish a Harvard Town Center overlay district for purposes of zoning. The reason for this is that most buildings in the center of town are nonconforming and if, for example, a building burned down, rebuilding it to match its prior appearance, would require variances. The planning commission is investigating establishing an overlay area that would streamline this process.

Wendy indicated that she would do further research into other towns that have heat pump restrictions as a point of reference and report back to the commission and discuss with Richard C.

Pam Marston note that air conditioning units that are not window-mounted should be considered in zoning restrictions as well.

The chair indicated that he has drafted a letter to be sent to residents of the districts that outlines issues associated with heat-pump and HVAC installation vis-à-vis historical commission approvals. This was suggested as a possible method to educate the public about the issue and to avoid work being done without approval and requiring subsequent remediation, etc. Seth T. suggested that it might be useful to get feedback from recipients of this letter by requesting them to fill out an online survey (eg surveymonkey). This would also be a way to develop an email list of interested residents. The chair pointed out that there is still a legal requirement to send paper notifications unless a 2/3 vote at town hall is made to change the relevant town bylaw. The chair asked the board to take as an action the development of suitable questions for a follow-up survey to the heat-pump/HVAC letter.

The chair raised the point that the design guidelines have not been updated recently, perhaps 3 or 4 years ago, in 2020. He suggested that language around heat pumps and condensers could be reconsidered and updated. Prior



work had updated language regarding solar panels.

Wendy C. asked if generators are a common issue in the town. The chair agreed that generators could be an issue and should be addressed similarly. Several board members drew the distinction between permanently installed generators and temporary ones wheeled out on an ad hoc basis when power outages occurred. The chair made the point that the general philosophical position of the commission is, “we’re not ever saying to somebody you can’t do something. We’re saying we want to help put it in a place that has the least impact.”

### **Budgetary issues:**

There was a discussion on the limited budget of the commission, currently set at \$250, which is re-applied for each year. If there are substantial increases in the number of mailings, stationary costs will rise and possibly necessitate increased funding. The chair also noted that, for example, if the commission decided to pursue a demolition delay bylaw and wanted to put a notice in the town newspaper, the cost would come out of the budget as well. The chair suggested that a request may be appropriate to increase the budget to \$500 from the town. Steve suggested that a line item be added requesting a few hours (2 to 4) of administrative support per month to mitigate the work required to put together mailings by board members.

### **Commissioner document binders:**

A brief discussion was made regarding the notebooks used to both orient new members and to act as a reference for existing members for issues such as the open meeting law in Massachusetts, etc. While some members indicated a preference to maintain a hard-copy notebook of documents, others were satisfied with an electronic collection. The chair took an action to email the board members with an up-to-date list of documents with links to same.

### **7 Massachusetts Avenue, Harvard Realty:**

The chair indicated that he sent a letter to the owner of Harvard Realty regarding their installation of heat pump equipment on the northern side of their building which is visible from the area of the common and from Massachusetts Avenue. He further said that the owner responded today and said that they are going to submit a retroactive application for review next month. This issue will require a public hearing. The chair indicated that this is clearly a substantial change because it is a new installation and the public hearing will be needed to decide what to do about it.

### **Additional Heat Pump Project (address withheld):**

The chair said that this situation is more complicated and involves two violations and the building inspector is involved. The chair said that it is not clear if the building inspector concern will be addressed before or after the issue with the historical commission.

### **Window information:**

The chair reported that he circulated draft information regarding windows in the historical districts. He said that the plan is to make a new space on the town historical commission website for residents to have a source of information regarding recommended practices and information about vendors. The intent is to have a ready answer to individuals immediately proposing window replacement that addresses concerns such as cost and energy efficiency, etc. The chair expressed the hope that the web site would be a living document and continue to be updated with new information as it became available. The underlying philosophical position to all of this was stated as to encourage people to preserve property as much as possible including elements such as doors and windows rather than making them new. Arguments regarding the actual payback time of replacement windows versus repairing existing windows and using properly fitted storm windows were discussed as well.

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## **Stretch Code:**

Richard C. raised the topic of “stretch energy codes” in Massachusetts. Many municipalities in Massachusetts have adopted this code which applies to new construction, additions, and renovations. The code creates stricter guidelines on energy efficiency for new construction and alterations in municipalities that are designated “Green Communities.” He indicated that there is a move afoot to introduce this code into Harvard and that this code is very strict, attempting to achieve “net zero” efficiencies. There may be future interactions between these types of code modifications and requests to perform renovations on historical homes.

## **Demolition delay:**

The chair said that he would follow up with Rebecca S. to continue to develop an approach to create a demolition delay bylaw in Harvard. One issue is how long such a delay should be as too short a delay would not provide a significant deterrence to a developer planning to tear down a structure.

## **CORRESPONDENCE:**

### **REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES AND LIAISONS:**

**Monument Committee (MM)**

**CPC (PM)**

**Transportation Advisory Committee (PM) –**

Pam M. spoke as liaison to the Transportation Advisory Committee. Their purpose is to develop transportation alternatives for people who live in Harvard. One effort by the committee is intended for individuals to come to the center of Harvard and then provide transportation, for example, by bus, to Ayer to meet a train, etc. Their other major effort is to create bike and walking paths to enable access to schools, Devens, athletic fields, etc. Pam said that they meet approximately every three months. (Pam also indicated that she is a liaison to the CPC and votes despite not being an actual CPC board member.)

**Planning Board (RC)**

**Design Review Board (SN)**

**Devens Committee (RC)**

**PUBLIC COMMENTARY:** None

**EXECUTIVE SESSION:** None

**SET DATE FOR NEXT MEETING:** August 30<sup>th</sup> was decided upon rather than September 6<sup>th</sup> to accommodate a travel conflict on the part of the chair.

**MEETING ADJOURNED:** Meeting was adjourned at 7:56pm.