

CAMBRIDGE MATTERS  
The Historic Preservation Commission  
By: Commissioner Steve Rideout  
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December, 2017

On Tuesday evening the 18<sup>th</sup>, I went to the work session and the meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). What follows is a summary of my observations about what took place, as I think the work that the HPC Commissioners are doing along with city staff is critically important to the efforts to improve Cambridge. I also think that those of you who live in the Historic District and own property in the historic downtown business section of the city need to understand what is going on with regard to the work of the HPC as they develop new Guidelines for the HPC.

I am delighted with the work of the HPC Commissioners based not only on last evening but on other times that I have seen them at work. They take their positions seriously, work hard in reviewing the documents presented, visiting the properties involved, and hearing these cases. The meeting last evening lasted 3 hours, and there were many more hours of preparation that took place for them to make the decisions that they made last evening. We are lucky to have them helping us with an important part of our community.

There was a public work session that started at 6:00 p.m. There were several people present that had matters on the 7:00 p.m. docket. The work session was intended to give the consultant to the HPC some ideas on a few of the various sections of the existing HPC Guidelines in order to begin the conversation about and drafting of the new guidelines. An effort was made several years ago to do draft guidelines that resulted in the City Council rejecting the work of the HPC.

This work on new Guidelines will be going on for several months, so I urge those of you that have homes or business property in the Historic District to attend these work sessions or have someone present who can then report on what took place in order for everyone to understand what changes are

being considered and how those changes might impact you and property you own here. As liaison with the HPC, I plan to do it for City Council so that they are not surprised when a final product is delivered for our consideration.

What was accomplished during the work session was a review of a draft of Chapters 1, 2, and 6 of the attached. The consultant will begin the work drafting Guidelines along the lines of what is shown in Chapters 1, 2 and 6 along with suggestions from the members of the HPC. Those drafts will then be brought back for further discussion in public work sessions by the HPC. Other chapters will be considered and a similar process will occur with them. This is just the start, so becoming involved now would certainly benefit you and your neighbors who live or own buildings in the Historic District.

At 7:00 p.m. the regular HPC meeting began. I will not give you much detail except for two matters that took place at the end of the meeting. There were 3 items on the consent calendar that were approved:

- Window Replacements at 1101 Travers
- A New Commercial Sign at 516 Race Street for WHCP Radio
- A New Fence at 117 Vue de Leau

As HPC Commissioner George Vojtech had conflicts of interest regarding the latter two items, he appropriately recused himself from participation in those items and removed himself from the meeting so as not to influence decisions regarding either matter.

Two matters from Old Business were removed from the agenda as they were being deferred to a yet to be determined future date. The matter of 203 Choptank was on the agenda, but no one appeared. Staff indicated that they would take further action regarding that matter.

The two items that were relevant to ongoing efforts to improve the Historic District came up under New Business. The first involved 309 Oakley Street. Arthur Zachai and his wife recently purchased the property and are interested in bringing it back to look as it did when built years ago. Jay

Corvan, a local architect, is working with the homeowners on their rehabilitation efforts. Approvals were obtained from the HPC for the plans to restore a front porch and remove a furnace shed at the rear of the home. The Commissioners were very pleased that the new owners of the property were interested in returning the home as nearly as possible to how it looked when first built.

The second matter involved 303 Oakley. The complexity of the issues presented made this a very difficult matter to determine. City staff had done an excellent job in pulling all of the pieces of the project and matters of concern together so that the presentation and the issues to be decided were clear. Steve DelSordo, a next-door neighbor to the property, was also present and able to give significant detail regarding the property and the years of neglect that it had experienced. The owner of the property, a bank, was also represented by a very capable and interested contractor that had been hired by the bank to make repairs to the property in order, hopefully, to bring a good price for the property.

According to the evidence presented, the property had been vacant for most of the last 10+ years and had been allowed to deteriorate. Earlier this year U.S. Bank became the owner of the property and had asked their contractor to make repairs to the property while limiting how much he could spend to accomplish the repairs.

From the evidence provided, the contractor had been given specific directions on what to do and had assumed that those giving him the directions had sought the appropriate approvals for the work through local city commissions. That had not happened. When the work on the property was noticed, a complaint was made to the city department of public works, and a stop work order was issued.

Complicating the issues before the HPC was the fact that some of the work, as general house repairs, would not under normal circumstances need HPC approval. Because of the HPC violations, however, the Stop Work Order applied to work on the entire project.

After staff made its presentation, the contractor explained the problems that he faced meeting both the demands of the bank to limit the expenses and the demands of the HPC process to address the historic character of the property. The main concern was a porch railing that would apparently cost a great deal to fix and replace with like materials. The contractor was seeking permission to replace the old railing with a vinyl railing that was as close in appearance as he could find to the existing railing.

The challenge for the HPC Commissioners appeared to be not wanting to reject the willingness of the bank to fix much of the property in the right way but with a vinyl proposed porch railing that was not historically appropriate vs. refusing the proposal regarding the railing by the bank's representative with the resulting possibility of the property continuing to deteriorate and fall into disrepair, if the bank refused to pay for the repair or wood replacement of the railing.

There was also the challenge by Mr. DeSordo, the neighbor, who had lived next door to the deteriorating property for years but who also is an expert in historical preservation of homes and wanted the property to be restored properly.

Underlying the issues to be decided was the fact that this property, despite the existing city housing code had been allowed to deteriorate and now was in very bad condition. The whole issue of code enforcement is currently being reviewed by the City Manager in anticipation that she will provide a report to City Council in the spring with some recommendations that will, hopefully, address the housing code itself and how to strengthen it and its enforcement.

After discussion, the HPC Commissioners decided that the contractor and the bank needed to look further to see if another solution to the problem of the railing could be found. The railings as presented were found to be inadequate and inappropriate. This decision, without saying "no" to the bank allows it to look for different solutions that introducing a vinyl railing on a beautiful and historic property that does not meet the requirements of the guidelines under which the HPC works. The HPC Commissioners also

asked staff to seek a removal of the Stop Work order so that the other repair work not subject to HPC compliance can continue with the contractor and bank determine their options regarding the railing.

Some would say that the decision is an example of how the HPC frustrates efforts to save historic buildings, and others would say that the decision is exactly what the HPC is intended to do – protect the historic character of the City of Cambridge while supporting owners' efforts to improve their properties.

Too often the HPC is faced with making decisions that may not be popular but are caused because people fail to maintain their property and seek proper approvals or want a quick fix and do work done over a weekend to avoid detection. The effort being undertaken by the HPC and its consultant with regard to the new Guidelines is intended

- To make people more aware of the process and how to make their way through it easily
- To make more matters administrative so as to expedite the process
- To make the process work more smoothly from the application to the issuance of the Certificate of Appropriateness
- To provide examples of generally approved materials and types of doors, windows, and roofing materials
- To provide required forms and easy to understand directions for property owners

I hope that the above has been helpful.

Steve

# Attachment

AVID H GLEASON ASSOCIATES, INC., ARCHITECTS

Cambridge Historic District Design Guidelines

Draft: Outline of Guidelines

Original by Richard Wagner November 28, 2017

Consolidated Markup by Herve Hamon (Comments by HH, DPW Staff, Pat Escher, Ron Berman & Susan Morgan), December 2, 2017

Comments received from Janice Olshesky December 8, 2017

Discussion with Herve on telephone December 8, 2017

Various e-mails from Herve December 2 - 12

Consolidated by Richard Wagner December 13, 2017

*Comments & questions in italic*

## Notes

1. I have incorporated most of the remarks received to date.
2. The intent of the Guidelines is to provide consumers (primarily property owners and renters, architects, designers, and contractors) guidance on understanding the significant features of the historic district, and how those features should be maintained when changes to the exterior are contemplated; and HPC members guidance and written references when rendering decisions reading changes proposed to properties in the historic district.
3. It is not the intent of the Guidelines to answer every possible question that may arise, but to give overall guidance.
4. I understand from Pat that we will defer the “tiered” until after “a better survey of the historic district”.
5. In my telephone conversation with Herve, we discussed using Sec. of the Interior’s 3-level approach to Rehabilitation 1) Preserve and Maintain – which would include advise and Guidelines on maintaining existing historic fabric; 2) Repair, which would provide advice on repair in kind (using the same material) or repairing with substitute materials (a list of which would be in an Appendix not incorporated in the Guidelines so it can be updated on a regular basis without going back to city council; and 3) Replace, using in kind or substitute materials. This links Guidelines to state and federal standards, and also to levels of work that need to go before the HPC for judgement.
6. Maintain easy to understand format for consumers – property owners and renters, architects, contractors and the like.
7. Only provide Guidelines for hardscape (landscape features such as fences, pools, etc.) and not vegetation.
8. Illustrations to be added later.

## Chapter1: Introduction

### Purposes of the Design Guidelines

Protect and enhance exterior character of historic buildings, including out buildings and certain landscape features;

Assist property owners, architect, builders, etc. to preserve, maintain, repair, and replace missing and damaged features on buildings in the Historic District; and

Preserve and enhance the value of the buildings and their property.

### How to Use the Design Guidelines

Guidelines are based on the Secretary of the Interior’s three levels of intervention 1) preserve and maintain, 2) repair, and 3) replace.

Guidelines are divided into Residential and Commercial, including Institutional buildings sections. Review appropriate section for your project. If unsure as to which section applies to your building, see City HPC staff.

Consider scheduling a Preliminary Review meeting with HPC (see Ch. 2).

Understanding the Context of the Historic District (*need map of HD with buildings shown, Commercial / Residential areas shown. To be provided by HPC staff.*) (*Input from Survey*)

Existing character of Commercial Area

Streets, sidewalks, views, building facades (front and rear), setbacks parking areas, materials, roof shapes, storefronts, etc.

Existing character of Residential Area

Streets, sidewalks, landscaping, waterfront, views, buildings (fronts, side and rear),  
high style and vernacular, setbacks, materials, roof shapes outbuildings.

Basis for the Design Guidelines

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

Background to and brief explanations of what they mean and how they are  
interpreted; possible federal and state tax credits (*assuming the former survive the federal  
tax reform/ budget process*).

## Chapter 2: Processes and Procedures of the HPC

Brief overview of HPC

Ordinance establishing the HPC (*link to town/HPC web site*)

Composition of the Commission

Powers of the Commission

Description of application process

Description of Application Form (*link to town/HPC web site*)

HPC review process

File Application (HPC staff will assist)

Staff review submission for completeness,

If Scope is Preserve/Maintain or Repair in kind only, then administrative  
(staff) review only, all other applications go to HPC

Schedule the review meeting, or Preliminary Review meeting,

What happens at the HPC review/Preliminary meeting?

Potential actions by the Commission

Approve,

Approve with revisions,

Table for more information requested by Commission,

Denial and resubmission.

Certification of Appropriateness (*HPC staff to supply text*)

Period of validity

Issue of Building Permit

How to handle changes during construction

Final Documentation

Appeals from HPC decision (*HPC staff and City attorney to supply text*)

*Typical Process Flow Chart; Typical time line including C of A period, pulling building permit. Graphic,  
city to produce*

## Chapter Three: Guidelines for Residential Buildings

*Map of Historic District with residential buildings highlighted*

Design Principles for Primary and Secondary Facades. (Primary facades face streets, secondary  
facades do not)

Scale

Proportion

Massing

Rhythm

Scale

Symmetry and Asymmetry

Design Principles for Primary Facades

Alignment with neighboring buildings,

Proximity to neighboring buildings (i.e. spacing between buildings),

Setback from street & sidewalk

Preserve and Maintain Primary and Secondary Facades

Repair Primary and Secondary Facades

In Kind Repair

- Substitute Material Repair
- Replace and Restore Primary and Secondary Façades
  - Replace damaged and non-original materials, In kind and Substitute materials
  - Restore Missing Features, In kind and Substitute materials.
- Guidelines for Primary Façade (Facades facing streets)
  - Openings (windows and doors),
    - Awnings on windows
    - Storm Windows and doors
    - Shutters
  - Porches and other notable features (i.e. steeples, turrets), drop awnings
  - Existing Materials
    - Masonry,
    - Wood
    - Asbestos shingles
    - Non-traditional materials (metal and vinyl siding). *RW 11/28 Are there other materials that should be addresses? Response HPC 12/2 - HPC to provide in collaboration with staff a complete list of authorized materials, in context with the style of house and location in town, with flexibility for new upcoming materials, granted the applicant provides a track record of durability and aspect quality. Response RW 12/13 – Not sure what is meant by authorized material, looking for existing materials that are prevalent on Primary facades (as well as secondary, see below) that should be addressed in the Guidelines regardless of building style.*
  - Color. Historic colors, complimentary colors, generally not painting unpainted materials (brick).
- Guidelines for Secondary facades (Side and rear facades)
  - Openings (windows and doors), awnings on windows
  - Porches and other notable features (i.e. steeples, turrets), drop awnings
  - Existing Materials
    - Masonry,
    - Wood
    - Asbestos shingles
    - Non-traditional materials (metal and vinyl siding). *RW 11/28 Are there other materials that should be addresses? Response HPC 12/2 - HPC to provide in collaboration with staff a complete list of authorized materials, in context with the style of house and location in town, with flexibility for new upcoming materials, granted the applicant provides a track record of durability and aspect quality. Response RW 12/13 – Not sure what is meant by authorized material, looking for existing materials that are prevalent on Primary facades (as well as secondary, see below) that should be addressed in the Guidelines regardless of building style.*
  - Color. Historic colors, complimentary colors, generally not painting unpainted materials (brick).
- Guidelines for Roofs and Cornices
  - Slope of roofs
  - Roof materials
  - Ornamentation *(is there any cresting, etc. on roofs?)*
  - Flashing *(Is flashing prominent? Of concern? , i.e. in reroofing roof with metal valleys, should they continue to be metal or can they become asphalt shingles (assuming roof is asphalt shingles?)*
  - Cornices
- Guidelines for Outbuildings (garages, gazebos, etc.)
  - Garages
    - (Are their other types of outbuildings in Cambridge?)*

#### **Chapter Four: Guidelines for Commercial Buildings.**

- Design Principles for Primary and Secondary facades (Primary facades are those fronting streets):
  - Scale

- Proportion
- Massing
- Rhythm
- Scale
- Symmetry and Asymmetry
- Design Principles for Primary Facades
  - Alignment with neighboring buildings,
  - Proximity to neighboring buildings (i.e. spacing between buildings),
  - Setback from street & sidewalk
- Preserve and Maintain Primary and Secondary Facades
- Repair Primary and Secondary Facades
  - In Kind Repair
  - Substitute Material Repair
- Replace and Restore Primary and Secondary Façades
  - Replace damaged and non-original materials, In kind and Substitute materials
  - Restore Missing Features, In kind and Substitute materials.
- Guidelines for Primary Façades
  - Storefronts
    - Enframing
    - Awnings
    - Commercial Signs
    - Materials
      - Wood
      - Metal (*any existing in downtown?*)
      - Masonry
        - HPC Comment to add "ceramic". Does this mean terra cotta or ceramic tile? If the latter, where is it located? Something else?*
  - Upper Facades
    - Windows
    - Cornice and Ornamentation
    - Materials
      - Metal (*any existing in downtown?*)
      - Masonry
        - HPC Comment to add "ceramic". Does this mean terra cotta or ceramic tile? Something else?*
    - Roofs
      - (Is illumination of facades allowed?)*
    - Commercial Signs
      - Where do I find current Commercial sign regulations?*
      - Storefront Signs
      - Wall Signs
      - Blade Sign
      - Sign Illumination

## Chapter Five: Additions and New Construction

Guidelines for additions and new construction (Residential and Commercial Buildings)

*(Not sure what comment "Within the guidelines of Z&P, the additions should match buildings on which they are added" means. Please explain.)*

- Locating and orienting additions
- Locating and orienting New Buildings (including outbuildings)
- Scale, proportion, rhythm, massing
- Openings (doors and windows)
- Roofs shapes and Cornices
- Details and Orientation (including porches and other projections)

## Materials

### Chapter Six: Landscapes and Public Spaces

#### Guidelines for Residential Area Landscapes

Statement regarding natural landscape not reviewed by HPC, but consider plantings and design appropriate to style of house, and maintaining large trees.

Walls and Fences

Sidewalks

Driveways

Decks

Pools

Gazebos and other yard structures

#### Guidelines for Public Spaces

Statement regarding compatibility with buildings in area, maintainability, compliance with City and ADA standards.

Public structures *(need example or 2)*

Street furniture *(does the city have approved street furniture?)*

Sidewalks *(what are city's standards including materials allowed?)*

Street and Pedestrian Lighting *(What are city's standards?)*

*(Street Trees?)*

### Chapter Seven: Sustainability

#### Historic Buildings Sustainable Design Features (Preserve and Maintain, Repair or Replace/Restore)

Orientation of building

Shutters

Porches

Storm windows and screens

Storm and screen doors

Operable awnings

Shade trees

#### Modern sustainable design

Insulation – attic, walls, foundations, basements, and crawl spaces.

*(Since adding insulation is a primary method of reducing energy consumption, and many historic buildings are without, how does the HPC wish to handle given the comment "Insulation of attics, walls, foundations and crawl spaces should not be in the purview of the HPC, since it is inside the buildings"? My concern is if insulation is added inappropriately, particularly in framed exterior walls, change in the wall's dew point will eventually lead to deterioration of the exterior walls.*

Elevating buildings along the shoreline. *HPC Staff to do map with high water overlaid HD map*

Solar panels – roof and ground mounted, not visible for public rights-of-way

Wind turbines – locate so they cannot be seen from public-rights-of-way. *(Ave. Wind speed May – Oct is 7mph; Oct – May 11.2 mph, (need sustained winds of 4 MPH or more to be turbines viable) Winds from north Feb & Mar., from south, Mar - Oct, from west Nov – Jan. Source weatherspark.com). Note, wind speed taken 10 meters (33.8 FT) above open ground. Turbines should be placed a minimum of 10 meters from any obstacles that block wind – trees, buildings, etc., so turbines probably not viable in Residential Areas, and minimally viable for roof mounted on Commercial Buildings if they cannot be seen from public rights-of-way.*

*Other Sustainability issues?*

### Appendix included in Guidelines

Glossary of Technical Terms

### Appendix not to be included in Guidelines

Substitute Materials Likely to be Approved by HPC for Repair or Replacement

(HPC - select from list add possible other substitute materials. Assumes substitute material will be similar in color, size, shape, and reflectivity to the original)

For Brick (facades, chimneys)

Thin brick Veneer (mortar joints usually larger than traditional, color fades over time.)

For Pillow Block (foundations and chimneys) (does pillow block exist?)

Stamped poured in place foundations (mortar joints usually wider than traditional)

For Wood Siding

Cementous siding (thickness may be less than traditional lap siding by 1/8" - 1/4")

For historic metal display window framing

Front spline metal frames (Kawneer makes clip on to simulate 1920s- 1950 frame; glass can be thermopane as well as tempered)

For Stucco (does stucco exist?)

EIFS (subject to denting, lightweight)

For Roof Slate

Fiber Cement Slate (rubber and plastic have tendency to curl in hot weather and color will fade in a few years.)

For Wood Shakes or Shingles (roof or siding) (Do wood shakes/shingles exist?)

Synthetic molded tiles, coated metal shingles, concrete tiles (weight of concrete tiles may require roof to be reinforced)

For Wood Windows

Fiberglass (relatively new so longevity not known, better insulator than vinyl, approximately look of wood, limited muntin profiles, thin sash dimensions); Vinyl (inexpensive, limited life, sash and frame may not be insulated), metal clad wood usually does not require painting, limited stock colors, wood will rot if frame not properly installed)

For Wood Doors

Fiberglass (best approximation of wood panel door replacement, inexpensive doors may warp, good thermal value), Steel (very secure, but can dent or scratch, unless insulated lack thermal value, doors with recessed panels expensive), Vinyl (inexpensive, may bind or crack with extreme temperature change, limited colors available)

For Wood or Metal Trim and Ornamentation, including Cornices

Molded EIFS (subject to denting, lightweight, ease to mold into shape), Milled PVC (inexpensive, limited profiles, impervious to insects and rot, off gasses chlorine when burned), Cementous Trim limited profiles, impervious to insects and rot, holds paint well), Milled Polyurethane (more expensive than PVC, limited profiles, impervious to insects and rot, holds paint well)

For Wood Porch Floors

Composite board (limited spans require more joists, fading if exposed to direct sunlight, fair range of colors, low maintenance), PVC Board (limited spans require more joists, range of colors, may become hot in direct sunlight in summer)

For Wood Porch Railings, Balusters, and Columns

Milled PVC (inexpensive, limited profiles, impervious to insects and rot, off gasses chlorine when burned),

For Wood Bead Board Porch Ceilings

Cementous Board (impervious to insects and rot, holds paint well),

For Wood Front Steps

Cementous Board (limited spans require more carriages, impervious to insects and rot, holds paint well)

For Brick Front Steps

Precast concrete (difficult to find with precast brick threads)