

# Lowell Historic Board Minutes

**June 14, 2021 6:00 P.M.**

**Note:** These minutes are not completed verbatim. For further detail, contact the Division of Development Services, 375 Merrimack Street, Lowell, MA or refer to video recordings available online at [www.LTC.org](http://www.LTC.org).

**Members Present:** Chairmain Harris, Vice Chairman Jenness, Member Lockhart, Member Wilde, Member Erickson, Member Cassidy, Member McCall

**Members Absent:** Member Villaras, Member Depeiza

**Others Present:** Jess Wilson, Associate Planner/Acting Historic Board Administrator

*The following represents the actions taken by the Historic Board at the 6/14/2021 meeting. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting occurred using the Zoom video conferencing platform.*

*Chairman Harris called the meeting to order at 6:05pm.*

I. CONTINUED BUSINESS

**545 Broadway Street (Acre Neighborhood District 01854) - Residential Renovation**

Aloiso Ramalho is seeking Historic Permit Approval at 545 Broadway Street. The application seeks approval to redevelop the existing structure into thirteen (13) residential units. The property is located in the Acre Neighborhood district. The proposed application requires a Historic Permit from the Historic Board pursuant to the Lowell Historic District Act, Chapter 566, Acts of 1983.

On Behalf:

Ernst Dorante, Contractor

Aloisio Ramalho, Property Owner

E. Dorante introduced the project and the progress made since the previous Historic Board meeting.

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

J. Harris asked who attended the site visit.

E. Dorante stated that Jess Wilson attended the site visit. He described the state of disrepair of the wood siding and stated that it cannot be repaired.

L. Cassidy noted that corner boards may be needed if the siding changes, and asked the Applicant what sources they looked at for historical reference.

E. Dorante stated that he tried to find information online but was unsuccessful. He stated that he is looking at other 1960s era buildings as a stylistic reference, and that he photographed the existing windows so that they can be matched.

L. Cassidy asked if the windows were drawn to scale.

E. Dorante confirmed that they are and acknowledged that they are larger than many of the other windows on similar buildings in the vicinity.

L. Cassidy expressed that she was glad to see the existing rafter detail added to the drawings.

J. Harris asked if the original wood siding still exists.

E. Dorante confirmed that it does, but is in terrible condition. He stated that they will replicate the size and color, although it may be difficult to find a supplier.

L. Cassidy and E. Dorante discussed the profile of the siding and agreed that new siding would seek to mimic the existing to the greatest extent possible in terms of size, color, texture, and profile.

J. Harris asked if the clapboard trim and cornerboards would be wood.

E. Dorante confirmed.

J. Harris asked about the proposed asphalt roofing.

E. Dorante clarified that is an error and that the roof will actually be rubber, like the existing.

J. Harris and E. Dorante discussed the preservation of the pulley system at the roof line on the West Façade.

J. Harris and E. Dorante discussed the proposed treatment of the basement windows along Broadway Street.

J. Harris recommended recessing the new stone within the existing openings on the front façade to visually maintain the historical integrity of the façade.

R. Lockhart asked about the condition of the existing windows.

E. Dorante stated that they are in a severe state of disrepair and cannot be refurbished.

R. Lockhart stated that the Historic Board Members could advise on specs for replacement windows.

J. Harris noted that the windows could be approved administratively.

Motion:

L. Cassidy motioned and J. Wilde seconded the motion to approve with conditions. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

1. Applicant must submit the final window details to DPD staff for final review and approval prior to installation.

II. NEW BUSINESS

**110 Mansur Street (Belvidere Hill Neighborhood District 01852) – Replacement of Slate Roof on Porch with Copper Pan Roof**

Quinn’s Construction is seeking Historic Permit Approval at 110 Mansur Street. The application seeks approval to replace a portion of the slate roof on the porch with copper pan roofing. The property is located in the Belvidere Hill Neighborhood district. The proposed application requires a Historic Permit from the Historic Board pursuant to the Lowell Historic District Act, Chapter 566, Acts of 1983.

On Behalf:

Tom Quinn, Quinn’s Construction

T. Quinn described the scope of work.

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

C. McCall recused herself from the discussion.

L. Cassidy asked if this application required a vote, J. Harris and J. Wilson confirmed that it did not.

L. Cassidy asked the Applicant to clarify why they were choosing to replace the slate roof with copper.

T. Quinn stated that the slate is older and has been severely damaged by ice over the past six years.

L. Cassidy stated that the slate roof is considered a character defining feature of the buildings dating back to the 1800s, and that copper would completely alter the appearance of the building. She advised against copper roofing and suggested installing ice dams or rakes from above instead.

T. Quinn stated that is not an option due to ice dams and backup.

L. Cassidy, J. Harris, and T. Quinn discussed various alternative approaches to repair the roof that would minimize the visual impact. The Board Members and Applicants ultimately agreed that zinc-coated copper would be a good compromise since the color will be closer to that of the existing slate.

R. Lockhart agreed with the suggestion and expressed support for the project.

Motion:

None

III. OTHER BUSINESS

**1. Discussion of Historic Mural Policy**

J. Harris noted that there are a number of redundancies between the adopted City-wide mural policy and the draft Historic Board mural policy.

C. McCall described the new application process for murals. She identified the overly-restrictive language of the draft historic policy as the most significant concern. As written, over 700 properties would be excluded from consideration.

K. Jenness suggested removing the first 3 preamble paragraphs, stating that the language is too defensive. She suggested the ordinance discuss the process for applying, the review standards, and what will be considered. She acknowledged that the City-wide ordinance is comprehensive and establishes a set of baseline requirements for any mural application.

The Board Members discussed the limitations and validity of the restrictions that are currently written into the draft historic policy.

L. Cassidy acknowledged the potential impacts of required state-level review.

C. McCall noted that she has a list of the properties and a map.

The Board Members discussed whether they want to add any additional prohibitions to certain types of buildings in the historic districts beyond what is covered in the City-wide ordinance. They decided it would be preferable to review each mural proposal on a case-by-case basis.

A. Erickson stated that the Historic Board policy should clearly state that something that is considered Historic may not be destroyed, and should discuss surface conditions, i.e. the difference between exposed and painted brick.

The Board members discussed and agreed that new structures such as parking garages would be suitable for murals with paint applied directly to the surface, which the current language would not allow.

J. Harris noted that paint can trap moisture and cause damage to the brickwork, especially if the bricks are older and softer as is often the case with historic buildings.

C. McCall identified the need to hone in on a definition for historic and acknowledged that the presence of public art can be a strong driver for the economy. She noted that there are already four buildings downtown being actively considered for murals and stated that the Board should be as transparent and clear as possible with the public when it comes to expectations.

L. Cassidy suggested organizing the guidelines for murals by the different historic districts. She expressed her preference for allowing historic sign murals to fade, rather than be restored.

The Board Members discussed how to go about making revisions to the draft ordinance and agreed to get comments to J. Wilson within 1-2 weeks to revise and distribute ahead of the July 12 Historic Board meeting.

A. Erickson expressed her opinion that the Board should be open to reviewing the restoration of fading historic murals. J. Wilde agreed.

J. Harris noted that the current ordinance language states that “ghost” signs may be preserved to halt fading.

K. Jenness agreed that is a good compromise between allowing to fade completely and restoring to a new condition.

J. Harris asked if there has been any interest in restoring any historic sign murals.

J. Wilson stated that the Applicant for 52 Lawrence Drive had asked about the possibility of eventually restoring the Knit Fabrics mural.

C. McCall noted that the Massachusetts Cultural Council acknowledged Lowell as the first municipality to pass a mural policy and stated that this is a progressive step forward.

The Board Members discussed successful mural programs in other communities, and the open meeting law and quorum requirements for site visits with Board Members.

## **2. Discussion of Historic Permit Violations and Enforcement Protocol**

J. Wilson described the Historic Permit violation at 135 Central Street and the concern for other potential past and future violations.

C. McCall referenced the language in the Design Review Standards and Process Fact Sheets, and noted that Development Services has an enforcement agent for every Board except the Historic Board. She suggested granting enforcement powers to the Historic Board Administrator or the Enforcement Agent for Development Services.

The Board Members discussed which legislation might state enforcement authority. J. Wilson agreed to research this further.

The Board Members discussed the nature of the permit violation at 135 Central Street.

C. McCall stated that the Applicant should remove, repair, and property replace the sign.

J. Harris stated that the damage is already done and not much can be done to repair it. Replacing the bricks could cause further damage.

J. Wilde suggested writing a letter to the Applicant on Historic Board letterhead.

J. Harris agreed and suggested that Stephen Stowell may have an existing relationship with the Applicant and could have a face-to-face conversation.

K. Jenness suggested they request the Applicant appear before the Historic Board.

C. McCall asked if Historic Sign Permits are entered into the City's MUNIS system.

J. Wilson stated that they have not been in the past.

C. McCall and K. Jenness agreed that Historic Sign Permits should be recorded the same way as any other sign permit in MUNIS.

J. Harris dismissed the Applicant's contention that the mortar joints are not strong enough to support a sign bracket.

C. McCall agreed that drafting a letter to the Applicant makes sense and suggested that the Historic Board Administrator no longer issue permits over the counter, but rather have the Applicant appear before the Board each time. She suggested that the Board condition that Members of the Historic Board be present on site during the installation of signs.

L. Cassidy asked if City Council would need to vote on enforcement authority.

C. McCall stated that she is not familiar with the process for changing Historic Board legislation.

L. Cassidy suggested the Board write the proposed language and then put it before City Council for approval.

J. Harris stated that more research should be done ahead of the next Historic Board meeting to better understand what the Board is authorized to do and what the next steps should be to strengthen enforcement protocols.

L. Cassidy stated that fines are a good mechanism and can be informational, spreading compliance by word-of-mouth.

### **3. Minutes for Approval**

May 10, 2021

#### Motion:

K. Jenness motioned and L. Cassidy seconded the motion to approve the minutes for May 10, 2021.

The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

## **IV. ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM HISTORIC BOARD MEMBERS**

J. Wilson announced that the Historic Board will be returning to in-person meetings and stated that she would follow up with more details.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:43pm.