Town of Sudbury

Historic Districts Commission

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MINUTES
February 24, 2026 AT 7:30 PM
Virtual Meeting

Members Present: Chair Ahnu Shah, Taryn Trexler, Chris Hagger and Shervin Hawley

Members Absent: Pete Iovanella and Griff Noble

Others Present: Beth Perry, Planning and Zoning Coordinator, Peter Benton and Elizabeth Watson, Heritage Strategies,

Mr. Shah called the meeting to order at 7:33 PM.

Purpose: Discuss draft design guidelines and related preservation topics for Sudbury's Historic Districts Commission (HDC); review design principles document; discuss next steps for guidance, district-specific recommendations, and outreach.

1. Agenda Item: Design Principles Document — Focused Review

The Commission reviewed the draft **Design Principles document**, with focused discussion on two sections:

- **"Accommodating Change Within a Historic Context"** (early pages), and
- **"Design Review Process"** (approximately page 15), including guidance encouraging applicants to engage qualified professionals.

Commissioners expressed general agreement that the draft tone was clear, accessible, and appropriate for a broad audience.

2. Recommendation to Split Documentation

Commissioners recommended restructuring the materials into a **two-tier documentation system**:

1. **A full, standalone "Design Principles for Historic Preservation" document**
   - To serve as a comprehensive reference.
   - The existing draft may be refined and finalized for this purpose.
2. **A concise, applicant-facing design guidelines document**
   - Intended as a front-facing resource for property owners and applicants.
   - To include cross-references to the full Design Principles document.

Consensus was reached that this approach would improve clarity, accessibility, and usability.

3. Applicant-Facing Guidelines — Content Recommendations

Commissioners recommended that the applicant-facing guidelines include:

- A 1–2 page summary of key preservation principles
- Checklists for common project types
- Sidebars with clarifications and tips
- A decision tree or flowchart illustrating the design review process
- Clear explanation of required submission materials ("What You Need to Submit")
- A plain-language overview of the design review process emphasizing early and informal contact with the HDC

Commissioners emphasized encouraging applicants to meet informally with the Commission early in the design process to avoid unnecessary redesign and expense, and to engage preservation-experienced design professionals and contractors where appropriate.

4. Presentation and Clarity Enhancements

The Commission discussed improvements to presentation and comprehension, including:

- Use of photographs from Sudbury's historic districts
- Inclusion of diagrams, sketches, and schematic images
- Addition of a glossary for common architectural terms (e.g., eaves, rake, rake return)
- Inclusion of visual building-part diagrams and references to helpful books and resources
- Creation of a curated reference list for interested homeowners

Commissioners also discussed interviewing past applicants to gather feedback on what has worked and what has not in the current HDC process. Heritage Strategies indicated willingness to conduct outreach if the Commission provides suggested applicant names.

5. Technical Guidance: Windows

Commissioners expressed strong interest in expanded guidance on **window repair versus replacement**, emphasizing:

- Preservation of authentic historic fabric
- Use of evidence-based information comparing restoration and replacement costs and energy performance

Recommended content includes:

- Practical methods to improve thermal performance of existing historic windows (weather stripping, storm windows, repair techniques)

- Acknowledgment of practical constraints such as availability of skilled carpenters, contractor capacity, and restoration labor costs

6. Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) Application

Commissioners recommended revising the COA application to:

- Incorporate checklist items from the new guidelines
- Require more complete information at the time of submission
- Improve efficiency of review and reduce continuances

It was suggested that the COA application be embedded in or directly linked from the applicant-facing guidelines.

7. District-Specific Guidance

The Commission discussed the need for clearer district-specific context. While the five local historic districts share common themes, each has distinct character and review considerations.

Commissioners recommended preparing short summaries for each district describing:

- Primary character and uses
- Typical building types and scale
- Special review considerations
- Examples and illustrations

For districts or sub-areas dominated by post-1940 development (e.g., portions of the Wayside districts), commissioners supported simplified guidance reflecting lower historic sensitivity, with clear explanation of any conditional allowances.

8. Townwide Preservation Context and Demolition Delay

Commissioners raised concerns that many historically significant buildings lie outside local historic districts and that many inventoried structures may be unprotected.

Discussion included:

- Limitations of the demolition delay bylaw (pre-1940 only)
- Vulnerability of mid-century (post-1940) structures

Commissioners supported including guidance on **single-property historic districts**, explaining the designation process and available resources.

9. Decisions and Agreements

The Commission reached consensus to:

- Proceed with two-tier documentation (full principles document and concise applicant guidelines)
- Include district-by-district summaries for all five local historic districts
- Add practical guidance on windows, including repair and thermal improvement options
- Include simple how-to resources and a list or template for preservation professionals
- Direct Heritage Strategies to revise documents incorporating Commission feedback, prepare district summaries, assemble a curated reference list, and conduct applicant interviews if names are provided

10. Outstanding Items / Follow-Up

- Compile evidence-based data on window repair versus replacement (cost and energy performance)
- HDC to determine timeline and scope for revising the COA application
- Identify local contractors and consultants experienced in preservation work
- Confirm responsibility and timeline for district boundary reevaluation and potential creation of new or expanded districts

11. Policy and Tone Direction

Commissioners agreed the documents should:

- Emphasize preservation of authentic historic fabric
- Reference the Secretary of the Interior's Standards in plain, accessible language
- Encourage early informal consultation with the HDC
- Clarify that respectful contemporary design is acceptable when responsive to character-defining features rather than conjectural historic replication

Mr. Shah made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:45pm. Ms. Trexler seconded the motion. Roll Call Vote Mr. Shah – Aye, Ms. Trexler -Aye, Mr. Hagger-Aye and Mr. Hawley – Aye