

TOWN OF HINGHAM

Historic Districts Commission



MEETING MINUTES

DATE: January 15, 2026

PLACE: Remote Meeting via Zoom

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair, Daniel Clark, Joshua Blevins, Justin Aborn

ALTERNATE MEMBERS PRESENT: Mary Anne Donaldson

ALSO PRESENT: Heidi Gaul, Historic Preservation Administrator

MEMBERS ABSENT: Catherine Daley, Eric Smoczynski, Steven Sadler, Carol Pyles

Call to Order: Chair Dan Clark, called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and stated the following:

This meeting is being held remotely as an alternate means of public access pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025 and all other applicable laws temporarily amending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law. You are hereby advised that this meeting and all communications during this meeting may be recorded by the Town of Hingham in accordance with the Open Meeting Law. If any participant wishes to record this meeting, please notify the chair at the start of the meeting in accordance with M.G.L. c. 30A, § 20(f) so that the chair may inform all other participants of said recording.

REVIEWS AND HEARINGS

Chair Clark announced that the voting members would be Commissioners Aborn, Blevins, Donaldson, Smoczynski, and himself.

Chair Clark announced that he would need to drop off the call intermittently and therefore Vice Chair Smoczynski would act as Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

Dave May

160 South Street

Application for a Certificate of Appropriateness to remove an existing unused and inoperable chimney at the rear of the house in the Lincoln Historic District Extension (Phase I)

Administrator Gaul showed photos of the home while Mr. May described the project. He requested approval for a Certificate of Appropriateness to remove an unused chimney located at the rear of the house. The chimney is not original to the 1851 cape-style home, is not operational, and has no fireplace or appliance connected to it. It extends into the middle of the kitchen and limits his planned kitchen renovation and structural repairs.

The chimney is on a rear wing of the house and is largely not visible from the street. It can only be seen

from a small section of the sidewalk when walking from Hersey Street toward the downtown; it is not visible from the front or most other street viewpoints. Removing the chimney would improve the interior layout and functionality of the kitchen without impacting the historic character or street-facing appearance of the house.

Commissioner Smoczynski asked if there were any questions or comments. Commissioner Aborn asked Mr. May what was holding the chimney up since it is not connected to anything. Mr. May replied that the chimney is brick from top to bottom and runs straight down into the kitchen, where it is exposed on all four sides. There is little to no true foundation beneath it, likely ending just below the floor joists. Because of this, the upper portion of the chimney must be removed before the lower section can be taken down.

Commissioner Blevins inquired about the date of the addition where the chimney is located. Mr. May explained that the chimney and wings were added sometime between 1851 and 1939, first appearing in the 1939 town assessment. He believes the chimney was built with the wings, but no definitive date can be confirmed. His research was inconclusive, and noted that differences in brick, mortar, and construction methods at the home indicate that the chimney was not original to the house.

MOTION by Commissioner Blevins to issue a Certificate of Appropriateness to remove the existing chimney on the rear edition of the home at 160 South Street in the Lincoln Historic District Extension Phase (I). The certificate shall be conditioned upon the work being completed in a manner consistent with the application and specifications dated December 22, 2025.

SECOND by Chair Clark

There was no discussion.

ROLL CALL VOTE:

Aborn – Aye
Donaldson - Aye
Blevins – Aye
Clark – Aye
Smoczynski - Aye

Chris McKenna
207 South Street

Application for a Certificate of Appropriateness to remove and replace windows at 207 South Street located in the Lincoln Historic District Extension (Phase II)

This application has been withdrawn.

3. Mike Ahern - 709 Main Street (continued from December 18, 2025)

Application for a Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish an existing detached garage, shed, and two additions and to build a new addition at 709 Main Street located in the Glad Tidings Historic District

Commissioner Smoczynski asked Administrator Gaul if there had been any follow-up, questions, or letters from the public regarding this application. She said there were not.

Mr. Ahern shared his screen and presented revised plans for 709 Main Street, including restoration of the main house, a reconfigured three-car garage, a pool house, and retention of an existing shed formerly proposed for demolition. His proposal would restore the historic main house with original window sizes, new trim and clapboard, a new asphalt roof, aluminum gutters, and repairs to rotted sills and significant settlement on the right side. He proposed to eliminate the entry addition on Mill Lane and to replace it with a recessed connector addition that he felt would be more consistent with historic connected-barn aesthetic and would also create a new secondary entry and courtyard.

He relocated the garage entrance to the rear in response to prior feedback, and the addition and garage roofs have been made lower than the main house, with aligned windows to maintain appropriate proportions. The proposed pool house at the rear, with the first floor serving as a pool house and the second floor contains an ADU (Accessory Dwelling unit) and has an exterior rear stair as required for the code-compliant second means of egress and will not be visible from the public way. The attached garage also plans to have an ADU on the second floor which could possibly serve as a “Nanny flat.”

Mr. Ahern displayed computer-generated perspectives to illustrate massing, roofline changes, and relationships among the connector, garage, and guest house. He cited nearby Main Street properties as precedent for rambling, connected forms with varied rooflines. In response to questions from the commission, he stated that square footage comparisons indicate that the proposed living space is comparable to existing conditions, with no substantial increase to the main house footprint.

Commissioner Aborn expressed concern that the proposed pool house feels visually and stylistically disconnected from the rest of the property. He suggested it should more clearly relate to the main house and garage, so it feels intentionally designed as part of the overall site. Commissioner Smoczynski raised a related concern that the rear garage massing still feels tall, with insufficient scale reduction moving away from the main house. He suggested that a lower roofline or dormers might reduce its mass. Mr. Ahern explained that lowering the roof or adding dormers could make the second-floor space unusable and that the garage roof is already lower than the main house and consistent with nearby examples. He emphasized that the connector roof is intentionally lower to visually recede from the street. Administrator Gaul asked for clarification on roof heights, and it was confirmed that the garage roof is approximately 2-1/2 feet lower than the main house, while the connector roof is approximately 6 feet lower.

Commissioner Blevins praised the improved massing of the main house and had no concerns with its overall design. His main concern was the pool house, specifically the large, steep roof, which he felt dominated the building. He suggested raising the front wall and using a shallower, saltbox-style roof to reduce visual impact and improve interior space. Mr. Ahern explained the current steep roof results from dormer guidelines, setbacks, and egress requirements, noting a simpler, two-story design could improve interior usability but poses proportional challenges. Commissioner Blevins suggested eliminating the dormers entirely. Commissioners agreed a less steep roof is feasible, though it requires further design exploration. The consensus was that the pool house is a substantially new design needing more review, while the main house design is acceptable.

Commissioner Donaldson expressed concerns with the overall plan even though she agreed that parts of the proposal comply with the guidelines. In particular she objects to the pool house and the exterior staircase. She believes the design does not sufficiently blend with neighboring homes and lacks the finesse needed to preserve the town’s historic character. She identified issues of scale, massing, and cohesion. She described the project as feeling disjointed: an original house, a middle addition, a garage appended to that, and a separate pool house in the rear, reading as multiple unrelated buildings rather than a unified

design. Mr. Ahern disagreed, stating that the guidelines explicitly encourage staggered, disjointed massing and varied rooflines, which he believes the project follows closely. He argued that the design is consistent with surrounding Main Street homes and noted the net increase in living space is relatively modest.

Chair Clark commented that the project has come a long way and is generally headed in the right direction, but stated that the house and its setting are very sensitive and that this is likely the only chance to get it right for a long time, which is why it's getting close review. His main concern is still the overall massing. He feels the design moves too quickly from the original house to large additions, without enough of a step-down or transition. In many nearby examples, additions tend to start smaller and build up, which helps the original house stand out. He also thinks the additions look too similar to the original house, making everything feel a bit too uniform instead of letting the historic part clearly read as the main structure. He suggested more differentiation, either in design or materials. He also noted ongoing concerns about the size and impact of the connected three-car garage. Because the design has changed so much, he suggested a site visit with story poles to better understand the scale.

Mr. Ahern responded that some comparable homes do have two-story connectors and said it's been difficult to respond to changing feedback. He's open to simplifying materials, especially on the garage, but said the connected garage and its size are necessary for the project to work and to keep the building legally multifamily. He also expressed frustration with the time, cost, and lack of a clear path to an endpoint.

Administrator Gaul explained that the attached garage is required to allow an ADU above it under current state law. A detached garage would be permitted but could not include an ADU. She noted that recent state ADU legislation supersedes Hingham's earlier town meeting vote, driving the design as proposed.

Mr. Ahern expressed some frustration because he perceives that the feedback keeps changing and isn't clear, especially on the massing. He believes his design follows the historic guidelines, fits the neighborhood, and is meant as a multi-family building, not a single-family home.

Chair Clark explained that the board has to give feedback in public meetings, which can slow things down, even though they try to move projects along quickly. He acknowledged the applicant's frustration and said that split opinions are normal since the board has people with different backgrounds. He suggested a small, informal meeting to help clarify what's needed for a final vote. Commissioner Blevins added that the board is giving detailed input because the design doesn't read as historic residential. He felt that it feels more like a modern multi-family building. He pointed to issues with scale, massing, and details that need attention.

Commissioner Smoczynski commented that the Commission generally supports the recent changes in massing, specifically the rotated garage doors and the rear assembly. Mr. Ahern asked if the house could be discussed on its own, without the pool house.

There was continued discussion regarding design elements where Mr. Ahern explained the difficulties with the original house's extreme simplicity. Adding more detail to the additions could overwhelm it, since the home has minimal trim or historic features to reference. He added that staggering the additions could be a way to create distinction. He added that material changes would be limited, with some flexibility at the garage, but, overall, he said there is little room to add architectural detail without harming the original character.

Mr. Ahern agreed to redesign the pool house and then discussion focused on keeping the existing shed

and overall design flow. Mr. Ahern explained that the shed was retained at the commission's request and now serves as the pool equipment and landscape storage, which would allow the pool house to be reduced in size. While he personally preferred removing it to preserve a clear visual corridor from Main Street, he agreed it could function without being altered.

Commissioner Smoczynski suggested simplifying the design and strengthening its relationship to the main house to resolve much of the feedback and asked for clearer direction. Chair Clark explained that the main concern is a lack of "evolution" in the massing—unlike nearby homes that feel built up over time—and noted that while progress has been made and feedback has been incorporated, the process feels slow because the design keeps evolving. Mr. Ahern agreed with the concept but said the site is too small to easily create that layered effect. Chair Clark suggested refining either the garage or the connector massing to achieve that sense of evolution without overcomplicating the design.

Commissioner Smoczynski suggested to make the next meeting more productive, Mr. Ahern should provide multiple quick design studies for the secondary entry door elevation for the pool house, specifically focusing on how to break up the mass of the building.

Administrator Gaul suggested that Mr. Ahern meet with her and Chair Clark, and possibly one other member to get clearer, more consistent feedback ahead of the next meeting. This could help avoid conflicting individual opinions and give better direction on what the majority might support. She also reminded Mr. Ahern and the members that due to a pool, Mr. Ahern would eventually need to have fencing approved. She noted a 6-foot fence would eventually be required.

Administrator Gaul and Commissioner Smoczynski suggested that Mr. Ahern have all possible design choices and specifications, such as windows, doors, light fixtures, trim, and stone, etc., ready for the next meeting.

It was agreed by all that Mr. Ahern would return for another meeting. Administrator Gaul said she would have Mr. Ahern sign an extension agreement.

OTHER BUSINESS

Administrator Gaul made several announcements including:

Administrative Items:

Administrator Gaul shared the following HDC Certificates of Non-Applicability:

- 340 Main St: barn roof replacement (asphalt, in-kind)
- 241 Main St: energy storage battery for existing solar (not visible)
- 675 Main St: restore 9 wood windows (front facade)
- 15 Ship St: asphalt roof replacement (in-kind)
- 577 Main St: garage doors (in-kind wooden doors)
- 5 Jones St: cedar roof on outbuilding (not in-kind)
- 13 Ship St: asphalt roof replacement (in-kind)
- 207 South St: vinyl windows (dropped from agenda)

Demolitions Recently Approved by the Historical Commission

- 25 Arnold St: full house demolition (in buffer zone, not individually listed on the Historical Inventory)
- 25 Main St (Nona's new location): receiving bay with overhead garage door visible from Cedar/Central St approved

Other Administrative Announcements:

Administrator Gaul shared that the Community Preservation Commission (CPC) recently approved grant funding in the amount of \$30,000 for a restoration of the Iron Horse sculpture which would include vandalism repair, cleaning and a new wax coating.

BYLAW CHANGES

Administrator Gaul reviewed a recent meeting among most members to review administrative issues, in particular some bylaw changes. She said one issue was regarding an architectural member of the commission having to be an AIA member which makes it difficult to fill that position. She discovered that changing the requirement for architect members (AIA affiliation) would require amending the Town's Special Act from the 1960s, so that change isn't feasible at the moment. Currently, the plan for bylaw changes is to only make technical corrections, such as formatting, spelling, and the addition of gender-neutral language. In addition, the HDC will be allowed to request nominations from relevant groups to fill vacancies; if no response is received within thirty days, commissioners would then be allowed to appoint their own candidates. Ms. Gaul further explained that, since no substantive bylaw changes will be made, a formal warrant article would not be needed, just a vote to authorize staff to implement these technical updates and request nominations.

MOTION by Commissioner Blevins to approve the edits to the bylaws.

SECOND by Commissioner Blevins.

There was no discussion.

ROLL CALL VOTE:

Aborn – Aye
Donaldson - Aye
Blevins – Aye
Smoczynski - Aye

Motion passes

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The commissioners agreed to postpone approving previous meeting minutes until everyone has a chance to read them.

ADJOURN

MOTION TO ADJOURN by Commissioner Blevins
SECOND by Commissioner Aborn

ROLL CALL VOTE:

Aborn – Aye
Donaldson - Aye
Blevins – Aye
Smoczynski - Aye

Meeting adjourned at 9:31PM

Respectfully submitted by Robin Gorfine, Recording Clerk