

# Lowell Historic Board Minutes

**July 12, 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, Member Depeiza

**Members Absent:** Member Villaras

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

*The following represents the actions taken by the Historic Board at the 7/12/2021 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
- II. NEW BUSINESS
- III. OTHER BUSINESS

## **1. Discussion of Revised Historic Mural Policy**

### Discussion:

R. Lockhart expressed support for the revised policy.

K. Jenness agreed and stated that the policy is clear and direct and addressed Board Member's prior concerns.

C. McCall stated that Section 4.1 "historically unpainted masonry building surfaces" is too vague, and that muralists are not going to use the suggested panel method of installation as that is a completely different art medium.

L. Cassidy asked for clarification of Section 5.4.

K. Jenness explained that Section 5.4 refers to incidental signage similar to historic building plaques. Small signs are often installed with a mural containing the mural title, artist, and other info about the project.

L. Cassidy asked about the temporary public art policy referenced in Section 1.5 and agreed that “existing historic surfaces” should be defined.

C. McCall stated that the word “historic” was redundant, and that the language should simply read “murals cannot damage surfaces.”

J. Harris provided the example of the concrete block building on Dutton Street as a surface that would be considered to have a non-historic surface.

C. McCall, J. Harris, and K. Jenness agreed that it made sense to strike the word “historic” from the sentence.

K. Jenness noted that section 5.1 similarly can be interpreted in multiple ways and should be restructured along the lines of “materials used should be appropriate to the historic context.”

L. Cassidy referenced a list of guidelines and evaluation criteria for reviewing historic projects. These include seven (7) aspects of integrity. She suggested incorporating some of the language from those review criteria into the policy.

J. Harris asked about the inclusion of Section 1.4

J. Wilson stated that was added because the neighborhood districts are not included in CASE’s Historic Board review criteria.

C. McCall elaborated that that CASE’s criteria *do* contain limitations and prohibitions to historic structures beyond the downtown district.

J. Harris suggested eliminating Section 1.4.

K. Jenness stated she understands why it was added as it prevents potential confusion regarding the jurisdiction of murals in the neighborhood districts.

Several members of the Board concurred it made sense to remove Section 1.4.

J. Harris reiterated the distinction between historically unpainted masonry surfaces and masonry that has already been painted over one or more times. He stated it is his preference to not paint directly on any exposed brick surfaces.

K. Jenness questioned the need to prohibit the direct application of paint on brick and expressed that she would be open to considering it on a case-by-case basis.

C. McCall agreed the language is too prohibitive.

L. Cassidy stated that the Board’s role is to evaluate and agreed that the deterioration of masonry should be prevented. She expressed that the Board is in place to review case-by-

case based on integrity, setting, historic significant, and that they must consider not just how the surface is impacted but the entire surroundings as well.

J. Wilde asked if painting significantly increases moisture and deterioration.

J. Harris confirmed that older, softer brick is highly susceptible and added that the National Park Service discourages painting on brick.

L. Cassidy noted that the Secretary Standards would say no, which would create a conflict if the Board were to adopt a more lenient policy.

A. Erickston stated that she would have thought that paint could function as a stabilizing and protective coating.

L. Cassidy noted that many of these old mill buildings were not designed to house many apartments with many bathrooms that create excess moisture. She stated that buildings are a living thing and the special relationship has changed. She reiterated that it is not preferable to paint it and strongly discouraged in the standards, but noted that historically some buildings have been painted and are monitored and maintained.

J. Wilde suggested re-phrasing to say “painting directly on surfaces is strongly discouraged” as opposed to “not allowed.”

J. Harris agreed they could adopt a more permissive approach rather than ruling it out entirely.

K. Jenness and L. Cassidy asked what would be considered “historic brick,” noting that there isn’t a specific time period they can use as a threshold as there are many factors other than time that contribute to the deterioration of masonry.

K. Jenness stated that it would make sense to review case-by-case by conducting a site visit to look at the actual conditions of the brick.

C. McCall stated that the Board should anticipate having a mural application on the next agenda for review and that artists are hesitant to come before a Board to permit work if they don’t have security of the wall which creates a chicken or the egg situation. She expressed that the Board’s policy should not prohibit anything. The Board should allow the direct application of paint on historic brick (once the term is defined) so long as the brick is in good condition and the applicant provides a strong maintenance plan. She said most likely groups will come to the Board to get permission for a building and then come back later with the full application once the building has been pre-approved by the Board.

J. Harris noted that as with any project, the Applicant should first speak with the Historic Board Administrator for initial feedback.

L. Cassidy stated that the definition of “historic” is important and reiterated the need to define it and ask for clarification on the interpretation of Section 1.2 through 1.4.

K. Jenness clarified that there are a few out-right prohibitions and the rest is intended to be reviewed on a case-by case basis.

C. McCall agreed that people should be encouraged to come talk to the Board prior to applying so that the Board can review on a case-by-case basis. She noted that the Board has a reputation for being overly restrictive and that this is an opportunity to better engage with the public and educate the public about the role of the Historic Board. She stated that she is interested in looking at the 7 aspects of integrity that L. Cassidy referenced as it may help inform the guidelines.

R. Lockhart agree with C. McCall’s assessment.

L. Cassidy stated that while they don’t want to be restrictive, there are national standards for preservation that are restrictive by their nature. She noted these have long been established and that every Board refers to the same guidelines. She agreed it is not the Board’s job to exclude people, but education on national and state guidelines.

C. McCall stated that the Zoning Code is incredibly restrictive but still has a pathway for people to ask for special permission.

L. Cassidy and R. Lockart agreed. R. Lockhart asked if the type of paint should be specified and if there is a certain type that is more suitable to older brick.

J. Harris stated that is not included in the current language and noted that technology is always evolving.

K. Jenness stated that the policy should not get that granular.

L. Cassidy agreed it makes more sense to evaluate case-by-case and noted that Applicants are required to specify the paint type in the narrative.

K. Jenness noted paint type could be recommended early in the process if applicants come to the board for pre-application review.

J. Harris asked if fellow Board Members wanted to do another round of revisions and discuss again at the next meeting.

C. McCall asked if there was a need for a public engagement process.

J. Harris agreed and stated that the Board should be in agreement on the final policy before it is shown to the public.

L. Cassidy suggested adding language from the standards for definitions and suggested the Board vote on the policy with the incorporation of a couple small changes. She reiterated

that Section 1.4 should be removed and the word “historic” should be removed from Section 4.1.

J. Wilde agreed the Board should vote and asked if the anticipated application will be for a full proposal.

C. McCall provided information on the project team, which includes Project Learn, ArtUp, and Beyond Walls. She noted that are still looking for an artist and wanted to get approval prior to hiring an artist, and that they may not be able to answer all of the narrative questions.

J. Wilson elaborated that CASE received an incomplete application and had requested more information about the artist and proposed mural be submitted by the July 28 deadline to get on the agenda for the August 9 Historic Board meeting.

K. Jenness noted that the City-wide mural policy received public input and suggested the Board adopt the policy and then send to a public hearing in August.

A. Erickson agreed that there should be an opportunity for public input and expressed her support for the policy.

L. Cassidy expressed that the Board should not rush and suggest the language in Section 4.1 read “murals shall not damage existing surfaces. Murals applied as a coating upon historically unpainted surfaces is not recommended as it can trap moisture and lead to deterioration.

K. Jenness agreed.

L. Cassidy noted that “method of installation and attachment must be non-intrusive and reversible” does not apply to painting, which is hard to reverse.

Several Board Members agreed.

J. Harris asked if fellow Board Members were ok with the language about grandfathering existing murals and the treatment of ghost signs.

Several Board Members concurred.

K. Jenness stated the only other major change needed is to Section 5.1 which addresses materials.

J. Harris suggested that the “theme and concept” language be removed.

K. Jenness suggested that materials used to fabricate the mural shall respect the surrounding historical building context.

Several Board Members agreed.

Motion:

C. McCall motioned and R. Lockhart seconded the motion to approve the draft historic mural policy as amended.

The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

**2. Minutes for Approval**

June 14, 2021

Motion:

K. Jenness motioned and L. Cassidy seconded the motion to approve the minutes for June 14, 2021.

The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

IV. ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM HISTORIC BOARD MEMBERS

The Board discussed plans to return to in-person meetings and the need to record and publicize meetings like the other land use boards.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:13pm.