

Dear Chair Bonnie Sontag and Members of the Planning Board,

I read with great interest the applicant's consultants' analysis of NHC's process. Both consultants emphasized that consideration of the addition's compatibility with the historic structure comes first, and compatibility with the neighborhood, second. One consultant states that "the priority for review comes from 36 CFR Part 67.6 (b)(6), of the National Park Service regulations," but the document being cited describes the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Application Process for Historic Preservation Certifications Under the Internal Revenue Code, which, while it incorporates the Standards as the governing assessment criteria, actually describes the process by which the Secretary of the Interior certifies rehabilitation projects for tax credit purposes. The "CFR" acronym stands for "Certificates of Rehabilitation," and the full quote is: "In situations involving rehabilitation of a certified structure in a historic district, the Secretary will review the rehabilitation project first as it affects the certified historic structure and second as it affects the district and make a certification decision accordingly."

See <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/36/67.6>

As the applicant is not seeking certification of its project by the NPS for federal tax purposes, it would have been improper for the NHC to mold its review process to that document.

Rather, the NHC rigorously focused its attention first on the "subject historic building," and then on the building's "lot" and "setting within the DOD" because this is the sequence for historical review that is laid out by the language of the city's ordinance. While the applicant's consultant concludes that this sequence of "first" and "second" indicates that "the relationship between the new construction and the historic Bank takes priority over the relationship between the new construction and residential homes," the NHC has read it differently, and sought a solution in which a sound historical rapport can exist *both between the new construction and the historic Bank and between the new construction and the neighboring historic houses*. The Commission did not think of the neighborhood as an "unrelated contextual condition," but rather as a valued collection of historic houses, some of which were constructed in "the same period" as the historic bank building, but others which provided the neighborhood setting for construction when the Institution first built its beautiful 1871 building (for example, 9 Prospect is listed in our District Data Sheets as c. 1775-1800; 5 & 7 as c. 1845).

While the consultants cite language from the Internal Revenue Code tax credit program and on Preservation Brief 14, along with NPS bulletin "New Additions to Historic Buildings" in interpreting the Standards, rather than relying on the full array of relevant NPS briefs the Commission engaged with between February 2020-January 2021, we, and the consultant, have quoted the exact same language in our deliberations, but reached different conclusions. For example, regarding the eave height of the proposed addition on Prospect, the Commission did not reach the conclusion, as the consultant did, that "any dimensional discrepancy will be so readily absorbed by the context as to prove imperceptible."

In fact, one of our key concerns is that the dimensional discrepancy will be starkly apparent and disrupt the proportions of the streetscape.

While the consultant suggests that the NHC should have looked to the 1917 expansion of the Massachusetts State House or to the 1850 and 1958 expansions of the U.S. Capitol as proof that the “volumetric expansion” of institutional buildings can be appropriate, the Commission instead looked to the 2017 revised Secretary’s Standards, to the NPS Bulletins, and to the DOD ordinance for guidance, not to the architectural models of these state and national capitol buildings and their 19th and 20th-century alterations and acres-wide settings (the Massachusetts State House sits on 6.7 acres of land, and the U.S. Capitol sits within a 68-acre park). Likewise, while one consultant pointed out that Mass. Historical “recently” approved the construction of a very large addition to the Cambridge Public Library, we note that this building complex, proposed in 2003 under the 1995 Secretary’s Standards, abuts a 4-acre park used by the public for family picnics and soccer games, a site quite different from the lot occupied by the Institution for Savings (the Cambridge Public Library garage was buried beneath the park to lessen the impact of new construction). Similar lot conditions exist at Fairhaven High School, another example of successful building expansions cited by the consultant; the Salem District Court, cited as another successful example, is being demolished to make way for a 61-unit condominium complex, but, since Salem’s approach is being cited, we note that the historic review guidelines of that city focus strongly on replacing “missing” residential buildings in commercial districts with buildings of comparable height, massing, and scale to those “missing” buildings to avoid having a detrimental effect on the houses directly adjacent to a rehabilitated property.

While there cannot be an empirically correct singular response to the difficult problem faced by the applicant in designing an addition on this lot, the Commission engaged in a dynamic review process that was highly sensitive to the flexibility and autonomy desired by the applicant as well as to the need for the Commission to encourage development that is compatible with the city’s architectural history as it is expressed in the collection of historic buildings that constitute the neighborhood protected under Mass. Historical Section’s Form G, Streetscape. Our Commission has been extraordinarily sensitive to the neighborhood setting and to the historic homes in the proposed addition’s immediate proximity, and have drawn fairly and consistently from the Department of the Interior guidelines in pointing out why the height and massing of the proposed addition do not meet the Secretary’s Standards either in relation to the historic building or to its setting.

In determining whether the proposed addition satisfies the Secretary’s Standards for subordination to the historic building and is compatible with neighboring historic and protected houses, the NHC made calculations of the proposed volume above grade of the addition in relation to the volume above grade of the historic 1871 IFS structure. Because the ratio of the new proposed to existing volume above grade is $235,600 \text{ cubic feet} / 109,260 \text{ cubic feet} = 2.1$, and the

proposed addition is therefore over twice the existing volume (mass) of the historic building, the proposed addition's height and massing will put it out of scale, proportion, and harmony with both the subject historic building and the neighboring context buildings on Prospect, Otis, and Garden. Although the NHC fully acknowledges that a building "slightly larger" has been contemplated by the Standards, the Commission deemed the proposed addition substantially and significantly larger, at 2.1, not "slightly larger."

The NHC consults the Secretary's Standards, the National Park Service explication of the Standards, and experts at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions, and the leadership of other state historical commissions on best principles and practices for interpretation and application of the Standards. We looked at how other Massachusetts cities with preservation ordinances have approached such new construction projects, and we see that the issue of neighborhood compatibility continually arises.

Please find below a bibliography of the publications that were cited by the NHC in its public hearings between February 13, 2020 and January 28, 2021 on the Institution for Savings proposed addition. The pages that follow the bibliography provide quotations and citations from all National Park Service materials referenced by the Commission in public meetings. These sources were provided to the Planning Board on June 30, 2020. The index to the NPS briefs can be found at: <https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm>

Primary Source Materials

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, 2017, pp. 75-162, especially Standards for Rehabilitation 1 & 9

New Exterior Additions and Related Construction, p. 79

Building Site Criteria, p. 142

Setting (District/Neighborhood), p. 146

New Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings and Related New Construction, pp. 156-162

Applying Rehabilitation Standards: New Additions to Historic Buildings, Preservation Concerns, National Park Service Technical Preservation Services Brief explication of Standard 9.

New Additions to Historic Buildings, explication of Standard 1; section titled "Size, Scale, and Massing of the New Addition"

Interpreting the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, "New Additions to Mid-size Historic Buildings," ITS Number 18

New Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings: Preservation Concerns, National Park Service Brief 14, especially the sections on:

“Design Guidance: Compatible New Additions to Historic Buildings” “Revising an Incompatible Design for a New Addition to an Historic Building to Meet the Standards”
“Incompatible New Additions to Historic Buildings”
“New Additions in Densely Built Environments”
“Designing a New Exterior Addition”
“Preserve Historic Character”

The DOD ordinance (XXVII-F-3.a-d.)

Secondary Source Materials

Semes, Steven W. “Differentiated and Compatible: The Secretary’s Standards Revisited,” *Traditional Building*. February 2009 (Vol. 22, No. 1), pp. 20-23.
Particularly, Semes’s explication of Standard 9 as it applies to materials and stylistic compatibility of additions to historic buildings. Semes was formerly the historical architect in the Office of Historic Preservation at the National Park Service.

Semes, Steven W. The Future of the Past: A Conservation Ethic for Architecture, Urbanism, and Historic Preservation. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009.
Particularly, Semes’s chapters on the four design options for additions to historic structures (literal replication, abstract reference, intentional opposition, and invention within a style).

The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s explication of the SOI Standards, “How to Determine Compatibility for New Structures in a Relatively Visually Consistent Historic District”

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Further, please find below the specific language from the publications that the NHC quoted in its deliberations to determine the Secretary’s recommended limitations on the size, scale, and massing of an addition to an historic building:

The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation & Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, 2017, pp. 75-162, especially Standards for Rehabilitation 9 (“New additions...will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing, to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.”)

New Exterior Additions and Related Construction, p. 79: “Generally, a new addition should be subordinate to the historic building.”

Building Site Criteria, p. 142: “[The Secretary recommends against] new construction on the building site which is visually incompatible in terms of size, scale....”

New Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings and Related New Construction, pp. 156-162: “[The Secretary recommends] considering the design for a new addition

in terms of its relationship to the historic building as well as the historic district, neighborhood, and setting.”

“[The Secretary recommends] designing an addition to an historic building in a densely-built location (such as a downtown commercial district) to appear as a separate building or infill, rather than as an addition. In such a setting, the addition or the infill structure must be compatible with the size and scale of the historic building and surrounding buildings – usually the front elevation of the new building should be in the same plane (i.e., not set back from the historic building). This approach may also provide the opportunity for a larger addition or infill when the façade can be broken up into smaller elements that are consistent with the scale of the historic building and surrounding buildings.”

Applying Rehabilitation Standards: New Additions to Historic Buildings, Preservation Concerns, “Size, Scale, and Massing of the New Addition,” National Park Service Technical Preservation Services Brief explication of Standard 9:

“Taken together, size, scale and massing are critical elements for ensuring that a new addition is subordinate to the historic building.... Typically, a compatible addition should be smaller than the historic building in both height and footprint.... It may be possible that an addition slightly taller or slightly larger than the historic building may be acceptable, as long as it is visually subordinate to the historic building. In some cases, separating the addition from the historic building with a small hyphen can reduce the impact of an addition that is larger than the historic addition.”

Interpreting the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, “New Additions to Mid-size Historic Buildings,” ITS Number 18:

According to National Park Service Brief 18 on New Additions to Mid-Size Historic Buildings, successful additions can result from quite varied design approaches, but what is common to buildings that meet the Standards is subordination. Example from Application 1, in which the addition is “distinctly subordinate”; example from Application 2: “The proposed addition has a footprint nearly twice the size of the original building, which is far too large to be offset even by its location at the rear...The historic setting is also altered by so large and addition.”

New Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings: Preservation Concerns, National Park Service Brief 14, especially the sections on: Preserve Historic Character:

“A new addition should always be subordinate to the historic building; it should not compete in size, scale or design with the historic building...Certain types of historic structures, such as government buildings, metropolitan museums, churches or libraries, may be so massive in size that a relatively large-scale addition may not compromise the historic character, provided, of course, the addition is smaller than the historic building...Large new additions may sometimes be successful if they read as a separate volume, rather than as an extension of the historic structure, although the scale, massing and proportions

of the addition still need to be compatible with the historic building. However, similar expansion of smaller buildings would be dramatically out of scale.”

“Design Guidance: Compatible New Additions to Historic Buildings”:

“Inherent in all of the guidance is the concept that an addition needs to be subordinate to the historic building.”

“Incompatible New Additions to Historic Buildings, Figure 16”:

Depiction of a proposal that “doubles the size [of the subject building] and therefore does not meet the Standards.”

“New Additions in Densely Built Environments”:

“Height...should generally be consistent with those of the historic building and other surrounding buildings in the district....”

“Designing a New Exterior Addition to a Historic Building”:

“The new addition should be smaller than the historic building – it should be subordinate in both size and design to the historic building.”

I appreciate the opportunity to provide you with this overview of the Commission’s historical review process.

Respectfully,

Patricia Peknik

