

Historic Preservation Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes
Subject to review and approval
Tuesday, February 10, 2026, at 7:00 PM
via Zoom Video Conference
REMOTE ACCESS ONLY

Commission Members Present: Eric Gilbertson (Chair), Robert McCullough (Vice Chair), Paul Carnahan, and Linden Chozinska,

Member Absent: Bryan Jones

Others Present: Meredith Crandall (Administration); Britta Tonn, Matt Moore, Nicola Anderson, and Greg Montgomery representing Evernorth, Downstreet Housing and Community Development, and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board concerning 87 Elm Street, North Branch Apartments.

1. Call to Order: 7:02 PM
2. Public Comments. None
3. Approval of the Agenda. Approved unanimously.
4. Comments from the Chair. Reserved

5. 87 Elm Street: Request for Preliminary Comments on Flood Mitigation Plans. Downstreet Housing and Community Development non-profit presented very preliminary review of alternatives for the historic Elm Street Apartments to address the problems caused by past flooding and the likelihood of recurring floods. Ultimately, plans will require Section 106 review if (as is nearly guaranteed) they use federal funding for the work.

Nicola Anderson introduced the project, outlining Downstreet's mission of offering affordable housing located in walkable downtowns, and preserving historic buildings. Proposed funding for their project is through federal CDBG, with an application deadline of February 27th, what remains of disaster recovery funding specific to Vermont, with 40 million devoted to housing. Downstreet's priority is to make sure that the remaining families currently in the building have safe and adequate housing, which is problematic because the building's utilities remain in the basement and the first floors are allow below the base flood elevation.

Britta Tonn then provided historical background for the Elm Street buildings, with emphasis on 87 Elm Street. Dates of construction for the buildings that have been merged over the years to result in 87 Elm Street range from 1880 (Building A) to 1908 (Building C), with rehabilitations during the 1990s and a major rehabilitation in 2009. Commission asked for greater clarity about the various dates of rehabilitation in future, in order to keep discussions clear during Section 106 review.

Greg Montgomery then provided analysis of the requirements for flood-proofing and the numerous problems associated with various options that must be examined under the Section 106 review, emphasizing that the report being developed for the CDBG grant application will provide an assessment of all available options. The success of the funding application will depend on a financially viable option that leaves no person in harm's way. The dilemma is that the CDBG application must demonstrate the financial viability of safe and affordable housing in terms of flood mitigation, in order to attract investment, but so far the options for preserving the historic building does not appear to meet that test of financial viability. Thus, the success of the funding application may depend on whether demolition of the building(s) is permitted as part of the review process for Section 106. Britta noted that a 2021 Programmatic Agreement specifies the Section 106 process for CDBG funding. Options are:

1. Do nothing.
2. Site and landscape adaptation.
3. Do the bare minimum.
4. Elevate the building.
5. Elevate the interior structure
6. Abandon the lowest floor.
7. Move the historic building.
8. Unconventional adaptation.
9. Partial demolition.
10. Full demolition.
11. Sell the property.

A long discussion about the various options followed without result, pending completion of the more thorough analysis of the costs and problems with each of the options. The commission noted that a clear explanation of why elevating the building as a whole, elevating the interior of the building, or abandoning the first floor would be cost prohibitive or not practical will be necessary before a decision about demolition could be reached by the Commission. The Commission also encouraged Downstreet to investigate whether demolition of one of the buildings would open opportunities for creative ways to provide flood mitigation for the remaining buildings in a financially viable manner, thus forestalling loss of the entire lengthy block of buildings on Elm Street, which would create a dramatic gap in the streetscape. The Commission also asked for more information about the difference in cost between building new apartments and elevating the existing buildings.

The practical constraints are that if Downstreet's funding submission—a competitive process—is not successful, the non-profit may be forced to abandon the project, which would create an uncertain future for the buildings. Whether that uncertain future is preferable to the certainty of the adverse effect caused by demolition is a question for the Commission to determine in the future.

6. Election of officers. Bob nominated Eric for Chair, and Paul seconded. Paul nominated Bob as the Vice Chair, and Linden seconded. Both were re-elected to their positions unanimously.

7. Continue Planning for Lyssa Papazian Presentation. Postponed pending better information about possible sources of funding. It might be best to think about scheduling the presentation in the fall. The discussion will continue at the March meeting.

8. Review and Approve Minutes: 12/9/2025 & 1/13/2026. Both unanimously approved on motion by Paul, seconded by Bob.

9. Other Business. Alex Brown donated a large collection of slides of Montpelier photographing many buildings, both downtown and residential, and depicting a number of events from the 1990s. Discussion revolved around ways to scan the slides, possibly by developing a program with the high school.

10. Adjournment. 9:00 P.M. Next meeting March 10th, 2026.