

Minutes
Historic Preservation Commission Meeting
Tuesday, July 8, 2026 at 7:00 PM
Via Zoom Only

Members Present: Eric Gilbertson (Chair), Robert McCullough (Vice Chair), Linden Chozinska, and Yana Walder.

Guests attending: Judith Ehrlich, VTrans; Doug Pfohl, VTrans; Corey Line, DPW; and Lucky Boardman, building owner.

Members Absent: Bryan Jones, Paul Carnahan

1. Call to Order: 7:01 P.M.

2. Public Comments. None

3. Agenda approved unanimously.

4. Comments from the Chair: None

5. VTrans Sec. 106 Review Request: Improvements to the Washington County Railroad crossing on Main Street adjacent to the Barre Street intersection, including new signal equipment and warning system improvements, pedestrian safety fencing, and other site improvements.

Doug Phol and Judith Ehrlich presented the project and explained that the primary concern is to improve the safety at the intersection of Barre and Main Streets, as well as the entrances/exits to Shaw's Supermarket and Stone Cutters Way. The project is in preliminary design stage and has been in planning stages for several years, supported by two diagnostic studies. Federal Rail Agency requirements establish safety ratings, with a desirable rating of 60; currently, the crossing is rated at 38.

Design features of the project include signal cross arms above Main Street on both sides of the track; an aluminum signal box with public information panel and located adjacent to Main Street near the Citizens Bank building; lights at the northeast corner of Barre and Main Streets; separation of the track area from adjacent asphalt pavement at several locations, possibly with the use of ballast; separation of the track from the adjoining bicycle/pedestrian path on the westerly side of Main Street, using a low, plank rail; and possible landscaping.

Discussion followed, focusing on ways to apply exterior treatments to the bright aluminum signal box (Sculpt Nouveau suggested) to reduce brightness and inhibit graffiti; whether the aluminum cross arms could be adonized in black to make them less visible and reflect the styling of downtown light posts; and mounts or a prefabricated concrete platform for the signal box to elevate it against flooding. It was reported that the owner of the Shaw's parcel suggested that it would be helpful to create a pedestrian crossing at the Shaws exit, where the project is also considering a small island.

Commission members believed the improvements were necessary to improve safety, and Bob encouraged the project because the railroad adds to the vitality of Montpelier's Downtown Historic District, and the railroad infrastructure is interesting. Eric reflected that there is a significant history of railroad infrastructure within Montpelier downtown.

The commission unanimously approved a motion to prepare a Section 106 letter with a finding of no adverse effect that also includes recommendations to consider ways to treat the aluminum elements to reduce visibility.

6. 144 Elm Street: Review proposal to demolish historic structure - consider sending comments to Development Review Board for 8/3 Permit Hearing.

Lucky Boardman presented the proposal and explained that he had approached several engineers, contractors, and construction firms about a previous suggestion from Bob and Eric during an informal site visit to consider preserving the front ten or fifteen feet of the historic building to maintain the historic building's contribution to the streetscape, incorporating that part of the building into the design of an affordable housing complex. However, exact estimates of the cost and feasibility of that proposal were not provided. Commission members acknowledged that rehabilitation of the full building would not be practical, especially given the extensive alterations to the building, and also acknowledged the importance of providing affordable housing.

The Commission determined that it would forward comments and recommendations to the DRB. Without more detailed estimate it is not possible to determine if the demolition is a reasonable plan for a property listed as a contributing structure in the Montpelier National Register Historic District which has the same legal responsibilities as an individual listing. Bob will try to connect Lucky Boardman with Eliot Lothrop, a historic preservation contractor whose work is primarily on timber framed buildings, to obtain a more thorough analysis of a possible preservation and incorporation of the façade that could be provided to the Board. The building at 144 Elm Street is a timber framed building. The commission recognized that the flood damage and other deterioration make reuse of the building for housing not practical. In the meantime, Bob will prepare a draft memorandum for the DRB outlining the Commission's concerns about the project.

The original part of 144 Elm St. is a significant part of the historic streetscape views on Elm street. In addition to making a contribution to the streetscape, the project is an opportunity to experiment with approaches to salvaging historic buildings in Montpelier that have been damaged by the flood and to demonstrate creative solutions to that difficult challenge.

7. Other Business: Next Meeting, Aust 11th (anticipating Review of NR Listing & Sec. 106 for Dam Removals)

8. Adjournment: 8:35.