



Values-Based Preservation Planning: Decision-Making in Context

Eastern Massachusetts Historical Commission Coalition | October 21, 2025

What is Your Role?

- Municipal boards and commissions serve their communities
- Every community has a unique context and a unique set of values and goals
- Your role is to make decisions that align with your community's context and values, based on your best judgment



Case Study Walkthrough

Scenario: Historic district homeowner wants to convert a purpose-built single-family house into a primary dwelling for themselves and an accessory dwelling for their adult child. They propose:

1. Add an entrance to the second unit on the first story by creating an opening in the building exterior
2. Add a window on the second story
3. Install a fence around the perimeter of the property

How would you make this decision based on your community's context?



Case Study: Community A

Community Context:

- Recently adopted a Housing Production Plan that recommends converting single-family houses into two-family houses
- Zoning bylaw amended at Town Meeting to allow this conversion
- Local historic district has design guidelines that allow historically-appropriate fencing styles in a variety of materials

Decision:

- Allow door to be added, matching size of existing, historic doorframe, but clearly distinguished not to look like false history
- Allow window to be added, matching size of single windows on the second story of a secondary elevation
- Allow a composite picket fence to be installed back-of-sidewalk

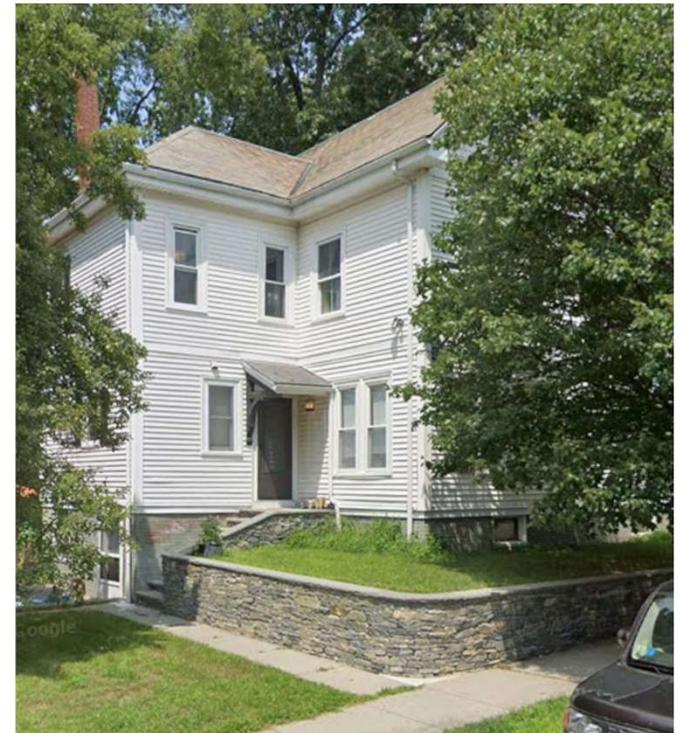
Case Study: Community B

Community Context:

- Recent comprehensive plan lists preserving historic buildings as a goal
- Only single-family houses are allowed in this zoning district
- Local historic district has design guidelines that allow historically-appropriate fencing in traditional materials

Decision:

- Do not allow any new openings into façade
- Work with property owner and architect to redesign project using a less visible side/rear entrance
- Allow wood picket fence to be installed back-of-sidewalk, based on historic photos of property



Be Part of the Conversation

- Look for opportunities for your board/commission to be involved in community conversations
- Regularly review and, if needed, revise your decision-making framework to align with community goals
- Be a resource!

Routine Planning Processes

- Comprehensive/master plan
- Open space and recreation plan
- Housing production plan
- Hazard mitigation plan
- Zoning bylaw revisions