
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
AUGUST 13, 2026, MEETING MINUTES
SACO CITY HALL AUDITORIUM**

1. Call to Order

The meeting began at 5:30 pm.

2. Recognition of Members Present

Commissioners: Andrew Bracy, Chair; Chris Delano, Vice Chair; Steve Ryan, Beth Johnston, Angie Presby.

City Staff: Madison Vlass, Assistant City Planner

Commissioners Absent: Diana Huot, Phil Grim, Nicholas LaBelle, David Arenstam

Angie Presby was elevated to full voting status for the meeting.

3. Acceptance of Agenda

Steve Ryan moved to accept the agenda for the August 13, 2026, Historic Preservation Commission meeting. Beth Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Approval of Meeting Minutes: July 14, 2026, and July 28, 2026

Tabled to future time when a quorum of those present at the meeting could vote to approve.

5. Public Comment

No members of the public spoke.

6. New Business and Other Topics

a. Replacement Window Guideline Discussion

Madison Vlass reintroduced the topic of window replacement guidelines, which has spanned several recent meetings. She brought up the working document that has been evolving and noted that increasing inquiries from homeowners made clear guidance more urgent.

The commissioners discussed the question of whether homes with non-historic windows should be encouraged to upgrade to historically compatible windows or permitted to replace their current units with similar modern versions. Commissioners observed that even if a window is not historic, selecting a replacement that matches the historic character of the building helps maintain architectural integrity. Commissioners agreed with this viewpoint while recognizing that not all properties can be treated the same. The group discussed developing a list of contributing structures in the future.

Conversation then turned to broader preservation concerns. The issue of deteriorating buildings in the district was raised and commissioners worried that strict requirements for window replacement could discourage

owners from addressing essential repairs, especially where cost plays a significant role. Other commissioners spoke to the delicate balance between affordability and preservation. It was observed that while education and encouragement are important, expectations and the ability to enforce them also help preserve the district's integrity.

Madison Vlass presented two options for window replacement guidance. Commissioners considered how each would impact both homeowners and the district. They emphasized that the exterior appearance of proposed windows should matter more than the material. After further discussion, the Commission agreed that Option 2, which keeps all replacement windows under case-by-case review and encourages property owners to replace non-historic windows with more historically appropriate styles, provides flexibility while still supporting preservation goals.

b. Strategies for HD Outreach and Education

Madison Vlass described efforts to strengthen outreach to homeowners and real estate professionals. She explained how she monitors listings in the district and contacts Realtors directly to ensure prospective buyers understand HPC requirements. She also plans to distribute a simple postcard, including a QR code, that directs users to essential district information.

She shared insights gained through discussions with Maine Preservation and noted that many communities face similar challenges educating their residents about preservation. Commissioners responded positively.

Commissioners commented that residents often appreciate the charm of downtown without realizing that historic preservation plays a major role in creating that atmosphere. They expressed support for an idea that the city hosts information sessions or public workshops. Commissioners agreed that better community education would strengthen long term preservation efforts.

c. Murals and Public Art in the Historic District

Madison Vlass presented the developing process for reviewing public art proposals. The goal is to ensure that when a mural or sculpture is proposed for a location inside the historic district, the HPC is included early enough to identify concerns, while leaving artistic content decisions to the Arts Commission and City Council.

She outlined a clear path for proposals. The Arts Commission would identify a site, Planning staff would review it for potential impacts, artists would submit concepts, and City Council would review artistic content. The HPC would then review any impacts on historic structures. Commissioners indicated support and appreciated the clarity of the proposed process.

d. Shipwreck Discussion

Madison Vlass updated the Commission on research into a shipwreck discovered several years ago. She explained that the city hired archaeologist firm Near View to document the wreck. They conducted a visual survey and used dendrochronology to date the timbers to the early 1810s. They explored possible connections to local industry, and although they found broken bricks nearby suggesting a link to a historic brickyard, no definitive identification has been made. They also uncovered stories from historic newspapers, though none correspond conclusively to the vessel.

Commissioners expressed fascination with the project. Commissioners commented on how remarkable it is that the wreck has survived and shared her hope that further study might uncover a more complete story. Madison noted that Near View will revisit the research and recommend next steps, such as assessing the wreck's condition or determining whether it might qualify for National Register consideration.

7. Planning Staff Administrative Updates

a. Future Trainings

Madison announced that the annual FOAA training is scheduled for October. IT security training will also take place on the same agenda. Commissioners who need assistance with city issued iPads were encouraged to reach out. Madison reminded members that NAPC training videos are available for additional learning.

b. Housing Action Plan

Madison updated the Commission on the Housing Action Plan. The public comment period has closed, and staff will work on revisions. Some parts of the plan relate to the historic district, especially in light of recent state laws affecting housing density.

c. Scams

Madison reported that scammers have recently targeted applicants using information pulled from public documents. One HPC applicant received a fraudulent invoice but did not make any payment. Madison stressed that the city will never request wire transfers. To improve security, personal information will be more redacted in future public packets.

d. New application

Madison presented the redesigned COA application, which is now part of a unified Planning Department form. Commissioners expressed support for the clearer layout.

e. Postcards

Madison also announced a transition from letters to postcards for abutter notices, which will save staff time. Commissioners had no concerns with this change.

f. Flash Vote

Madison introduced FlashVote, a new citywide survey tool intended to collect community input. Commissioners were encouraged to register and participate.

8. General Correspondence

a. 154 Main Street COA Staff Review – Sign

A new sign for Gnarly Vintage Toys, similar in size to neighboring signs and installed on an existing bracket, was approved.

b. 98 Beach Street COA Staff Review – Minor Project

Staff approved the homeowner's plan to replace porch roofing, limited siding, deck boards, and part of the porch railing using in kind materials. The deck will remain natural instead of painted.

c. Public Art Proposal – Piping Plovers in Joe Riley Park

The Arts Commission plans an RFP for a small piping plover sculpture. Madison found no conflicts with historic district standards, and commissioners expressed support for the proposal.

9. Adjournment

Next Meeting: Tuesday, September 8, 2026
The meeting adjourned at 6:42 pm.