

REPORT OF THE WELLESLEY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

The Wellesley Historical Commission is the body of Town government responsible for preserving and protecting local historical assets through education, legislation, policy recommendations, and physical conservation. The Commission works in collaboration with the Massachusetts Historical Commission, operating under the provisions of Chapter 40, Section 8D of the Massachusetts General Laws, and with Wellesley's boards and commissions according to Article 17 of the Town Bylaws.

The Commission has seven voting members, who are appointed by the Board of Selectmen for three-year terms, and a small number of advisory members, who are invited by the Commission to contribute their expertise. For the twelve-month period ending June 30, 2013, the Commission's voting members were David Wright (Chair), Lawrence McNally (Vice-Chair), Peter Fergusson, Dwight Lueth, Helen Robertson, and Kathryn Venne, with one seat vacant. Terry Catchpole and Joel Slocum served as advisory members throughout the period. Joshua Dorin joined the Commission as an advisory member in January 2013. Each member took on individual assignments and made significant contributions to meeting the Commission's goals.

In accordance with the 2009 Memorandum of Agreement among state and town bodies regarding documentation of the 1938 building of Wellesley High School, WHC assisted in developing a 1938 Room in the new high school to commemorate the history of the earlier building. In September 2012, WHC reviewed a proposal to place a 1919 plaque, memorializing three WHS students who died in World War I, in the 1938 Room. Opinion on the Commission was divided over the appropriateness of a plaque from an earlier period in a room dedicated to the 1938 building. The plaque was eventually mounted in the room, and re-dedicated on November 27.

WHC helped provide oversight of the Fuller Brook Park Preservation Project throughout the period. David Wright represented the Commission on the interdepartmental Fuller Brook Park Coordinating Committee. In addition to an overall commitment to preserve the park's rustic character in the spirit of the late nineteenth-century landscape architect Fredrick Law Olmsted, the park committee dealt with such history-related matters as restoring historic masonry bridges and providing interpretive signs.

During October 2011, a massive chimney at the north end of the Wellesley Hills Branch of the Wellesley Free Library partially collapsed. Because the building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, WHC worked with library administrators and trustees, the Permanent Building Committee, Community Preservation Committee, Department of Public Works, and other interested parties to assure that the chimney would be restored to its original appearance. In December 2012, Commission members were instrumental in bringing Judith Selwyn, a highly-regarded specialist in historic masonry restoration, into the project as a consultant. On April 22, 2013, Annual Town Meeting approved funding for the project, contingent on WHC's certification that the work complies with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

In this and other projects, the Historical Commission enjoyed a close consultative relationship with the Community Preservation Committee, the Town board that administers funding under the state Community Preservation Act for historic preservation and other purposes. WHC member Dwight Lueth served throughout the period as the Commission's representative on CPC.

WHC serves the community by responding to inquiries from individual Wellesley residents for advice on historic preservation or for help in bringing a historical matter before the Town. During the reporting period, WHC re-affirmed its 2011 declaration that Brookside Road was an area of historical significance, in support of residents' (eventually successful) efforts to preserve the historic character of this designated Scenic Road.

In November 2012, WHC was notified that the former electrical substation—a brick building in Greek revival style dating from the turn of the twentieth century, located in the municipal complex at the intersection of Routes 9 and 16—had been proposed to house the Town's new Department of Facilities Maintenance. Representatives of the Board of Selectmen and the Facilities Maintenance Department presented plans for the project at WHC's December 4 meeting. Having previously declared the building's exterior to be historically significant, the Commission requested and received a tour of the interior, in the company of other Town officials, on December 11. Commission members urged that certain features of the interior, such as ceramic electrical insulators embedded in the walls and a metal spiral staircase, be preserved when the building is rehabilitated.

At its meeting of March 5, WHC heard a presentation by Selectwoman Katherine Babson regarding the Town's plan to purchase a section of the Cochituate Aqueduct, and specifically a proposal to improve hikers' access by demolishing an 1848 stone waste weir that formerly controlled water flow on the aqueduct. In the following discussion, WHC advised strongly against the proposed demolition, noting that the stone building was an original component of the Water Supply System of Metropolitan Boston Thematic Resource Area, a National Register-listed site that winds through six towns.

As 2013 began, WHC learned of plans to raze the Beebe House, an 1876 residence still standing on the property of the demolished Wellesley Inn, as part of a long-awaited redevelopment of the site located at the heart of Wellesley Square. Research showed the house to be a significant historical asset of the town owing to the prominence of its former owners, associations with Dana Hall School and Wellesley College, architectural interest, and location near the town center. Following a walk-through of the house on January 18 accompanied by Jordan Warshaw, the developer's principal, WHC issued a written report recommending preservation of the structure, and met with the Board of Selectmen to state its case.

In subsequent meetings of WHC with Mr. Warshaw and representatives of the Selectmen, an earlier proposal to rehabilitate the Beebe House as two units of affordable housing was revived and updated. WHC and Mr. Warshaw spoke on behalf of this plan at meetings of the Wellesley Housing Development Corporation, Design Review Board, and Planning Board. The boards' response was generally favorable, contingent on securing funds to cover the additional cost of historic preservation over that of new construction. At the end of this reporting period, the search for preservation funding from public and private sources was ongoing.

WHC anticipated meeting regularly during summer 2013, to deal with continuing developments in such matters as the Beebe House and the Hills Branch Library, and to work on a long-range plan to document the town's historical assets.

Respectfully submitted,

Wellesley Historical Commission

David Wright, Chairman