

Suffield Historic District Commission Meeting Minutes
Regular Meeting: May 4, 2026; 7:30 P.M.
Town Hall Upper Level Meeting Room

Chairman Schwemmer called The Historic District Commission meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, May 4, 2026.

Attendees: Commissioner

John Schwemmer, Scott MacClintic, Beth Tracey, Aysha Moore-Manwaring and Crystal Quandt (Alternate)

Attendees Absent: Commissioner

Bill Moryto and William Howell (Alternate)

Designation of Voting Members

Chairman Schwemmer noted that the designated voting members this evening would be himself, Commissioner MacClintic, Commissioner Tracey, Commissioner Quandt and Commissioner Moore-Manwaring.

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Moore-Manwaring MOTIONED and Commissioner Quandt seconded to approve the minutes of the April 6, 2026 Regular Meeting as presented. Vote: 4 in favor (Schwemmer, MacClintic, Quandt and Moore-Manwaring) – 1 abstain (Tracey.) Motion passed.

Public Comment

None.

Applications for a Certificate of Appropriateness

a. 557 N. Main Street – Window Installation

Contractor Tim Therrian appeared before the commission to request approval to replace the existing casement windows on the closed porch at 557 N. Main Street with white exterior/wood interior 6-over-6 double-hung windows. He stated that the goal was to match the window style used on the rest of the residence. Some commission members agreed that the double-hung style was more traditional, however, Chairman Schwemmer expressed concern that the new design might look too crowded or "busy", potentially making the porch appear more like a standard room addition than a porch. He felt that transitioning from the current casements to double-hung windows would result in a "much busier look" with increased "visual obstructions" in each window, whereas the existing casements were more in keeping with the "open porch" aesthetic.

Discussion continued regarding concerns about the proportions of the porch windows. At approximately 27 inches wide, the proposed windows are narrower than the standard windows on the home's second floor, leading to concerns that a 6-over-6 configuration would result in panes that appear cramped and disproportionately small in relation to the rest of the residence.

Some commissioners maintained that double-hung windows are "technically more historic" and more consistent with the home's overall character. They also noted that the existing casement windows were likely a later addition, possibly installed when the porch was first enclosed, and that returning to double-hung windows would more accurately reflect the home's historic appearance.

The commissioners further expressed concern about approving the project without professional renderings or visual representations demonstrating how the proposed 6-over-6 configuration would appear on the structure.

Commissioner Moore-Manwaring MOTIONED and Commissioner Tracey seconded to approve the application for 557 N. Main Street as submitted. Vote: 1 in favor (Moore-Manwaring and 4 opposed (Schwemmer, MacClintic, Tracey and Quandt.) Motion failed.

The Commission suggested that Mr. Therrian return next month with sketches outlining the 6-over-6 and 4-over-4 options to provide a clearer visual representation. The sketches should include both straight-on and side views, along with elevations. The Commission also stated that the application fee will be waived for the new permit request.

Old Business

a. 234 S. Main Street (Suffield Historic Society) – Installation of outdoor air conditioner condenser

The Commission revisited a proposal for the installation of an air conditioning condenser at 234 South Main Street. The project includes the placement of an outdoor condenser unit and a new electrical panel on the side of the historic structure.

Sara Zak, the applicant, explained that after doing additional research she was told by their contractor, Westside Oil, that relocating the equipment further toward the rear of the property would be difficult due to limitations within the building's crawl space, which is largely inaccessible and transitions into a slab foundation. The applicant further stated that Westside Oil told her moving the electrical panel to a less visible location would likely require a larger panel box and could necessitate the installation of a visible exterior "slim duct," which would negatively affect the building's appearance.

Commission members expressed strong opposition to the proposed placement, stating that locating modern mechanical equipment on the side elevation of the original historic structure would compromise the building's historic profile and visual integrity. Several commissioners emphasized that the King House is one of the community's most significant landmark properties and that it would be inappropriate for the main facade and side elevation to be visually interrupted by a prominent modern air conditioning unit.

To address these concerns, the Commission strongly recommended relocating the condenser and associated equipment further toward the rear of the property, specifically beyond the corner of the main house and behind the building's "L" addition. Commissioners noted that beginning the screening fence at the corner of the structure would preserve unobstructed views of the side facade from the street while still allowing the equipment to remain accessible.

The Commission also discussed appropriate screening methods, including a traditional picket fence with a solid backing as a more visually compatible alternative to either lattice screening or a fully solid fence. Commissioners stated that this approach would more effectively conceal the equipment while maintaining a historically appropriate appearance consistent with the character of the property.

Chairman Schwemmer underscored the importance of the project by describing the King House as a "marquee building" within the historic district that should serve as a model for proper preservation practices.

Commissioner Moore-Manwaring MOTIONED and Commissioner MacClintic seconded to approve the application as submitted. Vote: 0 in favor – 5 opposed. Motion failed.

The Commission provided direction to the applicant, who indicated plans to return at a future meeting with a revised proposal incorporating the Commission's recommendations.

Ms. Zak expressed concern that the Commission recognize the efforts of the Suffield Historical Society to complete the project "by the book," noting that many property owners within the Historic District undertake exterior work without first seeking approval from the Historic District Commission or following the proper review process. She emphasized that the Society was making a good-faith effort to comply fully with the Commission's procedures and preservation standards.

Chairman Schwemmer acknowledged the good-faith efforts of the Suffield Historical Society in working through the Historic District Commission review process and complying with the appropriate procedures. He also agreed that it is both disappointing and frustrating that some homeowners install exterior equipment and undertake alterations within the Historic District without first obtaining the required approvals from the Commission. He reiterated that landmark properties such as the King House carry a heightened responsibility to serve as examples of proper historic preservation practices. He emphasized that projects involving prominent historic structures should demonstrate that modern mechanical systems and updates can be integrated thoughtfully and "by the book" without compromising the building's historic character or visual integrity.

b. Historic District Commission Handbook Grant

The Commission engaged in an in-depth discussion regarding the Suffield Historic District Commission (HDC) handbook, which has not undergone a comprehensive update in approximately 22 years. Commissioner Tracey reported that she is continuing to work with the state to secure a grant to fund the revision process. She reported that the grant application has been completed and is awaiting Chairman John's signature before submission. If awarded, the grant would allow the Commission to hire a consultant specializing in historic district handbooks to draft updated regulations reflecting currently accepted materials, preservation standards, and best practices.

Local realtor and observer Robin Zatony was invited by Chairman Schwemmer to address the Commission. She expressed concerns regarding the lack of a modernized “rulebook” which has created frustration for both realtors and homeowners. She noted that, without clearly established guidelines, it seems as though the Commission is often forced to deliberate each case individually rather than relying on consistent standards. Ms. Zatony encouraged the Commission to adopt a more welcoming and collaborative tone when working with new residents who purchase significant historic properties. She suggested that early communication and relationship-building could help foster interest in historically appropriate restoration efforts. Specifically, she proposed that a Commission representative, such as the Chairman, meet informally with homeowners early in the process to explain expectations regarding required materials, including renderings and sketches from multiple viewpoints, in order to minimize confusion and avoid delays during formal hearings.

Chairman Schwemmer agreed that early communication is valuable and stated that he frequently speaks informally with potential buyers and applicants. However, he cautioned that he cannot predict or guarantee the final decisions of the full Commission. The discussion also highlighted the need for stronger coordination with the building department. Commissioners noted that applicants often arrive at hearings unprepared because they are not consistently provided with accurate or complete information beforehand. As a possible solution, the Commission discussed developing and distributing clearer, updated checklists to ensure that all required documentation and supporting materials are submitted prior to hearings.

In addition, Ms. Zatony offered her services to assist in any way possible to obtain the funding for the updating of the handbook and to move the project forward. Chairman Schwemmer welcomed her assistance and suggested they speak further on the subject.

New Business

None

Adjournment

Commissioner Moore-Manwaring MOTIONED and Commissioner MacClintic seconded to adjourn at 8:49 p.m. Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristen O. Lambert
Recording Secretary