



**TOWN OF WINCHESTER**  
MIDDLESEX COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS  
HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
TOWN HALL  
WINCHESTER, MASSACHUSETTS 01890

**MEMORANDUM**

**February 24, 2022**

TO: Winchester Planning Board

FROM: Jack LeMenager, Chair  
Winchester Historical Commission

CC: Design Review Committee  
Town Planner Brian Szekely  
Town Manager Beth Rudolph  
Winchester Historical Commission

RE: CBD Petition: 10 Converse Place

The Historical Commission previously met twice to discuss the development of 10 Converse Place: September 27 and October 25, 2021. At its October meeting, the Commission voted unanimously, 6-0 (one absent), to endorse the design plans of the project at 10 Converse Place, as presented, finding that it would not adversely impact the historical resource.

Since that time, the plans for the project have changed considerably, following the Planning Board's input and further recommendations. Ian Gillespie, on behalf of 10 Converse Place team, along with colleagues Paul Soughley and architect David Tabenken, met with the Historical Commission on Feb. 14, 2022, to explain the updates and changes to the plans.

At the conclusion of their presentation and the Commission's subsequent period of questions and discussion, the Historical Commission again voted unanimously, 5-0 (two absent), that the project at 10 Converse Place would have no adverse impact on the historical resources of the town.

The Commission members and Town Planner Brian Szekely felt it would be helpful to provide the Planning Board a brief summary of the Commission members' thoughts, ideas and opinions on the updated proposal. The following observations were made during the Feb. 14 meeting, with some members clarifying their remarks in print. Commissioners Michelle McCarthy and John Clemson, who were absent, added their comments at the end.

- The architect explained that the landscaping would include a multi-use path (a rebuilding of the existing bike path), a sloped lawn, a terrace leading down to the water, and stone steps at the water’s edge. Commissioner Emily Dowling expressed concern that the stone steps may present a safety hazard to young children. She asked if there would be any buffer between the steps and the water to prevent children from falling or running into the pond. Mr. Gillespie and Mr. Tabenken responded that Copley Wolff was still working on the design. While they had not yet determined a suitable solution to Commissioner Dowling’s concerns—which had been shared with them by other parents—they were working with Copley Wolff to create a landscape that was safe, beautiful, and functional.
- Commissioner Janet Boswell said that she was “incredibly impressed” with the new design of 10 Converse Place. She said she believed that the developers had addressed all of her concerns with the original design and noted that she liked the new design far more than the original. Ms. Dowling agreed with Ms. Boswell, stating that she was particularly impressed with how the architects had reduced the massing of the building and added more commercial space.
- Chair Jack LeMenager agreed with Commissioners Boswell and Dowling and noted that he especially liked the addition of the curved elements to the design, which break up its mass, and the way the design and the material selection reflect the historical context of the town hall, the library, and other downtown buildings. Despite its size, he liked the stepped-back, tiered design that minimized its mass. He also liked that it was set back further from the pond than the existing “Laundry building,” providing the town with a new gathering spot for residents to sit together and relax—a worthy addition to the town common and the benches at Thompson and Main streets.
- Vice-Chair Bruce Hickey and Commissioner Jon Carlisle agreed with their fellow Commissioners’ approval of the new plans.
- Commission members Michelle McCarthy and John Clemson were not able to attend the Feb. 14 session and subsequently submitted comments for inclusion in this memorandum.
  - *Commissioner Clemson:* The building is noticeably taller and wider than its surrounding historical context, which is part of the Winchester Center National Register Historic District. It is out of scale with abutting historic buildings including the Brown and Stanton Block (WNT.127), the White Block (5-13 Mount Vernon, WNT.144), the Winchester Savings Bank (26 Mount Vernon, WNT.147), the Winchester Fire and Police Station (30-36 Mount Vernon, WNT.148) and Winchester Town Hall (71 Mount Vernon, WNT.150). Its scale could be mitigated through the reduction of its height and by breaking its width into two distinct volumes. The cornice at the fourth-floor windowsill level should project from the plane of the façade rather than be defined only by a flat band course of contrasting texture or color. This important design feature needs to have a strong sculptural or plastic quality and physically project in order to soften the building’s height, which I believe is its intended purpose. A second, smaller projecting cornice at the fourth-floor parapet would also soften the height. The first story should be enlivened with public, commercial space. I would suggest the building be named for the main thoroughfare on which it is located: Mount Vernon Street; rather than the rear alley Converse Place.
  - *Commissioner McCarthy:* “I really like the design, which I approve, and strongly believe it fits in beautifully with the historic buildings in our downtown. Initially, I was concerned about its height. However, upon further investigation, I realized that it is

comparable in the height of the other buildings in the Center Business District. It would be unfair to deny this new building when the CBD zoning allows for it. Change is hard, especially for a beautiful historic town like Winchester. However, I believe this is a wonderful new design that takes the historic brick buildings downtown and blends in well. I applaud the applicants and their architect for working so hard on this design, effectively capturing the historic feel of our town. Specifically, I especially like the curved corners, the outside open space, and the access provided to all residents to the pond. I believe this new design will have a positive impact on the historical resources downtown. Secondly, I believe this would be an important addition to housing downtown. I believe the planning board should take the lack of housing downtown into consideration when making this important decision.”