

MELROSE HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES FOR MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6th, 2023 @ 7PM

This meeting of the Melrose Historical Commission was conducted via in-person participation in the Cassidy Room of City Hall, Melrose

CALL TO ORDER

This regular meeting of the Melrose Historical Commission was called to order by Chair Kate Monea at 6:58pm. Members present in addition to Chair Monea were Vice Chair Tom Champoux, Secretary Kimberly Marolda, Joe Hunt, Kate Roberts, George Bibilos, and Shane Egan. General members of the public present were potential MHC member Jayn Stillson, former MGC member Jim Bennett, and members of local volunteer group Melrose Together, Sam Hammar, Jen Lelerc, and Bo Tsang DiMatteo.

ORDERS OF BUSINESS

The first order of business was to approve the previous meeting's minutes from January 9th, 2023, which were universally approved by the Commission.

Second order of business was to open up the forum for comments from the public of which there were none.

PRESENTATION

- I. *Melrose Together with Jim Bennett (Local Historian and former MHC member) – Art Installation at 12-16 Essex St.*
 - a. Melrose Together is a volunteer group that connects neighbors in need with neighbors who want to help, sharing community-driven volunteer opportunities and organizing grassroots city-wide events in an effort to sustain community spirit and support local businesses.
 - b. Melrose Together has partnered with Bennett to document the historic stories surrounding Charlie Sing, Chinese immigration to the United States, and the early Chinese laundry businesses in Melrose in the late 1890s.
 - c. A series of art panels by local Chinese-American artist Bo Tsang DiMatteo will be installed as a mural along the construction site of the 12-16 Essex St. development project to commemorate the history of Melrose's first minority-owned business – Charlie Sing's Chinese Laundry – and to celebrate the contributions of minorities to our community.

- d. This installation will be celestial-themed honoring the Chinese zodiac, as each of us are distinct and unique while also being part of the same celestial being who looks at the same constellation of stars.
- e. Art installation to be launched March 2023, pending the beginning of construction.

DISCUSSION

I. Wayfinding Signage Project in Collaboration with Office of Planning & Community Development

- A. The Office of Planning & Community Development is installing two outdoor kiosks in the city to assist with pedestrian / bicyclist navigation, and has asked for the expertise of the MHC in drafting site-specific narratives of historical significance for inclusion.
 - 1. Two signs, one for Ell Pond and the other for the intersection of Main St. & Grove St.
- B. There will be 1500-3000 characters of text space available with QR code space, but the kiosks will not support any other visual media such as pictures.
- C. Guest Jim Bennett intimated that the placement of each kiosk bookends the Downtown Historic District, and perhaps that is what the Office of Planning & Community Development would like us to lean towards for content (marketing the Historic District).
 - 1. Vice Chair Tom Champoux recommended that one sign be dedicated to the history of Melrose's business district, with the other dedicated to residential community history, as the placement of each kiosk borders the historical downtown area on either end.
 - 2. Chair Kate Monea suggested the Ell Pond kiosk be dedicated to the indigenous people of the area.
 - 3. Joe Hunt recommended that the Main & Grove kiosk commemorate the former trolley turnaround that once dominated the intersection.
- D. Bennet stated that more kiosks are likely to be built in the future, so MHC input now will be valuable to get the commission's foot in the door for future historical content.
 - 1. Chair Monea will inquire as to whether there is an intended scope of historical context for future kiosks, and if so, how many are planned.
- E. Chair Monea will send out a collaborative group document for first stabs of verbiage by the group; the draft must be completed by the end of February.

II. Melrose Historic District Commission Liaison Update

- a. Chair Monea mentioned that there is a separate Historic District Commission that specifically oversees Melrose's historic district, which includes a large portion of the Main St. area. There is currently no point of contact between the two commissions even though there may be content overlap.
- b. The Melrose Historic District Commission reviews all proposed architectural changes in the Downtown Historic District to preserve and protect the distinctive and significant characteristics of buildings and places; to maintain and improve the settings of those buildings and places; and to encourage new designs compatible with existing buildings in the district. They review proposed changes to buildings, as well as signs, fences, walls, light fixtures, or similar devices that are visible from a public way. Building projects that must be reviewed include construction, reconstruction, demolition, and removal of architectural features. The Commission may review the kind, color, and texture of exterior building materials and the type and style of windows, doors, lights, signs, awnings, and other fixtures. The City's Building Commissioner will not provide a building or demolition permit for any construction project or sign located in the Historic District unless the Commission has reviewed the project and issued a Certificate of Appropriateness.
- b. The Downtown Melrose Historic District was established in 1979 and has general boundaries following rear property lines of properties bordering Main Street from the intersection of West and East Foster Streets to the south side of West and East Emerson Streets.
- c. Roberts volunteered to be the liaison between the Historic District Commission and the Historical Commission and will receive contact information from Chair Monea. Roberts will then make the connection to establish parameters of participation.

III. Website Progress: A new website would be our ideal primary site moving forward, and any other sites would need to be removed or migrated in order to streamline materials.

- a. Vice Chair Champoux reiterated that we are still in the process of migrating from a Wordpress site to a full website in conjunction with City Hall, as City Hall has stated that all content should be contained within the main city website.
 - i. He stressed that the city website would limit us to only one page, and that the IT department of City Hall suggested they meet in person to discuss options for more space.
 - ii. Chair Monea asked if any other members would like to be present at this meeting, to which Roberts volunteered.

IV. *Research Your Home Night Planning:* This event has not been in effect since pre-pandemic.

- a. Vice Chair Champoux stated that Temple Beth Shalom has agreed to host provided the event is held on an evening in March, April, or May, provided it is not a Thursday.
 - i. Temple has appropriate presentation technology to highlight demos on how to use available resources and conduct online searches, in addition to wifi, large presentation screens with bluetooth / casting connectivity, outlets, and ample tables and chairs, and space for each participant to spread out with their research.
 - ii. A date of 5/10/23 was proposed from 7pm - 9pm, which Vice Chair Champoux will schedule with Temple
- b. Chair Monea stated that all attendees should be encouraged to sign up ahead of time online with the address, as Commission members can prepare the space accordingly in addition to pre-researching each location as a courtesy to each participant. Attendees will be requested to bring their own laptops to use for research.
 - i. Secretary Marolda suggested that attendees could sign up ahead of time by emailing the MHC address, and we in turn could respond with a short questionnaire including their name, contact information, and address of property they are interested in researching, along with a disclaimer as to why we would request such information.
 - 1. Addresses would be requested for the MHC to conduct pre-research wherever possible to help the guest get started.
 - ii. It was recommended at previous meetings that attendees to any Research Your Home Nights should fill out a Form B while at the event, provided their house is 50 or more years old.
- c. Ways to promote the event were then discussed, with suggested ideas being:
 - i. Social media posts
 - ii. Flyers at:
 - 1. City Hall
 - 2. Public Library
 - 3. YMCA
 - 4. Milano Family Senior Center
 - 5. MacAuley's House of Vacuum Cleaners
 - 6. Melrose grocery stores
 - 7. Any Melrose printed or digital press

- iii. Roberts volunteered to design the flyer
- d. Chair Monea then suggested that the agenda for the evening should begin with a brief introduction and a general overview of how to best utilize any available resources, with the remainder of the evening opened up for independent work. Lecture-style presentations should be avoided, and the Commission is encouraged to brainstorm ideas as to how to make the event more immersive for attendees.
- e. It had been suggested at previous Commission meetings that our first event should coincide with the unveiling of our Historic Home Signage Program; we could potentially offer a discount on the Signage Program for any eligible attendees. There will also be a donation box present at these events for attendees to consider.
- f. Chair Monea commented that a list of research resources was being updated for use in upcoming events, but the library will not lend anything out for use at said event.
 - i. Bennett mentioned that many items have since been digitized since the last event, and that the homeancestry.com account is available for use via the library. Fire Insurance Maps are also available online via the Library of Congress.
 - ii. Shane Egan stated that his most recent conversation with the librarian indicated that there would be some resources available to borrow, but not all. Egan will follow-up for a list of what could be used.
 - iii. Vice Chair Champoux mentioned that census records online are good resources, in addition to potential resources via the Registry of Deeds and MACRIS to assist with homeowner history plus architectural and development details.

V. *Historical Commission 50th Anniversary:* Anniversary date of Sunday 10/29/2023, and Mayor Brodeur supports a public celebration.

- a. Chair Monea had sent out a brainstorming document to circulate for event brainstorming and logistical ideas, and revisited each idea currently on the list.
- b. It had been previously mentioned that one of the earliest members of the Historical Commission is still alive and in the area, and recommended that any former Commission members be officially invited to attend any events in celebration of the Commission.
 - i. Chair Monea noted that she had contact City Hall, and they confirmed that they should be able to provide a roster of all previous MHC members
- c. Previous meeting notes mention the notion of making the celebration a month-long event to coincide with other City events, and to invite other local historians to attend and make presentations.

- i. Was suggested presenting an honorary award to those in our City who have made independent contributions to preserving local history, with Mayor Brodeur presenting the award. It was recommended to name the award after Mary Stetson Clark, as she was the one who had originally pushed the concept of the Commission forward.
- ii. To promote, it had previously been mentioned that a banner could be added to the website and our social media to celebrate our history, with other suggestions that we could use these mediums to collect and display photos of what life was like in Melrose ca. 1973.
- iii. It had also previously been mentioned that we utilize participation in the autumn Victorian Fair to promote any events that are organized, and that it can also be advertised alongside any Research Your Home Nights that may occur around that time.
- iv. Previously recommended ways to include the public in any celebrations:
 - 1. Any business along Main Street with a window facing the street could be gifted an enlarged photo of their location ca. 1973 for window display; it was proposed we ask local historian Scott Macauley for ideas and any archival stories and photos.
 - 2. It was also suggested we partner with Miter Biter Frame Company and Hunt's Photo & Video to assist with photographic reproductions and framing for these window displays.
- d. Vice Chair Champoux and Egan met with a representative from the Melrose Chamber of Commerce, who suggested that we join the Chamber as a non-profit (annual fee of \$95.00), which would permit the commission to formally have a discounted presence at various events sponsored throughout the year, such as the Melrose Farmer's Market and the Victorian Fair.
 - i. The Chamber rep also offered ideas for celebratory events, such as a historic car parade through downtown and offered to review their photo archive for inclusion.
- e. Guest Bennett used this opportunity to discuss legacy planning for local historian Scott MacAuley's personal collection, which could be done in conjunction with City Hall with the MHC being the broker of the plan.

VI. Other Business – Term Expirations and Vacated Seat:

- a. Chair Monea stated that there are Commission members with terms that are nearing completion, including Monea herself, Bibilos, and Hunt. Bibilos and Hunt have expressed interest in renewing their terms for another three-year commitment, but

Monea will not be renewing her term and will be stepping down as Chair at the end of February.

- i. Chair Monea's term completion will open up a vacant seat (three year term) on the Commission for Mayor Brodeur to fill. The City is looking for recommendations from within the committee to kickstart the process.
- ii. Guest Bennett recommended utilizing social media to advertise the vacant seat.

VII. Election of Chair

- a. Chair Monea described the duties of the seat and asked for volunteers. Roberts volunteered with the caveat that it be interim-only. Vice Chair Champoux motioned for approval, which Secretary Marolda seconded.

NEXT MEETING

Chair Monea reminded the Commission of the next scheduled meeting date of Monday 3/06/23 at 7pm. This meeting will be held in-person at City Hall in the Cassidy Room pending room reservation; a message will be sent to all Commission members including the location, the agenda for the upcoming meeting, and the minutes for the February 6th meeting for review.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned by Chair Monea at 9:02pm.