

Hingham Planning Board

**Supplement to Application for Site Plan Approval
In Association with Application for Building Permit**

Applicant: The Hingham Historical Society
Subject Property: 181 North Street

The Hingham Historical Society seeks Site Plan approval, under Section I-G of the Zoning By-Law, in association with its application for a special permit A2, to allow it to open the Benjamin Lincoln House, located at 181 North Street, as a house museum.

The property is located in Residence District A, the Town's Lincoln Historic District, and the Lincoln Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places.

1. Background

The Hingham Historical Society has entered into a purchase and sale agreement to acquire the Benjamin Lincoln House, at 181 North Street. It gratefully acknowledges the Town of Hingham's assistance in that effort through a grant of Community Preservation Act funds voted at Hingham's 2020 Town Meeting. One condition on the Society's ability to draw down the CPA funds and close on its acquisition will be a successful application for a special permit to allow the Society to open the house as a museum.

By its application for site plan approval, the Hingham Historical Society seeks the Planning Board's approval of its plans to make minor changes to the subject property that will allow it to operate a house museum at this property.

2. Proposed Project

The Society intends to operate the property for the foreseeable future on the simple model currently in place at the Society's existing house museum, the Old Ordinary, located nearby at 21 Lincoln Street. This model would involve opening the house for scheduled docent-led tours and limiting the number of visitors present on the property at any one time. As with the Old Ordinary, the house will also be open to researchers and scholars by appointment and Society staff and volunteers engaged in collections care and management; and as with the Old Ordinary, additional uses supporting the operation of the building as a house museum will include storage for artifacts and archival material, office space for staff and volunteers when working on site, and occasional small events which, like the docent-led tours, would be open to only a small number of attendees.

Current conditions, including COVID-19-related social distancing, the phased reopening of public buildings, and the economic downturn are expected to affect the intensity of use at the property for the next several years. Moreover, having been given the unique opportunity to develop a museum in this historically significant structure, the Society will in any event proceed with deliberation in pursuing new curatorial and programming initiatives at the property.

The Society's experience running the Old Ordinary provides insight into the impact that operating a house museum at 181 North Street will have on the neighborhood and the Town. While the Benjamin Lincoln House will be open 12 months a year (unlike the unheated Old Ordinary, which is only open from May through November), program schedules and visitor statistics from our existing house museum are instructive. For the past several years, the Old Ordinary has been open Wednesday through Saturday with three scheduled, docent-led tours offered each day. Tours at the Old Ordinary are capped at 12 participants each, although, with the exception of the extremely popular Candlelight Tours held at the Old Ordinary two weekends per year, our Old Ordinary tours seldom come close to selling out. June is the most active month of the year at the Old Ordinary: we greet around 100 visitors over the entire month. Typically, we see one or two visitor cars park at the Old Ordinary for each summer tour, as participants tend to be family groups, and many prefer to walk to the Old Ordinary from Hingham Square.

While a tour of the Benjamin Lincoln House will likely prove a popular activity for curious locals for a period of time after it opens, we anticipate that attendance will soon fall into line with that at the Old Ordinary (and the Hingham Heritage Museum, at Old Derby Academy in Hingham Square).

The Society also hopes to offer school tours of the Benjamin Lincoln House as it currently does at the Old Ordinary. School tours typically take place over a few weeks in the fall or spring, with the children dropped off and picked up by a school bus that does not remain on-site during the tours.

3. Site Plan Approval in Association with Application for Special Permit A2

The Society submits the following proposed findings to the Planning Board for its consideration under Sections I-G and I-I(6) of the Hingham Zoning By-Law:

a. Protection of abutting properties against detrimental uses by provision for surface water drainage, fire hydrant locations, sound and site buffers, and preservation of views, light and air, and protection of abutting properties from negative impacts from artificial outdoor site lighting.

The minor changes to the property reflected on the accompanying Site Plan will not adversely impact abutters. The property will appear largely unchanged from the street and from neighboring properties. The handicap ramp and van-accessible parking space will be at the rear of the house and other on-site parking will be off the existing driveway at the corner of the property. Because the rear of the property is fairly level, only minor changes to the grade will be needed. The existing driveway is of a pervious material, as will be the new parking spaces adjacent to it. The assembly and drop-off area at the back of the house is already of a hard surface, and the only addition to this hard surface will be a van-accessible parking space adjacent to that drop-off and assembly space. Views will be preserved, and no sound or site buffers will be necessary. Exterior lighting will be upgraded, including the addition of a post light near the parking spaces by Lincoln Street, but will remain consistent with lighting at nearby residential properties.

- b. Convenience and safety of vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site and on adjacent streets; the location of driveway openings in relation to traffic or to adjacent streets, taking account of grades, sight distances and distances between such driveway entrances, exits and the nearest existing street or highway intersections; sufficiency of access for service, utility and emergency vehicles.**

As show on the Site Plan, only minimal alterations to the existing physical layout of the property will be needed to enable the Society to receive the projected number of visitors. Entrance to the house will as a rule be through the rear, where there is adequate space for off-street, outdoor assembly of visitors and a handicap ramp along the back wall to the house. Vehicles entering the property will use the existing driveway entrance off Lincoln Street and exit from the existing driveway onto North Street. This existing U-shaped driveway will continue to provide sufficient access for service, utility, and emergency vehicles. Current traffic patterns will not be altered; the U-shaped driveway will be marked as one-way, with entrance from Lincoln Street and exit onto North Street, continuing what has been the practice of the owners and their visitors for many years. On-site parking consistent with the intensity of the anticipated use will be provided at the Lincoln Street end of the existing driveway (which will be widened somewhat to allow cars to back out easily) and a drop-off spot and van-accessible handicap parking space will be located adjacent to the existing back patio.

Because the grade at the back of the property is quite flat, these few improvements will be made without material impact to the terrain or landscaping. A new section of retaining wall directly in front of the existing retaining wall will level the grade for parking spaces at the Lincoln Street entrance to the property.

- c. Adequacy of the arrangement of parking, loading spaces and traffic patterns in relation to the proposed uses of the premises; compliance with the off-street parking requirements of this By-Law.**

The existing U-shaped driveway, with the addition of a van-accessible handicap parking space near the house and three other parking spaces off the driveway, will adequately handle projected vehicular access to the property. The Society is seeking a parking determination because the Zoning By-Law does not provide off-street parking requirements for a house museum.

- d. Adequacy of open space and setbacks, including adequacy of landscaping of such areas**

There will be no material change to the existing amounts of open space or setbacks or the landscaping of these areas. Each is currently appropriate to the house and its location and will continue to be so.

- e. Adequacy of the methods of disposal of refuse and other wastes resulting from the uses permitted on the site, including but not limited to, discarded building materials, concrete truck wash out, chemicals, litter and sanitary wastes; provided that discharge of refuse or other wastes into the municipal stormwater system shall be expressly prohibited**

After the Society purchases the property, there will be no full-time residents in the house; for that reason, we anticipate that the property will generate less refuse and less wastewater than previously. Trash pick-up will be handled by the Society as we do at our other properties: it is carried away by staff or volunteers on a regular basis. The construction that will occur at the property to ready it for its new use will not create significant construction, landscaping waste, or sanitary waste. A building permit will be required for the construction of an accessible entrance to the house and ramp, and a condition of the building permit will be identification of the location where the contractor will dispose of all debris.

- f. Prevention or mitigation of adverse impacts on the Town's resources, including, without limitation, water supply, wastewater facilities, energy and public works and public safety resources.**

The proposed use and attendant minor changes in the physical layout of the property will not create adverse impacts on any Town resources. Water and energy usage and wastewater creation will likely decrease as the house will no longer be a full-time residence.

- g. Assurance of positive stormwater drainage and snow-melt run-off from buildings, driveways and from all parking and loading areas on the site, and prevention of erosion, sedimentation and stormwater pollution and management problems through site design and erosion controls in accordance with the most current versions of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's Stormwater Management Policy and Standards, and Massachusetts Erosion and Sediment Control Guidelines and, if applicable, additional requirements under the Town of Hingham MS4 Permit for projects that disturb more than one acre and discharge to the Town's municipal stormwater system.**

Because the grade at the back of the property is quite flat, the proposed improvements will be made without material impact to the terrain or landscaping. The addition of a handicap space adjacent to the brick patio will increase the small paved area behind the house, but the remaining driveway and proposed new parking spaces by Lincoln Street are and will be of a pervious material.

- h. Assurance that appropriate Best Management Practices have been incorporated to minimize the amount of disturbed areas and protect natural resources, stabilize sites when projects are complete or operations have temporarily ceased, protect slopes on the construction site, protect storm drain inlets and armor all newly constructed outlets, install perimeter controls at the site, stabilize construction site entrances and exits to prevent off-site tracking of material, and to provide for regular inspection of stormwater controls at consistent intervals.**

As discussed, the minor work that will be done at the property to prepare it for its new use will not implicate any of these concerns.

- i. Protection of natural and historic features including minimizing: the volume of cut and fill, the number of removed trees of 6 inches caliper or larger, the removal of stone walls, and the obstruction of scenic views from publicly accessible locations.**

The proposed change in use will have a positive impact on the natural and historic features of the subject property and those adjacent to it. Operation of the property as a house museum will create positive impacts for the surrounding area, by ensuring appropriate upkeep of the property itself and strengthening the historic character of both historic districts. No tree removals or removal of stone walls are planned, and no scenic views will be obstructed.

j. Minimizing unreasonable departure from the character and scope of buildings in the vicinity or as previously existing on or approved for the site.

The proposed change in use will not affect the exterior appearance or size of the house or property. The locus is a highly appropriate location for a house museum given the compatibility of this use with the characteristics of its surrounding area. The property is located in the Town's Lincoln Historic District and the Lincoln Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places. It is sited adjacent to or nearby multiple historic buildings, including New North Church and the Society's other house museum, the Old Ordinary. Operation of the property as a house museum will create positive impacts for the surrounding area, by ensuring appropriate upkeep of the property itself and strengthening the historic character of both historic districts.

4. Request for Waivers

The Society requests waivers of the Site Plan Review requirement described in Section I.I(4) e, f, g, h, i, j. Each presents an expense to the Society, a member-supported non-profit corporation, without providing the Board with information material to its review of this application:

e. detailed information on utilities, landscaping, refuse storage and removal

There will be no substantial change in how these maintenance concerns will be handled. We anticipate that the use of water, gas, and electricity and the generation of refuse will decrease after the Society owns the property and there are no longer full-time residents. The Society will undertake appropriate landscaping efforts at the property, as it does at its other properties.

f. grading plan, estimated net import/export of material, drainage analysis, and traffic analysis, as applicable

There will be only minimal grading work done, making the creation of a formal grading plan, materials estimate, and grading analysis unnecessary. The anticipated vehicular traffic to the property once it opens as a house museum (based on the Society's experience running the Old Ordinary at 21 Lincoln Street) makes the expense of a traffic analysis unnecessary to this Board's decision-making.

g. analysis of the capacity of Town soils, water supply, ways and services to absorb the impact of the proposed development

The anticipated usage of the property in the near-term will be limited and the contemplated uses (docent-led tours, research appointments, artifact storage) are all low-impact, rendering the need for a formal analysis unnecessary to the Board's decision.

- h. analysis of compliance of the construction activities and the proposed project, including the extent the project incorporates low impact design and green infrastructure solutions, with the most current versions of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection Stormwater Management Policy and Standards including (i) the Massachusetts Stormwater Handbook, (ii) Massachusetts Erosion Sediment and Control Guidelines, and (iii) if applicable, additional requirements under the Town of Hingham MS4 Permit for projects that disturb more than one acre and discharge to the Town’s municipal stormwater system**

These analyses appear to be inapplicable to this project and of little relevance to the Board’s decision-making.

- i. Site Lighting Plan showing the location, height, photometric, orientation, and specifications for all outdoor site lighting, including information on the intensity and range of illumination for each source of light proposed.**

With few exceptions, the Society’s use of the subject property will be limited to daylight hours. Some additional exterior lighting is, however, advisable for safety during those times when the public is invited to the property after dark. Upgraded and limited additional lighting (installation of a post light near the entrance to the property) will be of a residential character and in keeping with the neighboring residential properties. The absence of a formal site lighting plan will not adversely affect the Board’s decision-making.

- j. an erosion control plan and an Operations and Management Plan for both the construction activities and ongoing post-construction maintenance and reporting requirements.**

The regrading necessary for handicap accessibility is minimal and will not increase erosion on the subject property. A building permit will be required for the construction of the accessible entrance and ramp, and a condition of the building permit will be identification of the location where the contractor will dispose of all debris. The plans described in sub-section j will not inform the Board’s decision-making on this project.

5. Conclusion.

For the reasons set forth above, the Society respectfully suggests that its application for Site Plan Approval, under Section IV-B, 6 a & B, satisfies the standards at Section I-I(6) of the Hingham Zoning By-Law.

Respectfully submitted,

_____/s/ Deirdre Anderson_____
For the Hingham Historical Society