

-Just as a little background for those of you who don't know me already, I am an architectural conservator with a master's in Historic Preservation from Columbia. I've worked or consulted on over a hundred landmarks across the US and internationally, so I'm very familiar with how different municipalities and communities approach preservation. I am also a commissioner on the NHC.

-In our letter to Zoning & Planning, the NHC runs through the carefully considered & storied history of the so-called "50-year rule," a threshold for significance evaluation since 1935, in use across America for 86 years. As a model for state and local preservation programs around the country, this **50-year-age restriction repeats itself in myriad forms in more than 1,000 state and local preservation ordinances.**

We're an important city in Massachusetts; our neighbors Cambridge, Lexington, and Brookline are nationally renowned for their meaningful zoning and preservation laws. We don't want to be the city that bucks the national standard.

-There's a lot more detail and data in the letter we shared. But contrary to many misconceptions, the whole theory behind historic preservation is **not** to create villages that are frozen in time, but to allow for community evolution—**including growth and modernization**—to create a living, breathing cityscape. Pegging our "period of significance" to a specific year (1945, in this case) rather than a rolling timeframe freezes us in amber. In 50

years, Newton will be a very different looking place, as it should be because we need to adapt. I don't think we want to see a version of Newton that *only* has Victorians, colonials, and Tudors, and then modern structures from the year 2071. This is so much bigger than any one building typology or construction era that we do or don't care about.

This past December, President Trump passed an executive order at the tail end of his administration that served to elevate classical (a.k.a. Greco-Roman) architecture and to **prevent** contemporary designs for any future federal buildings. It wound up being one of the first orders that President Biden revoked, and to my point here, the National Trust said in a statement that while it values traditional and classical buildings, any attempt to “stifle the full record of American architecture... with a narrow list of styles ... is inconsistent with the values of historic preservation.”

To exclude ALL modern architecture past, current, and future, from the purview of the NHC is—in this same way—stifling the full record of local architecture and inconsistent with the values of historic preservation.

If Frank Gehry or Santiago Calatrava comes in tomorrow and designs a house for some lucky, wealthy homeowner, it would truly be a loss—an architectural tragedy--to see that get demolished in 50 years simply because our ordinance doesn't require it to be reviewed. And as a member of our current commission, I personally want to help make sure that in 2071 it's still a **preservation** commission, not some kind of stodgy antiquities commission

that only regulates buildings more than 120 years old. Please do not let that happen.

-Now! If I have understood the aim of these ordinance revisions, and if it is to reduce the load or purview of the NHC, it makes far more sense to re-write the context clause, as Alan has suggested, rather than to set an arbitrary age limit.

Normally, “context” encompasses: 1) elegant, stylistically cohesive streetscapes like Auburndale’s Italianate homes or Prince Street’s Victorians, as well as 2) planned communities like Tuxedo Park, NY or Seaside, FL and 3) groupings of functional, needs-based housing enclaves that support a certain class of workers, or a specific cultural or ethnic community (also called “vernacular architecture”). But there is a difference between these categories, and streets of developer-built “spec” or “efficiency” houses that were not necessarily designed with any intent other than to turn a quick profit. We are wrong to think there is historical significance in *all* of our visually similar streets . . .

Currently, I don’t think we are wielding the “context” tool correctly. So tightening the scope of “context” would be far more productive for all of us—and help achieve ZAP’s aims, I think—rather than arbitrarily limiting the building age.