

Historic Preservation Commission Meeting Minutes Draft
City of Geneva
109 James Street - City Council Chambers
December 16, 2025

Call to Order

Chairman Zellmer called the meeting of the Geneva Historic Preservation Commission to order at 7:00 pm on Tuesday, December 16, 2025.

1. Roll Call

Present: Chairman Zellmer; Commissioners Tobler, Phillips, Jensen, McManus, Riebe, Solomon

Absent: None

Staff Present: Preservation Planner Emily Stood, Community Development Director David DeGroot,
Assistant Planner Jessie Malkosky

Others Present: City Attorney Ron Sandack

2. Approval of Minutes

Minutes of November 18, 2025

Motion by Commissioner Solomon, seconded by Commissioner Jensen, to approve the minutes of the November 18, 2025, meeting as presented. Motion passed by roll call vote with Chairman Zellmer abstaining (6-0).

3. Review of Building Permit Applications (Certificate of Appropriateness)

3a. **521 South Street**

CASE 2025-115

Applicant: Jon Rae

Application: New Window on Addition (Plan Amendment)

Preservation Planner Emily Stood summarized the property history, noting its long-term occupation by the Snyder family (c. 1900-1974). She reviewed the previously approved 2025 addition (shown under construction) and explained the requested amendment: adding a window on the façade of the new addition, using materials matching the already approved windows on that structure. The application was characterized as a minor plan change.

John Rae, the applicant, stated the window was originally ordered to replace a bedroom window during earlier roof work. When the roof and balcony design changed, an extra window became available. Instead of disposing of it, the applicant proposed installing it on the side elevation of the addition to bring more light into the space.

With no further questions from the commissioners, several stated they saw no issue with the request, as the window matched existing materials and complemented the design.

Moved by Commissioner Jensen, seconded by Commissioner McManus, to approve the application for the new window on addition (plan amendment) at 521 South Street as presented.

Ayes: Tobler, Jensen, McManus, Phillips, Riebe, Solomon, Zellmer

Nays: None

Motion Passed: 7-0

4. Public Hearing

Chairman Zellmer reviewed the public hearing procedures, administered the oath to those who had signed the registration sheet, and confirmed no commissioners needed to recuse themselves.

Motion moved by Commissioner McManus, seconded by Commissioner Phillips, to open the Public Hearing.

Ayes: Tobler, Jensen, McManus, Phillips, Riebe, Solomon, Zellmer

Nays: None

Motion Passed: 7-0

4a. **4 E State Street**

CASE 2025-114

Applicant: David Patzelt

Application: Demolition of a Historic Landmark

A Public Hearing was held to consider an application for the demolition of the designated historic landmark at 4 East State Street, known historically as the Alexander Brothers Blacksmith Shop (c. 1846-47). The applicant, David Patzelt, represented the current property owner, Mill Race Land Company LLC. The application was filed under Standard 4 of the City's demolition review criteria, which permits consideration if the retention of the structure is not in the best interest of the majority of the community.

Preservation Planner Emily Stood presented a detailed history of the property, including its various commercial occupants over more than a century and its designation as a historic landmark in 2018 following a previous demolition request. She summarized the subsequent boundary amendment in 2022, the denial of a prior demolition application in 2023, and ongoing, court-upheld property maintenance code violations for which significant fines remain unpaid. Staff clarified that the Commission's role was solely to evaluate the demolition request based on the presented standard, not to re-litigate the landmark's significance or future development.

The applicant, David Patzelt, presented his case, arguing that eight years had provided sufficient time for a preservation solution to emerge, yet no viable plan for reuse, relocation, or rehabilitation had been found. He stated that the cost of restoration far exceeds the structure's value and that its presence is a primary obstacle to the redevelopment of the larger 1.4-acre site, which has been identified in City planning documents as a key opportunity parcel. He concluded that demolition would serve the best interest of the majority of the community.

During questioning, Commissioners focused on the applicant's assertion that no redevelopment could occur with the structure in place. Mr. Patzelt stated that structural engineering assessments determined the limestone walls could not support additional loads, making integration into a new project impossible. He confirmed that if the demolition request were denied, no redevelopment plans for the site would be submitted. Commissioners also questioned the relationship between the unpaid code violation fines and the demolition request, with City Attorney Ron Sandack clarifying that fine enforcement was a separate matter for the City Council.

The Commission then heard sworn testimony from the public. Speakers in favor of demolition described the property as an unsafe "eyesore" that hinders progress and creates a negative gateway impression. They argued for moving forward with redevelopment.

Speakers opposed to demolition challenged the notion of a community majority favoring demolition, emphasized the structure's historical and educational value, and argued that its deteriorated state was the result of owner neglect. They urged the Commission to seek collaborative solutions that incorporate the historic fabric into any future development.

Following public comment, a motion by Commissioner Phillips, seconded by Commissioner Tobler, to close the Public Hearing passed unanimously (7-0).

Ayes: Tobler, Jensen, McManus, Phillips, Riebe, Solomon, Zellmer

Nays: None

Motion Passed: 7-0

In their deliberations, Commissioners expressed that it was impossible to objectively determine the "majority interest of the community" based on the divided testimony. They noted a consistent lack of good-faith redevelopment proposals from the owner and a strong concern that approving demolition would reward a strategy of "demolition by neglect." The Commission reaffirmed its duty to preserve designated historic resources. Individual responses from the discussion are summarized as follows.

Commissioner Riebe: Commissioner Riebe notes that there haven't been any plans to incorporate the existing structure in a development plan. Having had foundation issues in his own primary residence dating to a similar period, he believes that a plan at some level is possible, and that approving demolition without a plan puts the Commission in a precarious situation. He doesn't think the Commission has seen what they need and can understand why this demolition has been denied in the past.

Commissioner Jensen: Commissioner Jensen is not convinced that the preservation of the landmark is not in the best interest of the majority of the community, and is unsure at this point how that could be measured. The rights of the property owner and the community don't have to compete, and, as everyone is part of the same community, she believes a solution can be found by working together.

Commissioner Zellmer: Commissioner Zellmer is also not convinced that demolition is in the best interest of the community and adds that as the Historic Preservation Commission, the charter is to examine historic structures and determine their value. It is difficult to gauge the interest of the majority of the community. Both sides have been heard, and beyond the site being an eye sore, which might be self-created, not enough has been heard towards demolition.

Commissioner McManus: Commissioner McManus doesn't feel that new information has been presented. The difference between this application and the last is that the property has sat longer, and any sway in public opinion is due to the continued site condition. The Commission exists to retain historic spaces, and she does not believe that the general consensus of the community has been gauged to be fully in the direction of changing the HPC's earlier denials, considering public comments in both directions.

Commissioner Tobler: Commissioner Tobler suggests a compromise such as incorporating a portion or all of the structure into a larger development. He is reluctant to approve demolition without plans and would like to see more options before approval.

Commissioner Solomon: Commissioner Solomon brings up the 2022 Landmark Boundary Amendment as a way the Commission has attempted working with the property owner,

and is disappointed that no plans have been proposed since then. He believes that the ultimate goal of the property owner is to allow the structure to decay and become a safety hazard which must be removed, which is not acting in the best interest of the partnership. The HPC has been upholding its bid to preserve the property and also to be a partner, while the property owner is wearing the will of the community down by leaving the structure as it is.

Commissioner Phillips: Commissioner Phillips agrees with Commissioner Solomon, and is not willing to reward past behavior with demolition. He believes that preservation and development together are what the HPC is looking for, and does not believe that anyone thinks there are no alternatives available for reuse which would benefit the community. It is very difficult to determine what the best interest of the community is. It may be that if an appeal is filed to City Council, they may be able to better determine that as elected officials rather than an advisory board, although past decisions by the HPC have been legitimized by City Council and the courts. Commissioner Phillips sees no reason to change the decision against demolition at this time.

Motion moved by Commissioner Jensen, seconded by Commissioner Tobler, to approve the application for demolition of the historic landmark at 4 East State Street.

Ayes: None

Nays: Tobler, Jensen, McManus, Phillips, Riebe, Solomon, Zellmer

Motion Failed: 0-7

5. Secretary's Report (*Staff Updates*)

Preservation Planner Emily Stood reported that three (3) building permit applications were approved administratively in November/December 2025:

- Two (2) were for like-for-like re-roofing projects.
 - One (1) was for a fence on the side and rear of a lot, which had very low visibility.
- All other ongoing projects were proceeding normally and would be updated in the new year. Staff wished the Commission happy holidays.

6. New Business

6a. From the Commission: Commissioner Phillips inquired about a sidewalk issue raised by a speaker during public testimony. Staff clarified that sidewalk gaps are part of an upcoming Comprehensive Plan update with a bike/pedestrian component, which will prioritize such improvements

6b. From the Public: Al Watts also provided an informational update regarding the City of Batavia's recent approval to demolish a 110-foot historic chimney (former Keystone Dairy), with demolition imminent.

7. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Commissioner Salomon, seconded by Commissioner Jensen. Motion carried unanimously by verbal assent. Meeting adjourned at 8:47 PM.