



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
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*HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION*

**Historic Preservation Commission**  
**Public Meeting for Somerville Main Post Office, Section 106**

The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) held a public meeting at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 6, 2014 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Conference Room at City Hall, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA.

*The Somerville Main Post Office was designated as a local historic district last summer. This means that exterior alterations, which are visible from public rights-of-way, must be reviewed by the HPC. The United States Postal Service (USPS) identified the City as a consulting party in the Section 106 process due to the sale of the building; therefore, the City submitted comments to the USPS regarding potential adverse effects. The Moffet mural, located in the lobby, is private property of the USPS. The USPS will restore the mural whether it is relocated or stays at the current location. If the mural is relocated, the intent is to continue to provide public access to view the mural.*

This meeting gathered comments from the public and the HPC to inform a comment letter regarding potential adverse effects with regard to the Section 106 process for the Somerville Main Post Office, located at 237 Washington Street. Three Aldermen were present as well as residents of the City, members of multiple local organizations and local media. Public comment at this meeting primarily addressed the future of the 1937 Moffet mural and a desire for continued access to view this valued artwork. Concern was voiced for the material quality of the lobby and vestibule, as well as the architecture of the historic structure. The following list outlines the items of concern raised by residents of the City and members of the public:

1. The public was fairly divided when discussing if the mural should be relocated, if relocation could provide more access. One resident voiced that minimum future access should be no less than the existing access, which is approximately 300 days per calendar year as the Post Office is open Monday – Friday and Saturday morning.
2. There was concern that removing the mural would devalue the historic structure. In addition, as the mural was created for this particular building and, more specifically, the west lobby wall, there was also concern that removing this feature eliminates both the historic and architectural context. Finding an appropriate new location may be more difficult when also considering the new location would need to provide an appropriate civic context.
3. The public recognizes that 'protective covenants' will be put in place and voiced concern over what entity would hold this covenant as well as who will be ultimately responsible for inappropriate changes, should they occur. Possibly a preservation restriction or easement would be more appropriate to ensure the architectural and finish quality of the interior remains unchanged.



4. The USPS has agreed to preserve the 1937 Moffet mural on the lobby wall. However, residents want clarification that preservation in this instance means the mural will be appropriately preserved in a manner that continues to allow access to view the artwork.
5. The future use of the structure was also a concern, as a new use will often alter the feeling and association of the structure.

The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) comments expressed similar concerns. While the HPC recognizes the exterior of the structure is within their jurisdiction, their primary concerns addressed the material and architectural quality of the lobby, vestibule and mailboxes as well as the best long-term location for the mural. The following list outlines their primary concerns:

1. The HPC was divided (2-2) with regard to relocating the mural, should relocation provide public access more consistent with the existing access granted by the Post Office use.
2. The HPC discussed the long-term future of the mural. Specifically, if the short-term future of the mural does not provide adequate public access, retaining the original location may be in the best interest of the mural. The public may be provided future access as the use of the building changes over time.
3. The HPC echoed resident concerns pertaining to the 'protective covenants' in that the HPC wants to ensure the intent and language of the covenants regarding preservation of those features that make this structure eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places is clear to the future owner as well as provides sufficient protection for these historic and high quality finishes.

The HPC assured the public that the letter would be available to the public and the meeting adjourned at approximately 8:30.