

PROPOSED ADDITION OF MODERN HOUSES
TO THE
LINCOLN HISTORIC DISTRICT

a joint project of the

Town of Lincoln Historic District Commission

and

Friends of Modern Architecture



CONTENTS

PROPOSED ADDITION OF MODERN HOUSES TO THE LINCOLN HISTORIC DISTRICT

TEN FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT ADDING MODERN HOUSES TO LINCOLN'S HISTORIC DISTRICT

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN LINCOLN OR DID YOU KNOW?

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE

LINCOLN, MASSACHUSETTS AND ITS DEFINING MODERN LEGACY

ANALYSIS OF HOUSE SALES IN THE LINCOLN HISTORIC DISTRICT

PROPOSED ADDITION OF MODERN HOUSES TO THE LINCOLN HISTORIC DISTRICT

Proposal

The Town of Lincoln Historic District Commission and the Friends of Modern Architecture (FoMA) are working closely with the owners of Modern houses who are interested in adding their houses to the Town's Historic District. We currently have at least 21 homeowners who would like to do so this year.

Background

Lincoln voted to adopt its Historic District By-law in accordance with the Massachusetts Historic Districts Act (M.G.L. Chapter 40C) on March 28, 1981. Through the By-law, the Historic District is "intended to preserve and protect as a permanent legacy the significant historical areas and distinctive architectural characteristics of the Town of Lincoln in their settings."

Lincoln's Historic District currently consists of 73 properties located in four areas of the Town:

- Lincoln Center – 62 properties
- Woods End, off of Baker Bridge Road – 5 properties
- Codman Estate and Farm – 4 properties
- Cory-Brown-Hunt Houses, Conant Road – 2 properties.

The Massachusetts Historic Districts Act provides for the expansion of the Historic District at the request of property owners and by the vote of the Lincoln Historic District Commission and then the Annual Town Meeting.

The HDC's Structure

The Lincoln Historic District Commission (HDC) applies the By-law to the District. The HDC has seven members, all residents of Lincoln, who are appointed by the Selectmen. Under the By-law, the HDC has members representing the Lincoln Historical Society, the Massachusetts State Association of Architects, Lincoln realtors, and Historic District residents, as well as two members representing the Lincoln Planning Board. The Selectmen also appoint two alternates. HDC members serve three-year terms which are renewable. The HDC meets once a month and provides public notice of its agenda for each meeting.

The HDC's Mandate

The Historic District By-law provides certain guidelines for buildings and structures located within the District. HDC members are responsible for approving requests for permanent exterior alterations in the District that are above grade and visible from a public way, and for new construction and demolitions. The By-law contains the criteria for the HDC's review of those requests, including the standards for its decisions, and the types of changes that are exempt or excluded from HDC review.

In determining the appropriateness of a proposed change, the HDC considers the proposal in relation to the historical and architectural significance of the subject building or structure and its site, as well as in relation to the historical and architectural significance of the buildings and structures in the surrounding area. The HDC can impose dimensional and set-back requirements in addition to those required by other applicable Town By-laws. The HDC may issue a certificate of non-applicability for ordinary maintenance and a certificate of hardship in certain instances when the refusal of a request would create a hardship for the applicant.

Basic Procedural Steps to Add Houses to the Historic District

1. Work closely with each homeowner who has expressed an interest in adding their Modern house to the district to ensure their understanding of the Historic District and to secure their final approval and permission to proceed.
2. Submit the proposal for adding Modern houses to the Historic District to the HDC for public review and approval, along with an explanatory statement, the homeowner permissions, and the property inventory forms.
3. Work closely with Town officials, members of the public, and the homeowners to develop a warrant article and obtain approval of the Town at Town Meeting by a two-thirds majority vote.

Frequently Asked Questions about Historic Districts

1. **Is there a precedent for adding individual properties to the Historic District?**
Yes. The Massachusetts Historic Districts Act provides that single buildings, structures, or properties may be included in a historic district. Lincoln's Historic District currently consists of non-contiguous sections.
2. **Is entry into the Historic District voluntary and subject to public review and vote?**
Yes. Adding a property to the existing Historic District is a voluntary choice by the homeowner. The process of adding a property is subject to a thoughtful and considered public review process, including public review before the HDC and culminating in a vote by the Town at Town Meeting requiring a two-thirds majority vote to pass.
3. **What are the specifics on restrictions in the Historic District?**
Proposed changes are evaluated in view of their appropriateness to the existing building or structure and its site, and surrounding buildings and structures. Excluded from consideration are: alterations not visible from a public way; interior alterations; items of ordinary exterior maintenance; paint color or roof material; storm doors and windows; screens; window air conditioners; lighting fixtures, antennae, and similar items; and small exterior signs.
4. **Is the Historic District an effective means of preserving houses?**
The Historic District By-law is an effective means of preserving important exterior features of houses and provides a good balance between the Town's interests and those of property owners.
5. **What impact has the Historic District had on the real estate values?**
Analysis of Town of Lincoln Assessors' data indicates that being within the Lincoln Historic District has no significant effect on the sales prices of single-family houses.
6. **Are there means of protecting specified interior features?**
Yes. At the initiation and request of homeowners, the Lincoln Historical Commission oversees Preservation Easements held by the Town that protect both interior and exterior features of two houses in Town.
7. **Is there a mechanism to obtain further review of a decision of the HDC?**
Yes. The applicant may ask for a review by "persons of competence and experience in such matters, designated by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council," or may appeal to the Middlesex Superior Court.
8. **Is there a mechanism for withdrawing a property from the Historic District?**
Yes. At the request of a property owner, and after review by the HDC and approval by vote of the Town at Town Meeting, a property can be withdrawn from the Historic District.

**TEN FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
ABOUT
ADDING MODERN HOUSES TO LINCOLN'S HISTORIC DISTRICT**

1. What are the community benefits from a Modern House overlay district?

Adding a Modern House Overlay to Lincoln's existing Historic District will help preserve and protect the distinctive characteristics of Modern buildings, structures, and neighborhoods while sustaining the treasured look and feel of the Town.

2. Is Lincoln's Modern heritage historically important?

The Modern Movement in Lincoln dates from 1937 until the 1970s and encompasses over 300 Modern houses as well civic, cultural, and commercial buildings. Lincoln became a vital incubator for Modern house design with distinguished individual examples as well as entire neighborhoods of Modern houses.

3. Why did Lincoln become a center for Modern architecture?

Lincoln's proximity to Cambridge, Walter Gropius's appointment to Harvard in 1937, and his house in Lincoln explain it to some degree. But less obvious is how Lincoln's long held values and commitment to community corresponded to those of the Modern Movement.

4. Were most of Lincoln's Modern Houses built after World War II?

The great majority were built after the war, but fourteen Modern houses were built in Lincoln pre-war between 1937 and 1942, an unprecedented and surprising number, particularly in a small New England community.

5. Who designed Lincoln's pre-war houses?

They were designed by both international and American architects, including: Harvard professors Walter Gropius (from Germany), Marcel Breuer (from Hungary), Walter Bogner (son of Austrian immigrants), and G. Holmes Perkins; Harvard graduates Henry Hoover, Carl Koch, and Constantin Pertzoff (from Russia); and New England natives J. Quincy Adams (Columbia University) and Cyrus Murphy (Boston Architectural College). Saville Davis (Editor, Christian Science Monitor) designed his own house.

6. Were the pre-war houses a specific Modern style...white cubes with flat roofs?

Each house demonstrates the use of Modern principles. Modernism was not a specific style, but rather an *idea*. Reflecting modern times, mass-produced materials and scientific and engineering innovations were applied in efforts to improve living and working conditions, providing fresh air and light in efficient, elevating, and affordable designs.

7. How are the early post-war houses best characterized and understood?

In the immediate years after World War II, during a period of scarce money and supply of building materials, Modern houses were a sound economic choice. Efficient house designs provided open floor plans and used affordable materials like cinder and concrete block, recycled brick, surplus military materials such as aluminum and plywood, and other experimental materials. To save money or inspired by the creative spirit of the era, some technically inclined homeowners, many from MIT, designed their own houses while other houses were factory manufactured and assembled on site.

8. How were the later post-war houses different?

By the 1960s and 1970s, improved economic conditions and increasing familiarity with Modern design instilled greater confidence in architects and clients, and more freedom was taken with Modern principles. Modern design is meant to adapt to the needs and circumstances of homeowners, and it has proven to be flexible as needs change, while remaining true to its core ideas.

9. Are Modern houses in Lincoln clustered in neighborhoods?

There are several Modern neighborhoods throughout the Town including Woods End Road, the first Modern neighborhood and already part of the Town's Historic District. Other Modern neighborhoods include Old Concord Road, Brown's Wood, Twin Pond Lane, Tabor Hill, Woodcock Lane, Rockwood Lane, Stonehedge Road, and Hiddenwood Path.

10. Has Lincoln's culture been influenced by Lincoln's Modern era heritage?

The Modern Movement exalted community and Modernism in Lincoln was part of the larger community involvement of Lincoln's citizens that continues today. This is seen in Lincoln's democratic self-governing spirit, support of low to moderate income housing, commitment to landscape design and town planning, and nationally recognized land conservation program that provides connecting trails throughout the Town. Some of Lincoln's Modernists were its earliest conservation leaders including J. Quincy Adams, who served as Chairman of the Town's Conservation Commission for almost thirty years, and William Preston and Constantin Pertzoff who served on the Planning Board and as trustees of the Lincoln Land Conservation Trust. Rather than exploiting land for denser development Modernists developed model Modern neighborhoods featuring quality built moderately priced houses on larger than required lots, allowing the land to dominate. They also gave generously to Lincoln's conservation efforts. Artistic interests were supported through the deCordova Museum, which sponsored art exhibitions and offered studio classes to the community and aspiring artists.

**INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN LINCOLN
OR
DID YOU KNOW?**

- Houses built more than 50 years ago are now considered historic; the Modern house era in Lincoln began in 1937 and lasted until the 1970s.
- There are approximately 300 houses in Lincoln that fit the criteria of Modernism.
- Characteristics of the Modern house can include simplicity of form, open floor plan, larger windows that enhance the connection to the land, efficient use of space and materials, and the use of innovative materials such as plate glass, linoleum, concrete, and cinder block.
- Unique to Lincoln are the number of modest Modern houses built on large tracts of land.
- Beginning in 2007, FoMA has been surveying Lincoln's Modern houses. This work forms part of the Massachusetts Historical Commission's Inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and was funded by the Massachusetts Community Preservation Act and the Codman Trust. Descriptions of almost 164 buildings have been completed to date and have been filed with the State.
- Copies of the completed survey forms are available in the Lincoln Library, Lincoln Town Offices, and online by searching the Massachusetts Historical Commission's database at <http://mhc-macris.net>, or by selecting the property on the Town of Lincoln GIS map at <https://www.axisgis.com/LincolnMA> and clicking on the link [MA Historical Commission Form](#).
- Lincoln's collection of Modern architecture was influenced by regional needs and materials and inspired by emerging Modern architecture including Bauhaus, Scandinavian and California Modern architecture, and Frank Lloyd Wright.
- Modern architects who built houses for themselves and their families in Lincoln include Lawrence Anderson, Walter Bogner, Marcel Breuer, Earl Flansburgh, Walter Gropius, Henry Hoover, Thomas McNulty, Cyrus Murphy, Constantin Pertzoff, Frances Quarton, Lucy Rapperport, and Mary Otis Stevens. All of these houses (with the exception of the McNulty and Quarton houses) are extant and are lived in today.
- Other prominent Modern architects who designed houses in Lincoln include J. Quincy Adams, Huson Jackson, Carl Koch, G. Holmes Perkins, Eleanor Raymond, and Hugh Stubbins.
- Brown's Wood, Hiddenwood Path, Old Concord Road, Rockwood Lane, Stonehedge Road, Tabor Hill Road, Twin Pond Lane, Woodcock Lane, and Woods End Road were all originally designed as predominantly Modern neighborhoods.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE

Modern architecture emerged from immense social, cultural, and technological changes on both sides of the Atlantic in late 19th and early 20th century. Developed by visionaries in creative epicenters, such as Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus in Germany, and Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright in Chicago, the movement produced a wide range of new design approaches for the built environment.

One common goal was to advance social ideals and to impact society in a positive manner through architecture that was "of its time." Embracing democratic goals, leaders in the movement aspired to make good design available to all through the economic use of mass-produced building systems and materials assembled into simple, modest forms. For example, many excellent residential examples are characterized by large expanses of plate glass which enable expansive visual connections to the outdoors from modest interior spaces.

Designs were based on readily available, manufactured structural components, resulting in a direct, honest expression of their nature in the overall building massing and details. Applied ornament was eschewed, and dynamic, abstract compositions featuring the inherent properties of various materials became fundamental to design.

The integration of these social ideals and emerging construction materials resulted in many varied examples of Modern architecture, all satisfying the basic qualities of well sited, scaled and proportioned buildings with uplifting light-filled spaces, meeting inhabitants' requirements for quiet, privacy, and personal activities.

For purposes of FoMA's proposed addition of Modern houses to the Lincoln Historic District, characteristics of Modern Architecture are summarized below.

1. The design is site specific, with an emphasis on optimum views, integration of interior and exterior spaces, and the inclusion of natural daylight.
2. The building is of modest and human scale, and attentive to proportions.
3. Use of modern, readily available, manufactured components and systems in construction to realize economic benefits of mass production.
4. Materials and components carefully selected and composed to achieve an economy of means.
5. The plan is not confined by customs of traditional space definition, and spaces can flow into one another.
6. There is a direct and honest expression of the building's structure and the characteristics of the materials used.
7. Absence of historical architectural references (representation) in design compositions and components. Most Modern residences are more "abstract" than "representational."
8. The plan is based on functional program requirements and specific occupant needs.

LINCOLN, MASSACHUSETTS AND ITS DEFINING MODERN LEGACY

With roots dating back to 1937, Lincoln's significant Modern era can now be considered an historic period. The Friends of Modern Architecture/Lincoln would like the Town of Lincoln to consider adding representative, non-contiguous Modern houses to the Lincoln Historic District.

Distinguished as one of America's most prominent small communities for Modern architecture, Lincoln became an incubator for Modern design from 1937 when its first Modern houses appeared, until the 1970s.⁽¹⁾ A period marked by unusual vitality, the spirit of Modernism was demonstrated through its architecture seen in over 300 Modern houses, in unique model suburban neighborhoods, in Town buildings – including schools, civic buildings, and cultural buildings – in a low-moderate income housing complex, in landscape design, and in town planning practices including a nationally recognized conservation program. Individual artistic interests were supported through the Town's community-centered contemporary art museum, the deCordova, and its public arts programs.

Modernism's emphasis on architecture that would enhance daily life and human interaction was to be achieved by low-maintenance houses designed to meet each family member's personal needs, while freeing time for life-enriching activities. It fostered a frame of mind that was community-oriented, generating community participation on Town boards and a number of Town-run organizations. It included thoughtful town planning leading to conservation efforts to protect open land for contemplation and outdoor activities, and a community-centered art museum to support creative endeavors, considered central to enhancing and enriching life.

Lincoln's unprecedented number of pre-war Modern houses is especially surprising for a small, New England community signaling Modernism's relevance and reach. Fourteen houses built before World War II reveal a story of social change and awareness of architecture's role in modern times, and as such, are of particular historical importance.

Houses built between 1937 and 1942, were designed by both international as well as local architects including: Walter Gropius from Germany; Marcel Breuer of Hungary; Russian émigré Constantin Pertzoff; Harvard professor Walter Bogner, the son of Austrian immigrants; Harvard professor G. Holmes Perkins, a New England native along with J. Quincy Adams and Cyrus Murphy; as well as mid-westerners, Harvard educated architects Carl Koch and Henry B. Hoover whose 1936-1937 residence was built a year before Walter Gropius's 1938 house, and who designed over fifty Modern houses in the region.

Each house demonstrates the use of Modern principles. Modernism was not a specific style, but rather an idea. Reflective of modern times, mass-produced materials and scientific and engineering innovations were applied in efforts to improve living and working conditions, providing fresh air and light in efficient, uplifting, yet affordable designs.

Though Modern design was embraced in America during the Great Depression, it was also relevant for many returning veterans after the war. They discovered that Modern houses were a sound economic choice in a period of scarce money and material supply. Employing an economy of means, efficient house designs were often built with affordable materials such as redwood (less expensive at the time), cinder or concrete block, recycled brick, surplus military materials such as aluminum or plywood, or other experimental materials. To save even more money (and perhaps inspired by the prevailing aura of creative spirit), some houses were designed by technically inclined homeowners, while others were factory manufactured and assembled on site. These houses found their north star in their functionality, eschewing efforts

to appear “chicly Modern.” Their sometimes “ugly duckling” appearance belies their depth of thought. Rather than using superfluous decorative features, their charm is seen in their honesty of expression of structure and purpose. Small spaces feel larger due to open floor plans and the use of large plate glass windows open to nature, and they were easy to maintain.

By the 1960s and the early 1970s, improved economic conditions and familiarity with Modern design instilled greater confidence and more freedoms taken with Modern principles. Not meant to be static, Modern design adapts and develops in a relevant manner. In the “late Modern” houses, sometimes more expensive building materials were used instead of the practical, affordable, mass-produced materials promoted by early Modernism. Decisions related to scale and greater amenities affected priorities in design.

The Town’s unique Modern heritage can be seen in the workings of the community where its democratic mission impacted town planning most notably in the development of its zoning bylaws and planning efforts, including its nationally recognized conservation ethos. Town leadership was dedicated to acquiring and maintaining conservation land with connecting trails throughout the Town for public use. Some of Lincoln’s Modernists were conservation leaders including architect J. Quincy Adams, who served as chairman of the Lincoln Conservation Commission for almost thirty years; conservationists Jean and William Preston; and Constantin Pertzoff who served on the Lincoln Land Trust and the Planning Board. Rather than exploiting their privately held land with denser development, Adams, Preston, and Pertzoff developed model neighborhoods. Adams began developing Old Concord Road in the 1940s, Preston and Pertzoff worked together to develop Woodcock Lane in the 1950s, and Pertzoff developed Twin Pond Lane in the 1960s. Each featured quality built moderately priced Modern houses on larger than required lots, allowing the land to dominate while at the same time conserving land.

Other unique Modern neighborhoods include a Utopian MIT “Modern” neighborhood, Brown’s Wood, conceived and organized before the 1955 two-acre zoning by-law went into effect and two Deck house neighborhoods, Stonehedge Road and Hiddenwood Path, consisting of affordable modular houses sensitively sited within natural settings. Ann Gras, Brown’s Wood founder, along with her husband, Ranulf Gras, was ingenious in carving as many lots as possible into wooded, ledge-filled natural settings to reduce the cost of the lots. Town selectmen encouraged her to complete the plan before two acre zoning went into effect because of the sensitive manner in which her work had been done.

While Lincoln resident Walter Gropius was at Harvard, another Lincoln resident, Lawrence B. Anderson, was at the forefront shaping changes at MIT’s School of Architecture and Planning (his tenure lasting from 1933-1970). Anderson was instrumental in forging innovative programs bringing economic, scientific, and engineering disciplines to architectural training. During the war, he encouraged the highly respected California Bay architect William Wurster (who had come to Harvard to study city planning during Gropius’s tenure) to serve as dean of MIT’s School of Architecture. Wurster’s non-ideological, regional approach to Modernism can be seen in many simple, wooden houses throughout Lincoln, especially in Lincoln’s Brown’s Wood. Anderson and Wurster brought the great Finnish architect Alvar Aalto to MIT as a visiting lecturer and formed an alliance with the Danish Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, each imparting strong influences on MIT students and faculty during this fruitful period. The influences that were brought to bear on architecture education at Harvard and MIT over this thirty-year period as Modernism was examined and advanced at both schools are saliently reflected in Lincoln’s important collection of Modern houses.

Gropius’s arrival to Harvard revitalized architectural education at Harvard and MIT, reincarnating the Modern Movement, which had been arrested by fascism in the years leading up to World War II, stimulating regional American movements. With many residents having

close associations to Harvard and MIT, Lincoln became a microcosm for European Modernism's ideals making it the unique town it is today.

One of the twentieth century's most vital social movements, the European Modern Movement was based on the philosophical idea that architecture has a certain and unquestionable affect upon society. In Lincoln, this Utopian driver was most likely not on most homeowners' minds, yet the force of a Utopian idea underlies the Movement's survival from Europe to America, spawning widespread interest and enthusiasm. During this short-lived and idealistic period, the region's rich heritage of Modern architecture reflects an extraordinary period in America when academia opened its doors to Modern leaders broadening and infusing a social component into the field of architectural education. Its ideals influenced Lincoln's unique Modern legacy seen in the workings of the community and its exceptional range of Modern architecture – and, in its relationship to the landscape, a thoughtful, integrated Modernist approach exemplified by the siting of simple architectural forms within natural settings.⁽²⁾ Instead of dominating, Modern houses blend in scale with their topography and purpose.

While other towns might possess important houses or neighborhoods, Lincoln embraced a way of life. Its inventory has a breadth not found in any other town in New England, or perhaps the country. Lincoln is where the internationally distinguished Bauhaus masters Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer built their houses, as did Harvard and MIT professors and their associates, and students and acolytes who together designed over 300 Modern residential, civic, commercial, and educational buildings who "saw Modernism as a force for bringing scientific and economic progress and social justice to the world."⁽³⁾

By recognizing the Town's Modern architecture in the Lincoln Historic District, we provide an opportunity for future generations to understand and remember Modernism's essential social and design ideals and their lasting effects in the shaping of this community.

Material from *Plain Living, High Thinking* by Dana Robbat, May 14, 2017.

Footnotes:

1. MacLean, John C. "Hollingsworth house, historical background." Draft. 26 October, 2008.
2. Idem.
3. Fixler, David. Introduction, "Middlesex County House Tour: Saturday, October 10, 2015.

ANALYSIS OF HOUSE SALES IN THE LINCOLN HISTORIC DISTRICT

Summary

Analysis of Town of Lincoln Assessors' data indicates that being within the Lincoln Historic District has no significant effect on the sales prices of single-family houses.

For this reason, the Assessors do not consider whether a property is in the Historic District as an attribute for determining assessments.

The attribute the Assessors use to account for differences in land values due to location is called Site Desirability. Site Desirability applies to the land value of a property. It determines the assessed value per square foot of the first 80,000 square feet of the property. Examining the map of Site Desirability shows that the Site Desirability of Historic District properties is consistent with properties outside the Historic District. For example, the properties in the Woods End Historic District on Woods End Road have the same Site Desirability as the properties on Granville Road which is adjacent to it.

For analysis of the consistency of assessments, the Assessors use the Assessment to Sale Ratio. An analysis of the Assessment to Sale Ratios for properties within the Town of Lincoln Historic District shows that they are not different from those of the Town as a whole.

Analysis Details

This analysis looked at the Assessment to Sale Ratios of houses in the Historic District compared to those of the Town as a whole.

In the five years from 2012 through 2016, there were nine sales of single-family houses in the Lincoln Historic District out of a total of 57. During this same time period the number of sales of single-family houses for the entire town was 226 out of a total of 1,522.

The mean Assessment to Sale Ratio for the nine properties in the Historic District was three per cent higher than the mean Assessment to Sale Ratio for the whole town. In other words, the mean sales price relative to the assessment for the properties in the Historic District was three per cent lower than for the town as a whole. However, the standard deviation of the Assessment to Sale Ratio for all single-family sales was 11 per cent, so this difference is well within the expected variation of values. It is also quite clear from the data that the houses in the historic district which sold below their assessed value were those that required significant improvements.

FY2017 Site Desirability

