

Approved 6/28/10

## Minutes of the Avon Hill Neighborhood Conservation District

May 24, 2010 - 5:30 P.M. - 831 Massachusetts Ave., Basement Conference Room

Members Present: Theresa Hamacher, *Chair*; Art Bardige, *Vice Chair*; Catherine Henn, Robert Crocker, *Members*; Heli Meltsner, Constantin von Wentzel, *Alternates*

Staff: Sarah Burks

Members of the Public: see attached sign in sheet

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With a quorum present, Ms. Hamacher called the meeting to order at 6:35 P.M. She made introductions and reviewed the commission's procedures. She designated both alternates to vote in turn, beginning with Mr. von Wentzel.

### Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

**AH-346: 10 Humboldt St., by Jeffrey A. Frankel.** Install two skylights on small roof on north side of house, behind front door portico.

Mr. Burks reported that she had received a request from the applicant to withdraw the application without prejudice.

Mr. Bardige moved to approve the request. Mr. von Wentzel seconded the motion, which passed 5-0 with Mr. von Wentzel voting as alternate.

**AH-345: 27 Agassiz St., by Streeter/Tellier.** Extend rear deck; alter select windows at rear and at basement level; add new rear door.

Ms. Burks showed photographs of the house from Agassiz and Lancaster streets. She described the 1890 Queen Anne house and pointed out the affected features that were visible from a public way.

Rebecca Street, an owner, described the alterations proposed in her application, including extending the rear deck, constructing a 7' pergola on top of the 2'4" deck, replacement the basement windows along the driveway with glass block, and a group of windows and adding a door on the rear elevation. She described the materials for the deck and pergola as mahogany, except where the structure met the ground, which would be a non-wood material.

There were no questions of fact from members of the public.

Mr. Bardige asked why Ms. Streeter had selected glass block for the basement windows.

Ms. Streeter replied that she preferred the glass block for increased security, bars being difficult to install because of the slate foundation.

Ms. Meltsner commented that glass block was a material not developed until well after the construction of the house. She noted that other modern features were common to see on nineteenth century homes in the neighborhood such as decks but indicated that the Commission would like to see balance between new and old and that the essential character of the house and district should not be diminished by later alterations.

Michael Bentley, the abutter of 33 Agassiz Street, commented that the pergola as drawn appeared to be closer to 8' high and would be approximately as high as the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the house. He said the pergola was not allowed under Cambridge bylaws. He said the rule was a 6' fence was allowed on the property line. The proposed pergola on top of the deck would be 10' high along the property line. He noted that trees along the property line had been cut down while he and his wife were out of town. He objected to the pergola, which he considered akin to a fence, because it was higher than 6'.

Ms. Meltsner noted that the pergola was not as dense a structure as a typical fence.

Ms. Hamacher said the pergola would be visible from the public way and over 6'. It would require Commission review and approval.

Ms. Burks agreed that the pergola was not exempt from Commission review but indicated that the guidelines did not prevent such a structure from being approved by the Commission. She said the building code required a building permit for fences over 6' high. She said she did not know how pergolas were addressed in the zoning code but that the Inspectional Services Department required the rafters on top to be a minimum distance apart so that the structure would not count as a roof and increase FAR.

Mr. Bardige asked about the existing fence between the two properties.

Ms. Streeter replied that the fence was on her property and predated her ownership.

Mr. Bentley concurred. It had been there a long time and was about 6' high.

Ms. Henn asked how the proposed height of the pergola was selected.

Ms. Streeter said she had chosen the height so that there would be head clearance under it for persons on the deck. The height from the deck to the top of the pergola would be 7'4".

Mr. Bentley said he objected to a manmade structure of that height between the two houses.

Ms. Hamacher closed the public comment period and asked for Commission deliberation.

Mr. Bardige recommended regular windows rather than glass block in the basement window openings.

Mr. von Wentzel concurred and offered that hurricane rated windows would be more resistant to being broken, since security was the primary reason the applicant mentioned for wanting glass block.

Ms. Hamacher said the glass block would be incongruous to the architecture and period of the house. She indicated wood exterior was the appropriate material for the windows.

Mr. Crocker proposed awning windows, hinged at the top.

Ms. Hamacher said the pergola would be set far from the street. She reviewed the general conservation standards and the district guidelines for fences, materials, and alterations.

Mr. von Wentzel commented that the guidelines aimed to balance the interests of homeowners with the goal of preserving the pedestrian enjoyment of the neighborhood.

Mr. Bardige and Mr. von Wentzel agreed that they did not consider the pergola to be a fence. It was very transparent, apart from the plants that would grow on it.

Ms. Hamacher noted that, other than the objection from the neighbor, the proposal seemed to be consistent with the guidelines reviewed.

Mr. Crocker noted that the placement of the pergola on the north side of the property was such that it would not shade the neighbor's property.

Mr. von Wentzel agreed, adding that it would be at least 16' away from the neighboring house.

Ms. Hamacher noted that it would be very transparent most of the year.

Mr. Bentley said it felt like an extension of the first floor wall.

Mr. von Wentzel acknowledged the point but said the pergola would be subordinate to the water table and therefore would read as smaller than the first floor wall of the house.

Mr. Bardige moved to approve a certificate of appropriateness for the application, for the work submitted, with the condition that wood windows be substituted for the concrete block in the basement window openings. The motion allowed for the owner to decide whether to include muntins on the basement windows or not, on the basis that either might have been used on a house of that period.

Mr. Crocker seconded the motion, which passed 5-0 with Ms. Meltsner voting as alternate.

### Minutes

Ms. Meltsner moved to approve the April minutes. Mr. Bardige seconded, and the motion passed 5-0 with Ms. Meltsner voting as alternate.

Mr. Bardige moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. von Wentzel seconded, and the motion passed 5-0 with Mr. von Wentzel voting as alternate.

The meeting adjourned at 6:35 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks  
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public that Signed Attendance Sheet  
May 24, 2010**

Rebecca Streeter	27 Agassiz St
Colette Bentley	33 Agassiz St
Michael Bentley	33 Agassiz St