

Minutes of the Avon Hill Neighborhood Conservation District

Thursday, April 21, 2011 - 6:30 P.M. - 831 Massachusetts Ave., Basement Conference Room

Members Present: Art Bardige, *Vice Chair*; Robert Crocker, Catherine Henn, *Members*; Heli Meltsner, *Alternate*

Members Absent: Theresa Hamacher, *Chair*; Maryann Thompson, *Members*; Mark Golberg, Constantin von Wentzel, *Alternates*

Staff: Sarah Burks

Members of the Public: see attached sign in sheet

With a quorum present and in the absence of the chair, Vice Chair Art Bardige called the meeting to order at 6:39 P.M. He made introductions and described hearing procedures.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

AH-378 (Readvertised Hearing): 27 Raymond St., by Harvey C. Mansfield, Trustee.

Review work recently completed without a certificate including removal of 3 windows on the first floor of the façade and replacement with 4 aluminum-clad windows and a door; construct landing for new door. Review work completed in 2010 without a certificate including replacement of windows at second floor front and on other building elevations to match pre-existing configuration.

Sarah Burks described the 1925 house's (First Period) Colonial Revival design with a projecting second floor garrison and exposed beams on the façade. She described the existing conditions. She provided background on the architectural firm of Kilham, Hopkins & Greeley, which had designed the house. She showed a photo of a similar house by that firm which was in more original condition. She said the review criteria for the district required a binding review of the application by the Commission. She described the scope of the recent work commenced prior to Commission approval or building permit application: removal of first floor front windows and replacement with larger aluminum clad windows. The proposal also included a new door replacing the rightmost window, a landing, and paved terrace. She showed photographs from the public way indicating that the first floor windows and door were visible over the fence. Other windows had been installed the previous year, also without a permit or Commission review. She said that she was made aware of the work by the contractor, who came in for a building permit after the new windows were already installed, but before the job was completed. The pre-existing windows were wood one-over-one windows, which were probably not original but a later replacement sash. She said the original windows would have likely been six-over-six wood windows. She said the Commission should review the application for appropriateness and the fact that the work had already been largely completed was not relevant to determining its appropriateness.

Harvey Mansfield, an owner, said he bought the house in 1983 and had married Anna last fall. He described recent changes including moving the patio to the front and starting a lawn. Changes had been made inside. The old windows were loose and drafty. He said his contractor, R. L. Rogers, had a death in the family and was unable to attend. He described the interior layout with large open rooms. He said that Anna had a good idea for getting more light into the living room. The back of the house had been renovated before 1983 in the Cambridge Modern style. He said he had enlarged the house on the side toward the Bagalays house in the 1980s,

which had required a variance. He said the windows had been selected at J. & C. Adams, where they didn't mention the district review process. He had not been aware that the window casings were at issue. The attention to the design had been directed to the inside. He said the dogwood and maple trees would obscure the view from the street during the summer.

Mr. Bardige noted that the contractor should have applied for a building permit before work began, which would have alerted the Historical Commission staff to the job.

Ms. Burks agreed, saying that replacement windows were not exempt from needing a building permit.

Robert Crocker stated that it was not the responsibility of the window distributor to advise about regulatory requirements.

Heli Meltsner agreed, adding that it was the owners' responsibility to apply for the proper permits. She asked when the bay window on the second floor had been installed.

Mr. Mansfield answered that it had been added before he bought the house. The windows had, however, been replaced last year.

Mr. Bardige asked what kind of casings and trim the first floor windows had before they were removed.

Anna Schmidt, Mr. Mansfield's wife, said the casings and trim matched the existing on the second floor. The other windows in the house had been replaced in 2009 with aluminum clad one-over-one double hung windows. Only the first floor front windows remained. She questioned why the grandest room in the house had such small windows. It was very dark.

Ms. Meltsner explained that the revival style house was mimicking the small windows of First Period American houses.

Ms. Burks asked the applicants to describe the proposed finished conditions.

Ms. Schmidt described a small landing and a couple of stone steps down to the front patio. The walls around the windows and door would be shingled to match the existing.

Mr. Bardige asked for public comment.

Judy Bagalay, of 15 Raymond Street, read and submitted a written statement in which she welcomed her new neighbor, Anna Schmidt, and urged the Commission to approve the application. She said it was unfortunate that the contractor did not pull the permit until the work was almost finished, but it would be very costly and onerous to change the windows now. She asked the Commission to be homeowner friendly by approving the project.

Ms. Burks noted two other letters of support received into the record from Laurel and David Lhowe of 24 Bates Street and from Morton and Phyllis Keller of 29 Raymond Street.

Michael Rabieh, of 23 Vincent Street, noted that the changes were on the first floor and normally the gate at the 6' high fence was closed so you don't see the first floor.

Mr. Bardige reviewed the General Conservation Standards and guidelines for alterations and materials.

Catherine Henn said that if the owners had applied before the work was begun, the Commission would have certainly encouraged them to use wood replacement windows. She said she was not as concerned about the change in the size of the windows because it was not a high style house, architecturally.

Mr. Crocker agreed. He noted that much of the first floor was obscured from view due to the fence and landscaping. He was concerned that this not be an example that would encourage people to think it was okay to do work without a permit.

Ms. Meltsner said she had the same concern. Other people would expect similar results. She said one goal of the district was to retain architectural integrity of the buildings. This house did have some integrity to its original design. The shared public vista and shared appreciation of the neighborhood was what they were here for. It was important to maintain stewardship of the character of the neighborhood. She suggested there were other ways of getting more light into the room such as adding more windows on the sides or back of the house. The goals of the district did not provide much reason to find the work appropriate. The First Period style had an emphasis on small windows, organic materials, and few doors. The changes to the façade were quite radical with the mostly glass first floor wall.

Mr. Mansfield said it was just an ordinary Garrison Colonial Revival house with a bay window.

Mr. Bardige said the alterations were not appropriate to the house. The Commission could also consider whether there was a hardship to the owners. The result of the alterations was a hodgepodge of modern on the first floor and some First Period Colonial Revival detailing on the second floor. He said he would almost advocate going all the way with the design and making the house more cohesively modern in design. The house had been altered before with the inappropriate bay window and replacement windows. Either it should go back to the previous condition or a more cohesive modern design should be developed so that it wasn't such a mix.

In answer to Mr. Mansfield, Mr. Crocker offered a real estate perspective and said the larger windows and door would probably appeal to a potential buyer.

Ms. Henn said she was less of a purist. The existing high fence, which did not achieve the goals of the district, was grandfathered and out of the Commission's review.

Mr. Bardige said he was always willing to look for a compromise solution and the Commission did not want to hurt the homeowners, but had no reason for being if it did not uphold the procedures of the district. He said he would like to protect the neighborhood from bad contractors. He noted that the Bagalays had been through many Commission hearings, of which Mr. Mansfield was aware, so he had to accept some of the blame for not applying for approval.

Ms. Meltsner said the owners had the option of requesting a continuance so that they could consult a design professional about designing something that would be appropriate and would

provide the desired addition light to the interior spaces. She suggested either a modern design or a modified First Period design.

Mr. Crocker agreed that an architect might be able to help.

Mr. Bardige said he would favor a more cohesive design. There was no exterior elevation provided in the application but the existing conditions were half one style and half another. The new single light windows were different from the double hung windows in the rest of the house.

Ms. Burks commented on the procedural aspect of the case. The Commission could only respond to an application by determining if the proposed changes were appropriate or else incongruous. The Commission could not require that other alterations, not applied for, be made to the house. She said the Commission seemed to be encouraging the applicants on ways in which they could improve their application and make a case for the appropriateness of the new windows and door by designing a more cohesive design. The applicants could request a vote on the application now or request a continuance.

Ms. Schmidt said she would welcome the input of an architect in designing an alternative to the small double hung windows on the second floor.

Mr. Mansfield asked if the aluminum material was problematic or just the size of the new windows.

Ms. Burks said the aluminum cladding was incongruous to the First Period Colonial Revival style .

Ms. Henn noted that several of the Commission members had indicated that they would be okay with a more modern, non-historical direction for the design.

Mr. Bardige noted that it was a risk and he could not promise approval of a modern design, but it did not seem to be the sense of the meeting that the existing application would be approved.

Mr. Mansfield asked for a continuance to the September 26 or October 24 meeting of the Commission because of their plans for an extended absence from Cambridge over the summer months.

Ms. Henn moved to grant the requested continuance.

Mr. Crocker seconded the motion, which passed in a 4-0 vote.

Ms. Henn moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Crocker seconded, and the motion passed 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 7:45 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public that Signed Attendance Sheet
April 21, 2011**

Judy Bagalay	15 Raymond St
Anna Schmidt	27 Raymond St
Harvey Mansfield	27 Raymond St
Michael Rabieh	23 Vincent St

Addresses are in Cambridge, unless otherwise specified.