

## Minutes of the Avon Hill Neighborhood Conservation District

Monday, September 22, 2014 - 5:30 PM - 831 Massachusetts Ave., Basement Conference Rm.

Commissioners Present: Constantin von Wentzel, *Chair*; Mark Golberg, *Vice Chair*; Art Bardige, Catherine Henn, Heli Meltsner, *Members*; John Sanzone, *Alternates*

Commissioners Absent: Robert Crocker, *Member*; Theresa Hamacher, *Alternate*

Staff Present: Sarah Burks

Members of the Public: see attached sign-in sheet

---

With a quorum present, Mr. von Wentzel called the meeting to order at 5:33 P.M. He made introductions and described hearing procedures. He designated alternate member John Sanzone to vote on all matters.

### Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

**AH-491: 37 Lancaster St., by John & Elizabeth McQuillan.** Reconstruct and alter footprint and materials of driveway; construct granite curbing and fence along Lancaster Street and Washington Avenue.

Ms. Burks showed images of the property and reviewed the background of the house renovation project, which had begun in 2012. She described the architecture of the house, carriage house, and condition of the existing circular driveway.

Bhupesh Patel, the owner's representative, described the work that had already been completed in phases one and two of the project including kitchen remodeling, water management on the site, second floor bathroom remodeling, exterior repairs, and a new driveway on the north side of the house. He provided further detail about the challenges of managing water on site because of the heavy clay below the top soil. When the new driveway was constructed, clay had been excavated from that area and grading done to direct the water away from the house and around to the front yard. He explained that in the next phase of the project, water would have to be likewise directed around the carriage house to the front. The giant beech tree at the front corner of the carriage house had been fenced off and protected during construction.

He went on to explain that an old willow tree in the circle inside the driveway had died about 30 years ago and a Norway maple tree had replaced it. That Norway maple had recently been removed and the re-grading of the driveway begun. He described the proposed design for the reconstruction of the driveway, with a square center courtyard and new tree. He described the CULTEC water containment boxes and showed a section drawing to elaborate. He explained that a low rock wall at the south and west sides of the property was proposed to help retain the slope between the CULTEC boxes and the sidewalk.

Mr. Patel described the options for the walkway to the front door from the southwest corner of the lot and from the driveway. It would be re-located from Washington Avenue so that it would no longer serve as a cut through for pedestrians trying to avoid the corner along the public sidewalk. He said the exact location would depend on the location of the CULTEC boxes. The height of the wall would vary along the side, following the grade, but would be about 10" to 24". He indicated that the other option, shown in the application, was a low granite curb with a wood fence.

Ms. Henn asked about the height of the fence and Ms. Meltsner asked about the type of stone proposed and whether the stone wall would include a cap. Mr. Patel answered that the fence would be 3' high and the type of stone being considered was the same used at the mechanical pit (two types of granite that resemble the coloring of the Roxbury Puddingstone used in the

house's foundation). No cap was proposed for the wall. He asked for the Commission's feedback on the wall and fence options so that he could report back to the owners.

Mr. von Wentzel directed that the Commission would consider one aspect of the project at a time, starting with the driveway.

Ms. Meltsner asked about the proposed driveway materials. Mr. Patel described them as concrete with expansion joints and a stone edge. Jack Shea, of S + H Construction, added that the edge stone might be bluestone and the concrete might have an exposed aggregate such as pea stone.

Mr. von Wentzel clarified that the existing concrete driveway was to be replaced with new concrete, but enlarged in size to better accommodate a car's turning radius. He asked about the material in the tree pit/center court. Mr. Patel indicated that the center would consist of loose gravel.

Ms. Meltsner asked what type of tree would be planted there. Mr. Patel said it wasn't finalized but it would likely be a sugar maple, swamp maple, or other tree with a similar root system and that could endure the wet soil conditions. Ms. Meltsner commented that a lot of aspects of the job were not yet finalized, which would make it difficult for the commission to decide on the matter. She asked about the materials at the north driveway. Mr. Patel said that granite and stone dust had been used there. He added that the arborist had recommended against using a porous material north of the beech tree because it would not be beneficial for the beech to encourage its roots to move in a northerly direction.

The commission asked additional questions about the stone wall and fence designs. Ms. Henn noted that the house had a very horizontal orientation. She commented that if the fence was angled, it would distract from that horizontal emphasis.

John Henn, of 6 Walnut Avenue, asked if cars would park in the carriage house. Mr. Patel replied in the affirmative. Mr. Henn expressed admiration for the renovation in general and remarked that the carriage house should remain in use as a structure to house vehicles rather than be converted to residential use.

Ms. Henn indicated a preference for the stone wall design over that of the fence. She said she had no objections to the design of the driveway.

Mr. Bardige, who had arrived after the start of the hearing, commented that an exposed aggregate driveway surface was a hard detail to get right and often did not hold up well to plowing. Mr. Patel suggested brushed concrete. Mr. Bardige said he had no objection to re-locating the walkway and noted that the formality of the house could handle a formal granite curb and fence. He said it would be difficult to try to match the color and coursing of the puddingstone foundation.

Ms. Burks agreed that the puddingstone did not have to be replicated in the wall's materials. She said the property had never had a fence along its front sides. The original historic landscape treatment was very simple, allowing the focus to be on the house. The lawn just died into the sidewalk. The design of the fence was overly detailed and drew attention away from the buildings in an inappropriate way. The low masonry wall was a simpler approach and would serve a function in holding back the added topsoil necessary to cover the CULTEC boxes for the drainage system.

Mr. Golberg said both fence and wall had merits, but execution was key to success. He had no preference as to the walkway location but suggested that a former sign post at the sidewalk be removed.

Mr. Sanzone expressed his strong preference for the low stone wall over the lattice fence. The fence would look clearly new. A wall could be formal without being contemporary in design.

Ms. Meltsner also expressed preference for the wall. The fence would contrast too much with the house. She noted that final drawings, material samples, and a mock up would need to be approved before the wall was constructed.

Mr. von Wentzel said the English formal garden style of the fence did not seem appropriate to the style of the house. He did not object to the changes at the rear of the courtyard or the placement of the bluestone walkway.

Ms. Henn moved to approve the re-construction of the concrete driveway, as presented, including expansion joints, granite edge treatment, and changes to the footprint near the beech and at the rear, and for the loose gravel pit/court with granite edge and a granite driveway apron to match that of the north driveway apron, all subject to the staff approval of drawings for the driveway. Mr. Golberg seconded the motion, which passed 5-0 (with Mr. Sanzone voting and Mr. Bardige not voting).

Mr. von Wentzel moved to approve the relocation of the walkway with a new bluestone walkway, allowing the owner to determine the best placement of the walkway. Ms. Henn seconded the motion, which passed 5-0 (with Mr. Sanzone voting and Mr. Bardige not voting).

Mr. Bardige moved to approve a masonry wall of 18" thickness and varying height of 10" to 2' largely following the contour of the property and subject to final design, material samples, and mock up by the staff. Ms. Meltsner expressed interest in being present for the inspection of the material samples and mockup of the wall. She seconded the motion, which passed 5-0 (with Mr. Sanzone voting and Mr. Bardige not voting).

Mr. Bardige moved to adjourn. Mr. Golberg seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Burks  
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public  
Who Signed the Attendance Sheet  
September 22, 2014**

Jack Shea     26 New Street  
Ed Sullivan   26 New Street  
John Henn     6 Walnut Avenue

Addresses are in Cambridge unless otherwise specified.