

Approved 12/3/09

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

October 5, 2009 – Christ Church sidewalk, 0 Garden Street - 8:30 A.M.

Members present: Chair King; Vice Chair Irving; Ms. Tobin; Messrs. Bibbins and Crocker

Staff present: Mr. Sullivan, Ms. Burks

Public present: Rev. Joseph Robinson, Charlie Allen

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Property

Case 2404: 0 Garden St., by Christ Church Cambridge. Install sign.

Chair King called the meeting to order at 8:35 A.M. and explained that the purpose of the site visit was to view the signs at the front of the church for informational purposes prior to the continued public hearing at the Commission's November meeting.

Mr. Bibbins asked about the status of the two sandwich board signs that were located at the front of the property near the new sign. Mr. Sullivan answered that they were considered to be signs under the zoning code, though the Commission did not usually involve itself in portable furniture, portable play equipment, and the like.

Mr. King noted that the previous week there was also a large portable sign for a yard sale posted on the property. Rev. Robinson said the church's tenant, a school, had put up the yard sale sign.

Mr. King said the church building was a great advertisement for Christ Church. He noted that there were five other permanent signs and historic markers marking the church.

Rev. Robinson said he had hoped that the banner standard could eliminate the need for sandwich board signs, but not all the church groups had yet caught on.

Mr. Sullivan noted that the Commission held several hearings to review the application from the First Church Congregational for an L shaped metal framed 5' high sign with a bulletin board for short term signs and another panel for longer term signs. It was low, dark in color, and relatively unobtrusive.

Mr. Irving asked what information was contained in the white sign closer to the building. Rev. Robinson answered that it listed the staff schedule.

Mr. Bibbins reflected on the historic relationship of Christ Church and Cambridge Common. The view across the Common with its paths and view to the church were very important.

Mr. King recalled Professor Eliot's advice that the Commission should preserve historic vistas as the landscape of the district.

Rev. Robinson distributed a summary of goals and concerns of the church and his full statement from the previous hearing. He described the design considerations of keeping the banner standard away from the building and the granite historic marker. The banner standard would be installed less than 50 percent of the time. The church could get a bigger bang when it was not there all the time. It could be installed for less time. Some of the banners could be fabricated in house, thereby saving the church money.

Ms. Burks pointed out that both this banner standard and the recent banner at First Parish Unitarian were out of compliance as to size with the zoning code. The two churches were in a residential zone. She recommended that the church find out what would be allowed as-of-right by zoning or with a variance. She said she would check to see if the Longy banners had received zoning relief.

Mr. King noted that the Armenian Church annually put up a temporary sign advertising its rug sale.

Rev. Robinson said there should be a category of sign in between temporary and permanent.

Mr. Irving noted that the three banners served to announce temporary events, semi permanent schedules, and permanent messages.

Mr. Sullivan noted that the 12' x 3' three-sided frame could hold a total of 138 s.f. of signage, plus there was another 24 s.f. of sandwich board signage.

Rev. Robinson asked how much s.f. was on the Longy banners. Mr. Sullivan did not have the s.f. but said the Longy banners were against the building, not between the building and the street. The church's banner standard was taller than permitted under zoning.

Mr. King noted that each of the Certificates of Appropriateness that the Commission had granted were for signs that were found to be appropriate to the specific location. If approval were granted here, it would have to be appropriate to this location and not consider precedents of other signs elsewhere. The banner standard changes the character of the historic setting.

Dr. Solet asked about the Reverend's comments at the last hearing about freedom of expression. Mr. King said the Commission would not review content of signs, nor does a building's use matter.

Rev. Robinson said the colors would bring change and vitality to the site. The church was once marigold yellow per a painting.

Mr. Irving moved to adjourn. Mr. Bibbins seconded. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 9:05 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner