

Approved 10/8/09

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

September 10, 2009 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: Chair King; Vice Chair Irving; Dr. Solet; Ms. Tobin; Messrs. Bibbins, Crocker, Ferrara and Shirley

Staff present: Mr. Sullivan, Ms. Burks

Public present: See attached list.

Chair King called the meeting to order at 6:07 P.M. and introduced the commission and staff. He reviewed Commission procedures and designated the two alternates to vote in turn. He explained the consent agenda policy and procedures, and then reviewed the agenda.

Marilee Meyers of 10 Dana Street wished to be heard on Case 2408: 20 Mt. Auburn St., and Case 2412: 18 Mt. Auburn St., and these were held for discussion.

Dr. Solet moved to approve the following case per the consent agenda procedures. Mr. Ferrara seconded and the motion passed 7-0.

Case 2410: 3 Church St., by First Church in Cambridge. Install temporary banner.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 2404: 0 Garden St., by Christ Church Cambridge. Approve previously-installed sign.

Mr. Shirley recused himself because of a professional association with the applicants. He left the room.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the application. He reported that the church had installed a portable sign on a steel frame that had three faces, each 3'8" wide and 12' tall. The three faces of the sign together had 132 square feet of surface area. He read the temporary sign policy adopted by the Commission in 1967, which exempted signs of 15 square feet or less installed for one week or less for a charitable event. The Christ Church sign did not meet the description for an exempt sign. When the staff wrote to the church about the violation, the rector explained that he had been told by someone in the CHC office that only permanent signs needed to come before the Commission.

Mr. King asked about the proposed use of the sign and the frequency anticipated for its installation. He explained that the Commission would review the shape, color, size, texture, materials, etc. of the structure, but not the content.

Charlie Allen, a parishioner, offered to show examples of the panel designs that had been displayed on the sign. The sign served a vital church purpose and was sited and used in a manner consistent with the church's history; it met the church's needs of today. The church would celebrate its 250th anniversary in 2011 and it would return to the Commission for some other alterations before that. The sign was constructed in good faith that it was in compliance with the temporary sign policy, based on a miscommunication. The frame of the sign was aluminum and could be easily removed when not in use. The sign was positioned so as not to obscure the church.

Reverend Joseph Robinson, rector of Christ Church, said the slogans offered a peek into the vision of the church. Episcopalians didn't advertise, but the panels were meant to offer comfort to passersby. The structure was designed to be neutral in style, removable, and have little impact on the landscape. He had designed it himself in consultation with his architect friends. The panels were often original pieces of local art. The 12' height was just enough to be seen from a car over the head of a pedestrian. The three panels did not all display the same message.

A small leaflet box had been attached to the side of the sign. The sign was colorful, airy, moved with the breeze, was locally produced, not always present, and was placed thoughtfully in context with the building. He apologized for any misunderstanding. He asked the Commission to allow the church to keep it.

Mr. Irving asked how many days of the year it would be displayed.

Rev. Robinson replied that it would be up less than half the year. It had been reinstalled that day. He described the materials. The panels were made of plasticized canvas run through a large printer. The panels would change for different seasons and liturgical events.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked how the height was chosen. Did the church study other sizes that might be as effective without being so tall? Rev. Robinson replied that a sidewalk full of people would block the sign to those in cars. Ms. Meyer observed that a simpler text could be read from a car through the pedestrians.

Mr. King closed the public comment period.

Dr. Solet said that she had seen a sign about the economic crises last spring and been amused by it. The sign would be a bright spot. She didn't see it as a distraction from the church.

Mr. Bibbins observed that he had a long relationship and fondness for Christ Church, but he was troubled by the height of the sign; it didn't seem worthy of the church. It was not necessary to have a sign that could be read over the heads of pedestrians. Some modification might be necessary.

Mr. King said it was very important that the sign panels were flexible and obviously temporary. He thought the sign was akin to the banners displayed on light poles.

Mr. Ferrara asked if the Commission had approved other signs that didn't meet the policy. Mr. King mentioned the banners at the Longy School of Music.

Mr. Sullivan noted that the sign policy was a rule, not a guideline, and operated by exempting signs smaller than 15 square feet installed for less than a week. Other sizes of signs, or those that would be installed for longer than a week, were required to receive a Certificate of Appropriateness – just as the First Parish had in the case on the consent agenda. There were five churches on the Common alone, and four more elsewhere in the Historic District, so the Commission would need a good reason to make a finding that was contrary to the policy. The sign in question had almost nine times the square footage of an exempted sign and would be installed for half the year – a radical departure from the original goals of the Commission in establishing a temporary sign exemption policy. He added that the zoning code limited non-commercial signs to only ten square feet.

Mr. Irving said the sign could hardly be considered temporary if it were up for half the year. Nine other churches could look to it as a precedent.

Mr. Allen admitted the sign was a radical departure and couldn't be considered temporary, but it had a well-conceived purpose and would help the congregation be a good steward of the historic church.

Rev. Robinson admitted that the structure wasn't a temporary sign under the rules, but said it wasn't a permanent sign because it would change from time to time. The Commission didn't have a regulation to apply to this type of sign. The structure was a standard to hold the panels, but not a sign itself. Mr. Sullivan said that it was clearly a structure within the jurisdiction of the CHC.

Mr. King agreed that the sign was on the tall side; the pedestrian should be considered the audience, not the driver. The operative criteria were appropriateness and hardship. He was impressed by comments that the church was trying to be welcoming in an urban setting.

Dr. Solet asked if the sign detracted from the church. It was common for pedestrians to walk by and not notice the building. The sign would draw attention to the church.

Mr. Irving responded that the church itself draws attention, and asked about the banners at the Longy School. Mr. Sullivan replied that the Commission had allowed a Certificate of Appropriateness for banners on Pickman Hall, near the Commander Hotel, and a two-sided bulletin board about 5' high at the Congregational Church further up Garden Street. Mr. King observed that each of these cases had been considered to be appropriate in their context and not as a precedent for other churches.

Mr. Bibbins noted the extensive time given to evaluating the Prince Hall monument on the Common, and said that this deserved the same consideration. A site visit would be helpful.

Mr. Sullivan noted that the First Parish banner was quite large, but limited to only one month. Perhaps Christ Church could agree to a limited schedule. Mr. Ferrara said this could be expressed as a certain number of days a year. Mr. King asked if the church had a schedule for the installation. Rev. Robinson replied that he couldn't ask future generations to limit the number of days the sign would be installed. This might involve a First Amendment issue. He would be happy to work toward a compromise on the height, although the proportions repeat those of the tower. Mr. King said that he was not trying to limit the ability of the church to express its views, but to honor the concept of a temporary sign. Rev. Robinson said that the sign was standing now, and was scheduled to come down on October 4. It would be up at Thanksgiving, Christmas, Epiphany, and Easter.

Mr. King asked Rev. Robinson whether he would waive the 45-day decision period and allow a site visit. Rev. Robinson agreed, as long as the church wouldn't be penalized for having the sign installed over the next month. Mr. King agreed.

Mr. Bibbins moved to continue the case to a subsequent meeting, and to hold a site meeting within the next month. Mr. Irving seconded, and the motion passed unanimously with both alternates voting.

Case 2407: 1270 Massachusetts Ave., by A.D. Club, Inc. Alter storefront, including signs, awnings, and planters.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the application. Adidas was being replaced by TD Bank North. They wished to install awnings, wall signs at the corners, and planters, all of which would be exempt from review, and an illuminated blade sign, which would require a Certificate of Appropriateness. Hiding the conduit as proposed would require removing the stone lintel, which he opposed.

Jennifer Roy of SMMA Architects said that they hoped to work with a mason to hide the conduit. She told Ms. Solet that the awning hardware would be attached to the storefront, not to the masonry.

Mr. King asked how long the conduit had been in place. Mr. Sullivan replied that the illuminated Adidas sign predated the conservation district. He was more concerned that any disturbance of the lintel would result in visible repairs than about leaving the conduit in place. Josh Swerling of Boehler Engineering said that the object was to both mount the sign and hide the conduit.

Mr. Sullivan drew the Commission's attention to the 5'6" by 2'6" size of the proposed sign and asked if this was an appropriate size for a projecting sign. He noted that the Commission had been relaxed about signs, and took seriously its charge to promote the commercial vitality of the district. He was not concerned about the internal illumination.

Mr. Ferrara expressed concern about how the sign was mounted in contact with the frieze. He noted that the existing sign was mounted on a pole with minimal contact. Ms. Roy said that the sign would be held 1½" from the frieze.

Mr. Swerling told Ms. Solet that the sign would be about 6" thick. There was little danger of snow building up on it.

Merilee Meyers said that the conduit was inoffensive and the necessary repairs would be very difficult. The sign was too big, more like a billboard. A building like this required subtlety.

Mr. Ferrara suggested that the sign could be reduced in size and become better proportioned if it simply said "TD" like the corner sign, at approximately the size and position of the Adidas sign.

Mr. Irving moved to approve in principle an illuminated sign, held off the building and mounted like the existing sign, and reduced in size from that proposed, subject to staff approval. Mr. Shirley seconded, and the motion passed 7-0, with Ms. Tobin voting. Mr. Sullivan agreed to inform the City Council of the Commission's approval in connection with the applicant's pending request to the Council for the sign to overhang the public sidewalk.

Case 2408: 20 Mt. Auburn St., by Peter Reddien. Remove chain link fence and install new board fence.

Case 2412: 18 Mt. Auburn St., by Axel Christensen. Remove chain link fence and install new board fence.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the applications, which involved a two-family house.

Carise Pingnot, the architect, said that they wished to remove the chain link fence and replace it with a board fence 42" high. Mr. Sullivan noted that most residential conservation districts allowed similar fences without review if they were less than 48" high.

Ms. Pingnot told Ms. Meyers that there would be spaces between the pickets.

Mr. Irving moved to approve the fence as proposed. Mr. Bibbins seconded, and the motion passed 7-0, with Mr. Ferrara voting.

Case 2411: 195 Brattle St., by Joseph Ferrara. Exterior repairs and restoration, including alterations to select windows and doors, shingles, stucco, porches, bay, gutters, dormer, re-pointing, and structural work.

Mr. Ferrara, the applicant, recused himself and moved to the audience.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the application. The Queen Anne house was designed in 1896 by H. Langford Warren, a leading practitioner of the style. He showed both old and contemporary images and described the owner's plans to restore the original fenestration, window sash, balcony, and railings.

Maggie Booz, the architect, said they would restore the building as closely as they could, using the original photographs as evidence. On the Brattle Street elevation, they intend to repair the structural deflection in the roof line. All the sash would be removed to protect them from damage, restored, and replaced. The front porch would be removed and rebuilt to correct drainage issues, and the brick treads replaced with bluestone. The present incorrect railing would be replaced with the correct detail.

On the west elevation, the fenestration would be restored from the present two double-hung windows to six-over-six as originally designed. The balcony railing would be reinstated, matching the porch railing. A gutter detail on the second floor of the bay would replace the original shingled skirt. On the north elevation, where there are no historic photographs for guidance, a modern sliding window in the kitchen would be replaced with two casements to match the size of other nearby windows. On the east elevation, the modern French doors would be replaced with 6+6 double-hung windows, the sliding door would be replaced with two casements, the modern casement side light would be replaced with the correct size for the original opening, and the deck would be replaced with a brick porch to match the details of the front porch. Landscape details included a bluestone walk from the sidewalk to the front porch, a bluestone patio in the east yard, a paved driveway (paving as yet undetermined), and a fence at the end of the drive. Some downspouts would be moved to correct drainage issues.

Mr. King asked about the HVAC units; Ms. Booz said they would be at the northeast corner. She said they were having the new windows made to match existing, and expected the staff would be asked to review those details as well as the paint colors and masonry work. There would be no exterior storm windows.

Mr. Irving observed that this would be a significant construction project, and wondered about the schedule. She-Ms. Booz stated that it would not be a gut rehab; the exterior would be done first and interior work in phases later. The family would remain in residence.

Mr. Sullivan asked about shingle and stucco replacement. Ms. Booz said that she expected to lose much of the siding when the house was straightened. Most of the stucco was loose or had already been replaced. New stucco would be left natural, and not painted.

Mr. Sullivan asked about the new detail on the west bay. Mr. Ferrara said that the original detail seemed incorrect; the proposed trim seemed more appropriate to the house. Mr. Sullivan observed that rake and gutter profiles were often continuous, and suggested that metal gutters would provide both more capacity and a better match. He suggested delegating certain details to the staff.

Mr. King asked for public comment. Mr. Sullivan noted that he had provided the commissioners with copies of electronic correspondence with Peter Schweich of 192 Brattle Street, and summarized his concerns.

Mr. Irving moved to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as proposed, delegating the details of the gutters, windows, masonry and paint color to the staff. Mr. Crocker seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with Ms. Tobin voting.

Discuss and forward comments on proposed zoning language re: wind turbines

Iram Farooq of the Community Development Department and chair of the Green Building Task Force said that the City Council had asked the Historical Commission to comment on a proposed zoning amendment regulating the installation of wind turbines. Turbines now required a variance. Under the new ordinance they would be allowed by special permit throughout the city, except building-mounted turbines would be allowed for up to two years as of right in C-3 zones if more than 200' from a residential area, for educational purposes only. She assured Mr. King that nothing in the amendment would override the Commission's jurisdiction in historic districts.

Ms. Solet asked if there were any noise control engineers on the task force. Ms. Farooq replied in the negative, and said that the noise ordinance would prevail and no turbines would be allowed within 200' of a residence. Ms. Solet replied that the noise ordinance might not be effective because it was complaint driven, noise readings cannot be determined in advance, and noise disturbance varies with the amount of wind. A turbine cannot be screened from view, yet the vision of a turbine along with the noise increases the annoyance. The science is changing so rapidly that the zoning change may be premature

Mr. Shirley was troubled by allowing a turbine 40' above the building. If a building was already 120' tall, the additional height could be disruptive. Ms. Solet observed that two years might be a long time to live with a nuisance.

Mr. King referred to section 11.22.2 of the proposed ordinance and asked if it allowed two years for installation or two years of operation ~~from the date of installation, or two years of operation~~ after installation. He recommended a clarification, and asked when it would be possible for individuals to comment. Ms. Farooq replied that public hearings were over, and the measure was before the city council, where the petition would expire on September 28 if not acted upon. The public could comment at the meeting on Monday night, or send a letter.

Mr. King suggested that the CHC communicate its understanding that its jurisdiction remains in full force and effect with respect to wind turbines, to observe that it was poor public policy to allow 40' high as of right additions to existing buildings, and to convey that several members had expressed concern about the adequacy of the noise ordinance as currently written, and the ambiguous language regarding the term of installation or operation. The members agreed by consensus. Mr. King offered to draft the letter.

Preservation Grants

Mr. Sullivan presented the following applications subject to availability of funds, with the expectation that the City Council would approve an allocation of \$400,000 for the program for FY 2010.

IPG 09-8: Harvard Epworth Methodist Church, 1551 Massachusetts Avenue. Stained glass window restoration. Estimated project cost: \$347,000; this phase, \$100,000. Request: \$100,000. Recommendation: \$50,000 matching. Mr. Irving so moved, Dr. Solet seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with Mr. Ferrara voting.

IPG 10-1: Temple Beth Shalom, 8 Tremont Street. Replace basement-level aluminum replacement windows with new Pella fiberglass windows. Estimated project cost: \$10,000. Request: \$10,000. Recommendation: \$10,000. Mr. Irving moved to offer \$5,000 on a matching basis. Ms. Tobin seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with Ms. Tobin voting.

IPG 10-2: Christ the King Presbyterian Church, 99 Prospect Street. Masonry restoration. Estimated project cost: \$350,000; this phase, \$250,000. Request: \$100,000. Recommendation: \$50,000 matching. During a site visit by Commission staff, it transpired that the most immediate need was a new roof on the tower and sanctuary. Mr. Irving moved to approve a matching grant of \$50,000 in principle, and to authorize the Director to negotiate a division between roofing and emergency masonry repairs. Mr. Ferrara seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with Mr. Ferrara voting.

PG 10-1: 342 Norfolk Street, by Just A Start on behalf of homeowner. Strip and reside with new claps and trim and all new windows. Estimated project cost: \$42,520. Recommendation: \$30,000. Mr. Shirley so moved, Ms. Tobin seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with Ms. Tobin voting.

Minutes

Ms. Tobin moved to approve the minutes of July 2, 2009, with a correction on page 5 of 'kids' for 'kits.' Mr. Shirley seconded, and the motion passed 4-0 with Ms. Tobin, Messrs. Bibbins, King, and Shirley voting and Dr. Solet and Messrs. Crocker, Ferrara, and Irving not voting because they had not been present on July 2.

Dr. Solet moved to approve the minutes of July 8, 2009 as submitted. Mr. Bibbins seconded, and the motion passed 4-0 with Dr. Solet, Ms. Tobin, Messrs. King and Bibbins voting and Messrs. Crocker, Ferrara, Irving and Shirley not voting because they had not been present on July 8.

Mr. Shirley moved to approve the minutes of July 10, 2009. Mr. Bibbins seconded, and the motion passed 6-0 with Dr. Solet, Ms. Tobin, Messrs. Bibbins, King, Ferrara, and Shirley voting and Messrs. Crocker and Irving not voting because they had not been present on July 10.

Executive Director's Report

Mr. Sullivan described the Cambridgeport history program scheduled for October 3rd. He noted that there would be a reception for the WWII oral history book on October 15, and that commissioner training was scheduled for November 23rd.

Mr. Sullivan reported that Lesley University had requested a blue oval marker for Edith Lesley's house at 29 Everett Street, and circulated their proposed language. Mr. Shirley moved to approve the proposal, Dr. Solet seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Solet reported that the King of Thailand marker dedication at her house would be held on September 20 at 11 AM.

Mr. Irving moved to adjourn, Mr. Shirley seconded, and the motion passed unanimously at 10:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

Charles M. Sullivan
Executive Director

**Members of the Public
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 9/10/09**

Eileen Sullivan	71 Farragut Avenue, Somerville
Joseph Robinson	Zero Garden Street
Jennifer Roy	SMMA, 1000 Massachusetts Avenue
Charlie Allen	44 Cottage Street
Jan Ferrara	195 Brattle Street
Carice Pingenot	20 Mt. Auburn Street
Peter Reddien	20 Mt. Auburn Street
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana Street
Maggie Booz	237 Putnam Avenue

Town is Cambridge unless otherwise indicated.