

Approved 6/2/11

**Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission**

April 7, 2011 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: William B. King, *Chair*; Bruce Irving, *Vice Chair*; M. Wyllis Bibbins, Robert Crocker, Chandra Harrington, Jo M. Solet, *Members*; Shary Page Berg, Joseph Ferrara, *Alternates*

Members absent: Susannah Tobin, *Alternate*

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, Sarah Burks

Public present: See attached list.

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Chair King called the meeting to order at 6:04 P.M. and made introductions.

Public Hearing: Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD) Designation Proceedings

Consideration of tabled matter: petition requesting initiation of a NCD designation study for the properties at **0-12 Blanchard Road** and **149-267 Grove Street** and consideration of inclusion of the property at **777 Huron Avenue** in an NCD study area.

Mr. King noted that a large number of letters had been received and distributed to the Commission.

Mr. Sullivan said that most of the letters contained requests to remove names from the NCD petition. Support for the study had substantially evaporated, but there was more awareness now of the history of the area and interest in neighborhood issues. He recommended taking the matter off the table and declining the petition.

Mr. King asked what further city involvement was underway. Mr. Sullivan replied that Councilor Seidel was trying to arrange a meeting with the neighbors.

George Kouyoumjian said he had recently made an offer to purchase 8 Blanchard Road. His real estate agent had informed him of the hearing. Mr. King explained the NCD designation study procedures. He also summarized what kinds of changes could and could not be reviewed by an NCD commission.

Rob Ehlert of 11 Blanchard Road said that owners on Blanchard Road did not want an NCD. He asked what they could present to the Commission to make that clear. Mr. King answered that the Commission had already received substantial correspondence on that point.

Carey Bloomfield of 10 Blanchard Road registered her lack of interest in an NCD.

Mr. Irving moved to remove the item from the table. Mr. Bibbins seconded. Mr. King designated Ms. Berg to vote, and the motion passed 7-0.

Mr. Bibbins noted that there was substantial opposition in the neighborhood. There did not appear to be sufficient community support for a study.

Mr. King commented that there needed to be sufficient momentum and support in the neighborhood to warrant asking the manager to appoint a study committee, and the staff to devote time and money to conduct the study. Productive discussions were necessary for a study process.

Mr. Bibbins moved to decline the petition. Mr. Crocker seconded. Mr. King designated Mr. Ferrara to vote, and the motion passed 7-0. Mr. King thanked the neighbors for their time and attention.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

**Case 2684: Sheraton Commander Hotel, 16 Garden St., by Michael Guleserian.** Construct entrance vestibule for restaurant, change door to a window and window to a door, and replace awnings.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the application.

Michael Guleserian, the General Manager of the Sheraton Commander, explained that the hotel was finishing a renovation of its restaurant. The exterior expression of the transformed restaurant would consider the history and architecture of the 1927 building. The vestibule would provide an outside entrance. The name, Nubar, was his father's middle name. He wanted more modern awnings. The present door on the sidewalk would again be a window. Two windows in the courtyard would become a pair of doors to access outdoor seating.

Richard Hardaway, the architect, reviewed the elevations. He described the logo and the gabled roof of the vestibule. The metal door would be replaced with a paneled door more in keeping with the building.

Dr. Solet said her initial thought was that people would think Nubar was just a bar and not a restaurant. Mr. Guleserian said the people eating at the tables would be visible through the windows.

Mr. Ferrara asked if the columns and pilasters would be made of wood. Mr. Hardaway answered that it would be a synthetic material, painted like wood. Mr. Guleserian noted that the columns and pilasters elsewhere on the building were painted concrete.

No members of the public spoke when invited to do so. Mr. King closed the public comment period.

Mr. Irving said it was always difficult to try to match the appearance of a material with a substitute. Was the proposed stucco trying to match the precast concrete? Mr. Hardaway said they would use real wet stucco with a smooth but sandy finish.

Ms. Berg was concerned that the rounded windows would be covered by the new rectangular awnings. Mr. Hardaway said he had initially felt similarly, but the new awnings would be bigger; the existing awnings were underscaled. Mr. Irving agreed that the round awnings had a dated look. Ms. Burks asked if the proposed awnings would be canvas and open on the sides. Mr. Guleserian answered in the affirmative.

Mr. Ferrara said the gable of the vestibule looked too heavy for the columns.

Mr. Sullivan said he had been skeptical of adding a vestibule, but Mr. Hardaway had made a compelling argument by recalling the pilasters of the Mt. Vernon entrance. Mr. Hardaway had designed numerous projects for the hotel over the years.

Mr. Irving moved to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work as presented, subject to the Director's approval of the stucco sample and construction details, including the color of materials and awnings. Mr. King designated Mr. Ferrara to vote on the matter. Dr. Solet seconded the motion, which passed 7-0.

**Case 2685: 0 Garden St., by Christ Church Cambridge.** Alterations at sanctuary entrance for accessibility including grade changes, sloped walkways, raised garden beds, paving, and alterations to doors; two lights.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the church, built in 1760 and designed by Peter Harrison. It was an architectural landmark of Colonial New England. It was the first Anglican church in Cambridge and one of the most significant buildings in the city. He described the tongue-and-groove siding and the heavy water table at the base of the building. The granite landing at the front door had been installed after the 1930s. In 1977, the church applied for a Certificate of Appropriateness for three new reproduction doors that would open outward. When the

Commission refused to permit this the church agreed to install full-height center door leaves opening inward, while the side doors with fixed panels in the arches would open outward to meet egress requirements.

Jonathan Austin, chair of the property committee, explained that the scope of work included exterior repairs and painting. The church would be celebrating its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1761 completion of the building later this year and wanted to look its best. He described the sanctuary extension and Parish Hall addition. The Harrison building was much the same as originally constructed. The application for accessible entries was not brought forward as a code requirement but because the church thought it was the right thing to do.

Susan Roote, the Warden, mentioned the darkness outside the front entry. It felt unsafe to church members leaving meetings at night. There were often people sleeping on benches and in the adjacent cemetery.

Frank Shirley, the architect, explained that his client felt a moral obligation to make the front doors open to all. The existing arrangement was awkward for people coming in and out. There was no space to stand or greet or say goodbye. He described his proposal to construct 1:20 sloped walkways by warping the grades around the tower. He reviewed the proposed site plan. The driveway would be mounded to allow a higher starting point and to help drainage. The landing outside the three doors would provide a plinth for the church and an area for the congregation to gather. Low retaining walls would obscure the slope of the walkways. He described the existing habit of vehicles parking on the brick forecourt and driveway in front of the church. The low walls would keep vehicles away from the tower. All walkways would be brick to match the existing. The plinth and walls of the garden beds would be stone. To solve the darkness and security problem, two electrified gas lamps would be installed at the edge of the plinth. The front doors would be rehinged and changed to outswinging. The water table would be preserved at the sanctuary walls but eliminated at the tower because of the change in grade level. He described the drainage design and the construction details designed to protect the sills of the church.

Mr. Bibbins noted that he had been a member of the church more than twenty years ago and had ~~been professionally involved~~ volunteered to assist in some of the work done there. He asked how the drainage system would weep at the bottom. Mr. Shirley described the concrete slab, flashing, and drainage design. The sills had been inspected and there were no reports of meaningful deterioration.

Ms. Berg wondered if the planter walls would be used for drinking and sleeping.

Mr. Irving asked if the design was symmetrical, and Mr. Shirley replied in the affirmative. Mr. Irving asked if the lamp had been selected yet, and Mr. Shirley replied that it had not.

Dr. Solet asked if the bollards would contain the push-button door openers, and Mr. Shirley replied in the affirmative. She asked if the doors could stay open and if there would be designated handicapped parking spaces.

Ms. Harrington asked if the church had considered more than two lamps, and Mr. Austin said there was a difference of opinion about that.

Mr. Shirley told Mr. Ferrara the type of stone for the plinth had not yet been determined. Mr. Ferrara asked about the grid pattern for the stone. Mr. Shirley said it was not intended to be expressed.

Mr. King asked if the existing doors would be retained. Mr. Shirley replied that they would be rehinged.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked if the doors were recessed in the frame now and how did bringing them forward in the frame change the dynamic.

Mr. Shirley replied that he was not bothered by having the doors flush with the casing. He showed a 19<sup>th</sup> century photo of that condition. The church wanted them to swing out because it would appear more welcoming.

Mr. Bibbins noted that out-swinging doors would be a maintenance issue because they would get more weather and wear. He expressed doubt that the arched tops would clear the trim. The nineteenth century doors had transoms and flat-topped doors.

Mr. Sullivan said jamb details should be provided. The doors would have to be placed in a different plane in order to swing out. He recommended this portion of the proposal not be approved at this time.

Mr. King closed the public comment period.

Mr. Bibbins commented that the water table was an integral element of the building. It extended around the whole building except at the doors and acted like a foot. It was simple but elegant. As original fabric, it should be preserved. Removal might be approvable for a strong reason like handicapped access, but that could be handled at one of the doors. He said the cemetery side door would be his preferred location. He said the gathering place and the elimination of parking near the building were good objectives, but the 18" high planter wall was regrettable. The redundancy of the sloped walkways was problematic.

Mr. Ferrara said the plinth was a vast change, but could serve to strengthen the tower's relationship to the ground. The paving was modern but elegant. It would be a substantial change to a very significant building.

Mr. Irving noted that in the 1792 drawing the water table was only interrupted at the entry doors. When the sanctuary was extended, the details were meticulously matched. It was remarkable that the design had been kept so close to the original. Maybe accessibility did not have to happen at all three doors.

Ms. Harrington suggested that if the changes were not required for code compliance, maybe they shouldn't be done. There were other ways to keep cars away from the building. The desire for a gathering space was understandable but the church wasn't designed for that. Why did the church want to do it now?

Mr. Austin said the church did not want to send a negative message to the disabled. The assessed value of the property was low because of its tax exempt status. The total cost of painting, new boilers, repairs, etc. might add up to enough to trigger the requirement for accessibility improvements.

Mr. King acknowledged that the building was one of Cambridge's most significant. He said he was very sympathetic to accessibility issues. The Commission had dealt with the issue in many institutional buildings. The design was elegant and symmetrical.

Dr. Solet said she was sensitive to the handicapped experience. If the accessible parking was in back near the parish house, then the most logical place for an accessible entry was the closest door to it. Reverend Robinson clarified that there were no handicapped parking spaces by the parish house; they were located on the street.

Mr. Sullivan said the design was symmetrical to a fault. It was not necessary to have multiple accessible doors, bollards, and inclined paths. He recommended putting the accessible entry at the west side door. Losing the water table was a great concern. The lights were distracting and an incongruous 19th century design on an eigh-

teenth century church. Perhaps lights could be installed down the path along the cemetery in cooperation with the city. He asked for further details on the proposed jamb changes and brick and granite samples. How would parking be prevented on the brick forecourt? He recommended continuing the hearing.

Reverend Robinson said the threshold was an important piece of real estate from a theological perspective. It was important to be welcoming to people of different abilities by letting them enter any door.

Irena Matulic of Frank Shirley Architects explained that the concept was for universal design. All the doors would open in the same way and be open to all people.

Mr. Irving asked if the disabled members of the congregation had offered opinions about both accessibility and removal of original building fabric. Reverend Robinson described an elderly woman who had difficulty with the steps but insisted on using the front door. The members were excited about the proposed changes.

Dr. Solet recommended a site visit. Mr. King asked the applicants if they would waive the 45 day period for action. Mr. Austin agreed.

Dr. Solet moved to continue the hearing to May 5 and to schedule a site visit to occur during the interim. Ms. Harrington seconded. Mr. King designated Ms. Berg to vote, and the motion passed 7-0.

Mr. Sullivan stated that repairs in kind could receive a Certificate of Nonapplicability from the staff.

Mr. King called for a brief recess and reconvened the meeting at 8:15 P.M.

**Case 2687: 27 Holyoke Pl., by President and Fellows of Harvard College.** Construct garden structures in phase II of student garden.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the community garden that Harvard started last year.

Mark Verkennis of the Harvard University Planning Office said Phase I with 4' x 4' raised beds had been completed. Phase II would include 26 more raised beds, apple trees, a wildflower border, and vertical planters. He reviewed the site plan. The sign kiosk, which was approved by staff on a temporary basis, would become permanent. The application also included a temporary cold frame, additional storage sheds, a compost bin, and a rainwater collection system.

Erin Kelly of the Graduate School of Design explained that the Phoenix Club did not ~~their~~ want its wall used for climbing plants. She had designed a freestanding system of vertical planters made of milk crates. It would be four crates high at the most. The vertical posts would be 11' high. She described the types of plants that would be grown, including kiwis and hops.

Ms. Kelly told Ms. Harrington that the crates would remain in place during the winter.

Mr. Verkennis told Dr. Solet that the students had been respectful of the garden and its crops.

Mr. King suggested coordinating programs and experimentation with the Harvard Forest in Petersham.

Mr. Sullivan asked if the unsightly rainwater collection tank would be screened, and Mr. Verkennis replied that there other tanks could be considered. Mr. Irving suggested a Rain Hog.

Mr. King closed the public comment period.

Mr. Sullivan recommended approving the application, subject to staff approval of details. Mr. Irving so moved. Dr. Solet seconded. Mr. King designated Mr. Ferrara to vote, and the motion passed 7-0.

**Case 2688: 4 Hawthorn St., by William A. Truslow.** Preserve and repair historic concrete block wall.

Mr. Sullivan described the location and design of the wall. Another similar wall at the corner of Brattle and Craigie streets was built in 1870. This wall probably dated to the same period.

William Truslow, an owner and trustee, presented the application. He explained that the wall was crumbling. He had spoken to a mason, Rob Pollard, who had worked at Harvard. The goal was to repair and stabilize the wall, not to restore it to new condition. He wanted it to look as if no work had been done. He was inclined not to remove all the moss unless the commission thought there was a good reason to do so. He had a few surplus concrete blocks from the wall's original construction that he could use to fill in where needed. The color of the mortar would be tricky.

Mr. Irving asked if Mr. Truslow owned half the wall. Mr. Truslow said the wall was owned by a trust. He and his neighbor, Jeff Nunis, would repair the entire wall. The property line was at the blue marker.

Mr. Irving moved to grant the certificate on the condition that masonry repair samples be approved by the Executive Director. Mr. Ferrara seconded. Mr. King designated Ms. Berg to vote, and the motion passed 7-0.

#### Preservation Grants

**IPG 11-6: 54 Brattle St. (Dexter Pratt House), Cambridge Center for Adult Education.** Masonry, roof, windows. \$50,000

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the Dexter Pratt House. The Cambridge Center had requested a grant of \$50,000 on a project totaling \$133,000. The scope included roofing, gutters, downspouts, drainage, trim, and restoration of windows and addition of storms.

**PG 11-4: 56 Sixth St., by Just-A-Start.** Strip and re-side, windows. \$30,000

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the scope of work including the roofing, Hardiplank siding, trim, and 2-over-2 Jeld-Wen double glazed windows. The grant request was \$30,000. The house was one unit in a three unit row. Original elements were present.

**PG 11-5: 269 Norfolk St., by Just-A-Start.** Strip and re-side, windows. \$30,000

Mr. Sullivan described the ca. 1870 house. He explained that the owners had started their renovations with just the top floor and now wanted to finish removing the asphalt siding and restore the rest of the exterior. The transom window and side lights would also be restored. The porch roof was larger than it would have been originally, but they wanted to retain the size. The grant request was for \$30,000.

He recommended approving all three grant requests.

Mr. Irving asked if the owners at 269 Norfolk Street might be convinced to go back to the original dimension of the porch roof. Mr. Sullivan suggested a deeper hip roof and removal of the 4 x 4 support posts.

Mr. Irving moved to approve the three grants in the amounts requested (\$50,000, \$30,000 and \$30,000). Dr. Solet seconded the motion. Mr. King designated Mr. Ferrara to vote, and the motion passed 7-0.

#### Preservation Award Nominations

Mr. Sullivan showed slides of the nominated projects. The Commission discussed the merits of each project and made final selections. The award presentation program was scheduled for May 25, 2011.

Executive Session: Update on Current Litigation

Dr. Solet moved that the Commission go into Executive Session to discuss current litigation. Ms. Berg seconded. Mr. King designated Ms. Berg to vote, and the motion passed 7-0.

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After voting to close the Executive Session, the Commission re-commenced the regular part of the meeting at 10:20 PM.

Minutes

Mr. King noted the use of an extra "of" on page 2 of the February 3, 2011 minutes.

Mr. Bibbins moved to approve the corrected minutes. Ms. Harrington seconded. Mr. King designated Ms. Berg to vote, and the motion passed 5-0 with Messrs. Irving and Crocker, Dr. Solet, and Mss. Berg and Harrington voting. Messrs. Bibbins, King, and Ferrara abstained because they had not been present on February 3.

Ms. Berg moved to approve the March 3, 2011 minutes, as submitted. Mr. Bibbins seconded. Mr. King designated Mr. Ferrara to vote and the motion passed 7-0.

Mr. Bibbins moved to adjourn, and Mr. Irving seconded. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 10:32 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,



Sarah L. Burks  
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public  
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 4/7/11**

Lauren Curry	Just-A-Start, PO Box 410310
Robert MacArthur	Just-A-Start, PO Box 410310
Steven Samuel	7 Blanchard Rd
Charlie Marquardt	10 Rogers St #1120
Roy Tishler	207 Grove St
Abby Zanger	207 Grove St
Ben Wilson	265 Grove St
Mark Verkennis	1350 Massachusetts Ave
Duncan MacArthur	245 Grove St
Peter Graham	Just-A-Start, PO Box 410310

Town is Cambridge unless otherwise indicated.