

Approved 8/4/11

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

May 5, 2011 – Cambridge Senior Center, 806 Massachusetts Ave. – 6:00 P.M.

Members present: Bruce Irving, *Vice Chair*; M. Wyllis Bibbins, Jo M. Solet, *Members*;
Shary Page Berg, Joseph Ferrara, Susannah Tobin, *Alternates*

Members absent: William B. King, *Chair*; Robert Crocker, Chandra Harrington, *Members*

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, Sarah Burks

Public present: See attached list.

Vice Chair Irving called the meeting to order at 6:05 P.M. and made introductions. He described the consent agenda procedure and reviewed the agenda. The following cases were identified for the consent agenda procedure and no objections were registered:

Case 2703: Kidder Hall, 2-4 St. Johns Rd., by Lesley University. Create accessible entrance with sloping walkway and modifications to porch and steps; construct new sidewalk; install bike racks.

Case 2704: Burnham Hall, 99-2 Brattle St., by Episcopal Divinity School. Install gas meter and vents.

Case 2705: Lawrence Hall, 99-4 Brattle St., by Lesley University. Create accessible entrance with ramp, remove doors, and alter step; replace basement window sash; install louvers; install vent caps.

Mr. Ferrara moved to approve cases 2701, 2704, and 2705 per the consent agenda procedure and subject to further review and approval of construction details by staff. Shary Berg seconded the motion. Mr. Irving designated all three alternates to vote on all matters. The motion passed 6-0.

Mr. Irving noted that Christ Church had requested a continuance for Case 2685. Dr. Solet moved to continue the hearing until the July meeting, unless the church wanted to return sooner. Ms. Tobin seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 2445 (amendment): 1991 Massachusetts Ave., by St. James's Episcopal Church and Oaktree Development. Consider proposed change to driveway/garage ramp, surface parking and Beech Street elevation of new condominium building.

Mr. Irving explained that the hearing concerned proposed changes to the driveway/garage ramp and surface parking on Beech Street and there would not be an opportunity to discuss the other aspects of the project.

M. Wyllis Bibbins recused himself, as at previous hearings, because of a previous professional relationship with the church. He left the table.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the proposed change that would move the ramp to the parking level from the side of the building to fit within the building envelope, where there had previously been on-grade parking proposed. He reported that the applicants had also appeared before the Planning Board about the change.

Phil Terzis of Oaktree Development said that the ramp issue had come up during the Inspectional Services Department's permit review, after the special permit for the earlier design had been granted. He explained that the driveway could not be in the portion of the site in a Residence B zone because multifamily construction was not allowed there. The proposed change would solve the problem by bringing the driveway out of the side yard and into the building. It would cost more and eliminate one bedroom in a first floor unit, but the side yard could

be landscaped with grass and trees and less shoring of the Kingdom Hall building would be needed. He showed plan, elevation, section, and perspective views. The two on-grade parking spaces in the side yard would be dedicated to church use, which was allowed in the B zone. They would be meeting with NSTAR the following day to discuss the new proposed location for the transformer—in the side yard with fencing and bushes around it.

Michael Brandon of 27 Seven Pines Road, Clerk of the North Cambridge Stabilization Committee, asked if the garage door would be visible from the street. Mr. Terzis answered in the affirmative. It would be about 27' from the street, however. He showed the door on the rendering and said the design details were not final.

Elaine Callahan, representing herself and Jackie Kelly of 42 Blake Street, asked if the drawing was on line. Mr. Terzis replied that he could provide it to the neighborhood group. Mr. Brandon suggested putting it on Oaktree's website.

Costanza Eggers of 47 Porter Road asked what was meant by "sacrificial plantings" on the plan. Mr. Terzis explained that the plants might need to be removed if NSTAR needed to access the transformer. NSTAR had indicated that new transformers do not hum

Ms. Eggers asked about delivery, drop offs, trash, and noise. Would the ramp be shorter? Steeper? Mr. Terzis said that trash removal would probably be privately contracted. The bins would be stored in the basement and moved to the Beech Street sidewalk for removal once or twice a week. The ramp would be shorter and steeper but Traffic and Parking had approved the configuration.

Ms. Callahan asked additional questions about trash removal procedures. Mr. Irving said the topic was outside the Historical Commission's jurisdiction.

Ms. Callahan asked about snow storage. Mr. Terzis answered that it would be put in the landscaped areas along Beech Street and Massachusetts Avenue.

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Dr. Solet asked if the garage door would have a beeping signal. Mr. Terzis answered in the negative.

Mr. Irving asked for public comment.

Ms. Callahan referenced MGL Ch. 9, Section 26B. She said the project would have an adverse effect. Any alteration would compromise the permanent easement on the property. The attachment to the church violated the Commission's memo of understanding with the church.

Mr. Brandon said the proposed changes had been brought prematurely. The application had been informal, did not provide enough detail, and was received after the deadline. The landscape plans were not sufficiently detailed. The view corridors were not adequately shown. The view of cars parked next to the Kingdom Hall was a negative. The design might in some ways be better for the neighbors, but in other ways it was not. Putting the building on stilts to accommodate parking violated the Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District design guidelines. The application to amend the design should allow the Historical Commission to reconsider the entire project. The zoning violation could have been dealt with earlier. The neighbors were burnt out and felt they had no options left other than to appeal. He hoped the Commission would disapprove the amendment and that Oaktree would sit down with the neighbors and redesign the project.

Ms. Callahan said stilted underground parking did not fit the era of the Romanesque church. The height of the building was too high. The design did not fit in with the landmarked lot, Nolen garden, church, or city. She said an amendment would incorporate the original.

Mr. Irving closed public comment.

Mr. Sullivan said the Commission needed to determine if the proposed alteration was appropriate in the context of the previously-approved design for the landmark property. It would be difficult to find anything in the amended design inappropriate except the placement of the transformer. He suggested the Commission approve the amendment, subject to staff review of the design details and the landscape plan, and on the further condition that the transformer be put in a vault.

Mr. Irving observed the applicant's oversight had resulted in a beneficial change to the design. The large ramp in the side yard was gone. The design was better for the change.

Dr. Solet moved to approve the amended Certificate of Appropriateness for the ramp and on-grade parking and landscaping as proposed, subject to staff approval of the garage door, materials, colors, and landscape plan of the area between the condo building and the Kingdom Hall, and to require that the transformer be placed to a vault unless it was physically impossible to do so, in which case approval of the location and screening of the vault would be delegated to the Executive Director. Ms. Berg seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Mr. Irving called for a brief recess, and then reconvened the meeting at 7:39 P.M.

Mr. Bibbins returned to the Commission table.

Case 2701: 175 Brattle St., by Mr. & Mrs. Edwin Kania. Construct a one-story entry bay at rear entrance.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and said that the proposed addition could not be seen from a public way.

Jim Skelton of Judge Skelton Smith Architects showed photographs of the house and drawings of the rear of the house. The mudroom addition would be 8'6" deep and would not project further than the existing potting shed, which would block any view of the addition from Channing Place. The addition would be painted white like the existing structure.

Dr. Solet asked if there would be a roof deck. Mr. Skelton replied that the balustrade was only decorative.

There were no questions or comments made by members of the public.

Mr. Ferrara said the proposal would be an improvement.

Mr. Sullivan recommended approval of a Certificate of Nonapplicability, based on the lack of visibility from a public way.

Dr. Solet so moved, Ms. Tobin seconded, and the motion passed 6-0.

Case 2590 (amendment): 99 Brattle St./10 Phillips Pl., by Lesley University o/b/o 99 Brattle Street Condo. Assoc. Amend plans for Sherrill Plaza project to include exterior lighting details.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the spherical, Modernist light standards on Sherrill Plaza.

George Smith of Lesley University said there were eleven existing light fixtures on the plaza. They were over 40 years old and were not in great condition, nor were they aesthetically pleasing. They would require extensive repair. He summarized the application to change the standards with the goal of having better lighting for im-

proved safety. He showed illustrations of the existing and proposed fixtures. The new fixtures would be more traditional in style. They would measure 12' 6" to the top. They would use LED bulbs and would be very efficient. They would cast the light down, not up.

Ms. Berg asked if uplights were also proposed. Mr. Smith said that two 12-volt halogen uplights per tree were proposed in the plaza.

Dr. Solet noted that LED light bulbs had a blue cast and could be disruptive to sleep by affecting the circadian rhythm. Mr. Smith said they had chosen bulbs with white light, not blue.

Mr. Sullivan noted that the schools were considering making this type of fixture standard on the campus.

Mr. Ferrara moved to approve the application. Ms. Tobin seconded and the motion passed 6-0.

Case 2702: St. John's Chapel, 91 Brattle St., by Episcopal Divinity School. Clean, repoint, repair, and apply water repellent to masonry.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and explained that the steeple had been restored in 2002. The chapel exhibited many generations of mortar; the oldest joints had a grapevine pattern, but the more modern repairs were obtrusive and did not match. He said the job would require proper supervision and approval of samples.

Edward Nilson of the Episcopal Divinity School explained that there had been a lot of water infiltration in the steeple in March 2010. He submitted a report from the contractor, with the proposed scope of work including cleaning and sealing the masonry. The coating was clear and would allow the masonry to breathe, while preventing water from penetrating the wall. It would last approximately 10 years.

Dr. Solet asked if the product was environmentally compliant, and Mr. Nilson replied in the affirmative.

Mr. Bibbins questioned the proposed 1:1:6 mortar mix. Mr. Nilson said Gnazzo, the masonry contractor, would provide samples.

Mr. Sullivan said he was generally against sealants, but he would approve it if it did not change the appearance of the wall.

Mr. Bibbins moved to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness subject to the Executive Director's approval of details and samples. Ms. Berg seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

New Business, Determination of Procedure: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 2710: 4 Berkeley St., by Episcopal Divinity School. Approval of previously-installed satellite dish.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the visibility of the satellite dish. It had been installed at some previous date by a former tenant and the school had pointed it out to him on a site visit.

Dr. Solet suggested that any approval expire when the dish no longer worked or needed to be replaced, so that it could not be replaced in kind.

Mr. Sullivan suggested that the Commission approve a Certificate of Hardship based on the cost and inconvenience of removing the dish, which had been installed by a tenant. He further suggested that the certificate be limited to the life cycle of the existing device.

Ms. Tobin so moved, adding that the dish could be removed at any time without further review by the Commission. Dr. Solet seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Preservation Grants

PG 11-6: 1 Allston Court, by Just-A-Start, Inc. Request for \$30,000 to strip and reside, roof, windows

Mr. Sullivan reported that there was \$86,394 available in the preservation grants account, which would not receive more funds until the new fiscal year in October. He showed slides of 1 Allston Court and described the scope of work, which would include siding and slate roof repair. Just-A-Start Inc. had requested \$30,000 and an approval in principle for the same amount in the next fiscal year. He recommended the Commission approve a grant of \$30,000 and to discourage the applicant from applying for more at this time.

PG 11-7: 118 Pearl Street, #2, by Just-A-Start, Inc. Request for \$11,000 to replace siding, north elevation only

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the application for \$11,000 for siding repairs on the north side only. He said he generally discouraged a piecemeal approach to rehab projects.

Approval in principle: Homeowners Rehab, Inc. requested approval in principle of \$50,000 each to remove vinyl siding and restore or install new clapboards and trim at five properties: **14 and 18-20 Carlisle Street, 171-173 Columbia Street, 175-177 Columbia Street, and 300 Prospect Street.**

Mr. Sullivan said that an approval in principle would allow HRI to claim matching funds on a grant application they were making to NeighborWorks, a national housing and community development agency. The buildings would be stripped and reclad with Hardie board and new trim. He suggested that \$30,000 be approved for each of the five properties, subject to availability of funds and subject to grant approval from NeighborWorks.

Ms. Tobin moved to approve a grant of \$30,000 for the 1 Allston Court project, discouraging reapplication for that same project; to not approve a grant for the 118 Pearl Street project; and to approve five grants of \$30,000 to the Homeowner's Rehab, Inc. properties at 14 Carlisle Street, 18-20 Carlisle Street, 171-173 Columbia Street, 175-177 Columbia Street, and 300 Prospect Street, subject to availability of funds and the grant from NeighborWorks. Dr. Solet seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Director's Report

Mr. Sullivan reported on an appeal of the Commission's Certificate of Appropriateness for the Lesley project at 1803 Massachusetts Avenue, the city's complaint about the transformer at 1131 Massachusetts Avenue, and the MIT Investment Management Co.'s plans to demolish the MIT Press building at 292 Main Street and significantly alter the J.L. Hammett (Rebecca's) Building at 264 Main Street.

Dr. Solet reported that Dr. Pipes at 17 Berkeley Street had repainted his house last summer without consulting the Commission about color.

Dr. Solet moved to adjourn, and Mr. Bibbins seconded. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 8:47 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 5/5/11**

John Hixson	41 Norris St
Phil Terzis	Oaktree, 129 Mt. Auburn St
Steven Spandle	2 Ware St #3
Jim Skelton	5 Pinckney, Boston
Costanza Eggers	47 Porter Rd
Andrea Wilder	12 Arlington St
Elaine M. Callahan, obo Jackie Kelly	of 42 Blake St, PO Box 610062, Medford
Michael Brandon	27 Seven Pines Ave
Bill Judge	99 Brattle St
George Smith	29 Everett St
Kevin Murphy	29 Everett St
Oliver Radford	33 Richdale Ave
Ed Kania	175 Brattle St
Campbell Ellsworth	267 Norfolk St

Town is Cambridge unless otherwise indicated.