

Approved 11/1/12

## Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

May 3, 2012, 6:00 P.M. Cambridge Senior Center, 806 Massachusetts Ave.

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

Members absent: Chandra Harrington

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, Sarah Burks

Public present: See attached list.

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Chair William King called the meeting to order at 6:06 PM and made introductions. He explained the consent agenda policy and asked if there were any cases which members of the staff, Commission, or the public thought did not require a full hearing. Dr. Solet moved to approve the following cases subject to review of construction details by the Executive Director. Mr. Crocker seconded the motion, which passed 7-0.

**Case 2866: 33 Garden St., by Longy School of Music of Bard College.** Install freestanding sign.

**Case 2867: 51 Brattle St., by President & Fellows of Harvard College.** Replace windows.

**Case 2870, 175 Brattle Street, by Edward and Anne Kania.** Remodel potting shed at rear of house.

### Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

**Case 2717 (continued): 1131 Massachusetts Ave./1-5 Remington St., by Veritas at Harvard Square, LLC.** Application for Certificate of Hardship for transformer, installed previously, in violation of Case 1956.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and reviewed the history of the case, which had begun with the installation of a transformer and signs without prior approval by the Commission.

Mr. King designated alternates Shary Berg and Susannah Tobin to vote on the case. He asked if NSTAR was a property owner. James Rafferty, attorney for Veritas at Harvard Square, LLC, stated that NSTAR had an easement from the property owner for placement and access to the equipment that belonged to NSTAR. He introduced William Zamparelli, NSTAR public relations representative, and Jeanette Sandberg, a lead engineer. He reported that the owner and NSTAR had met on site in March to look for other possible locations for the equipment. The equipment as originally designed was to be smaller and the owners thought it would be located in a sidewalk vault. Later they learned from NSTAR that such a design was not possible. The City Electrician had explained to him that three pole-mounted transformers had been removed from a pole, and that capacity had been consolidated into the new transformer.

Ms. Sandberg explained that the customer's application indicated a load requirement of 350 kilovolt amps (kva). NSTAR's standard transformers were 300 and 500 kva in capacity, but the size difference between the two was minimal. She explained that the transformer could not be located in the underground garage because the ramp was too steep and winding for service access. [Mr. Ferrara arrived].

Mr. Rafferty added that the garage and a storm water retention tank took up most of the below-grade space on the site. He had been exploring administrative ways to prevent this from happening again. The Pole & Conduit application could require CHC staff review prior to submittal in the same way that Board of Zoning Appeal applications are handled. He said that NSTAR had agreed to abide to whatever procedure the city came up

with. He noted that a landscape mitigation proposal had been submitted last year. The physical limitations of the site prevented any other solution.

Dr. Solet asked Ms. Sandberg if the transformer could be lower and longer. Ms. Sandberg replied that the height was needed for the transformation process. NSTAR used industry-standard equipment to keep costs under control. Mr. Zamparelli added that equipment needed to be standardized for maintenance and repair reasons.

Ms. Burks commented on the proposed changes to the Pole & Conduit application process. Although it would mean more work up front, it would result in more and better information about intended designs.

Mr. King said that he had had a favorable opinion about the proposed landscape mitigation. He encouraged NSTAR to not require meters to be located on the front elevation of historic properties. Mr. Sullivan concurred, noting that until a few years ago the staff was able to notify the utility of a historic designation and they would find an alternate location for meters and equipment. He noted that NSTAR had made an exception on their new policy for exterior placement of gas meters and approved a basement location for a property owned by Harvard University on Hawthorn Street. In Rhode Island, the preservation community had succeeded in getting an act passed by the legislature to make utility companies recognize the jurisdiction of historic district commissions. Mr. Zamparelli said he would be happy to meet with the staff to discuss policies. Mr. King suggested that the staff draft a letter with procedural recommendations for him to send to the Pole & Conduit Commission.

Ms. Berg was concerned that the landscape plan did not provide sufficient room for wisteria to grow. She commented that the mitigation proposal was not clear enough.

Dr. Solet noted that loss of electric service would be a substantial hardship. She moved to find that the conditions for hardship had been met, and that the application could be approved without substantial detriment to the public welfare and without substantial derogation from the intent and purposes of the ordinance. She further moved to issue a Certificate of Hardship for the current equipment on the condition that the landscape mitigation plan, or other mitigation approved by the staff in consultation with the Commission's landscape specialist, be completed within six months. Mr. Irving seconded, and the motion passed 6-0 (Ms. Berg abstaining).

**Case 2838 (continued): 153 Brattle St., by Tom & Jeanne Hagerty.** Demo garage; construct new garage at rear; extend driveway; alter retaining walls at side yard; path and paving details; relocate bench.

Mr. King designated Ms. Berg and Mr. Ferrara to vote on the case, noting that they had thorough notes from the last meeting and the site visit.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides of the 1806 house and existing garage, which was approved with a Certificate of Appropriateness about 15 years ago. He described the views of the proposed new garage from the public ways surrounding the property. Recent correspondence had been distributed to the Commission members.

Guy Grassi, the architect, explained that the design of the proposed garage had the same footprint as before, but it would be lowered to just under 23' high. The details had been simplified in response to Commission comments at the previous hearing. The eave height had also been lowered. He displayed design drawings.

John Grove, the landscape architect, described other accessory buildings in the neighborhood. He noted that the gates at the driveway would be closed except when a vehicle needed to pass through. Regarding the

Fetcher Steele-designed landscape, he said that the front fence and gate were designed by Steele but would not be changed. It could not be determined whether the side plinth was also designed by him.

Matt Langan of John Grove's office described the elevations of different parts of the site. A retaining wall on the right side of the driveway would separate the grades.

Dr. Solet inquired if there was a way to lower the structure, which would be very large for the available space. Mr. Grassi noted that the proposed garage was smaller than the carriage house at 151 Brattle Street.

Mr. King asked if a new garage was needed or if a parking space at the back yard would be enough.

Annette Lamond of 7 Riedesel Avenue said that very few garages had been constructed in the district since it was established in 1963. She showed a photo of the property before the Steele landscape design had been carried out. Approval would set a bad precedent and encourage similar applications. She read a letter from Esther Pullman opposing the new garage.

Ann Kania of 175 Brattle Street contrasted the application to recent applications for demolition of buildings to increase open space and yards. While most everyone would like to have a driveway and a garage, she was not sure everyone could have one without compromising the historic character of the district.

Mr. Rafferty pointed out other new garages that had been recently constructed in the historic district, setting precedent for approval of this application. He said the location of the existing garage in the front yard of 153 Brattle was not appropriate. He urged the Commission to approve the application.

Dr. Solet asked if the applicant had received a copy of the letter from Robin Karson, a Steele scholar. Mr. Grove indicated that he was a fan of Fletcher Steele's work. He had gone out of his way to document the Steele design. The area to be disturbed by the driveway and the garage contained new plant materials, not historic plantings. The house would remain on its plinth, which predated Steele. All the documentation had been submitted to the CHC for its records. He noted that many of Steele's designs included driveways and garages.

Mr. Bibbins commented that Steele made a practice of dealing with the automobile as quickly as possible, and often tucked it away in a corner of a property. He wondered why Steele had not designed a garage as part of his design for 153 Brattle in the 1920s.

Ms. Berg said she was disturbed by the proposal for several reasons. Enlarging the driveway and bringing cars to the back of the lot would change the quality of the space. The proposed garage was too large and too urban. The mature landscape, though not purely Steele, would be negatively impacted.

Mr. Irving asked if reducing the size of the garage further was an option. Mr. Grassi said they could eliminate the second floor and lower the height to 15' so as to eliminate the need for a variance. The lower building would be less conspicuous from the street.

Dr. Solet said she could understand the desire to drop children off on the property and not across the street. The Commission had hoped that the existing garage, which was allowed for a hardship of a previous owner, would one day be demolished and the landscape would remain undisturbed.

Mr. Sullivan outlined two possible outcomes: maintain the status quo and deny the application because of the intrusion to the landscape and the size of the proposed garage, or approve a new garage of reduced volume.

Mr. Rafferty asked if there was less concern about extending the driveway, apart from a new garage.

Mr. Ferrara stated the wish to protect the landscape and preserve the plinth. A driveway would largely destroy it. Perhaps the driveway could be extended up to the plinth and the garage could be demolished.

Dr. Solet moved to deny the application on the grounds that the proposed alterations were incongruous to the historic property, its terraces, and the highly valued historic landscape design by Fletcher Steele. Mr. Crocker agreed that the existing landscape should be preserved and seconded the motion.

Mr. Rafferty questioned if the side plinth was visible from a public way. Mr. Sullivan replied that it was.

The motion passed 5-2 with Ms. Berg and Mr. Ferrara voting and Messrs. King and Irving opposed.

Mr. King suggested that the Commission consider whether its denial created a substantial hardship and if a Certificate of Hardship could be approved without substantial detriment to the public welfare and without substantial derogation from the intent and purposes of Chapter 40C. Mr. Rafferty said the matter brought to the Commission was an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness. His client had not waived his right to pursue a Certificate of Hardship in the future, but did not wish to do so at the present time. Mr. King said that in light of those comments it was not necessary to make a finding about hardship. He called a brief recess. [Ms. Tobin left].

**Case 2869: 0 Garden St., by Christ Church Cambridge.** Install banner signs on specific days.

Mr. King reconvened the meeting at 8:25 P.M.

Mr. Sullivan reviewed the chronology of the three-sided banner sign that was installed without approval of the Commission at Christ Church several times since 2009. He showed a slide of the sign. The Commission had invited the church to apply for a sign to be installed on a clearly defined schedule of dates during the year. The staff had met with church representatives to discuss such a schedule. He had recommended that a smaller sign be used on some of the dates, as the list was very long.

Reverend Joseph Robinson, the rector, noted that an application for a preservation grant for the exterior of the sanctuary was being held up until the sign issue was resolved. He asked the Commission to remove the suspension on the basis of the church's good faith going forward about the sign issue.

Mr. King appreciated that the grant suspension had focused the church's attention on resolving the sign issue. He did not have a problem with removing that stipulation to use the grant for its intended purpose.

Rev. Robinson said the church had raised \$2.5 million and had begun major capital improvements. He described the banners and nature of their designs. They would rotate, unlike a static sign. Eight days advance posting of the banners was considered necessary to advertise events to the congregation. The sign frame was not a permanent structure. It was designed to be in proportion to the tower of the church. No more than two of the banners would be visible from any angle. The signs would not be displayed all the time, but would come and go to create excitement. Most banners were hand-painted works of art. A lower sign would be blocked from view by parked cars. A smaller sign might work for evensongs.

Mr. Irving asked why the signs needed to be displayed for eight days. Wouldn't announcements to the congregation serve the same purpose?

Ms. Berg said the sign competed with the tower and was twice as tall as it needed to be for pedestrians. Rev. Robinson said its height allowed drivers to see it over parked cars.

Dr. Solet said she had seen people stop to look at the sign, and then look at the building. She would support the application.

Mr. King said there was no precedent for such a sign. Perhaps the temporary sign policy adopted in 1967 was no longer adequate.

Mr. Sullivan indicated that at 12-13' high, the existing sign was too tall. He asked if all the dates on the schedule were necessary. Events like homecoming and the church fair did not seem as important as the religious holidays, but he did not want to wade into religious territory about prioritizing holidays.

Rev. Robinson said he could lower the height of the sign to 10' but 8' would be too squat in proportion. The frame could be painted black. It could be approved as a Beta project then re-evaluated in a couple of years. He asked if the Commission would approve the 10' banners for 100 days and the smaller sign for 100 days.

Dr. Solet moved to approve a temporary certificate of appropriateness to expire January 7, 2014 in order to assess the impact of the banners in the Old Cambridge Historic District. She further moved that during this trial period, the church had permission to install up to three banners, each banner not to exceed 3' in width and 10' in height, for up to 105 days per year, and to install a single banner, not to exceed 3' in width and 5' in height, for up to an additional 35 days per year (or in substitution for the 3 larger banners for any of the above-allotted 105 days) for a total of not more than 140 days. She noted that the references to "banner" or "banners" included their metal supporting posts and that if the applicant wished to extend the arrangement past January 7, 2014, a new application would have to be filed and approved. Ms. Berg seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 with Mr. Ferrara and Ms. Berg voting.

#### Director's Report

Mr. Sullivan reported on his talk about the history of Huron Avenue to a study group discussing the reconstruction of the street.

Mr. Irving moved to adjourn. Ms. Berg seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 at 9:12 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks  
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public  
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 5/3/12**

Patrick Boey	175 Brattle St
Patrick O'Donnell	140 Charles St
Robst A. Hawes	148 N. Franklin St, Holbrook, 02343
Mark Verkennis	1350 Massachusetts Ave
Lael Harris	27 Garden St
Britta Wierich	27 Garden St
Joe Robinson	0 Garden St
Richard Monagle	358 Putnam Ave
Janette Sandberg	101 Linwood St, Somerville 02143
Bill Zamparelli	101 Linwood St, Somerville 02143
Annette Lamond	7 Riedesel Ave
Tom Hagerty	153 Brattle St
Guy Grassi	46 Waltham St, Boston 02118
John Grove	37 Woodlawn Ave, Needham 02492
Matt Langan	15 Arnold St, Marlborough 01752

Town is Cambridge unless otherwise indicated.