

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

November 1, 2012 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: William B. King, *Chair* and Bruce Irving, *Vice Chair*;
M. Wyllis Bibbins, Robert Crocker, Jo M. Solet, *Members*
Shary Page Berg, *Alternate Member*

Members absent: Chandra Harrington, *Member*; Joseph Ferrara and Susannah Tobin, *Alternate Members*

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, Sarah Burks

Public present: See attached list.

Chair William King called the meeting to order at 6:07 P.M. and made introductions. ~~He dispensed with the consent agenda and explained hearing procedures.~~ He designated alternate member Shary Berg to vote on all matters. He explained the consent agenda procedure, reviewed the agenda, and asked if there were any cases that a member of the public, commission, or staff would recommend for approval per the consent agenda for which it would not be necessary to have a full hearing. Case 2964 was recommended for approval per the consent agenda procedures. Mr. King asked if anyone present wanted a full hearing on that case.

Hearing no objections, Jo Solet moved to approve the following case, per the procedures of the consent agenda policy, and authorized the staff to review and approve construction details:

Case 2964: 164 Brattle St., by The 164 Brattle Street Realty Trust, Marc Bloostein, Trustee. Infill porch at southwest corner; reconfigure window layout at rear of east wall.

Robert Crocker seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Public Hearings: Landmark Designation Proceedings

Case L-105: 60 Clifton Street. Consider preliminary study report and draft recommendation to City Council.

Charles Sullivan showed slides and described the house, built in 1855 on Rindge Avenue and moved to Clifton Street in 1859. The house had been subject to a demolition delay followed by a landmark designation study. During that time, the applicant proposed a development project that included restoration of the front block of the house, removal of the ell and later addition, construction of a new addition, and the construction of a free standing second dwelling to the rear. This design received approval from the Historical Commission and the Planning Board and was near completion. He showed slides of the existing condition of the house with the new addition. He remarked that the landmark study and demolition delay had the desired effect of preserving the house, rehabilitating it and putting it back to use. He recommended letting the study period expire and not to forward the matter to the City Council. There would be no additional gain to continued review of the building.

Mr. King asked how much original fabric remained. Kevin Emery, an owner, answered that the sheathing, framing, and foundation were original, but the exterior cladding and trim and windows were new. Mr. King noted that the house was one of the first houses on the street and in the race course neighborhood. He said the study had facilitated a good result for the house.

Dr. Solet praised the owners for the creative design solution to re-use the volume of the main block of the house in combination with a new addition. Mr. Emery agreed that in this particular case, re-using the existing

house worked out well. He added that the special permit process was long, but he had enjoyed working with the staff and the Commission.

There were no questions or comments from members of the public so Mr. King closed the public comment period.

Mr. Irving moved to let the landmark study expire and not to forward the matter to the City Council for designation. Ms. Berg seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Case L-110: 37 Brookline Street fence. Request for designation study received from property owner, Peter Valentine.

Sarah Burks showed slides and summarized the staff memorandum about the property and Peter Valentine's art fence. She described the painted mural, which continues to evolve with additions and updates by the artist. She described the sculptural assemblages and cutouts that encouraged interaction between the fence and the viewer. Ms. Burks described the criteria for significance, as provided in the landmark designation ordinance. She indicated that although the fence was a significant example of contemporary folk art, it was difficult to make it fit the criteria of significance for associations with historical persons or events or as architecturally significant for associations with a famous architect or builder. She also pointed out that the landmark ordinances exempted paint color from the jurisdiction of the Historical Commission, thus calling into question whether the painted design on the fence would be afforded any protection by landmark designation.

Dr. Solet said she could see the fence potentially meeting criterion one of the ordinance for associations with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic, or social history of the City. She expressed concern at the idea that landmark protection would not prevent the mural from being painted over.

Mr. King asked Mr. Valentine about the history of the fence and how he adds to it and maintains it. Mr. King also remarked on the city's most unusual landmark, the Houghton Beech tree.

Mr. Valentine replied that he did not see any problem with the landmark ordinance working with his fence. He read a prepared statement regarding the historical significance of the fence and how it gives meaning to the average person. He said there was nothing else like it and explained his use of magical verse on the fence, a means of getting people to physically interact with the content on the fence by moving while reading and experiencing it thereby opening up the mind. He said he had already included his essential philosophy on the fence; it was limited in size and there would come a time when additions would have to stop. He explained that he had started the fence in 1991 and chose the purple color to make people feel comfortable and relaxed. The content on the fence had come from bursts of inspiration. Inspiration could strike at any time, but he could not provide a schedule. He said the major cut outs in the fence were there from the beginning. The cuts provided a limited view into the yard, but helped maintain some privacy. He joked that it was MIT trying to get the house back.

Mr. King said design guidelines for a landmark designation would have to be carefully crafted in order to protect the character of the fence.

Dr. Solet said some properties are treated like landmarks without official designation by the City Council.

Ms. Berg said it might be easier to treat the fence as a piece of art. She inquired whether the Arts Council had a mechanism for dealing with private art in the public sphere. How would the materials be conserved?

In reply to Bill Bibbins, Mr. Valentine said that graffiti had not been a problem on the fence because he had a way of protecting it and monitoring it. Mr. Bibbins remarked on the relationship between the fence and the house and the respect generated by the fence that might discourage vandalism. He agreed with Mr. Valentine that the angle of the house on the lot was important to the composition.

In reply to Mr. Irving, Mr. Valentine described the materials of the fence, spruce boards, waterproofed posts, metal hardware, and metal post caps. He said he had used painted tin at the top to prevent further rot. He confirmed that it was the message of the fence that mattered, not the materials themselves. He had considered replacing the wood fence with metal, but it was too expensive. The color was chosen not for its appearance but for its energy. The fence was alive, not just an art piece. It was about people's experiences with the fence.

Dr. Solet asked if it had been photographically documented. Mr. Valentine indicated that he had not done so. A relative was putting together a book about it.

Marilyn Wellons, of 653 Green Street, submitted a letter of support for designating the fence. She said the fence reminded her of the turbulent years in the 1970s and 80s when people were engaged in important public debates.

Cathie Zusy, of 202 Hamilton Street, challenged the Historical Commission and the Arts Council to think outside the box. She said she had witnessed its effect on passersby and could make her feel better after a hard day. She noted that Leslie Umberger of the Smithsonian American Art Museum and Jo Farb Hernandez of SPACES (Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments) had written in support of studying the options for reservation and documentation of the fence. She said the best things in life were full of mystery and surprise. She asked whether landmark status would allow for moving the fence inside some day. Could the fence be separated from the property?

Mimi Taylor, of 55A Brookline Street, said she had seen Cambridge change from the People's Republic to a place just for the high tech community.

Shannon Flaherty, of 319 Hurley Street, spoke in support of the fence. Her interviews in Central Square had revealed that there was a great diversity of spiritual practice in the Square. The fence was a reflection of its place and Mr. Valentine's spirituality.

Lydia Eccles, an Allston artist, read her statement of support. She said she had commissioned Mr. Valentine to paint a mural at the Oni Gallery about ten years ago. She likened the fence to a book in progress but on view for everyone to experience. She mentioned the Museum of Visionary Art in Baltimore, but said the fence was better than anything they had there.

Katelyn Payne, of 471 Mass. Ave., Boston, said she had driven by the fence once and felt compelled to stop. Mr. Valentine's words were inspirational.

Ms. Berg suggested a joint study with the Arts Council.

Dr. Solet pointed out that the Shell sign was protected and it would be inappropriate for it to say anything other than, "SHELL," so there was precedent for protecting the content of a landmark.

Mr. King said the fence had a protector in Mr. Valentine. He remarked that the input of the Arts Council would be appropriate but the fence was not public art, it was privately owned.

Mr. Sullivan noted that the Houghton Beech was an unusual case. When the tree dies, the landmark will be gone. The fence was also fragile and ephemeral, requiring continued maintenance. He suggested that the request for a landmark study be tabled in order to allow for time to think about how best to protect it, consult with the Arts Council, and give the matter proper consideration without starting a clock on the one-year protection period of a traditional landmark study. Tabling the matter would keep it an active item on the Commission's docket.

Dr. Solet moved to table the matter. Mr. Irving seconded, and the motion passed 6-0.

Mr. King noted the recent designation of Central Square as a Cultural District. The Massachusetts Cultural Council would help towns market their cultural districts.

Mr. Irving moved to urge the Massachusetts Cultural Council to pay particular attention to the fence when it was coming up with ways to help foster the life of the Central Square Cultural District. Dr. Solet seconded, and the motion passed 6-0.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 2890 (Amendment): 19A Berkeley St., by Wendy Weiss. Replace windows.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides of the property.

Meichi Peng, the architect, noted that the addition on the north side of the building had been approved a few months ago. Only one window in the unit (19A was at the back of the building) was original; the others were modern replacements. The replacements were not of high quality and did not fit the openings properly, causing air infiltration and rot. She explained that they would like to replace all the windows and showed the Commission a sample Marvin replacement unit.

Wendy Weiss, the owner, explained that the house had been divided into two condominiums in 1986 and that was likely when the replacement windows were installed. She said the Marvin window would be more authentic looking than the existing replacement windows. She said they wanted to make the house more energy efficient including insulation and new windows. She said she wanted to replace the one remaining original wood window also.

Mr. Irving noted that old windows in good repair with a storm could be as efficient as a double glazed replacement unit. He suggested that the one remaining original window be restored, given a storm window, and the combination could be replicated in the other openings throughout the unit.

Dr. Solet reminded the Commission that at 24 Berkeley Street, the Commission had not allowed double glazed replacement windows on the main block of the house. She noted that storm windows came in different designs and could be very subtle in appearance.

Ms. Weiss agreed to continue the hearing until December 6 in order to investigate the suggested approach. Dr. Solet moved to continue the hearing, with the owner's consent. Ms. Berg seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Minutes

The Commission reviewed the May 2012 minutes. Mr. King asked if an administrative protocol had been established with the Pole & Conduit Commission yet. Ms. Burks answered that it had not yet been established. Mr. King recommended a change on page 2, to read, "recent correspondence had been distributed..."

Mr. Crocker moved to approve the minutes as corrected. Mr. Irving seconded, and the motion passed 6-0.

New Business

Preservation Restriction: 10 Hollis St. Vote regarding CHC recommendation to City Council re: Historic New England's restriction on the property.

Mr. Sullivan reported that Historic New England had negotiated with the property owner a preservation restriction for the exterior and interior of the house at 10 Hollis Street. The restriction needed to get City Council approval. The Law Department had asked the Historical Commission to forward its recommendation on the matter.

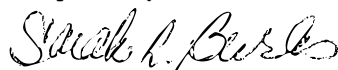
Mr. Irving moved to endorse the preservation restriction, as drafted. Dr. Solet seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Mr. King asked the remaining members of the audience about their interest in the proceedings. The group included a realtor, a preservation student, and an aspiring commission member.

Kyle Sheffield, of 13 Ellsworth Avenue, offered some information about Australia's efforts to designate and protect the works of public artist Keith Haring. He said he would send further info to the staff in case it could be useful in the 37 Brookline study.

Mr. Irving moved to adjourn. Mr. Crocker seconded, and the motion passed 6-0 at 8:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,



Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 11/1/12**

Meichi Peng	460 Harrison Ave, A6, Boston 02118
Wendy Weiss	19A Berkeley St
Cathie Zusy	202 Hamilton St
Shannon Flattery	319 Hurley St
Dan McLaughlin	1109 Boylston St #1, Brookline 02467
John Sanzone	540 Memorial Dr. #304
Lydia Eccles	P.O. Box 201, Allston, 02134
Kevin Emery	9 Gregory Ln., Reading 01867
Suphoj Chancheaw	460 Harrison Ave, Boston 02116
Gary Jaworski	71 Joyce Dr., Plymouth 02360
Casey McNeill	50 Brainerd #1, Allston 02134
Kaitlyn Payne	471 Massachusetts Ave. #61, Boston 02118
Peter Valentine	37 Brookline St
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St, #404
Maryann Taylor	55A Brookline
Brian Wight	18 Chester Ave, Waltham 02106
Marilyn Wellons	651 Green St
Kyle Sheffield	13 Ellsworth Ave

Town is Cambridge unless otherwise indicated.