

Approved 7/11/13

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

April 4, 2013 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue - 6:00 P.M.

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

Members absent: William Barry, *Member*; Susannah Tobin, *Alternate Member*

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, *Executive Director*, Sarah Burks, *Preservation Planner*

Public present: See attached list.

Chair King called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM and made introductions. He explained the hearing procedures and designated both alternates to vote, beginning with Shary Berg on the first case.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 3019: Cronkhite Graduate Center, 84 Brattle St., by President and Fellows of Harvard College for Harvard University Housing. Enlarge window wells and lower retaining walls; replace steps with ramp at loading dock; install bike racks; paving changes; install window A/C units seasonally.

Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner, showed slides and reported that Harvard had withdrawn the air conditioning portion of the application. The balance of the application was before the Commission.

Gary Hammer of Harvard's Planning and Project Management office summarized the application for bike racks, a ramp, window wells to light the basement lounge, painting, and vent louvers.

Jo Solet inquired about drainage at the window wells. David Godfrey, the architect, described the details.

Chandra Harrington asked about the new retaining walls. Mr. Godfrey said they would be 2' high, but only the cap would be visible.

Joseph Ferrara asked about tree removal and the distance from the retaining wall to the sidewalk. Mr. Godfrey said that the distance was 6'.

There being no questions or comments from the public, Mr. King closed the public comment period.

Dr. Solet moved to approve the application as presented, minus the air conditioning. Ms. Harrington seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with Ms. Berg voting.

Public Hearings: Demolition Review

Case D-1291 (continued): 27 Montgomery St. by Hong Zhuang. Demolish workers cottage (by 1872).

Ms. Burks showed slides and reviewed the February decision to find the 1872 workers cottage significant and preferably preserved. The Commission had encouraged the applicant to return if design modifications were made to the proposal. Ms. Burks said she had met several times with the owner and her architect since then.

Fred Porzio, the architect, presented his revised design for a new two-family house. He had relocated the garage to be between the units. The front unit would be 33' high and the rear unit would be 35'. Other design schemes did not work as well. This plan was not as bulky and had a pleasing architectural character.

Dr. Solet commented that the new design was a dramatic improvement over the proposal presented in February. It was a creative response to the comments made at the first hearing.

Mr. King agreed, but noted the additional height of the rear building and asked his colleagues if they thought it was too large. Bill Bibbins said that the volume would be perceived to diminish because of the distance

from the street. Mr. Irving added that in the context of the varied grouping of buildings, the height would not be objectionable. He noted that a new vernacular type of residential structure was developing.

There being no public comment or questions, Mr. King closed the public comment period. He noted that letters of support from Holly Donaldson, Marian Sabal, George Plante, Folk-Man Wong, Frank Cardosi, and Gerard Libaridian had been placed in the record. He noted a letter of objection from Laura Carlson.

Ms. Harrington moved to waive the remainder of the demolition delay by finding that the existing house was no longer preferably preserved in the context of the proposed replacement project. Dr. Solet seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with Mr. Ferrara voting.

Case D-1296: 7 Montgomery St., by Stephen Aliano. Review removal of walls and floors of workers cottage (by 1872) without a demolition permit.

Ms. Burks showed slides of the property. She described the work done to date and summarized the staff report about the history and architecture of the workers cottage.

Mr. King asked if the Commission was to decide if a voluntary demolition outside the procedures of the ordinance had occurred, or if it was to consider whether the building was significant and preferably preserved. Mr. Sullivan replied affirmatively to both suggested actions. A North Cambridge workers cottage had been demolished in violation of the ordinance. This was a house type that had been found significant many times before. The contractor had formed an intent to demolish the building and acted on it.

Dr. Solet asked if a Certificate of Hardship could be granted given the physical condition of the owner. Mr. Sullivan answered that this was not a designated property. It was an over-50-year-old building subject to review under the demolition delay ordinance. There had been about five illegal demolitions since the demolition delay ordinance was adopted in 1979. At least two had been penalized by a full two-year moratorium; in other cases a shorter moratorium had been recommended.

Alan LaBella of Just A Start Corp. told the history of the project, starting with a variance granted in 2011 for an addition to provide accessibility for the handicapped owner. In 2012, a funding request was made to Just A Start for a complete rehab. Just A Start secured \$135,000 through loans and grants and the project was put out to bid. The first contractor reneged and walked away. The second contractor pulled permits and removed the roof in November of 2012. That contractor and the owner mutually agreed to break their contract. In December 2012, a third contractor assumed the permits for the project. Winter weather delayed the job until the first week of March. Then the new contractor, Andrew Stevens, took down more walls than he was supposed to and ISD stopped the work. The owner, Michael Aliano, had been living in an apartment, but his relocation funds had run out. He was paying rent, a mortgage, and a construction loan causing him substantial financial hardship and stress. He was currently in the hospital. Mr. LaBella said the owner should not suffer another two years because of a mistake. The plans for the design had not changed from what was approved by the Board of Zoning appeal and the Inspectional Services Department. He asked that the project be allowed to proceed.

Andrew Stevens, the contractor, displayed the permit plans. He admitted to a mistake but explained why he had taken down approximately 40 linear feet of exterior wall. The framing was insufficient, with no plates and

inadequate headers. He thought the city understood that the structure was inadequate and needed to be rebuilt, but that had been a misunderstanding.

Steven Aliano, the son of the owner, said his father was a lifelong Cambridge resident. He had spinal stenosis and other muscle disorders. He was unable to walk more than 5-6' at a time and needed a fully accessible place to live. He noted a doctor's letter and a letter signed by neighbors in support of the project.

Mr. King closed the public comment period. The Commission discussed the project design and accessibility arrangements, including a chair lift to the back deck.

Mr. Sullivan said this was not the first time that construction had gone too far during the course of a rehab project. The circumstances of the owner, however, were very different than in past cases. He thought the public interest would be served in this particular circumstance by cutting short the delay and letting the project move forward. Mr. King said he was not convinced that the ordinance had been violated.

Mr. Irving made a motion to advise the Inspectional Services Commissioner to suspend the moratorium and allow the project to resume as designed, it being in the public interest to not further delay the project. Dr. Solet seconded, and the motion passed 6-0 with Ms. Berg voting and Mr. King abstaining. Mr. King said he agreed with the result of the matter, but had a different idea of the procedural approach to the case.

Case D-1297: 93 Kirkland St., by 93 Kirkland Street LLC. Demolish rear portion of building (built 1911) and relocate building on same lot for a project that includes rehabilitation of the front portion of the existing building and construction of detached townhouses behind.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides of the six-unit apartment building built in 1911 for Grace Norton, a sister of Charles Eliot Norton. He described the building's architectural features and its site in relationship to the Norton family's Shady Hill estate. It was designed by the prominent architectural firm of Newhall & Blevins with a blend of Classical and Craftsman features. He described similar apartment houses in Cambridge. He summarized the application to demolish the rear portion of the building and move the building to a new position on the same lot.

Mark Boyes-Watson, the architect, showed a site plan and pointed out that part of the lot was in Somerville. The plan had been modified so that none of the new building would be in Somerville. Zoning would allow 13 units and 14,000 square feet of floor area. The front building would have six units and three townhouses would be constructed in a new building behind. The design would preserve the street presence of the building and hide all the parking. He indicated the location of the proposed curb cut and driveway. He displayed existing and proposed elevations. The front porch would be modified and the chimneys removed. The building had been neglected. The windows were not original and might be changed back to the original 6+1 sash arrangement. The stucco finish was in rough condition. The slate roof would remain. A dormer would be constructed on the rear of the roof for a mezzanine level in the back. The new building would be modern in design, with a flat roof. The cornice height of the front building was 32' and the two end townhouses would also have a 32' cornice height.

Dr. Solet asked why the rear portion of the existing building was to be demolished if the front portion was nice enough to move and rehab. Mr. Boyes-Watson replied that the new plan would provide an additional 1,000 square feet, but in a very different configuration. Mr. Ferrara asked if the original building had a second means of egress. Mr. Boyes-Watson said it did. The rehabbed building would not require a second egress because it would

have sprinklers. Mr. Bibbins asked about the material of the new building. Mr. Boyes-Watson answered that it would likely be clad with cedar shingles. In answer to Mr. Irving, Mr. Boyes-Watson said there would be 11 below-grade parking spaces for the 9 units. The rear townhouses would be sold as condos but the front building would probably be rental. He described the driveway, paths, yard spaces, and new front porch.

Valerie Livingston, spokesperson for the DeWire Family Trust, asked for clarification of the site plan and the Somerville line. She commented that there was a lot of hardscape in the plan. Mr. Boyes-Watson agreed there would be less green space, but the left side and rear would be landscaped. Ms. Livingston said the essential character of the building would be lost. The neighborhood largely consisted of one- and two-family houses in the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles. Grace Norton was ahead of her time by offering gracious living and lots of green space to her working-class tenants. The green space was a visual amenity to the public. The proposed development would mean the loss of peace and tranquility. She asked for a delay to allow the architect time to design something more in character with the neighborhood.

Thomas DeWire of 2 Holden Street said his father had built the two two-family houses at the corner of Holden Street and Kirkland Street. He corrected the staff report, saying that his father was a Somerville businessman, not a developer. He had purchased the property from Grace Norton. His father had a building permit for a third building, but chose not to build it because it would have been too dense. He objected to the proposal and would prefer to see the existing building rehabbed.

Mr. King described the demolition delay ordinance and review process. He asked about the zoning. Mr. Sullivan answered that it was zoned Business A, a commercial zone that allowed higher density than the rest of the adjacent Shady Hill neighborhood. Residential development in the Business A zone was equivalent to the Residential C-2 zone, which was denser than C-1, C, or B zones. The height limit was 45 feet.

John Sanzone of 540 Memorial Drive said the rear decks of the building were one of its most interesting features. Would the modified building have decks? Mr. Boyes-Watson answered that the front building would not. The trees at the back of the lot would stay. An elm would be removed for the driveway.

Dr. Solet questioned the need to demolish the rear of the building and build a new one. A rehabbed building with lots of green space around it would be unique and desirable in Cambridge. The proposed development would be incongruous to the site. She moved to find the existing building significant as defined in the ordinance for the reasons indicated in the staff report. Mr. Irving seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with Ms. Berg voting.

Dr. Solet moved to find the existing building preferably preserved in the context of the design presented. There was no second to the motion.

Mr. Irving moved to find the rear portion of the existing building and its current location on the site not preferably preserved in the context of the design proposal. Ms. Harrington seconded, and the motion passed 6-1 with Mr. Ferrara voting as alternate and Dr. Solet opposed.

Preservation Grants

IPG 13-8: 54 Brattle St., by Cambridge Center for Adult Education. \$50,000 requested for accessibility improvements.

Mr. Sullivan reported that the accessibility design that received a Certificate of Appropriateness in Case 2996 had been modified and the upper ramp would be located inside the modern addition, not in the courtyard. He recommended approval of the request for \$50,000 for accessibility improvements.

Mr. Irving moved to approve a grant of \$50,000. Ms. Harrington seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with Ms. Berg voting.

IPG 13-2: 838 Massachusetts Ave., by St. Peter's Episcopal Church. \$21,062 for window restoration.

Mr. Sullivan said that in October the Commission had denied a grant request to replace all the windows in the parish house. The church had reexamined the windows and now proposed to rehab 59 windows and replace the others. The current grant request was for \$21,062.

Mr. Bibbins said they had already repaired some of the windows as a sample. He moved to approve the requested grant. Mr. Irving seconded, and the motion passed 7-0, with Mr. Ferrara voting as alternate.

[Ms. Harrington left the meeting].

Preservation Award Nominations

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and reviewed the nominees. Discussion ensued. Mr. King recommended 38-40 Arlington Street for the Platt Award. It was agreed that a final list would be presented in May.

Minutes

Mr. King noted a typo on page 3: delete "the" on the first line.

Mr. Irving moved to approve the March 7 minutes as corrected. Dr. Solet seconded. The motion passed 6-0 with Ms. Berg and Mr. Ferrara both voting. Mr. King abstained because he had not attended the meeting.

New Business

There being no new business, Mr. Crocker moved to adjourn. Ms. Berg seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:20 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 4/4/13**

Chris Packard	1100 Mass Ave
Gary Hammer	1350 Mass Ave
David Godfroy	281 Summer St, Boston 02210
Thomas DeWire	2 Holden St
DeWire Family Trust (Valerie Livingston)	2 Holden St
Alex Steinbergh	3 Clinton St
John Sanzone	540 Memorial Dr

Town is Cambridge unless otherwise indicated.