

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

January 8, 2015 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge Senior Center - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: William King, *Chair*; Bruce Irving, *Vice Chair*; William Barry, Robert Crocker, Chandra Harrington, Jo M. Solet, *Members*; Shary Page Berg, Susannah Tobin, *Alternates*

Members absent: M. Wyllis Bibbins, *Member*; Joseph Ferrara, *Alternate*

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 P.M. He made introductions and reviewed hearing procedures, and announced that public testimony would be limited to 3 minutes. In the absence of Mr. Bibbins, he designated alternates Berg and Tobin to vote alternately on all matters.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 3258 (Amendment): 91 Winthrop St., by Laurelwood, LLC. Add seating on porch roof; construct glass enclosure for stair and mechanical lift.

Mr. King announced that the applicant had withdrawn his request for a Certificate of Appropriateness, so there would be no hearing in this case.

Case 3309 (Amendment): 205 Brattle St., by Katrina Armstrong & Thomas Randall. Amend plans and construct 2-story addition on east side.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides of the property and noted that the applicant sought an amendment to a previously granted Certificate of Appropriateness.

Tom Randall, an owner, said he had a family of five and wanted an addition for entertaining that would not intrude on the landscaping. Paul Fiore, the architect, described the addition and noted that the previously-approved dormer on the rear of the house would not be built.

Mr. Barry asked if the materials would match those existing on the house, and Mr. Fiore assured him that they would.

Mr. Irving moved to approve the application as submitted. Mr. Barry seconded, and the motion passed unanimously with Ms. Berg voting.

Case D-1356: 29 Highland St., by Highland Street Cambridge LLC. Demolish house (1922).

Mr. Irving announced that he would recuse himself from this case because he had evaluated the property for the applicant prior to the purchase. He left the table and sat with the audiencepublic.

Ms. Burks showed slides and summarized the staff report, explaining the significance of the property for its associations with the Read and Hubbard families and as an example of the Colonial Revival style by noted architect Allen Jackson. The older frame carriage house would remain.

Mr. King described the demolition delay ordinance and reviewed the commission's procedures. He asked for questions of fact from members of the commission and the audience.

Susan Hammond of 15 Hemlock Road was told that the carriage house would not be razed.

Linda Kaboolian of 23 Highland Street said that Jackson was not a well-known architect, and that his book was about the Tudor style. Celia Hubbard did not live in the house as an adult.

Annette LaMond of 7 Riedesel Avenue noted that Jackson designed several houses and also the Cambridge Skating Club. Mrs. Hubbard had been an early member of the Cambridge Garden Club.

Kenneth Taylor of 23 Berkeley Street asked about the relationship of the house to 88 Appleton Street. Ms. Burks replied that Eliot Hubbard had purchased and renovated 88 Appleton in the Colonial Revival style in 1922, and then built 29 Highland for his son on the same property.

Dr. Solet moved to find the building significant for the reasons stated in the report. Ms. Berg seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. King announced that the Commission would consider whether the house should be found preferably preserved.

Christian Nolen, the owner, said that he and his wife had fallen in love with the carriage house, and bought the property before developers could subdivide it. He introduced David Stern, his architect, and Glen Valentine, his landscape architect.

Mr. Stern said the existing house did not meet the needs of the owners. They had been drawn to the carriage house, which was in disrepair and hard to see from the street. They wanted to make an energy-efficient house in a landscape that would draw the house and the carriage house together, so they could use the latter as a garage with studio and office space. The new house would face Appleton Street, with large windows facing north. The materials would be stone, wood, and metal.

Mr. Valentine said the landscape plan would remove invasives and open up views. The existing house sat about 9' above Highland Street. The new house would be higher up the slope, sitting above a series of terraces with low stone walls and evergreen plantings. The beech tree would be preserved.

Mr. Stern said the house was in a state of disrepair and hadn't been occupied for decades. The interior quality was bare-bones, with no distinguishing features. It was not a high-style design. It lacked significance and had not been included in the Commission's 1973 book on the neighborhood; if it was significant, the authors would have included it. The carriage house was more important.

Mr. Nolen said that they had met almost all their abutters, and that the owners of 88 Appleton, 15 Hemlock, and 23 Highland supported their plans. They hadn't bought the property with the intent of demolishing the house. They looked at adding on to the rear, but it would need a new roof and new windows. The carriage house was the important thing. There were many better Colonial Revival houses.

Dr. Solet asked about setbacks. Mr. Nolen replied that the existing house was set back 48'. They couldn't keep the house if they wanted to have usable yard space around a new house. She asked if there was a structural engineer's report indicating that the house was compromised or not well built. Mr. Stern said the sleeping porch floor was cracked and sloping. Mr. Nolen said the realtors told them about

problems with the house, including a disconnected boiler, asbestos, water penetration, brick bearing walls that would be difficult to insulate, and mostly original systems.

Mr. King opened the meeting for questions of fact.

Susan Hammond asked about siting of the new house.

Annette LaMond commented on heavy traffic on Appleton Street.

Ms. Kaboolian asked about the difference in footprints and extent of pavement. Mr. Stern said the buildings were about the same size, spread over two floors instead of 2½. There would be a little less pavement. Mr. Valentine said the current driveway was steep and encouraged runoff. The new level driveway would control runoff much better.

Kenneth Taylor said the site plan showed the north portion of the lot as largely pavement. Mr. Valentine said there would be a parking court for the three-bay garage. It would read as a garden because the paving would be broken up by walls and hedges. Mr. Stern added that gardens didn't have to be green; different textures and materials were important.

William Edgerly of 32 Highland Street said he and his wife had lived on the street for 44 years and had been friends with Betty and Celia Hubbard. Highland Street should be considered as an entity – as a neighborhood. The Hubbard house was a cornerstone of the street, and if it were demolished it would mean the loss of a house that knitted the neighborhood together. Mr. Stern responded that change was always difficult, but unavoidable. A replacement could be beautiful. Mr. King said that responses should be held until after public comment.

Peter Gerhardt, a former resident, said the Commission should take a broad view of the neighborhood in evaluating this proposal.

Ms. Kaboolian said that she and her husband had taken a bastardized house and renovated it to match the character of the neighborhood. She supported the proposal because she was sympathetic to the difficulty of change and didn't find the proposed house objectionable. She would prefer to see a terraced garden rather than the sloping lawn. There would be more gardens and less blacktop.

Toby Fairbanks of 221 Mt. Auburn Street said that he grew up on Highland Street. The Hubbard house was not a great asset to the area. Bill Wainwright built a charming modern house, now demolished; change does happen in Cambridge.

Susan Hammond of 15 Hemlock Road delivered a letter from Jonathan Cole. She said the carriage house was falling apart and should be restored. The Hubbard house was “an odd duck.”

Cynthia Ellis of 16 Highland Street expressed uncertainty about the proposed project and how it might relate to the neighborhood.

Diana Thom of 45 Highland Street said she had completed a major renovation of her house. It would be good for the neighbors to get together to discuss the future of the neighborhood.

Liz Adams of 26 Hubbard Park said she was a Hubbard relation. She thought the new owners would do a wonderful job with the project.

Foster Hancock of 57 Brewster Street said that the proposal wouldn't fit the neighborhood, which was nearly all of the same era. The carriage house could be pulled forward on the lot to highlight it. The new and old structures were inconsistent in design.

Charlotte Wagner of 163 Brattle Street spoke highly of the applicants and their plans.

Mr. Edgerly said the issue was demolition of the existing house, not the design of the replacement. The loss would be too high a price to pay.

Mr. Sullivan reviewed the 17 letters received about this matter. Four supported the application, 11 opposed it, and two expressed interest in the outcome. Two correspondents suggested expanding the Old Cambridge Historic District to include the south slope of Reservoir Hill.

Mr. King said he had been frustrated over the years that not all of Old Cambridge was in the historic district. The area was too small for a neighborhood conservation district, but an expansion of the historic district might work.

Mr. Stern said that part of the charm of the neighborhood was that there was a mix of periods and styles, including several modern houses. They tried to site the new house to respect the stable and take cues from it, but not to mimic it.

Mr. King closed public testimony.

Ms. Berg commented about the landscape plan that the parking area seemed large and the path from Highland Street would be awkward. The existing woody character was not noted on the plan, and some of the new trees seemed wrong. Mr. Valentine responded positively.

Dr. Solet observed that the parking could be improved without removing the house. Mr. Stern told her the carriage house would be used as a garage with an apartment and office above.

Mr. Barry said the house had character and he was inclined to see it preferably preserved. The proposed design was not well fleshed out, and did not make compelling case for demolition.

Ms. Harrington asked for more insight into how the decision was made to demolish the house. The issue was not about the carriage house, but about the house proposed for demolition.

Mr. Sullivan said that he had met the applicant and his architect on site last spring, shortly after they closed on the property. They indicated at the outset they they had no interest in the house, and intended to raze it. The fact that the house wasn't mentioned in 1973 was irrelevant; it was barely 50 at the time. He considered the house to be a significant example of the Colonial Revival. During his lifetime Allen Jackson was well-respected and worked throughout Old Cambridge. The 30,000sf lot could easily be subdivided, the house restored, and a new one built on Appleton Street. He recommended the house be found preferably-preserved. The commission should discuss expanding the historic district.

Mr. Barry said the issue was demolition of a significant house, not the design of its replacement.

Mr. Nolen said that Mr. Sullivan had mischaracterized his intent. They had undertaken six studies of alternatives, and made a good-faith effort to work with the house.

Mr. Barry moved to find 29 Highland Street preferably preserved in the context of the replacement proposal as discussed. Ms. Harrington seconded.

Dr. Solet observed that the Commission wouldn't be asking for minor revisions in the plans; she was hearing support for preserving the house.

Mr. Nolen said the lot could support three houses, and he didn't think that would benefit the neighborhood.

Ms. Tobin hoped for more discussion with the neighborhood to find a solution that could preserve the house. Mr. King said he was not opposed to modern architecture, and sympathized with Dr. Solet's comments about sending a clear message about preservation.

Mr. King called the question on Mr. Barry's motion, which passed unanimously with Ms. Tobin voting.

Case D-1357: 46-52 Massachusetts Ave., by Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Demolish Bexley Hall (1911).

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and reviewed the staff memo, describing Bexley Hall as significant for its associations with ~~attempts to develop~~ the development of filled land on the Cambridge side of the Charles in the early 20th century, and for its design by William L. Mowll, a noted architect of the period.

Thayer Donham of M.I.T. introduced Kelley Brown; both were campus planners. Ms. Donham said that the Institute had neglected its older buildings for a long time, and showed a map of buildings that were being studied for capital improvements. Bexley had been examined in the spring of 2013 and found structurally deficient; the engineers, LeMessurier Associates, recommended that the building could fail, and would have to be rebuilt from the inside out. The building was closed in June 2013 and had deteriorated further since then. The Institute had not anticipated this, so they had prepared a proposal for a temporary landscaped area until development plans could be completed. She offered to return when there was a more permanent plan.

The temporary open space would retain the foundation and backfill it to create a park about 2' above grade with ramps from Massachusetts Avenue and the alley behind. There would be areas for events, with seating and lighting. The facility would help manage the tour buses that unload there. She had no guidance on how long it would be before the site would be redeveloped.

Mr. King observed that the park might become popular and difficult to redevelop. He noted that the Executive Director's report contained long-term commitments for future consultation on sites of M. I. T.'s demolished buildings on Hayward and Carleton streets.

Dr. Solet said it was unfortunate that M.I.T. had created a situation that couldn't be fixed.

Kelley Brown told Mr. Irving that the building had housed 116 students, and that Building 11 next door was the religious services building.

Ms. Tobin moved to find the building significant for the reasons in the staff report. Ms. Harrington seconded, and the motion passed unanimously with Ms. Tobin voting.

Mr. Sullivan observed that M.I.T. had not tried to demolish the building by neglect; they admitted negligence, which had caused them to reduce undergraduate enrollment because of the loss of beds.

Dr. Solet moved to find Bexley Hall not preferably preserved on the basis of the apparent infeasibility of repairing it, the public safety problem it presented, and the Institute's agreement to return for review of their replacement proposal. Ms. Tobin seconded, and the motion passed with Ms. Berg voting.

Preservation Grants

Case IPG 15-7: 31 Bishop Allen Drive, by St. Paul's A.M.E. Church. Request for \$50,000 outright to install an elevator.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides, ~~noting the excellent condition of the church interior and reported that the church was in excellent condition, and so was eligible for consideration of a grant for accessibility~~ reported that accessibility was an eligible improvement for a grant. An elevator would fit neatly into a recess behind the bell tower. There was a balance of \$180,000 in the fund.

Dr. Solet moved to approve a grant of \$50,000. Ms. Berg seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with Ms. Tobin voting.

New Business

135 Western Ave. Property recently listed for sale; consider staff recommendation to initiate landmark study

Mr. Sullivan showed slides of the tall porticoed 1846 Greek Revival house at 135 Western Avenue, which had recently been placed on the market. A call from a prospective owner and a communication from realtor John Sanzone made him concerned about the future integrity of the building, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Mr. Irving moved to initiate a landmark designation study and schedule a hearing for the next meeting to confirm that decision. Mr. Barry seconded, and the motion passed unanimously with Ms. Berg voting.

Elections for Chair and Vice Chair

Ms. Harrington nominated Mr. King to continue as Chair. Ms. Tobin seconded, and the motion was adopted unanimously with Ms. Berg voting.

Ms. Harrington nominated Mr. Irving to continue as Vice Chair. Mr. Crocker seconded, and the motion passed unanimously with Ms. Tobin voting.

Organization and Procedural Matters

Mr. Irving said he had been getting frustrated with the length of meetings and didn't want to burn out. He had met with Mr. King and the staff to discuss ways of keeping the meetings moving ahead and not getting side-tracked.

Ms. Berg observed that every meeting was different. With a shorter agenda it might be okay to spend more time discussing cases.

Dr. Solet said it was helpful for the chair to offer guidance, but she didn't like the three-minute rule for testimony. The Commission had a reputation for being willing to listen. It was a matter of credibility and respect.

Ms. Harrington said that the rule was democratic and consistently applied. Ms. Tobin agreed. Mr. Sullivan observed that with all the testimony during ~~the~~ this meeting his stopwatch had gone off only once.

Mr. Barry said it was important to be fair to proponents as well, and not to allow ad hominem remarks. The chair should keep people on topic.

Ms. Berg moved to adjourn. Mr. Barry seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:55 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed the Attendance List on January 8, 2014**

Kenneth Taylor	23 Berkeley St.
Susan Hammond	15 Hemlock Road
Chris Taylor	23 Decatur Street
Christian Nolen	29 Highland Street
Glen Valentine	11 Craft Road, Belmont
Tom Randall	205 Brattle Street
Paul Fiore	98 Otis Street
Michael Finch	78 Edenfield Ave, Watertown
Cynthia Ellis	16 Highland Ave.
Zeynes Ton	45 Highland Ave.
Linda Kaboolian	23 Highland Avenue
Harold Nahigian	23 Highland Street
Jessica Nahigian	23 Highland Street
Thayer Donham	77 Massachusetts Avenue
Kelley Brown	77 Massachusetts Avenue
Susan Denny	29 Highland Street
Lindsay Allison	159 Mt. Auburn St.
Sandra Fairbank	221 Mt. Auburn St.
Toby Fairbank	221 Mt. Auburn St.
Phoebe White	99 Hancock St.
Charlotte Wagner	163 Brattle St.
Elizabeth Adams	26 Hubbard Park Road
John Hawkinson	P.O. Box 397103, 02139

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.