

## Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

May 7, 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, Joseph Ferrara, *Alternates*

Members absent: Susannah Tobin, *Alternate*

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

Public present: See attached list.

Chair King called the meeting to order at 6:06 P.M. He designated alternates Berg and Ferrara to vote in turn, beginning with Ms. Berg. He outlined hearing procedures and dispensed with the consent agenda.

### Public Hearing: Demolition Review & Landmark Designation Procedures

**Case D-1356 (Continued): 29 Highland St., by Highland Street Cambridge LLC.** Selective demolition and relocation of 1922 house on the lot; construction of addition.

**Case L-116: 29 Highland St.** Consider citizen petition to initiate landmark designation study for property.

Mr. Irving recused himself from the case because he had been consulted about the property prior to purchase. He left the Commission table and sat with the other members of the public.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and reviewed the case history. The house had been found significant and preferably preserved per the demolition delay ordinance in January. The proponents returned in April with a revised proposal for partial demolition and to move the main block of the house to reposition it on the lot. The staff had met in the interim with the applicants' architect. A landmark study petition had been received just before the April hearing and was advertised for May. If the Commission were to find the building not preferably preserved in light of the current revised proposal, then the landmark study question would be moot. He explained why the two matters were advertised and arranged on the agenda in this order. He reported that he had also received, on May 6, a petition for the commencement of a neighborhood conservation district study for the area around Highland Street. This new petition had not yet been verified and was not subject of a hearing at the present meeting.

John Gilmore, of 47 Reservoir Street, asked a procedural question. He indicated that his reading of the ordinance was that the CHC was obligated to start a study and prepare a report upon receipt of a landmark petition.

Mr. King explained that it was the Commission's practice to consider whether or not to initiate a landmark designation study upon receipt of a petition. There were pragmatic reasons why a landmark study might not be started; it was a lengthy process to prepare a report, and some petitions had been found to be frivolous or unreasonable. He recommended, regardless of what might happen with the 29 Highland Street case, that the Commission schedule a hearing in June for the consideration of the NCD study petition.

Sue Denny, an owner of 29 Highland Street, said they had taken the feedback from the last hearing and gone back to the drawing board with their architect. She introduced architect David Stern, of Stern McCafferty Architects.

Mr. Stern said he came away from the last hearing with three considerations: how much of the house was being preserved, the relationship of the addition to the existing house, and the siting of the house on the lot. The new proposal retained more of the original house by keeping the kitchen wing. The end wall would remain intact and would not need to be reconstructed in the new location. The addition was smaller and tucked behind the corner of the main house. The two would be separated by a gasket. He showed a rendered view from Appleton Street. Less of the addition would be visible from Highland Street. He showed more renderings and described the low retaining walls and landscape design. The addition would be secondary to the volume of the main house. The fenestration had been adjusted to better relate to the main house. Other siting options were studied per Mr. King's suggestion. The steep drop on the southern portion of the lot and the mature trees there made it infeasible to move the house to the south. Many neighbors including three abutting properties supported the plan. Since the purpose of the delay was to find a preservation alternative to demolition, and that had been accomplished with the current plan, he asked the Commission to waive the remainder of the delay.

Mr. Barry asked about the patinated metal materials for the addition. Mr. Stern replied that it was a simple palette of materials that would be distinct from the main house. They were sympathetic without trying to replicate those of the house. The vertical wood siding would show a textural change from the metal panels, but the coloration would be similar. The exact colors had not yet been selected because it would take considerable time and effort to finalize them and they needed a green light for the project first.

Dr. Solet asked about the paved area at the back of the property to the right of the barn. Mr. Stern replied that there was a pedestrian path and landscaped area there. There also would be a terrace on the south side of the addition.

Mr. Crocker asked about the sizes of the footprint of the house and the addition. Chris Taylor of Stern McCafferty Architects said the existing footprint was 1400 sf and the addition was 1000-1200. Mr. Stern noted that the height of the addition was lower than the existing house and the second floor of the addition would step back.

Mr. King asked for questions of fact from the public.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked about driveway material. Mr. Stern replied that it would likely be pavers, but the exact kind hadn't been selected. Ms. Meyer suggested a fieldstone retaining wall instead of the more modern look of flat stones. Mr. Stern said it could go either way. The landscape details were not yet finalized. Christian Nolen, an owner of 29 Highland Street, said the flat stone wall would match that already in place at 23 Highland Street.

Mr. Gilmore asked about the percentage of the addition's elevation that would be glass. Mr. Stern said that number had not been calculated.

William Edgerly of 32 Highland Street said he had lived across the street for 44 years. He had watched the house decline after the Hubbard family's trust took over the property. The current time was an opportunity for the property to be reinvigorated. He was opposed to the boxy addition. It would stare him in the face. He would rather see the existing house renovated in its current location. He noted that Annette LaMond had prepared a report about the architect of 29 Highland Street, Alan Jackson.

Ms. LaMond, of 7 Riedesel Avenue, was asked by the chair to summarize her findings about Jackson. She said Jackson was known for his careful siting of structures. The house at 29 Highland was well done and left room at the back for an addition. Other houses designed by Jackson included 48 Highland Street. His attention to detail was very good. He had also designed the Cambridge Skating Club building. She expressed hope that the house would be restored in place.

Mr. Gilmore said he was not opposed to modern architecture. There had been a lot of change in the neighborhood including 5 demolitions within 300 yards of his house. He said 29 Highland Street was a salvageable house on an exquisite street. He objected to rotating and moving the house because it would change the nature of the corner.

Ms. Meyer said the proposed siting would obscure the carriage house. She objected to the proposed landscaping. She approved of the retention of the kitchen wing and spoke of her fondness for the sleeping porch. The proposal was a type of sterilized history that she did not like.

Mr. King closed the public comment period.

Mr. Barry noted that the proponents had listened and responded to comments. Modern architecture was not a bad thing and could complement historic buildings. The sleeping porch was an important feature of the house, though in poor condition. The proposed addition did not look subservient to the main house; it was in line with or proud of the south wall of the house. The adjusted window proportions were appreciated but the overall ratio of solid to void was jarring. It seemed like a mismatch of the property with the desires of the owners but they had shown a clear desire to stay with the lot and work with the existing building.

Dr. Solet said she was willing to see the sleeping porch go, though noting there was a new porch of similar size on the addition. Mr. Stern said the staff had indicated that the kitchen wing, bay and entry were of greater importance to the house than the sleeping porch.

Ms. Harrington said she was heartened to see how much work had gone into reversing the initial request for full demolition. She said she had read all the letters and there were more in support for the project than opposed.

In response to a question, Mr. Sullivan said that a south orientation was traditionally preferred. Though it would be more appropriate to leave the house where it was, the proponents' plan would make it

a part of the streetscape on Appleton Street. He noted that this was not an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness as if it were in the historic district but rather a demolition review. The Commission should determine which alternative was in the greater public interest: to leave the house where it was, or to allow it to be moved in light of the revised design proposal. There were competing interests and arguments on both sides.

Mr. Ferrara commented on the importance of corner lots. To move the house away from the corner was a substantial change. There was a well-defined cadence and average setback on Highland Street.

Mr. Stern noted that the house on the northwest corner of Appleton and Highland streets (71 Appleton Street) did not face Highland Street and that 29 Highland Street was already set very far back from the corner.

Mr. Nolen asked if the staff had a recommendation.

Dr. Solet noted that if the house were not to be moved, it would no longer need a demolition permit because the scope of demolition did not now rise to that level. She asked for a comparison of setbacks of 71 Appleton Street and the proposed siting for 29 Highland Street. Mr. Stern approximated the relationship of the two houses on the site plan, but 71 Highland was not included on that plan. He said that great efforts had been made to retain the house and the proposed siting was reasonable. The new siting would create a better relationship between the house and carriage house and open up views of the carriage house.

Dr. Solet moved to terminate the demolition delay and preferably preserved status of the house in the context of the current design proposal. There was no second to the motion.

Mr. Barry moved to initiate a landmark designation study for the property. Mr. Crocker seconded the motion, which passed 7-0, with Ms. Berg voting.

Mr. Sullivan explained that with the landmark study in effect, the proponents could apply for a certificate of appropriateness if they wanted to come back with revisions or further detail on the design during the landmark study. Changes could be approved to the property during the study.

#### Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

**Case 3403: 174 Brattle St., by Silvia Gosnell.** Replicate existing wood fence with cellular PVC material; paint to match existing.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the existing wood fence, which was installed in 2003. He noted that the Commission had approved PVC trim elements in limited circumstances within the Old Cambridge Historic District, such as skirt boards or roof balustrades where material met the ground or was subject to snow accumulation.

Philip Gosnell, son of owner Silvia Gosnell, indicated that while the material was proposed to change, the appearance of the fence would remain the same. The only change would be a slightly different post cap.

Dr. Solet asked if the existing fence could be repaired.

Lilian Bracamonte, the house manager, said the existing fence was too rotten to repair. The owner wanted to make an investment in the property and to get a longer lasting material. Maintaining the wood fence was not worth the effort. They had painted just two years ago and it was already not looking good.

Mr. Ferrara asked if the posts would be placed with the same spacing. Ms. Bracamonte replied in the affirmative.

Russ Colligan of Walpole Outdoors said the solid cellular PVC products had been very successful. The company had even changed its name from Walpole Woodworkers. Other examples of a solid cellular PVC fence in Cambridge included one at the Jewett House at Harvard Divinity School. The paint by Sherwin Williams was specially formatted to adhere to the PVC and they could match any Benjamin Moore color as well. The paint came with a 25 year warranty.

Ms. Bracamonte displayed a sample fence panel.

The Commission asked questions about the material's sheen, susceptibility to mildew, and cleaning. Mr. Sullivan asked if the hardware would be visible where the panel meets the post. Mr. Colligan replied that there were recessed covers over the screws and it was hardly noticeable.

Ms. Meyer asked about cost differential. Mr. Colligan said the solid cellular PVC was 30% more expensive than cedar.

Mr. Ferrara asked how long the lengths of the extruded material could be. Mr. Colligan replied that they could be up to 10' lengths.

Ms. Berg asked about precedent in the district. Mr. Sullivan said there was a rooftop balustrade made of PVC at 147 Brattle. Dr. Solet noted that the Commission had approved use of the material for the bottom rail of the fence at 121 Brattle. Mr. Colligan said the driveway gate at 156 Brattle was made of this material and also noted the use of the material on fencing and an archway on Berkeley Place.

Mr. Sullivan noted that the existing fence was a modern addition and not a replication of an original fence. It could be replicated with the new material.

Mr. Barry said this was the new wood of today. The cedar of today.

Ms. Meyer said she would miss the appearance of wood as it ages and settles.

Mr. Barry said the material had been around a while. It might be too pristine, but the Commission should wait and see. This case could be a prototype test case. He moved to approve the application as submitted, and asked that the minutes reflect that as a test case, this was not a district-wide precedent for use of the material in all circumstances. Ms. Berg seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 with Mr. Ferrara voting.

**Case 3404: 13 Brattle St., by Trinity Property Management o/b/o Bill Keravuori, Beat Hotel.** Install permanent blade sign to replace temporary sign.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the application. He noted that two temporary signs had been installed when the restaurant opened.

Bill Keravuori, an owner of the establishment, described the proposed neon sign. It would be more like older signs that had been in the Square in an earlier era. He noted that he had received the support of the Harvard Square Business Association. The curve of the street and the lower level location of the retail space made it difficult to see the restaurant. The Coop's awnings also hampered the view. It would be an eclectic sign for an eclectic establishment. He described the materials as being naked neon on a flat backing. He described the colors. It was an exciting design and it would help his business. It would evoke a bygone era of the Square. He described the mounting detail and where on the building it was best to attach due to the structure of the building.

Ms. Harrington asked if the lights would blink. Mr. Keravuori replied in the negative.

Ms. Berg asked about the zoning status of the sign. Ms. Burks explained that the Commission could approve the position of the sign above the second floor sill and the illumination of a blade sign but that the proposed sign was conforming as to size. The landlord had approved allotment of some of the Palmer Street sign area to the front of the building.

Mr. Sullivan asked if the two existing signs would be removed. Mr. Keravuori replied yes. Ms. Burks asked if the sign band would return to its previous color and appearance. Mr. Keravuori replied yes. Mr. Sullivan recommended delegating the attachment details to staff so the sign could be attached in the least obtrusive way.

Mr. Irving moved to approve the sign and to delegate approval of attachment details to staff. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 with Ms. Berg voting.

#### Preservation Grants

**Case IPG 15-8: 1418 Cambridge St. (#4), by First United Presbyterian Church.** Request of \$100,000 For accessibility improvements.

**Case PG 15-4: 22 Plymouth St., by Just-A-Start, Corp.** Request of \$30,000 to strip and reside building.

Mr. Sullivan reported that the available balance in the grant fund was in the low five figures, but there were a couple of approved grantees that were not ready to proceed so some money would be freed up. He showed slides of 1418 Cambridge Street and explained that the proposed work included accessibility improvements. Three previous grants had been approved for the church to address the roof, buttresses, and stucco. Now that the envelope was secure, accessibility could be supported with grant money. He recommended approving a grant of \$50,000, subject to the availability of funds. Mr. Sullivan then showed slides of 22 Plymouth Street. The proposal included stripping off the siding, new clapboards, and porch repair. He recommended \$30,000 grant, subject to the availability of funds. Mr. Irving moved

to approve the two grants as recommended. Mr. Ferrara seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with Mr. Ferrara voting.

#### Preservation Awards

Mr. Sullivan showed slides of the final award selections.

#### Director's Report

Mr. Sullivan reported that Edward Seldin was supportive of the idea of landmarking his house at 145 Elm Street. He had thought there was a preservation easement, but a signed copy had not been found. He recommended scheduling a hearing in June to consider a landmark study of the property. Dr. Solet so moved. Ms. Harrington seconded. The motion passed 6-0 with Ms. Berg voting and Mr. Crocker abstaining.

#### Minutes

Mr. King and Dr. Solet offered edits to the April 2 minutes on pages 2, 3, 10, and 11. Ms. Berg moved to approve the minutes, as corrected. Mr. Barry seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 with Mr. Ferrara voting.

#### New Business

Mr. Sullivan reported that there was a possible demolition violation at 11 Kinnaird Street and that a stop-work order had been issued by the Inspectional Services Department. It would come to the commission for a hearing in June. He also reported that M.I.T. had gone public with their current proposal for treatment of existing buildings in Kendall Square and the development of new ones. The proposal included the preservation of the three buildings under landmark study, though details of those designs were not yet fleshed out. It would come to the Commission for consideration in July.

Mr. King reported on the receipt of letters from Marilee Meyer and Carole Perrault with complaints about the hearing process for the changes at Holyoke Center. He said he had replied and asked them to share any further design suggestions with the staff, which was delegated ongoing design review of the project.

Ms. Harrington moved to adjourn. Mr. Crocker 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 the Attendance List on May 7, 2015**

Christian Nolen	29 Highland Street
Susan Denny	29 Highland Street
David Stern	46 Waltham Street, Boston 02118
Chris Taylor	23 Decatur Street
William Edgerly	32 Highland Street
Lois S. Edgerly	32 Highland Street
Joe Moore	7 Riedesel Avenue
John Gilmore	47 Reservoir Street
Annette LaMond	7 Riedesel Ave
Esther Pullman	10 Ash Street Place
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana Street
Russ Colligan	Walpole Outdoors Co., 50 Walkers Brook Drive, Reading 01867
Lilian Bracamonte	174 Brattle Street
Philip Gosnell	174 Brattle Street
Pearson Miller	253 Albany Street
Jack Bardy	13 Brattle Street
Elizabeth Gilmore	47 Reservoir Street
Bill Keravuori	78 Montgomery Street, Boston 02116
Amzlia Todd	16 Gray Gardens East
Liz Whitbeck	1 Fitchburg Street, B450, Somerville 02143
Tracy Jean-Chronberg	37 Hawthorn Street
Bertil Jean-Chronberg	37 Hawthorn Street

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.