

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

June 2, 2016 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge Senior Center - 6:00 P.M.

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

Members absent: William Barry, Chandra Harrington, *Members*

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

Public present: See attached list.

Chair King called the meeting to order at 6:02 P.M. He described the hearing procedures and designated both alternates to vote on all matters.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 3609: Longfellow Park, by City of Cambridge. Install 2 park signs and 2 benches.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the application for two benches and two signs. He noted that there had never been benches in the lower, grassy part of the park before and that the Cambridge Plant & Garden Club had renewed the plantings in the park. He recommended a Certificate of Appropriateness, as submitted.

Ms. Berg asked if the benches would be long enough to sleep on. Mr. Sullivan answered that they were no more than 8' across with a bar in the middle. They would be the same as the benches used at the Common, so he thought it would not be problem.

Mr. King asked for questions and comments from the public. There being none he closed the public comment period.

Dr. Solet asked if the benches would be far enough away from the paved path so as not to obstruct persons traversing it, especially those in wheelchairs. Mr. Sullivan answered that the benches would not obstruct the path.

Mr. Ferrara moved to approve the application as submitted. Dr. Solet seconded the motion, which passed 7-0.

Case 3610: Kidder House, 2-4 St. John's Rd., by Lesley University. Install pad-mounted transformer.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and noted the proposed location of the transformer pad adjacent to the brick wall. He noted that there was a very distant view of the location from Brattle Street, but educational campuses in the Old Cambridge Historic District had always been treated as open to the public for the purposes of historic district review.

Steve Perry of Perry & Radford Architects presented the application on behalf of Lesley University. He explained that the campus needed more electricity to move into the modern era. The school was trying to do it in a nice way by putting the transformer next to one of the less significant buildings on campus. There would be the need for more transformers, but not for several years.

Mr. King asked how large it would be and Mr. Perry provided the dimensions for the unit that was preferred. He noted that if Eversource required a different unit it would vary only by a few inches.

Dr. Solet asked if the plantings near the transformer would be mature in size since the bush that was being removed was very large. Mr. Perry noted that the existing honeysuckle was an invasive species. Dr. Solet asked the color of the transformer. Mr. Perry answered it would be a standard green. Dr. Solet asked if there would be visible poles or wires added. Mr. Perry said all wiring would be below ground. Dr. Solet asked about noise and vibrations, noting that students sleep nearby and that the unit would be located next to a brick wall. Mr. Perry said he had studied these issues.

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

Mr. Irving moved to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the application, subject to review and approval of construction details by staff. Dr. Solet asked if the Commission would consider a Certificate of Hardship since the electrical needs were requiring the transformer. Mr. Irving said he understood her point but he considered the proposed installation to be appropriately designed. Mr. King noted that granting a Certificate of Hardship could also set a precedent for future transformers here or elsewhere. He supported the proposed motion for a Certificate of Appropriateness. Mr. Crocker seconded the motion, which passed 7-0.

Case 3611: 9 Riedesel Ave., by Robert Neer. Add oval window on west façade.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and pointed out the location of the proposed window.

Arch Horst, the architect, explained that the window was for more light in a bathroom.

Mr. King asked if there were other oval windows on the house. Mr. Horst said there was another leaded glass window. The house next door had an oval opening at the porch. Mr. Neer said he chose an oval because he thought it would be more attractive. Some light was needed, but they also wanted privacy so chose a decorative window with cut glass. A similar leaded glass window was located in the kitchen.

There were no questions or comments from the public. Mr. King noted a letter of support had been received from Annette LaMond at 7 Riedesel Avenue. He closed the public comment period.

Mr. Irving moved to approve the application, subject to review and approval of construction details by staff. Ms. Berg seconded the motion, which passed 7-0.

Public Hearings: Demolition Review

Cases D-1384 and D-1385 (amendment): 207 and 227 Cambridge St. Withdrawal of application to demolish significant buildings and revised project plans for limited scope of demolition at rear of existing buildings. *Request received from applicant to postpone matter to the July 7 meeting of the Commission.*

Mr. King noted that a request to continue the hearing to July 7 had been received from the applicant. Dr. Solet moved to grant the continuance. Mr. Crocker seconded, and the motion passed 7-0.

Case D-1399: 86 School St., by 86 School Street LLC, Husam M. Azzam. Demolish house (1835).

Mr. King explained the demolition review process.

Ms. Burks showed slides and summarized the staff memo about the history of the house and neighborhood. She said that the house was in poor condition but was a rare survivor of the period. She

recommended finding the house significant for its associations with development in Cambridgeport in the 1830s and 1840s and for its associations with the Moses Binney family, its first residents.

Matt La Rue of 88 School Street said he was an architect and abutter. He did not have any objection to the proposed demolition and supported the proposed improvements to the property.

Mr. King said he was impressed by the age and history of the building and agreed it was significant within the meaning of the ordinance.

Dr. Solet moved to find the house significant as defined in the ordinance and for the reasons presented by the staff. Ms. Tobin seconded. The motion passed 7-0.

Mr. King invited the proponents to present the proposed replacement project.

Andrew Bram, attorney for Mr. Azzam, reported that the initial intent was to repair the building. There was a tenant still living there when the house was purchased, making it difficult to inspect the interior. An engineer had now been through the house and reported that its condition was dangerous. Because of the cost and risk involved in trying to repair it, the application was to demolish the house. He distributed photographs and the engineer's report. Mr. King read the report into the record.

Mr. Azzam said the house was in danger of collapsing. He pointed out the open kitchen window and a large hole under the door to the ell. The stairs lacked the head height needed for code compliance. He presented the design of the proposed house. It would have three stories and a basement. It would have a flat roof, roof deck accessed by a spiral stair. It would be clad with Hardie panels of different types.

Mr. Ferrara asked about the height of the Mansard house at 88 School Street. Mr. La Rue said he hadn't measured it, but guessed it was about 35' high.

Dr. Solet asked if the windows would be operable. Mr. Azzam said he hadn't decided but they could be. Dr. Solet asked where the mechanicals would be located, and Mr. Azzam answered that the air conditioning would be on the roof. The height of the building would be about 32'6".

Mr. King asked if the project would need a variance or special permit. Mr. Azzam replied in the negative. The existing curb cut and one parking spot would be retained and a second parking spot rented in the lot next door.

Dr. Solet asked where the front door would be located. Mr. Azzam indicated it would be on the same elevation as the existing front door, facing the driveway.

Mr. King noted that the style was very different from anything else in the neighborhood. Ms. Berg noted that there was a modern Boyes Watson-designed building not far from the location.

John Whisnant of 61 Otis Street asked how long the house had been vacant. Mr. Azzam said for about a year but the building had been neglected for a long time before he bought it.

Marie Saccoccio of 55 Otis Street noted that there were some wonderful old workers' cottages on Winter Street that had been beautifully restored.

Heather Hoffman of 213 Hurley Street noted that she lived across the street from another project by Mr. Azzam. The story about the condition of the former house across the street from her had been the same. She had not objected at the time, but now regretted it. The new houses had been poorly constructed. The proposed new building did not fit into the neighborhood. Mr. Azzam pointed out that the house he built on Hurley Street had been highlighted in the Boston Globe as a house of the week in July 2003.

Beaver Spooner of 329 Walden Street asked why the roof would be flat. Wouldn't a pitched roof be better in this climate? She noted that the architecture was out of character for the street. Mr. Azzam said he preferred the Modern style aesthetic with the flat roof. It would be built to support the snow load.

Jacob Albert of 136 Fifth Street noted that due to the small size of the lot the setbacks and FAR calculations must be very close or over what would be allowed. He recommended that if the Commission were to vote to allow the demolition it should be conditioned on meeting the zoning requirements for the replacement building.

Betty Saccoccio of 55 Otis Street said she was concerned to see a very small house turned into a monstrosity. Why would someone buy a small house and then transform it in this way?

Bill Dines of 69 Otis Street commented that the engineer's report was very general and didn't describe specific deficiencies of the house.

Mr. La Rue explained that he thought greater density on the street was a good thing. With three bedrooms the new house might attract another family with children.

Mr. Sullivan said that a determination of whether the house was preferably preserved would require the Commission to consider what was in the greater public interest. If the Commission was leaning toward demolition he would recommend finding it preferably preserved until such time that all requirements for a building permit for the replacement had been met.

Mr. King observed that the house was in serious disrepair. There were other larger houses nearby, but in more traditional architectural styles. Creating a home size that can accommodate families with children is in the public interest. He agreed with Mr. Sullivan's recommendation.

Dr. Solet noted that the proposed fenestration was limited, providing little light for a family. She suggested that the owner continue to consult with the staff about the design. Mr. Azzam said he could make the windows bigger.

Mr. Irving moved to find the house preferably preserved until such time that the replacement building had met the other requirements needed for the issuance of a building permit. Mr. Ferrara seconded the motion, with passed 6-1. Dr. Solet voted opposed.

Ms. Burks pointed out that the existing house was not properly secured, causing a danger that someone could get into the house, be hurt, or cause a fire or other damage to the property. She noted that the demolition ordinance had a clause that if a preferably preserved building were lost to fire or other

reason that there could be a moratorium on building there for two years, so she advised the owner to properly secure it prior to demolition—especially with young children living next door.

The commission took a short break and reconvened at 7:40 P.M. [Mr. Ferrara left the meeting].

Determination of Procedure: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 3620: 149 Brattle St., by Clementine Knight. Change window to a door and alter railings at 2nd floor balcony on the west side.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and noted that it was a late application. It had not been advertised, but it could be approved subject to the ten day notice procedure. He summarized the very complicated history of the house and showed views of the affected area from the public ways.

Andrew Grace, the architect, noted that the owner had grown up in the house. The house had been constructed in several phases. The second floor side porch had a triple hung window and an aluminum storm door. He proposed changing the window to a pair of narrow French doors with storm doors so that it would be easier to access the porch. He described the proposed repairs and improvements to the porch deck and railing. The railing height would be increased and the deck lowered to meet code. The railings would be pulled in so that they would not interrupt the window and quoins on either side.

Clementine Knight, the owner, said the house was over 200 years old. Every generation had made changes, some good and some bad. She wanted to make the porch better and was renovating the bathroom inside. A window would be added on the back of the bathroom, but would not be visible from the street.

Dr. Solet asked how much the railing would increase in height. Mr. Grace said 9". The new doors would be painted mahogany. The interior doors would open to the inside and the storm doors would open out. Dr. Solet commented that it would be a good improvement to safety and the appearance of the porch. She moved to approve the application, subject to the ten day notice procedure. Mr. Irving seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Mr. Sullivan asked if the triple-hung sash could be retained in the house. Ms. Knight replied in the affirmative, noting that there were many old building parts stored in the house.

Case 3621: 11 Garden St., by First Church Congregational. Install solar panels on flat roof of parish hall.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides of the church and its parish hall. He explained that the church was seeking provisional approval in order to move forward with an application to participate in a joint solar project with other faith organizations in Massachusetts.

Susan Redlich of 19 Sacramento Street introduced herself as a member of the church. She explained that the church felt a responsibility to maintain the building and were currently fundraising for capital improvements on the interior. The church was also concerned about global warming and was trying to do its part to reduce energy consumption. A preliminary investigation indicated that solar could pay for itself within 13 years. The roof would need to be inspected and an architect engaged.

Mr. King asked if the dots on the diagram corresponded with the number of proposed solar panels. Ms. Redlich said there would be somewhere between 50-100 panels. She explained that in order to move ahead with the joint solar initiative, the church needed to have conditional approval because it would cost \$5,000 to withdraw from the program after beginning the process with the cooperative.

Mr. Sullivan said he would have no reservations if the solar panels were flat to the roof (a flat roof on the parish house) but if they were angled, a mock up would be helpful to know how many could be placed there before it would look inappropriate to its context.

Dr. Solet pointed out that the last solar application included a skirt around the array to keep squirrels away from the wires.

Mr. Irving spoke in favor of giving the church the assurance it needed to move forward.

Mr. King said he sensed a consensus that when more details were available this could be found to be an appropriate alteration to the building.

New Business

66-68 Otis St. To consider initiating a landmark designation study for the property at 66-68 Otis Street per ordinance, Ch. 2.78 Article III of the Cambridge Municipal Code.

Mr. King reported that a petition of ten Cambridge voters had been received asking the Commission to initiate a landmark designation study for the property at 66-68 Otis Street.

Mr. Sullivan reported that the 1846 double house had been covered with asbestos siding for many years. It had originally had Ionic capitals, window hoods, cast iron ventilators, and recessed entryway. The new owner had made several modifications including removal of the siding down to the sheathing and replacement with new, removal of the decorative ventilators, and resizing of some windows. The original entrance hood, recessed entranceway with paneling and side and transom lights (original doors not extant) and the pedimented cornice still existed. A stop-work order had been issued by Inspectional Services because there were questions about whether the project was in compliance with zoning. The proposed plans were to add two more entry doors to the front for a total of four residential units, which would substantially change the character of the house and result in the loss of original features. The glass in the sidelights and transom lights was original and was patterned with flowers, a popular design of the period, made locally in East Cambridge. He had met with the owner and recommended that he preserve the entry, move the new doors to an interior vestibule, and the top pediment detail. The owner had submitted a new plan consistent with those recommendations. It would be dependent on the interior vestibule being approved by ISD. He recommended that the petition be accepted, the landmark study started, and a public hearing on the matter to be scheduled for July 7.

Dr. Solet asked if Mr. Sullivan was hopeful that the windows would be put back into their original configuration. Mr. Sullivan answered in the negative.

Mr. King explained that the matter had not been advertised as a public hearing. He asked for a show of hands of people supportive of the petition to start a landmark study. Five or six hands went up.

Mr. Albert, a former CHC member, said it would be very unfortunate if the windows were not returned to their original size and configuration.

Mr. Whisnant, also a former CHC member, said the work had been done without respect for the neighbors, without proper permits, and with blatant disregard for public safety by ripping off the asbestos shingles without proper protective measures.

Marie Saccoccio said the windows had gone in on a Friday afternoon after city offices closed.

Mr. Dines said the windows had been framed for their original size then reframed at the last minute, raising the sills. The same developer had renovated the house next door.

Mr. Irving moved to accept the petition, initiate the study, and schedule a hearing for July 7. Dr. Solet seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Executive Director's Report

Mr. Sullivan introduced Gulnur Cengiz, a BU preservation studies student from Turkey who was interning with the Commission this summer.

John Hawkins thanked the staff for posting the Directors Reports online.

Mr. Crocker moved to adjourn, Mr. Irving seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:45 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed the Attendance List on June 2, 2016**

Branka Whisnant	61 Otis St
John Whisnant	61 Otis St
Susan Redlich	19 Sacramento St
Jacob Albert	136 Fifth St
Charles S. Fineman	75 Winter St
Robert Neer	9 Riedesel Ave
Arch Horst	55 Brewster St
John Sanzone	540 Memorial Dr
Andrew Grace	66 Dunster Rd, Jamaica Plain 02130
Clementine Knight	149 Brattle St
Bill Dines	69 Otis St
Beaver Spooner	329 Walden St
Marie Saccoccio	55 Otis St
Betty Saccoccio	55 Otis St
Heather Hoffman	213 Hurley St
Gulnur Cengiz	365 Harvard St

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.