

Minutes of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Mon., June 13, 2011 at 6:00 PM, Friends Meeting House, 5 Longfellow Pk., Cambridge

Commission Members present: James Van Sickle, *Chair*, Judith Dortz, William King, *members*; Deborah Masterson, Grenelle Scott, *alternate*

Commission Members absent: Robert Banker, *member*

Staff present: Eiliesh Tuffy

Members of the Public: See attached list

Chair Van Sickle called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM then introduced the Commissioners and staff present.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

HCM-105: 154 Mount Auburn Street, by Adrian Catalano. Continuation of the May, 2011 hearing. Full exterior renovation, window replacement and two-story rear addition as part of a conversion from a 3-family to a single family residence.

Mr. King asked for a summary of the history of the property and about any points of fact from the earlier May hearing that would be relevant when reviewing the proposal currently before the Commission.

Ms. Tuffy presented images of the property, the front portion of which is an 1853 two-story wood-frame Greek Revival residence. The only substantial additions and alterations to the property occurred during the first 50 years after its initial construction, and have been in place since 1902. The property was originally developed by Emery Willard, and was constructed by a builder named Isaac Hyde, who was also the original occupant. The house at 154 Mt. Auburn Street is a contributing building within the Ash Street National Register District. This lot was recently subdivided and the adjacent 1-story commercial building at 152 Mt. Auburn Street is no longer associated with this property.

By 1873, a rear ell of unknown height appears on the city atlas. The front porch is first indicated on the 1886 city atlas. On the 1900 Sanborn map, the rear ell is further described as 1-1/2 stories in height at the rear wall of the main house, then stepping down to a shorter, 1-story section. In 1902, a permit was issued for unspecified alterations

Images of comparable buildings within the Ash Street district that were constructed within 5 years of 154 Mt. Auburn were shown to illustrate similarities in design. In response to questions raised at the May hearing regarding the building's level of historic integrity, particularly in regard to the existing windows, a complete permit history was conducted by staff. Building permit research did not reveal any prior window or exterior siding replacement, indicating that the existing 6-over-6 windows are original and that the main block of the house retains a very high level of historic integrity. Further, surviving buildings in the district from this timeframe exhibit similar design elements.

Ms. Masterson asked if the property's designation as a contributing building within a National Register district changed any aspect of the Commission's review. Ms. Tuffy said that, in addition to the property's local designation, National Register status is an honorific designation through the National Park Service that recognizes historic significance at the national level. As far as project review guidelines, the Cambridge Historical Commission operates under much the same guidelines as those applied to National Register properties, which stress repair or replacement-in-kind of historic materials over full replacement or the use of substitute materials.

The current proposal calls for changes to the main block of the house, including:

- removing the wood fire escape and changing the 3rd floor door to a window on the east elevation,
- removing the east chimney
- skylight alterations
- rebuilding the front porch
- replacing all existing clapboards with new cedar clapboards, and
- replacing all existing windows with aluminum-clad, insulated wood windows in a 2-over-2 glazing pattern.

The existing rear ell would be demolished to construct a new, 2-story rear ell with a 1-story bump-out facing Ash Street and a covered rear entrance in the southeast corner of the building.

Mr. Catalano, the developer for the property, was present to answer questions from the Commission regarding the modified plans before them.

Mr. Catalano pointed out that the height of the flat roof on the proposed 2-story rear addition is a lower than, and deferential to, the original building and connects at a point underneath the eaves of the main house. To prevent the rear ell from looking like a large cube from Ash Street, a 1-story bump-out (measuring 4'W x 5'L) is proposed to add depth to this elevation. The low, hip roof of the bump-out was designed to mirror the roof of the front porch. The rear ell would be set back approximately 22' from the commercial building at 152 Mt. Auburn. This placement of the ell also leaves a 7-8' return on the rear elevation of the main house.

The current proposal calls for the removal of one chimney (east chimney). The existing roof shingles are to be replaced with new architectural shingles. New cedar clapboards are to be installed on the entire building exterior, and the wide corner boards are to be replicated. The proposed windows for both the main block and the new addition are Jeld-Wen premium wood windows with aluminum exterior cladding in a 2-over-2 glazing pattern.

Regarding the front porch, Mr. King asked if its reconstruction would require a new railing to meet current code. It does not, because the height of the porch is less than 30 inches above grade. Although the original porch decking would have been fir wood, the Commission agreed that mahogany would be a suitable replacement for the porch deck. It was undetermined if the deck would be painted or left natural with an oil sealant.

Mr. Van Sickle pointed out that the bump-out on the rear addition also necessitated the relocation of an original window opening on the main house, throwing off the symmetry of that elevation. Mr. Catalano offered to relocate the 2nd floor window as well to be in alignment with the 1st floor.

Ms. Dortz asked about the proximity of the nearest building under the current proposal, to which the owner said it would be approximately 17' to either of the direct abutters' properties. She also asked if there would be any vents to the exterior of the building. Mr. Catalano said most of the venting would be through pipes on the roof, plus a couple vents on the east elevation of the main house, facing the adjacent commercial building.

Mr. King asked if there would be air conditioning mechanicals outside, to which the applicant responded that there would be air handlers at grade level on the east façade of the main house, set back from the front of the building and in the furthest location from abutting residential properties.

Mr. Van Sickle said that he was ambivalent about the request to change from a 6-over-6 window glazing pattern to a 2-over-2 pattern. His main concern was to discuss the bulk of the new addition.

There were no questions from the public.

Comments were accepted from the public.

Catherine Hayden, a direct abutter at 30 Ash Street, noted that another window on the rear elevation was proposed to be relocated. The easternmost window on the 2nd floor of the rear elevation would move to the right, making it even closer to her living space and therefore more intrusive to her privacy. She commented that she would like to see that window eliminated entirely, to which the applicant responded that he had certain code requirements for light and ventilation that he was legally obligated to adhere to. Ms. Hayden said she thought Mr. Catalano was doing a great job so far but that she would prefer not to have that 2nd floor window.

Curt Pollari of 151 Mt. Auburn St. (aka 24 Ash Street) said he felt this design was far superior to the original design presented at the May meeting, especially the current roofline of the rear addition. He felt the proposal to build a double pitched roof was too much. He also suggested that opaque glass could be installed in the bathroom window Ms. Hayden was opposed to if privacy was a concern.

Public comment was closed to begin Commission deliberation.

Mr. King said he was delighted to see a rehabilitation of the property happening, particularly elements such as the removal of the wood fire escape. While the decrease in housing units is not in line with the City of Cambridge's overall goals, that is not a matter for the Historical Commission to rule on. He felt the proposed addition was scaled appropriately to the house and consistent with the guidelines for substantial additions within the Half Crown-Marsh district in its subservient height and bulk. In addition, he felt the current scheme preserved the layered views typical of the district. Mr. King felt he had received sufficient information to vote in favor of the proposal.

Ms. Dortz was concerned about the addition's proximity to a large tree on the rear property line, but the owner said it would be over 12 feet away. She was also concerned about the overall bulk of the rear addition, commenting that it felt boxy. Mr. Catalano said that the proposed roof line of the new ell would be 5' taller than what is currently there and added that the 1st floor bump-out was designed to prevent the ell from looking like a box. When asked why the 2nd floor windows on the rear of the addition were shorter awning windows, Mr. Catalano said they were decreased in size at the request of the neighbor.

Mr. Van Sickle commented that he thought the previous scheme was superior in design, but agreed that it was too bulky in relation to the existing house. He was further bothered by the proposed misalignment of the windows on the main block's rear elevation, particularly on a building in which its architectural style relies heavily on symmetry. He was hoping to see a 1-1/2 story rear ell with a lower eaves line rather than a full 2 stories and agreed with Ms. Dortz that it still had a scale and bulk problem.

Regarding the windows, Mr. Van Sickle stated it is the policy of the Commission to encourage owners to keep and recondition existing windows and that every window that is lost is unfortunate. If the windows were too deteriorated to fix, however, he would not be opposed to replacement windows in a 2-over-2 configuration, since it could be appropriate given the transitional architectural style of the property. He also reiterated that mahogany would be a more weather resistant substitute for traditional fir decking.

Ms. Masterson asked if the applicant had looked into window repair, to which Mr. Catalano said he felt the cost would be prohibitive. Ms. Masterson said she was leaning towards keeping the 6-over-6 glazing pattern, rather than 2-over-2. She also said she would have preferred a gable roof on the addition, but was pleased to see the overall roof height brought down from the initial proposal.

Mr. King moved that the current proposal, which meets the guidelines for significant additions in the district, be approved with the following conditions:

- Main House, rear elevation: the 1st and 2nd floor windows should be vertically aligned
- Exterior Siding: all exterior siding should be cedar clapboards to match the existing in profile and reveal

Ms. Dortz seconded the motion.

Ms. Masterson moved to amend the motion on the table to specify the number of panes for the divided light windows, which passed 3-2.

Ms. Masterson amended the motion on the floor to state that, instead of the proposed 2-over-2 window glazing pattern, that an additional condition of the approval call for 6-over-6 window glazing. Mr. King seconded the amended motion, which passed 4-1.

Minutes

Pg. 2: add "t" to "pain", for paint

Pg. 4: change "assess" to "access"

Mr. King made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Dortz seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:27p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy
Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public who signed the attendance sheet, June 13, 2011

Curt Pollari
Adrian Catalano

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267 Grove St., Cambridge, MA 02138