

Minutes of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Mon., May 9, 2011 at 6:00 PM, Friends Meeting House, 5 Longfellow Pk., Cambridge

Commission Members present: James Van Sickle, *Chair*, Robert Banker, Judith Dortz, *members*; Grenelle Scott, *alternate*

Commission Members absent: William King, *member*; Deborah Masterson, *alternate*

Staff present: Eiliesh Tuffy

Members of the Public: See attached list

Chair Van Sickle called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. Mr. Van Sickle introduced the Commissioners and staff present then read the rules and regulations for public hearings.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

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

Ms. Tuffy presented images of the property, which is an 1853 frame Greek Revival with 1902 alterations. The property was originally developed by Emery Willard, and is a contributing building within the Ash Street National Register District. This lot was recently subdivided and the adjacent 1-story commercial building is no longer part of this property.

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 windows on the east elevation,
- removing a chimney
- skylight alterations
- rebuilding the front porch
- replacing all exterior clapboards with HardiPlank, and
- replacing all windows with aluminum-clad, insulated wood windows in a 2-over-2 glazing pattern.

The existing rear additions would be demolished to construct a new, 2-story rear ell and mudroom.

The architect, Peter Wright, elaborated on the proposal. He stated that one rear bump-out would be eliminated on the first floor, as well as a smaller, 2nd story rear addition. He believed these dated to the 1940s. A bulkhead on the west elevation would be removed, but the full-height basement door on the east elevation would remain. The rear deck would be a 4-foot projection, covered by a shallow hip roof. Mr. Wright also mentioned that the proposed rear wall of the new addition would not project out as far as the existing rear ell does.

The proposed additional green space would equal approximately 300 sq. ft. and they would make the landscape uniform throughout the lot. The current asphalt driveway would be replaced with a more porous pea gravel surface. The Commission also commented that any air

condensers could be placed on the elevation facing the commercial building to minimize their appearance and any impact on neighboring residential properties.

Removal of the existing clapboard siding was discussed. The developer, Adrian Catalano, passed around photographs to the Commission and the public of his previous projects that were clad in cement fiber siding as a reference for what the substitute siding material would look like installed. The wide corner boards are built up using three vertical trim pieces.

The architect also said the windows would all be replaced with a different, 2-over-2 glazing pattern because it seemed more consistent with the later Italianate details of the building's architecture. Ms. Dortz asked if the large, 6-over-6 windows at the front porch would remain. The architect stated they would also be replaced with new, 2-over-2 windows, also because they felt it would look better.

The architect also said the front porch would be replicated to match the existing details with perhaps the exception of the trellises at the end of the porch. The existing fir decking material would be replaced with stained mahogany.

At the roofline, there are three existing skylights on the rear slope of the roof. One skylight would be removed and the outer two would be repositioned in the new plan.

Questions of fact were accepted from the public.

Philip Lowe of 33-35 Ash Street said that, in the 30+ years he has lived in the district this was the first time he recalled not seeing renovation plans from a neighbor before a public hearing. Ms. Tuffy pointed out that the standard abutter notices – with relevant contact information – were mailed to the neighbors and that all applications are public records available for review at the Historical Commission offices. Mr. Lowe asked for clarification that the Commission's jurisdiction applies to anything visible from a public way, and Chair Van Sickle confirmed that to be true. Mr. Lowe expressed that in a couple instances he felt that the Commission had not been very consistent in imposing exacting conditions for replication of certain building elements, such as window dimensions. He asked the Commission to consider the intrusion the proposed project might have on the neighbors and advocated for consistency in such rulings.

Mr. Alan Steinert of 993 Memorial Drive asked if the color of the exterior paint would remain the same. The developer said he would change the paint color, perhaps to an historic shade of yellow. Chair Van Sickle stated that this Neighborhood Conservation District Commission has no jurisdiction over color, but encouraged the applicant to make use of the Historical Commission's paint consultant on staff. Mr. Steinert asked if there was any other form of review required for the proposal and whether an appeal process existed. Ms. Tuffy confirmed with the applicant that a Board of Zoning Appeals hearing would be required for existing non-conformities in the side yard setbacks, but that the public hearing in process was the forum to raise concerns over aesthetics of the design. She also noted that there is a standard appeal period of 20 days from the time a Certificate of Appropriateness is issued by the NCD Commission.

Delphine Lowe of 33-35 Ash Street said they had to submit a proposal for a 2nd floor rear addition to the Commission and it was reviewed with consideration of the view from Hawthorne behind their house without the screening of summer foliage. Because of this, they were not able to build what they had proposed.

Catherine Hayden of 30 Ash Street spoke as a direct property abutter. She mentioned that she had previously tried to add dormers on the north elevation of her property but that the owner of 154 Mt. Auburn Street had protested against it. Despite positive support from other neighbors regarding that project, her proposal had been rejected.

The developer said the new rear ell would be 13' x 17' and the finished project would result in a modest net gain of 255 sq. ft. Mr. Steinert asked what the square footage of the fiberglass-covered rear porch was and if it was calculated into the current FAR, to which the architect responded that it equaled 42 sq. ft. and was included in the existing FAR.

Comments were accepted from the public.

A letter of support from the current property owners, Mr. & Mrs. Crowley of Littleton, Mass. was read into the record.

Ms. Hayden commented that the Crowleys have never lived at the property and are not residents of the district.

Chair Van Sickle pointed out that the hearing was to review the appropriateness of the proposed design changes and read from the Guidelines for Infill and Substantial Additions or Alterations, pointing out the goals of conserving the modest character of the buildings. In reading over the guidelines, it was pointed out that the proposed addition of 255 sq. ft. was very far from meeting the limitation of 25% of the property's square footage.

He read from the Guidelines that the new addition: should be subordinate in height and detailing to the original structure; lot coverage should be smaller than the existing structure; height should be lower than the existing structure; addition should preserve the layered views or create new layered views, which are common in the district; any new shadows created by the addition should fall mainly on the applicant's property.

Ms. Hayden said she was concerned that the new 2-story addition would have windows that look directly into her family room, and that it would be a change from the way the house has always looked.

The developer commented that the owners were within days of selling to a multi-unit condominium developer until he put an offer on the property with plans to return it to a single family dwelling, reducing the density of the lot. Mr. Lowe asked the developer if his purchase was contingent upon the Commission's approval, to which the developer said it could be.

Public comment was closed to begin Commission deliberation.

Ms. Dortz commented that the roofline of the addition placed up near the chimneys seemed too high and resulted in an addition that created a lot of bulk. She saw the current design as very dense in appearance.

Mr. Banker stated he felt it was hard to visualize the impact the addition might have on the surrounding neighbors and asked if the Commission should continue the hearing for further consideration and so the applicant could make alterations to the plans. The architect asked if

the Commission would benefit from seeing a perspective drawing or a plat plan with dimensions. Ms. Dortz said the measured drawings were already provided, but in two-dimensional form it was hard to assess how massive the addition might be. The discussion focused on the roof height and the architect's dilemma of working with mismatched interior floor heights.

Chair Van Sickle said the applicant should be commended for improvements such as removing the fire escape and fiberglass roof at the rear, but had mixed feelings about reconstructing the front porch and problems with the proposed siding material. The Commission has only approved fiber cement siding on 1 project (98 Foster St) because it was very run down. That project did not have comparable street exposure to 154 Mt. Auburn and was also not in a National Register District. He concluded by saying that it would be much more appropriate to retain wood siding.

The chimney removal was not seen as a negative change. The Commission was undecided on the appropriateness of the proposed window replacement and muntin reconfiguration. Some support was given to the porch reconstruction and change of decking materials.

With regard to the rear addition, it was stated that this type of addition would be much more appropriate than dormers, for example. The Commission acknowledged the neighbor's concerns regarding privacy but observed that most owners in the district lived with windows at their property lines and suggested perhaps the windows could be reduced in size. A stepped second floor addition and lowering the eaves could alleviate the bulk.

General concerns focused on the scale of the addition and attention to original materials. It was requested that the applicant return to the June hearing with a reworked set of drawings, taking into account the concerns of both the Commission and the neighbors.

Mr. Banker moved that the public hearing be continued until the first available date for a subsequent hearing, during which time the applicant was encouraged to work with staff to find solutions to issues presently raised. Ms. Dortz seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.

HCM-109: 988 Memorial Drive, #81, by Fred Thum. Select window replacement.

Staff presented images of the property, which is one unit in the 7-story brick building – known as the Barrington Court Apartments – designed by architect Roscoe Whitten and completed in 1924. This is one of several adjacent buildings that were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986 as part of the Memorial Drive Apartments District.

The current proposal is the first request for a replacement window other than a true divided lite wood window in the building's 87-year history. The proposed replacement window was already reviewed and approved by the building's board of trustees. The purpose for the public hearing is for the Half Crown-Marsh Commission to review the window for its appropriateness within the district and streamline future permit applications for a similar scope of work and window model.

Recent changes to the building code require a mechanized, operable vent for bathrooms. Natural venting with operable sash windows does not meet the code requirements. As part of

the applicant's interior bathroom upgrades, they wish to replace the original, 8-lite casement windows with a new, aluminum-clad insulated casement window. The glazing pattern of the lower 6 lites would match in proportion, but the upper 2 lites would be filled in by a vent and surrounding panel piece.

Chair Van Sickle asked if the proposed Marvin casement window was a standard size. The board-appointed project review architect, Marc Maxwell, stated that he believed it is what Marvin calls a semi-custom window.

The Commission agreed that, if repair or replacement-in-kind of the true divided lite bathroom windows were not possible that the aluminum-clad Marvin window with 5/8" exterior muntins and interior spacer bars is an acceptable bathroom window replacement model that could be approved at the staff level for subsequent permit applications at 988 Memorial Drive.

Ms. Dortz moved to approve the application as submitted. Ms. Scott seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.

Ms. Dortz moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Banker seconded the motion, which passed 4-0. The meeting was adjourned at 8:17p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy
Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public who signed the attendance sheet, May 9, 2011

Marc Maxwell	20 Windom St., Somerville, MA 02144
Adrian Catalano	267 Grove St., Cambridge, MA 02138
Peter Wright	106 Larch Rd., Cambridge, MA 02138
A. Curtiss Pollari	24 Ash St., Cambridge, MA 02138
Fred Thum	988 Memorial Dr., Cambridge, MA 02138
Sejal Shah	988 Memorial Dr., Cambridge, MA 02138
Alan Steinert	993 Memorial Dr., Cambridge, MA 02138