

## Minutes of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Mon., Sept. 19, 2011 at 6:00 PM, Friends Meeting House, 5 Longfellow Pk., Cambridge

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

Commission Members absent: Robert Banker, *member*; Michael Robertson, *alternate*

Staff present: Eiliesh Tuffy

Members of the Public: See attached list

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

### Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

**HCM-118 (Amendment): 152 Mt. Auburn St., by Paulette and Richard Crowley.** Amend proposed scope of work to include replacement of siding, window casings and sills, rear window, and corner boards.

The property is a one-story commercial building constructed in 1915 which is located in the Ash Street National Register District.

The property owner was already approved to replace the clapboards on the east, alley-side elevation, which is not publicly visible. The current application proposes replacement of clapboards and window trim on the west elevation, which is clearly visible from the public way. Despite noticeable deflection that may have occurred with building settlement, the condition of the clapboards appears to be good, with minimal signs of splitting in the most prone areas closest to the end grain.

There were no questions from the public.  
Comments were accepted from the public.

Adrian Catalano of 154 Mt. Auburn St. said he would be pleased to see new clapboards on the commercial property and commented that it might be harder to lease the space if it is not fixed up. He also mentioned that the meter for his property is currently placed at the rear of 152 Mt. Auburn during his construction project and that it would be relocated.

Catherine Hayden of 30 Ash St. said that she agreed with Mr. Catalano about the application under review and thought that the commercial property would be much improved and sturdier. She can see this elevation from her property and approved of the proposal to install new clapboards.

The Commission added their comments to the discussion.

Ms. Dortz suggested that the gate to the alley side of the property could be improved upon as part of the renovations. The property owner, Ms. Crowley, said she was hesitant to make any further changes, but would consider it if the commission would like her to.

Mr. King made a motion to approve the application as submitted, delegating to staff the approval of an appropriate alley door if one is proposed. Ms. Masterson seconded the motion, which was approved 6-0.

**HCM-105 (Amendment): 154 Mount Auburn Street, by Adrian Catalano.** Amend plans to alter rear addition and reinforce front porch.

Staff summarized that the current application was a follow-up to a previous public hearing, which granted approval for the full exterior renovation, window replacement and two-story rear addition as part of the conversion of an 1853 structure from a 3-family to a single family residence. The property is located within the Ash Street National Register District.

The amended plans call for

Changes to the main block of the house, including:

- reinforcing the roof of the front porch by adding a laminated beam across the front eaves line
- rebuilding the front porch columns with a steel post inside the outermost corner, which would increase the width of each split-column post from 3” to 4-1/2”
- replacing the decking with traditional fir, as opposed to mahogany
- window alterations on the rear elevation

Changes to the new rear addition include:

- addition of a 2<sup>nd</sup>-floor balcony, facing east

The Commission asked the property owner what prompted the changes to the original plan. Mr. Catalano said it was in order to meet guidelines enforced by the Inspectional Services Department. By reducing the footprint of the addition’s second floor he would be able to complete the project in one phase of construction instead of two, shortening the overall building schedule. He said that while he preferred the design of the original plan, meeting the two-phase construction process would be more costly, wasteful, and disruptive to the neighbors.

Mr. Van Sickle asked the applicant to describe the work proposed for the front porch and asked if an engineer had worked out the proposed plan. Mr. Catalano said that the design had been engineered for maximum snow loads. To accomplish this, he wished to reinforce the front corners of the porch with steel posts. He proposed to conceal the metal posts by replicating the current design on a larger scale. Using 3/4”-thick pine boards to box in a 3” metal post would increase the overall dimension of the split-column posts from 3” each to 4-1/2” each. Mr. Van Sickle noted that detailed drawings of the porch reconstruction and column modifications were not included with the application materials.

Ms. Masterson asked if the amended rear addition had already been approved by the BZA. Mr. Catalano said that the current design allowed him to build the project as-of-right, avoiding the BZA process.

Mr. King noted that as-of-right design often results in a less desirable end result, citing the Cambridge Historical Commission’s practice of suggesting certain projects to go through the

BZA process if it leads to a superior design. He wished developers' aversion to the BZA process was not as prevalent a mindset.

No questions were posed by the public.  
Comments were received from the public.

Catherine Hayden of 30 Ash St. said this is a terrific project and that Mr. Catalano had been terrific to work with. Mr. Van Sickle also read an email from Ms. Hayden to the Commission speaking in favor of the amended plans.

Mr. King moved to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness for the amended plans, with the condition that drawings of the front porch reconstruction details be submitted to staff for review. Ms. Masterson seconded the motion, which was approved 6-0.

**HCM-127: 9 Kenway St., by Tom Traynor.** Review of re-grading and landscaping plans.

The property under review is a two-story Colonial Revival-style house with a modified saltbox roofline. This house, as well as the house directly behind it at 120 Foster Street, were both designed by architect Joseph Guiney and constructed in 1931. New owners purchased the property several months ago and are in the process of improving the house and site.

Prior to the hearing, elements of the rehabilitation were approved by staff, including:  
- window installation where inappropriate alterations had previously been made, and  
- roof gutter replacement

The application currently under review is for a stormwater mitigation plan, which involves re-grading of the lot. Re-grading projects are subject to review by the Half Crown-Marsh Commission, in order to ensure the project does not displace water onto neighboring properties. This includes retaining walls and fencing, which are measured from the lowest immediately adjacent grade (such as the sidewalk, when the yard is raised above it). Landscaping plans are only provided to the Commission for informational purposes in order to assist them in understanding the final grading of the site. Regulation of specific landscape plantings does not fall under the Conservation District Commission's purview.

Staff conducted a site visit, during which it was apparent that the existing grade was detrimental to the structure. The soil from planting beds around the perimeter of the foundation was raised up to a level where only two inches of foundation wall is exposed and heavy rains cause splash-back onto the exterior siding. Additionally, window wells to the basement have been filling with water and spilling into the lower level of the house.

The current proposal calls for a system of underground drainage pipes that lead to two dry wells, one at each corner of the lot closest to Kenway Street. A retaining wall will remain along the Kenway Street edge of the lot. An open picket fence is intended to be installed on top of the stone wall, the height of which would measure 4-feet from the sidewalk which can be built as-of-right.

Ms. Dortz asked if replacement of the garage door was still part of the scope of work. The existing door was repaired instead, and will not be replaced as part of this project.

The property owner, Mr. Traynor, addressed the Commission and noted that he had several members of the project with him to answer any questions including the Civil Engineer, General Contractor and Landscape Architect. The landscape architect, Lorayne Black, walked through the plan and re-stated that the front wall and fence would top out at four feet, as measured from the sidewalk.

Mr. Traynor, when asked about the extent of re-grading required for the project, said that 70 cubic yards of soil needed to be removed. The final grade would have a 2% slope to adequately drain the site. The engineer said that currently all sides of the yard slope toward the house. Mr. Traynor added that the basement does not have a sump pump and that Plan B would be to add one.

Mr. Van Sickle asked what needed to be done to make the draining legally compliant. The engineer said Massachusetts Code calls for an 8-inch reveal around the entire building foundation. The drainage system would consist of a trench drain with stone on either side of it. The system is in the shape of a horseshoe that leads to the 6-foot diameter dry wells. The dry wells would be installed above the level of the basement floor. He also mentioned that most of the water problems were not from the high water table in the ground, but rather from excessive water run-off from the roof. Inadequate gutters caused water to flow directly down the exterior walls of the house and infiltrate the wall.

When asked if the system was designed to handle heavy rains the engineer said it was actually over-designed for an even larger water capacity. When asked if the trench system would divert any water to either the city drainage system or the neighbors' properties, the engineer said it would not.

Mr. Smith asked how the re-grading would affect 120 Foster Street. The engineer said 18 inches of topsoil would be removed at the rear property line. Initial investigation showed that the bottom of the existing wood fence in that location was rotted, so Mr. Traynor had proposed rebuilding the neighbors' fence.

The Commission asked about the existing heights of the solid wood perimeter fence. Mr. Traynor said it was 9-feet at the northeast corner of the property. He suggested installing a new 6-foot fence on top of a retaining wall at the rear, which is the current condition of the fence along the east edge of the property. It was noted that the perimeter fence was not including in the scope of work on the application currently under review.

Despite researching the information on the Commission's website and attempting to design a plan according to the rules, Mr. Traynor said it was difficult to find clear direction with regard to the fencing. Mr. King said the reason for fence review is because the district ordinance states that no unreviewed fence should be higher than four feet in order to preserve the view through the lots. Mr. Van Sickle reminded the owner that he could always repair the existing fence, but at the same time he would not discourage him from applying for a new fence design.

Ms. Dortz pointed out that none of the other houses on the street appeared to have front yard fences, and that by installing one here it would noticeably set the property apart from the others. This was a change she felt to be inappropriate. Mr. Traynor said there is a high, solid

stockade fence at the end of the street on the corner of Doane. He said the goal of installing a fence was to provide an enclosed area where his children could have some level of safe, unsupervised play. The landscape architect said they were striving for a very open design, which could be achieved through their selection of a low, picket fence that returns around the corners to the front face of the house.

Questions were received from the public.

Mr. Arthur Hughes of 6 Kenway St. submitted a letter stating his support of the proposed project.

Elizabeth Van Ranst and Gerry Zuriff of 120 Foster said they had a number of concerns with the proposed project. Of primary concern was the plan to plant tall trees and shrubs along their southern property line, which they felt would significantly reduce the amount of natural sunlight on their property. The species identified on the landscape plan were thought to be too dense and too tall at their full height, which would also block out their current vista of the sky. The potential reduction in sunlight was believed by the abutters to be a negative impact, affecting their personal well being. Concerns over lateral growth of the new plantings into their yard, specifically the encroachment of tree branches and roots were raised. This was the first mention they had heard of rebuilding their fence.

The landscaper said the fence posts appear to be intact, it is just the pickets that are rotted and need to be replaced. Mr. Van Sickle reiterated that, while a goal of the Commission is to preserve the open views through the district by discouraging high stockade fences that wall off the neighborhood, it does not rule on landscape plantings.

Ms. Black addressed the issue raised over the selection of species, saying that she had picked narrow-growing plantings that are a variety of deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs respectively. These were felt to provide the best level of screening without creating a solid wall of plantings. The engineer said that lateral root growth could be contained by the installation of either the concrete retaining wall base or a heavy duty plastic sheet that acts as a barrier and re-directs roots back onto the property owner's site.

Mr. Van Sickle asked if the applicant's goal with the plantings was to create a privacy screen for the 1st and 2nd floor of the house. Mr. Traynor said he did feel he should be able to have some level of privacy in his own home and did not want people to have direct views into his windows. He also said that this was a draft landscape plan, so he wasn't even sure if the species listed would be available, so he did not want to be locked in to certain plantings. The Commission raised the point that in tight urban environments, certain realities exist that limit your privacy and perhaps window treatments could alleviate those concerns.

**\*\*Note: Judith Dortz excused herself from further deliberations, as the lengthy proceedings posed a time conflict\*\***

Mr. King summarized that the Commission's role was to review structures, not plantings, and that it was the responsibility of the neighbors to try to work out an agreement on plantings and a schedule for their trimming. He said what bothered him was if the plantings would prevent you from seeing through to the adjacent lot and felt that could be worked out by the owner and his team. Mr. Traynor proposed eliminating the last three plantings in each corner of the rear property to maintain the layered view as seen through the side yards.

Mr. Van Sickle commended the property owner for submitting such a thorough application, pointing out that he had never seen such an extensive and well-presented plan for a drainage and re-grading project.

Ms. Masterson made a motion to approve the re-grading and site drainage plan as submitted, finding no adverse effect on the abutting properties. Mr. Smith seconded the motion, which was approved 5-0.

Ms. Scott moved to approve the minutes from the August meeting. Mr. Van Sickle seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Mr. Smith moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. King seconded the motion, which passed 5-0. The meeting was adjourned at 8:02pm

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy  
Preservation Administrator

**Members of the Public who signed the attendance sheet, September 19, 2011**

Paulette Crowley	359 King St., Littleton, MA 01460
Adrian Catalano	267 Grove St., Cambridge, MA 02138
Gerald Zuriff	120 Foster St., Cambridge, MA 02138
Elizabeth Van Ranst	120 Foster St., Cambridge, MA 02138
Lorayne Black	62 Peabody St., Groton, MA 01450
Jude Gauvin	127 Pleasant St., Northborough, MA 01532
Kathy Irving	46 Parker St., Watertown, MA 02472
Nate Stein	3 Haskell St., Beverly, MA 01915
Jonathan Roth	2 Seaport Lane, Boston, MA 02210
Thomas Traynor	955 Massachusetts Ave, Cambridge, MA 02139
Arthur Hughes	6 Kenway St., Cambridge, MA 02138