

MINUTES OF THE HALF CROWN-MARSH NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION

APPROVED AT THE APRIL 13, 2015 MEETING

February 23, 2015 - 6:00 PM at Friends Meeting House, 5 Longfellow Park, Cambridge
Meeting originally scheduled February 9, 2015 was postponed to February 23 due to a snow emergency

Members present: James Van Sickle, *Chair*; Judith Dortz, *Vice Chair*; Deborah Masterson, *member*; Charles Smith, Peter Schur, *alternates*

Members absent: William King, *member*; Marie-Pierre Dillenseger, *alternate*

Staff present: Samantha Paull

Members of the Public: see attached list

Mr. James Van Sickle, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:02pm and gave an overview of the agenda. Mr. Van Sickle discussed meeting procedures. He designated Mr. Charles Smith and Dr. Peter Schur as voting alternates.

HCM-272: 9 Dinsmore Court, by Edward Gilmartin, Estate of Maria Francesca Crusco o/b/o Mahmood Firouzbakht. Exterior renovation, addition and parking space.

Ms. Paull gave an overview of the history of the property, structure, and applicant's proposal before the Commission. She also pointed out there had been a house at 13-15 Dinsmore Court, with a similar footprint to the others on Dinsmore Court, that was demolished in 1918 under permit 18598.

Mr. Mahmood Firouzbakht, the soon-to-be property owner, added that the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority had taken part of the lot at 13-15 Dinsmore Court by eminent domain for the Riverview development, which was why the property had an angular lot line.

Mr. Mark Boyes-Watson, the architect, stated that the proposal was to update the structure. He said he wanted to make it a nice house while maintaining the rhythm and massing along the street itself. He outlined the proposal, which included restoration of the front elevation. He continued that changes were proposed for the least visible sides, the left and rear elevations. He stated that the site plan included a garden to the left of the structure and an off street parking space. He noted that the size of the structure and addition were compliant with the zoning, however the addition would have to go through the BZA for review due to the minimal rear setback. Mr. Boyes-Watson showed on plans that the addition would not extend out past the existing second story addition; that the proposal really was to fill under the second story addition and extend the addition along the entire width of the rear elevation. He added that the rear property line was shared with 27 Willard Street, which has a garage close to the property line. He noted that as the garage had no windows on that elevation, changes would have a minimal impact on the neighboring property's garage.

Mr. Firouzbakht noted that there was an email from Ms. Amanda Rodriguez, who owned 27 Willard Street, stating her support of the project.

Mr. Boyes-Watson referred to the plan boards to show the proposed elevations reflecting the addition, which was simple and utilized the same mansard roof lines. He brought the window wells on the front elevation to attention and the bay window proposed for the left elevation.

Ms. Judith Dortz, Vice Chair, asked how far the bay would protrude. Mr. Boyes-Watson responded that it was just under two (2) feet and would add interest in the room. He said they were also proposing to add a door to the left elevation to allow access to a patio/garden space. Mr. Boyes-Watson referred to the site plan and mentioned the potential for incorporating a low, three (3) foot tall, painted wood fence along Dinsmore Court. He noted that the preliminary landscape plan included adding a magnolia tree to either side of the front steps and a small row of boxwoods in front of the window wells. Mr. Boyes-Watson stated that fencing would be kept low along the garden area as well but that it would be reinforced with a hedge to provide privacy. He continued that a mix of shrubs would be added along the back property line shared with the Riverview Complex and possibly a new fence would need to be worked out there.

Mr. Firouzbakht stated that he would be happy to reconstruct the shared fence between the subject property and the Riverview Complex. Ms. Paull referred the Commission to a staff photograph of the property showing the referenced fence.

Ms. Jennifer Jones, owner of a condo at Riverview, said she believed the fence was owned by Riverview because a piece had recently been replaced farther to the north of the subject property. She continued that sections of the fence had been replaced each year, noting that this year the snow loads have caused many sections of the older fence to fail.

Mr. Firouzbakht stated that the house was lovely but in poor condition and needed to be restored, inside and out. He continued that he felt he was proposing a nice rehabilitation project for the home and that in converting from a two family to a single family, he was hoping to create a home for a growing family or a household who can move in and make this a home for a long term.

Ms. Dortz asked if the parking area proposed was sized for one car or two cars. Mr. Boyes-Watson responded it was proposed for one car at eighteen (18) feet deep. Dr. Schur asked if he was proposing gravel or a paving material. Mr. Firouzbakht clarified that the idea was to use pervious pavers. Mr. Boyes-Watson responded that they were looking at individual pavers set in stone dust or possibly brick as it was a small space. Mr. Firouzbakht added that he was happy to use whatever material the Commission preferred.

Mr. Charles Smith asked if the residents of Dinsmore Court currently were utilizing the street for parking. Mr. Firouzbakht responded yes, the left hand side of Dinsmore Court was used for parking and added that by including the proposed parking space it would not eliminate any on street parking spaces. Mr. Van Sickle added that many of the small quasi-private streets were required to have a minimum clearance of ten (10) feet. Mr. Boyes-Watson added that they needed approval from the Commission for parking in front of the house but due to the quasi-private classification of the street, no approval was needed for the curb cut by City Council.

Mr. Van Sickle noted that while the general stance is to keep all parking behind the front plane of the structure, the Commission had approved off-street parking spaces that extended beyond the front plane of the structure in the past.

Mr. Firouzbakht stated that he followed up with the neighbors and their general consensus was that it was a good thing and the possibility of taking a car off the narrow street without eliminating parking was good for the area. Mr. Van Sickle asked if there was potential for moving it over and back. Mr. Firouzbakht responded that it would result in a loss of yard space. Ms. Dortz asked if they could locate it more parallel to the fence. Mr. Boyes-Watson responded that at that angle, it would not be possible to pull into the space.

Ms. Dortz asked for confirmation that the proposal included keeping the historic double entry door. Mr. Boyes-Watson replied that yes both doors would be kept to preserve the historic facade but that only one would be operable. Mr. Firouzbakht added that the non-functional door would have a coat closet behind it.

Ms. Paull asked the applicants if they had reviewed the windows for preservation or if they were looking to replace them. Mr. Firouzbakht stated that he did inspect the windows closely and they appeared to be in rough shape. He continued that they were possibly salvageable but it would require time and money. He expressed his concern that the windows may have been exhausted of their useful life and with all of the windows on the back being new, consistency was important to him.

Mr. Boyes-Watson stated that the proposed product by Jeld-Wen was close to the historic sash size and muntin profile but with more energy efficiency.

Ms. Paull noted that energy efficiency comparable to new windows can easily be obtained with proper weather-stripping and a good fitting storm window. Mr. Van Sickle added that in some cases the efficiency can be greater with a historic window and storm than a replacement window. He continued that he hoped to see the original windows repaired. He noted that the plans reflected the use of double glazed windows with no storms. Mr. Van Sickle emphasized the importance of preserving historic wood windows, including their impact on the character of the neighborhood, displaying the Commission's position on preservation. He stated many have been lost over the years during renovation projects and they cannot be returned to the structure; once they are gone, the original fabric and part of the character is too forever lost.

Ms. Paull asked for clarification of the rear entry stairs, noting the stairs were accessed from the rear of the property rather than the parking pad and if they were adding any additional walkways or something by the stairs. Mr. Boyes-Watson stated that a patio space was proposed behind the stairs.

Ms. Jones stated that Mr. Firouzbakht had met with almost every abutter at the Riverview Condo complex. She continued that none of the neighbors seemed to have an objection. She was relieved it would be renovated and not fall down as she could see the icicles getting larger and larger on the property. She said that as she lived on Bradbury Court, her unit looked out onto the subject property. She added that in regard to the fence, she believed it was on Riverview property as they had recently had a survey done. Ms. Jones also mentioned her concern with the proposed parking space as during winter, the snow gets plowed to the end of the street and may block access to the space. She also asked if there was storm water retention being added into an overall landscape plan for this project.

Mr. Firouzbakht stated he would be happy to replace the fence by working with the Riverview complex. Ms. Paull advised Mr. Firouzbakht that if he constructed the fence on his property, he would need to follow up with staff as it might be located in the district at that point.

Mr. Van Sickle asked if drainage had been investigated to see if there was an issue on the property and if there was any potential impact to neighbors in expanding the basement. He also asked if the basement was dry. Mr. Firouzbakht responded that the basement was dry the last time he was on site, and indicated that several of the neighbors had flooding issues in the past however the City had recently upgraded storm water and sewer lines. He stated that the neighbors stated there had not been issues since the upgrade. Ms. Jones confirmed that there had been serious issues of sewage back up during certain storm events. Mr. Boyes-Watson added that the low point of the neighborhood is farther north in the Bradbury Court area. Ms. Jones stated that storm water from Sparks and Willard Streets had been coming back and Riverview is hoping to put backflow preventers on the Spark Street side. Mr. Van Sickle noted that all drainage was supposed to take place within the bounds of one's own property. Mr. Boyes-Watson responded that during the renovation, a drain will be added under the slab and they may look at dry wells. Mr. Firouzbakht replied that drainage is important to him as he used to have a basement regularly flood with sewage when he lived in the Kendall Square area. Mr. Boyes-Watson stated that the overall plan will include on-site mitigation, but it will not solve the problems of the area.

Mr. Van Sickle read two emails into the record, one from Joan Pickett of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Association who shared positive interactions with Mr. Firouzbakht during the renovation of 24 Clinton Street and the second email was from Amanda Rodriguez who resided at 27 Willard Street. Both supported the project.

Ms. Paull noted that there was an email from a Ms. Liz Toupin offering her support and asking if the project included a garage. Mr. Firouzbakht added that the neighbors at 7 Dinsmore Court also supported the restoration of the house.

Mr. Smith stated that the proposed renovation will help the street and neighborhood. He emphasized the importance of preserving the historic windows. He noted that the parking would have minimal impact from Willard Street as it was setback past the house.

Ms. Masterson stated she was in favor of the parking space proposed in this application as it reduces the impact of cars on the street. She continued that it added to the property, making street cleaning and parking during winter easier. She noted that she felt preservation of the windows was important. She stated during her renovation the addition of new storm windows made all the difference with her historic wood windows. She asked for clarification of the proposed location of the AC condenser. Mr. Firouzbakht stated that it most likely will be in the back. Mr. Boyes-Watson confirmed the location would be by the neighbor's garage in the rear of the subject property or by the side stairs off the kitchen. He continued that they would research the best location.

Ms. Dortz agreed with the other Commissioners that the preservation of the windows was important. She asked if the applicant was certain there was enough room to navigate in and out of the parking space. She continued that otherwise, the project will be great for the neighborhood and will be the best looking house on the street. Mr. Boyes-Watson responded that the parking space will keep the car away from the house, but does meet size requirements for use as a parking space with an effort to maximize the greenspace on the lot. He noted that the parking space will require approval from Zoning.

Dr. Schur stated he felt the house looked neglected and it would be a nice start to fixing up the street.

Mr. Van Sickle noted that he agreed with the other Commissioners that the parking at the end of the street is a benefit to the property and will have minimal visibility as it is pushed up against the street and

allows one to see the front yard and front of the house from Willard Street. He believed the preservation of the windows was important to the structure.

Ms. Masterson made a motion to approve the application with plans as submitted with the condition that the front windows be preserved if possible and that the applicant follow up with staff to discuss the condition of the windows. The motion was seconded by Mr. Smith. It was approved 5-0.

Minutes

Mr. Van Sickle, Ms. Dortz and Ms. Dillenseger provided edits. Dr. Schur made a motion to approve the minutes as corrected. The motion was seconded by Ms. Dortz. The motion was approved 5-0.

Ms. Masterson made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Smith seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0 at 7:02 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Samantha M. Paull
Preservation Administrator

**Members of the Public
(who signed the Attendance list)**

Mahmood Firouzbakht	Applicant	7 Crescent Street
Mark Boyes-Watson	Architect for 9 Dinsmore Ct	30 Bow St, Somerville, MA
Jennifer Jones	Abutter	24A Bradbury Street

Note: All addresses are located in Cambridge unless otherwise noted.