

DRAFT MINUTES

Minutes of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission *Approved at the December 14, 2015 Meeting*

September 21, 2015 - 6:00 PM at Friends Meeting House, 5 Longfellow Park, Cambridge

Members present: James Van Sickle, *Chair*; Judith Dortz, *Vice Chair*; Deborah Masterson, Marie-Pierre Dillenseger, William King, and Peter Schur, *members*

Members absent: Charles Smith, *member*

Staff present: Samantha Paull and Susan Maycock

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.

Mr. Van Sickle designated Ms. Judith Dortz, Vice Chair, as a voting alternate for HCM-303 and he designated himself as the voting alternate for HCM-304.

Mr. Van Sickle recused himself from the first case, HCM-303, 16 Brown Street, as he was an abutter. He moved to sit with the other members of the public. Ms. Judith Dortz, Vice Chair, assumed the chair.

HCM-303: 16 Brown Street, by Deborah Manegold. Construct new entry steps, construct side entry hood, and replace fence gate.

Ms. Samantha Paull, staff, gave a brief history of the structure and an overview of the proposed application.

Mr. Keith Cantwell, architect for the project, presented the application. He described the proposed stairs, which would be brick with granite slabs for the treads and landing. He said that the railing would be similar to the existing plain metal rail but would have more pickets to meet current code. He noted that the proposed fence was solid on the bottom four (4) feet and lattice on the top two (2) feet.

Ms. Dortz asked about the height of the current gate. Mr. Cantwell responded it was four (4) feet, three (3) inches tall and the proposal was for a four (4) foot gate with a two (2) foot square lattice top.

Ms. Dortz asked if the stairs would be the same height. Mr. Cantwell replied yes, however he noted that the last step would be a bit larger to have the plinth be horizontal instead of having a notch. Dr. Schur asked if he was reducing the number of steps. Mr. Cantwell replied yes and no, the existing risers were all different sizes and the proposal included making them a consistent seven (7) and a half (½) inches.

Mr. Cantwell said the side entry hood was designed to look like an early addition but was clearly not original to the structure, thus the scroll brackets. He noted that the pitch matched the roof pitch on the rear brick addition.

Ms. Dortz asked how far it would protrude. Mr. Cantwell replied thirty-two (32) inches.

Ms. Dillenseger stated her preference for the brackets versus the columns that were a part of the previous design. She also noted that the lattice was proposed as the top portion of the gate on the previous application.

Ms. Masterson asked how far it was setback from the edge of the house. Mr. Cantwell replied twenty-one (21) feet. Ms. Masterson expressed her preference for a lower gate. Ms. Dillenseger concurred and noted that one of the goals of the District was to preserve thru-views.

Ms. Masterson expressed concern that the fence gate was being discussed again and noted that she felt the applicant should have appealed the earlier decision. Ms. Paull clarified that the District Order did not have a provision for administrative *res judicata* and that the appeal related to the hearing procedure not whether the owner was happy with the decision or not. Ms. Masterson said she disagreed.

Ms. Dillenseger voiced her support of the new steps and said the plans provided in the application were helpful.

Ms. Dortz called for questions from the public. There were none.

Ms. Dortz called for comments from the public. Mr. Van Sickle, neighbor at 15 Brown Street, stated that the applicants are great neighbors and had done a great job restoring the house. He offered his support for the proposed changes and support for the taller fence gate. He noted that there was a shrub that blocked much of the thru-views and view of the gate.

As there were no other comments, Ms. Dortz closed the public comment period.

Ms. Dortz emphasized her concern regarding the proposed bracket as it was not of the same style as the house.

Mr. Cantwell noted that scroll brackets are a common element on homes in New England of this time frame in the area, reflecting alterations over time and the story of the house.

Ms. Susan Maycock, staff member, echoed what Mr. Cantwell said. She continued by saying that houses in Cambridge, especially East Cambridge, in the 1870s and 1880s added entry hoods with scroll brackets. She noted that the colonial elements on the house were not original to the house and thus adding more may be additional conjecture and be more confusing rather than in harmony with the development of structures in Cambridge.

Ms. Dortz said she still felt something simpler would be more appropriate.

Ms. Masterson asked if they could address each item with a separate vote to understand the components of the application. Ms. Dortz replied yes and noted that they would vote on the steps then the side entry hood then the fence.

Dr. Schur made a motion to approve the front steps as submitted. Ms. Dillenseger seconded the motion. The motion passed 5-0.

Dr. Schur made a motion to approve the side entry hood as submitted. Mr. King seconded the motion. The motion passed 4-1, with Ms. Dortz opposed and Mr. Van Sickle recused.

Mr. King made a motion to approve the fence as submitted. The motion was not seconded and failed.

Ms. Masterson made a motion to approve the gate with the condition that it not exceed four (4) feet in height to preserve thru views. Ms. Dillenseger seconded the motion. The motion passed 4-1 with Mr. King opposed.

Mr. Van Sickle rejoined the Commission.

HCM-304: 1000 Memorial Drive, by 1000 Memorial Drive Trust. Construct new garden unit entry.

Ms. Samantha Paull, staff, gave a brief history of the structure and an overview of the proposed application.

Ken Lau, a representative for the owner, was present and gave an overview of the request. He said the request was to add a new opening, with a recessed entry door down to the garden unit. He pointed to staff's photographs to depict the approximate area. He stated that they hoped to also remove the window bars and repaint the structure; noting that he was in touch with Susan on the Historical Commission's staff regarding color options.

Ms. Dortz asked what the existing door on the street elevation accessed. Mr. Lau clarified that it accessed the elevator that accessed only the third floor.

Ms. Alice Borden, resident at 998 Memorial Drive, noted that the previous owner of the building was disabled.

Dr. Schur asked if the elevator was still active. Mr. Lau responded it still worked but he was uncertain whether it was being utilized at the time.

Mr. Lau noted the limitations of the site and structure in regard to adding a door elsewhere on the structure. He pointed to the rear left (north) elevation, noting that the goal was to maintain the bulkhead in the rear for access to the mechanical areas as well as an access point below the elevator, for safety, maintenance and rescue.

Ms. Masterson asked which window would be impacted on the front elevation. Mr. Lau walked the Commission through the elements impacted by the proposed new opening, stairs to the vestibule, and new doors – for the garden unit and mechanical access. He noted that a portion of the paneling and trim work on the front elevation would be cut into in order to provide head height for the stairs.

Dr. Schur asked if the door to the elevator was remaining. Mr. Lau stated that they were hoping to keep the door and possibly add elevator access to the second floor as well; however, they were reviewing the code limitations of the elevator as it was residential and not commercial.

Ms. Masterson asked if the other entrances were being altered. Mr. Lau responded no. Ms. Dillenseger asked if the doors were going to all be replaced or would all match. Mr. Lau said they do not match

currently but the goal was to have new doors match the existing main entry doors. He noted that the work would not impact the elevator door. Mr. Lau said that the building had five (5) electric meters. He added that the garden unit was currently occupied and the owner was hoping to make it easier to access. Dr. Schur asked how the tenants get into their unit now. Mr. Lau responded that there's a door on the left elevation toward the rear corner of the structure that the tenants were utilizing. Mr. Van Sickle asked if that door would be removed once the new door was added. Mr. Lau clarified no, it would remain as emergency egress as it accessed a rear stair for the other units and the door to the garden unit would be closed up.

Ms. Borden noted that the structure previously had four (4) or five (5) units, but was later cut up into an eighteen (18) room bed and breakfast style rental. She continued that the interior had eight (8) rooms per floor and the staff people living in the basement. She thought they were using the elevator door as an entry to the garden unit. She also stated her concern with the bars on the windows in case of an emergency. Mr. Lau responded that he was unaware of the use of the elevator door for entry. He said he had looked into utilizing it as an entry point but it was not possible to have the mechanical equipment for the elevator and the legal access to the unit.

Ms. Dortz asked what other options had been considered. Mr. Lau said they looked at adding a stair down, inside the existing front door, but ran into problems getting enough head height for the stairs. He also mentioned that the side setbacks are really tight and didn't provide much space for adding access either. Mr. Van Sickle suggested looking at a bulkhead style option. Mr. Lau responded there was not enough room.

Mr. Van Sickle asked if the paneling was repeated inside the recessed area. Mr. Lau replied it was not proposed but could be done.

Mr. King mentioned concern for where AC units would be placed. Mr. Lau responded that the plan was to install new split ductless units with chillers on the roof.

Ms. Borden stated she would be happy with anything that was more residential than transient as the previous transient use was a zoning issue. She mentioned concern about the proposed entrance's proximity to the sidewalk.

Ms. Dortz expressed concern that the owner was not looking at the project holistically but one addressing the one change of the garden unit entry. Mr. Lau said his goal was to have an economically viable project.

Ms. Masterson asked if there was a plan B if the door wasn't approved. Mr. Lau said they hadn't gotten that far yet. He noted that he was happy to work with the Commission within their parameters.

Len Edgerly, neighbor at 165 Mt. Auburn Street, was present and noted that he was there to find out more information.

Dr. Schur asked if there was parking for the building. Mr. Lau responded no. Ms. Borden said that was a real problem when it was an 18 room bed and breakfast.

Ms. Masterson asked if the windows were staying. Mr. Lau replied yes. Ms. Masterson asked about the chainlink fence. Mr. Lau clarified that the fence belonged to the city.

Mr. Van Sickle echoed Ms. Dortz's concern about the plans not reflecting the entire renovation project. Mr. Lau replied that he hoped to better understand the feasibility of the garden unit door before spending more money on plans.

Mr. King expressed concern about the proposal, and while he supported the creation of larger residential units for families to grow in Cambridge, he recommended renovation without compromising the architectural integrity of the structure. Mr. King hoped Mr. Lau would research alternative entrances that did not adversely impact the paneling. Mr. Van Sickle agreed.

Dr. Schur suggested replacing the elevator door and working out an entrance within the existing structure to preserve the paneling. Ms. Dortz and Ms. Dillenseger agreed.

Mr. Lau asked if he needed to come back for review if an architect could get the entrance to work out on the interior. Mr. Van Sickle replied no.

Mr. Lau thanked the Commission for their guidance on the project and noted that he would also look into scrapping the elevator and utilizing that door as an entrance to the garden unit. Mr. Lau asked if he could withdraw his application and review options with the owner. He said he hoped to see if there was a solution that met the concerns of the Commission, possibly even interior to the structure, which made economic sense. He indicated that he would follow up with staff after research.

Mr. King made a motion to accept the withdrawal without prejudice. Dr. Schur seconded the motion. The motion passed 5-0.

New Business

The Commission discussed creating a cell phone policy. The general consensus was only emergency calls would be taken and the meeting would be paused for the Commissioner to address the emergency.

Mr. Van Sickle opened discussion about the items required for an application to be considered complete and noted a site plan was not currently required unless it was a larger project, over 500 sqft. Mr. King expressed that 500 sqft was rather large and improbable for most lots in Half Crown Marsh. He requested that a site plan be submitted when a project includes any alterations to the site, including foundation work, window wells or AC condensers. The other Commissioner's echoed his idea.

Mr. Van Sickle asked staff to look into how the application process could be amended. Mr. King replied that maybe staff could put together a list of what was currently required for an application, along with the additional items the Commission wanted to add to the list and it could be reviewed at the next hearing.

Ms. Masterson asked for guidance on how they state their opinion on items that would have a non-binding review. Mr. Van Sickle replied that it seemed the Commission's Order stated that items were exempt, however they could still be discussed but only if the item was proposed as part of an application. Mr. King noted he felt some items, such as curb cuts, should be reviewed by the Commission to discuss how they impact the district, but in an advisory manner. Mr. Van Sickle and Mr. King asked staff to get some clarification on the District Order.

Ms. Dillenseger noted that the projector has been more helpful than images printed out and hopes that an alternative venue could be found for hearings during warmer months.

Mr. Van Sickle echoed Ms. Dillenseger's sentiments. He also requested PDF plans to show on the projector if possible. Ms. Paull replied that she would ask if possible to have those but could not guarantee it for all applications. Dr. Schur noted that it's most helpful when proposed and existing are shown side by side.

Mr. Van Sickle suggested the new application requirements be summarized and discussed at the next meeting.

Minutes

Ms. Masterson made a motion to approve the August 17, 2015 minutes with edits from Ms. Masterson, Mr. King, and Mr. Van Sickle. Dr. Schur seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0, with Mr. Van Sickle not voting.

Ms. Masterson made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:03pm. Ms. Dillenseger seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0, with Ms. Dortz not voting.

Respectfully submitted,

Samantha Paull
Preservation Administrator

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

Keith Cantwell	Architect	184 Liberty Street, Randolph, MA
Deb Manegold	Owner	16 Brown Street
Ken Lau	Developer/Representative	277 Broadway
Len Edgerly	Neighbor	165 Mt. Auburn Street
Alice Borden	Neighbor	998 Memorial Drive

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