

Minutes of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission ***Approved at the May 15, 2017 Meeting***

January 23, 2017 - 6:00 PM at Lombardi Building, Basement Conference Room, 831 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge

Members present: James Van Sickle, *Chair*; Judith Dortz, *Vice Chair*; William King, Deborah Masterson, Peter Schur and Charles Smith, *Members*; Adrian Catalano, *Alternate*

Members absent: Marie-Pierre Dillenseger *Member*

Staff present: Samantha Paull Elliott and Susan Maycock

Members of the Public: see attached list

Mr. James Van Sickle, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:00pm, gave an overview of the agenda and discussed meeting procedures. He noted that Mr. Adrian Catalano, Commissioner, would be the voting alternate for the item.

HCM-361: 96 Foster Street, by Mary Lord. Raise house, build new foundation, alter windows, alter door openings, selective window replacement, install composite watertable and install new skylights.

Ms. Samantha Elliott, staff, gave an overview of the property, showed slides photos before their renovation project started and current photos.

Mr. Thomas Bakalars, the architect for the project, introduced himself, noted that he brought product samples with him and gave an overview of the application. He introduced the owner, Ms. Mary Lord, who moved into 96 Foster Street from 18 Foster Street when she was 3 years old. Ms. Lord said her mother added the small window in the gable end in 1970s and that the property was a rental before her family purchased it. Mr. Bakalars continued, noting that the house had been vacant for some time as Ms. Lord's mother died, then her father fell ill and was put in a nursing home. He said the idea was that he'd move back home, but was unable to as his condition worsened and he passed away. Mr. Bakalars said that the house, stuck in probate court, had little to no maintenance for 10-15 years until Ms. Lord obtained ownership a few years ago. Mr. Bakalars said the previous contractor started work with the impression that he could complete the job, but as soon as he started issues sprang up and he was fired. Mr. Bakalars showed photos of the current interior and exterior conditions, reflecting how low the property was sitting and how it was sinking into the ground. Mr. Bakalars continued, showing the proposed site plan and elevations. He noted that the proposal included raising the rear patio one step, about eight (8) inches which would allow room to add a drainage system. Mr. Bakalars said they were also proposing a four (4) foot open picket fence to the rear with a brick retaining wall around the property, replacing an existing crumbling retaining wall.

Ms. Deb Masterson, Commissioner, asked how much the house would be raised. Mr. Bakalars replied one (1) foot and two (2) inches. She asked if the current retaining wall was masonry. Mr. Bakalars said it was currently railroad ties with some flag stones in the front landscaping area and they were proposing a brick

retaining wall. He showed a slide that reflected more detail of the retaining wall. He said they also had done exploratory digging and found good clean fill 10-15 feet down, which would aid in on-site drainage.

Mr. Adrian Catalano, Commissioner, asked if the brick patio counted toward the open space requirement. Mr. Bakalars replied that it did not because it was not possible to meet the minimum dimensions within the lot. He noted that it would still be all useable space for the occupant.

Ms. Masterson asked where the fence was measured from. Mr. Bakalars replied that it was measured from existing grade.

Mr. Van Sickle asked if Mr. Bakalars could discuss changes to the house itself. Mr. Van Sickle noted that the terrace, walkways, retaining walls, and skylights were exempt. Mr. Bakalars noted the structural changes included the foundation for the bay window, raising the house, building the additional foundation, rebuilding the chimneys, and repairing windows. Mr. Bakalars said the chimney would be rebuilt but they would be replicas, not useable chimneys. Mr. Bakalars showed proposed brick materials, full size bricks would be used on foundation and veneer on chimney. He noted that the full foundation wouldn't be rebuilt, but only the space between the existing foundation and where the house was raised would be built.

Mr. Charles Smith, Commissioner, asked how the new foundation would affect the abutting houses in the back. Mr. Bakalars said that there should be no thru-view impacts as the house would be in the same location. He added that it was unlikely to cause additional shadows as there were trees extant on the property.

Ms. Masterson asked how they would lift the house as the lot was so tight. Mr. Bakalars replied that one would hire building movers using pneumatic jacks to lift the house. He noted that it was only about \$8,800. Ms. Masterson asked if there were large dump trucks or other equipment needed. Mr. Bakalars clarified that only a small machine, like what was used for the exploratory excavating, would be needed.

Mr. Catalano asked if Mr. Bakalars had ever designed a faux chimney before. Mr. Bakalars replied no. Mr. Catalano elaborated that while it was a lightweight alternative, it presented real water problems as the brick wicks moisture.

Mr. Van Sickle asked where the faux chimney was proposed. Mr. Bakalars said the idea was to do both chimneys as faux chimneys, as they took up substantial room inside. Mr. Van Sickle asked how large the house was. Mr. Bakalars replied it was 1,209 square feet without the basement.

Mr. Catalano asked if they were proposing to add egress windows in basement. Mr. Bakalars clarified that no sleeping quarters were proposed in basement, so egress windows were not required.

Mr. King asked how high the top of the remaining chimney was in comparison to roofline. Mr. Bakalars said it was the same height.

Ms. Dortz asked what would be seen from the street of the bay foundation addition. Mr. Bakalars showed a slide of the front elevation rendering and noted that about a foot and a half would show.

Dr. Peter Schur, Commissioner, asked what was proposed for the gutters. Mr. Bakalars showed a sample of the fiberglass gutters that he would be using for the project.

Mr. Catalano suggested that he might consider asking the Commission to not rebuild the chimneys. Ms. Elliott gave an overview of the chimney situation.

Mr. Van Sickle opened to public questions and comments.

Mr. Jay Connor, 98 Foster St, said he'd lived at his house for over 21 years, and hadn't seen Mary Lord in 10 years. He was confused about why the house needed to be raised and he thought the architect said that nothing was wrong with the existing foundation. He expressed concern with adding additional living space, it increases it to 1.0 FAR. He asked how far below grade the foundation was and added that if the house had been properly cared for in the last 15 years they wouldn't be here.

Mr. Bakalars clarified that nothing was wrong with foundation, or the stones themselves, but rather the height as it was an issue of rot. Ms. Ford added that there were mushrooms. Mr. Van Sickle asked why the height was chosen. Mr. Bakalars said it was limited to accessibility with steps.

Mr. Connor added that the additional FAR is an issue. Mr. Van Sickle clarified that the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission did not render decisions on FAR/zoning issues.

Mr. Ed Serues, abutter at 100 Foster St, asked how the Commissioners thought they were preserving and protecting a structure because the proposal looked more like something you would find on the seashore. Mr. Serues asked why they weren't preserving the structure. Mr. Bakalars replied that the entire exterior of the existing was being restored - woodwork, cornices, windows, all elements except for the shutters will be repaired. Mr. Bakalars said only pieces that were rotten or broken would be replaced as required.

Mr. Van Sickle noticed that the clapboards were currently down to the ground and asked if there was evidence of a water table. Mr. Bakalars replied no, they were proposing one but there was no existing evidence of one. Ms. Lord added that they found someone who could restore the windows as keeping the character and fabric was important. Mr. Bakalars noted that the restoration would not make things look new and crisp. Mr. Series asked if the owner was moving back. Ms. Lord replied that was the intention.

Mr. Frank Neczypor, abutter at 114 Foster St, expressed concern in the totality of the neighborhood increasing in volume. He said the house shouldn't be raised permanently but rather when the sills rot, you jack house up, replace sill plates and jack house back down, over time because of fertilizer and mulch, land rises over time. He added that the house was cute, like other worker's cottages in the area; that was the neighborhood. He said raising the house would have a negative impact on the character with being able to see the foundation and the windows from the street.

Ms. Ann Lowell, abutter at 88 Foster St, said she would love to see the house fixed up but had concerns with raising up the house. She asked if there was a notice required to be posted at the property. Ms. Elliott noted that the majority of the time the notices are posted and confirmed that her name was on the abutters mailing list. Ms. Lowell asked if the basement would be livable. Mr. Catalano said egress windows would be required for living space in the basement.

Craig Burr, abutter at 101 Foster Street, asked to see the front elevation plans. He asked if the foundation could be made smaller so one wouldn't see the courses of brick in the front of the foundation. Mr. Bakalars replied no.

Mr. Van Sickle asked for other comments from public; seeing none, he closed the public hearing.

Ms. Dortz expressed concern about the height gain and asked if there was any other way to achieve height. Mr. Bakalars replied that even what they were proposing was not enough from a building standpoint; he added that he preferred to raise it another 8-9 inches but did not have the room. Mr. Bakalars clarified that part of the issue was the slope of the lot, as the sill plate was completely submerged in the back.

Mr. King said shrubbery in front might help hide the foundation. Mr. Van Sickle said he agreed with Mr. Bakalars that raising the house 14 inches was the minimum. Mr. Catalano, added that most houses in New England were far higher than what he was proposing. Mr. Catalano expressed concern about protecting the sill plates, whether they're pressure treated or not. He added that the proposed measurement was the minimum he would recommend and that raising it may not be enough to fully address rot issues.

Mr. King said that the Commission needed to work together to save the house to conserve the neighborhood. He said he had always emphasized the importance of chimneys in the neighborhood and benefited from Mr. Catalano's comments about what happens with a veneer faux chimney. He said he might still fight when a chimney was important for the streetscape but he felt these chimneys were not readily visible from a public way, nor were they a crucial part of the streetscape or house. He noted that raising the house to better preserve the house is clearly in the public interest and he supported that.

Ms. Masterson said she loved the house and was glad that someone was working on restoring the house. She echoed concerns about the increased height. Mr. Van Sickle said it seemed like he was barely meeting the minimum required by code. Mr. Catalano agreed. Ms. Masterson asked if they could dig their property down. Mr. Van Sickle replied that would cause a drainage issue with water flowing into the house and lot. Mr. Van Sickle said the proposal preserves the house for the future and that it was necessary to help keep the house longer. Mr. Catalano noted that any exhaust would require additional foundation space too.

Mr. Van Sickle said that 45 Foster Street had similar issues as it hadn't been maintained or raised previously. He noted that he had been walking around Bay Village in Boston, that the plaque said that the whole of Bay Village was raised by 6'. He shared his belief that this was the nature of building and development and time passing and the neighborhood had changed and the goal was to preserve the integrity of the neighborhood. He said he saw no issues with raising the house.

Ms. Dortz asked where the air conditioning condensers would be located. Mr. Bakalars showed on the plans where they were proposing condensers.

Dr. Schur asked what would happen if the Commission approved it but it was denied by Zoning. Mr. Van Sickle then they would not be able to build it as submitted.

Ms. Masterson asked what to do about the sign, nothing that it had not been posted prior to the hearing. Mr. Van Sickle asked if it could be clarified by the city solicitor but go forward with their decision and review. Ms. Elliott said she will review and discuss with the city solicitor if needed.

Mr. Catalano made a motion to accept the proposal as presented. Mr. King made an amendment to not require that the faux chimneys be constructed. Mr. Catalano accepted the amendment. Mr. Smith seconded the motion. The motion was approved 4-1 with Ms. Masterson opposed.

Minutes

Mr. King made a motion to accept the November 21, 2016 minutes with edits. Dr. Schur seconded the motion and it was approved 5-0 with Mr. Catalano voting.

Mr. King made a motion to accept the December 19, 2016 minutes with edits. Ms. Masterson seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0 with Mr. Van Sickle voting.

New Business

Ms. Elliott offered an update on the meeting location search. She noted she had heard back from the New School, but that they would not be able to start meetings until 7pm. Ms. Elliott replied that the Water Department Building requires more research. Ms. Dortz and Mr. Catalano did not support using the Water Department Building. Ms. Elliott offered to follow up with the parking and potential of a meeting space at the Water Department Building for reference.

Ms. Susan Maycock, staff, noted that she would be attending the hearings in Ms. Elliott's place.

Ms. Masterson made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Dortz seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0 with Mr. Van Sickle voting and the meeting was adjourned at 7:40pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Samantha Elliott
Preservation Administrator

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

Thomas Bakalars	Architect	30 Fenway, Boston
Mary Lord	Owner	2125 Newport Pl NW, Washington, DC
Anne Lowell	Neighbor	88 Foster Street
Jay Connor	Neighbor	98 Foster Street
Francis Neczypor	Neighbor	114 Foster Street
Craig Burr	Neighbor	101 Foster Street
Ed Serues	Neighbor	100 Foster Street

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