

Minutes of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission ***Approved at the July 17, 2017 Meeting***

June 19, 2017 - 6:00 PM at Lombardi Building, Basement Conference Room, 831 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge

Members present: Marie-Pierre Dillenseger, Peter Schur and Charles Smith, *Members*. Adrian Catalano, *Alternate*

Members absent: James Van Sickle, *Chair* Judith Dortz, *Vice Chair*, William King, Deborah Masterson

Staff present: Susan Maycock

Members of the Public: see attached list

The Chair and Vice Chair being absent, Charles Smith was designated to preside and called the meeting to order at 6:15pm. He outlined the meeting procedures. Adrian Catalano, alternate, was designated a voting member for this meeting.

HCM-378: 60 Foster Street, by Marc and Madeleine Holzer. Rebuild entry steps in masonry and construct new covered entry.

Ms. Maycock distributed photographs and presented an overview of the property's history and the project. She pointed out that 60 and 62 Foster Street were built by Patrick O'Connor, a local carpenter, who also owned several adjacent lots on Foster Street. Both were originally two-family houses with double doors surmounted by bracketed hoods. When 60 Foster was converted to a single family house in 1991, a number of changes were made including the current fanlighted entrance.

The owners Marc and Madeleine Holzer introduced themselves and asked their architect Amy Semmes to present the project. Ms. Semmes pointed out that the owners have been in the house for a couple of winters and are concerned because there is no shelter at the entry. She described the current door with its narrow sidelights. The owners would like additional lights and height at the entrance, and she thought that a covered porch would look more appropriate than the current "builders' special" fanlight flat against the facade. She said the proposed sidelights and transom would be wood with insulated glass and simulated divided lights. The front door would be a six-panel door with raised panels. The fiberglass columns would have square bases and pilasters would be flat against the front wall. She stated that the current concrete steps are crumbling and need to be replaced. They would rework the steps and landing in brick and bluestone. The proposed handrails would be simple wrought iron that would be sturdy and easiest to grip.

Ms. Holzer explained that they had met with Samantha Elliott to discuss the situation and since they feel that this is a "plain Jane" house that they were looking for a porch that would meet their needs and be more in keeping with the house.

Dr. Schur asked if there is a safety problem with the entrance the way it is now. Mr. Holzer replied that the steps are currently open to the weather and that they are both older and he is concerned about slipping on the ice since he has done that before and badly injured his shoulder. Dr. Schur asked about

the material of the platform under the porch. Ms. Semmes responded that for the porch floor and steps, the horizontal surfaces would be bluestone and the vertical surfaces would be brick like the brick foundation.

Ms. Dillenseger said that she thought it would make sense to avoid adding columns to the porch, in order to be better aligned with the similar house next door at 62 Foster. She was concerned about maintaining the views through properties in the district, and had some reservations about adding columns which restrict some of the view. She asked the applicants what made them decide to use columns instead of just a hood.

Ms. Holzer responded that their architect told them that columns would be a better idea because the structure would be outside the house rather than having to tie it back into the house. Ms. Semmes added that she was concerned that the platform has to be 4 feet deep to conform to the code and that would be too big to support a hood on brackets.

Mr. Catalano asked how the joists run and if the top of the proposed column is at the height of the floor. Ms. Semmes responded that there is no floor assembly directly inside the front door, and no finished ceiling in the foyer so nothing to tie brackets into.

Mr. Smith stated that when the house was built, it was a simpler time in the neighborhood. He said he thought something other than pillars might be more appropriate.

Mr. Catalano asked whether they were reusing the front door and was told no because it dated from the 1990s renovation.

Ms. Semmes showed photos of other houses in the neighborhood that have columned porches. A discussion followed about the appropriateness of columns for this house.

Ms. Dillenseger asked if they were sure that a hood here could not be supported by brackets. Ms. Holzer responded that it would have to be cantilevered and that the contractor had told them that the house was not structurally very sound. When he was working on the house he found that there was a 5" drop between the front and back walls and that he had to completely rebuild some of the floors to try to make them level.

Dr. Schur asked if the owners would be amenable to square posts and they said they would. Ms. Dillenseger and Dr. Schur said they would like them as slender as possible. In response to the architect's concerns about size, Mr. Catalano said that a 3" steel column wrapped in cedar would be adequate.

Ms. Semmes asked for a clarification whether the objections were to the columns or the shape of the pediment.

Mr. Smith said he kept coming back to the Issue of workers cottages and simplicity and thought that square posts might be simple enough. He asked how wide the corner boards are and Ms. Semmes said not very wide, about 5 ½".

Ms. Semmes said that when she looked at the whole façade, she felt that the pediment helps the proportions because the center of the second floor has no windows after the HCMNCD approved the

removal of the last narrow window from when the house was a double house. Ms. Dillenseger said that the house is now very simple and that she felt the new entry almost overwhelms the whole façade.

Dr. Schur asked what the procedure would be if the commission wanted to be sure that brackets and a hood are not feasible before it approved a columned porch. Mr. Catalano said that this was not a contractor's job, that an engineer would need to certify that it was not feasible.

Mr. Holzer said that he thinks that the current doorway with the fanlight is rather pretentious. He is concerned about keeping the house in character with the neighborhood, but he is not comfortable that any brackets could support a roof of the size they need. Ms. Holzer added that they just want to fix their crumbling front steps and to make the house livable, but they don't want this to cost a fortune. If they need to explore the feasibility of a hood they would have to hire an engineer and get new plans.

Ms. Dillenseger said that the commission is charged with keeping things consistent with the district order and in this case fairly modest.

Dr. Schur said that given how large the roof of the proposed porch is, he can't think of any houses that don't have columns or posts. He suggested that the staff could handle the review of construction details such as the size of any posts.

Dr. Schur moved that the proposal to rebuild the steps and to build a covered porch be approved as presented, with the condition that the columns are replaced by proportionate, slender square posts, the exact dimensions of which would be approved by staff. Mr. Smith seconded the motion.

The motion failed with 3 (Mr. Smith, Mr. Catalano, and Ms. Dillenseger) against and 1 (Dr. Schur) for.

A general discussion followed the vote, as the owners looked for direction on how to proceed. The commissioners who voted against the motion stated their concerns.

Mr. Catalano said he was not comfortable voting for the proposed porch design without their exploring the possibility of a hood with brackets. Mr. Smith said that he wanted it to look simple like the house. Ms. Dillenseger didn't feel that there was enough data to show that a bracketed hood would not be possible. Collectively these commissioners wanted to make sure that the bracketed solution is not feasible before considering other schemes.

Ms. Holzer replied that the porch roof is 8 feet wide, and they were not sure that they could get brackets to support it. Mr. Holzer added that if you walk down Foster Street there are all styles of architecture with all kinds of entries. He described different entrances in the neighborhood and said that they had tried to survey these before coming up with their proposal. He said that the house has been modified several times since it was built, and he didn't understand where the discussion was going. He worried that they were going to have to rip apart a lot of the work that they had just done if they had to put brackets in and secure them to the house.

Minutes

The minutes from the meeting on May 15, 2017 were reviewed and corrections were made. Ms. Dillenseger made a motion to approve the corrected minutes and Mr. Smith seconded it. The motion was approved 4-0.

Mr. Smith made a motion to adjourn and Ms. Dillenseger seconded the motion. The motion was approved 4-0, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Maycock
Survey Director

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

Madeleine Holzer	Owner	60 Foster St
Marc Holzer	Owner	60 Foster St
Amy Semmes	Architect	60 Foster St

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