

MINUTES OF THE HALF CROWN-MARSH NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION

Approved at the MAY 13, 2019 Meeting

April 8, 2019 - 6:00 PM at Lombardi Building, Basement Conference Room, 831 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge

Commissioners present: James Van Sickle, *Chair*; Marie-Pierre Dillenseger, Peter Schur, Jo Solet *Members*; Adrian Catalano, Rory O'Connor, *Alternates*

Commissioners absent: Maximillian Frank

Staff present: Eric Hill, Survey Director

Members of the Public: Leon Navickas, Sophia Navickas, Mary Lord, Thomas Bakalars, Woodrow Landay

James Van Sickle, Chair, called the hearing to order at 6:03pm. He began by explaining the rules and procedures for the Commission and laid out the order for how the hearing would be held. Mr. Van Sickle also noted that as Mr. O'Connor as an alternate and last to arrive, would not be able to vote on the applications presented; however, he could still contribute to the discussion.

HCM-451: 32-34 Sparks Street, by Creative Properties on Centre, LLC. Reduce size of four windows on side elevation.

Staff showed slides and gave a quick history of the property and noted that the applicant had recently been before the commission. Staff explained that the applicant was proposing to raise the sill on the four windows to allow for countertops on the interior as the kitchen on floors two and three would be located at that wall.

Mr. Van Sickle opened the hearing up to questions of the applicant, owner or staff.

Ms. Dillenseger noted that the plans submitted showed two smaller rectangular fixed windows on the third floor on the side elevation. She went on to mention that according to the images in the presentation, there was only one window in that location.

Mr. Navickas stated that it was a drawing error and that it would be fixed.

Staff stated that only items included in the scope of work and subsequently posted in the legal ad would be voted on.

Commissioner Solet asked the applicant if they looked into alternative options to achieve their goal for a countertop at the interior and keep the existing window dimensions.

Mr. Navickas mentioned that they looked at other options and still felt that given the location of the windows and that they would match the adjacent windows in size for a uniform look.

Ms. Solet stated that in her home, they created a "window well" feature and tiled the interior and the new well space serves as a quasi-storage space. She went on to explain that raising and lowering sills on windows to fit the interior programming is common and that the window well option could be a viable alternative.

Commissioner Van Sickle stated that if approved, the three windows on the upper stories would be uniform and while the residents would lose interior light, that is not under their purview.

Mr. Van Sickle opened the hearing for questions or comments from the public. None present.

A motion to vote was called for and **Peter Schur made a motion to approve the proposal as presented. Commissioner Adrian Catalano seconded the motion. The vote was 5-0 to approve the application (O'Connor did not vote).**

HCM-452: 96 Foster Street, by Thomas Bakalars, AIA. Replace ten windows on structure.

Staff showed slides and gave a quick history of the property and listed out all previously approved work as part of case # HCM-361 in 2017. Staff explained that the applicant was approved to replace all windows and to restore ten of the windows as part of the approval. It was noted that the applicant in working with a past staff member was asked to restore some of the windows and thus, did not pursue replacement throughout. Staff explained that a detailed window survey of all windows were documented, and staff showed a couple windows proposed for replacement on the screen.

Thomas Bakalars, the architect for the project along with Woody Landay explained that a detailed window survey was done as part of this application and brought a sample window that is proposed for the Commission to see. He explained that the 5/8" muntin would be proposed and that the windows are an insulated, clad window.

Ms. Solet asked the applicant if they had reviewed the *Guidelines for Preservation and Replacement of Historic Wood Windows in Cambridge* report. She went on to explain that at Half Crown-Marsh as well as the main Cambridge Historical Commission hearings, they are seeing cases of replacement windows failing.

Mr. Bakalars noted that typically earlier replacements are the ones to fail as the older versions of clad or vinyl replacement windows are not of the same quality that would be installed today. He stated that if approved, they would likely remove the storms to show the detail of the windows.

Commissioner Catalano explained that he has been through the process multiple times for window replacements and that typically when looking at homes, storm windows can cause reflections or obscure details. He agreed with Mr. Bakalars in that the most common failure of replacement windows are with the older variety of replacements which are cheaper.

Mr. Bakalars explained that the windows are technically historic, but they are replacements themselves from the 1920s. The windows do not appear to be of the quality which warrants restoration and if they were restored, it would be a lesser window than what is proposed.

Mr. Catalano stated that the proposed window is a good product and is a better quality compared to some other major manufacturers.

Commissioner Schur asked the applicant if a screen was proposed and if so, was a full or half-screen proposed.

Mr. Bakalars stated that a full screen was proposed at this time.

Staff stated that it is their position that only half screens should be allowed as to not obscure the detail of the windows.

Commissioner Solet explained that since the double-hung window can only have one half open at a time, a half screen would be better but did not feel strongly one way or the other if it should be a stipulation for approval or denial.

Ms. Dillenseger asked staff to give their recommendation on the proposal as he visited the site and observed the condition of the windows from the interior as well as the exterior.

Staff explained that while it is the staff and commission's position to push for preservation of historic wood windows, the ten windows at 96 Foster Street are not of the quality nor craftsmanship that would warrant restoration. Mr. Hill went on to note that the windows have severe rot as the home has been unoccupied for years and not climate-controlled, so the wood has also begun to warp. He mentioned that the windows are technically "historic" as they are over 50 years old, but it was his opinion that the windows were later replacements from the 1920s or 1930s. He recommended that the windows be replaced and match the remainder already approved for replacement on the home.

Mr. Van Sickle explained that when reviewing cases like this, challenges balancing the age of the property with the architectural details significance and design come in to play. He asked the applicant how long the property has been vacant.

The owner mentioned that it has been vacant for over ten years and they have been working on it to restore it to its former glory.

Ms. Solet explained that the main Cambridge Historical Commission typically talks about the original fabric and the case for historic vs. original feature preservation.

Mr. Bakalars stated that the home was previously tilted and leaning and has since been lifted and leveled. A soil exploration was done, and an alluvial deposit of pure sand was 12' down.

Mr. Van Sickle expressed gratitude that the home was finally moving forward and was happy that it would be restored soon.

A motion to vote was called for and Adrian Catalano made a motion to approve the proposal as presented. Commissioner Peter Schur seconded the motion. The vote was 5-0 to approve the application (O'Connor did not vote).

After the vote, Mr. Van Sickle explained that normally, preservation of old windows is enforced; however, the detailed window survey and documentation of the windows makes the case for replacement.

Mr. O'Connor told the applicant that they could go with either a full or half-screen and the approval was not stipulating what type of screen (if any) is installed. Mr. Van Sickle agreed.

Minutes of March 11, 2019 hearing:

Ms. Dillenseger made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 2019 hearing pending minor edits. Commissioner Adrian Catalano seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous to approve the minutes, 5-0 (O'Connor did not vote).

The meeting adjourned at 7:12 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Eric Hill
Survey Director, Cambridge Historical Commission