

MINUTES OF THE HALF CROWN-MARSH NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION
Approved at the 11/19/2019 Meeting

October 21, 2019 - 6:00 PM at Lombardi Building, Basement Conference Room, 831 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge

Commissioners present: Peter Schur (Acting Chair), Jo Solet, *Members*; Rory O'Connor, Adrian Catalano *Alternates*.

Commissioners absent: James Van Sickle, Chair; Marie-Pierre Dillenseger, Vice-Chair; Maximillian Frank.

Staff present: Eric Hill, Survey Director

Members of the Public: Francisca Amacher, 239 Mt. Auburn Street.

Dr. Peter Schur, acting as Chair, called the hearing to order at 6:02 pm. He explained the rules and procedures for the Commission and noted that there was a quorum.

HCM-471: 165 Mt. Auburn Street, by David and Sarah Karmon. Update previously approved plans to add decorative post for new porch roof; replace non-original bump-out on second floor side façade with a transom window.

Staff showed slides and gave a history of the property. He noted that the applicant was approved for similar work at the January 2019 hearing. A cantilevered porch and a 2/2 window were approved per the submission. Staff explained the changes which included a turned post supporting the porch roof, which would have a slightly different pitch, and the proposal for a three-pane transom window replacing the previously approved 2/2 normal height window on the side elevation. Staff recommended approval of the proposed work noting that the proposed changes are minimal and allowed for individualized alterations while respecting the architecture of the home.

Dr. Schur asked the applicants if they wanted to present anything or add to staff's comments.

David Karmon, owner, mentioned that the proposed alterations were drawn up to provide support for the porch roof and the design of the turned post would match the decorative elements on the enclosed porch.

Sarah Karmon, owner, added that the proposed change in the window at the side elevation would be located at the shower and thus, to ensure privacy, the sill was proposed to be raised to appear as a transom.

Dr. Schur opened the hearing up to questions for staff or the applicant.

Dr. Solet asked the applicants if they wanted to have a landing at the porch entrance. She explained that as currently drawn, the door would swing out and end abruptly at the stairs. She mentioned that in order to pass building inspection, this may have to change.

David Karmon noted that there is only a storm door at the enclosed porch and that the main entrance is already at a landing in the porch.

Dr. Solet explained that the transom would be unique to the home and would not fit as well as a traditional double-hung window on that façade. She asked the applicant if they explored installing a faux window that was drywalled on the inside.

The applicant stated that it was investigated, but as they would lose light from the skylight at the bump-out and the location of the window at the shower, there was a chance for moisture to be trapped.

Staff agreed with the applicants noting that drywalling the interior is typically a benefit; however, at a shower or tub, there is more moisture and if not sealed perfectly, rot and mold would occur. Mr. Hill went on to note that if required to be replaced, the shower would have to be removed, at least in part.

Mr. Catalano explained that a three-foot landing at the front entrance may be required by Inspectional Services, and as the stairs are being reconstructed, they would likely lose the “grandfathered in” status.

The applicant explained that the steps would be reconstructed with the same number of steps, but the first would be much longer.

Dr. Solet stated that she still suggests a faux window or a two-pane window.

Mr. O’Connor was supportive of the window and porch roof as proposed.

A motion to vote was called for and **Adrian Catalano made a motion to approve the proposal as presented. Commissioner O’Connor seconded the motion. The vote was 4-0 to approve the application.**

HCM-472: 245 Mt. Auburn Street, by Aaron Kemp. Construct new fence at front yard; construct rear deck and pergola at rear yard.

Mr. Hill showed slides and gave a history of the property and explained the design of the proposed fence compared to similar fences nearby. He noted that the applicant proposed Azek material, which had been approved for a fence at 174 Brattle Street in the Old Cambridge Historic District, and the profile and design is nearly indistinguishable from a traditional wood fence. Staff recommended approval of the rear deck and pergola as submitted and approval of the fence at the front yard without the arbor. Mr. Hill explained that while 50% of the fence would be over 4’-0”, the design and location of the fence would still allow the home to be visible from a public way and that the arbor would be substantially taller than the 6’-0” fence and draw attention to a lawn feature which should not draw attention.

Dr. Schur asked the applicants if they wanted to present anything or add to staff’s comments.

Aaron Kemp, the applicant and owner, described how he and his wife had brought back the home from an eyesore to a beautiful asset to the community. The intent of the fence was to provide privacy while limiting noise pollution from the busy Mt. Auburn Street. Mr. Kemp noted that the intent for the arbor was to replace the arbor existing on the site, but tie in with the design better, as well as serving as a visual entrance with the gate underneath. Mr. Kemp explained that they designed the fence with the gate off-set from the front door to allow visitors to walk through the front and side yard gardens.

Dr. Schur opened the hearing up to questions for staff or the applicant.

Mr. Catalano noted that he was ambivalent over the arbor and felt that it would overshadow the fence.

Dr. Solet asked the applicant how tall the rear deck would be.

Mr. Kemp stated that it was 30" (2'-6").

Mr. O'Connor addressed his concerns over the height of the fence and arbor at the front yard and asked if a 5'-0" fence would be agreeable to the applicant.

Mr. Kemp stated that due to the desire for privacy, they do not want to settle for a fence less than 6'-0". He explained that a mock-up was created to view visibility from the interior spaces in the home and a 6'-0" fence would allow views of the river while removing the view of pedestrians and vehicles on the street.

Staff explained that five letters of support and one letter in opposition from abutters were submitted and in the commissioner packets. The Commissioners took time to read all the letters.

Mr. Catalano reiterated that a tall fence does not seem to make sense as it would still be open pickets.

Mr. O'Connor agreed and mentioned that he had no issues with the deck and pergola at the rear yard.

Mr. Kemp explained that if not approved for a 6'-0" fence, he would work to maintain the existing fence rather than buy and install an expensive fence that does not meet their needs.

Dr. Schur noted that only one example of a 6'-0" fence was approved to his memory which was on Hilliard Street to enclose a yard adjacent to the American Repertory Theater on Brattle Street.

Dr. Solet felt that the arbor as shown in the renderings looked like a sealed box.

Mr. Kemp explained that he supplied all the drawings and renderings himself and is not a trained architect.

Ms. Francisca Amacher, 239 Mt. Auburn, felt that the fence is okay if it does not go along the side yard. She explained the need for a higher section but was concerned over the tall fence running along her side yard so close to the property.

Mr. Kemp noted that he was agreeable to shortening the length of the fence at the side yard from 16'-0" (two panels) to 8'-0" (one panel).

Ms. Amacher explained that as an architect, proportions of fences are important and should relate to the surroundings and the building(s) in which they are near.

Dr. Solet asked the applicant if landscaping features such as a hedge or yew were investigated as alternatives to a fence by the applicant.

Mr. Kemp felt that a fence would allow more light to flow into the kitchen and finished basement via the previously approved light wells.

Sarah Kemp, owner, explained that the family spends most of their time in the nook (the side addition which was an enclosed porch prior to the conservation district) and they almost always keep the shades drawn on other windows due to the home's close proximity to the busy street.

Mr. Catalano asked if a variance would be required for any of the work proposed.

Mr. Kemp explained that the only feature that would require a variance would be the deck as it would impede on the side/rear yard setbacks. He felt that it should not be difficult to be approved by the BZA.

A motion to vote was called for and **Jo Solet made a motion to approve the proposal with the condition that the fence at the side yard only extends one panel and the arbor be removed from the front yard fence. Commissioner Schur seconded the motion. The vote was 2-2 (Catalano and O'Connor voted against).**

A second motion was then made by Rory O'Connor to approve the pergola and deck at the rear yard as submitted and to continue the remainder of the proposal to a subsequent hearing. Adrian Catalano seconded the motion. The vote was 4-0.

Mr. Kemp signed the consent to continue application form.

Minutes of July 8, 2019 hearing:

Mr. O'Connor made a motion to approve the minutes from the July hearing as pending minor edits. Commissioner Schur seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous to approve the minutes, 4-0.

The meeting adjourned at 7:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Eric Hill
Survey Director, Cambridge Historical Commission