

Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

October 4, 2010 - 6:00 P.M. – 344 Broadway, City Hall Annex/McCusker Center, 2nd Floor

Commission Members Present: Nancy Goodwin, *Chair*; Tony Hsiao, *Vice Chair*; Carole Perrault, Charles Redmon, *Members*; Siobhan McMahon; Sue-Ellen Myers, Monika Pauli, *Alternates*

Commission Members Absent: Lestra Litchfield, *Member*

Staff: Eiliesh Tuffy, Sarah Burks

Members of the Public: See attached sign-in sheet

With a quorum present, Ms. Goodwin called the meeting to order at 6:01 P.M.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

MC-3741: 57 Dana Street, by Philip Holland and Siobhan McMahon. Replace exterior doors.

Staff member Eiliesh Tuffy outlined the basic project scope, which was further detailed by the property owner through a PowerPoint slide presentation. The property is an end-unit in a series of brick row houses. The proposal was to replace the deteriorated wood front doors with new wood doors to match. One set of French doors at the rear of the property will also be replaced, but it is not visible from the public way.

Ms. Carole Perrault asked the owner if the doors still held the original glass, and whether that glass was etched. It was believed that the existing glass was a later replacement, which made it difficult to determine if the original had been etched.

The new doors are to be custom milled out of either Fir or Sapele wood by a contractor in Beverly to replicate the original paneling as closely as possible. The entire frame will be removed and replaced as part of the work. The choice of wood was discussed and the owner stated that the Fir would be 30% cheaper than Sapele, but Sapele was thought to hold up better in freeze/thaw conditions. The point was raised about how the Sapele would wear over time, since the Commission and staff were not familiar with the product. The intention would be to paint the new doors either dark green, black, or red.

The single-glazed French door at the rear of the house poses a safety concern to the owners. It will be replaced with a similar door, but with insulated glass for greater strength and better weatherization. Ms. Goodwin mentioned that tempered glass might be required for the French door.

There were no questions from the public.

Ms. Perrault moved to approve the proposed replacement doors. Mr. Redmon seconded the motion, which passed 6-0 (Ms. McMahon was recused from voting).

MC-3743: 2 Ellsworth Park, by Frieda Grayzel. Window replacement.

Ms. Tuffy showed slides and described the property, which is one of four adjacent houses designed by architects William and Elmer Hutchins and completed in 1895. With only a few exceptions on the rear elevation, the building retains its original 2-over-1 wood windows. The owner proposes to replace the historic single-pane windows with new, insulated window units. A site visit was conducted by staff to discuss repair and winterization options prior to the Commission meeting.

The owner, Frieda Grayzel, stated her concerns about rattling windows that were difficult to open. She mentioned that the 1st floor tenants had to install plastic on their windows in the winter. As part of this project, she had explored four options, including restoration. At the time of the Commission meeting Ms. Grayzel was awaiting bids from restoration contractors and, based on preliminary consultations, was leaning towards refurbishing the existing windows. She said she definitely did not want to install vinyl, because the framing was very wide creating a smaller window opening than she liked.

Ms. Tuffy pointed out that the application was submitted with cut sheets for both a Pella and a Marvin replacement window, because the owner was undecided. Ms. Goodwin asked if both products offered simulated divided lites. She also stated that it was an unusual presentation, because the Commission was being presented with two options. The Commission always prefers refurbishing historic windows.

Ms. Sue-Ellen Myers proposed an approval to install replacement windows, but in multiple phases.

Mr. Redmon inquired whether refurbishing was less expensive than replacing the windows. Ms. Grayzel said that restoration was looking to be less expensive. Ms. McMahon noted that replacement window costs appeared to be rising proportionate to the federal tax credit amounts. Ms. Monika Pauli asked about storm window replacement, and the owner said the contractors discussed re-caulking the storms internally and externally.

Ms. Sarah Burks suggested an approval on behalf of the Commission that delegated a final decision to the staff once more information was available. Mr. Redmon said that would require them to reject the current proposal. Mr. Hsiao said the Commission would not typically reject the proposed aluminum-clad wood windows.

There were no questions or comments from the public.

Mr. Hsiao moved to approve the original application to install aluminum-clad windows as submitted, with the option to amend the certificate if another course of action is decided upon. Mr. Redmon seconded the motion, which passed 7-0.

Determination of Procedure: Alterations to Designated Properties

MC-3749: 16 Bigelow Street, by Doug Gesler. Reconstruct front porch and window details.

Ms. Tuffy presented slides showing existing conditions at the property, which falls within the Bigelow Street National Register district. Staff discovered the front porch and stairs partially dismantled, and instructed the owner to appear before the Commission to present plans for its reconstruction as well as detailing of the window bay trim and gutter installation.

Mr. Doug Gesler, the property owner, said he planned to rebuild the porch with 9-1/2" turned wood balusters on the top deck rails similar to #17 Bigelow. Mr. Hsiao asked what the descending stair rails would look like, since many adjacent properties have simple pipe rails. Mr. Gesler thought he would box out the metal fence posts along the front property line with wood and create a solid wood fence with a cut out design pattern that continued up the front steps.

Mr. Redmon asked the owner what his intentions were for the cheek walls of the staircase. Mr. Gesler proposed cast concrete stairs and cheek walls, similar to the staircase at #18 Bigelow, but with added bluestone caps to create a more durable top surface. Ms. Goodwin pointed out that bluestone would not have been used to cap the historic granite sidewalls and it could be a more complicated design than necessary, but that concrete alone would be a clean, simple solution. Mr. Redmon said veneers could pop off over time. Mr. Hsiao suggested going in the direction of the stairs at #18 Bigelow.

Ms. Perrault noted that the top landing is wider than the stairs. Mr. Gesler said the width was dictated by the underlying framing.

Mr. Hsiao discussed the need for drawings in order to work out some of the finer details of the front fence and stairs. Ms. Goodwin suggested referring those details to the Architects' Committee. Mr. Hsiao agreed.

No questions or comments were received from the public.

Ms. McMahon moved to approve select portions of the application as submitted, specifically points #1, #2, #4, #5, and #6, but refer point #3 regarding the stair and fence detailing to the Architects' Committee. Mr. Redmon seconded the motion, which passed 7-0.

MC-3557: 298 Harvard St., by 298 Harvard Realty Trust. Receive construction update; Discuss landscape plan and alterations to corner tower.

Lauren Harder and Martin Hill presented a construction update on the rehabilitation of the former Castle School building. At issue was the installation of a new stone veneer at the base of the corner tower.

Mr. Hill said they initially thought they could get a thinner stone but it was difficult to find, so they chose the thinnest product that was readily available and tried to square off the pieces as best as possible. He also said cleaning the remaining original stone was not possible without using an acid, which would be detrimental.

The Commission asked about the protrusion of the new veneer compared to the water table. Mr. Hill said the stone protrudes 1-1/2", which is greater than the 1-1/4" protrusion of the water table, and that they would have to mill new moldings to resolve those profile discrepancies.

Mr. Hsiao commended the team on the magnificent transformation of the building, and pointed out that it sits on a very prominent corner, with the tower prominently marking that corner. Ms. Harder said finding the right materials to match has been a challenge and that, so far, they had been lucky. At this stage they were asking how they should go forward, acknowledging that there were issues with the depth, tone, and shape of the tower base's new stone veneer that re-designed moldings would not resolve.

Mr. Hsiao asked what the total thickness of the current veneer was and, if removed, how thin a stone would they need to fit properly. Mr. Hill stated the current material was 2" to 2-1/2" when you factored in the wire mesh, mortar and stone veneer, and that they had looked for thinner material with no success. He suggested they could re-clad the base in painted wood paneling or a textured stucco finish.

Ms. Pauli said she has seen stained foundation stone painted in the past including this project, where the foundation underneath the addition was painted black and covered with lattice. Mr. Redmon felt a black tower base would not be ideal. Mr. Hsiao asked if the veneer was removed, and there is only 3/4" available for a new material, what were the available options? Ruling out lattice and/or wood clapboards, he mentioned that companies have come up with a cutting method to replicate historic stone. The Commission recognized that the color of the current veneer was not working and that a darker, quieter color in either a stucco or stone-dust paint finish with penciled in joints could work, if a similar stone could not be secured in a more shallow depth. Ms. Harder said they had been researching other materials to try and get the color right. Mr. Hill mentioned a property at 55 Magazine Street, where a company from Rhode Island had used a grout-like patching material that seemed to work well.

Mr. Hsiao asked if stone could be grafted from another portion of the building, but Mr. Hill said there was nothing left of the excavated foundation stone remaining on site. When asked if they were aware of the original quarry for

the stone, the project team said they did not know. Ms. Burks said there are people who sell salvaged granite, and Mr. Hsiao added that it could be a source for stone cut down to a ¾” veneer.

Ms. Harder stated that the corner tower was a detail that everyone agrees is very important and that, based on the Commission’s comments, they would seek to find a foundation cladding material reduced in depth and closer in color to the historic stone, perhaps building up layers of stucco and stone dust to accomplish that goal.

Ms. Burks commented that stucco might not last long and could be a difficult material to maintain. Mr. Hsiao encouraged finding stone that was thinner and a better color, but stucco could be used as a fallback. He suggested contacting a stone expert for consultation.

With respect to the mechanicals, Mr. Redmon suggested painting ductwork to match whatever material is directly behind it to make the ductwork disappear.

Ms. Harder summarized the landscape plan and answered questions about planting density and mature heights. Mr. Redmon said that, with time, the plantings could help screen the foundation to some extent. Mr. Hsiao suggested they consider more mature plantings, since it could be more appealing to potential buyers. Ms. Harder also mentioned there was an irrigation plan and some subtle uplighting of select trees anticipated. Ms. Burks suggested using the porch lighting as a primary light source, rather than installing excessive lighting along the pathway.

The design of the rear trellis, which is visible from Lee Street, was briefly discussed as an element that could also be brought before the Commission for design suggestions. Mr. Redmon mentioned that a soft green edge at the meeting point of the house and the trellis could be helpful, and that a site visit with the Commissioners might be useful to discuss details of the proposed stone wall, carport and trellis. Mr. Hsiao agreed that a site visit for those details would be an appropriate next step.

Minutes

Mr. Hsiao moved to accept the September 7th minutes.

Mr. Redmon seconded the motion.

The motion passed 7-0.

The meeting adjourned at 7:52 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy
Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 10/4/10

Doug Gesler

16 Bigelow St., Cambridge, MA 02139