

Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Tue., Oct. 9, 2012 at 6:00 PM, McCusker Center, 344 Broadway, Cambridge

Commission Members present: Nancy Goodwin, *Chair*; Tony Hsiao, *Vice Chair*; Carole Perrault, Charles Redmon, *members*; Monika Pauli, *alternate*

Commission Members absent: Lestra Litchfield, *member*; Sue-Ellen Myers, *alternate*

Staff present: Eiliesh Tuffy

Members of the Public: See attached list

Chair Goodwin called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

MC-4166: 20 Greenough Ave., by James and Colleen Kochman. Replace original windows with tilt-and-turn replacements.

The property under review is a frame two-family residence that was constructed in 1889 and a rear addition added in 1913. The house retains many of its original 2-over-2 double-hung wood windows. The proposed mahogany replacement windows replicate the look of a double-hung window on the exterior, but operate like an in-swing casement window. The property owner brought a full-size window mock-up for the Commission to review.

The owner, Mr. Kochman, said he had installed storm windows on the house years ago but did not like that they obscured the wood windows. He also felt that window restoration and the de-leading that would be required on the historic windows would involve too much debris and toxic elements.

He was looking for a more energy efficient window system and that this model, which is more commonly used in Europe, eliminates the draft issues that are common between the meeting rails of a traditional double-hung window. In order for the frame of the window to accommodate the tilt-and-turn hardware it would be thicker than the existing wood window. As a result, there would be about a 5-10% reduction in the daylight opening.

Ms. Goodwin asked if the house had a central air conditioning system. The property owner said the house has an attic fan that can be run while the windows are open to draw out the heat.

Mr. Redmon asked if 2-over-2 storms or any window screens were proposed, but the owner said there would be no storm windows and possibly only a few screens on select windows.

Ms. Goodwin asked if the exterior trim was being replaced, to which the owner responded that the existing trim from the 1938 shingle siding project would remain.

The muntins of the replacement window were found to be 2mm wider than those of the historic windows.

Mr. Hsiao commented that the key factor in this case was that the type of window would change and he saw nothing wrong with that. While the materials and quality of the window are very good, it is trying to emulate something that it is not.

When asked why he did not select a wood double-hung replacement window, the owner said he did not feel the ones on the market now are of good quality.

No questions or comments were received from the public.

Ms. Goodwin stated that it is the Commission's role to push for the retention of historic wood windows with the addition of storm windows for energy efficiency. While she found the window sample to be an intriguing product, she felt that it would be more appropriate for new construction. Ms. Perrault agreed and seconded a preference for restoration.

Mr. Redmon moved to reject the application as submitted because installing replacement windows were not consistent with the Commission's goal of preserving original historic building fabric. Mr. Hsiao seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

MC-4167: 3 Greenough Ave., by Hugues Djikpesse, Stephen Friedberg and Constance Hale. Full exterior siding and trim replacement; Porch replacement; New rear balcony

This 3-story frame Mansard was constructed in 1872 with a one-story, flat roof addition added in 1890. The lot is situated at the corner of Greenough and Highland avenues and, due to the current fencing and landscaping plan, the most visible elevation faces Highland Ave. The existing exterior of the building dates to an extensive remodeling in the 1980s following a house fire. The exterior siding is vertical T-111 panels and the windows throughout the property are vertical casements.

The current proposal is for full exterior siding and trim replacement plus the addition of a new 2nd floor roof deck at the rear of the building. The proposed materials would be HardiPlank siding, Azek trim and pressure-treated wood porch railings. As part of the project, the existing fence would be lowered in height by removing the top portion of the existing fence.

Mr. Redmon asked if the windows would be replaced as part of the project, but the architect said they were not in the scope of work.

Ms. Tuffy asked if the work was intended to be completed in phases. Ms. Ling said the deck proposal could be completed as early as this Fall, but that the rest of the work would probably be delayed until Spring 2013. Two of the owners expressed that their units could go on the market at that time.

Ms. Goodwin asked if cedar clapboards had been considered, but the architect assumed that cedar would be more expensive as opposed to HardiPlank which is readily available and convenient. Ms. Tuffy asked if the T-11 siding had been removed on any portion of the building to investigate what, if any, siding was underneath, but that had not been done.

Questions were received from the public.

James Kochman of 20 Greenough Ave asked what HardiPlank was. The Commission explained that it's a fiber-cement composite material with a 4-6" reveal meant to replicate the look of clapboard siding. Ms. Ling said that it was an attractive material for its fireproofing capability.

Mr. Kochman asked if the review in this case was binding, but was told the level of work did not trigger a binding review.

Comments were received from the public.

Mr. Kochman said he was disappointed and thought the proposal to use HardiPlank was a shame. He also commented that if the owners are planning to sell soon that they should just use real clapboard.

Tuny McMahon of 14 Highland Ave. said she did not like HardiPlank and could not understand why they would convert back to a phony product. She pointed out that the preserved historic slate Mansard roof was beautiful and that they ought to make the rest of the building right. If they were going to do the work, they should do it right.

John Jacoby of 7 Greenough said he was surprised when the 3rd floor deck had been built previously and that the addition of another outdoor deck was disconcerting to him.

An email was received from an abutting neighbor at 63 Highland Avenue stating noise and privacy concerns about the addition of a new exterior porch on the 2nd floor of the rear elevation, which looks right out towards her residence. If approved, she stated a preference for some form of screening to afford both her and the Greenough resident some level of privacy.

The Commission shared its comments on the project.

Ms. Perrault said she thought the decks were getting out of control on this building. Ms. Ling responded that the new rear deck would replace an inappropriate shed roof that was added recently over the rear entrance and was felt to be an improvement from the current appearance.

Ms. Goodwin agreed that visually it would be an improvement but, in order to address the neighbors' concerns, perhaps it could be a flat roof with a railing but without access to that roof surface.

Ms. McMahon said she would love to see an historic photograph of the property. The architect said she had access to one that hangs in the building foyer and could share it with the Commission staff.

Mr. Hsiao noted that this is a tricky project since the building has already had a number of accretions. As it stands now, the verticality of the siding and the casement windows gives the house the appearance of an abstracted Victorian. He said that if restoration to a more historic appearance was the goal he would want to see a true restoration based on historic photos.

Mr. Redmon made a motion to deny the application as submitted, because the use of composite siding and trim is incongruous with the guidelines of the district. Ms. Pauli seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

The Commission wished to convey a few recommendations to the condominium owners in a follow-up letter from the staff, since none of the owners were in attendance at the public hearing. Those comments were:

- Consider cedar clapboard siding rather than a non-historic fiber cement product
- As part of a long-term exterior rehabilitation plan, returning the windows to double-hung sashes should be considered
- While paint colors are exempt from the Commission's purview, Historical Commission staff are available for consultation on paint selection. The current proposal for stained wood railings creates a polychrome effect as opposed to a single trim color which would be more historically accurate
- Use the historic photograph on display in the building's common area as a guide for exterior rehabilitation efforts

If exterior work cannot be conducted prior to the marketing of the two units intended to go up for sale in 2013, the owners may elect to work with their architect and Historical Commission staff to develop a set of elevation drawings that would be in line with the suggestions of the Commission. These plans could be made available to potential buyers with the knowledge that the proposed changes would be acceptable for Historical Commission approval.

Minutes

Mr. Redmon made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 2012 meeting. Mr. Hsiao seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy
Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public who signed the attendance sheet, October 9, 2012

Tuny McMahon
John B. Jacoby

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