

Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Mon., July 1, 2013 at 6:00 PM, McCusker Center, 2nd Fl., 344 Broadway, Cambridge

Commission Members present: Nancy Goodwin, *Chair*; Tony Hsiao, *Vice Chair*; Carole Perrault, *members*; Sue-Ellen Myers, Monika Pauli, *alternates*

Commission Members absent: Lestra Litchfield, Charles Redmon, *members*

Staff present: Eiliesh Tuffy

Members of the Public: See attached list.

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

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

MC-4288: 13 Greenough Ave., by 13 Greenough Ave Nominee Trust. Replace windows throughout and redesign porch.

The property under review is a three story Mansard constructed in 1884 for Ms. Lois Ellis. The property was held in the Ellis family for almost 30 years, from 1884 – 1912. Lois Ellis's daughter, Myra Ellis, served as the Assistant Principal at Cambridge Rindge & Latin high school. The house was shingled in 1938, and alterations to the rear ell of the building were made in 1979. The current work consists of further modifications to the rear ell – which are not publicly visible and therefore exempt from the Commission's review – window replacement and a redesign of the existing front porch. This is part of a larger renovation project which will convert the existing two-family residence to a single family house.

The existing wood windows and storms are proposed to be removed in favor of new, double-glazed sashes. As part of the proposed porch redesign, the existing sidelights would be removed to install a wider front door, and a new transom window would be added. To accommodate the new transom, the ornamental hood over the door would be raised up to clear the new transom.

Ms. Perrault asked the applicant, Mr. Cafasso, if staff had discussed with him the value of retaining wood windows. Mr. Cafasso said that conversation had taken place, but he preferred to install the same insulated windows in this project that he has used at his own house.

Ms. Goodwin asked if the wood brackets under the existing front porch roof would remain, and if the window trim would be left in place. The applicant said the porch brackets and window trim would be retained as part of the rehabilitation. Mr. Hsiao asked about some of the details of the trim work once the porch roof is relocated to a higher point on the wall. Those details had not been worked out or drawn up yet.

Questions were received from the public.

Tuny McMahon of 14 Highland Ave. asked if the windows would be plastic. The applicant said they would be aluminum-clad on the exterior. Ms. Pauli asked if the windows would be the same size. The applicant said they would lose about ¼" on all edges of the glazed opening.

William Craig of 14 Greenough Ave. said he lives directly across the street from #13. He asked if the window sizes would be changing. Mr. Cafasso said the new windows would fit into the existing window openings.

Comments were received from the public.

Tuny McMahon commented that, just because replacement windows are being installed everywhere doesn't make it right and that, as someone who buys a property in a conservation district you should respect the historic integrity of the building.

The Commission stated that the windows are very important to the overall architecture of the building, and that keeping historic fabric was a priority. They did however feel that the suggested changes to the porch and front door would be in keeping with the character of the Mansard building, particularly since there are other examples of front door transoms on the same block. The applicant was directed to work out the proportions of the new roof and details of the surrounding trim to submit to staff for signoff.

Ms. Perrault moved to deny the application to replace wood windows with aluminum clad sashes as they are incongruous with the historic building fabric found in the district, but encouraged the applicant to proceed with the suggested porch renovation. Mr. Hsiao seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

MC-4293: 1 Corliss Pl., by Hugh Russell, Kent French and Robert Guthrie. Construct 2nd story on 1999 rear addition.

The proposal calls for adding a second floor of living space above a previously-approved rear addition that is now 14 years old. The original portion of the house dates to 1874. The property is on Corliss Place, which is not accessible by vehicle and has only 2 houses at the end of a short footpath from Antrim Street. The owners of 1&2 Corliss Place have formed their own community on this unusual street layout. The review of the project is binding because this rear portion of the lot is publicly visible from Fayette Street and the adjacent public school grounds. The addition is also adding 35% of new square footage to the property, which triggers a binding review. Letters in support of the proposed addition were sent to the Commission from abutters at 31 Antrim Street and 2 Corliss Place.

The applicant explained that the modifications to the property were being proposed to adapt the property in such a way that it would accommodate him and the other occupants so they could remain in the house into advanced age.

Ms. Perrault asked if the ridge of the new addition would be taller than the original house and asked if it could be made shorter. Mr. Russell explained the interior floor layout that dictated the overall roof height in the submitted elevations. Mr. Hsiao asked whether a different interior truss system would allow the ridge to be lowered slightly. Mr. Russell explained that, since the new addition would be used as a music studio, larger volumes support better acoustics.

Ms. Perrault said her concern was the balance with the historic structure, and that most historic preservation standards, such as the Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, recommend subservient additions to historic buildings. The front building is 27', and the new design would be 27'-6". At the same time, she understood the internal building program and was sympathetic to an owner who wishes to remain a resident of the neighborhood. Mr. Russell said if he could not build the music room to its acoustical best, he would have to move. Ms. Perrault suggested that if an appropriate solution could not be found, that he might consider applying for a hardship ruling. Ms. Goodwin wondered if dropping the ridge by 6" could be accomplished without changing the acoustics of the interior space.

Questions and comments were received from the public.

Tuny McMahon of 14 Highland Ave. said she didn't feel that 6" of additional height on the rear addition made a big difference.

Commission members pointed out that, given the unusual siting of the lot, it was rare to see the two segments of the building at the same time.

Mr. Hsiao said Ms. Perrault was correct in her statement that typically additions defer to the original structure. He also wondered what reducing the ridge by 6” would mean on the interior. Mr. Russell said that as a trained architect he could make it work.

Mr. Hsiao made a motion to accept the applicant to construct a second floor addition on the existing 1999 rear ell, with the recommendation that the owner/architect reduce the ridge height so as not to exceed that of the original historic structure. Ms. Pauli seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

MC-4294: 7 Trowbridge Pl., by Young H. Lee. Demolish rear ell on existing building; construct new rear addition and dormers; and construct new building to the rear.

The building under review is located on Trowbridge Place, which was laid out in 1882. Between 1886-1887, four similar houses were built on the street by the carpenter Alex Shepherd. Shepherd also built two structures that sit side-by-side at 379 & 381 Harvard Street, which lie just to the northwest of 7 Trowbridge Place through the block. Over the years, three of the four original houses on Trowbridge Place were demolished for high-rise residential towers and a large paved parking lot. Virtually all of the historic context of the original street has been lost, with only #7 Trowbridge remaining. The house was expanded with a rear addition in 1890 & 1902, which records show was partially designed by architect Herbert McClare but it is unremarkable in its design.

The current proposal is to demolish the ca. 1890 & 1902 2-story rear ell addition, replace it with a small 1st floor bay on the rear elevation, renovate the entire front building and construct a second single-family dwelling towards the rear half of the same lot. The project team presented the drawings outlining the proposal. The scope of work for the project, which includes over 750 square feet of new construction, qualifies it for binding review by the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission (NCDC).

Anthony Galluccio stated that, while the site allows for 4 units they decided to only design the plan for 3 and that the project as designed was “as of right” under zoning. Prior to the hearing, the team had discussed the proposal with Historical Commission staff as well as the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Association (MCNA). The MCNA chose not to take a position on the plans. Mr. Galluccio discussed the immediate context of the building, which he described as a “sea of parking”, and felt that the addition of another single family house in this location would actually bring it closer to its historic context as a low-scale residential street. By building a new single family residence on the rear portion of the lot, he hoped to attract a family as buyers so that it would be less of a transient property.

The architect ran through the details of the architectural plans. The attempt was to keep the footprint of the newly constructed building small to maintain green space and allow for 2 parking spaces between the front and rear buildings. A third parking space was incorporated into the ground floor of the rear building for that dwelling.

Heights of the buildings were discussed. The front building was said to measure out at 35’ 7” to the ridge. The new rear building, as proposed, would be 34’-10” in height, 9” lower than the ridge of the front building.

Ms. Goodwin asked why, if the site is surrounded by parking, they chose to enclose 1 parking space in the rear building which, in turn, raises the entire structure up a full story. The architect said that by Zoning they had to accommodate 3 cars for the 3 dwelling units and with the required setbacks it pushed the 3rd space into the rear building. Mr. Galluccio said there was no room to place parking on the left side of the rear building due to setback requirements without requesting Zoning relief, which he did not wish to pursue.

Ms. Perrault asked if they had thought about simply preserving the existing structure without any added new construction. Mr. Galluccio said it was a challenging house to restore and that by adding a second house at the end of Trowbridge Place it might give it more of a residential feel. Ms. Perrault asked if the team had pursued any outreach to the neighbors. Mr. Galluccio said they had presented the plans to the neighborhood association. Ms. Perrault mentioned the neighbors who live in the brick building at the rear of the lot would have the greatest visibility of this new structure. Staff mentioned that a legal notice had been mailed to every tenant in those buildings that appear on the Board of Elections' roster.

Commenting on the designs, Ms. Myers said it seemed the shed dormers that go up to the ridge line were an attempt to capture as much space as possible. The architect said he could lower the dormer rooflines 9-12" to eliminate that join-up.

Ms. Pauli asked what the ceiling heights were in the new building, and the team responded it would have 8-foot ceiling heights.

Staff asked the architect to point out all outdoor spaces that had been incorporated into the design, in the form of balconies or roof decks.

Ms. Perrault asked how the team jumped from the simple form of the original house's roof to the multiple dormers. The original architecture is very simple and plain, as is that of the surrounding context, including the massive Verizon complex. Ms. Perrault asked Ms. Tuffy to return to the slide that showed the context from Trowbridge Street toward the Verizon complex. She specifically highlighted the pedimented Verizon structure as a good example of the simplicity of lines. The architect said they are trying to take advantage of the view up above all the ground-level parking and out towards Trowbridge Street.

Questions and comments were accepted from the public.

Caleb Huntington of 4 Trowbridge Place said he and his wife live in the rooftop unit of the tall high-rise directly across from the house. He asked about the paving materials proposed for the lot, as they have the unusual perspective of staring down onto this lot from a high vantage point. Mr. Galluccio said he would prefer to use either cobblestone or red brick as a paving material on the site.

Mrs. Huntington asked if it might be possible to retain the 3rd parking spot along the street, directly in front of the existing house as has been done in the past. Mr. Galluccio said that would also require a variance. The Huntingtons said they were both happy so far with what they had seen. They also mentioned they could use some additional voices in their effort to convince Verizon to install noise-suppression of some sort to minimize the sound of their rooftop mechanicals next door on Ware Street. Staff mentioned they could have the License Commission come out to test the decibel level to determine if Verizon was in violation of the Noise Ordinance.

Ms. Goodwin asked about the ground-level floor of the rear building, pointing out that it was being called basement on the plans. She asked about the floor height on that level, and the architect answered it had a ceiling height just under 7 feet.

The project as submitted consists of 2,300 sq ft in the front building and 1,400 sq ft in the rear building, which meets the 3,700 total allowable square footage for the lot.

Tuny McMahon of 14 Highland Ave. reiterated that the applicants had presented to the MCNA, who felt this case was all about the surrounding context and that they were not concerned about it.

The Commission in its deliberation said they could appreciate what the applicant was trying to do for this house and the formerly low-scale residential street. They understood the applicant's concept of adding another house so the existing one would not feel so isolated, in effect starting to rebuild a community. The question was how successfully the proposed project would implement the intent. The Commission

felt the new structure was massive and out of scale and proportion. The new house was thought to be out of balance with the existing house. More simplicity in the exterior design was felt to be appropriate to the existing architecture. The balconies on the rear building were not thought to help the overall design, and the dormer rooflines should be more traditional, terminating at a point lower than the roof ridge. The Commission suggested considering cutting back the project even further from 3 units to 2. If three units and associated parking spaces remained the goal, an alternate study which places all 3 cars between the two structures was suggested. Landscaping both edges of the lot to the left and right of the houses was recommended.

Ms. Perrault, however, offered an alternative viewpoint regarding the proposed new structure. She stated that although on the surface it might appear that infill is not an issue with this site, it is not so simple and that the site is complex. Ms. Perrault said that the site reminded her of the book, The Little House, by Virginia Lee Burton in which a rural house is encroached upon by surrounding development. She felt that adding a second structure was missing the point and would eliminate what remaining visual clues exist as to the history of the place, including the remaining yard and the building's orientation north towards Trowbridge Place rather than east towards Trowbridge Street. Additionally, she pointed out the link of this house to the two extant houses on Harvard Street, built by the same carpenter of 7 Trowbridge Street. She felt that if the applicant's proposal were implemented significant features of the site's history would be lost— features made all the more valuable because of the out-of-scale mid-20th century context. The simplicity of the house's design, she thought to be a character-defining element that would also be lost by cluttering the roofs with dormers and decks. Ms. Perrault highlighted the National Register of Historic Places criteria for determination of integrity. (Although not a National Register property, the criteria are useful in analyzing a historic structure's integrity in general.) With all the proposed changes to the front building Ms. Perrault thought they may as well build a new building there. Ms. Perrault further mentioned that most, if not all, historic preservation standards, such as the Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, recommend that new construction be subservient to the historic structure. She said she came into the meeting prepared not to support the project but, hearing the comments of her fellow Commissioners and that the MCNA is not expressing concern, she was torn.

Ms. Pauli said typically a secondary structure looks like a carriage house but this looks like a garage and that is the problem, emphasizing the desire to rework the approach to the 3rd parking spot.

Mr. Galluccio felt the public and the members of the Commission offered good comments and that his team would take another look at the points raised during the discussion. He concluded by stressing the positive approach his team was taking to retain the existing structure over wholesale demolition.

Mr. Hsiao said he also suggested producing a 3-D model for the next time they appear before the Commission because that medium is found to be very informational.

Ms. Goodwin asked if the applicant would like a continuance of the hearing, to which he applied in the affirmative.

Minutes

Mr. Hsiao made a motion to approve the minutes of the May 2013 meeting. Ms. Pauli seconded the motion, which passed 3-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy
Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public who signed the attendance sheet, July 1, 2013

Margaret McMahon	14 Highland Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139
Adam Siegel	130 Centre Street, Brookline, MA 02446
Caleb & Mima Huntington	4 Trowbridge Pl, #PH, Cambridge, MA 02138
Ken Allen	1 Corliss Place, Cambridge, MA 02139
Hugh Russell	1 Corliss Place, Cambridge, MA 02139
Anthony Galluccio	1498 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02139
Peter <Lege?>	<477?> Concord Ave., Cambridge, MA 02138
David Barsky	429 Cherry Street, Newton, MA 02465
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana Street, Cambridge, MA 02138