

Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Monday, October 7, 2013, 6:00 PM, McCusker Center, 2nd Fl., 344 Broadway, Cambridge

Commission Members present: Nancy Goodwin, *Chair*; Lestra Litchfield, Carole Perrault, Charles Redmon, *Members*; Monica Pauli, *Alternate*

Commission Members absent: Tony Hsiao, *Vice Chair*; Sue-Ellen Myers, *Alternate*

Staff present: Sarah Burks

Members of the Public: See attached list.

After staff resolved a technical problem with the projector, Chair Nancy Goodwin called the meeting to order at 6:10 PM.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

MC-4349: 10 Ellery St., by Richard Freeman, owner, o/b/o Adam Siegel. Demolish existing rear additions, renovate main building and construct new 2-story dwelling approximately 14 feet behind the front structure.

Ms. Perrault stated that she would abstain from voting on the case because she lived in an abutting property, but because she was a tenant and had not financial interest in the building, she felt comfortable participating in the discussion of the case.

Ms. Burks showed slides and described the history of the 1840 Greek Revival house, which was one of four “cottages” built on this end of Ellery Street for Isaac Livermore on land that was once the location of the Dana Mansion, which had burned in 1839. The houses at 6 and 12 Ellery Street had been demolished in 1974, leaving 8 and 10 Ellery Street. The builder of both 8 and 10 was Henry Learned. She noted that they were the two oldest surviving houses on Ellery Street.

Campbell Ellsworth, the architect, described the previous proposal to move the main house block forward and to construct a 2½ -story ell, below grade parking, and a new 24-unit building to the rear of the existing (for a total of 4 units on the site). He then described the current application which would keep the main block (33’ high) and porch of the existing house in its current location, rebuild the foundation, remove the existing 740 sf ell, and construct a detached 2-story Mansard-roofed (23’ high) single unit dwelling to the rear for a total of 2 units on the property. A largeThe back yard would remain as open space and the grade of the site would not be changed. Parking would be provided at grade. The spacing between the buildings would be 14’ (zoning requires minimum of 10’).

He displayed a plan of the neighborhood showing the relative FAR of other buildings nearby. The FAR of the first application was 0.75 and of the current proposal was 0.48. He reviewed the plans and elevations. There would be six windows on the rear wall of the main house. He described the 2 dormers proposed for the main house, each consisting of two smaller gables connected in the middle with a shed roof. The highest point of the dormers would be below the ridge line of the main roof and would be set back from front, back, and side walls.

He described the proposed new Mansard building to the rear of the existing house. He noted that the owners of 5 Dana Street had given Adam-Mr. Siegel a letter of support for the proposal.

Ms. Goodwin asked the floor area of the existing ell. Mr. Ellsworth replied that the ell contained 740 sf and the proposed new building would have 1,3650 sf (680 sf x 2 stories).

Ms. Perrault inquired if all the abutters had been consulted. Mr. Siegel answered that he had spoken to the neighbors at 5 Dana Street who had in turn spoken to the owners of 7 Dana Street. Ms. Perrault noted that the natural grade of the site went up from front to back. She asked if the proponents had considered putting the new unit in an attached structure. Mr. Siegel replied in the affirmative. The existing ell was very small with low ceilings and was not large enough for a separate unit but he said they had considered a larger attached unit. Mr. Campbell said the attached option could be studied again, but Mr. Siegel said the economic of the project did not make it possible.

Ms. Litchfield asked how the back building would compare to the front building as seen from the street. Mr. Ellsworth showed an updated elevation and sketched the rear building behind the front building. He noted that the view in pure elevation was not what one would experience in person.

Ms. Goodwin asked what the size had been of the attached unit in the previous proposal. Mr. Siegel answered that it had been 1600 sf.

Ms. Perrault asked why a Victorian style had been chosen for the new building. How was a Mansard building compatible with the cluster of Greek Revival and Gothic Revival houses? Mr. Siegel replied that Ms. Tuffy had pointed out a Mansard roofed carriage house behind a Greek Revival main house on Centre Street, where the carriage house had later been converted to residential use. He noted that with only two units proposed for the property, the economics of the property would require that the second unit be worth a good sum of money.

Mr. Redmon asked if the proponents had considered turning the rear building 90 degrees so that its narrow side would face the street. Mr. Campbell replied in the negative and said the proposed configuration made sense for the layout of the units.

Ms. Goodwin asked for questions of fact from the public.

Karin Landry, of 8 Ellery Street, asked if letters had been sent to owners or renters of adjoining property. She asked if there would be green space in the back yard. Mr. Siegel said he had sent a letter to the abutter at 8 Ellery Street listed and that there would be green space in the back yard. Ms. Landry asked why a connected unit or detached turned 90 degrees had not been proposed. Mr. Ellsworth said the choice of a Mansard roof was to keep the overall height of the new unit ~~was kept~~ low in comparison to the front house. He said the rear building was less ornamented than that of the previous application.

John Cassell, of 8 Ellery Street, said he did not understand the relationship of Mansard to Greek Revival. The destruction of the view of the two houses at 8 and 10 Ellery would be a loss to Cambridge.

Ms. Landry questioned whether the project would lower the value of the average house on the street. Ms. Goodwin noted that sales prices and values were beyond the purview of the Commission.

Ms. Goodwin opened the floor to comments from the public.

Marilee Meyer, of 10 Dana Street, said she was troubled by the massing of the rear building, which was wider than the front building, and by the re-organization of windows on the front building. The dormers on the front building were very high. Mr. Siegel said they had ~~studies~~ studied many different types of dormer.

Mr. Cassell said the proposal would destroy the proportions of the building and he didn't like how close the new building would be to his house.

Mr. Ellsworth noted that the proposed dormers complied with the dormer guidelines.

Tunie McMahon, of 14 Highland Avenue, said the width of the rear building bothered her.

Ms. Goodwin read the letter of support from the neighbors at 5 Dana Street, which commented that preserving the open space at the back of the property was a benefit to all the abutters. Ms. Goodwin closed the public comment period and opened deliberations.

Ms. Goodwin commented that a new building on the site could be executed in a contemporary style and did not have to be a historic style like Mansard. The second unit did not have to be detached to have economic value. It would be more consistent with the style of the house to have an attached unit.

Ms. Litchfield said houses built behind houses was a problematic pattern in Cambridge. The rear yard houses were always bigger than they appear in concept. She objected to the removal of the entire ell. The two-story part of the ell at least was original to the house. She indicated that it would be better to see an addition to the house than a detached structure. She remarked favorably on the reduced program of the applicant's proposal. The width of the new building, however, would diminish the character of the front house.

Mr. Redmon said that chopping off the original house devalued it. The dormers would also have a negative impact on the front house. He recommended turning the detached building 90 degrees if it remained detached, but indicated that attached units were very commonly seen in Cambridge. The massing of the Mansard was very horizontal and flattened like a pancake. A modern house with a flat roof would be better than the Mansard.

Ms. Pauli commented that she was happy to see the volume of the project reduced from the previous proposal. She said the same volume could be achieved in a different configuration.

Ms. Perrault said it was the wrong project for the house. The house had survived from the 1840s with organic additions that grew from the house's main core. The mass of the new building was inappropriate. The existing house would have its integrity diminished with the proposed design. The Mansard style was out of character for this setting. She said that, in her opinion, 9 Centre Street was not a parallel site relative to mass/scale and she was puzzled why the project team had not taken their cues as to mass/scale/style and details from the ells found in this cluster of houses. She noted that the frequency of applications for back yard dwellings had increased. She reviewed the purposes of the enabling ordinance, to preserve, conserve and protect the beauty and heritage of the city and to improve the quality of the environment through the identification, and to conservation, and maintenance of neighborhoods, areas, sites and structures, and to resist and restrain environmental influences averse to the purposes of the ordinance. She said the latest "environmental influence" is excessive development that diminishes traditional back yards. She reviewed the goals of the Mid Cambridge NCD order, to avoid excessive infill, encourage new construction that complements existing buildings, encourage preservation of neighborhood buildings, protect National Register structures, and enhance the economic vitality of the neighborhood. She said the order was a response to townhouse development. She said certain sites in the district deserved more respect because of their historic importance and integrity. This site was one of them. The proposal was not in a traditional manner of expanding for the type and period of the house. She said the Victorian style free-standing carriage house design was out of sync and incongruous with the historic aspects, architectural significance, and distinctive character of this site. She said she did not support the proposal. She said she appreciated that the mass of the new construction had been brought down.

Mr. Ellsworth said that the proponents did not get a clear sense of direction from the Commission when they brought the first proposal. A strong effort had been made to scale it back going from big FAR to small FAR and 4 units to 2 units. Ms. Goodwin respectfully disagreed with Mr. Campbell's assessment about lack of direction. She said it was not within the Commission's purview to design the project.

Mr. Siegel said he would need a variance to expand the existing non-conforming building and could come back to the commission with a non-binding project application.

Ms. Goodwin summarized that the aspects of the current proposal that were not appropriate were the excessive nature of the infill unit which and the fact that the new FAR was inconsistent with the traditional way of adding to a building of this age and style.

Ms. Litchfield moved to reject the proposal as presented on the basis that it represented excessive infill ~~for~~ and compromised the historic integrity of the front structure with the proposed demolition of the historic ell and with the incongruous addition of a detached Mansard roofed building behind. The project would have a negative impact on the unique historic setting and was not a traditional way of adding on to a house of this period. Mr. Redmon seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.

Ms. Goodwin called for a 5 minute recess, then reconvened the meeting.

MC-4350: 6-8 Emmons Pl., by Lou Ferraro for 21 Troy Rd., LP. Demolish and reconstruct existing building with a new rear addition; Construct a secondary residential structure on the rear of the lot.

Ms. Burks showed slides and described the history of the property. The double house was one of four similarly massed Italianate buildings on the small dead end street, a private way. It was missing some of the trim detail retained in other examples on the street. She noted that the owner had completed a renovation and addition to the house at the corner of Emmons Place and Roberts Road the year before.

Campbell Ellsworth, the architect, described the existing site conditions and surrounding context. The foundation of the house needed to be rebuilt. The framing was undersized. By the time code-compliant stairs were built, window openings reframed, and framing brought up to code, there would be a super majority of walls and framing members that would need to be replaced. Rather than do that, he proposed to demolish the house and rebuild it to the same footprint, which was allowed per the building code, and construct a new rear addition. The addition would require a special permit. The house was very plain and original features were obscured by siding. A new entry hood and brackets were proposed. The existing access down to the basement would be replicated at the front of the building. He showed elevations and site plan for the reconstructed front building then described the new free standing dwelling unit proposed for the back of the lot. The detached unit was allowed by zoning and conformed to the FAR and setbacks of zoning. The required rear setback was 26'. He noted that 1 Emmons Place has a detached dwelling in the back of its lot.

Ms. Goodwin asked if the proponents had considered making the front house modern like the proposed new building at the back. Mr. Ellsworth said they had considered it, but dismissed the idea in favor of preserving the cluster of 4 similar houses on the street.

Ms. Perrault asked if there was a structural engineer's report about the existing foundation and framing. Mr. Ellsworth said that as a licensed builder and architect, he had assessed the existing building's structural elements. Ms. Perrault asked if the owner had spoken to the abutters. Mr. Ferraro said he had mailed a letter to everyone on the list of abutters.

Ms. Goodwin opened the floor to questions of fact.

Philippe Aghion, of 114 Trowbridge Street, asked what would happen to the large oak tree in the back yard. Mr. Ferraro answered that if the tree remained, there would still be a lot of green in the yard.

Ryan Enos, of 114 Trowbridge Street, asked why the roof of the front house was being raised. Mr. Ellsworth explained that the height would stay the same height as it is now.

Marilee Myer, of 10 Dana Street, asked how the site would be accessed by the fire department in the case of a fire. Mr. Ellsworth said he had inquired about that and was told that ladder trucks would be able to reach the site.

Ken McLaughlin, of 23 Roberts Road, said he was the rear abutter. He asked what mitigation would be done to prevent displacement of water from the construction of the basement of the new rear building. He noted the water problems that arose when excavation was done at nearby Nichols Place a couple of years ago. Mr. Ellsworth said he had consulted with a hydrologic engineer about any effects on ground water and had been assured that the water table would not change from the construction of the house. But anytime you cover more of a lot, the city required that storm water be contained on the site with a dry well. The dry well would either be located under the driveway or behind the rear house.

Daphne Holt, of 4 Emmons Place asked if the oak tree would stay or go. Mr. ~~Ferrara-Ferraro~~ said he would keep it if people wanted that. Ms. Holt asked how many parking spaces were proposed and was told three.

Ms. Litchfield inquired about the distance of the drip line of the tree.

Bill Zamparelli asked how many bedrooms would be located in each unit, because it might mean that more than one car per household was likely. Mr. Ellsworth said the units had the potential for 3 bedrooms. Mr. Zamparelli said he did not object to rebuilding the front house and noted that the proponents had done a nice job at 35 Roberts Road. He said he had concerns about the back building and overall density on the lot.

Mr. Enos said he liked contemporary architecture, but the proposed new building was a monstrosity. He objected to the height and appearance of the rear building.

Mr. Aghion said he was concerned about the height and style of the new rear building as well as the loss of green space. He did not object to the addition to the existing building.

Tunie McMahon, of 14 Highland Avenue, said she did not object to the contemporary style but did consider the new building to be infill construction taking away green space.

Richard Black, of West Roxbury, said he was there to represent the owners of 112 Trowbridge Street. The new building would be very close to 112 Trowbridge Street, cutting off air and light to 112. He said the owners would not tolerate a new back yard building.

Ms. Goodwin read an email received from Joyce Bowdoin of 112 Trowbridge Street objecting to the rear yard building and recommending additions to the existing structure.

Ms. Goodwin noted that Hardieplank siding was proposed for the reconstructed front house.

Ms. Perrault said that the green space in the back of the lot was an amenity. The district was formed as a way to regulate rear yard townhouse construction. The proposed rear structure was excessive infill.

Mr. Ferraro asked for definition of excessive infill. Ms. Burks replied that a number of factors were considered when reviewing an application for new construction and making a determination on what was an excessive amount of infill. Those considerations were presented in the form of a number of questions contained in the guidelines and asked by the commission. Mr. Ferraro pointed out that several of the neighboring lots had large garages in their back yards. Why shouldn't he be able to have a structure in his back yard?

Ms. Litchfield commented that the open space was an amenity to the front building, not just to the abutters.

Mr. Ellsworth asked for feedback on the idea of a larger addition to the front building. The commission indicated that adding onto the existing building was a traditional way to expand.

Ms. Goodwin closed the public comment period.

Mr. Redmon moved to deny the application, as presented, on the basis of finding the proposed new building to be excessive infill that would take away too much open space from the property and would expand the FAR in a non traditional manner. Ms. Litchfield seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Ms. Burks asked about the proposed reconstruction and addition to the front building. Mr. Redmon said the proposed addition was an appropriate way to expand. He moved for reconsideration of the first motion and rephrased the motion to split the application into two parts, denying the rear building but approving the demolition, reconstruction, and addition to the front building, with the condition that construction details, the landscape plan, and materials be subject to binding review at a site meeting of the commission. Ms. ~~Lestra~~Litchfield seconded the motion to reconsider and the phrasing of the new motion, which passed 5-0.

Minutes

Ms. Perrault said she had some corrections to the September minutes. Mr. Redmon moved to approve the September minutes, subject to corrections submitted by Ms. Perrault. Ms. Litchfield seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Ms. Litchfield moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Perrault seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed the Attendance Sheet on October 7, 2013**

Richard Black	250 Spring St, #23, W. Roxbury, MA 02132
James Pike	686 Massachusetts Ave, Boston, MA 02118
Ellen & Ken McLaughlin	23 Roberts Rd, Cambridge, MA 02138
Malcolm Pittman & Ellen Mayer	27 Roberts Rd, Cambridge, MA 02138
Margaret McMahan	14 Highland Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139
Ryan Enos	114 Towbridge St, #2, Cambridge, MA 02138
Adam Siegel	130 Centre St, Brookline, MA 02446
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St, Cambridge, MA 02138
Jim Tanner	1A Emmons Pl, Cambridge, MA 02138
Bill Zamparelli	7 Emmons Pl., Cambridge, MA 02138
Louis Ferraro	6-8 Emmons Pl, Cambridge, MA 02138
Kate Zamparelli	7 Emmons Pl, Cambridge, MA 02138
N. Kelly	30 Roberts Rd, Cambridge, MA 02138
Mark Peterson	27 Putnam Ave #2, Cambridge, MA 02138
John Cassell	8 Ellery St, Cambridge, MA 02138
Karin Landry	8 Ellery St, Cambridge, MA 02138