

## Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Monday, January 6, 2014, 6:00 PM, McCusker Center, 2<sup>nd</sup> Fl., 344 Broadway, Cambridge

Commission Members present: Nancy Goodwin, *Chair*; Carole Perrault, Charles Redmon, *Members*; Margaret McMahon, Sue-Ellen Myers, Monica Pauli, *Alternates*

Commission Members absent: Tony Hsiao, *Vice Chair*; Lestra Litchfield, *Member*

Staff present: Sarah Burks, Samantha Paull

Members of the Public: See attached list.

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Chair Nancy Goodwin called the meeting to order at 6:04 P.M. and explained procedures.

### Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

**MC-4388 (continued): 15A Ellsworth Ave., by ZLP LLC.** Demolish 1-story bay on right side of house and rear 2-story enclosed porches; construct new rear 2-story addition; add exterior stair on rear; alter windows as per plans; remove chimney; install skylights.

Sarah Burks described the case history, noting updated plans submitted on December 16, 2013. The current plans included the full scope of work and additional information the Commission had requested at the previous hearing. The owner is proposing to alter window openings, remove a chimney, install new skylights, remove a projection on the right side of the house, remove existing rear addition, construct a new rear addition, and alter windows. She explained that the subject property is located on a block where there are approximately 12 Italianate side-hall houses built in a similar time period and style to the subject property. The subject property has a three-sided bay on the front elevation and a small projection on the right elevation. Of the 12 homes on the block, each have their own character, some include their original features such as bays or wood windows and are of varying condition ranging from fully restored to needing repair. The subject property's condition is in the middle of the range, although a number of the original features were removed when vinyl siding was added and the windows were replaced. The applicant is proposing to remove the projecting side bay as part of this application. The three-decker to the south of the subject property was constructed in approximately 1903. The three-decker greatly limits any visibility along the left elevation due to the minimal setback.

Ms. Burks reported that she had met with the applicant after the November 2013 meeting and communicated the Commission's concern with adding a second door to the front façade. The plans submitted December 16, 2013 reflect a single entry door, maintaining the character of the structure.

Ms. Goodwin asked why windows were being removed on the left elevation. The proponent, Mr. Warren Zhu, noted that the interior would be renovated and the location of the existing windows did not fit with the proposed interior plan. Mr. Zhu also noted that the structures are so close, he was hoping to add some privacy to the elevation. The Commission referenced the interior plans, which staff noted - and Mr. Zhu confirmed - hasn't substantially changed from the previous submittal.

Ms. McMahon asked why Mr. Zhu wanted to remove the chimney. Mr. Zhu stated that the chimney is in disrepair and needs major repair. He is opting for demolition versus repair as it is not conducive to his interior floorplan.

Ms. Perrault asked whether Mr. Zhu intended to have parking between the buildings. Ms. Perrault stated she remembered the neighbors came to the previous meeting and expressed concern. She asked how

many units this structure would have. Mr. Zhu stated it's currently two units and will remain two units. Mr. Zhu said he was not sure if there was room to add parking with the renovations.

Ms. Perrault asked whether or not the basement would be inhabited after the renovations. She was concerned about the addition of a full-height window Mr. Zhu stated no intent to occupy the basement; it will just be utilized for storage and utilities. The larger window is for additional egress.

Ms. Myers asked Mr. Zhu how he was going to fill in the missing siding pieces from enclosing windows. He stated he would use vinyl siding, some of which would come from the bay they were taking down, or match as closely as possible.

Ms. Goodwin asked what materials the new windows will be. Mr. Zhu expressed that he would utilize vinyl windows to match the existing windows.

Ms. Perrault asked what the purpose of the deck on the second floor. Mr. Zhu stated it was more of a balcony, primarily for egress purposes rather than for use as a deck. Ms. Meyers asked how the apartments were divided. Mr. Zhu stated one per floor.

Maureen O'Connell, of 17 Ellsworth Avenue, asked if they were being turned into townhomes or if they were apartments. Mr. Zhu clarified that they are currently apartments and will continue to be apartments. Ms. O'Connell, of the public, asked where the third bedroom was located. Mr. Zhu stated in the addition, where the back porch is at present.

Marilee Myer, of 10 Dana Street, asked if the front porch was changing. Mr. Zhu responded no.

Ms. Goodwin asked if the rear stairs could be pulled back. Mr. Zhu stated it is laid out as reflected on the plans, so it doesn't block the window on the first floor.

Ms. Myer lamented the loss of chimneys in modern renovations. The removal of chimneys, in general, is detrimental to the character of the structures. Chimneys are a character defining feature and their removal throws off the vertical balance of structures.

Ms. Goodwin commended the owner on keeping the front porch. Mr. Redmon suggested that Mr. Zhu use a double hung window instead of a casement on the left elevation as casements are not original to the structure. Further, Mr. Redmon commented that the window header should align with existing windows on the structure. Mr. Zhu stated that was possible.

Ms. Perrault noted that it seemed odd that all of the windows on the basement were horizontal, with the exception of the new window. Mr. Zhu clarified it was for egress and would not be visible. Ms. Perrault voiced concern that the Commission role was to protect the exterior character of the home, and fenestration was important to the character of the house.

Ms. McMahon noted that the front was simple and commended the applicant for keeping it simple, maintaining the integrity. The other sides were too messy, even if you can't see them.

Ms. Perrault commended Mr. Zhu for maintaining the front elevation but questioned why the interior program was dictating the exterior and emphasizes what gives these structures their historical character is being diminished. Ms. Burks agreed that the window changes were regrettable, but reiterated that the front elevation would be preserved and the other elevations were not prominently visible due to closeness of the structures and location of vegetation.

Mr. Redmon expressed concern that due to the close proximity of the structures along the left elevation, the owner may not be able to add the additional windows but would rather be limited to keep the existing openings or only enclose windows, unable to create new openings. Mr. Redmon suggested Mr. Zhu follow up with zoning about the placement of any new windows.

Mr. Redmon moved that the application be approved, as submitted, with the following suggestions: look at placement of windows along both side elevations and aim to maintain the existing window design, vertical orientation, configurations, and sash style (double hung versus casement). Ms. Goodwin designated Ms. Pauli as the alternate to vote. Ms. Pauli seconded, and the motion passed 4-0, with Mr. Redmon, Ms. Goodwin, Ms. Pauli and Ms. Perrault voting.

#### Minutes

Ms. Perrault offered corrections to the minutes.

Mr. Redmon moved to approve the minutes of November 4, 2013, with corrections suggested by Ms. Perrault. Ms. Perrault seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Samantha Paull  
Preservation Administrator

**Members of the Public  
(who signed the Attendance list)**

Warren Zhu	25 Highland Avenue, B
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana Street
Maureen O'Connell	17 Ellsworth Avenue

Note: All addresses are located in Cambridge unless otherwise noted.