

Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Monday, June 2, 2014, 6:00 PM, McCusker Center, 2nd Fl., 344 Broadway, Cambridge

Commission Members present: Nancy Goodwin, *Chair*; Tony Hsiao, *Vice Chair*; Charles Redmon, Member; Sue-Ellen Myers and Margaret McMahon, *Alternates*

Commission Members absent: Lestra Litchfield, *Members*

Staff present: Sarah Burks, Samantha Paull

Members of the Public: See attached list.

Ms. Nancy Goodwin, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:00pm. A quorum was present. Ms. Goodwin reviewed the meeting procedures and read the agenda for the public.

MC-4483: 13 Bigelow St, by Pierre A. & Marie C. Humblet. Construct walkway and new steps.

Ms. Goodwin asked Samantha Paull, staff of the Commission, to give an introduction and overview of the application. Ms. Paull showed slides and presented the background of the property. She stated that the structure was built in approximately 1873 as a single family home and it was recently converted into a multi-family residence. The structure displayed architectural characteristics from the Second Empire style, with its mansard slate roof, arched windows, brackets, dormer windows on the mansard roof two over two windows, quoins, granite retaining wall and stairs, and wood half light entry doors. Ms. Paull informed the Commission that the applicant proposed to make a cut in the existing wall, install granite steps and construct a new walkway along the north property line or right elevation of the structure. She noted that this is a binding review as Bigelow Street is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Mr. Pierre Humblet, an owner, showed slides of the steps at 11 Bigelow Street and other walkways on the street. He mentioned that they were proposing a smaller stair set, subordinate to the main stairs. He stated that for many years, the driveway on 15-17 Bigelow Street's property was shared. However, this changed when the building turned into condominiums and they are now only permitted to utilize it for vehicular access.

He proposed to use granite posts, reclaimed if able, and reuse granite for steps. He stated the path will be used to access the garbage bins, bikes, and front yard.

Ms. Goodwin asked the owners to confirm if they were able to set foot on the driveway. Mrs. Marie Humblet, an owner, stated no, the police have been called in the past when they have walked on the driveway. She also stated that she is the gardener for this property.

Ms. Sue-Ellen Myers, a Commissioner, questioned if there would be any green space left. Mr. Humblet stated there will be some on the neighbors side, our walkway is proposed to measure three (3) feet.

Ms. Goodwin asked if the new post will match the existing posts. Mr. Humblet clarified that it would, for a symmetrical look.

Mr. Redmon asked if they currently had trash cans in that location. Mr. Humblet stated no and showed a slide which depicted the trash cans on the south side of the structure. Ms. Humblet described options for the trashcan location, noting that the tenants cannot walk on the driveway at 15-17 Bigelow Street. One location on the property would require them to chop down heirloom cherry trees, another is too narrow and yet another would be in front of the fence – beyond where the trashcans are located.

Mr. Redmon asked if the owners' proposal included a fence on the right side of the structure. Ms. Humblet replied no, but the trashcans will be hidden from view in a nook under the fire escape.

Mr. Francis Fox Spinks, neighbor at 17 Bigelow Street, stated he was present in support and has written a letter of support.

Mr. Michael Potts, neighbor at 12 Bigelow Street, mentioned he also submitted a letter in support of the proposal.

Mr. Dan Fisher, a neighbor at 25 Bigelow Street, said he was pleased with the proposal and that it will enhance the quality of the street.

Kera Lagios, a tenant at 13 Bigelow Street, stated that she studied architecture and is sensitive to design issues. She said Bigelow Street is a really nice street and appreciated the attention the Humblets put into the upkeep of their house. She also mentioned that the new walkway would improve access.

Jean Reiser, a neighbor at 16 Bigelow Street, said that she supported the proposal and believed it satisfied the problem. She added she believed it would look like it had been there forever.

Ms. Goodwin summarized the letters received in support of the application.

Mr. Scott Slater, a neighbor at 10 Bigelow Street, confirmed his support of the project. He asked to see the slide of the other walkway and noted it was very beautiful. He said that they have a nice aesthetic and they cared for their home well. There are some bad patches at 15 and 8 Bigelow Street but the Humblets will no doubt get a good mason. They took a wreck of a house and now it looks great.

Ms. Paull mentioned that a neighbor called and asked about a tree that is on the right elevation of the structure. Mr. Humblet responded that it will remain.

Ms. Goodwin said now that she had heard the full explanation and proposal, she understood it and could support it.

Mr. Hsiao noted that it was a very thoughtful approach and sensitive. He continued that given the challenges they had it was very appropriate.

Ms. Margaret McMahon, a Commissioner, stated she felt this will be an improvement.

Mr. Redmon noted to the owners that they might consider a screen fence.

Ms. Monika Pauli, a Commissioner, asked the owner to let the staff know where they find granite to match as the granite used is Quincy granite and it is hard to find.

Mr. Slater stated that they are planning an accessibility project and if necessary he would donate their granite from 10 Bigelow Street.

Mr. Hsiao made a motion to find the proposal appropriate as submitted. The motion was seconded by Mr. Redmon and carried 5-0 with Ms. Myers and Ms. Pauli voting as alternates.

MC-4484: 14 Ellsworth Ave, by Brianna Pearson. Reside the structure with artificial siding.

Ms. Goodwin asked Ms. Paull to introduce the item. Ms. Paull showed some slides and described the house. The subject property is a two-family home constructed in 1894 under permit 4876. She observed that there were a number of these duplexes throughout the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood, specifically Ellsworth Avenue and Highland Avenue, built by Osgood & Stevens. Hutchins, another area builder, built similar duplexes along Ellsworth Park and Highland Park. Many of these have had their character altered over the years with the replacement of original railings, balustrades, columns, windows, and the addition of artificial siding products. The subject property had aluminum siding added prior to the survey photo in 1982.

The structure shows influence of the Queen Anne style with its front facing gambrel roof and multiple bay windows. Many of the doppelgangers of this structure in this area of Mid Cambridge have been restored. Some have more decorative elements than the subject property, primarily those built by Hutchins had more of the dentil molding with turned or round columns. The structures also are clad with a mixture of clapboards, shingles, and some are both shingle and clapboards.

Ms. Paull stated that the applicant proposed to remove the aluminum siding, remove the original wood siding where it exists underneath and install an artificial polymeric siding called Everlast. The applicant proposed to utilize a clapboard-style siding.

Ms. Goodwin asked what the condition of the original clapboard is beneath the aluminum. Ms. Briana Pearson, an owner, stated that some of it is ok but that it was damaged, possibly from the installation of the aluminum. She went on to state that the trim is missing or rotted away in area and at the roofline, a careless roofer damaged the trim. She further explained that she has a young family and cannot afford to paint the structure every five to ten years as would be required with wood.

Ms. Sarah Burks, staff for the Commission, asked if the property had full time occupants or if it was a bed and breakfast. Ms. Pearson responded that she lives there full time.

Ms. Burks asked how they were proposing to deal with the trim. Ms. Pearson explained that prepping and painting the trim is very expensive and prohibitive. She wanted to make it low maintenance.

Ms. Goodwin asked if there was a sample of the product here. Ms. Pearson stated that there were two widths available. Mr. Mike Touren-Trend, a contractor, provided the Commission with two samples.

Ms. Paull asked the contractor about gaps between the pieces due to the temperature changes in this climate and how he would deal with the weak points those gaps would introduce. Mr. Touren-Trend stated that gaps up to 3/16" are possible in each 12 foot span. Red cedar or cementitious plank has

about 2/16" contraction. He mentioned that the product installation guidelines required it to be flashed behind where two boards abut.

Ms. Paull asked what trim product would be used. Mr. Touren-Trend responded that his company does not wrap trim. He has used cellular PVC where it can be custom milled in the past and proposed to use that at 14 Ellsworth Avenue. He stated the flat frieze and crown molding and historic sill nose would replicate existing but in PVC. He confirmed no metal would be used for trim.

Mr. Redmon asked about the corner boards. Mr. Touren-Trend responded that they would measure 2 ½ inches.

Ms. Goodwin asked if members of the public had questions. None arose.

Ms. Pearson stated she had a neighbor who was in support and offered to attend. Ms. Pearson told the neighbor that they did not need to attend the meeting.

Ms. Goodwin mentioned that Cambridge real estate is very valuable and the loss of traditional materials and historic fabric may negatively impact the value of the property.

Ms. Burks suggested Ms. Pearson maintain the aluminum siding to preserve the original fabric of the building that lies beneath. Ms. Burks noted that it would save Ms. Pearson time, money and trouble as well as give a future own the ability to restore the original siding and trim.

Ms. McMahon added that a \$50,000 estimate for painting sounded too high. She added that she had gotten lower estimates herself in the past.

Ms. Pearson stated that she was concerned about what was under the aluminum and that it would trap a fire inside the house. She also noted that there are problems with leaks that she cannot find the cause of and does not believe that this is a good enough example of this architectural style to preserve.

Ms. Pauli stated that PVC products are very bad in a fire. Ms. Burks added that vinyl releases toxic gases during a fire. Ms. Paull noted that there is actually constant off-gassing from the siding's exposure to the sun.

Mr. Hsiao stated that everyone has said what he would. Mr. Redmon made a motion to reject the application as submitted. Mr. Hsiao seconded the motion. The motion carried 5-0 with Ms. McMahon and Ms. Myers voting. Mr. Hsiao explained the non-binding nature of the review.

MC-4485: 1541 Cambridge St, #1, by Rajeev Pattni & Talia Wildes. Replace windows.

Ms. Goodwin requested Ms. Paull introduce the item. Ms. Paull showed slides and gave an overview of the house. She noted that the subject property was a multi-family home, originally constructed in 1894 as a single family home. It was owned by William E. Doyle and built by John A. McIsaac. The home has much of its character intact reflecting elements of the Queen Anne style with its bay windows, shake shingle siding, two over one windows, turned porch columns, balustrade, double entry half light doors,

and front porch. There is a substantial exterior chimney on the left elevation with decorative brick inlays.

Ms. Paull stated that the applicant proposed to remove the original two over one wood windows and install replacement windows in unit 1, which comprises the first floor.

Mr. Rajeev Pattni, an owner, stated he proposed to replace the windows with replacement units but keep the sills and casings.

Ms. Goodwin asked if a one over one design was proposed for the replacement product. Ms. Talia Wildes, an owner, stated no, some are a two over one configuration and all new windows would match current conditions.

Mr. Redmon asked if the existing windows are in poor condition. Mr. Pattni responded that they were and one window leaks and there is damage inside the house. He continued that windows are warped and covered in a lot of paint. Mr. Pattni stated that the windows do not operate well and that none of the windows are large enough to fit an AC unit.

Ms. Goodwin asked if he proposed to remove storms. Mr. Pattni said he was thinking about replacing the storms. Ms. Burks stated she recommended replacing with new storms.

Mr. Hsiao asked what material was proposed. Mr. Pattni responded he proposed Harvey vinyl windows.

Ms. Burks asked if he had consulted a window repair contractor. Mr. Pattni stated yes, Restoration Services, which was cost prohibitive at approximately \$25,000. Ms. Paull clarified that the window repair itself was \$18,500 and the quote included new storms at \$6,500.

Mr. Hsiao stated that the Commission generally favored repair and restoration rather than replacement. He continued that the Commission's purview is not about a monetary situation but rather what is appropriate to the building and district.

Mr. Pattni asked if storms should be used as they are not aesthetically pleasing. Mr. Hsiao responded that the storm window's purpose to protect historic wood windows and provide energy efficiency. Ms. Goodwin added the Commission strongly preferred restoration and new storms to protect the windows.

Mr. Hsiao made a motion to reject the application as submitted because vinyl is not an appropriate product to the age and character of the house and the overall district. The motion was seconded by Mr. Redmon. The motion was approved 5-0 with Ms. Pauli and Ms. McMahan voting as alternates.

Minutes

Mr. Hsiao made a motion to approve the May 5, 2014 minutes as submitted. Ms. McMahan seconded the motion. The motion carried 3-0 with Ms. Goodwin, Mr. Hsiao, and Ms. McMahan voting. The others abstained because they had not been present at the May meeting.

Mr. Redmon then moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:15 pm. Ms. Myers seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Samantha Paull
Preservation Administrator

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

Pierre Humblet	13 Bigelow Street
Marie Humblet	13 Bigelow Street
Talia Wildes	1541 Cambridge Street, Unit 1
Rajeev Pattni	1541 Cambridge Street, Unit 1
Linda Murphy	21 Bigelow Street
Michael Potts	12 Bigelow Street
Doug Gesler	16 Bigelow Street
Jean Reiser	16 Bigelow Street
Henry Irving	23 Bigelow Street
Francis Fox Spinks	17-B Bigelow Street
Kate Oliver	23 Bigelow Street
Daniel Fisher	25 Bigelow Street
Elliot S. Slater	10 Bigelow Street
Kera Lagio	13 Bigelow Street
Briana Pearson	14 Ellsworth Avenue
Mike Touren-Trend	200 Butterfield Dr, Suite I, Ashland, MA 01721
James McElhiney	11 Bigelow Street

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