

Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Monday, November 3, 2014, 6:00 PM, McCusker Center, 4th Fl., 344 Broadway, Cambridge

Commission Members present: Nancy Goodwin, *Chair*; Tony Hsiao, *Vice Chair*, Lestra Litchfield, *Member*; Monika Pauli, Margaret McMahon, Sue-Ellen Myers, *Alternates*

Commission Member(s) absent: Charles Redmon, *Member*

Staff present: Samantha Paull

Members of the Public: See attached list.

Ms. Nancy Goodwin, called the meeting to order at 6:08pm. She gave an overview and discussed procedures. Ms. Goodwin designated Ms. Margaret McMahon and Ms. Sue Ellen Myers, alternates, to vote.

MC-4586: 59 Magnolia Ave, Unit #2, by Amy Gelpey. Alter window opening.

Ms. Samantha Paull, staff member, showed slides and gave a brief background of the property and summary of the proposed scope of work under the application. She noted that the application included one window on the second floor for alteration. Ms. Goodwin asked for confirmation of which window the applicant had proposed to change. Ms. Amy Gelpey, an owner, noted it was the last window on the right side.

Ms. Lestra Litchfield, Commissioner, asked if the applicant was proposing to replace the whole window. Ms. Gelpey responded yes, but the casing will be the same and match the window next to it.

Ms. Litchfield asked if the owner knew what kind of window. Ms. Gelpey responded no.

Ms. Goodwin asked for confirmation that the owner was planning on matching the existing window. Ms. Gelpey replied yes. Ms. Goodwin continued, questioning if it was an insulated window. Ms. Gelpey again responded yes.

Ms. Goodwin asked if there were any members of the public present who had questions. None were present.

Ms. Litchfield requested the owner use simulated divided light windows versus snap-on muntins.

Mr. Tony Hsiao, Commissioner, made a motion to approve the application as described. Ms. Sue-Ellen Myers, Commissioner, seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0.

Ms. Monika Pauli, Alternate, arrived at 6:15pm.

MC-4588: 65 Ellery St, by River Street Apartments. LLC. Exterior renovation, addition and new garage.

Ms. Paull introduced the application, showed slides and described the history of the structure. She gave an overview of the proposal. She pointed the Commission's attention to the list of items on their

worksheets, which reflected the specific scope of the project. She continued that the Commission was not required to vote on each item, but rather it was an itemized list to confirm the scope with the applicant and reflect the scope properly to the Commission.

Mr. Campbell Ellsworth, the architect, was present. He noted that he was joined by two owners, Brett Sigworth and David Paul. He directed the Commission's attention to the proposed drawings. He noted that a special permit would be required for the windows proposed on the North elevation. He stated that the owners were converting the home, which was a legal three family, back into a single family structure. Mr. Ellsworth discussed the existing windows, noting that out of the 24 extant windows, many of them had been previously replaced, either an entire window or a sash itself. He noted that there were approximately two historic windows, one at the front arch and a second on the second floor bump out over the front entry. As a number of windows are proposed for alteration, he was proposing to replace all but those original two, if possible, with an Anderson A series window with an exterior composite casing.

Mr. Ellsworth indicated that the design maintains much of the historic structure with a single story addition off the rear elevation. He planned to maintain the openness of the yard. He mentioned he was proposing to preserve as much of the existing exterior fabric as possible and where required to use wood for any necessary trim or siding replacement and wood for the proposed deck.

Mr. Ellsworth continued his presentation noting that the basement height was over seven (7) feet tall and he was proposing to excavate to a minimum of 7' 3". This would require the addition of window wells for light, with wells being proposed on the front elevation and left side elevation. He also proposed the addition of a dormer on the third floor for increased usability of the space for bedrooms. He noted their intention to keep the existing slate roof, however they do not know the condition of it at the moment.

Ms. Myers, asked how many dormers were proposed. Mr. Ellsworth responded, one dormer is proposed. He continued that he proposed to remove the chimney, as it is currently removed below the roof.

Ms. Paull asked about the front window well; had Mr. Ellsworth looked into whether or not a side window well could be utilized for egress requirements? Mr. Ellsworth responded that he wanted to reserve the right to do the larger well, but was open to something smaller on the front elevation. Ms. Goodwin added that he could look at doing two smaller wells instead of one large well. Ms. Litchfield added she was concerned that the proposed front well was too close to sidewalk. Mr. Ellsworth noted that the window currently proposed is not a full egress size, so a smaller window well could be possible. Ms. Litchfield added that a smaller window well would allow for privacy and catch less debris, such as litter. Mr. Ellsworth stated that a well on the side, south elevation would also allow more light.

Ms. Goodwin asked if all trim on the addition and overall construction would be similar to that of the existing structure. Mr. Ellsworth confirmed that the project is slated to use wood trim replicating the existing, except for the casings. Ms. Litchfield asked for clarification why the chimney was being removed. Mr. Ellsworth responded that the chimney is not needed as the house will have a direct vent system. Mr. Sigworth, an owner, added that the chimney was a bit shaky currently as well.

Ms. Goodwin noted that the front door looked original and that the proposed garage doors were more contemporary. Mr. Ellsworth noted that he planned to maintain the front door and the garage plans were a mock up and he was open to suggestions. He was not certain of what style to proposed and didn't think barn door replicas were appropriate for this project.

Mr. Sigworth stated that the front door looked repairable but that he was uncertain of the exact condition as they hadn't closely inspected the door yet. Ms. Litchfield added that the old growth wood is so solid, she hoped they could keep it. Mr. Sigworth responded that it may just be a matter of squaring it off. Mr. Paul added that the garage door final design would relate to the structure.

Mr. Ellsworth asked about the sidelights. Ms. Myers asked if there was evidence of glass. Mr. Ellsworth stated that the panels were recessed. Ms. Myers responded that it is possible and that sidelights were historically appropriate. Mr. Paul added that it might have been switched out for the exterior lights that are located in those spaces currently. Mr. Ellsworth said he would know more once construction began.

Ms. Goodwin asked that the applicant follow up with staff throughout the process about construction details. Mr. Ellsworth stated that he would.

Ms. Pauli asked why he was proposing to use a multi-light muntin pattern on the windows in the dormer. Mr. Ellsworth said he wanted to add some variety and differentiate the dormer as an addition. Ms. Goodwin asked if they were simulated. Mr. Ellsworth replied yes the proposed product includes a spacer and muntins inside and outside.

Ms. Litchfield asked what the proposed material for the driveway was. Mr. Paul said pavers. Mr. Ellsworth expanded that they were looking at a 6" by 9" permeable paver, not asphalt. Ms. Myers asked if there would be additional paved space in the backyard for another parking space. Mr. Sigworth responded no, the parking would be tandem.

Mr. Hsiao asked if they were planning on fencing around the property. Mr. Sigworth noted that there is an existing shared fence along the south property line and they were hoping to remove the existing metal fence and mirror the higher quality fence along the south property line. Mr. Ellsworth added that they had not finalized a design and it could be an open picket style fence. Ms. Litchfield noted this would be preferable where more light was desired.

Ms. Goodwin asked for questions from the public. A neighbor, Joan Pickett at 59 Ellery, asked how much the setback from the south property line would change with the new addition and deck. Mr. Ellsworth responded that it would be reduced from about 9 feet 8 inches to 3 ½ -4 feet.

Ms. Goodwin asked if they had considered amending the plan to have the doors open to the rear of the property and deck versus to the side. Mr. Sigworth responded that they were concerned about the layout of furniture on the interior of the structure. Mr. Ellsworth added that the deck would mostly be utilized as living space in the back versus on the side elevation.

Ms. Pickett asked if the garage could be made into a dwelling unit. Mr. Ellsworth noted that to do so, the owner would have to obtain a variance and a change of use.

Peter Huybers, a neighbor at 63 Ellery Street, asked where the air conditioning unit would be located. Mr. Ellsworth noted that it would be located between the garage and the basement walkout/deck area. He continued that it would mostly be out of view or tucked away. Mr. Hughes noted that with the portion of the deck located on the south façade, it would become an alley way and rather close to the property line.

Ms. Goodwin noted that the application did not include a landscaping plan. Mr. Ellsworth apologized and stated that they were not at that stage yet. Mr. Sigworth noted that they wanted to maintain the greenspace and openness of the lot.

A resident at 63 Ellery Street (name indiscernible) asked about the chain link fence. Mr. Paul responded that they had not decided yet. Mr. Ellsworth added that they did not want to create hard privacy at the street edge and hoped to build something lower than the fence to the south, shared with 63 Ellery Street.

Mr. Huybers stated that the previous owners put up the existing fence without asking and now they were unable to utilize their driveway. The owners, Mr. Sigworth and Mr. Paul, stated that they would work with Mr. Huybers on a better design. Mr. Huybers added that he was in support of the application as it was a general improvement for the property.

Ms. Pickett mentioned that the south facing deck would have limited usability during certain times of the day. She continued that her house faces south and the front porch is not usable. She also mentioned that the view from the street would show a substantial deck. She said she was hoping to see some landscaping in the backyard. Mr. Sigworth stated that the landscaping would be something that is beautiful and adds some privacy in the rear of the property.

Ms. Margaret McMahon, Commissioner, stated that she was concerned that the proposal was too much for the lot and that the entire proposal changes the character of the structure. She emphasized concern about the "McMansion"-ing of Mid Cambridge.

Mr. Hsiao stated that one of the things about Cambridge was that there is something simple about this era of house. He continued that it was not a high style Italianate but a vernacular example. The qualities inherent to these houses should be respected. The fenestration is simple. From the main view, the structure has a certain calmness and quietness about it. As proposed, the window pairing was intense for this structure; as are the reduction in walls and large deck. He continued that a 3D view is needed to see what these changes will do to the property. Mr. Hsiao stated that the house would benefit with less not more. The decking was far too aggressive and something simple and straightforward would be more appropriate. He stated a landscape plan for the space would allow a planting edge that would create a stronger sense of a lawn. He encouraged the applicants to scale it back; to reconsider the location of the door to the deck, to use a single door on rear elevation. He stated that, as proposed, the dormer would have a big impact on the elevation and street view. He requested that the applicants do something simpler for the dormer, with windows that would align with the lower windows. As proposed, he continued, it felt foreign and the amount of window detail was too much. He suggested the applicant use a 2/2 window. He applauded the applicants for returning the home to a single family and mentioned that it was an overall positive project. He added that the landscape would be critical to making it attractive for a buyer.

The owners thanked the Commission and the public for their comments.

Ms. Litchfield agreed with Ms. McMahan and Mr. Hsiao. She added that she was happy the proposal was for an addition instead of a house behind a house. She voiced her concern that the side deck would be too much and that the area could be better utilized for landscaping and openspace. She noted that she too was concerned with the “McMansion”-ing of Mid Cambridge, explaining that some of the charm of living in an urban area is the cozier spaces. She continued that she hoped the applicants would take Mr. Hsiao’s design suggestions.

Ms. Goodwin concurred. She stated that adding the addition as well as the side deck with the roof deck and all the railings that come with would be too much for the simple Victorian design. She emphasized that removing the side deck would visually calm the structure down.

Mr. Hsiao stated that the deck could step down to the lawn in the rear, creating a continuous living space by adding steps and removing the rear railing.

Ms. Myers added that she supported the sentiments of the other Commissioners. She continued that she was concerned with the number of windows added to the structure and she wanted to emphasize eliminating the side deck. She said that the dormer, as proposed, looks a bit like a blinking light, and is distracting to the structure. She asked if the proposed dormer would touch the ridge line.

Mr. Ellsworth responded no.

Mr. Sigworth asked if the deck wouldn’t feel like such overkill if the side were removed. Mr. Hsiao responded yes. Ms. Litchfield agreed. Ms. Myers added if the double door were reduced to a single and moved as well, that would help.

Ms. Pauli stated her agreement with the other Commissioners and added that it appeared that there were too many skylights. She hoped the applicant would amend the dormer to a simpler design.

Mr. Hsiao added that the applicants might find that they do not need as many skylights if the dormers are aligned. Mr. Sigworth stated that they will continue to look at that.

Mr. Hsiao stated that individual light wells on the front elevation would be more appropriate as that is the first impression toward the community. He continued that a double light well was not typical for Cambridge.

Ms. Goodwin asked for clarification about the number of proposed bedrooms, it appeared they were proposing four plus a bedroom and living space in the basement. Mr. Sigworth responded that many buyers have live in nannies or live in care and having the option is important. Mr. Paul added that some use them as in-law suites.

Mr. Ellsworth asked if modifications to the plans would be followed up with staff rather than returning to the Commission. Ms. Goodwin clarified that yes, if it’s a minor alteration. Anything substantial, she continued, could potentially be reviewed by the Architect’s Committee rather than require a rehearing.

Mr. Hsiao made a motion to approve as submitted with the following recommendations:

- Amend the design of the dormers to a simpler design, more appropriate to this house, aligned with the windows below;
- Simplify windows all around the house in respect to existing fabric, aligning the windows vertically when possible and horizontally with their header heights;
- Elimination of decking on the side, concentrating the deck to the rear of the property and reducing railing if possible;
- Reduction of light wells in the front windows;
- Examine and possibly reduce the amount of skylights being proposed; and,
- Maintain the historic front door if possible.

Ms. Litchfield seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0.

Minutes

Ms. McMahan made a motion to approve the minutes as corrected. Ms. Pauli seconded. The motion was approved 5-0.

Mr. Hsiao made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Litchfield seconded. The motion was approved 5-0 and adjourned at 7:34pm.

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

Amy Gelpey	59 Magnolia Street, Unit #2
April Ogribue	1 Brookline Place, Unit #604
Brett Sigworth	25 Hale Road, Stow, MA 01775
David W. Paul	91 Elmcrest Road, N. Andover, MA 01845
Peter Huybers	63 Ellery Street
Peter Huybers	63 Ellery Street
Noreen Huybers	63 Ellery Street
Campbell Ellsworth	267 Norfolk Street

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