

MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION
APPROVED AT THE MARCH 6, 2017 HEARING

Monday, February 6, 2017, 6:00 PM, Fourth Floor Meeting Room, City Hall Annex, 344 Broadway, Cambridge

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

Commission Members absent: Monika Pauli, *Member*

Staff present: Samantha Paull Elliott

Members of the Public: See attached list.

Ms. Nancy Goodwin, Commission Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:00pm. She reviewed the agenda as well as meeting procedures. She designated that all alternates present would be voting.

MC-5137: 19 Maple Street, by Sam and Meredith Wolff. Alter garage into in-law suite.

Ms. Samantha Paull Elliott, staff, showed slides, gave an overview of the structure and application.

Mr. Sam Wolff introduced himself and his wife, Meredith Wolff, as owners of the property. He said they purchased and renovated the house a number of years back; they worked to restore missing architectural elements that they discovered in photographs. He outlined the proposal, to convert the existing garage into a residential space, noting that the garage had been previously altered with different garage doors, different openings, a small side addition, dormer addition, and shed roof over the doors. He directed the Commission to the drawings, noting that the proposal was to restore the historic door openings, install glass doors into the bays, construct a dormer to provide for head height, alter a window on the rear facade into a door for egress, and construct a dormer for a bathroom.

Ms. Elliott asked if Mr. Wolff had confirmed whether or not the door was required for egress. Mr. Wolff replied that ISD had not clarified specifically but that the discussed had been that the doors on the front elevation were too close together to be considered separate egresses for emergency purposes and that one had to be able to turn left or right from the bottom of the stairs to exit should there be an emergency.

Mr. Charles Redmon, Commissioner, asked if there was a plan for landscaping between the windows and the parking area on the front elevation. Mr. Wolff replied yes, they were looking at adding planters there as they would still be using it as a parking area.

Ms. Lestra Litchfield, Commissioner, asked what exterior material were proposed. Mr. Wolff replied that the roof was currently slate and that they would be using salvaged slates to match the existing roof during the repair process. He noted that the siding would be wood to match the existing, repairing the rotten pieces as needed. Ms. Goodwin asked what was proposed for the windows. Mr. Wolff said that they were proposing to replace the windows as needed and install windows and doors where the garage doors currently existed.

Ms. Goodwin asked what it meant to be an in-law building versus just a separate unit. Mr. Wolff clarified that it was a city term as it was a freestanding structure but would not be separated out from the house. He added that the water and power feed from the main house, not separate meters and he intended to continue for it to operate that way.

Ms. Goodwin asked for questions from the public.

Mr. Angus Scott introduced himself and his wife, Ana Yankova, as the abutter at 44 Highland Avenue, purchased home in 2009. Mr. Scott said his wife and he discussed their concerns with Mr. Wolff and sent email to Commission. Mr. Scott said he understood the Commission did not review changes in use but rather reviewed changes to the exterior visible from public way. He expressed concern over the alterations on the rear facade, as those three (3) windows abutted their property. Mr. Scott said he felt that the proposed alteration negatively impacted the character of building and hoped the owner could find a different egress. He passed out photos of that elevation and submitted a letter to the Commission.

Mr. Redmon asked if there was a fence blocking part of this from view. Mr. Scott replied that they had a fence on their property and that the photo was taken from inside their house.

Mr. John Deyab, neighbor at 23 Maple Avenue, said he had talked to Mr. Wolff about concerns with flooding of surrounding properties when he was digging to add sewage and water. Mr. Wolff told him that there was not an extant water or sewage line so a two (2) to three (3) foot wide trench would be dug for those lines. Mr. Wolff added that he felt confident that there would not be flooding or ground water issues.

Mr. Mark Witinski, neighbor at 40 Highland Avenue, unit #3, asked for the distance between the Maple Avenue garage and the 44 Highland Avenue. Mr. Scott replied that there was 33 feet between the windows. Mr. Witinski asked if the trench would remain open. Mr. Wolff clarified that once digging was completed, it would only be open for a few days while the pipes were laid and would not be a retention area. He noted that as part of the renovation they would be adding gutters around the garage. Ms. Yankova asked how long it would take to fully dig the trench. Mr. Wolff replied three (3) to four (4) months.

Mr. Scott asked if the shutters would be reinstalled on the rear elevation. Mr. Wolff replied that he became aware that some of the shutters had been beyond repair when they were taken down during the painting of the garage and he proposed to have custom shutters built to be added.

Mr. Witinski asked if the new stair dormer was wider than the existing dormer. Mr. Wolff replied that it would be the same width, only one foot taller so the stair would have the required head height. Mr. Witinski asked if a fireplace was proposed. Mr. Wolff replied no.

Mr. Scott noted that a small window was missing from the rear elevation. Mr. Wolff replied that they were looking to close the window to allow for the ideal layout in the downstairs bathroom but they were open to keeping it if required.

Mr. Witinski asked if the Commission could require him to use the bathroom window instead of the kitchen window for egress. Ms. Litchfield replied that the Commission did not redesign projects, but rather aimed to preserve the overall character of the structure.

Mr. Tony Hsiao, Commissioner, asked if the central window could be altered into a door instead of the proposed window as it would better preserve the character and symmetry. Mr. Wolff said that he was not sure if that would meet the egress requirement but he was open to it.

Ms. Goodwin read a letter submitted to staff via email dated February 1 from Angus Scott and Ana Yankova.

Ms. Goodwin noted that the Commission did not have any oversight regarding construction times but that ISD did have construction hours outlined as part of their regulations. Ms. Goodwin asked if Mr. Wolff wanted to address any points of the letter. Mr. Wolff responded that he had met with the abutters and attempted to work out a lot of their concerns prior to the hearing, including venting the kitchen out north or south, frosting the glass on the rear second story dormer. He asked what the Commission's stance was on frosting historic windows.

Ms. Litchfield noted that as city residents there was a certain level of privacy one gives up by moving into a more densely populated area. She added that she understood the desire for privacy but it was rather common to have blinds on windows or look into your neighbor's house as most houses in Mid Cambridge were less than 33 feet away from each other. Mr. Scott said that the garage was not being utilized as a residential unit when they purchased the property so he felt they purchased their property under different conditions. Ms. Litchfield replied that Cambridge was a growing city with new infill being added every year and while she respects the difficulty they may be having with the proposal, they needed to keep it in mind that properties evolve as needs change over the years. Ms. Yankova replied that they did not want to stop the project, but did hope to find a middle ground.

Ms. Sue Ellen Myers asked if this was to be assess as an infill project or alteration. Ms. Elliott clarified that the application should be reviewed as alterations as the structure already existed.

Ms. Litchfield asked if the garage had ever been occupied. Ms. Elliott replied that she was unsure.

Ms. Litchfield said, in response to the abutter letter from 44 Highland Avenue, she did not think the Commission could support conditioning fixed windows on the rear elevation. Mr. Redmon further added that fixed windows would be a code violation. Ms. Yankova asked about frosting windows. Mr. Redmon replied that he was concerned with the permanent nature of frosting the windows and recommended a fence, with a solid four (4) to six (6) foot section and a two (2) foot lattice topper for a height up to eight (8) feet. Ms. Elliott echoed Mr. Redmon's concern about the permanent alteration of frosting. She noted that it was commonly done permanently in showers, but elsewhere it was recommended that a removable film or blinds be used to provide privacy. Mr. Wolff replied that he was open to the fence.

Mr. Hsiao added that a potential solution for the egress window/door on the rear elevation could be to maintain the upper sash of the central window and add a solid door below, He said this would provide privacy for the rear abutters, meet the egress needs and preserve the character. Mr. Wolff said he was open to that.

Mr. Redmon made a motion to approve the application with the following conditions:

1. Provide a landscape plan to staff prior to permitting that reflects the addition of landscaping in front of the doors facing Maple Ave with the suggestion to eliminate parking space and add greenspace there;

2. Locate the required egress door in central window opening on rear facade, maintaining the upper sash of the window to preserve header heights and install a door below;
3. Investigate maintaining the small window, but it is not required to be preserved; and,
4. Recommend looking at constructing an opaque fence with a two (2) foot lattice top for additional privacy

Mr. Hsiao seconded the motion. The motion was approved with Ms. Goodwin and Mr. Redmon voting.

MC-5138: 15 Bigelow Street, by 15 Bigelow St. Condo. Install solar water heater panels on roof.

Ms. Elliott showed slides while giving an overview of the structure and application.

Ms. Litchfield asked if there were only the four (4) panels that were 18 inches from all edges of the roof. Ms. Mindy Maxell, an owner, replied yes.

Mr. Francis Spinks, abutter at 17 Bigelow Street, asked what would be seen from the street. Ms. Elliott showed him a copy of the application and proposal. He had no additional questions.

Mr. Hsiao made a motion to approve the application as submitted. Mr. Myers seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0 with Mr. Redmon and Ms. McMahon voting.

Minutes

Mr. Redmon made a motion to accept the January 9, 2017 minutes as submitted. Ms. Sue Ellen Myers, Commissioner, seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0.

Mr. Hsiao made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Redmon seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0 and the meeting was adjourned at 7:06 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Samantha Paull Elliott
Preservation Administrator

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

Sam Wolff	Owner	19 Maple Avenue
Julia Livingston	Mother of owner	19 Maple Avenue
Mindy Maxwell	Owner	15 Bigelow Street #7
Meredith Wolff	Owner	19 Maple Avenue
Mark Witinski	Neighbor	40 Highland Avenue, #3
Angus Scott	Neighbor	44 Highland Avenue
Ana Yankova	Neighbor	44 Highland Avenue
John Deyab	Neighbor	23 Maple Avenue
Francis Fox Spinks	Neighbor	17 Bigelow Street, #B

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