

MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION

Monday, January 3, 2022, 6:00 PM, online Zoom meeting

Commission Members present: Tony Hsiao, *Chair*, Lestra Litchfield, *Vice Chair*, Charles Redmon, *Members*, Margaret McMahon, *Alternate*

Absent:, Monika Pauli, *Member*

Staff present: Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator, Sara Burks, Preservation Planner

Members of the Public: See attached list

Meeting held via online zoom webinar, <https://tinyurl.com/MCjan2022>.

Due to statewide emergency actions limiting the size of public gatherings in response to COVID-19, this meeting was held online with remote participation and was closed to in-person attendance. The public was able to participate online via the Zoom webinar platform. The meeting ID was 814 7378 9278.

Commission Chair Tony Hsiao made introductions and explained the meeting procedures and called the meeting to order at 6:08 pm.

Case MC-6346: 115 Inman Street, by Douglas Arsham and Jennifer Efron. Construct rear roof deck.

Ms. Crosbie presented slides of the property, noting this is a non binding review.

Mr. Douglas Arsham, the applicant, explained their plan for the deck accessed by the third floor in the rear, noting that they hadn't decided if the material will be wood or something else, and that the proposed dormer will require a variance.

Commission Questions - none

Public Questions - none

Public Comments - none

Commission Comments

Vice Chair Lestra Litchfield stated that she liked the plans, specifically the dormer's location below the roof ridgeline and the deck being pulled back from the edges.

Commissioner Charles Redmon agreed with Ms. Litchfield.

Mr. Hsiao had no issues with the design and noted it was well thought out.

Mr. Redmon motioned to approve the application as submitted. Ms. Litchfield seconded, and the motion passed, 4-0.

Case MC- 6347: 14-16 Clinton Street, by Susan Farist Butler. Install solar panels.

Ms. Crosbie presented slides of the property, noting that the building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, therefore the review is binding.

Mr. Jamie Wood, consultant for the applicant, explained the goal of the project is to provide green energy and supply additional energy for the neighborhood. The proposed panels are LG 395-watt panels, 51 in total, and they are repurposing the existing array in the rear.

Commission Questions

Mr. Redmon asked how would the energy be transferred to the neighborhood. Mr. Wood replied that after first being used on site, it would flow back through the meter to the next closest demand, it would be used in close proximity.

Ms. Litchfield asked how high are the panels. Mr. Wood answered four inches from the roof surface. Ms. Litchfield asked what is the roofing material. Mr. Wood replied asphalt.

Mr. Redmon asked if the panels go over the ridgeline. Mr. Wood replied that they do not, they will be 6 to 12 inches below the ridge and will not be visible.

Public Questions

Ms. Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked if the panels will be seen from the street.

Public Comment

Ms. Susan Butler, the applicant, noted that the panels will not be visible from the street and clarified that the building has 5 apartments.

Ms. Meyer noted that solar panels were installed on a house in Garden Street, and after a while she no longer noticed them, and stated that this is the wave of future energy. Ms. Butler responded that she is very concerned about climate change which is why she is adding more solar panels.

Commission Comments

Ms. Litchfield commented that the Commission has been concerned in the past about National Register properties having solar panels, but once they're up they are not that noticeable, and in this instance it appears that the panels will hardly be seen.

Mr. Redmon had no comments.

Commission alternate Margaret McMahon agreed with Ms. Litchfield.

Mr. Hsiao commented that this is an appropriate response, and the panels are very low profile and minimally visible.

Ms. Litchfield motioned to approve the application as submitted with the condition that the panels are a minimum of 6 inches away from the edges of the roof. Mr. Redmon seconded, and the motion passed, 4-0.

Case MC- 6348: 17 Clinton Street, by Susan Farist Butler. Install solar panels.

Ms. Crosbie presented slides of the property, noting this case is a non binding review.

Mr. Wood again described the goals of the project and noted that the panels will be more visible on this building with front gable roof.

Commission Questions - none

Public Questions - none

Public Comments - none

Ms. Butler stated that they are maximizing generation and that they have eliminated the midday peak. She also asked the Commission their opinion about the existing chimney that will cast a shadow on the panels. Ms. Litchfield answered that she would like it to remain. Mr. Redmon agreed.

Commission Comments

Mr. Redmon noted that this was very straightforward and motioned to approve the proposal with the same condition that the panels are pulled back a minimum of 6 inches from the edges of the roof. Ms. Litchfield seconded, and the motion passed 4-0.

Case MC-6350: 7-9 Cleveland Street, by Lise M. Zeig, David Owens, Nancy Seidman. Replace ten windows.

Ms. Crosbie presented slides of the property, noting this is a non binding review.

Ms. Nancy Seidman, one of the applicants, explained the need to replace the windows, noting three issues – 1) the existing windows are very leaky, and the sashes are loose, 2) they researched windows to find the best match to the existing windows, 3) they already purchased the windows unaware that replacement of original windows might require a formal review.

Commission Questions

Mr. Hsiao asked if the windows are 6/2 and it was confirmed.

Mr. Litchfield asked if the new windows will have simulated divided lites. Mr. Owens, one of the applicants, answered that he thinks they are divided.

Public Questions

Ms. Meyer asked if the storm windows will remain. Mr. Owens replied that they hope to remove the storm windows. Ms. Meyer asked if the windows are made of two glass sheets with muntins in between. Mr. Owens answered that they are applied muntins. Ms. Litchfield then stated they are not divided lites. The Commissioners referred to the application that included manufacturing information and there is a reference to a ¾-inch “grille.” Mr. Owens stated that they will be applied muntin on both sides and that it will look like a single element dividing the glass.

Public Comment

Ms. Meyer commented that she likes the shadow of the muntin on the exterior. Ms. Litchfield replied that they think the windows will have that shadow.

Commission Comments

Mr. Redmon stated that it's a straightforward presentation. Ms. Litchfield noted the submitted manufacturer information does state "¾ inch grille," and agreed with Mr. Redmon.

Mr. Hsiao looked at the manufacturer website and saw that the proposed windows do simulate a divided lite.

Ms. Litchfield motioned to accept the proposal as presented. Mr. Redmon seconded, and the motion passed 4-0.

Case MC-6274 (continued): 123 Hancock Street, by Sam Wolff. Remove rear addition and extend existing dormer. Construct 2 new dwelling units.

Ms. Crosbie briefly presented slides on the property.

Ms. Heather Souza, the architect for the applicant, introduced the revised design, first presenting images of buildings that inspired the design and noted that the historic building will be the primary structure on the site while pushing the contemporary addition to the rear. She also noted that the rear addition of the existing house will be removed and that the 2 new units will encroach on the rear setback. Ms. Souza then presented the site plan showing one parking space for each unit, that the trees will remain except for one, and that arborvitae will be planted as screening.

Ms. Souza then presented solar studies, elevations, and 3-d renderings. She pointed out that the elevation facing the park is staggered and not blocking the view of the existing house.

Commission Questions

Mr. Hsiao asked about floor to floor heights. Ms. Souza answered that first floor is 10', 9'-6" on 2nd floor, and 8' finished floor on 3rd floor but 9' to the roof. Mr. Hsiao asked if the basement will be occupied. Ms. Souza replied there will be storage, mechanicals, and a rec room in the basement. Mr. Hsiao asked if there will be light wells. Ms. Souza said yes. Mr. Hsiao asked about the flat roof in the front. Ms. Souza stated that the flat roof has a subtle pitch for runoff. Mr. Hsiao asked what is the height of the existing house to compare with the new units. Ms. Souza did not have that information on hand.

Ms. Litchfield asked about cladding materials. Ms. Souza responded that they are proposing to use fiber cement with lap siding, painted. The back corner unit will have varied siding including board and batten and paneled façade. Ms. Litchfield asked if the panels will be metal. Ms. Souza said no but was open to suggestions.

Public Questions

Tomer Cohen of 7 Centre Street made a request that taller trees are planted on the side abutting the Cooper Playground to provide more screening.

Mr. Evan Remington of 324B Harvard Street asked if the developer can provide solar studies that show the south face of 324 Harvard Street and would the Commission approve the proposed unit being moved further west away from the rear of the site. Ms. Souza answered that she would be happy to send the solar studies to Mr. Remington.

Ms. Casey Weinz of Hancock Place asked for clarification on the scale of the project. Ms. Souza went over the floor heights. Ms. Weinz asked how many square feet is the existing home and how many square feet total with new construction. Ms. Souza replied that with the removal of the addition, the existing house is roughly 1600 sf, new construction is 4,000 sf and the total is 5,700 sf.

Ms. Meyer asked about the tree next to the park, it shows up in one drawing and not the other. Ms. Souza answered that it will remain. Ms. Meyer also asked who owns the chain link fence. Mr. Wolff replied that he thinks the City owns it. Ms. Meyer asked if they are going to do anything along the property line such as a slat fence and landscaping. Ms. Souza replied they are maintaining the white picket fence and will be planting a buffer. Ms. Meyer replied that she hopes it can be more naturalistic as opposed to a symmetrical line of arborvitae. Ms. Meyer asked about the board and batten and if they considered other materials. Ms. Souza said they are open to other suggestions. Ms. Meyer asked about the location of mechanicals. Ms. Souza answered that they have not specified the HVAC equipment, but they are looking at a heat pump system that has a lower decibel reading. Mr. Wolff commented that it's still in flux, but the heat pump system is the direction people are going in.

Ms. Weinz asked about the number of units. Ms. Souza replied it's one unit per building.

Public Comments

Mr. Remington stated on behalf of residents of 322 and 324 Harvard Street, they are disappointed with the Commission's suggestion of adding a floor to the rear unit. They would like a design that moderates the impact of reduced sunlight so perhaps move the building further from the property line.

Ms. Meyer commented that the lawn graphic does not convey the reality of the site and how it's really used. Regarding the board and batten, it looks like a cheap shortcut, when you look at the front house it's noble with integrity trying to be a grownup, to want to be casual does the front house an injustice. She stated she is getting tired of square boxes but appreciates the applicants working with neighbors. It still doesn't sit well, it's a big block next to the historic house. It's better but not ready for prime time.

Mr. Aaron Sarna of 322 Harvard Street concurred with Mr. Remington, he liked the earlier designs, he has a baby and will be spending a lot of time in the park and is concerned with the roof overlooking the park, worried about umbrellas blowing off, etc.

Mr. Cohen reiterated the comment about trees and concerns about the proposed roof deck. He would like to preserve privacy on both sides.

Ms. Weinz stated the third floor seems towering over the historic house, it looks too tall and aesthetically doesn't fit into the neighborhood.

Ms. Crosbie read out comments by Diane Rubin of 328 Harvard Street and Suzanne Mann of 128 Hancock Street which are included as part of the record.

Commission Comments

Mr. Redmon commented that his initial reaction to the floor height dimensions is to suggest sinking the whole building further into the ground. He also noted the windows not being subdivided increase the appearance of a large-scale house, so perhaps 1/1 windows. And regarding the roof deck, consider a solid wall facing the park and keeping the ends of the deck open (with railing) to resolve potential privacy issues. Regarding the proposed board and batten, he noted it does cheapen the house and suggested continuing the clapboards and painting the third floor a different color.

Ms. Litchfield agreed with Mr. Redmon and commented that the scale is still looming. She appreciated how park side elevation has been broken up, but the height is an issue, maybe adjusting the ceiling heights, even in the 2-story section. She also noted that they need to know the height of the original house, that it helps to gage proportions and scale. Right now, it just still seems too dense.

Ms. McMahon agreed, noting the existing house is being swallowed up and the additions are too much, and the contrast is sad.

Mr. Hsiao restated that they need the existing heights. He noted the elevational relationship of the proposed and existing buildings, the additions appear looming but moving them down, close to grade, makes a huge difference. He noted the parapet of the proposed house was coming close to the height of the dormer. He also commented that the window proportions require more study, the windows on the second floor are worth reconsidering. He recommended looking at the windows on the existing house, there's a subtle change in size from one level to another that makes a difference. The cornice element could be reduced, it contributes to the heaviness of the design, it could be simplified, more refined. He also suggested pulling back the third floor, and squeezing down the height, simplifying the detailing, and noted that pulling it in would mitigate the view and the bulkiness (and respond to neighbors' concerns), make it look more detached and more like a 2-story house with an addition. Regarding the landscape, greening the edge of the park is important and vertical plantings provide privacy to abutters. The back elements need to pull away from the rear, adjust the height and massing, and lower the building. Mr. Hsiao specified he would like to see elevations overlaid to show what you truly see, and more information regarding building heights and what you see on the street. He mentioned that more development on the site work would be helpful, adding that the Commission appreciates the effort at responding to comments and the preservation of trees, and detachment of the new units which he thinks works, but it feels too crowded. The shadow studies should show all four seasons at 9:00 am, noon, and 3:00 pm. In addition, supplemental solar studies with color coding to show how much more shadow is being cast can help the applicant's case or help with adjustments.

Ms. Litchfield concurred, pulling down the proposed building has the potential to make a huge difference.

Mr. Wolff agreed with a continuance.

Ms. Litchfield motioned to continue and summarized what the Commission would like to see at the next meeting:

- Adjustments to the massing, floor to floor heights, and grade,
- Lighter cornice,
- Windows – break up the solidness which makes it look more massive, possibly 1/1,
- Location of light wells,
- Height of existing structure and how it relates to the new structures,
- Overlays of elevations,
- Deck on third floor, reconsider to provide more privacy to park,
- Rethink board and batten cladding,
- New shadow studies that are easier to read at 9, 12, and 3,
- Mr. Redmon added to make a green fence between parking and park instead of the existing chain link fence.

Mr. Redmon seconded, and the motion passed 4-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:29 pm.

Minutes for the December 2022 meeting were approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public Present on January 3, 2022**Panelists:**

Douglas Arsham	115 Inman Street
Jennifer Efron	115 Inman Street
Sue Butler	14-16 and 17 Clinton Street
Josh Wood, solar consultant	(14-16 and 17 Clinton Street)
Lise Zeig	7-9 Cleveland Street
David Owens	7-9 Cleveland Street
Nancy Seidman	7-9 Cleveland Street
Sam Wolff	123 Hancock Street
Heather Souza, architect	(123 Hancock Street)

Attendees:

Marilee Meyer	10 Dana Street
Diane Rubin	328 Harvard Street
John Pitkin	18 Fayette Street
Casey Wenz	4 Hancock Place
Evan Remington	324B Harvard Street
Aaron Sarna	322 Harvard Street
Drew Volpe	12 Ellery Square
Tomer Cohen	7 Centre Street