

MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION

Monday, April 3, 2023, 6:00 PM, online Zoom meeting

Commission Members present: Tony Hsiao, *Chair*; Lestra Litchfield, *Vice Chair*; Charles Redmon, Monika Pauli, Katinka Hakuta, *Members*

Absent: none

Staff present: Eric Hill, Survey Director

Members of the Public: See attached list

Meeting held via online zoom webinar <https://tinyurl.com/MCapr2023>. 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 843 6394 7874

Commission Chair Tony Hsiao made introductions, explained the process for the hearing, and called the meeting to order at 6:03.

Case MC-6676:74 Antrim Street, by Alexandre Servan-Schreiber. Construct roof dormer.

Mr. Hill presented a brief history of the house built in 1889 as a Queen Anne style two-family residence.

Alex Van Pragh, architect, explained that the goal of the project was to add a shed dormer to the north slope of the roof to increase the head-height of the upstairs spaces. He mentioned that the dormer guidelines required the dormer be set back approximately eight or ten feet from the property line, and they were not proposing to add windows in the dormer as to not trigger a need for a variance or special permit. For the design of the dormer, he decided to clad it with siding and trim to match the rest of the house. He stated that he was not thrilled with the proposal, but the size and scale appeared to be consistent with other houses on the street.

Commission Questions

Chair, Tony Hsiao, asked staff to show the section drawing to compare it with the side elevation of the proposed dormer. He noted that the dormer was showing a one-foot setback from the plane of the house and the elevation appeared to show it to be setback much farther. He wanted to confirm which drawing was correct. Additionally, Mr. Hsiao asked Mr. Van Pragh if the dormer would spring from the roof-ridge or if it would begin below the ridge.

Mr. Van Pragh explained that it was to begin one foot back from the plane of the house, and expanded to state that it could be pulled back from the wall and down from the ridge further if needed, but they would lose usable square footage at the interior.

Mr. Hsiao explained that the elevation was not fully detailed and that could be a reason for the discrepancy between the section drawing and elevation. Additionally, it could be a drawing error.

Monika Pauli asked what the pitch of the roof and proposed dormer were.

Mr. Van Pragh explained that the existing roof was 12x12 and the dormer would be 2x12.

Lestra Litchfield asked staff and the applicant why a variance would be needed to add windows to the dormer.

Mr. Hill explained that adding or expanding windows within a setback would trigger a need for Board of Zoning Appeal approval, which seemed to be due to fire safety. There are also concerns for privacy, but staff believes the main reasoning is for safety and the mitigation of the transmittal of a potential fire from one building to another.

Ms. Litchfield added stating that most houses in the neighborhood have dormers with windows, including her own.

Mr. Hill noted that it is likely those were added with a variance, were grandfathered-in before the current building code, or they are set back enough from the property line.

Ms. Pauli asked the applicant what the purpose of the dormer would be.

Mr. Servan-Schreiber, the owner, explained that they would like to convert their existing closet to a smaller living space with the help from additional ceiling heights from the proposed dormer.

Public Questions and Comments

None

Commission Comments

Ms. Litchfield explained that she understood the need for usable space inside, but oversized shed dormers are not always appropriate. She explained that to offset the bulkiness of the dormer, the architect could move it down from the roof ridge slightly to delineate it better from the existing roof and to look into a variance or ways to add windows to break up the solid mass and design. Alternatively, shingle detailing in the siding at the dormer could be an option, with 25 Dana Street as a property to look at for inspiration.

Ms. Pauli agreed with Ms. Litchfield, stating the ridgeline of the dormer should drop. She expanded to state that adding windows would make a big difference in the design from the exterior along with the usability of the room inside. A solid box as a dormer is not appropriate.

Mr. Hsiao agreed with his colleagues explaining that the architect could look to push the dormer back to a point where windows are allowed as-of-right and/or push it back on the house to increase living space inside the unit. He explained that the review by the commission is non-binding and they are providing comments, but they strongly recommend the changes to the proposal.

Ms. Litchfield motioned to deny the proposal as submitted, with the following recommendations:

- Bring the dormer down at least one foot from the ridgeline of the roof.
- To look into adding windows to the dormer either with a variance application or setting the dormer out of the side yard setback

Mr. Redmon seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the motion passed 5-0.

Case MC-6677: 107 Ellery Street, by 107 Ellery Family Nominee Trust c/o Jim Chen. Alter fenestration and remove chimneys.

Mr. Hill presented a brief history of the house built in 1877 as an Italianate style single-family residence. It was converted into a two-family in 1955 and altered with a new entry, vinyl siding and removal of brackets in 1970.

Jim Chen, the architect, explained that the proposal was to replace all windows on the house with vinyl windows with muntins between the panes of glass, alter the opening of a window on the side elevation, and to remove the two chimneys on the house. He noted that the existing windows were not efficient and many of the windows are original, wood, two-over-two windows, some with exterior storms. Of the 26 windows, four had already been replaced. The change in one window would be at the kitchen, where its sill would be raised about one foot to fit the countertop underneath.

Commission Questions

Lestra Litchfield asked if the two chimneys were to be entirely removed or if they would reconstruct above the roofline.

Mr. Chen stated that the owner is proposing to remove the chimneys as it will help enhance the spaces inside the building. The middle chimney would be replaced with a slightly larger skylight and the smaller, rear chimney would be removed entirely. He expanded to state that the rear chimney was falling down and was a hazard.

Ms. Pauli asked if the replacement windows would match the existing in size and style.

Mr. Chen stated that they would be the same size and style, but not true divided or simulated divided lights.

Ms. Litchfield asked if the proposed windows were to be vinyl-clad wood or entirely vinyl.

Mr. Chen explained that they would be entirely vinyl.

Public Questions and Comments:

None

Commission Comments:

Mr. Redmon stated that the commission does not approve vinyl windows.

Ms. Litchfield stated that the commission traditionally approved vinyl-clad wood windows with simulated divided lights (sdl). She said that the look of the sdl windows most-closely matches that of a traditional divided light window as the muntins are on both sides and a spacer bar gives the window additional depth.

Mr. Chen stated that the owner is most concerned about cost. They would investigate sdl windows, but vinyl would allow for more cost-savings.

Mr. Hsiao explained that the sdl clad-wood windows are a good investment and last longer than most lower-quality windows on the market. The proposed windows are not appropriate.

Ms. Litchfield added that she had no issue with the removal of the rear chimney, but the middle chimney is a character-defining structure for the building. She suggested the owner look to construct a faux chimney in its place.

Katinka Hakuta stated that due to the property's high visibility not having a neighbor to the south, the removal of the chimneys would be very noticeable. The main/larger chimney is more significant.

Ms. Litchfield agreed and stated that it was too bad the owner could not be present to hear this discussion and the comments by the commissioners.

Mr. Hsiao noted that the neighboring house at 109 Ellery was recently renovated and could provide some design inspiration for what could happen at 107 Ellery Street.

Ms. Pauli agreed with the other commissioners and added that having appropriate or original window trim would make a large difference.

Mr. Redmon made a motion to deny the proposal as submitted, with the following recommendations:

- The applicant should look into simulated divided light windows, preferably vinyl-clad wood windows for the replacement product.
- The center chimney could be demolished below the roofline and a faux chimney rebuilt above.

Ms. Litchfield seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the motion passed 5-0.

The March 6, 2023 minutes were approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:47 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Eric Hill, Survey Director

Members of the Public Present on April 3, 2023Panelists:

Alex Van Pragh, applicant/architect (74 Antrim Street)

Sacha Servyn-Schreiber, owner (74 Antrim Street)

Jim Chen, applicant/architect (107 Ellery Street)

Attendees:

N/A