

MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION

Monday, February 6, 2023, 6:00 PM, online Zoom meeting

Commission Members present: Tony Hsiao, *Chair*, Monika Pauli, Katinka Hakuta, *Members*

Absent: Lestra Litchfield, *Vice Chair*, Charles Redmon, *Member*

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

Members of the Public: See attached list

Meeting held via online zoom webinar <https://tinyurl.com/MCfeb2023>. 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 898 3905 2168.

Commission Chair Tony Hsiao made introductions, explained the process, and called the meeting to order at 6:05.

Case MC-6632: 73 Highland Avenue, by Jamie Wong. Install fiber cement siding, replace front porch and 8 windows.

Ms. Allison Crosbie, preservation administrator, presented a brief history of the building designed by George Fogerty and built in 1894.

Mr. Jamie Wong, the applicant, stated that he has been the owner since 2015. He explained that the porch is in severe disrepair, and it has started to pull away from the structure and the columns are beginning to buckle. He shared his screen and showed slides of the building and stated that he would also like to replace 8 windows and re-side the building with fiber cement. He said that the shingles were starting to fail. On the porch he would like to bring the railings up to code but also restore the porch details. He also mentioned that he would like to restore the curving window in the corner tower and would appreciate recommendations for someone who specializes in this kind of restoration.

Ms. Norma Fernandez of U.S. Siding introduced herself along with Diogenes Porto and stated that their company is experienced in this kind of work and have been featured on "This Old House."

Commission Questions

Commissioner Monika Pauli asked how many windows are original. Mr. Wong clarified what windows were original.

Mr. Hsiao asked if they will be mimicking the existing details and noted that right now that it's hard to tell from the drawings how much is being replicated. Mr. Wong replied that the goal is to replace the porch as closely as possible, including the columns, turret, and dentils. Mr. Hsiao asked if all the siding is to be replaced. Mr. Wong answered yes, the entire house, and stated that the previous owner had tried to patch some areas.

Commissioner Katinka Hakuta asked about the materials for the porch, noting that it looks like treated lumber, composite decking, vinyl railings – and specifically what is the material for the details on the porch. Mr. Porto replied that the trim will be pvc because it doesn't deteriorate, and it perfectly mimics the wood. Mr. Wong interjected that the goal is to replicate all the details. Ms. Pauli asked if they would have the pieces custom made because otherwise you won't get exactly the same shape. Mr. Porto replied that they will be close, maybe not exactly the same. Mr. Porto then said that if needed, they can use wood.

Mr. Hsiao shared his screen to show the street view of the property and a close-up of the porch. He remarked that there are a lot of details around the porch and many subtle details as well, such as the tapered columns, the pediment and trim, crown dentils, and asked to what extent are you going to attempt to copy this detailing. Ms. Fernandez answered that it is possible to copy these details, they have done this in the past, and there are a lot of shapes and sizes. Mr. Porto said that crown moldings today are being done in pvc.

Mr. Hsiao asked about the siding, is the intention to do the same shingle and clapboard as it is now. Mr. Wong answered yes. Mr. Hsiao asked about the windows. Mr. Wong said there is only one window in the front that will be replaced. Mr. Hsiao asked if the intent is to replicate the trim. Mr. Wong replied that it is.

Ms. Crosbie asked if the fiber cement will be able to curve around the corner bay. Mr. Porto said yes, he had already confirmed with Hardie Plank.

Public Questions and Comments

Mr. Mark Shea of 81 Highland Avenue spoke in support of the proposal and is aware of the issues with mold that can grow on the shaded side of the building.

Commission Comments

Ms. Pauli recommended J.P. Moriarty for restoring the curved window. She also commented that her preference is always for natural wood materials, noting that pvc does not age well. She recommended Spanish cedar or mahogany for at least the intricate details.

Ms. Hakuta concurred with Ms. Pauli and stated that she appreciates the effort that has gone into this project, but agrees about the use of natural materials, and echoed Vice Chair Lestra Litchfield's previous observations that you can always tell the difference when the material is not wood. She also stated that she understands the concern over cost but still recommends the use of wood.

Mr. Hsiao agreed with the Commissioners noting that Hardie Plank is almost too perfect, it doesn't look natural because it's machine made. He also agreed that the spirit of the proposed project is great, and the Commission appreciates the effort being made to respect the character of the house. He went on to explain that the Commission tends to not favor Hardie plank but also clarified that this is a non-binding review.

Mr. Hsiao asked if the Commission would like to make a motion.

Ms. Pauli wondered if the determination should reject or accept the proposal.

Mr. Porto interjected that the house's proximity to the one next door creates a lot of shade resulting in the deterioration of the siding, and that is why they recommend the use of fiber cement and pvc. He also stated that the pvc will be painted and is happy to submit samples for review.

Mr. Hsiao stated that there have been projects in the past where synthetic materials are used in the back and on the side of a building, when not visible from a public way, but with the prominent turret, there isn't a natural break from the front to the side. He further explained that this Commission typically rules against Hardie Plank because it's not a natural material, and he noted that with this beautiful building the Commission prefers wood. He also explained that the Commission can potentially reject the proposal with the recommendation to use wood on the most visible facades of the building.

Mr. Wong remarked that he has seen other properties in the neighborhood that have used inferior materials, and asked if they were reviewed by the Commission or just went ahead and installed what they wanted. Mr. Hsiao replied these properties have been resided at different times in the past. He reiterated that this review is non-binding so the applicant is not obligated to follow the recommendations. He also said that properties on the National Register are subject to more stringent regulation and require binding review.

Ms. Pauli agreed with Mr. Hsiao's comments and said the Commission's role is to advocate for the preservation of historic architectural features. Ms. Pauli motioned to reject the proposal with the following recommendations:

1. Consider replacing the wood shingle and clapboard siding in kind on the most visible sides of the building.
2. Consider using natural wood materials for the more intricate detailing on the porch and use pvc for flat trim.

Ms. Hakuta seconded, and the motion passed, 3-0.

The January 2023 minutes were approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public Present on February 6, 2023

Panelists:

Jamie Wong, applicant

73 Highland Avenue

Norma Fernandez, contractor

US Siding

Diogenes Porto, contractor

US Siding

Attendees:

Mark Shea

81 Highland Avenue