

Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

February 6, 2012 - 6:00 P.M. – 344 Broadway, City Hall Annex/McCusker Center, 4th Floor

Commission Members Present: Nancy Goodwin, *Chair*; Tony Hsiao, *Vice Chair*; Lestra Litchfield, Carole Perrault, *Members*; Sue-Ellen Myers, Monika Pauli, *Alternates*

Commission Members Absent: Charles Redmon, *Member*

Staff: Eiliesh Tuffy

Members of the Public: See attached sign-in sheet

With a quorum present, Ms. Goodwin called the meeting to order at 6:10 P.M.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

MC-4030: 13 Bigelow St., by Pierre and Marie Humblet. New curb cut and driveway proposal.

The property under review is a two-family residence constructed in 1873. This 2-1/2 story Mansard building is located at the south end of Bigelow on the west side of the street. This lot, like several others at the south end of the street, is bounded at the front sidewalk by a retaining wall of dressed granite. The current proposal for a curb cut and 17'Wx32'D driveway would impact the historic granite wall along with a set of granite stairs and alter the grade of the side yard to make way for 2 parking spaces. The cars are proposed to be parked behind the front face of the building to minimize their impact on the streetscape.

In addition to falling within the boundaries of the local conservation district, this property is part of the Bigelow Street National Register District. In cases where National Register properties are involved, the Mid Cambridge Commission has binding review authority over publicly visible changes to the property.

Mr. Humblet walked the Commission members through the application materials outlining the character of the street and the varied designs and paving materials of existing curb cuts on Bigelow Street. In the survey of curb cuts, some had retained the historic slabs of granite and incorporated them into new driveway, rotating them 90 degrees and utilizing them as curbstones. This is similar to what Mr. Humblet proposed. He also proposed repositioning the existing stairs at a point further north along the wall to preserve that element.

The Commission asked what precipitated the plan for a new curb cut, and the owner explained that a long-standing practice of shared access to the driveway on the adjacent property was no longer being honored. When asked if that agreement had been written up formally, the owner responded that it had not.

Questions and comments were received from the public.

An email was received from an abutter at 10 Clinton St. in opposition to the application.

Mr. Hsiao noted that, while the applicant did a very thorough job of documenting all of the curb cuts that have occurred along Bigelow, the data proves that the historic fabric of the streetscape is being lost and that this property is more valuable as an intact surviving example of the original development of the

street. Despite the thoughtful consideration put into the design, it was felt that the proposal would have an adverse impact on the property and the National Register district.

It was also suggested that the owner consider entering into mediation with the neighboring property owners regarding continued shared access to the driveway.

Mr. Hsiao made a motion to reject the application as the proposed curb cut is incongruous and has an adverse impact on the historic resource. Ms. Myers seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

MC-4031: 449 Broadway, by Cambridge Public Library. Freestanding illuminated signage proposal.

Before introducing the project team, staff outlined that the proposed art piece and illuminated sign proposal was subject to review by the Commission because the property is publicly owned and because the sign would require a variance for internal illumination.

Susan Flannery, Director of Libraries, introduced the project artist/designer Tom Wojciechowski. Ms. Flannery noted that two illuminated signs dating to 1967 were located on the property prior to the recent library expansion project. The goal of the project is to make sure people new to the community can easily identify the building as the Main Branch of the public library. Existing signage on the entrance canopy was thought to be difficult to read by passing drivers. The hope was to create signage closer to the sidewalk and along Broadway that was artistic in nature, incorporating images drawn from Cambridge history to engage the public and make the piece more educational and interactive.

The designer discussed the materials for the sign, which is a square column of translucent glass panels printed with the historic images and a steel base.

Ms. Goodwin asked if the branches of the adjacent willow tree would be in the way of the sign. Library staff said the branches are high and only minimal pruning would be required.

The Commission asked if library staff had received comments from the public that they had difficulties finding the library. Ms. Flannery said that the building's proximity to the high school causes confusion for some people, who think the library is part of the school complex.

There was discussion about the readability of the sign and the scale of the text, suggesting it might be legible to pedestrians but not vehicular traffic. Although illumination is proposed, the sign would not be lit outside of the library's hours of operation. Concerns were raised about the potential for vandalism, but library staff said they have yet to experience any following the expansion. The question was asked whether a more flexible sign format that could be changed seasonally had been considered rather than a static design.

Questions and comments were accepted from the public.

George Metzger of 90 Antrim Street spoke in favor of the signage proposal, saying that he felt this design was just right and that the location at the intersection of Broadway and Trowbridge seemed totally appropriate. He added that the glass column was subtle, transparent and would not compete with the building, but rather hints at what is behind it.

Margaret McMahon of 14 Highland Ave. spoke in opposition to the proposal, saying she felt it was superfluous and that the siting of the piece was not meant to be a library park but rather the Joan Lorenz Park.

Patricia Payne, Trustee of the Cambridge Public Library, said that this location is a focal point that introduces you to the library. She pointed out that not everyone knows this building and that she felt it was important to greet people from the street. The existing signage is very far away from the street, and this presents an opportunity to welcome visitors. The design also has a historic connection to the community.

Elizabeth Gombosi of 42 Irving Street said that she felt the building itself is an illuminated sign. She found the addition of this sign to be jarring, especially in a park and thought it was totally unnecessary.

Public comment was closed.

Ms. Goodwin commented that she had concerns about the height and readability of the sign, and that the design seemed more pedestrian focused due to the educational graphics. The designer said that the sign text and graphics were meant to be read from 40-90 feet.

Mr. Hsiao thanked the project team for their thoughtful presentation, stating that the library expansion has been a great success. He understood the current proposal as an effort to improve the library's graphic image/messaging and acknowledge the pedestrian while taking design cues from the building's contemporary materials. However, he said that it seems like the building itself already accomplishes much of this, especially since it is showcased by its location in a park. In many ways the building already is a sign. Ms. Perrault added that the framing of the main entrance is very symmetrical, and that this runs counter to that symmetry.

Staff asked for clarification from the Commission on the key points of concern, which were stated to be the proposed illumination as well as the scale of the signage.

Ms. Goodwin said that a mock-up of the sign and its illumination on site is beneficial for the Commission in its review. The other Commission members added that an on-site testing of the height and level of illumination would be helpful.

The Commission continued the hearing, to allow the applicants time to further develop the proposed installation and arrange for an Architects Committee meeting on site to view a mock-up of the desired height, materials and day/night illumination.

Determination of Procedure: Alterations to Designated Properties

MC-4036: 2 Clinton St., #31, by Cyril McArdle. Window replacement.

This application was received after the legal ad and abutter mailings were sent for this month's public hearing, which means that this case is being reviewed subject to an abutter notification mailing offering a 10-day appeal period to request a full public hearing next month.

The property under review is on the top floor of a 3-story multi-family condominium building. The Tudor Revival building was originally designed by architects Newhall & Blevins and was constructed in 1909.

Leaded glass windows at the front of the unit are currently removed for repair and are intended to go back into their original openings. That aspect of the project, since it is merely repair work, is exempt from this review. In addition, there is an air conditioning unit being installed at the roof level that will not be publicly visible making it also exempt from this review.

The proposed windows to be replaced are on the south elevation at the 3rd floor level. The current windows are asymmetrical wood double-hung windows, with a smaller upper sash and a larger lower sash. The current storm windows are aluminum with a meeting rail at the center of the opening, rather than in-line with the wood window's higher meeting rail. The replacement windows would be insulated vinyl windows to match the current sash proportions.

The Commissioners recommended repair and restoration of the wood windows and installation of new, high quality storms if energy efficiency was the concern. Compared to the lifespan of old-growth wood, vinyl windows cannot even compare in quality or durability, and the insulating value is soon lost due to failed seals that cannot be repaired.

There were no questions or comments from the public.

Ms. Litchfield made a motion to deny the application to replace wood windows with vinyl replacements, as they are a material that is incongruent with historic windows in the district. Ms. Perrault seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

MC-4037: 21-23 Leonard Ave., by Madelyn Yucht. Change window to a door on front elevation; new deck over front porch.

This application was received after the legal ad and abutter mailings were sent for this month's public hearing, which means that this case is being reviewed subject to an abutter notification mailing offering a 10-day appeal period to request a full public hearing next month.

The porch under review is on the front of an 1897 triple decker, which was originally design by architect Zebedee E. Cliff. The deck would be constructed at the second floor level, on top of the existing 1st floor entrance porch. One existing window opening is proposed to have the sill dropped to the floor to install a new door for access to the porch. The building is situated on a triangular lot that also borders Line Street, but the proposed work is primarily visible from Leonard Ave.

There were no questions or comments from the public.

Mr. Hsiao moved to approve the application as submitted with the following recommendations:

- Deck Railing: a wood railing of the same style as the existing is preferred
- New Door: wood preferred; maintain the same width as the existing window opening if code allows
- Door Glazing: a fixed pane of glass without muntins/grilles is preferred

Ms. Perrault seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy
Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 2/6/12

Tom Wojciechowski	35 Medford St., #202, Somerville, MA 02143
Cyril McArdle	21 Newton St., Brighton, MA 02135
Patricia Payne	931 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139
Pierre Humblet	13 Bigelow St., Cambridge, MA 02139
Marie Humblet	13 Bigelow St., Cambridge, MA 02139
Susan Flannery	Cambridge Public Library, 449 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02138
Warren Pearson	Cambridge Public Library, 449 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02138
Margaret McMahon	14 Highland Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139
Elizabeth Gombosi	42 Irving St., Cambridge, MA 02138
George Metzger	90 Antrim, Cambridge, MA