

**DRAFT Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission—THIS DRAFT HAS NOT YET BEEN REVIEWED OR APPROVED BY THE COMMISSION**

**Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission**

January 2, 2020 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge Senior Center - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: Bruce Irving, *Chair*; Joseph Ferrara, Chandra Harrington, Elizabeth Lyster, Jo Solet, *Members*; Gavin Kleespies, Paula Paris, *Alternates*

Members absent: Caroline Shannon, Susannah Tobin, *Members*; Kyle Sheffield, *Alternate*

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, *Executive Director*, Sarah Burks, *Preservation Planner*

Public present: See attached list.

Mr. Irving called the meeting to order at 6:05 P.M. He introduced Commissioners and staff and designated both alternates present to vote on all matters. He dispensed with the consent agenda procedure.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

**Case 4093: Harvard Square Kiosk & Plaza, by City of Cambridge.** Amend design of plaza to reflect safety improvements and review details of rooftop signs.

Mr. Sullivan explained that the commission had approved a Certificate of Appropriateness for the kiosk and plaza in May 2019. The current application was to amend aspects of the plaza site plan and to provide requested details of rooftop signs for the kiosk, which had been approved in principle with the condition to return with more information. He showed photographs from the 1940s to 1970s of rooftop signs on the kiosk.

City Engineer Kathy Watkins reported that Out of Town News had vacated the building. The interior had been cleared out and the temporary operator, Culture House, would occupy it until the City was ready to begin construction. A pedestrian had been killed crossing Brattle Street in September 2019. The City had conducted a safety audit and proposed that several improvements could be made, including widening the plaza toward the Coop to create a shorter crossing distance, installing striped markings, raising the bike line, adding a bike signal to cross over to the east side of Massachusetts Avenue at the north end of the plaza, and adding a flashing light at the Massachusetts Avenue and Church Street crosswalk.

Ted Touloukian, the architect for the kiosk, proposed placing three signs in the previous locations on the roof. Ms. Watkins explained that Mass DOT regulations required that only one of the three signs could have advertisements at any one time and that 15 hours per month must be available for DOT public service announcements. The proposed orientation and size of the signs was the same as in the May presentation. The signs would have a 5” thick shroud, a diagonal brace, and two vertical support members underneath the shroud. The brightness of the image could change at dusk.

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact from the Commission.

Dr. Solet asked about bike lane and pedestrian interaction. Ms. Watkins explained that planters on the north end of the plaza would deter pedestrians from crossing north of the crosswalk. The bike lane would be raised above street level. Mr. Kleespies suggested an initial period of enforcement for cyclists.

Mr. Ferrara noted the pinch point at the south end of the plaza. Ms. Paris asked at what point Massachusetts Avenue would narrow to a single lane. Ms. Watkins said it would narrow westbound at

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Dunster Street and southbound at Church Street. Dr. Solet expressed concern that Uber/Lyft drivers would block traffic if there were only one lane. Ms. Watkins said the Traffic Department was working with Uber and Lyft to determine specific locations for pick up and drop off. Ms. Lyster asked about stopped cars between the crosswalk markings. Ms. Watkins said the pavers would be the same as existing, but with a new specification for the subbase. Dr. Solet asked that with all the construction whether it was the right time to change traffic patterns. Ms. Watkins said there would be less impact now than later.

Mr. Kleespies asked if the City would allow non-event content on the signs. He suggested they consider artistic content and historic photos. Ms. Watkins agreed. Ms. Harrington asked if the signs would be distracting. Ms. Watkins said they would follow the safety regulations of MassDOT. Advertising would be subject to the City's standards (no cigarette ads, for example) and would pay for the operational costs of the kiosk.

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact from the public.

Brad Bellows of 87 Howard Street asked if other city buildings had advertising. Ms. Watkins said she wasn't aware of other buildings, but the bus stops did. Mr. Bellows said distracted driving would be a risk factor.

James Williamson of 1000 Jackson Place asked if traffic lights without masking were being considered. Ms. Watkins said they were studying all the options. Ms. Watkins said the goal for the advertising was to cover the operational costs of the kiosk. Mr. Williamson asked if there was a traffic analysis report. Ms. Watkins said the analysis had been done but she had not seen a written report.

Mr. Touloukian told Susie Thomas of 12 Murdock Street that the signs would be four feet high.

Suzanne Blier asked about the safety of the super-crosswalk. Ms. Watkins said there was a strong desire line at the north end of the intersection. Ms. Blier said the landmark report referenced periods of significance for the kiosk between 1927-28 and 1984, neither of which had signs present. The report also indicated that rooftop signs should not be allowed. Ms. Watkins said that overall signage clutter would be reduced from the previous condition.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked about the color temperature of the signs. Mr. Touloukian said the signs would have a range of color temperature but the brightness could be adjusted depending on the time of day.

Mr. Williamson asked about the hours of operation for the signs. Ms. Watkins said they would be operated 24 hours a day. Mr. Williamson said the signs were oriented toward vehicles. He asked if analog signs had been considered. Ms. Watkins said the signs would be visible to both vehicles and pedestrians. Static signs were inflexible and hard to change on a weekly or monthly basis.

Ms. Blier asked if the limitations set for the lit façade of 10 Church Street had been considered

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for this project. Ms. Watkins said she had not seen those requirements.

Mr. Irving opened public comment.

Vice Mayor Jan Devereux suggested striping the crosswalks soon. The signs could be distracting; the area was hyperactive already. She asked if the sign proportions were a standard proportion for advertising. She objected to the light pollution of the signs.

Brad Bellows said the widening of the plaza was a great idea. He commended the quality of the architect's drawings. The kiosk had been without signs longer than it had them. They would be a safety hazard and he wanted documentation of the safety study for them.

Mr. Touloukian told Randy Black of Murdock Street that the signs would not be solar powered.

Ms. Blier said it was a critically important building. The signs were a concern and there must be other ways to do advertising like sandwich boards or banners.

Ms. Meyer noted the elimination of the neon Out of Town News sign. The City was ignoring citizen concerns and suggestions. Digital billboards could be a Pandora's Box with inappropriate advertising.

Mr. Williamson noted that the accident report had not been issued yet. The crossing from Milk-Bar to CVS was very dangerous. The cut through with the raised bike lane should be studied further. It should not intersect with the plaza. More video screens were not needed. If the signs went forward, he suggested that only one be digital and the others be analog and that advertising not be allowed.

Heather Hoffman of 213 Hurley Street said the traffic lights should be visible to pedestrians and not masked to orient them only to the vehicles. The signs were not needed. Harvard square was cool enough without them.

Nicola Williams of 8 Brewer Street said the public process had been inadequate. The landmark report clearly recommended no billboards. "8 minutes to Park Street" would be okay but advertising would be distracting. There were many other ways to market local events.

Mr. Irving closed public comment.

Mr. Sullivan explained that the guideline in the landmark report was intended to discourage a large billboard on the top of the kiosk, an idea that had been proposed early on in the project planning. He said he had advised that the only appropriate format for advertising would be to replicate the size and proportion of the historic signs.

Mr. Kleespies said the tourism booth had been unsustainable and eventually became neglected. The kiosk needed to be self-sustaining. If the roof signs were the way to do that, he did not object. There was less advertising in the plaza now that the elevator headhouse had been rebuilt.

Dr. Solet said she opposed the motion to approve the certificate in May. Advertising revenue could be achieved inside the kiosk. The rooftop signs would detract attention from the building.

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Ms. Harrington said the proposed signs were not as she imagined them in May. “8 Minutes to Park Street” signs would be okay but the LED screens with advertising would ruin the building.

Ms. Lyster said she was wary of rooftop signs, but digital signs were even worse. How often could they change the image? Twenty-four hours a day was too much. How much revenue would they produce? Pop-up retail would be a good income source for the building.

Mr. Ferrara said he could support reduced signage focused on pedestrians and oriented more to the plaza and less to the street.

Mr. Irving said he had listened carefully to the comments and he was no longer convinced that the signs were a good idea. They were not wayfinding signs and could add to the visual complexity of the intersection. There must be other ways to produce revenue.

Ms. Harrington moved to approve the proposed changes to the plaza as proposed. Ms. Lyster seconded, and the motion passed 5-2 with Ms. Paris and Dr. Solet voting in opposition.

Ms. Harrington moved to not approve the signs as presented for all the reasons expressed by the public and commission. Dr. Solet seconded, and the motion passed 6-1 with Mr. Kleespies in opposition.

Public Hearing: Demolition Review

**Case D-1545: 51 Vassar St., MIT Building 44, by Massachusetts Institute of Technology.** Demolish the cyclotron building (1938).

Mr. Sullivan explained the demolition review procedure. He described Building 44 at MIT, built in 1938 as the one-story enclosure for a cyclotron and rebuilt in its present two-story form in 1962. He showed the current context of the building in a streetscape of much larger buildings. He described the simple modernism of the design with sloping window heads and finished in a buff brick consistent with MIT’s early-Modern buildings. He recommended that the Commission find the building significant for its associations with early research in nuclear technology and as the last remaining cyclotron in Cambridge.

Mr. Irving asked if there were questions of fact from the Commission or public. There were none. He asked for comments related to the building’s significance.

Dr. Solet moved to find the building significant as defined in the demolition ordinance and for the reasons given in the report. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion, which passed 7-0.

Sarah Gallop of MIT’s Office of Government & Community Relations explained that a cyclotron is an instrument for accelerating ions to extremely high velocities for use in atomic disintegration experiments. She explained the purpose of the proposed replacement building was to house a new College of Computing. This would be an interdisciplinary college for all students regardless of their school or discipline. The college would teach ethics and computer science and help build connections across disciplines.

Sonia Richards, MIT Program Manager, described the site selection and designer selection process. Several sites were considered and among the factors that contributed to the selection of this site were

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the proximity to the Stata Center, the Brain & Cognitive Science building, and the Main Group. The project would activate the pedestrian experience along this part of Vassar Street. The criteria considered in reviewing architectural proposals were ground floor activation, pedestrian experience, massing, façade design, and the ability to meet the programming needs of the college. Skidmore Owings & Merrill (SOM) had been selected as architects.

Travis Wanat, Senior Project Manager, described the project schedule and the history of the MIT Cyclotron. It was used for isotope isolation in medical research in the 1940s. Use of the cyclotron ended in the early 1960s. The large magnet that operated the cyclotron is still in the building and a time capsule is buried beneath it. Professor Samuel Ting discovered the J Particle as part of his research conducted in the building and won the Nobel prize in 1976. His lab had been moved to another building. The public art on the outside of the building had been relocated to the Alumni Pool. There would be space in the new building to display historical information about the cyclotron.

Emma Corbalan, MIT Project Manager, showed renderings of the SOM's design proposal. The building would extend over the railroad tracks to provide for larger floorplates on the upper stories. She described a glassy transparent façade with a high-performance wall system. A collaborative public zone would be located at the center of the building. She ended the presentation with a video walk-through of the design concept.

Ms. Harrington asked about the floor area. Ms. Corbalan said that it would be about 165,000sf.

Dr. Solet recalled the presentation by Frank Gehry of a very early design concept for the Stata Center. Ms. Gallop said they would commit to further consultation with staff as the details of the design are worked out. The design for this building was not as far out as Gehry's concept. Dr. Solet asked about sound considerations of the glass building. Ms. Corbalan said that SOM was very accomplished at designing glass buildings and could execute all the appropriate details of the light, sound, reflections, etc.

Mr. Kleespies said there was a lot of interesting modern and contemporary architecture in this part of the city and yet the opportunities to build a big statement building are rare in Cambridge. Was this design bold enough? Ms. Corbalan said the selection committee saw a lot of interesting ideas presented in the design competition. The winning design was somewhat reserved, but elegant and clean.

Vice Mayor Devereux asked how the building would relate to the public path along the railroad tracks. Ms. Corbalan said they would work closely with the City on that.

Ms. Corbalan told John Hawkinson that the design principal was Colin Koop.

Ms. Hoffman commented that the building did not have a human-friendly scale.

Mel Downes of Walden Street asked if the cyclotron would be relocated. Mr. Wanat answered that it would be dismantled. The science had evolved, and the cyclotron was no longer needed.

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Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Mr. Sullivan explained that the criteria for deciding that a significant building should be found preferably preserved is a determination of whether the public interest would be best served by a delay or by allowing the proposed project to proceed. The Commission was usually presented with schematic designs during a demolition review hearing, rather than the greater level of detail required for a landmark or historic district design review. In the present case MIT had presented a conceptual level of design, but he noted that the Commission had allowed MIT to take down significant buildings with this level of detail or only with a promise to return for further review. This had occurred with Bexley Hall and with the Rinaldi Tile building.

Dr. Solet asked if the staff would review the design going forward or if it would come back to the Commission. Ms. Gallop indicated that the project would go through the major project review design process with the Planning Board. She anticipated there would be several hearings as part of that review.

Ms. Harrington was pleased that MIT planned to preserve artifacts and the history of the building.

Mr. Kleespies moved to find that the existing building was not preferably preserved in the context of the proposed replacement. Ms. Harrington seconded, and the motion passed 7-0.

Mr. Irving asked when the time capsule would be opened. Dr. Solet asked if they could attend. Ms. Gallop said she would invite the Commission to the event.

**Case D-1546: 41 Tremont St., by 41 Tremont St. Ventures LLC.** Relocate house (1846) on same lot.

Ms. Burks showed slides and summarized the staff report. She recommended that the house be found significant for its associations with the first phase of development of Tremont Street in the mid-1840s and for its architectural integrity as an example of the Greek Revival style. She noted that staff had determined that the outbuildings at the rear of the lot were not significant and they were not the subject of the hearing. The application included removal of the ell and foundation and relocation of the main block of the house onto a new foundation. New units would be constructed in the rear.

Mr. Irving asked if there were questions of fact about the significance of the building.

Beth Pendry of 14 Tremont Street said several neighbors wanted to preserve the character of the neighborhood and had not fully developed their lots. Tony Iarrobino of 19 Murdock Street agreed that the house was significant. Jeffrey Purcell of 20 Tremont Street said the house was very significant.

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period about significance.

Dr. Solet moved to find the house significant for the reasons given in the staff report and as defined in the ordinance. Mr. Kleespies seconded, and the motion passed 7-0.

Robert Linn, the architect, explained that the Residence C-1 zoning allowed for additional density. He proposed removing the ell and moving the house to the left and slightly back to achieve

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conforming side and front setbacks. The design of the two new units was still a work in progress but they would be contemporary in style. The floor-to-ceiling heights in the house were low, the second floor being under 7 feet. He proposed a lower foundation so no porch railing would be needed, increasing the second-floor to ceiling height, and adding dormers.

Dr. Solet asked about curb conditions on Murdock Street. Mr. Linn said they proposed one opening for a driveway and three parking spaces.

Mr. Kleespies expressed concern about the extent of changes to the existing house. Ms. Burks asked for clarification about the scope of demolition because the application had only been for moving the house. Demolishing the ell was also included on the plans shown to the Commission. Mr. Irving asked how much the house would be increased in height. Mr. Linn said it would be 14" taller; the roof would be raised, trim reconstructed, and the third-floor level moved up.

Mr. Linn told Ms. Lyster that the new units be the same height as the front house.

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact about the development plan.

Ms. Pendry asked if the building needed to be moved in order to lower the foundation. Mr. Linn replied in the negative, and he explained that the existing non-conforming setbacks prevented construction of dormers on the north side. If the house stayed where it was the changes would not be in keeping with its style, such as large dormers only on the south side.

Don McCusker of 42 Tremont Street said he understood the need for better space on the top floor. He did not object to relocating the house, but the dormers would negatively change its look. The new units at the back did not conform to the look of the neighborhood. Mr. Linn explained that the units at the back could be constructed as-of-right by zoning, even if the house remained in its existing location.

Attorney Sean Hope apologized for the inaccurate description of the scope of work on the application. If left in its current location, the dormers would be off balance on the south side of the roof. He said he would be happy to meet with the neighbors about the rear houses.

Mr. Iarrobino asked how the contractor planned to access the site; Murdock Street was only 8.5 feet wide. Mr. Hope said they could get a temporary construction curb cut from Tremont Street.

Karen McGuire of 22 Tremont Street asked why the parking was not located on the Tremont Street side of the lot. Mr. Hope said there was no curb cut on Tremont Street. Ms. McGuire asked the dimensions of the ell. Ms. Burks answered that it was 14' x 19' in plan.

Randy Black of 17 Murdock Street asked about the proposed Tremont Street addresses of the back units and wayfinding if they are accessed from Murdock Street.

Steve Blossum of 14 Murdock Street said the outbuilding would not be. There was a parking issue to work out on Murdock Street. He recommended that the applicants meet with the neighbors.

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Dr. Solet asked about the potential for a district or group of landmarks in the vicinity. It was a unique neighborhood. Mr. Sullivan said there were always options.

Mr. Ferrara said the Commission did not have enough information about the proposed changes to the house and the description in the application had been inadequate for proper notice.

Mr. Kleespies said he recognized that the applicants were trying to save the house. A lot of what the proposed was reasonable but the plans needed to be clarified.

Mr. Sullivan said he had no objection to the relocation, but he did object to lowering the foundation or raising the roof because the intact original exterior would be destroyed and the elongated facade would destroy the proportions of the house. The dormers would be disfiguring. He suggested creating a cathedral ceiling on the second floor rather than raising the roof. He recommended that the existing house be found preferably preserved. He noted that the house could be considered a potential landmark.

Mr. Irving said the proportions of a Greek Revival house were very important. A raised foundation emphasized the temple-like quality intended by the style.

Dr. Solet moved to find the house preferably preserved in the context of the proposed relocated and altered building. Ms. Paris seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 without further discussion.

Mr. Sullivan indicated that the applicants were welcome to return with a revised proposal at any time during the one-year demolition delay.

#### Minutes

The Commission reviewed the November 7, 2019 draft minutes.

Dr. Solet offered corrections on pages 1, 2, 4, and 9. She moved to approve the minutes as corrected. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion, which passed 7-0.

#### Director's Report

Mr. Hawkinson asked how the MIT/CHC protocol related to the demolition review ordinance. Mr. Sullivan answered that he could not waive the demolition review process provided for in the ordinance. Ms. Burks noted that Building 44 was not listed on the National Register and therefore would not have been subject to the protocol in the first place.

Ms. Paris moved to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Solet seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 10:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks  
Preservation Planner



**Members of the Public  
Who Signed the Attendance List on January 2, 2020**

Anthony Carrera	10 Murdock St
Dan McCusker	42 Tremont St
Travis Wanat	MIT
Sonia Richards	MIT
Emma Corbalan	MIT
Sarah Gallop	MIT
Suzanne Blier	5 Fuller Pl
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St
Brad Bellows	87 Howard St
Can Keskin	12 Murdock St
Edwin M. Steckevez	17 Murdock St
James Williamson	1000 Jackson Pl
Steve Blossom	16 Richardson Rd, Newton 02464 (owns 14 Murdock)
John Hawkinson	Cambridgeday.com
Rebecca Rahmlov	Touloukian Touloukian Inc.
Grisnette Yolon	Touloukian Touloukian Inc.
Jan Devereux	City Council
Heather Hoffman	213 Hurley St
Nicola Williams	8 Brewer St
Tuesday Thomas	12 Murdock St
Karen McGuire	22 Tremont St
Tony Iarrobino	19 Murdock St

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.