

Approved 9/4/2014

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

August 7, 2014 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge Senior Center - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: William King, *Chair*; Bruce Irving, *Vice Chair*; William Barry, Chandra Hanington, Jo M. Solet, *Members*; Shary Page Berg, Joseph Fenara, Susannah Tobin, *Alternates*

Members absent: M. Wyllis Bibbins, Robert Crocker, *Members*

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

Public present: See attached list.

Mr. King called the meeting to order at 6:03 P.M. He made introductions and dispensed with the Consent Agenda. He reviewed hearing procedures and designated the alternates to vote with Ms. Tobin and Mr. Ferrara voting on the first case, then Ms. Berg and Ms. Tobin on the second, etc.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 3308: 534-536 Mass Ave., by The New Dance Complex, Inc. c/o Richard Getz, Treasurer.
Demolish non-original components of existing storefront and construct new storefront for ground floor dance studio. Alter rear elevation.

Ms. Berg recused herself because her husband, a lighting specialist, was consulting on the project.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides of the building, a designated landmark designed by Hartwell & Richardson in 1884 for the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. He summarized the application to demolish the existing, non-original storefront and to construct a new storefront within the opening of cast iron lintel and masonry piers. He displayed the original elevation drawing, noting that two stained glass transom windows over the storefront were intact behind a sign.

Peter DiMuro, Executive Director of the Dance Complex, explained that the intent of the redesign was to create a street-level portal for dance while keeping the character of the historic building. The space would be used for dance classes, a place to hang art, and as a reception space for events.

Vital Albuquerque, the architect, described the scope of work, which included new bathrooms, an accessible entry off the vestibule, reopened windows on the back wall, and new storefront glazing. He noted that there was an 8" grade change from the sidewalk to the ground floor, so using the already sloped entrance to make the change was preferable to having a door at the sidewalk. The wall of the vestibule would be opened up with glass, as per the original elevations, increasing visibility into the space. The stained glass transoms would be restored and a center panel added. There would also be a leaded glass transom above the new glazing in the vestibule. He noted that the slope of the ramp up to the vestibule did not meet current accessibility codes and that some modification would be necessary. A tiled floor with "IOOF" was located in that vestibule.

Mr. Sullivan suggested a meeting with city staff and the architect to discuss code requirements.

James Williamson of 1000 Jackson Place said the existing storefront was awful. He suggested that an entry door be located at the front of the new storefront, to encourage future commercial tenancy of the space. He asked if fire egress was provided in the design. Mr. Albuquerque replied in the affirmative.

Mr. Barry asked if a horizontal band at a height of approximately 4' (like in the original elevation) had been considered. Mr. Albuquerque answered that the intent was to keep the storefront as open as possible while retaining the original three-bay pattern.

Dr. Solet moved to approve the application subject to approval by staff of construction details, including accessibility improvements and the design of new stained glass. Mr. Irving seconded the motion. There was no discussion and the motion passed 7-0, with alternates Tobin and Ferrara voting.

Case 3309: 205 Brattle St., by Katrina Armstrong & Thomas Randall. Add skylights; expand window well for egress; construct dormer addition on north elevation.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides of the house, a Federal Revival designed in 1954 by architect John Abbott. He noted that the house preceded the historic district. He described the visibility from Brattle Street and Lexington Avenue and noted the recent construction of an 8' fence on the property line. He summarized the current application for an addition, window well, and skylights.

Paul Fiore of Foley + Fiore Architects said the owners had purchased the home about a year ago. The window well was desired for egress from a basement play room. The retaining wall would project 6-8 inches above grade and would be capped with bluestone. A ladder would be located inside the well. He described the proposed rear addition and the location of the new skylights. He was unsure when the fence was installed or by whom.

Mr. Barry suggested that the addition could be modified with the cornice of the main roof running through the projecting bay or by constructing a continuous shed dormer. Mr. Fiore indicated that he had considered some of those options, and reviewed his design intent.

Dr. Solet asked if the skylight could be located on the back side of the building. Mr. Fiore noted that there was a skylight on the rear already. The new front-facing skylight would help light a dark space.

Ms. Harrington asked about the existing basement window. Mr. Fiore explained that it was a high basement window, not large enough to crawl through.

Mr. Irving moved to approve the application as submitted, subject to review of construction details by staff. Ms. Tobin seconded, and the motion carried 7-0 with alternates Tobin and Berg voting.

Mr. Sullivan said he would follow up about the fence.

Case 3310: 66 Winthrop St., by University Assoc. of Greater Boston. Install electronic sign.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides of the church, built in 1954, and the steps to the basement, part of a 1999 renovation.

Bruce Broolsma, the president of the church council, described some of their programs, including a student-run homeless shelter. The building was used six nights a week and it was a challenge to communicate all the activities in an effective way. The property was in two zoning districts (Business B on the western edge and Residence C-1 for the rest). Most of the foot traffic occurred at the corner of

Winthrop and Dunster streets. He described the proposed flat-screen monitor (approximately 50" wide), which was designed to be vandal-proof, cleanable, and shatter resistant.

Dr. Solet noted that auto traffic on Dunster Street was one way northbound between Winthrop and Mt. Auburn Street.

Ms. Harrington asked how the church currently posted its programs and announcements. Mr. Brolsma answered that there was a classic static display sign and a sandwich board. Typical events were concerts, special meetings, and services.

Ms. Burks asked whether the church had consulted the city about zoning regulations. She said the proposed sign could need a variance for height and illumination in a residential district.

Ms. Berg was concerned about setting a precedent for internally illuminated signs and moving content. There were many churches in the district.

Mr. Sullivan said he had discussed the same concerns with the church administrator and had suggested that the monitor be located on the concrete wall rather than on a pole above the wall. He also suggested limiting the refresh timing of the content. Mr. Brolsma said the pole mounting would deter vandals. Content on the sign was flexible. The thickness of the unit would not allow it to fit on the wall without interfering with the handrails for the stairs.

Dr. Solet was concerned that controlling the refreshment rate could impact free speech.

Mr. Williamson asked if the tree would be affected. Mr. Brolsma said it would be trimmed. Mr. Williamson asked if students were the anticipated audience for the sign. Mr. Brolsma answered in the affirmative. He added that the church would be amenable to turning off the sign at a designated hour.

Mr. Barry noted there was nothing specific in the application about the dimensions, materials, illumination, mounting, etc. of the sign.

Dr. Solet suggested orienting the sign parallel to Dunster Street south of the basement stairs. Mr. Brolsma wanted to angle the sign so that it would be visible from both streets.

Mr. Williamson objected to the monitor, and spoke in favor of a traditional bulletin board.

Mr. Sullivan said the location included buildings of a residential scale and use and said it would be inappropriate to have an electronic sign in this setting, or anywhere in the Old Cambridge Historic District. He contrasted this site with the busy setting of the Harvard Square Information Booth, where the Commission had approved TV screens.

Mr. Barry said he would need more detail in order to make a decision, but did not think an electronic or digital sign format was out of the question for the setting. It was a signage format that the Commission ~~would have~~ should prepare itself to deal with at some point.

Mr. Irving noted that the application was incomplete. He moved to find the proposed 50" wide pole-mounted screen inappropriate in its intended context, and to deny the application without prejudice. Mr. Barry seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with alternates Ferrara and Berg voting.

Determination of Procedure: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 3257: 8 Willard St., by G. Mead and Ann S. Wyman. Request to amend Certificate to substitute natural stone materials for the new retaining wall.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and distributed a photo of the proposed natural stone.

Mr. King asked if there was precedent in the district for fieldstone masonry. Mr. Ferrara answered that his house had fieldstone.

Ms. Harrington moved to amend the previously-issued certificate of appropriateness to allow the new stone, subject to 10-day notice procedures. Mr. Barry seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with alternates Ferrara and Tobin voting. [Dr. Solet left the room].

Minutes

Mr. King offered corrections to the July 10 minutes on pages 5 and 7.

Mr. Ferrara moved to approve the minutes as corrected. Ms. Tobin seconded, and the motion passed 6-0 with Ferrara, Tobin, Harrington, Barry, Irving, and King voting.

New Business

57 John F. Kennedy St., by Raj Dhandra, owner. Informational discussion of new design concept. (Public meeting but not a public hearing; no application had been filed and no decisions would be made.)

[Dr. Solet returned].

Mr. King explained that the proponent had asked to show the Commission a new design for informal comment. No application had been submitted and there would be no public comment.

Raj Dhandra, the property owner, said he had rethought the project at the Galeria and brought in a consulting architect. The new concept was for office and commercial use, not residential. The addition was about 17,000 square feet compared to the 26,000 of the earlier design.

Mr. King asked if he had spoken with the interested members of the Harvard Square community about the new ideas. Mr. Dhandra replied that he planned to do so after this meeting and before coming back to the Commission for a public hearing.

Mr. Williamson asked if the matter had been included on the mailed meeting notice; other people would have been interested had they known about it. Ms. Burks explained that the mailed notices list only the public hearing cases. Mr. Sullivan noted that the item had been included on the agenda posted at the City Clerk's office.

Annem Chan Waiy of Peter Quinn Architects showed renderings and shadow studies for a three-story addition on top of the building, with each story stepped back to minimize shadows on the park.

Mr. Barry asked about materials. Ms. Waiy said it wasn't fully decided but the third floor transition layer would be wood or high density composite and the top two levels would be metal. The deck railing would be glass. Mr. Barry commented that the massing was complex and there was a lot of

variety in the materials. He said he would rather see a unified building than a stack of boxes. The elevation views helped to show the cohesiveness of the design.

Dr. Solet remarked that the horizontal band of windows on the second floor facing JFK Street resembled a CD player. Ms. Waiy said they had chosen to use basic geometric shapes because they worked better with the existing building. Dr. Solet said there should be a stronger sense of coherence in the composition.

Mr. Ferrara said the massing was substantially improved compared to prior designs.

Mr. King said it was beneficial to have pushed the larger masses back against the garage.

Mr. Williamson commented that the architect's shadow impact study was confusing and just a play of numbers. It was a process of averaging averages.

Mr. Irving said it was a good idea to use the existing building as the base. Colors and materials would be very important. The limited shadow impact was good.

FY 2015 Community Preservation Act (CPA) project recommendations

Mr. Sullivan reviewed his memo of August 5 summarizing municipal proposals for CPA funding. The amount recommended for the preservation grant program was \$600,000, an increase of \$100,000 from last year. He summarized his recommendations for the other projects.

Ms. Harrington moved to approve the municipal projects as recommended by the staff. Ms. Tobin seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 with alternates Tobin and Berg voting.

Dr. Solet remarked on the negative effects of the City's new LED street lights with their blue spectrum. It was troubling that the decision had been made without considering sleep science data.

Ms. Harrington moved to adjourn. Ms. Tobin seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed the Attendance List on August 7, 2014**

Jayne Murphy	16 Campbell Park
Mary McCarthy	26 Marion Rd #2, Watertown 02472
Peter Di Muro	c/o Dance Complex, 536 Mass. Ave.
Bruce Broisma	59 Baldwin St, Tewksbury 01876
Vital Albuquerque	22 Bigelow St

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.