

Approved 4/1/10

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

March 4, 2010 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: Chair King; Vice Chair Irving; Dr. Solet; Mss. Berg and Harrington;
Messrs. Bibbins, Crocker, Ferrara, and Shirley

Staff present: Mr. Sullivan, Ms. Burks

Public present: See attached list.

With a quorum present, Chair King called the meeting to order at 6:06 P.M. and introduced the commissioners and staff. He described the consent agenda procedure and asked if there were any cases that a member of the public, commission, or staff would recommend for approval per the consent agenda and for which it was not necessary to have a full hearing. No items were selected for the consent agenda.

Public Hearings: Continued Cases

Case 2473: 156 Brattle St., by Barbara Piette. Install vent caps on the exterior of the house for direct vent gas fireplaces.

Ms. Burks summarized the application and asked the owner's representative to describe the proposed location of the second vent cap and what type of vent cap was preferred.

Thomas Blake, the contractor, indicated on a photograph where the vent caps would be located. He described the three types of caps under consideration; the honeycomb variety could be painted to match the house.

Ms. Harrington asked if other such vent caps had been installed in the district.

Mr. Sullivan replied that they had, but that none were facing Brattle Street. The application would have been approved administratively if the locations had not been visible from a public way.

Messrs. Irving, King, and Ferrara and Dr. Solet asked technical questions about the vents. Mr. Blake answered that they would not emit steam, would not be blocked by snow, would be positioned below the cornice trim, could not be directed up through the roof, and were designed to prevent hot air from damaging the surrounding painted wood materials.

There were no questions or comments from members of the public.

Mr. Shirley said the caps were not attractive and he had installed them at the back of houses, not the front.

Mr. Irving said it was a mechanical structure. The square vent cap, if painted with high temperature paint, would be acceptable. He moved to approve the installation on those conditions. Mr. Crocker seconded the motion, which passed 4-2. Messrs. Shirley and Bibbins voted in opposition and Ms. Harrington abstained.

Case 2445 (continued): 1991 Massachusetts Ave., by Saint James Episcopal Church. Review project details. *Request received from proponents to postpone hearing until at least April 1, 2010.*

Mr. King reported that the hearing had been postponed at the request of the applicant.

Public Hearing: Landmark Designation Proceedings

Mr. Sullivan explained that the next two hearing were scheduled per the Commission's policy that a hearing to consider landmark designation be scheduled prior to the expiration of a demolition delay period for preferably preserved significant buildings. He explained the landmark study process and read from the ordinance the criteria for landmark designations.

Case L-92/D-1176: 111 Clifton St., by S. Kaiser Bhuyan. Consider initiating landmark designation study.

Ms. Burks showed slides and reviewed the staff report for the 1884 house. The proposed replacement project would closely resemble the townhouse built across the street a few years ago.

Mr. King noted that the Commission had reviewed the potential replacement at the demolition review hearing. He pointed out, however, that if the Commission did not to initiate a landmark study, the owner could build whatever he wanted at the end of the demolition delay period, subject to other codes and building regulations in the city. He asked the proponents to describe the current plans.

Kaiser Bhuyan, the owner, said he had not been notified of the hearing, but had heard about it from his builder, Kevin Emery. Mr. Bhuyan said his house was not significant architecturally and had not been designed by a prominent architect. It would be replaced by better homes. A landmark study was not warranted, in his opinion. The replacement project did not need any zoning relief and conformed to all city codes.

Ms. Harrington asked if the owner had spoken to his neighbors about their concerns about the replacement project. Mr. Bhuyan answered that he had not met with them, and that the opposition was mostly sentimental. He noted that the maple tree in the back yard was not very old and did not shade the neighbors.

Mr. King asked for public comment.

Kevin Emery, the builder, said the similar building at 122 Clifton Street was aesthetically pleasing and fit in well in the neighborhood.

Victor Posinski of 104 Clifton Street said the neighborhood wasn't like Brattle Street, but if that was the criteria for preservation, then half the city could be bulldozed. The workers cottages in the racecourse neighborhood shared a common feeling and character. It had been a working class neighborhood with a lot of French Canadians. A new building should be consistent in scale.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street said 122 Clifton Street was not bad new construction but the character of older homes was being lost in the City.

Sylvia Barnes of 196 Harvey Street noted that Mr. Emery had built several buildings in the neighborhood. Parking was getting congested because of the number of new units in the vicinity. She asked if off-street parking would be accommodated in the proposed plan. Mr. Bhuyan replied that there would be a garage for each unit.

Rick Snedeker of 107 Clifton Street expressed concern about the loss of green space next door to his house. The existing house was a good example of its style.

Janet Snedeker of 107 Clifton Street said that 111 Clifton Street provided a buffer between her house and the large brick apartment building. It was a good solid house and she saw no reason to tear it down.

Mr. Bhuyan said he planned to keep the new house well maintained. There would be a large rear setback, preserving much of the green space. He was adding one more single family home.

Mr. King closed public testimony.

Mr. Irving said the house did not warrant landmark status.

Ms. Harrington asked about the rarity of the workers cottage type. Mr. Sullivan replied that there were a few hundred workers cottages in the City, most of which had been altered. It was an endangered type because many families find them incompatible with modern living standards. It was an indigenous type to working class neighborhoods near industries like the brick yards.

Mr. Ferrara agreed it would not be appropriate to landmark this house. But he recommended that the characteristics of the workers cottage be considered and the replacement building should be consistent.

Mr. Shirley said many ideas could be accommodated by the form of the existing building. It seemed possible to meet the goals of the homeowner without demolishing the house. He agreed, however, that it would be difficult to find that the house rose to landmark level. He encouraged the staff to do further research into how many workers cottages were left. A certain number of them were needed in order to preserve the character of the neighborhood. Vernacular architecture could have similar value to a community even though it was not high style. How should vernacular architecture get preserved? Dr. Solet agreed with Mr. Shirley's comments and encouraged the owner to investigate other options short of demolition.

Mr. Bhuyan replied that he had asked the same questions. The house was dark, with uneven floors. He looked into all options but he wanted to have a regular kitchen and bathroom. His decision was to build new.

Ms. Harrington said she could understand both sides of the situation. The discussion was important for the issues in the neighborhood to be identified.

Mr. King said there were a variety of historic preservation tools. He suggested that the staff consider a district study of some kind.

Mr. Irving moved to not initiate a landmark designation study for 111 Clifton Street. Mr. Crocker seconded the motion, which passed 7-0.

Case L-93/D-1177: 66-76 Harvey St., by Ronald A. Arslanian. Consider whether to initiate landmark designation study.

Ms. Burks showed slides and summarized the staff report about the former Heard A.M.E. Chapel of 1922. She described the folk Gothic design, executed in cast stone blocks.

Dick Nyon, representing the owner, said there was an agreement to sell the property to Kevin Emery and his partner. Mr. Nyon said that the feedback he had heard from the neighborhood was that they did not want the church use. The owners had not sold it to another church out of respect to that sentiment.

Kevin Emery, the potential buyer, said there were some adjustments made to the earlier plan because of FAR requirements in the zoning code. The footprint had shrunk a little but the design was similar. The lot would be divided into two with two units built on each lot. The design would be the same as at 122 Clifton Street.

Mr. Shirley asked if he had considered converting the existing building into residential. Mr. Emery replied that it had not been considered because the building did not meet market expectations.

Chris Lim of 134 Reed Street asked if the site plan would be the same as shown in October, with a wide center space between the two buildings. Mr. Emery replied in the affirmative.

Eamon Fee, Mr. Emery's business partner, said both buildings had been shrunk by 250 square feet. Mr. Lim's comments had been taken into consideration. There would be 3' additional space at the first floor between the new building and Mr. Lim's property.

Ian Jackson of 65 Harvey Street said he would prefer it to stay an active church. Parking for four new units might be a problem with only one spot for each on the site.

Ellie Stevenson of 80 Harvey Street spoke in favor of residential use and the proposed replacement buildings. She liked the design.

Robert Stevenson of 80 Harvey Street said he was the closest abutter. He spoke in favor of demolition. The church was very noisy. The wood shop was smelly. There should not be a business there, and residential use would be better.

Fran Waksler of 126R Reed Street described exhaust fumes and noise related to the former church. She would prefer the building remain empty but knew that wasn't possible. She objected to the same design being built throughout the neighborhood.

Norman Waksler of 126R Reed Street said the building was not important, architecturally.

Eve Carr of 128 Reed Street said she was okay with either use. The builders should keep the neighbors in mind when designing the new buildings and make concessions where possible.

Aileen Callahan of 69 Harvey Street said the proposed replacement was suitable to the character of the neighborhood. A historic marker should be installed to describe the history of the old building.

Mr. King closed public testimony.

Dr. Solet thought that the existing building could be converted to residential use. Mr. Nyon said that the owners had studied that possibility and hired engineers. The conversion would require that the building be gutted and everything be rebuilt inside. It would be prohibitively expensive. The walls would need to be reinforced or buttressed to support new floors inside.

Mr. King said the building's history was interesting but he did not support landmark study.

Mr. Bibbins observed that some of the interesting church details had been removed including the tower. It now looked much less like a church. The alterations had diminished the design. He moved to not initiate a landmark designation study. Mr. Crocker seconded the motion, which passed 6-0. Dr. Solet abstained.

Mr. King called for a brief recess.

[Mr. Crocker left].

Determination of Procedure: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 2478: 27 Holyoke Pl., by President & Fellows of Harvard College. Construct student garden including raised planting beds, accessible paths, seating, trellis, and landscaping.

Mr. Sullivan distributed a photo of the lot and summarized the application for a student garden.

Mark Verkennis of Harvard University Planning explained that the project was a collaborative effort of the Food Literacy Project, the Accessibility staff, University Dining Services, and the Center for Health and the Global Environment. He reviewed the proposed site plan. The one building on the lot was an electrical substation.

The below-grade electrical lines would dictate the location of the raised garden beds. The design was developed by students at the Graduate School of Design. He described the proposed first phase to begin in Spring 2010, including improving sidewalks, creating a new entry in the fence, construction of a level patio and raised beds, and installation of identification signs. The longer term work would include a theme garden, shady seating near the Linden tree, a vine trellis which could have a projection screen attached, and an outdoor art space. The materials would include untreated wood planters and stone dust paths. The garden would be student-run with oversight by the Center for Health and the Global Environment. Two full time interns would be hired to maintain the garden during the summer.

Ms. Berg said the idea was radical for Harvard. She expressed concern that the plants would be stolen.

Kathleen Frith of the Center for Health and the Global Environment said they had considered the security needs. Lowell House had security and the garden entrance would not be on Mt. Auburn Street.

Dr. Solet said the maintenance of the lawn should also set a green example. She encouraged educational efforts and community participation through a web site and involvement of summer school students. Ms. Frith said there would be a strong community component with workshops, etc.

Ms. Burks asked if all the beds would be raised, and Mr. Verkennis replied in the affirmative.

Ms. Harrington recommended a permanent art display against the brick wall. Ms. Frith said the university was talking to the Phoenix Club about an artistic trellis there. It would be part of a future phase.

Mr. Ferrara noted that the city's school system had a City Sprouts program. Ms. Frith said the university was working closely with that group.

Dr. Solet moved to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness, subject to the ten day notice procedures, and on the condition that construction details be approved by the staff. Mr. Irving seconded the motion. Mr. King noted the garden would receive northeast light. He designated Ms. Berg to vote, and the motion passed 7-0.

Preservation Grants

IPG Case 09-9: Holy Trinity Parish House, 145 Brattle Street. Increase \$25,000 grant to \$27,200 in recognition of extra costs to repair unanticipated rot in the portico and structural members of the cornice.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and reported that the Commission had previously granted \$25,000 to rebuild the cornice and gutter on the house. The church had requested an extra \$2,200 for extra costs resulting from unanticipated rot in the portico and structural members.

Mr. Irving moved to approve the grant. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion. Mr. King designated Mr. Ferrara to vote, and the motion passed 7-0.

Mr. Shirley asked about the shutters, and Mr. Sullivan replied that they were pre-existing. They were the wrong size but were in good condition.

Minutes

Mr. King said he had no corrections to the January and February minutes.

Dr. Solet said that on page two of the February 4 minutes, tenth paragraph, it should read, "seating on the low wall."

Ms. Harrington corrected line three on page three to change “find” to “fund.” She also said she had not been present and could not have seconded the motion to adjourn.

Dr. Solet moved to approve the January minutes, as presented. Mr. Irving seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with Messrs. King, Bibbins, Irving and Ferrara, Dr. Solet, and Mss. Berg and Harrington voting. Mr. Shirley did not vote because he had not been present in January.

Mr. Shirley moved to approve the February minutes, as corrected. Mr. Bibbins seconded, and the motion passed 5-0, with Messrs. Irving, Bibbins, and Shirley, Dr. Solet, and Mss. Berg voting. Messrs. King and Ferrara and Ms. Harrington did not vote because they had not been present in February.

Executive Director’s Report

Mr. Sullivan said he would have Preservation Award nominations available for discussion at the April 1 meeting. The program would be on May 20.

He reported that interviews for the Preservation Administrator position were underway. The new Avon Hill NCD rules were in effect. A purchase and sale agreement had been signed for the Shady Hill Square center lot. The preservation restriction was being reviewed.

Dr. Solet moved for adjournment, and Mr. Shirley seconded. The motion passed unanimously at 8:39 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 3/4/10**

Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St
Kathleen Frith	196 Larch Rd
Norman Waksler	126R Reed St
Frances Waksler	126R Reed St
Robert Stevenson	80 Harvey St
Ellie Stevenson	80 Harvey St
Eve Carr	128 Reed St
Aileen Callahan	69 Harvey St
Kaiser Bhuyan	111 Clifton St
Thomas Blake	23 Centre Ave, Belmont, MA 02478

Town is Cambridge unless otherwise indicated.