

Minutes of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

December 9, 2013 - 6:00 PM at Friends Meeting House, 5 Longfellow Park, Cambridge–

Members present: James Van Sickle *Chair*; William King, Deborah Masterson *members*; Marie-Pierre Dillenseger, Peter Schur, Charles Smith *alternates*

Members absent: Judith Dortz, Michael Robertson (resigning), *members*

Staff present: Susan Maycock

Members of the Public: see attached list

Chair Van Sickle called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM. He introduced the Commissioners and staff present and welcomed the new alternates Marie-Pierre Dillenseger and Peter Schur. To reach quorum, he designated Ms. Dillenseger as a voting member for this meeting, and Mr. King then ceded his vote to Dr. Schur so that he could participate in this his first meeting.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Property

HCM-220: 138 Mount Auburn St., by HartFam LLC. Alter existing Vertical Lift Platform to accommodate the replacement unit required by code.

Ms. Maycock reviewed the renovation history of 136-138 Mount Auburn Street built as a simple Greek Revival in 1853. The original gable roof burned off about 1970. She showed photographs of its original configuration, the inappropriate modern additions made after the fire, and the 1997 mansard roof, brackets, and bays that replaced the work done in the 1970s. In 1999 a vertical lift at the rear east corner was approved by the HC NCD Commission to avoid having an intrusive ramp on the west side. That lift is now deteriorated and code has changed to require further modifications to the enclosure, including adding a roof. The owner wishes to replace the current lift with a new lift that meets code and to house it in a way that is consistent with the color and materials of the house.

Joseph Hart, the owner, said that in 1999 when the lift was put in, there were not many models to follow. The lift is now deteriorated, and he would like to replace the whole unit with something more compatible with the building. The project is highly code-driven and must follow the codes of the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board which sets the height; the only aspect he has power over is the exterior. He described the standard exterior that is plexiglass and aluminum and said that he would prefer something that looked more like the building, with clapboards and corner boards. In response to a question from Mr. Van Sickle, he said that the current lift is open to the elements and is really an interior lift that was used on the exterior. All exterior lifts are now enclosed.

Mr. Van Sickle asked if the Commission had any questions of fact.

Ms. Masterson asked whether the lift takes the occupant up to the level of the first floor and whether there had to be work done to the landing pad. Mr. Hart said that the lift reached the first floor and that the existing pad could be reused. The only changes would be to the exterior housing.

**Minutes for the December 9, 2013 Meeting of the Half Crown-Marsh
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In response to a question by Dr. Schur about the need for a lift/elevator on this building, Mr. Hart explained that the Department of Public Safety and the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board insist that all individuals have access to any building that serves the public and on which substantial renovation has been done. Dr. Schur asked whether the lift will accommodate a wheelchair, whether a stairmaster could be used instead, and how often the current lift is used. Mr. Hart explained that the new unit accommodates a standard wheelchair and has an automatic opener that works for someone with limited mobility. He said that the codes do not allow a stairmaster because it assumes that a person can get out of a wheelchair by him or herself. He did not know how often the lift has been used in the past, but it is inspected every year and it was during the inspection that the deterioration was noted and the decision to replace it was made.

Mr. Smith observed that the new lift will cost more than repairing the old one, but it will be more compatible with the building. Mr. Hart responded that all the neighbors have gone the extra mile to respect the historic quality of the buildings in the area and that he wanted to do the same. To Mr. King's question about the building's use, he replied that it is currently used as offices for administration operations of the State Street Bank, but that there might be other commercial uses that would need access.

Ms. Dillenseger was concerned about the additional height of the new enclosure and whether it will block visibility from the building behind. Mr. Hart explained that the height is driven by code: the current height of the enclosure is just under 8 ft and the new height will be just under 11 ft, but that the footprint remains the same. He said that he had spoken to an individual in the building behind and he did not seem concerned and told him to do what needed to be done; they did not discuss height.

Dr. Schur asked about the number of tenants as there are 4 meters on the building, and Mr. Hart explained that those were left from the earlier renovation, but that there are only two tenants currently.

Mr. Van Sickle called for deliberation by the commission since there were no members of the public present.

Mr. King said that he assumed that none of the members felt that this new enclosure is really appropriate to the building and suggested that there are two approaches the commission could take: 1) accept that the code requires these changes and grant a certificate of hardship or 2) try to design something more appropriate. Given the constraints of the code, he felt that would be appropriate to consider this a hardship case because, although it does not meet the criteria for a certificate of appropriateness, it would not adversely affect the goals of the HCM NCD. Mr. Van Sickle agreed.

**Minutes for the December 9, 2013 Meeting of the Half Crown-Marsh
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Ms Masterson asked whether the current lift received a Certificate of Applicability when it was installed in 1999. Ms Maycock read a July 26, 1999 letter from Sally Zimmerman stating that because the lift would replace the proposed handicapped access ramp shown on the approved plans for Case HC-121, no additional review was necessary for approval.

Mr. Van Sickle explained the history of the HC and M NCDs and how the combined HCMNCD had adopted many of the stricter rules of the earlier Marsh NCD, so that the current application for a ramp required a hearing. He said that in his experience people in wheelchairs hate these lifts, especially the ones that are open, and so many are moving to be more like elevators and that this is in his view a good thing.

Ms. Masterson moved that the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness be amended to be a Certificate of Hardship to alter the existing Vertical Platform Lift enclosure as required by code and so that the finish will better match the building's exterior details and color scheme. The motion further stated that the Commission found that such an alteration will not cause substantial derogation from the purposes of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District. Dr. Schur seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

There being no corrections to the Oct. 15, 2013 Minutes, Mr. King moved to approve them, and Mr. Van Sickle seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Schur moved to adjourn, and Mr. King seconded. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 6:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Maycock
Survey Director

Members of the Public
who signed the attendance sheet, Dec. 9, 2013

Joseph Hart, 136 Boylston St, Boston 02116