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APPROVED
JAN 7,
2013

Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Tue., Nov. 5, 2012 at 6:00 PM, McCusker Center, 4th Fl., 344 Broadway, Cambridge

Commission Members present: Nancy Goodwin, *Chair*; Tony Hsiao, *Vice Chair*; Carole Perrault, Charles Redmon, *members*; Sue-Ellen Myers, Monika Pauli, *alternates*

Commission Members absent: Lestra Litchfield, *member*

Staff present: Eiliesh Tuffy

Members of the Public: See attached list

Chair Goodwin called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

MC-4187: 5 West Place, by Jon Penterman & Mary Gehring. Rebuild existing side staircase in composite materials.

West Place, formerly known as Jones Alley, is part of a network of short, narrow streets behind the current City Hall Annex building. The houses in this area are modest cottages on small lots that front directly onto the street with little to no surrounding open space. Because of this, the side staircase at 5 West Place directly abuts the roadway. Over the years, the staircases have consistently been rebuilt in wood. The front porch was replaced in-kind with a new wood porch to match 4 years ago.

The applicants feel that, due to the increased exposure to road salts and spray from passing vehicles, the wood side porch is deteriorating at a faster rate than normal and propose to rebuild the stairs in a more weather resistant composite material. Permit records indicate that the side staircase was last rebuilt 23 years ago, in 1989.

Ms. Goodwin asked if Azek replacement materials were available that are exactly the same as the existing design and details. The contractor felt there were.

Ms. Perrault asked why they chose to go in this direction. The applicants said it was because the staircase is not structurally sound, there are problems with the foundation and that they were advised by an inspector to replace it with composite materials. The owners also do not want to paint the staircase. Bruce Comen, who owns the other half of the double house, said they had recently replaced elements of the front porch in fir and pine, but were already seeing signs of deterioration.

Staff commented that the advanced state of disrepair to the side stair is merely typical of a 20-year old exterior wood stair. Ms. Perrault voiced concern that if they replace the side porch in Azek then they may wish to do the same for the more ornamental front porch. She said she does not support composite materials in this application, particularly when there are any details to replicate. Mr. Redmon asked if the owners had seen other porches constructed using composite materials, because they have a tendency to look shiny and are actually very slippery underfoot. Ms. Goodwin said that while Azek can be milled to specific profiles it does have a shiner

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appearance that makes it more noticeable. Ms. Pauli added that sometimes if composite materials are used high up on a building you can get away with it, but that this location is at ground level and will be too obvious. She added that often these composite materials do not age well either.

No questions were received from the public.

Tuny McMahon of 14 Highland Ave. commented that if the Commission approves this proposal now it would start a slippery slope that could lead to the front porch, siding, etc. being replaced with composite materials. She noted that plastic looks different and supported rebuilding in wood that would last a long time.

The property owner reiterated that they did not want to maintain the side porch and have to repaint.

Ms. Perrault commented that the value of the property must be high, even in this tight neighborhood. She thought the point about the slippery slope was valid and that this style of house is so simple that the porches are actually part of the only character-defining features of this architecture.

Ms. Goodwin reminded the public that the review in this case was non-binding and that despite the Commission's advice the owners were not forbidden to proceed with the project as proposed.

Mr. Redmon moved to reject the application as submitted because the use of non-historic building materials is incongruous with the goals and objectives of the conservation district. Ms. Myers seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Determination of Procedure: Alterations to Designated Properties

MC-4192: 12 St. Mary Road, by Rachel Zsembery and Chris Keene. Replace wood windows.

This 2-1/2 story frame duplex is one of a pair that were constructed on adjacent lots in 1887. The building at #12-14 was resided in 1968 with asbestos which obscured the exterior trim. Those windows that are publicly visible from the street are still the original 2-over-2 wood double hung windows. The applicants live on the 1st floor of the building, and the proposal is to replace the original wood windows with aluminum-clad, double-glazed replacement windows. The proposed windows would match the historic glazing pattern and have simulated divided lights with internal metal spacer bars. The exterior aluminum would be white in color.

Mr. Redmon asked if the 2nd floor owner had been consulted to try to coordinate a building-wide solution. The applicants said they had explored that option, but the other owner had recently moved in and was not in a position to undertake the work at this time.

Ms. Goodwin asked if the windows were really in that bad shape. The owners said there was a mix of original and later replacement windows throughout their condo unit. The estimated that 30% of the windows do not have tight seals, some were painted shut, others had rotted jambs. They wanted to find a replacement that matched the originals as close as possible. Their owners across the street used a similar replacement window and they felt they looked beautiful.

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Ms. Perrault asked how many windows would be replaced. The owner said 20 windows.

Ms. Myers asked if the art window on the front elevation would be replaced. The owners said it would not and mentioned that it is in a stairway that is part of the neighbor's condo.

Ms. Goodwin asked if the windows were fitted with storms, and the owners said some of them were missing. Ms. Goodwin pointed out that, should the proposed windows be installed on the 1st floor, then the 2nd floor would still have exterior storms while the 1st floor would look different.

Ms. Pauli asked if these would be insert replacement sashes. The owners said they chose that option because, since the asbestos siding covered up all of the original window trim, the thicker frames of the insert sashes could actually help frame out the window openings better than the thin existing aluminum trim.

Mr. Redmon asked if the owners had looked into wood windows and they replied that they had maintenance concerns about wood.

Ms. Goodwin commented that the seals on most insulated replacement windows fail within 20-25 years maximum and that studies have shown it's often better to repair the old growth wood and install high-grade storms than install an inferior replacement window. Staff added that the warranties are often invalid if the manufacturer can claim they were improperly installed.

Mr. Hsiao commented that this particular line of Pella Architect series had actually been approved for certain projects within the district in the past but that this is always reviewed on a case-by-case basis. This model has seemed to hold up fairly well. Mr. Redmon agreed that this was one of the better models currently on the market.

No questions were received from the public.

Tuny McMahon of 14 Highland Ave. commented that the house has a fairly simple exterior. Because of that she wondered how 2 types of windows on such a simple house would look.

Mr. Hsiao made a motion to approve the application as submitted because not all of the existing windows are original and the proposed replacement window was of a quality and detailing that closely replicates the historic window. Mr. Redmon seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy
Preservation Administrator

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Members of the Public who signed the attendance sheet, November 5, 2012

Chris Keene	12 St. Mary Road, Cambridge, MA 02139
Rachel Zsembery	12 St. Mary Road, Cambridge, MA 02139
Tuny McMahon	14 Highland Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139
Phyllis Bretholtz	65 Antrim Street, Cambridge, MA 02139