

## **DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION**

Monday, August 7, 2023, 6:00 PM, online Zoom meeting

Commission Members present: Tony Hsiao, *Chair*; Monika Pauli, Katinka Hakuta, *Members*

Absent: Charles Redmon

Staff present: Eric Hill, Survey Director  
Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner

Members of the Public: See attached list

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This meeting was held via online zoom webinar <https://tinyurl.com/45tspmdx> with remote participation and was closed to in-person attendance. The public was able to participate online via the Zoom webinar platform. The meeting ID was 816 0196 5698.

Commission Chair Tony Hsiao made introductions, explained the process for the hearing, and called the meeting to order at 6:05.

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### **Case MC-6765: 58 Antrim Street, by Hannah Brennan.** Install solar roof panels.

Mr. Eric Hill, Survey Director, presented background on the non binding review of the property and showed slides of the proposed solar panel layout. Ms. Hannah Brennan, the owner, was present.

#### Commission Questions

Vice Chair Lestra Litchfield asked how far the panels are from the roof edge and the ridgeline, is it 4 inches from ridge line and 3 feet from eave line? Ms. Litchfield also referred to the layout plan. Ms. Brennan confirmed the measurements on the plan.

Commissioner Katinka Hakuta asked for clarification of the orientation of the roof. Mr. Hill confirmed the orientation.

#### Public Questions and Comments - none

#### Commission Comments

Ms. Litchfield motioned to approve the proposal as submitted. Ms. Hakuta seconded, and the motion passed, 4-0.

### **Case MC-6783: 149A-151 Bishop Allen Drive, by Glenn H. Stevens and Jayesh Gosai.** Replace front porch railings, columns, and decking.

Mr. Hill showed slides of the property and the proposed porch replacement and noted this is a non binding review.

#### Commission Questions

Mr. Hsiao asked if the intent is to emulate what is there. Mr. Jayesh Gosai, one of the owners, replied yes, they are trying to replicate what's there. Mr. Hsiao asked about the materials saying that it looks like they're using fiberglass. Mr. Gosai confirmed they are using fiberglass because they think it's more durable. Ms. Litchfield asked about the decking. Ms. Judith Kaye, another owner, answered that they are using a composite that looks like wood. Mr. Gosai added that the brand is Timbertech. Ms. Litchfield asked if they had seen actual examples of these products. Ms. Kaye said yes.

Ms. Pauli asked if they considered natural materials, noting that after a while they will not look as good as they are when new. Ms. Kaye answered that after they are painted, they will be indistinguishable. Ms. Litchfield commented that the joints can separate after a while with these fiberglass materials, which is something to consider. One of the owners said they have only seen brand new examples, but the current porch is deteriorating, and she is not as concerned with seeing visible spaces. Mr. Gosai said they had painted the steps regularly and they still broke without warning. Ms. Litchfield agreed that wood degrades but explained that pvc also degrades, and maintenance is never ending no matter what the material.

Mr. Gosai asked the contractor to speak to the Commission's concerns. Mr. Jonatas Leal, the contractor, said the boards and railings are composite and only the columns are fiberglass. He questioned the separation of joints and assured the Commission that the materials will be solid. Mr. Gosai said it was hard to find exact matches in wood without doing custom made items which would be too expensive.

Mr. Hill asked about preserving the columns, noting that they looked in pretty good condition. Ms. Said there is damage at the base of the columns, and they thought it should be replaced completely to create a more solid porch. Mr. Gosai concurred with Ms. Said that it's unstable below the columns.

Ms. Pauli asked if the taper in the column will be replicated with the fiberglass columns. Ms. Kaye confirmed that the columns will be the same size and style.

Public Questions and Comments - none

Commission Comments

Ms. Sarah Burks, preservation planner, commented that she hadn't heard of any issues with fiberglass columns, but pvc trim and fiber cement siding can have problems. Ms. Burks also said that synthetic decking can get very slippery and recommended checking with manufacturer's instructions for de-icing in the winter. For instance, if they shouldn't use salt, it's good to have a backup plan.

Ms. Litchfield asked Ms. Burks about fiberglass balustrades, Ms. Burks said she has no experience with that application. Ms. Litchfield commented that you can see the difference when synthetic materials are used on houses with historic materials. Ms. Litchfield went on to say that if it's on the second level or under an eave, it's not as obvious, but at the street level, you can really see the difference, and cautioned that nothing lasts forever especially if exposed to a lot of sun and weather; these materials can dull and will need painting in the future. Mr. Gosai said he understood and stated they've been painting the deck every other year and they

will do their best to maintain it. Ms. Litchfield asked what happens when they look bad, do you paint it? Mr. Leal said they will be painted and won't need to be repainted.

Ms. Pauli remarked that it's good to compare the lifespans of materials.

Mr. Gosai said as it stands right now the porch is falling apart and as they reviewed materials the composite materials seemed to be the best choice with the intent to maintain the same look.

Mr. Hsiao commented that this is an interesting case because it brings up a lot of what the Commission is charged with reviewing. Mr. Hsiao noted that there is precedence in cases where the materials are not as close to the original and stated that sustainability is another concern to think about. He went on to say that knowing neighborhood examples of these products would be useful. Mr. Gosai pointed out that their neighbor in the rear has used something similar and it still looks good several years later. Mr. Gosai agreed that sustainability should be a concern, but they must also consider the expense.

Ms. Kaye mentioned that she has trex decking on a house in New Hampshire and it still looks good. Mr. Gosai said he likes to spend time on the deck and will continue to do so.

Mr. Hsiao stated that he can see that they are trying to maintain the look of what exists including the tapered columns, and emphasized that those details matter. Ms. Kaye stated that they did a lot of research to find these materials.

Mr. Hsiao shared his screen to look at examples of the product.

Ms. Litchfield pointed out that the porch is a very prominent feature of a very old house and explained that the Commission has approved composite siding on facades not facing the street or that are higher than street level.

Mr. Hsiao suggested a hybrid approval such as making the fascia and columns natural, and the balustrade and decking synthetic. Ms. Hakuta replied that the mix of materials might call attention to the fact that there are synthetic materials. Mr. Hsiao noted that it depends on the quality of the materials, stating that wood today is less dense and less quality than wood used in the past, so perhaps there's a synthetic that is better than cheap wood.

Ms. Litchfield pointed out that this is non binding review. Ms. Pauli commented that the fascia and columns are significant features.

Mr. Gosai stated that as elements are removed on the porch, they will be inspected to determine if they can be preserved.

Ms. Litchfield motioned to reject the proposal as submitted and recommended that the applicants consider the suggestions discussed in this meeting, including restoring features such as the columns and replacing their bases only, and consider alternative replacement materials for other features.

Ms. Pauli seconded, and the motion passed, 4-0.

**Case MC-6782: 27 Ellery Street, by Usha Mia Gaba.** Install fiber cement siding on left façade and pvc trim on windows and fascia.

Mr. Hill presented a brief history of the building and stated that the review is non binding.

#### Commission Questions

Ms. Litchfield asked the applicant if she is replacing the decorative oval window trim with pvc. The applicant, Ms. Usha Gaba, answered yes and explained that her biggest issue is gaining access to the neighbor's property to do the work. The house is right on the property line where the neighbor's driveway is located with parked cars. She further explained that if she's granted access she wants to do this only once and would like to use a very durable material so they don't have to ask for access for another 20 or 30 years. Ms. Litchfield asked if she had found designs that match. Ms. Gaba answered that her contractor is looking to match the trim as close as possible.

Ms. Hakuta asked if the original siding underneath could be restored. Ms. Gaba answered that it is very damaged, and it's been leaking for years. Ms. Gaba stated that the asphalt shingle siding is also in very poor condition and she would like to replace it and improve the look of the neighborhood. Ms. Litchfield wondered if the clapboards on the other 3 sides are original. Mr. Hill said he wasn't sure about the clapboards but the trim definitely appears to be original. Ms. Litchfield stated she remembers when the siding was being restored, a little bit at a time.

Ms. Gaba commented that access was mostly likely an issue for the previous owner as well, which is why the asphalt shingles were never removed.

Mr. Hsiao asked the applicant if she thinks she will get permission to access the driveway. Ms. Gaba replied that she has been in conversation with the neighbor and he said he might be amenable if she gets the permit.

Ms. Hakuta asked about the decorative frieze on the right side and asked if it is original and should be restored on the other side. Ms. Gaba answered that she is not touching the top and Mr. Hill said sometimes the frieze is traditionally on the front with slight returns.

#### Public Questions and Comments - none

#### Commission Comments

Ms. Litchfield commented that this is an interesting follow-up to the last submission. This is a less visible elevation on a one-way street and although she dislikes fiber cement on historic buildings, it would be less of a problem on this facade.

Ms. Pauli agreed with Ms. Litchfield and suggested that the wood trim on the oval window be retained since composite materials will not be able to match the look. Ms. Litchfield agreed with Ms. Pauli's point regarding the oval window.

Ms. Hakuta concurred, and remarked that anything would be better than the existing asphalt shingles. Ms. Hakuta also agreed about the oval window which she said is visible as you walk down the sidewalk. Mr. Hill suggested maintaining all the window trim which is good old-growth wood and that this trim has details that can't be replicated with composite. Ms. Gaba agreed with Mr. Hill but stated that the lack of access will be an issue. She reiterated that the

previous owner did not get permission to access the neighbor's property which is why that façade is the only one that didn't get restored.

Ms. Litchfield commented that she also has to get permission from a neighbor to do work on her house and explained that pvc isn't maintenance-free.

Ms. Gaba replied that the neighbor has lived with this asphalt façade for years, so they don't have a problem with looking at it.

Mr. Hsiao motioned to approve the proposal as submitted with the recommendation to maintain the wood trim, especially the oval window. Ms. Litchfield seconded, and the motion passed 4-0.

**Case MC-6766: 70 Inman Street, by Susan Schweitzer.** Construct 2-floor addition.

Mr. Hill presented slides of the property and the project proposal and noted that the review is binding.

Mr. Joe Artley, the architect and neighbor of the applicants, explained that it's been a 2-family for a while, one unit on each floor and divided on the third floor. The goal is to make a multi-generational house with the applicants on the first floor and their family on the other floor. The addition will provide additional bedrooms for both units. Mr. Artley shared his screen and showed the original house and the proposed addition which is staying within the setbacks. He explained the elevations, that there's a primary bedroom on the main levels and the roofline meets the existing roofline, and he explained the detailing.

Ms. Litchfield asked what the materials are. Mr. Artley answered wood frame construction, concrete foundation, Hardieplank, or similar, clapboards with 4-inch exposure, 1x8 skirt, 10-inch cornerboards, 1x6 frieze, aluminum gutters, asphalt roof shingles. Windows will be Anderson 2/2 with 1x5 pvc moulding that emulates the style from that era. The whole design of the addition is to emulate the original structure.

Mr. Hsiao asked about 3d renderings. Mr. Artley said he has not done 3d drawings with the same level of detail as the drawings.

Mr. Hsiao shared his screen to look at google earth street view and asked to confirm location of the addition and explained that a 3d rendering would be helpful to understand where this is located and how visible it is. Mr. Artley said the addition would be behind the porch and come to about the shed.

Ms. Pauli asked if they had considered removing the faux stone siding. Mr. Artley answered that will have to be left to the next owners. Ms. Sue Schweitzer and her husband Tim responded that they would love to replace the existing siding but it's too expensive. Her husband stated that they will eventually not be able to go up the stairs and will have to stay on the first level.

Public Questions and Comments - none

Commission Questions

Ms. Litchfield asked about the existing siding and noted that the addition seems to be set back from the road and is somewhat screened.

Ms. Pauli appreciated that the addition will have details reminiscent of the original house so someone in the future could restore the whole structure to its former Greek Revival style. Ms. Litchfield agreed.

Mr. Hsiao asked Mr. Hill to show the image of the house prior to the alterations. Mr. Hsiao commented that the proposed addition is appropriate, in scale and modest, deferential to the main house, and not very visible. Ms. Litchfield concurred.

Ms. Hakuta motioned to approve the application as submitted. Ms. Litchfield seconded, and the motion passed 4-0.

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The meeting was adjourned at 7:39 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

**Members of the Public Present on August 7, 2023**Panelists:

Hannah Brennan

58 Antrim Street

Jayesh Gosai

149 A Bishop Allen Drive

Jonatas Leal, contractor

Pessote Construction

Judith Kaye

151 Bishop Allen Drive

Susan Schweitzer

70 Inman Street

Tim Schweitzer

70 Inman Street

Joe Artley, architect

Inman Street

Attendees: