

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

December 3, 2015 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge Senior Center - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: William King, *Chair*; Shary Page Berg, Robert Crocker, Chandra Harrington, Jo M. Solet, *Members*; Joseph Ferrara, Susannah Tobin, *Alternates*

Members absent: Bruce Irving, *Vice Chair*; William Barry, *Members*

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

Public present: See attached list.

Chair King called the meeting to order at 6:04 P.M. He made introductions and reviewed the agenda, then designated the alternates, Mr. Ferrara and Ms. Tobin, to vote on all matters. He dispensed with the Consent Agenda Procedure.

Informational Presentation

29 Highland St., by Highland Street Cambridge, LLC, owner. Present preliminary schematics for revised design including moving carriage house forward and constructing connector to existing house.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and provided background on the property, which had been the subject of a demolition review and was currently under study for landmark designation. In May 2015 the Commission denied an application to terminate a six-month demolition delay and initiated a landmark designation study, with the result that alterations to the property would require a Certificate of Appropriateness. The staff had met with proponents in November to discuss a new design and supported their request to be put on the Commission's agenda for an informational presentation.

Susan Denny, an owner, explained that after the last hearing they searched for a solution that would be acceptable to all parties. Their proposal would preserve the house on its present foundation. They would move the carriage barn forward toward Appleton Street and build a small connecting structure between them.

David Stern, the architect, explored the concept with photographs, a site plan, and an elevation drawing. The connector would be partially hidden from Appleton Street by the existing L-shape of the house. It would be designed to be demure, simple, and distinct from the contrasting styles of the carriage house and the main house, and would be lower than the eaves of the ~~letter~~latter. The design had not been taken very far and the details were not yet developed. He noted that the existing carriage house doors were not original and would be modified. The existing hood over the garage bays was also not original and would be redesigned to be thinner and less prominent. The relocated carriage house would maintain its current orientation to the street. Ms. Denny pointed out that the carriage house was currently at the very back of the site and was deteriorating. Mr. Stern indicated that the new design would give the carriage house a new and active use as part of the residence. The staff agreed it could be a good preservation solution.

Ms. Berg asked the purpose of a two-story connector. Mr. Stern answered that all three structures would have some residential function. It was drawn as 1.5 stories but he still needed to get the measurements of the carriage house.

Ms. Harrington asked if moving the carriage house would damage it. Mr. Stern said the carriage house was on a rubble foundation. A full assessment of the structure had not been completed.

Mr. King described the proposal to preserve both the house and the carriage house as grand. Moving the carriage house forward would be beneficial since it was currently invisible to the public. He was surprised to see the size of its footprint compared to that of the house. He asked if turning the carriage house ninety degrees had been considered. He was concerned about the bulk of the combined mass. Mr. Stern said they had discussed other orientations, but did not pursue those options.

Christian Nolen, an owner, noted that the double gables of the carriage house were only seen on the west-facing façade. That was the front of the carriage house and the more interesting elevation. Ms. Denny added that if it was turned ninety degrees, there would need to be more pavement to move cars around to the garage doors. The ground floor would continue to function as a garage.

Mr. Ferrara said it was a promising scheme. He would not move the carriage house any closer to the street than they showed it on the site plan. The 1.5 story connector looked right.

Ms. Harrington liked the concept. Bringing the carriage house forward and into view was good. Connecting it to the house was an excellent use for it.

Mr. Crocker agreed it was an excellent idea. He asked if the Highland Street curb cut would be abandoned. Could the trees forward of the carriage house be saved? Ms. Denny confirmed that the Highland Street curb cut would be closed and the driveway paving removed on that side of the property. Mr. Nolen responded to the matter of the trees. A Norway maple, a sugar maple, and a water chestnut were completely compromised due to poor health and storm damage. They needed to be removed to prevent damage to the property.

Ms. Tobin said that she was favorable to the plan.

Mr. Sullivan reported further on his discussion with the proponents. Ideally the connector should be minimalist and recessive, and not interfere with the eaves of either the house or carriage house, but to be functional it might need to accommodate access to the second floor of the carriage house. The current location of the carriage house was damp and poorly drained. It was a very rare structure and he supported giving it a functional use. The scale of the two buildings was perhaps not ideal, but the proposal would preserve both of them. Connecting the side of the carriage house to the back of the main house would preserve the primary elevations of each building. He would support the concept if the owners brought it back to the Commission as an application.

Mr. King expressed optimism and said the Commission would have a public hearing if the owners developed the idea and returned with a formal application.

Informational Presentation

Cambridge Brickwalk Conservancy, by Diane Beck. Description of project.

Ms. Beck introduced herself and described the Cambridge Brickwalk Conservancy, a non-profit established to help design, preserve and maintain brick sidewalks in Cambridge. She said they supported accessibility, but noted that access code could be achieved using bricks. She noted the Conservancy's website: cbc-brick.org. She played a short video and passed around photographs of typical sidewalk conditions. She distributed a description of what cities such as Wellesley, Mass. and Portland, Maine had done regarding their historic brick sidewalks.

Ms. Berg asked Mr. Sullivan how decisions on sidewalk paving were made in Cambridge. Mr. Sullivan answered that the Commission had jurisdiction in the Old Cambridge Historic District and the Harvard Square Conservation District. The issue of material for sidewalks in Harvard Square had been addressed several years ago. The Disabilities Commission prefers concrete because it is smoother with fewer seams and less vibration. The wire cut bricks agreed upon in Harvard Square were smoother than city hall pavers (molded bricks). The city standard for curb cuts and ramps at intersections and cross walks is concrete, but the Commission has required that those areas of concrete be kept to the minimum.

Ms. Beck pointed out that Beacon Hill preservationists argue that historic materials can be used rather than concrete at ramps and crosswalks.

Mr. King noted that Hurlbut Street was scheduled to get new sidewalks in 2016 or 2017. The first public meeting with the neighborhood was held over a year ago, so the city did start the conversation early. Issues include durability, prior street work, and sidewalk trees. If a tree pit left less than 36" for the sidewalk a crosswalk would be necessary to meet the access code.

Dr. Solet asked if the Conservancy advocated repair of existing brick sidewalks. Ms. Beck answered affirmatively. Dr. Solet said she was shocked by the many areas patched with asphalt. Her international visitors were surprised to see such conditions in ~~the U.S~~[Cambridge](http://www.cambridge.org).

Mr. Sullivan said the staff would notify Ms. Beck of future hearings on sidewalks.

Preservation Grants

Mr. Sullivan said five new applications had been received and several more were anticipated. He showed slides of each property and reported that the available balance was \$438,179.75. He reviewed the proposals in the order in which they were received, describing the scope of proposed work and amount requested. Of the five applications, only 130 Magazine Street was eligible for an outright grant because it was the church's first application. All other grants would require a match. He recommended the amounts listed above for the five grant applications.

IPG 16-2	1418 Camb. St.	First United Presb. Church #5	\$16,500	Windows
IPG 16-3	71 Cherry St	Margaret Fuller House #3	\$33,700	Windows
IPG 16-4	130 Magazine St	Cambridgeport Baptist Church	\$50,000	Roof, masonry

IPG 16-5	400 Harvard St	Old Cambridge Baptist Ch #5	\$50,000	Masonry
IPG 16-6	53 Antrim St	1st Reformed Presb. Church #2	\$70,000	SG window

[Ms. Harrington indicated support for the grants, then left the meeting].

Dr. Solet moved to approve grants as recommended for IPG cases 16-2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. Mr. Crocker seconded, and the motion passed 6-0.

Ms. Tobin moved to adjourn, Mr. Ferrara seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:38 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed the Attendance List on December 3, 2015**

Christian Nolen	29 Highland St
Susan Denny	29 Highland St
David Stern	46 Waltham St, #302, Boston, MA 02118
Chris Taylor	46 Waltham St, #302, Boston, MA 02118
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana Street #404
Carole Perrault	9 Dana St
John Sanzone	540 Memorial Dr.

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.