

## Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Mon., Jan. 7, 2013 at 6:00 PM, McCusker Center, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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

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

### Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

**MC-4215: 12 Bigelow Street, by Sylvie Tomczyk and Michael Potts.** Replace wood windows with composite replacements in the Bigelow Street National Register District.

The property under review is one half of a double house, constructed in 1884. In researching the cases that have been reviewed within the Bigelow Street district it was found that 59 total cases had come before the Commission and 6 of those included windows in the scope of work. Three of the six window applications were for this property at 12 Bigelow Street, and involved alterations to windows on the rear elevation (exempt from review) and the side elevation (approved, and original exterior trim retained).

The only other case that involved original wood windows (46 Bigelow St., ca. 2002) resulted in the repair of the original sashes and, where repair was not possible, the windows were replaced in-kind with new all-wood true divided light windows to match the originals.

The current proposal is to replace five (5) windows on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the property. The existing windows are historically painted 2-over-1 true divided light wood windows. The replacement windows would be ivory-colored composite material. The glazing would be insulated sashes with applied muntins on the interior only of the upper sash to replicate the historic 2-over-1 pattern.

The applicants purchased the building in June and said they were unaware of the property's historic designation or associated restrictions. They stated that the front portion of their second floor is their bedroom and they like to open the windows every day for air circulation. They felt that the current setup of the original wood windows with an exterior storm made it impossible to get the air flow they desired.

The contractor pointed out that the Andersen Renewal windows were composed of 40% wood fiber, rather than a completely non-wood product. The Commission asked what type of muntins the replacement windows would have. While the window contract specified removable interior-only muntins for the upper sash, the contractor pointed out that simulated divided lights with interior metal spacer bars were also available.

Ms. Perrault asked if the owners knew how old the storm windows were, but they did not know. They expressed a desire to get rid of storm windows altogether because they preferred the ability to open the window without also having to open the exterior storm. Ms. Goodwin said that she has a more recent model storm window on her own house which she is able to raise a small amount for air flow and with minimal effort.

The owners said they were informed by staff that they could refurbish the windows and get new storms, but they don't feel they are easy to open. They did not fully understand the district regulations and

authority over window changes, particularly when they felt they were being respectful of the architectural character while also being more energy efficient.

Staff explained that repairing existing wood windows and replacing storm windows are all exempt from the Commission's review. It is anything other than a true replacement in kind of all-wood windows that triggers the Commission's review.

Ms. Tomczyk didn't understand why you would retain the wood window when all you see from the street is the exterior storm. The Commission explained that it is the storm window's main function to protect the historic wood window from deterioration due to weathering and preserve the original building fabric, which is a goal of the Commission regarding buildings within the district.

Mr. Hsiao pointed out that this Mid Cambridge district property also falls within a National Register district and is therefore subject to binding review authority by the Commission. He noted that allowing composite replacement windows on the second floor of the property could set up a later argument that the building lacked uniformity, and the remaining wood windows should also be removed. This is not a direction that the Commission supports.

The owner argued that they are already on that journey, given that the windows at the rear of the house are a wide mix already. Staff pointed out that those windows were installed without the benefit of Commission review because they are not publicly visible and therefore exempt.

The promotion of using exterior storm windows was most confusing to the owner. The Commission reiterated the value of a storm as a protective layer from weathering and as a form of double glazing for thermal insulation.

Questions and comments were received from the public.

Ms. McMahon said as part of their renovations they should want to get it right. The new owners bought an historic property and preserving it is part of the ownership. To change the exterior is something that shouldn't be done.

The Andersen representative, David Barry, said this line of Andersen Renewal windows has been approved in other historic districts. He said he had read the city's guidelines for the preservation of wood windows and, while he agreed with some points made in the document, he also found some of the comparison figures regarding efficiency to be very outdated. The product they are proposing is 40% wood and 60% polymers, which he felt was a far superior product to other replacement windows on the market. This model is also assembled using mortise & tenon joints in a style comparable to that of historic window assemblies. The Fibrex material has a melting point of 221 degrees and is designed to not dent, warp or fade, which allows them to offer darker, more historic color choices. This window is purported to only lose .5% of its Argon gas over a 20-year span.

Staff noted that the existing windows had survived for 129 years in good shape. Ms. Goodwin reiterated that replacement still comes at the loss of original building fabric.

Ms. Perrault asked about the condition of the wood. The owner said it was mixed, adding that the weights were gone, the windows rattle and some of the original glazing is gone in some of the windows.

Ms. Perrault commented that historic properties in designated districts that are well preserved result in more stable property values.

Ms. Tomczyk said their main concern was sustainability and environmental awareness.

Mr. Redmon made a motion to deny the application to replace the wood windows and recommended proceeding with repair and restoration. Should the windows be beyond repair, an exact replacement in kind with a high quality all-wood window would be permissible. Ms. Pauli seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

**MC-4217: 15 Maple Ave., Unit B, by Rachel Wachs.** Replace wood windows with new insulated wood windows in the Maple Avenue National Register District.

The unit under review is in the rear right corner of the building, which is currently used as a multi-unit residential property. The house was built on land from the former Hovey Estate. The 2-1/2 story Mansard was built for Elijah Luke and completed in 1868. It is one of the 4 oldest surviving houses on Maple Avenue, which was first laid out in 1860.

The current proposal to replace windows includes two wood windows towards the back half of a side elevation. The house itself has a very large front yard setback from the street, which places the side elevations at a very oblique angle when viewed from Maple Avenue.

The two windows under review are large, 2-over-2 wood windows with low interior sills that are a safety concern to the new property owners. The contractor, Mr. Gaboury, proposes replacing the existing wood sashes in-kind with new insulated wood sashes that replicated the 2-over-2 glazing pattern, but are fitted with safety glass instead of regular glass.

Mr. Gaboury estimated it would cost approximately \$6000 to restore the 4 existing sashes. The new insulated wood windows would be \$442 each.

Ms. Goodwin asked if he had considered putting safety glass into the existing wood frames, but he said that would require rebuilding the entire sashes. Ms. Goodwin then asked why they couldn't simply do a replacement in-kind of a single pane wood window with safety glass, since the intention was to reinstall the exterior storms anyway.

Mr. Gaboury said another advantage of the replacement sashes would be to eliminate existing lead paint on the moveable sashes, especially since the owners have young children, ages 1, 3 & 5. No questions were received from the public. Comments were received from the public.

Ms. McMahon of 14 Highland Avenue commented that this is a beautiful house. By comparison to the previous case for 12 Bigelow Street, the building fabric for this replacement window would not be changing since it would still be wood.

Ms. Perrault clarified that this replacement is proposed to be double-glazed though. The Commission discussed the fact that, since it is already the intention to reinstall storm windows, that there really is no need for an insulated replacement sash, and that they should stick with single glazing. Mr. Hsiao agreed, and supported addressing the safety glass and lead issues. He also said that he felt the Marvin wood windows better emulate the look of an historic window and glazing putty details. Considering this is one of the oldest houses on the street, which is a National Register District, the direction should be to undertake a replacement in-kind with single-pane safety glass.

Mr. Hsiao made a motion to deny the application to install double-glazed replacement windows and directed the contractor to pursue a replacement in-kind using single-glazed safety glass. Mr. Redmon seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

### Staff Report: Window Research

Staff is continuing to collect data on past cases involving window repair and/or replacement throughout the 30-year history of the district. The goal is to try to gauge the ratio of window repair versus replacement over that timespan and analyze what, if any, patterns have emerged. Of particular interest is the current condition of the preserved historic windows as compared to that of the various replacement windows that were selected. Replacement windows that were approved by the Commission will be studied to determine their durability and long-term performance.

### Minutes

Mr. Redmon made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 2012 meeting. Mr. Hsiao seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

A general discussion was raised about exploring means to inform potential property buyers of the historic designation of any given property they may be seeking to purchase. One suggestion was to reach out to the Inspectional field to research if there is a standard inspection form used by preliminary homebuyers. If so, it would be helpful to have a checkbox added that asks if the property bears any form of historic designation and/or restrictions.

Another suggestion was for staff to author a white paper explaining that wood windows are not bad, and that having to paint exterior features on their house is also not bad. A window workshop was suggested as a forum to reach out to property owners. The Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Association could be a potential partner in the planning and execution of such a workshop.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy  
Preservation Administrator

**Members of the Public who signed the attendance sheet, January 7, 2013**

Michael Potts	<illegible web address>, Cambridge, MA 02139
Tim Gaboury	649 Old Boston Road, North Attleboro, MA 02760
Tuny McMahon	14 Highland Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139
Sylvie Tomczyk	same as M. Potts, Cambridge, MA 02139
Scott Slater	10 Bigelow Street, Cambridge, MA 02139