

MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION

Monday, December 4, 2023, 6:00 PM, online Zoom meeting

Commission Members present: Lestra Litchfield, *Vice Chair*; Charles Redmon, Katinka Hakuta, *Members*, Catherine Tice, Nan Laird, *Alternates*

Absent: Monika Pauli, Tony Hsiao

Staff present: Allison Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public: See attached list

This meeting was held via online zoom webinar <https://tinyurl.com/MCDec2023> 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 813 4212 7406.

Commission Vice Chair Lestra Litchfield made introductions, explained the process for the hearing, and called the meeting to order at 6:02.

Case MC-6883: 8 Cleveland Street, by Michael Kleber. Install solar roof panels.

Ms. Allison Crosbie, Preservation Administrator, introduced the project and showed slides of the property and stated that the review was non-binding.

Mr. Michael Kleber, the applicant, introduced Mr. Ryan Severin from Empower Energy Solutions who then described the proposed solar panels consisting of 18 panels in a rectangular array located on the east facing side of the roof, and pointed out the setback requirements. Mr. Severin also explained that they have expertise in installing solar panels on slate roofs (the existing roof material on this building) which will remain intact. The panels will be black with a black frame. Mr. Severin mentioned that were slight adjustments to the layout for fire access as per the requirements by the City's Fire Department.

Commission Questions

Commissioner Nan Laird asked where the associated equipment will be located. Mr. Severin responded that the equipment will be located next to the utility meter. The equipment includes an inverter measuring 12" by 14" and an AC disconnect switch. The switch must be accessible to first responders in case of emergency. Ms. Laird asked how high this equipment is located. Mr. Severin answered it's about eye level, it can't be too high.

Commissioner Catherine Tice asked how many kilowatt hours for 18 panels are delivered annually. Mr. Severin answered that it's site specific, and in this instance he estimated about 7500 to 8500 kilowatt hours for the year.

Ms. Litchfield asked what the distance is from the panel edge to the eave. Ms. Crosbie showed a slide of the elevation showing 3 inches.

Ms. Laird pointed out that that she noticed an image of a tree shading a part of the roof and asked if was going to be trimmed. Mr. Kleber answered that it will not be trimmed so it will

shade the lower row of panel. He said he is very fond of the tree and is fine with the partial shade.

Public Questions and Comments - none

Ms. Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street wondered if each solar panel manufacturer has a different look or different approach, and wished she could have seen the actual product, not a drawing with boxes. Mr. Severin explained that there are differences in how panels look depending on the type of pv cells being used. Ms. Meyer mentioned ones that look like shingles. Mr. Severin replied that's a different type of panel and that in this case a more traditional rack system will be installed. He also noted that the array will be more flush than other installations. He then shared his screen and showed a picture of the solar panels on a slate roof.

Commission Comments

Commissioner Chuck Redmon commented that this is a straightforward standard installation with panels located close to the roof which will make it less visible. Mr. Redmon motioned to approve the proposal as submitted. Commissioner Katinka Hakuta seconded, and the motion passed 5-0.

Case MC-6884: 54 Antrim Street, by Nikhil Agarwal & Eleanore Fleming. Alter fenestration and remove chimneys.

Ms. Crosbie showed slides of the property and noted this is a non-binding review.

Ms. Brigitte Steines, architect for the applicants, introduced architect Rob Nafie who presented the project. Mr. Nafie explained the project is focused on the exterior restoration/renovation of the home with energy upgrades while maintaining the historic character. Alterations include the removal of the chimneys and the replacement of the windows. Mr. Nafie shared his screen and presented images showing the context of the neighborhood. He explained that 4 chimneys are to be removed and heat pumps will be installed. The reconfiguration of the interior includes the space where the fireplaces are located which is needed for ductwork. He pointed out that most of the windows visible from the public way will be restored, and he showed the window reconfigurations on the sides towards the rear and on the rear portion of the structure. All windows will be Marvin Elevate to maintain consistency. He continued to show slides of elevations describing the windows and explained the goal is to maintain the character and harmony of the window configuration. He also mentioned that they will work with CHC to look at exterior paint colors for the house.

Commission Questions

Mr. Redmon asked if the chimneys are in bad condition. Mr. Nafie answered that a structural engineer looked at the chimneys on site and said keeping them on the roof was not feasible, but that reconstructing a faux chimney on top of the roof was an option.

Ms. Laird asked where the heat pumps would be located. Mr. Nafie showed the locations on the left side of the house and added that they will be consulting with a landscape architect on plantings. Ms. Litchfield asked if a conduit would extend along the exterior. Mr. Nafie answered that there will be no exterior conduit, the ductwork will be handled in the interior.

Ms. Hakuta asked if they considered preserving one or more chimneys. Mr. Nafie replied that keeping the chimneys interfered with the interior layout but that they did consider keeping one chimney but didn't think it was that historic. He also said they considered having one faux chimney. Mr. Nafie then showed a video of the house and neighborhood, and Ms. Steines explained that they looked at the surrounding neighborhood and saw that many chimneys were not visible and there were only a couple of other chimneys visible on the street. Ms. Hakuta commented that she thought the front chimney looked visible.

Ms. Tice asked if all the chimneys go down to the basement. Mr. Nafie replied that was correct. Ms. Tice asked if there was any concern about the integrity of the chimneys in the house. Mr. Nafie responded that the structural engineer said there won't be a problem with removing the chimneys. Ms. Tice asked if they were already filled in. Mr. Nafie answered that they are not filled in.

Ms. Litchfield asked for clarification on the removal of the chimney stacks. Mr. Nafie confirmed that the entire chimney structures are being removed. Ms. Litchfield also asked about the proposed Marvin replacements, specifically will they have simulated divided lights (SDL). Mr. Nafie confirmed that they will have SDL and will match the existing muntin style, 2 over 2. Ms. Steines mentioned that they will be white as per the owner's preference.

Public Questions and Comments

Ms. Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked about a proposed elevation shown on sheet 18, pointing out two small picture windows and asked why they are not consistent with the other window. Mr. Nafie answered they have not made a final decision as to what exact style those windows will be.

Commission Comments

Mr. Redmon commented that the big issue is the removal of the chimneys. Ms. Litchfield concurred. Mr. Redmon hoped that the applicant can build a faux chimney that recalls the historic chimneys without posing a load bearing impact. Regarding the yellow chimney, Mr. Redmon expressed indifference as to whether that remains.

Ms. Litchfield clarified where the Commission stands on chimneys in the district and explained that for the last 30 years the district has been losing chimneys due to renovations, which is why there aren't many extant on the street today. She further explained that maintaining a nod to this historic feature is important to the character of the neighborhood. She agreed with Ms. Hakuta that the chimney in the front, #2 on the drawings, is the most visible, while the other two chimneys towards the rear are really not visible. She also commented that removing the yellow chimney would be an improvement. Ms. Litchfield explained that keeping the original chimney would be the Commission's preference but if it's not possible, the Commission recommends constructing a faux chimney. She also lauded the restoration of the original windows. Mr. Nafie interjected saying that they used the adjacent house as a design precedent and noted that the chimney had been removed, which is why they made this decision. Ms. Litchfield responded that this is a non-binding review, so the Commission tries to make a strong recommendation to preserve the character of the home, and it appears that the adjacent neighbor did not follow the Commission's recommendation. Mr. Redmon pointed out that

looking at google earth revealed several chimneys located on that same side of the street. Ms. Steines replied that they are mostly not visible from the street. Ms. Litchfield responded that this is why preserving this particular chimney, which is visible, is so important. Ms. Steines continued to explain that the owners care a great deal about preserving the house and that they love the windows, and that the budget is limited, which necessitates making decisions. Ms. Steines also stated that to build a faux chimney would be costly, that it must be structurally sound and safe. They would rather spend the money preserving the windows, but if they can fit this into the budget, they would look at keeping that chimney. Ms. Litchfield re-emphasized the importance of the chimney to the historic character of the neighborhood and the building. Mr. Nikhil Agarwal, one of the owners, reiterated the importance of the duct work associated with the air conditioning that would make keeping chimneys #1 and #3 problematic. Ms. Litchfield explained again that the Commission is not concerned about chimneys #1 and #3, only chimney #2. Mr. Agarwal asked for conditional approval and that they would work with the budget to see if they can keep chimney #2. Mr. Agarwal also remarked that the house is beautiful, and that people tried to convince them to replace the windows and he knew that would be a mistake.

Ms. Laird stated that she would be delighted to see the yellow chimney removed. She also realizes that the house will look naked without chimneys but it's necessary to address climate change with more efficient means of ventilation in the home and pointed out issues with her own home. Mr. Agarwal responded that he understands that chimney #2 is visually important and that they can look at pricing it out.

Mr. Redmon commented that keeping both chimneys #2 and #3 would maintain the rhythm that is common to buildings with chimneys on the street. Mr. Agarwal replied that keeping chimney #3 would hamper the effort to do the forced heat system ductwork and explained that they don't want pipes all over the exterior of the building.

Ms. Tice indicated that she installed a faux chimney in her own home, replacing a chimney that had been filled in with concrete from the roof membrane up, which she did herself in two hours. She suggested using the bricks from the original chimney to rebuild it and put a black steel cap on it. She explained that it wasn't an expensive project and thinks a mason could do it in an afternoon, and then they can remove the interior portion.

Ms. Litchfield summarized the comments from the Commission and stated that she would be happy with just chimney #2. She then asked for a motion.

Ms. Hakuta made a motion to accept the proposal as submitted with a strong recommendation to preserve or construct a faux chimney. Ms. Tice seconded the motion, and the motion passed 5-0.

Case MC-6885: 36-4 Irving Street, by Nathan Perkins & Tommy Leung. Alter front entrance and fenestration.

Ms. Crosbie provided background on the structure, a former stable, and stated that this was a non-binding hearing.

Mr. John Buckley, the project architect, described the building as part of a development in the 1970s. He explained that the building is very small, and the interior configuration does not conform to current codes. He then showed drawings illustrating these space limitations. Mr. Buckley stated that the intent is to be respectful of the historic character of the structure, to undo some of the changes from the 70s, and create a pleasant entry. He also pointed out the bulk of the building is not changing. He then showed elevations and described the enlarging of the windows, 2 instead of one, and combining the front door with larger windows and wood paneling below to treat it as a whole object, with the overhang above. Mr. Buckley stated that the goal is to breathe some life back into this building and bring it up to today's standards. He also pointed out that it has poor energy efficiency which will be improved with a new HVAC system located in the rear of the property so it's not visible from a public way.

Commission Questions

Ms. Litchfield asked about the proposed windows. Mr. Buckley answered they are looking at the Marvin Elevate line.

Public Questions

Ms. Meyer asked about the proposed window configuration and suggested adding a window on the side and installing lights on either side of the front door to bring in more natural light. Mr. Buckley answered that the front room serves as a mud room, staircase, and living room, and explained the challenges with the layout. Ms. Meyer commented that she liked the front façade as it is.

Public Comments

Ms. Meyer said she appreciated the proportion of the window, but that it's becoming more modern, and laments the big windows in front, but recognizes the challenges of the existing space.

Commission Comments

Ms. Tice asked how the proposed skylight accommodates the stairwell. Mr. Buckley described the strategy of creating the required height, which is 6'-8," using the skylight to provide the additional height. Ms. Tice complimented this approach.

Ms. Litchfield commented that it's a good project but also thought it loses a little of the outbuilding charm but understands the reasons.

Mr. Redmon motioned to approve the application as submitted. Ms. Hakuta seconded, and the motion carried 5-0.

MC-6888: 342-344 Harvard Street, by Waxwing LLC c/o Nathan Wong. Alter fenestration, replace railings, windows and exterior trim; install new siding, egress windows and doors, window wells.

Ms. Crosbie provided background on the building known as the Samuel Rindge house. The building is on the National Register of Historic Places, and the review is therefore binding.

Mr. Nathan Wong, representing the applicant, stated the building was acquired ten years ago and has been vacant. Mr. Wong indicated that the property was previously a halfway house and given its prior use it needs new life and has been working with architect Steve Hiserodt to maintain as much of the exterior as they can. Mr. Hiserodt then explained the existing conditions, pointing out that the roof is not original, and the building is currently covered with asbestos. Mr. Hiserodt presented elevations and explained that the front portion of the building facing Harvard Street is to stay the same, but they are adding windows at the basement level on the Dana Street side. Mr. Hiserodt also mentioned that the dormer windows were originally arched, and they would like to restore them if possible. Mr. Hiserodt proposed replacing the siding with wood shingle with coursing determined by any evidence found on site. He would also like to replace the asphalt roof with a synthetic slate, possibly the same product being installed at 382 Harvard Street. He also remarked that they would like to redo the scroll work detailing as well as other exterior details.

Mr. Hiserodt then described the alterations on the Dana Street side which he said are necessary to make the proposed five-unit layout work. This includes adding windows and adding a roof deck over the entry porch and reconfiguring windows on that level. The third-floor windows would remain as is. The rear façade will also have additional windows. On the left side elevation some alterations are not visible from the public way. The existing garage would be demolished, and three parking spaces would be provided while maintaining enough green space. Mr. Hiserodt also explained their intention to preserve the entry doors, which are double doors that don't meet current egress requirements unless they both open. He further stated they that intend to replace all windows, although there might be a couple of windows that can be restored but not enough to create a consistent look. He also mentioned the renovation is a level three which has energy code standards that must be met.

Commission Questions

Ms. Laird asked if the units will be condos or rentals. Mr. Wong answered they will be rentals. Ms. Laird then asked about the proposed window wells and how much they need to excavate to install them. Mr. Wong answered that there must be 3 feet. Ms. Laird asked about the front stairs, wondering if there are more stairs. Mr. Hiserodt showed the drawings and said the steps remain.

Ms. Litchfield asked if there is evidence that the building was clad in clapboard, and if so, would they consider using clapboard. Mr. Hiserodt answered that he would be happy to reclad in clapboard regardless of what they find. Ms. Litchfield stated she hopes the front doors will remain and asked for clarification on the window replacements. Mr. Hiserodt replied that their intention is to replace all the windows. Ms. Litchfield asked if there was a landscape plan. Mr. Hiserodt answered that at this point they do not have a landscape plan.

Ms. Hakuta asked a procedural question noting that there are a lot of outstanding issues in the proposal such as the entry doors and the windows. She asked if this is this the right stage to make a ruling. Ms. Crosbie replied that the Commission can either ask the applicant if they would agree to continue the hearing so the applicant can provide additional information. If the applicant does not agree to a continuance, the Commission would make a ruling with the information they have.

Ms. Laird asked about the landscaping, noting there are several mature trees and shrubs, and it would be nice to maintain some of these existing plantings.

Public Questions and Comments

Mr. Keith Killian of 340 Harvard Street commented that they worked with Window Woman of New England to restore their windows in conjunction with new storm windows, and stated it was even cheaper than buying windows that look historic. He further remarked that the aesthetic result is amazing.

Ms. Meyer asked how far the lot line is from 14 Dana Street, noting that it looks narrow. Mr. Hiserodt shared his screen to look at the site. Ms. Meyer commented that the mansard building extends the length of the proposed driveway and asked if the parking spaces will be dedicated. Mr. Wong responded that the spaces will be assigned with the lease. Ms. Meyer asked if the space in front of the parking spaces will be accessible. Mr. Hiserodt answered yes. Ms. Meyer then asked if there is enough space for the window wells from the sidewalk. Mr. Hiserodt replied that there's more than 12 feet from the sidewalk to the building. Ms. Meyer asked if they are rebuilding the front steps, pointing out that they're very steep. Mr. Hiserodt said he hopes to retain them and that if they take down the steps, they will be required to be rebuilt according to code.

Commission Comments

Ms. Litchfield asked about mechanicals. Mr. Hiserodt said that with the new energy code they are almost obligated to use heat pumps or other electrical means, the location hasn't been determined but he showed the most likely location on a plan, the rear corner near the parking spaces.

Mr. Redmon stated that there are many issues that are unanswered and suggested the applicants agree to continue the hearing to submit new documents with more information including landscaping, façade adjustments, such as clapboards vs. shingles for the siding.

Ms. Litchfield agreed, noting the need for more information on cladding, window trim, what's being restored or replaced, and a landscape plan is needed for a project this big with a lot of existing green space. And hopefully a solution to the front doors.

Mr. Wong agreed to provide all the required information.

Ms. Litchfield asked the Commission members for their opinion. Ms. Hakuta agreed, especially since this is a binding review, and recapped the need for more information on the front doors, window details and type, cladding, location of heat pumps, and landscaping.

Ms. Laird also concurred.

Ms. Litchfield motioned to continue the hearing. Mr. Redmon seconded, and the motion passed 5-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public Present on December 4, 2023**Panelists:**

Michael Kleber, applicant	8 Cleveland Street
Ryan Severin,	Empower Energy Solutions
John Buckley, architect	Newton, MA
Nathan Perkins	36-4 Irving Street
Tommy Leung	36-4 Irving Street
Nikhil Agarwal	54 Antrim Street
Eleanore Fleming	54 Antrim Street
Brigitte Steines, architect	Inkstone Architects
Rob Nafie, architect	Inkstone Architects
Nathan Wong	Waxwing LLC
Steve Hiserodt, architect	Brookline, MA

Attendees:

Marilee Meyer	10 Dana Street
Keith Killian	340 Harvard Street
Jennifer Hou	14 Dana Street
Nancy Seidman	9 Cleveland Street
Florence Killian	340 Harvard Street
V. Binnette	339 Harvard Street