

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

April 6, 2017 - 795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge City Hall - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: William King, *Chair*; William Barry, Robert Crocker, Chandra Harrington, Jo Solet, *Members*; Kyle Sheffield, *Alternate*
Members absent: Bruce Irving, *Vice Chair*; Joseph Ferrara, Susannah Tobin *Alternates*
Staff present: Charles Sullivan, *Executive Director*; Sarah Burks, *Preservation Planner*
Public present: See attached list.

With a quorum present, Chair King called the meeting to order at 6:03 P.M. and explained the hearing procedures. He designated Mr. Sheffield to vote on all matters. He described the consent agenda procedure and proposed the following cases for approval:

Case 3764: 16 Garden St., by Sheraton Commander Hotel. Replace HVAC equipment in parking lot and add rooftop chiller unit.

Case 3769: 5 Longfellow Pk., by Friends Meeting at Cambridge. Remove existing freestanding sign. Install new signs.

No one requested a hearing on either case. Mr. Crocker moved to approve Cases 3764 and 3769 per the consent agenda procedure. Ms. Harrington seconded, and the motion passed 6-0.

Mr. King described the Commission's hearing procedures and stated the three-minute rule for public comment.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 3708 (continued): 126 Mt. Auburn St., by President & Fellows of Harvard College. Install HVAC equipment and wood enclosure/screen.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the location. He noted that the case had been continued from an earlier hearing so the applicant could present additional information about the installation.

Diane Gray of Harvard Planning & Project Management introduced Kathy McCarthy of Harvard University and Yar Laakso of the Galante Architecture Studio.

Ms. McCarthy said that the HVAC equipment for the building was currently in an adjacent garage, but the system was not efficient and was difficult to service because the coolant lines ran under a roadway.

Mr. Laakso described the proposed location and said other locations wouldn't work for various reasons. The horizontal slats enclosing the units would be painted to match the house. He had worked with an acoustical consultant to make sure the project would conform to the city's noise ordinance and not disturb the occupants of the building.

Mr. King asked if the unit could be placed on the roof of the ell behind the main block of the house. Mr. Laakso said the two 3' x 3' units were quite heavy and would require a sturdy frame to support them. Ms. McCarthy said evergreens would screen the units from public view.

Mr. King called for public comment, but there was none.

Dr. Solet complimented the applicants for the quality of their documentation and moved to approve the application as submitted. Mr. Crocker seconded and the motion passed 6-0.

Case 3760: 43-45 Mt. Auburn St., by Foundation for Civic Leadership. Construct accessibility ramp on east side; remove non-original deck at third floor.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the building as a ca. 1845 house with a ca. 1925 one-floor brick wing added by a Harvard club.

Kyle Larabee, representing the owner, said the building houses a variety of non-profits. The new ramp would offer code-compliant accessibility. The decrepit third-floor balcony would be removed.

Mr. Sheffield asked about materials. Mr. Larabee said it would be unpainted pressure-treated wood on concrete footings with galvanized steel handrails. He told Mr. Sullivan that a sturdy lattice or slatted skirting could be added.

Mr. King asked for public comment, but there was none.

Mr. Sullivan suggested a Certificate of Hardship, on the condition that a skirt be added and the existing privet hedge be maintained. Mr. Crocker so moved, Mr. Sheffield seconded, and the motion passed 6-0.

Case 3761: 190 Brattle St., by Jonathan Seelig & Margaret Gold Seelig. Remove sunroom on rear elevation and construct new yoga room addition. Alter doors on rear elevation.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the proposal to remove a curved-roof greenhouse and replace it with a wood-framed room. The west end of the structure would be visible from Brattle Street.

Jonathan Seelig, one of the owners, said the footprint would be about the same. Adam Sitterly, an architect, said the structure would have operable windows and would be trimmed to match the house. A fiberglass gutter would be painted to match the trim.

Ms. Harrington said that wood might be more visible than the glass greenhouse. Mr. Selig said visibility would be minimal. Mr. Sitterly told Mr. Sheffield that the height would be about 6" lower.

Mr. Khanachet, an abutter, asked for confirmation that the dimensions would be about the same.

Dr. Solet moved to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as proposed. Mr. Barry seconded, and the motion passed 6-0.

Case 3762: Cambridge Common, by City of Cambridge, Arts Council. Install temporary banners on light poles as part of public art project.

Dina Deitsch of the Cambridge Public Arts Commission described the application and introduced Kelly Sherman, an artist. Permission was needed to install temporary 2' x 2' banners on about 15 existing light poles, 12' above the ground.

Ms. Sherman said the banners would contain short phrases derived from interviews of people about their memories of and experiences on the Common. The full stories would be on display at the Arts Council gallery at 344 Broadway.

Dr. Solet asked if the colors would be like those presented. Ms. Deitsch said every medium displays colors differently. She told Ms. Harrington that about 50 people had provided stories in writing, online and through voicemails.

Mr. Sullivan noted that the Commission had granted certificates for banners on Massachusetts Avenue, but not on the newly-renovated Common. Mr. King agreed that it was a physical modification that needed approval.

Mr. Sheffield asked if the banners would be accompanied by any descriptive material. Ms. Deitsch described the other temporary installations and said that four editions of a special newspaper would be available in news boxes on the Common.

Mr. King asked for public comment. A member of the public said it was a great idea. Mr. King then closed the public comment period.

Mr. King asked how the banners would be attached. Ms. Deitsch said with metal bands and brackets, and confirmed that the hardware would come down at the end of the project.

Dr. Solet asked if the banners would be illuminated. Ms. Sherman said no additional illumination would be provided.

Mr. Barry moved to approve the project as submitted, on the condition that staff approve installation details and the mounting hardware be removed at the conclusion of the project. Dr. Solet seconded, and the motion passed 6-0.

Case 3763: 21 Follen St., by Gail Greenwald. Install solar panels on ell.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and introduced the case. He noted that the Commission had granted a Certificate of Appropriateness a few months ago for a similar project next door at 19 Follen Street.

Chingsung Chang, the solar contractor, said the panels would be installed on the roof of the ell. A new code provision required that an inverter and a disconnect switch be installed in a “readily accessible location” on the side of the house or on the fence.

Mr. King asked if it could be installed behind the fence, but was told it could not. Mr. Sheffield noted that this was also a fire department requirement. Ms. Harrington expressed surprise, and was advised that the code update became effective in January.

Mr. Sheffield noted that the orientation did not appear to maximize efficiency. Mr. Chang replied that the owner wished to proceed anyway, and that the installation would cover a significant portion of her already low energy costs.

Mr. Sheffield asked about the conduit, and was told it could run along the ridge or along the soffit. He said that a painted conduit would be an added visual element. Mr. Barry was advised that the conduit could be run down into the house.

Mr. Chang said that the inverter box and the disconnect switch needed to be positioned together on the same side of the fence. They were each about the same size as a 200 amp electrical panel. There was no minimum height requirement. They could be screened by plants if not entirely obscured by them.

Mr. Sullivan asked if the fence could be moved back from the front corner of the house, and was advised that the homeowner was not willing to do that. Mr. Chang said that the conduit could be installed

in the basement, and that the equipment could be installed in a properly-labelled box on the fence. Mr. Sullivan said the panels on the ell roof would not be inappropriate, and perhaps the installation could be approved if the conduit were concealed and the boxes placed behind the fence with an access door.

Mr. Sheffield said that recessing behind the fence might be overkill; the boxes were only 2” deep and could be painted. Mr. Barry said it would be better to mount them on the fence than on the house.

Mr. King asked about the provision of Ch. 40C regarding this matter, and Mr. Sullivan read the language about supporting the Commonwealth’s goals to promote solar energy. Mr. King said he didn’t see the public interest if the installation would not generate much energy; Mr. Sheffield replied that the economics of the matter were not in the Commission’s purview.

Mr. Sullivan recommended approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as proposed on the condition that there be no visible conduit and that the panels be installed on the fence and painted to match.

Mr. Barry so moved. Mr. Sheffield seconded, and the motion passed 6-0.

Public Hearing: Demolition Review

Case D-1439: 127 Coolidge Hill, by Emily & Devereaux McClatchey. Demolish house (1925).

Mr. King explained the demolition hearing procedure.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and presented his memo on the significance of the structure, which was designed by Boston architect J. Robertson Ward in a stripped Neo-Classical design for an almost landlocked site in Coolidge Hill. This was a carefully planned neighborhood designed by Olmsted Associates, and the architecture of every house was approved by the design firm and the developers. The area was notable for the graceful layout of its streets and the architectural harmony of its residences.

Mr. King opened the meeting for public comment on the significance of the existing house, but there was none.

Dr. Solet moved to find the house significant for the reasons stated in the staff report. Mr. Sheffield seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Turning to the question as to whether the existing house was “preferably preserved.” Charles Meyer, the architect, said ~~the existing house~~that it was 20% smaller than it should have been for all the rooms it contained. It had such an odd plan that modifying it was not possible; so much would be destroyed it made more sense to start over.

The footprint of the new house would be centered on the lot, and the front door would be at the front, in contrast to the existing situation. The facades would be a combination of brick and wood, with a slate roof and a cupola. There would be a one-car brick garage at the end of the driveway.

Matthew Cunningham, the landscape architect, described the site plan with a terrace and pergola, lawn, and specimen trees.

Devereaux McClatchey introduced his wife Emily and said they had three children at Shady Hill [School](#). This would be a lifetime house, not a development opportunity. They hadn't started with the intention of building a new house, but the existing one was not adequate by modern standards for a growing family.

Mr. Barry asked for a comparison of square footages. Mr. Meyer said the current house had 6,000 sf; while the new one would have 7,400, including the unfinished basement and attic.

Mr. Sheffield asked if there was precedent in the neighborhood for a garage facing the street; Mr. Cunningham said there were a few. Devin Hefferon, his associate, said the garage would be about 25' further back.

Mr. Sullivan asked for a comparison of the heights of the old (30') and new (34'4") houses.

Chris Legg of 125 Coolidge Hill, an abutter, said that he and his wife supported the proposal because the McClatcheys had reached out and showed them the plans. The existing house had challenges; the owner lived alone and it was not suitable for a family.

Mr. Sullivan listed emails received in support and opposed.

Mr. Barry asked if it were in the public interest to delay demolition when several abutters were present showing support. He thought the new house was a strong piece of work, and a very able replacement that he could support as proposed.

Mr. Sheffield said the original house was significant, but because of restrictions caused by the corner lot and the placement of the garage he could see it replaced. The materials of the new house were luxurious and complementary to the neighborhood; the one-car garage was a correct move.

Dr. Solet said that the new house would fit in with the neighborhood. Would anything be served by delaying the demolition for six months?

Mr. King said it was a nice design, but he was troubled by the project. He knew several houses in Coolidge Hill, and they were all cramped by modern standards. Cities like Newton were seeing lots of demolitions for larger replacements. The implications of tearing down a well-designed house by a prominent architect in a neighborhood like Coolidge Hill disturbed him. He would not go so far as to say it was preferably-preserved, but wondered if a six-month delay would send a message to others. He would like this to be an exception rather than a precedent.

Mr. Sullivan said that most houses in Coolidge Hill were quite small. The new house would be bulkier than anything around it, although the inside corner lot might temper its impact. A neighbor told him that many owners in the neighborhood were getting older and would be selling soon; more new houses on this scale would detract from the scale of the neighborhood. The existing house was entirely viable. The new design was exemplary, but he was troubled by the precedent it would set.

Ms. Harrington agreed. Both the new and old houses were pleasing designs. Would it be in the public interest to delay when it will not change the outcome?

Mr. Crocker was familiar with the house; it was quite unique and not in bad condition. He would be sorry to see it go, even though the replacement was a good design.

Mr. Sheffield asked Mr. Sullivan to describe the effects of a delay.

Heidi Legg of 125 Coolidge Hill interrupted to raise other issues that she thought were important to the neighborhood, specifically developments around the house at 177 Coolidge Hill. Why had Mr. Sullivan approved the demolition of a garage there when the house had belonged to a Nobel Prize recipient? This had opened up the lot adjacent to 127 to development and 30 trees had recently been cut there.

Mr. Sullivan continued. He explained the timetable that would result from six-month delay, including an automatic hearing on landmark eligibility in the fifth month.

Mr. McClatchey said the public interest in this case lay with the neighbors who supported them. They were committed to the neighborhood and had tried to be sensitive to the broader context.

Mr. King closed the public comment period.

Mr. Barry said the challenging location of the lot and the awkward floor plan of the existing house would be reasons that this case could not be cited as a precedent for Coolidge Hill. He didn't think the delay should be used to send a message; each case should be weighed on its own unique circumstances. He saw no public interest in imposing a delay, and he moved to find the existing house not preferably preserved in the context of the proposed replacement project.

Mr. King recommended amending the motion to include a finding that the public interest would not be served by a six-month delay on the basis of the facts of this particular case. Mr. Barry accepted the amendment.

Dr. Solet said the unique qualities of the building meant that it would be valuable to have a photographic record, inside and out. Mr. Meyer agreed.

Dr. Solet then seconded Mr. Barry's amended motion.

Ms. Harrington said the Commission represented the public interest of the entire city, not just of the Coolidge Hill neighborhood, so she would oppose the motion.

Mr. King called for a vote on Mr. Barry's amended motion, which was adopted by a vote of 4-2 with Mr. Crocker and Ms. Harrington voting in opposition.

Mr. King recognized Ms. Legg and told her that the Commission had limited jurisdiction; it could not protect trees. Ms. Legg stated that Mr. Sullivan's sign-off on the demolition of the attached garage of "the Constable mansion" (177 Coolidge Hill) opened up a previously inaccessible lot to development. The lot had just been clear-cut and now a new house would go up there. Why was there no hearing? Could the owner be made to put the garage back up?

Mr. Sullivan said that the garage was an incongruous addition that obscured the view of the original house. He determined that it was not significant under the ordinance; that it might have blocked access to another parcel was not relevant to this determination. In any event, the lot was not landlocked; there

was direct access to Coolidge Hill Road. ISD had determined that this driveway was too narrow to be used, but there was sure to be additional public process before the BZA or the Planning Board.

Mr. Sheffield asked if there had been discussion about a neighborhood conservation district commission. Mr. Sullivan said there had not.

Mr. King called a recess, and the Commission reconvened at 9:10 PM.

Preservation Grants

Mr. Sullivan presented four applications for preservation grants, against a remaining balance of \$98,415. Two were affordable housing projects and two were institutional.

Case PG 17-5: 74-78 Willow St., by Homeowner's Rehab. \$50,000. Remove vinyl siding, restore exterior, and recreate decorative details. This building appeared to be in good condition, and he recommended deferring action.

Case PG 17-6: 89 Third St., by Just A Start. \$30,000. Remove shed dormer and restore Mansard roof. Funding this project would restore the integrity of Quality Row.

Case IPG 17-8: 5 Magazine St., by First Baptist Church. \$56,000 (matching). Replace boiler in parish house. First Baptist had received several grants for masonry restoration in the early years of the program, but had been unable to raise matching funds for the last one in 2009. Restoring heat to the parish house would enable them to generate income from the space. He recommended approval now, contingent on receiving a new appropriation in September.

Case IPG 17-9: 82 School St., by Rush AME Zion Church. \$50,000 (outright). Roof replacement. A very small and uniquely designed church in the Port neighborhood and a first-time applicant. Accessibility would be next.

Mr. Sheffield moved to approve grants for 89 Third Street, 5 Magazine Street, and 82 School Street as recommended, and to defer action on 74-78 Willow Street. Ms. Harrington seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Minutes

The commissioners reviewed the minutes of March 2, 2017. Dr. Solet proposed several corrections that were noted on the draft, and Ms. Harrington moved to approve the minutes as corrected. Mr. Crocker seconded, and the motion passed 6-0.

Preservation Award Nominations

Mr. Sullivan reviewed the list of candidates and showed slides. There was general discussion, and a consensus was reached on the awards to be made on May 18.

Other Business

Dr. Solet noted that the HVAC unit on the roof of a building adjoining the Old Burying Ground was making an excessive amount of noise. Mr. Sullivan replied that he had noted this on a visit earlier in the week, and that he would pursue a resolution.

Dr. Solet moved to adjourn. Mr. Crocker seconded, and the motion passed 6-0 at 10:14 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks, Preservation Planner
Charles Sullivan, Executive Director

**Members of the Public
Who Signed the Attendance List on April 6, 2017**

Diane Gray	1350 Massachusetts Avenue
Kathy McCarthy	1350 Massachusetts Avenue
Yar Laakso	146 Mt. Auburn Street
Kyle Larabee	16 Hazel Street
Adam Sitterly	4 Kennedy Road
Edward Pitts	875 Main Street
Charles R. Meyer	875 Main Street
Devin Hefferon	411 Main Street, Stoneham
Matthew Cunningham	411 Main Street, Stoneham
Devereaux McClatchey	5 Central Street, Winchester
Emily McClatchey	5 Central Street, Winchester
Elizabeth Rucker	32 Mansfield Street, Allston
Kelly Sherman	71 Fulkerson Street
Jonathan Seelig	190 Brattle Street
Dina Deitsch	33 Bigelow Street
Joseph Tierney	35 Hawthorne Street, Somerville
Priscilla Forney	6 Coolidge Hill Road
Heidi Legg	125 Coolidge Hill
Chris Legg	125 Coolidge Hill

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.