

Draft Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the Cambridge Historical Commission (acting as a Historic District Study Committee) and the Reservoir Hill Neighborhood Conservation District Study Committee

June 8, 2016 – 10 Phillips Place, Washburn Commons, Room 103--6:00 P.M.

CHC Members present: William Barry, William King, Jo M. Solet, *Members*; Joseph Ferrara and Susannah Tobin, *Alternates*

CHC Members absent: Chandra Harrington, Shary Page Berg, Bruce Irving, Robert G. Crocker, *Members*; Susannah Tobin, Joseph Ferrara, *Alternates*

RHNCD Study Comm. Members present: Peter Ellis, Robert Higgins, Arch Horst, and Bracebridge Young, with appointed CHC representatives Joseph Ferrara and Susannah Tobin

RHNCD Study Comm. Members absent: Chandra Harrington

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

Public present: See attached list.

William King called the meeting to order at 6:04 P.M.

Sarah Burks distributed written correspondence from Annette LaMond and Brian Pfeiffer and the committee members read over the letters.

William King said he had seen a West Newton demolition example recently. Arch Horst asked staff for clarification of the Newton neighborhood that was compared to Reservoir Hill at the last meeting. Charles Sullivan explained the location up the hill behind the West Newton Cinema. Newton was seeing demolition permit requests every few days. He reviewed the agenda items including discussion of boundaries and the draft goals and guidelines.

Peter Ellis said it was his sense of the last meeting that there was a consensus to flesh out an NCD proposal to contrast to the status quo, rather than to pursue an extension of the Old Cambridge Historic (40C) District. The size and potential for developments at the BB&N (80 Sparks) lot and the Armenian church lots was great. If there was no district in place, there could be significant changes to the appearance and feel of the neighborhood. The impact of demolition and redevelopment on those large lots could be very significant.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides of the properties along the eastern and northern boundaries of the study area for discussion purposes. He reviewed the history of the neighborhood's development and explained why the study area did not go through to Lakeview Ave. He described his reasoning for the draft boundaries of the study area. [Bracebridge Young arrived]. The properties under consideration for exclusion from a proposed district were 80 Sparks Street (mixed dates) and 77 Sparks Street (1950; 2005) as well as 102 Appleton Street (1889) and 110 Appleton Street (1907). The architecture of 102 Appleton was more consistent with the neighborhood than 110. Jo Solet asked if there were any deed restrictions on the use of the BB&N property. Mr. Young answered that there were none. Mr. Sullivan explained the northern boundary on Reservoir Street was the coachman's house (43 Reservoir Street) for the 25 Reservoir estate and the carriage house on the former reservoir site. He reported that a young couple had purchased 43 Reservoir and planned to restore it without making major changes.

Mr. Young commented on Ms. LaMond's letter with regard to the buses that run from the high school campus to the middle school. There was only one bus drop off each morning. The probability of the school selling the Sparks Street property and relocating was very low because the cost was too high to buy another property in the Cambridge area. Mr. Ellis commented that the short term likelihood may be small, but 25-50 years down the line it might be a different situation. Mr. Young clarified that the school would prefer not to be in a district, either NCD or Historic. Mr. King noted that a district designation might be more predictable for an institution like BB&N than the potential for a landmark study that could be started at any time in the future. Mr. Sullivan noted that if the property were excluded from a district, the carriage house and the main building would still be subject to demolition review and possible landmark study. Arch Horst recommended drawing out BB&N from a district because it was much bigger than anything else in the area except the Armenian Church. Mr. Ellis noted that BB&N was a major entry point into the neighborhood from the north. The existing setback and the traditional architecture of the main building made it relatively unobtrusive now but a residential developer would want more volume at the front of the lot.

Bill Barry asked if there was any advantage to cleaning up the northern boundary line of the existing Old Cambridge Historic District, which in some places cut properties down the middle. Mr. Sullivan answered that it would require a 2/3 vote of the City Council to amend the OCHD boundaries.

Mr. Ellis asked procedural questions about the remainder of the study, recommendations of the study committee, CHC public hearing and recommendation to City Council.

Mr. Young recommended excluding 80 and 77 Sparks Street from the draft district boundaries.

Joseph Ferrara indicated that because 110 Appleton Street was set way back it would be okay to exclude it from the draft district. With regard to 77 Sparks, he said that consistency of a particular style isn't what holds the district together but a quality of design and execution was and 77 had been designed very well in a contemporary style. There was a place for modern architecture in a district. With regard to the two larger properties, he said it would be better to keep 80 Sparks and the church lots within a district because of their large size and because their location bookended the district on Sparks Street.

George Mabry said his house was not designed in a particular style. There were not other examples like it from which to draw precedent or to instruct a commission as to appropriateness. He said he was concerned that decisions of a district commission would come down to an expression of taste. Mr. Sullivan answered that it was not taste but appropriateness that would be decided upon. The existing house's design was no less incongruous to the surrounding neighborhood than had been the 1950 original house. He asked Mr. Mabry what the downside of being in a district would be to him. Mr. Mabry answered that his house was clad with California redwood that was very expensive to maintain and difficult to source. At some point in the future he would have to change the type of wood or the construction details and the house would have to evolve.

Mr. Horst said that appropriateness was subjective, not quantitative like zoning. Some people want things to stay exactly as they are and never change.

Mr. Sullivan pointed out that district decisions are decided by a collective body, not by any one member's taste. Dr. Solet pointed out that there were very few property owner appeals or contests to CHC decisions in the Old Cambridge Historic District.

Mr. Mabry said time was very valuable and he was worried that getting changes approved would take a lot of time and multiple meetings. He noted that he had already canceled two vacations in order to be present at study committee meetings in hopes of discussing boundaries.

Mr. Higgins asked about the timeline for the rest of the study. Mr. Sullivan said the next meetings would go over the details of the proposal and then there could be a break until September. He recommended a public hearing with the CHC in October or November and then if it were headed to City Council that could happen before the end of the year. Mr. Ellis noted he would be unavailable for the June 29 meeting. He would not be able to call in and did not want to miss a vote or decision. Mr. Sullivan said he did not foresee any major decisions until fall. He assured Mr. Mabry that it was okay to take his vacation. He also offered to come out to the house and discuss specific maintenance and design challenges at 77 Sparks.

Mr. Higgins asked for a big picture view of how the Avon Hill NCD was working. Could they talk to a commission member? How long does it take to get a decision on an application?

Mr. Young recommended that a draft district proposal exclude the properties recommended by Mr. Sullivan (77 and 80 Sparks and 110 Appleton).

Mr. Sullivan reported on the property swap at 71 Appleton Street and 29 Highland Street. Mr. Young said the new owners of 29 Highland took down at least 6 significant trees without consulting him.

Mr. Young suggested that a postcard poll not get mailed out until at least September. He moved to adjourn the meeting, which was approved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:40 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Committee Members and Members of the Public
Who Signed In on June 8, 2016**

Jo M. Solet	15 Berkeley St
George Mabry	77 Sparks St
William King	25 Hurlbut St
Edward Kerslake	15 Woodbridge St
Brace Young	88 Appleton St
Peter Ellis	16 Highland St
Bob Higgins	1 Highland St
Arch Horst	55 Brewster St
William Barry	10 Norumbega St
Susannah Tobin	3 Arlington St
Gulnur Cengiz	365 Harvard St
Joe Ferrara	195 Brattle St
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.