

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

April 7, 2022 – Meeting conducted online via Zoom Webinar (830 4942 4423) - 6:00 P.M.

Members present (online): Bruce Irving, *Chair*; Susannah Tobin, *Vice Chair*; Joseph Ferrara; Chandra Harrington, Liz Lyster, Jo Solet, *Members*; Gavin Kleespies, Paula Paris, Kyle Sheffield, *Alternate Members*

Members absent: Caroline Shannon, *Member*

Staff present (online): Charles Sullivan, *Executive Director*, Sarah Burks, *Preservation Planner*

Public present (online): See attached list.

This meeting was held online with remote participation and was closed to in-person attendance, consistent with the provisions set forth in Chapter 22 of the Acts of 2022, which includes an extension until July 15, 2022, of the remote meeting provisions of the Governor's March 2020, Executive Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law. The public was able to participate online via the Zoom webinar platform.

With a quorum present (Irving, Ferrara, Harrington, Lyster, Solet, Kleespies, Paris, Sheffield), Mr. Irving called the meeting to order at 6:04 P.M. He explained the online meeting instructions and public hearing procedures, then introduced commissioners and staff. He dispensed with the consent agenda and noted that the applicant for Case 4716: 32 Church Street had requested an indefinite continuance while the design and logistics of an outdoor patio could be discussed with other city departments and neighborhood groups. Dr. Solet moved to grant an indefinite continuance for the case, to be advertised for a hearing when they were ready to return. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion. Mr. Irving designated Mr. Kleespies and Ms. Paris to vote as alternates. The motion passed in a roll call vote 7-0 (Ferrara, Lyster, Harrington, Solet, Irving, Kleespies, Paris).

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 4757: 139 Main St., by MIT 139 Main Street Fee Owner LLC. Paint a mural on the brick wall of the west elevation.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides of the Luke Building, a designated landmark. He explained that it had been renovated a few years ago and the applicant received a Preservation Award for that work. He summarized the application to apply a coating on the west wall and then to paint a mural there with the intent being that it would only be temporary and then removed.

Allen Breed, of MITIMCO, introduced himself and his colleague Stephanie Caress Murphy.

Ms. Murphy shared her screen and showed slides. She described the Kendall Square Public Arts Initiative to provide interactive art projects for the community. She showed historic photographs of the Luke Building with painted signs. She described the art works of the muralist, Percy Fortini Wright. The artist would first apply a primer of Prosoco Defacer Eraser, which would protect the brick and allow the mural to be power washed off the building after a year or two. The proposal was to paint the mural by June 2022.

Ms. Harrington asked why the request was for a temporary mural. Ms. Murphy said that changing the artwork occasionally would keep it fresh and exciting as well as allow new artists to show their work.

Dr. Solet asked if the primer and paint would have a negative impact on the plant material adjacent to the building. Ms. Murphy said it had been used safely in similar conditions.

Mr. Kleespies asked about the safety of the paint shedding off the building. Ms. Murphy said that when that starts to happen, they would power wash the wall to remove the mural.

Ms. Paris asked about the expected lifespan of the mural. Ms. Murphy answered that it would last 18 to 24 months.

Mr. Sullivan asked if the coating could be removed without damage to the masonry. Ms. Murphy replied that it was a protective coating and could be washed off the brick without damage. Mr. Sullivan stated that the Prosoco brand was widely used among masonry professionals and preservationists. He asked about the design for the mural. Ms. Murphy said it had not yet been designed but would not be political or controversial in nature.

Mr. Irving asked if there were questions or comments from the public. There being none, he closed the public comment period.

Mr. Ferrara stated that Prosoco was a preservation-focused company and that he was willing to delegate further review of the project to CHC staff.

Dr. Solet said MIT should know the science of the application and hoped that the project could offer knowledge for the future.

Mr. Kleespies encourage a design that would be engaging and thought provoking.

Mr. Sheffield recommended a mock-up for staff. Dr. Solet and Ms. Harrington expressed interest in seeing the building in person. Ms. Harrington moved to approve the application, as presented, on the condition that a sample of the coating and cleaning be presented to staff and on the further condition that the certificate be limited to five years, unless terminated sooner by staff, and could be renewed with a new application to the Commission. Ms. Lyster seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Solet, Lyster, Harrington, Irving, Kleespies, Paris, Ferrara).

Case 4758: 4 Willard St., by Koby Kempel. Replace roof; demolish carport; restore roof deck with 36” railing; demolish and replace retaining wall, steps and path, demolish driveway.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the Federal Revival house designed in 1904 by Ernest Machado, a Harvard-trained architect from Cuba. He said a major rehabilitation project was underway with interior renovation, exterior repairs, and paint removal.

Dustin Nolan, architect, explained that most of the exterior work was to restore or replace in kind. He summarized the application for new synthetic slate roofing (the existing material was synthetic slate), removing the 1957 carport structure, removing the front retaining wall and restoring the original grade, returning a balustrade to the right-side wing (shown in a historic photograph) but at code compliant height, adding decking boards to that roof and returning a window to a door, replacing the concrete steps and path to bluestone, and repaving the driveway. He displayed the plans and elevations.

Ms. Lyster asked about the gutters. Mr. Nolan said they were currently aluminum K-style gutters

and that they proposed putting copper half-round gutters. Mr. Sullivan indicated that would not be inappropriate but may require some reworking of the fascia.

Dr. Solet said she had been shocked to see the interior gutted. She noted that the street did not have ordinary curbs and asked if natural grading could be jeopardized by storm water. She asked about the condition of the foundation. Mr. Nolan indicated the stone foundation was in good condition but may need to be repointed and cleaned. Dr. Solet asked about paving materials and a door to the deck. Mr. Nolan indicated that the framing of a window opening indicated it may have been a taller window or a door.

Mr. Kleespies asked why they weren't using real slate. Mr. Nolan said the proposed material had been used on other projects and was the preferred material of the owner. Mr. Sullivan noted that the original slate had been replaced with synthetic in 2007 with approval by the Commission. He showed a sample of the proposed product on the screen.

Mr. Sheffield asked about the side window and shutters. Mr. Nolan described the true-divided-light window and said shutters would be returned to the front elevation but not on the sides or rear. Mr. Sheffield asked if the window wells on the front were existing. Mr. Nolan replied in the affirmative.

Ms. Burks asked for clarification about the foundation and right-side retaining wall. Mr. Nolan said it would not be replaced. The wall on the right side would be retained.

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact from the public.

Madeline Jacquet of 8 Willard Street asked about the side wall and the fence along her property line. Mr. Nolan said the carport would be removed but not the wall. He said the fence was on the #4 side of the property line and there was no current proposal to change it, but the owner would consult with her if he decided to replace it. Ms. Jacquet said she was concerned if the fence were to be removed because she had grandchildren and dogs who use her yard. She asked if the roof deck could be located on the north side of the house instead of the south. She expressed concern about noise and privacy. Mr. Nolan said there was no access to the roof on the north side. The proposed roof deck would be accessed from the primary bedroom suite so it wouldn't likely be used for large groups.

Jerrold Grochow of 7 Willard Street asked if two off-street parking spaces would be preserved with or without a garage. Mr. Nolan answered that an open driveway would allow for two cars, but with a garage there would only be one. Mr. Grochow noted the City's plans to rework the street and sidewalk. Mr. Nolan said he had not discussed that with Public Works but would reach out to them.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked about the proposed inconsistency of the shutters. Mr. Nolan said they were only proposed for the front.

Mr. Irving opened the public comment period.

Ms. Meyer urged the applicant to consider returning shutters to all the elevations.

Ms. Jacquet agreed.

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Dr. Solet encouraged further study of storm water issues, grading, walls, and shutters. She asked

about mechanical units. Mr. Nolan said they would be on the north side behind a bump out, not visible from the street. Dr. Solet said the framing of the opening to the roof deck should be investigated by staff.

Mr. Ferrara said a lower stone retaining wall would be appropriate.

Ms. Harrington agreed shutters should be replaced where missing. She encouraged communication with the neighbors.

Mr. Kleespies encouraged the use of natural slate and shutters on the sides.

Mr. Sheffield lamented the use of synthetic slate, encouraged a balustrade match the height of the others existing on the house, and urged the replacement of missing shutters on all sides. He suggested that the steps should be granite. He suggested that a new retaining wall match the material of the foundation.

Mr. Irving said he was not persuaded to allow a roof deck unless there is evidence it was original.

Mr. Sheffield moved to approve the application as submitted with the following conditions, that the existing shutters be repair or replaced in kind and that the owner consider replacing the missing shutters, that a forensic investigation of the framing of the opening to the south roof be delegated to staff, that a new retaining wall match the fieldstone foundation or the stone wall at #8, that the front steps and path be retained or match the existing material. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion. Mr. Irving noted the arrival of Ms. Tobin but suggested she not vote since she had arrived mid-presentation. She agreed. He designated Mr. Sheffield and Mr. Kleespies to vote as alternates. The motion passed 7-0 in a roll call vote (Ferrara, Lyster, Solet, Irving, Harrington, Sheffield, Kleespies).

Case 4761: 25 and 31 Brattle St., by Asana Partners. Install new glass canopy over storefront at 25 Brattle and a new overhang at 31.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the existing variety of awnings and canopies on the building. He pointed out the storefronts at #25 and #31. He said a variety was encouraged, rather than requiring a strict consistency of awning treatments on the building. Awnings were useful, especially on the south-facing storefronts.

John Piacitelli, architect, described the proposed addition of a glass canopy at #25. The steel structural elements would be painted to match the storefront glazing frame. The canopy would fit within the existing masonry opening for the store. An actuator-button for opening the door for accessibility code would be installed. He described the addition of a small brow to the store at #31. It would project about 8" and would be similar to the one at allbirds. An actuator button would also be installed there.

Dr. Solet asked about the actuators, door swing, and accessibility. Mr. Piacitelli explained that the slope from the sidewalk to the interior floor level was too steep and an automatic door was an option for improving accessibility. The door could not swing in due to the slope and for egress.

Mr. Irving asked for questions and comments from the public.

Nicola Williams of 8 Brewer Street asked how many local businesses would be in the building. She remarked that the Harvard Square Neighborhood Association had found it difficult to connect with the owners.

Welch Liles of Asana Partners, the owner, answered that there were no specific tenants for these spaces yet. He said he would be happy to meet with the neighborhood association.

Ms. Meyers asked if the full package had been posted online and Ms. Burks confirmed it had.

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Dr. Solet suggested a sliding door instead of an out-swinging door.

Ms. Paris asked why the storefront changes were not coming all at the same time. Mr. Sullivan indicated that it would not be desirable to have all the awnings be the same because it would look mall-like. He indicated a preference for loose canvas awnings.

Ms. Lyster moved to grant a certificate of appropriateness for the work, as presented. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion. Dr. Solet urged the applicant to consider a sliding door. She offered an amendment to the motion to require it. Ms. Lyster did not agree to the amendment because the door configuration was outside of the commission's purview and there was no second. Mr. Sullivan noted that it was a standard configuration for a door and actuator system. The door must swing out rather than in for egress purposes. Mr. Irving noted that Ms. Tobin would be voting on this case and designated Mr. Kleespies to vote as alternate. The motion carried 6-0-1. (Ferrara, Harrington, Irving, Lyster and Tobin in favor; none opposed, Solet abstained) [Mr. Ferrara left the meeting].

Public Hearing: Demolition Review

Case D-1609: 18 Pleasant St., by the Rossmore LLC & Boston Residential LLC. Demolish house (1864) and attached carriage house and office additions.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the case history of this demolition request. The Commission had found the existing building and attached carriage house significant at the previous meeting, imposing a twelve-month demolition delay. The proponents had returned with an amended design for the proposed replacement building and asked the Commission for consideration of that proposal.

Thomas Miller, attorney for the owners, introduced the applicants and their architect. He said they had made changes to the proposal based on the Commission's concerns about the contemporary design and how it relates to the residential neighborhood.

Daniel Martinez of Khalsa Design shared his screen and outlined the changes made to the design comparing elevations of last month and the current design. He indicated the construction would conform to LEED Silver standards. The location was not well suited for retail and was historically a residential use. He noted that the Business A zoning district's regulations provided a transition between the business area of Central Square and the Residential C-1 area. He noted other tall residential buildings nearby. He said the comments made last month about materials and contextuality of the design were heard and changes made. He said the city-owned building at 5 Western Avenue was used as a design inspiration. He pointed out the horizontal band above the third story, regularity of windows, spandrel glass or flat trim between the second and third floors. He described the proposed materials: brick on the first three floors, fiber cement or metal panels at the top floor, die concrete at the base, and a glass railing at the roof deck. He indicated that more traditional trim details were used to correspond to the masonry.

Dr. Solet asked how they would decide between the fiber cement or metal panels. Mr. Martinez indicated that samples could be provided, and the decision could be made in consultation with staff.

Ms. Paris asked about the sun and shadow studies. Mr. Martinez displayed the studies.

Ms. Lyster asked about the floor-to-floor heights. Mr. Martinez said they would be 9' on the first three floors and 10' at the top floor.

Mr. Irving asked for questions from the public.

Tarek Salib of 14 Pleasant Street said that he owned a dental office nearby and asked how demolition would be handled. How could he be assured that he would be able to maintain a sterile environment in his office. He also noted a rodent problem in the area. How would the demolition address that?

Ryan Wittig, an owner, agreed there was a rodent problem. The property would be baited in advance of demolition. He stated that the demolition process would take only a day or two and that he could consult Mr. Salib about the scheduling of the work. Mr. Miller added that demolition contractors were skilled in preventing dust at the site.

Ms. Meyer asked about the glass railing and bike lockers.

Mr. Irving asked for public comment.

Ms. Meyer said she appreciated the changes. She compared the cool material colors to the warmer earth tones of the apartment building across the street. She indicated that she was not yet satisfied with the replacement design. She said the large windows were not appealing. The building did not have to extend to the full height allowed by zoning.

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Ms. Lyster indicated the large windows conveyed an office feeling rather than residential. She said the expansive glass would not be a strong selling point for residential condominiums.

Ms. Harrington agreed. She thanked the applicants for the changes and the improved contextuality of the building to the nearby buildings but said the windows were oversized.

Dr. Solet said the large windows would allow a lot of light-spill at night and that a consistent internal window treatment would be needed.

Ms. Tobin said she shared her fellow commissioners' concerns about the scale of the windows in relation to the residential context.

Mr. Kleespies said the material choices were moving in the right direction. The new design was not radically different. Further work on the massing and materials could help make a more gradual transition between the smaller neighboring buildings and the larger more commercial buildings of the Square.

Ms. Paris agreed. The building looked too commercial and not residential enough.

Mr. Wittig responded to the comments about the windows saying that they thought it would be a missed opportunity not to maximize the windows that looked out toward the river and the setting sun.

Mr. Sheffield made some design suggestions including increasing the height of the entablature at the top of the building, replacing spandrel glass with an exterior material, removing the column at the

first-floor corner, removing the cap and setting the railing back from the building edge, and making the windows on the west façade more regularly positioned.

Mr. Sullivan noted the Commission's role to weigh the public benefits of the proposed building vs. preservation of the existing building. He said adding to the housing stock was a benefit and that the design feedback provided could lead to a finding that the existing building is not preferably preserved within the context of a replacement design. He encouraged the applicants to keep working on the design and come back.

Dr. Solet moved to confirm the commission's previous finding that the existing building was preferably preserved in the context of the design presented but to encourage the applicants to make some further updates and return at a future meeting. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion. Dr. Solet asked that the applicants provide more information about color and materials. Mr. Irving agreed. He designated Mr. Sheffield and Mr. Kleespies to vote as alternates. The motion passed 7-0 in a roll call vote (Solet, Kleespies, Lyster, Harrington, Tobin, Irving, Sheffield).

Landmark Designation Proceedings

Case D-1575: 21 Loomis St., by Kevin Emery & Eamon Fee. Consider initiation of a landmark study for the preferably preserved significant building subject to a demolition delay until May 6, 2022.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the history and architecture of the mid-century Cape house, the first house to be built in this suburban subdivision. The Commission had found the existing building to be preferably preserved in the context of the proposed two townhouse development in May of 2021. He said the question before the Commission was whether the significance of the existing building warranted a landmark study of the property. The proponents had not requested to present a revised replacement proposal.

Dr. Solet asked if the large lots were at greater risk of redevelopment. Mr. Sullivan said the size of the lots and the zoning would allow for considerably more FAR on many of the lots.

[Ms. Lyster left the meeting].

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact from the public.

Alisa Lemberg and John Chun asked about the current replacement design proposal.

Roxanne Spartichino said the neighborhood was unique in Cambridge and it would be a crime to destroy it. She noted that there were two great trees in the back yard.

Mr. Irving asked for public comment.

Ms. Lemberg said she was disappointed the developers did not have an amended proposal.

Mr. Sullivan noted the receipt of letters of support for a landmark study from Patricia Amoroso, Christina & Reed Casey, Alisa Lemberg, Krister Anderson, Joe & Donna Amoroso, Michael Costello, and Roxanne Spartichino.

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Ms. Lyster asked if a landmark study would prevent all changes to the property. Mr. Sullivan

answered that it would not, but proposed changes during a study would need a certificate of appropriateness, nonapplicability or hardship from the commission.

Ms. Harrington questioned if an NCD study of the Cambridge Highlands neighborhood would be better than a single property landmark study.

Eamon Fee, an owner, asked to make a statement. He offered reasons why the existing property did not meet the criteria for landmark designation. He said it did not reach the threshold of significance that it was not importantly associated to the history of the city as a whole. He said the Cape Code house type was extremely common and that there were other more significant examples of it in Cambridge. He said they had worked constructively with the Commission in the past and if they had thought it was possible to find a design that would satisfy everyone, they would have pursued it. He said the carrying costs were punishing and they wanted to be able to proceed with the development without further delay of a landmark study.

Mr. Kleespies expressed disappointment that there hadn't been more effort made to work something out with the neighbors. He said it was doubtful that a landmark proposal for this property would pass muster with the City Council.

Ms. Harrington respectfully disagreed. The building and its setting were very important within the context of the Cambridge Highlands neighborhood. Ms. Paris agreed.

Mr. Sullivan said it would be a hard sell to the City Council, which was being encouraged by some to eliminate single-family zoning all together. A neighborhood conservation district study would be a huge lift, especially given that the staff and committee were trying to wrap up a study in East Cambridge that had been quite controversial. There had been a similar situation on Grove and Blanchard streets several years ago and there was no consensus in the neighborhood to implement an NCD there.

Dr. Solet said she found compelling the neighbor's description of the area as representative of a way of life from the 1940s. There was a sense of community there.

Mr. Kleespies said the suburban history was complicated and had not been available to everyone at the time that it developed.

Dr. Solet said this neighborhood was built on the fringe of a more industrial area and that it wasn't like the more affluent suburban neighborhoods of towns further west.

Mr. Irving said this was a single house, not a question of a way of life. He said he could support a landmark study if it would provide a way to negotiate a modified design that would address some of the neighbors' concerns.

Ms. Paris said she agreed with Mr. Kleespies comments that the suburban story was more complicated than at first glance but the design originally proposed by the developers was in sharp contrast to the neighborhood setting.

Ms. Tobin moved to initiate a landmark study of the property based on the significance outlined in the staff report. Dr. Solet seconded the motion. Mr. Irving noted that Ms. Lyster had left the meeting

and designated all alternates to vote. The motion passed 6-0-1 in a roll call vote. (Harrington, Solet, Tobin, Irving, Paris and Sheffield in favor, none opposed, and Mr. Kleespies abstaining)

Minutes

The Commission reviewed the March minutes. Dr. Solet offered two corrections and asked that her closing remarks thanking the staff and commission for their efforts be added. She said she would forward her proposed changes to the staff.

Ms. Harrington moved to approve the minutes, as modified. Mr. Sheffield seconded. The motion passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Harrington, Sheffield, Tobin, Irving, Kleespies, Paris and Solet)

Preservation Award Nominations

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and showed slides of seventeen projects and two storefront improvement cases nominated for the annual awards program. The Commission deliberated and selected the final slate of award winners.

Mr. Kleespies moved to adjourn. Mr. Sheffield seconded the motion, which passed unanimously in a roll call vote. (Harrington, Sheffield, Tobin, Irving, Kleespies, Paris and Solet)

The meeting adjourned at 11:04 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

Members of the Public
Present on the Zoom Webinar online, April 7, 2022

Allen H. Breed	MIT
Stephanie Caress Murphy	MIT
G. Welch Liles	Asana Partners
John Piacitelli	Bergmeyer Associates
Dustin Nolin	DNA Architecture
Ryan Wittig	79 Glenwood Rd #2 Somerville
Ryan T. Will	667 Somerville Ave, Somerville
Jai Khalsa	Khalsa Design Group
Daniel Martinez	Khalsa Design Group
Thomas Miller	28 State St #802 Boston
Eamon Fee	210 Barker St, Pembroke
Jerrold Grochow	7 Willard St.
Madeline Jacquet	8 Willard St
Ruth Plaut Weinreb	9 Willard St
David Barrett	112 Brattle St
Tarek Salib	14 Pleasant St
Jessica List	34 Ashford St
Kathy McCarthy	1350 Massachusetts Ave, Suite 950
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St, #404
Charles	75 Winter St
Alisa Lemberg	25 Loomis St
Roxanne Spartichino	15 Loomis St
Kit Rawlins	220 Pearl St
Betty Saccoccio	55 Otis St
John Chun	48 Loomis St
Vincent Dixon	60 Lake St, Unit N
Yuting Zhang	100 Memorial Dr, Apt 5-15C
Lucy Lane	640 Massachusetts Ave
Amanda Strong	1 Broadway
Nicola Williams	8 Brewer St
John Hawkinson	CambridgeDay.com

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.