

MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION

Monday, January 4, 2021, 6:00 PM, online Zoom meeting

Commission Members present: Tony Hsiao, *Chair*, Lestra Litchfield, *Vice Chair*, Charles Redmon, Monika Pauli, *Members*, Margaret McMahon, * *Alternate*

Staff present: Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator, Sara Burks, Preservation Planner

Members of the Public: See attached list

Meeting held via online zoom webinar, <https://tinyurl.com/y7vonmsh>

Due to statewide emergency actions limiting the size of public gatherings in response to COVID-19, this meeting was held online 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 966 9883 7877.

Commission Chair Tony Hsiao called the meeting to order at 6:10 and introduced the format of the meeting and confirmed the presence of representatives for each case.

*Commission member Margaret McMahon was unable to establish an audio connection and was therefore unable to vote.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case MC-6074: 23 Line Street, by John H. Cunha. Install solar panels.

Ms. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator, introduced the property and showed slides of the Queen Anne/Colonial Revival house constructed in 1894.

The owner, Jack Cunha, explained the project, stating that the dormers were recently constructed creating livable space where he spends a lot of time. He has also installed mini splits for air conditioning. He noted the existing solar panels on two adjacent houses and that only the panels forward of the dormer will be visible.

No Commission Questions

No Public Questions or Comments

Commission Comments

Vice Chair Lestra Litchfield commented that the proposal looks great, she likes to see a buffer from the edge of the roof, and the applicant has shown that. Commission member Charles Redmon agreed with Ms. Litchfield.

Commission member Monika Pauli asked if the proposed panels will be a similar color to the existing ones in the neighborhood. Mr. Josh Marotske, representative from the company that is installing the panels, replied that they will be black on black.

Ms. Litchfield moved to approve the application as submitted. Mr. Redmon seconded, and the motion passed, 4-0.

Case MC-6081: 383 Broadway, by Case Resources LLC. Replace and reconfigure windows, replace siding, remove entrance in rear, add entrance on side.

Ms. Crosbie presented the history of the property.

Ms. Dunja Vujinic, architect for the applicant, described the exterior alterations including new windows consisting of wood with fiberglass, fiber cement siding, reconfiguration of windows, removal of a door in the rear and replaced with a window, and new sliding doors on the side. They are also proposing to remove the chimneys to accommodate new HVAC system.

Commission Questions - none

Public Questions and Comments - none

Commission Comments

Ms. Litchfield asked if they considered wood clapboard for the siding. Ms. Vujinic answered no because of the durability and cost issues associated with wood. Ms. Litchfield noted that the Commission doesn't usually approve of fiber cement siding because it looks very different. Ms. Vujinic replied that the construction budget was a factor. Ms. Litchfield stated that aside from the chimney removal and siding she likes what is being proposed.

Mr. Hsiao stated that all the Commissioners agreed with Ms. Litchfield, but that there are a lot of positives that balance with the loss of the chimneys and use of fiber cement.

No further comments by the Commission.

Ms. Litchfield moved to reject the application as submitted based on the two issues discussed, the removal of the chimneys and the use of fiber cement. Mr. Redmon seconded the motion, and the motion passed 4-0.

Mr. Hsiao explained that the applicant can still move forward with the proposed project.

Mr. Hsiao asked the applicants for 8 Ellery Street if they agree to change their place in the schedule so that they are last, and they agreed.

Case MC-6082: 134-136 Hancock Street, by Lili Walsh. Remove dormer, construct screen structure on roof, alter front entry, and expand second floor in rear

Ms. Crosbie presented slides of the history of the property.

Mr. John Buckley, the architect for the owner, presented drawings of the proposed project. He noted that the owner lives in the neighborhood and bought the property to avoid inappropriate development. Mr. Buckley further explained their intention of keeping the character of the building and reduce the footprint of the structure while adding floor space. He also stated that the existing dormer will be

removed and the space in the attic will be occupied by mechanical equipment. He is also proposing to remove the gable in the rear and add second floor and create two separated entrances in the front with two staircases and enclosed entry space with glazing and new central panel with possible pineapple motif. He also intends to remove the shingles and rehab the clapboard underneath including pilasters, water table, etc.

Mr. Buckley then described his design of a “widows walk”- like structure on top of the roof to conceal equipment and skylights, designed to be energy efficient through the use of an energy recovery system. Window locations will be maintained and replaced with Marvin wood windows in the same style and proportion. He also proposed a basement egress window facing Hancock Place.

Commission Questions

Mr. Hsiao asked if Mr. Buckley intends to restore the cladding underneath the shingles. Mr. Buckley responded that ideally it’s mostly patch and repair, but he doesn’t know the actual extent of the work. Mr. Hsiao asked about proposed alterations to the front columns, will the cap remain? Success will come down to the details, they need to be carefully considered. Mr. Buckley stated he would follow what they find when they remove more shingles. He also said they want to maintain existing details as much as possible.

Ms. Litchfield asked about the materials for proposed widow’s walk. Mr. Buckley replied painted wood. Ms. Pauli asked if he considered including a railing on the roof structure which widow walks typically have. Mr. Buckley answered that he started to design a railing, but it got fussy.

Ms. Litchfield asked if he considered putting the mechanicals in the rear of the building. Mr. Buckley answered that it’s possible, but the skylights would be visible, they are just above the ridge line because of the added waterproofing. Ms. Litchfield asked if the structure supports the skylights. Mr. Buckley replied yes. Ms. Litchfield asked is it a wooden box with a glass top? Mr. Buckley answered yes and shows the footprint of the widow’s walk.

Public Questions

Ms. Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked about the “dueling” staircases and the depth of the vestibule. Mr. Buckley stated that there will be no change in the massing of the front porch. Ms. Meyer asked if the front panels are clapboard? Mr. Buckley answered yes. Ms. Meyer asked if the windows will have mullions? Mr. Buckley replied yes. Ms. Meyer then asked about widow’s walk. Mr. Buckley explained the skylights are pitched, that the structure can be considered a fence. Ms. Meyer asked why he needs the box. Mr. Buckley answered that because of the orientation of the building, the structure is necessary to allow light into the stair well that is located right under the ridge line. Ms. Meyer asked if he was adding storm windows. Mr. Buckley replied no, that the Marvin windows are very efficient and will provide depth to the façade that storm windows obscure, that increasing the depth is always preferable, and also noted that the windows will have wood mullions. Ms. Meyer asked about the basement, will they raise the building to add more livable space. Mr. Buckley responded that the basement is a decent height, they might excavate but not raise the building.

Public Comments

Jay Poswolsky of 10 Hancock Place expressed gratitude for the design, stating that the neighbors were worried when the building came up for sale, and thinks the proposal will be a wonderful addition to the street, it’s very responsible and fits in the neighborhood.

Ms. Meyer of 10 Dana Street is glad the design addressed the context but still worried about the proposed widow's walk and would have liked more details, but it seems well thought out. And she suggested thinking more about the pineapple panel, whether it's raised, etc. She walks by every day.

Commission Comments

Ms. Pauli stated that she is happy with all the improvements, it's rare, but noted that she didn't see handrails on the steps in the front elevation. Mr. Buckley replied that he didn't include them in the drawing because they obscured the elevation, he will be keeping the iron handrail and replicate on the other side.

Ms. Litchfield asked what happens if the existing clapboards are not salvageable. Mr. Buckley answered he would replace with wood. Ms. Litchfield asked about the chain link fence. Mr. Buckley said it will be removed. Regarding the widow's walk, Ms. Litchfield stated that she preferred flat skylights on the front, right now it's an explanation point and asked how obtrusive are the proposed skylights. Mr. Buckley responded that the vents are significant in size, 12 to 14 inches in diameter, spaced 10 feet apart. Ms. Litchfield asked if they could be behind the ridge line. Mr. Buckley answered they could be. Ms. Litchfield said she would like to hear the views of the other Commissioners on the widows walk, everything else is a great improvement.

Mr. Redmon asked regarding the roof in the rear, if Mr. Buckley could make the stem of the "T" flat, and he also stated that he had no problem with the widow's walk. Mr. Buckley answered that he considered a flat roof but much of the space needs to be accessible, the waterproofing is an issue, and he thought the current scheme was more functional.

Mr. Hsiao stated that the level of details will affect the results. The front entry looks like it has columns that go all the way down, perhaps a railing between them. Details need to be fleshed out such as the proportion of the corner boards, the width of the trim boards, the widow's walk looks out of proportion, large and fussy. Mr. Hsiao suggested looking at simple skylights, it might save money to consider a simpler way of bringing in light, and be less obtrusive, and widow walks typically have delicate railings. Mr. Hsiao encouraged the architect to further explore the design. Mr. Hsiao also applauded the effort to bring back historic fabric and suggested that he work with CHC staff over refinements.

Ms. Litchfield concurred with previous comments. She suggested rethinking the proportions of the widow's walk, it's going to read bigger than you think.

Ms. Pauli also encouraged rethinking the skylights.

Ms. Litchfield made a motion to accept the application as submitted with the following suggestions: to revisit the widow walk and mechanicals and consider putting the skylights behind the ridge line., to work with CHC staff in articulating siding details, to look at other options for the front porch, including the placement of columns and the glazing. Mr. Redmon seconded, and the motion passes, 4-0.

Case MC-6080: 8 Ellery Street, by Bob Purdy. Construct 2-family residence with underground parking in rear of lot, restore most of existing structure.

Ms. Crosbie presented slides and history of the Greek Revival home associated with writer/journalist/activist Margaret Fuller and poet David Ferry.

Kelly Boucher, architect, described the proposed project, noting that the intention is to preserve the original structure and construct a freestanding 2-unit dwelling in the rear, and remove an existing shed in the back. She noted that the property is in the C-1 zoning district and that the lot is very long with large setbacks. She also explained that there are currently two parking spaces in front and they are

proposing to put all the parking in an underground garage in the rear, adding a driveway and removing a fence that currently runs along that side, eliminating all cars in the front. The 35-foot high new structure will incorporate Greek Revival details to relate to the existing architectural vocabulary of the existing house. The proposed building is symmetrical and split down the middle. The land slopes up from Ellery Street toward the back by up to 6 feet, so digging is not necessary.

Commission Questions

Mr. Redmon noted that the proposal seems off balance, the new building looks more important than the existing, what other massing studies have you done? Ms. Boucher replied that they looked at adding onto the existing building, but it then becomes non-conforming, the proposed building is taller in the back, the slope makes it higher. Ms. Boucher also explained that they want to avoid having to go to the BZA. She stated that zoning allows up to 6 units and they only have three, noting that they didn't max out to a full build-out, and that they did look at making one multi-unit building. Mr. Redmon noted that the existing house has an informal feel to the way it evolved that is missing in the addition. Mr. Hsiao interjected to save comments for later.

Mr. Hsiao asked the distance separating the house. Ms. Boucher answered 11 ½ feet.

Ms. Litchfield asked the distance from the bottom step of the new structure to the back of the existing house. Ms. Boucher responded 10 feet, which is required. Ms. Litchfield asked about materials. Ms. Boucher replied same as the existing building, cedar siding, cornerboards same depth as existing. Mr. Bob Purdy, the owner, also stated they are going to use a synthetic slate for the roof.

Mr. Hsiao asked about a site plan that shows the driveway, planting, etc. Ms. Boucher described proposed fencing, keeping the wrought iron fence, and will work with adjacent neighbors. Mr. Hsiao asked how many cars, Ms. Boucher answered three, no surface parking.

Ms. Pauli asked how much taller is the back of the proposed building relative to the front house. Ms. Boucher replied 4 or 5 feet higher than the front. Ms. Pauli asked if she considered sinking the garage, sloping it down, to lower the building a couple of feet. Ms. Boucher answered they want to avoid water drainage issues, and snow removal would be more problematic.

Ms. Litchfield asked about the foundation of the proposed structure. Ms. Boucher answered because of the slope it's 4 feet in the front and 2 feet in the back.

Public Questions

Michael Papish of 10 Ellery Street asked about the backyard, who will own it. Ms. Boucher replied that half of the rear yard will belong to each rear unit, the existing side yard amenity will belong to the front house. Mr. Papish asked about fences, Ms. Boucher stated that they are putting in fences.

Mr. Orhun Mortaglu of 5 Dana Street stated they purchased their backyard and it backs onto the 8 Ellery property. He noted that his house is missing on the shadow studies. Ms. Boucher replied that she used the City's GIS and it apparently is not up to date. Mr. Mortaglu stated the architect needs to update the shadow study and asked if she considered a more modern approach to the new design, right now he can't tell what is old and what is new. Mr. Purdy responded that this was intentional, that he's done modern style buildings, but felt this was more appropriate. Mr. Mortaglu asked if they're cutting trees. Mr. Purdy answered no. Ms. Boucher explained that because of the setback, the construction is far from the trees. Mr. Mortaglu noted there is a dead tree that should come down. Mr. Purdy offered to work with him to resolve this. Mr. Mortaglu asked about the 34-foot height of the new structure. Ms. Boucher said it's measured around the grade of the house.

Mr. Timothy O'Donnell of 3 Dana Street asked about the construction time frame. Ms. Boucher replied once the permit is issued, 8 or 9 months. Mr. O'Donnell noted that his bedrooms face the rear of the property. Ms. Boucher explained that there's 30 feet between the rear of new construction to his fence. Mr. O'Donnell asked if there will be chimneys. Ms. Boucher said no. Mr. O'Donnell noted water table issues. Ms. Boucher explained that they are not digging down so they will not impact the water table. The new basement will be higher than the existing one. Mr. O'Donnell asked about height of the back. Ms. Boucher explained 35 feet from low point and 30 feet above grade from where O'Donnell resides. Mr. O'Donnell asked about the shadow study. Ms. Boucher explained the study shows his building will not be impacted, not long shadows, but maybe at sunset. Mr. O'Donnell asked how does this project benefit the historic neighborhood. Mr. Purdy answered that they are preserving the existing building. Mr. O'Donnell asked how does the new construction benefit. Mr. Purdy the addition of only 2 new units in the rear with Greek Revival details seems preferable.

Ms. Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked about the height of both basements. Ms. Boucher answered they're almost level. Ms. Meyer asked about ceiling heights. Ms. Boucher answered depends on the floor. Ms. Meyer asked about a third story. Ms. Boucher answered yes, same as existing.

Public Comment

Ms. Megan Marshall, historian, author of Margaret Fuller biography and board member of Margaret Fuller Society, stated that this house is as significant as Fuller's birthplace. She read her comments from a letter to the Commission. Ms. Boucher responded that they agree with her, their goals are the same, they are preserving most of the existing building, except for a kitchen renovation, the underground parking will remove cars from the front.

Ms. Amy Thornton of 7 Dana Street noted that the back of the proposed house appears 2 ½ times larger than the existing house. Single family houses are extremely rare in this area, did they consider a single-family home on a smaller footprint? Ms. Boucher answered that they are not maxing out the space, only proposing 2 new units. Ms. Thornton responded that a single-family home would be worth 2 million, what's the motivation for an additional unit? Why?

Ms. Meyer stated that she has been worrying about this house, if the new addition was a barn, it would work. Perhaps the height can be skimmed to drop the roofline. What is the sf of each unit? Ms. Boucher each unit is roughly 2100 sf, the new units have 3 bedrooms each. Ms. Meyer stated that she appreciates using the vocabulary of the existing house, but it's just too big. Ms. Meyer asked about the Fire Dept input. Ms. Boucher answered that they have not discussed this with them yet, noting that they usually require 14-foot wide drive, and that they can use the grass edge to meet that, typical of the area. Ms. Meyer concluded to rethink the grade and shrink the proposed structure.

Mr. Michael Papish noted that the green space is an attraction and is concerned about the proposed construction and the creation of small tiny lots, worried about the construction going on with everyone stuck at home, and the loss of character to the neighborhood. Ms. Boucher responded that he will benefit and get more open space and the project will give two families the opportunity to enjoy the neighborhood. Mr. Papish expressed continued concern about the lack of light in winter.

Mr. Timothy O'Donnell stated his property abuts 8 Ellery and is strongly opposed to the project. He understands that the developer can do what he is proposing but saying that he can max out the space and is choosing not to makes him angry, and many people in his building feel the same way.

Mr. Mortaglu stated he is horrified by the proposal, it's gigantic and will dominate the historical house, it will compromise his privacy, cast shadows on his home, will increase density, and cramp the beautiful landscape.

Ms. Carole Perrault, former Cambridge resident, read her comments from a letter she submitted to the Commission, reiterating goals of the Commission and factors to consider.

Dara Manoach of 3 Dana Street expressed support of neighbors' comments. His bedrooms overlook the property and is sad to lose green space to more condos.

Commission Comments

Ms. Litchfield stated that Ms. Perrault's letter sums up her feelings about the project. Ms. Litchfield stated that it is excessive infill and similar to 10 Ellery that the Commission tried to prevent. She also stated that this proposal is really lacking detail – no site plan, no landscape plan, the relation of back and front buildings is skewed, the back building is much more dominant, we need a model. She agreed with Mr. Redmon's earlier query about massing studies and it would be useful to see these, noting that the lot does affect how large the building appears, it is difficult. The four homes on Ellery and Dana form an ensemble and it breaks her heart to see this proposal, 10 Ellery also broke her heart, but we can work together to find solutions. Ms. Litchfield encouraged the applicant not to create "cubicles" with fencing, and further stated that they are in the dark because there is no landscape or site plan.

Mr. Redmon concurred with Ms. Litchfield and Ms. Perrault's comments. He stated that conceptually it lacks the effort to look at context and how to respond. Mr. Redmon would like them to come back with a real model from Dana to Ellery and provide a detailed site plan and building sections, this will help you pick up clues on how to respond to context, and show us your previous studies and a large scale model.

Ms. Pauli agreed with the Commissioners noting this is such a unique house that needs a unique solution, zoning should not be guiding this design. It could be a little gem, perhaps a study for potential buyers who could appreciate it, we don't want you to go broke, but this is such a special place.

Mr. Hsiao agreed with the Commission, reiterating that this is a very sensitive project, he applauds the intent to preserve the existing house, but the relationship of house to the site defining characteristics of the landscape needs attention. He further stated they need to address neighborhood concerns and take into account all the relationships to the landscape. Mr. Hsiao also encouraged more 3-d views from eye level and from the street. The goal is to complement, not mimic, the architecture, and allow the history of the existing house to be more evident.

Ms. Crosbie asked the applicants if they agree with a continuance, and they confirmed. Mr. Redmon moves to continue the review to the next hearing and the applicants provide context studies, landscape plan, site sections, a model of the site of Ellery to Dana Street, the width of Ellery to Dana to opposite of 8 Ellery Street. Ms. Litchfield seconded, and the motion passed, 4-0.

Minutes for September and October 2020 were approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public Present on January 4, 2021

Panelists:

Josh Marotske: josh.marotske@brightwayenergy.com

Jason Griffin: jason.griffin@brightwayenergy.com

John Cunha: cunha@cunhaholcomb.com

Kelly Boucher: kelly@boucherarchitecture.com

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Attendees:

Rajesh Kakani,
 Amy Thornton,
 Pamela Ross,
 Gigi Ramakrishnan,
 Linda Mckane,
 Dara Manoach,
 Michael papish,
 Orhun Muratoglu,
 Jay Poswolsky,
 Timothy O'Donnell,
 Megan Marshall,
 Carole Perrault,

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 3 DANA ST APT 8A
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 1 Dana St 3B
 3 Dana St.
 10 Ellery St. Unit B
 5 Dana St.
 10 Dana Street
 3 Dana Street