

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

February 2, 2023 – Meeting conducted online via Zoom Webinar (829 9603 8389) - 6:00 P.M.

Members present (online): Susannah Tobin, *Vice Chair*; Chandra Harrington, Jo Solet, Yuting Zhang, *Members*; Paula Paris, Gavin Kleespies, Kyle Sheffield, *Alternate Members*

Members absent: Bruce Irving, *Chair*; Joseph Ferrara, *Member*; Elizabeth Lister, *Alternate 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 consistent with the provisions set forth in the Act Relative to Extending Certain State of Emergency Accommodations signed by Governor Baker on July 16, 2022. The public was able to participate online via the Zoom webinar platform.

With a quorum present, Vice Chair Tobin called the meeting to order at 6:05 P.M. [Mr. Kleespies joined the meeting]. Ms. Tobin explained the online meeting instructions and public hearing procedures, then introduced commissioners and staff. She dispensed with the Consent Agenda and designated the alternate members to vote on all matters.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 4905: 795 Massachusetts Ave., by City of Cambridge. Clean, repair or replace features on the exterior of City Hall. Relocate balcony signs. Install lightning and bird protection. Upgrade light fixture at tower.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and showed slides of City Hall, a designated city landmark. He described the quality of the masonry materials including brownstone and granite. The brownstone had withstood an abrasive cleaning by sandblasting ca. 1960. Exterior masonry issues had last been addressed in 2000 and the roof had been replaced in 2012.

Aoife Viglianti, of the Public Works Department, introduced Nick Stout of Public Works and Romina Tonucci of Finegold Alexander Architects. Ms. Viglianti shared her screen to show slides describing the proposed work. The restoration would match the existing materials. Construction would start in June and last approximately one year. Some stone had come loose and fallen on the Inman Street side in 2021, which prompted a full survey of facade conditions. The metal pins holding the stone mullions had deteriorated and needed to be replaced throughout. Repairs would also be made to the tower. Organic growth on the north side would be removed. Window sash would be repaired and repainted to match existing. The clock face and lettering on the balcony would be regilded. The two signs, Black Lives Matter and the African American Flag, would be relocated and installed in frames on either side of the tower, with the exact location to be determined. A new aluminum flagpole would be installed in the same location but with improved structural support. The roof drain at the balcony would be improved with a copper scupper. Bird deterrents and netting will be replaced. Lightning protection would be installed on the roof and tower. The tower lighting fixtures would be upgraded to be smaller and better distributed.

Ms. Tobin asked for questions of fact from the Commission members.

Ms. Harrington asked if all the deterioration would be addressed by this project, or would things be left undone? Ms. Viglianti said she hoped contingency funds could address any additional issues that

might be discovered. Ms. Harrington suggested a regular inspection and maintenance program so that problems can be tackled before they get too severe. She asked who decides what signs go up on the building. Ms. Viglianti replied that it was the City Council.

Dr. Solet asked if the building would remain open during construction. Ms. Viglianti answered in the affirmative. Dr. Solet asked about funding, signs, and energy usage. Ms. Viglianti answered that it was city funds, the signs details would come back and the tower lighting would not increase energy usage or be more visible from a public way.

Ms. Paris asked about the location of the leak and if the flag could be raised and lowered. Ms. Viglianti answered that the leak was at the balcony roof. The flag would remain functional, but the placement and accessibility would be improved for city staff.

Ms. Tobin asked for questions of fact from the public.

Dan Totten of 54 Bishop Allen Drive asked about the proposed sign locations. Ms. Viglianti said they would be removed from the balcony and installed in a permanent place on the face of the building.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked if the struts supporting the flagpole were original to the building and Ms. Viglianti replied in the affirmative. Ms. Meyer asked if the window sash would be insulated in an effort to move toward net zero. Mr. Stoutt said it was not part of the current project scope but city buildings would need to meet efficiency goals. Mr. Sullivan said the original windows were restored and weather stripped in the mid-1990s.

Ms. Tobin opened the public comment period.

Mr. Totten said he was impressed with the care being given to the building. Moving the signs would be okay but the inscription on the balcony was questionable. With the signs moved, the city might want to think about other ways to hide the quote.

Ms. Tobin closed the public comment period.

Dr. Solet asked what the inscription says. Mr. Sullivan described the quote as a homily on good government by Frederick Hastings Rindge, who built city hall and then gifted it to the city.

Mr. Kleespies read the language of the inscription. He noted that the reference to God and commandments might raise eyebrows when revealed again.

Ms. Harrington referenced the inscription inside the library, also built by Rindge.

Mr. Sullivan recommended the sign placement and construction details be delegated to staff.

Ms. Harrington moved to approve a certificate of appropriateness for the application as presented on the condition that construction details including sign size and placement be delegated to the Executive Director. Ms. Paris seconded. Ms. Tobin designated all alternates to vote on this and all matters. The motion passed in a rollcall vote 7-0. (Harrington, Solet, Zhang, Tobin, Kleespies, Paris, Sheffield)

Case 4906: Brattle Street from Sparks Street to Fresh Pond Parkway, by City of Cambridge. Construct phase two of the Brattle Street Safety Improvement Project including two-way bike lanes with concrete curbing and flex posts, crossing islands, and curb realignment.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and showed slides of the street both before and after installation of

phase one of the project. He noted pull-off areas at the Armenian church and the Cambridge Historical Society. He indicated that the historic district ended at Fresh Pond Parkway, so the portion of the project beyond that point was outside the jurisdiction of the Historical Commission.

Brooke McKenna, Acting Chief of the Traffic, Parking & Transportation department, introduced her colleagues Andreas Wolfe and Jerry Friedman. Ms. McKenna summarized the goals of the project and the requirements of the Cycling Safety Ordinance.

Mr. Wolfe shared his screen and showed slides illustrating the proposed design for phase two of the Brattle Street Safety Improvement Project. He described the concrete curbs and flex posts, as in phase one. He noted the parking outside of the bike lanes in front of the Armenian church. Flex posts would be used at driveways, side streets, and where the road bends or curbs bump out. He described the addition of raised pedestrian crossing islands at the existing crosswalks. Several curb extensions and bump outs that had been added about 2000 would be eliminated to allow for straight bike lanes. He noted that there would be parking on both sides of the street between Sparks Street and Riedesel Avenue and parking on the south side from there to Fresh Pond Parkway. The existing island at the Sparks Street intersection would be removed and replaced with paint on the pavement. A future roundabout at that intersection was still part of the long term plan. The curb extension at Channing Place would remain.

Ms. Tobin asked for questions from commissioners.

Ms. Harrington asked for more detail about the crossing islands and if blinking crossing lights would be included. Ms. McKenna described the change from flush islands to raised. Flashing beacons had been used in several locations on Massachusetts Avenue where there was more than one lane in each direction. They could be considered for use on Brattle Street, if needed. Ms. Harrington said the Sparks Street intersection was confusing and didn't feel safe for pedestrians.

Dr. Solet said she had voted against the curb extensions when they were proposed. Would the City shovel snow from the crossing islands to keep them clear? Mr. Friedman said the city did make sure the ramps and crosswalks got cleared of snow. Dr. Solet asked if there would be signs on the islands. Mr. Wolfe replied in the affirmative. She asked if the concrete curbs were placed with drainage and catch basin locations in mind. Mr. Friedman replied in the affirmative. Dr. Solet said she hoped safety improvements would include improvement of sidewalks, where needed.

Ms. Zhang noted that the flush islands were constructed of red concrete pavers, but the proposed raised islands were shown as concrete. Mr. Wolfe said the materials could be adjusted.

Mr. Kleespies said having bike lanes separated from traffic by parked cars was good, except where cars cross driveways and side streets. He asked if the historic bluestone sidewalk materials would be impacted; Mr. Andreas replied in the negative. Mr. Kleespies asked if other separation materials were still being considered. The concrete curbs and flex posts had a very utilitarian appearance. Ms. McKenna said they would continue to study other alternatives and address that when they return before the expiration of the certificate for phase one in November 2025.

Ms. Paris asked about the timeline. Ms. McKenna answered that phase two construction would occur in the spring and summer months.

Mr. Sullivan asked about the beige area on the plan near Sparks Street. Mr. Wolfe said that was painted pavement marking the narrowing of the street at the intersection with Brattle Street. Though part of the phase one design it had not yet been painted.

Ms. Tobin asked for questions of fact from the public.

Cathy Minassian of 145 Brattle Street expressed concern about the amount of space provided for parking in front of the church. How many cars would it accommodate? Ms. McKenna described the layout and noted the no-cost parking reservation program for funerals and the like.

Susan Shell of 3 Craigie Street asked if studies had been done on the safety of the concrete curbs as bike lane delineators. Ms. McKenna explained that several types of barriers were used and that these types of curbs had been used in Boston for several years. There had been studies about substantial barriers in general though perhaps not exclusively of this kind. Ms. Shell asked about snow removal. Mr. Friedman said the city had special equipment it uses to clear bike lanes. Boston had not had problems with removal of snow adjacent to these types of curbs. Ms. Shell asked about traffic congestion. Ms. McKenna said there was no removal of travel lanes, so there should be no change. Mr. Wolfe said he had received positive feedback from the Police department following the installation of phase one. He said the Traffic Department had met with BB&N to make sure the conditions would work with their school buses.

Robert Neer of 9 Riedesel Avenue asked if there was a less incongruous flex post design option. Though their number had been minimized, the appearance did not fit with the historic character of the neighborhood. Ms. McKenna answered that flex posts were all fairly consistent in appearance.

Jon Penterman of 213 Brattle Street asked about adding a crossing beacon at Lexington Street near the park. Ms. McKenna said they could look into it. Mr. Penterman noted that his property did not have a driveway. The bike lanes would eliminate access to their house and would make it impossible to drop off people in the family with disabilities. Trash pick-up and deliveries would also be difficult. Mr. Wolfe noted that the location was already signed as a no-stopping area and that the existing bike lanes were located there. Mr. Friedman said trash trucks could stop in the travel lane to collect the trash at the curb. Ms. McKenna said he could stop briefly to let someone out even though the bike lanes couldn't be blocked and there was no parking.

Lee Farris asked if tree roots would be damaged where the curb bump outs were to be removed. Mr. Friedman said they did not think so, but there was flexibility about the exact location of the curb line.

Laura Nash of 11 Buckingham Street said she didn't want to see a lot of signs at the Sparks-Brattle-Craigie intersection.

Father Vasken Kouzouian of 145 Brattle Street said the proposed parking lane was tight. The driver and passenger doors would open into travel lanes. Was pedestrian safety receiving the same level of consideration as cyclist? Mr. Wolfe said he was confident that safety would be improved for all.

Aurilee Hawley of 154 Brattle Street asked why the roundabout was on the back burner when it had been suggested five years ago. Ms. McKenna said designers were currently working on the plan and cost estimates, then funding could be requested.

Karen Falb of 245 Brattle Street asked the width of the lanes. Mr. Wolfe said bike lanes would be 4' wide at the crosswalks and vehicle lane widths would vary between 10-11'. Ms. Falb asked if the detail drawings could be posted online.

Cynthia Broner of 246 Brattle Street asked if there was a budget for replacing flex posts when they start to look dreadful. Ms. McKenna said missing or battered posts were replaced.

Ms. Tobin opened the public comment period.

Mr. Neer said there was no need for so many crossing islands.

Christopher Cassa of 103 Gore Street said the concrete curbs looked better than all flex posts. Adding wayfinding for turning cars would help. Speed had been reduced.

Helen Walker of 43 Linnaean Street said she found the two-way bike lanes terrifying. Yellow flashing beacons were needed for pedestrian safety.

Ms. Tobin closed the public comment period.

Dr. Solet asked about Brattle Street and the Cycling Safety Ordinance. Ms. McKenna explained the requirements of the ordinance and incorporated references to the Bike Network Vision plan for separated bike lanes on other streets such as Brattle Street. Dr. Solet said the plastic flex posts were inappropriate. The Craigie intersection looked terrible. Fire engines had a difficult time traversing the narrow lanes on Brattle Street.

Ms. Zhang said the quick build approach was easily reversible. Crossing islands were of a more permanent nature. The materials should be chosen carefully.

Mr. Kleespies noted the large number of tourists on Brattle Street. Road rules should be steadily enforced for all. Design study should continue.

Ms. Paris expressed concern about the safety of the Sparks Street intersection.

Mr. Sheffield asked staff for clarification on the Commission's jurisdiction on such matters. Mr. Sullivan answered that traffic regulations, parking, lane width, striping, and paint were outside the purview of the Commission. Structures such as curbs, flex posts, islands, and light posts were subject to the Commission's jurisdiction. Mr. Sheffield asked if there were changes to the design from phase one. Mr. Wolfe said the main difference was the addition of crossing islands and removal of the bump-outs. Mr. Sheffield asked where people could express their concerns and questions about other issues. Ms. McKenna said there would be an open house to view the final design and the staff were available to discuss concerns or questions. Mr. Sheffield recommended using historic materials for the crossing islands including granite curbs and brick pavers. The phase one approval was temporary for a period of three years. The same expiration should apply to phase two.

Mr. Sullivan agreed about materials and life of a certificate. Flashing beacons should be consid-

ered at Lowell Park and Sparks Street. He recommended delegating details to staff.

Ms. Harrington moved to approve a certificate of appropriateness for the application as presented on the condition that material samples and construction details be approved by staff and with the option for flashing beacons at Lexington and Sparks-Craigie Streets. Ms. Paris seconded. The motion passed in a rollcall vote 7-0. (Harrington, Solet, Zhang, Tobin, Kleespies, Paris, Sheffield)

Ms. Tobin called for a recess. [Mr. Sheffield left the meeting]. Ms. Tobin called the meeting back to order at 8:48 P.M.

Public Hearings: Landmark Designation Proceedings

Case L-136: 711-727 Massachusetts Ave. Gas Light Building LLC, owner. Consider preliminary landmark study report and make recommendations to City Council.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and showed slides of the building. He noted that the interim protections had ended in September but the Commission's certificate of appropriateness was still in effect. He summarized the architecture and history of the building as described in the study report. The standards and guidelines had been previously reviewed at a public hearing and approved in principle by the Commission. The Planning Board had approved an amendment to the Special Permit consistent with the design approved by the Commission.

Ms. Tobin asked for questions of fact.

Mr. Totten asked about the process for extending the life of the certificate of appropriateness. Mr. Sullivan explained that repeated six-month extensions could be granted by the Chair. Mr. Totten asked about architectural lighting. Mr. Sullivan said it had been installed prior to the landmark study. Future changes would require Commission approval.

Ms. Farris asked if the report mentioned the draft report written in 1990. Mr. Sullivan was unsure.

Marie Saccoccio of 55 Otis Street referred to her written comments. Why incorporate the proposed additions into the landmark report? Mr. Sullivan said it had been approved by the Commission during the course of the study and was an anticipated alteration.

Ms. Tobin opened the public comment period.

Mr. Totten spoke in favor of landmark designation. Without it, inappropriate alterations could be made, such as covering up historic lettering. He encouraged the Commission to prioritize proactive designation of important buildings around the city. This building should have always been a landmark.

Ms. Farris asked the Commission to support landmark designation. The Planning Board had not heard much during their initial hearings about the significance of the building or the prior landmark study report. The petitioners' action to request a landmark study should be mentioned in an active voice within the report. She did not think additional extensions of the certificate should be approved. She asked for similar protection of the Savings Bank Building.

Heather Hoffman of 213 Hurley Street spoke in support of landmark designation. The process seen with this project should not be repeated.

Ms. Tobin closed the public comment period.

Dr. Solet expressed appreciation for the public's participation in the process.

Marcel Safar, an owner of the building, explained that the proponents were moving as fast as the permitting process would allow. They had completed the discussion process with the Community Development and Traffic departments and were now seeking a building permit.

Mr. Kleespies moved to forward the final report to the City Council with a positive recommendation for landmark designation. Dr. Solet seconded the motion. The motion passed 6-0 in a roll call vote.

(Harrington, Solet, Zhang, Tobin, Kleespies, Paris)

Commission Policies

HVAC and Synthetic Materials Policies. Consider draft policies regarding heating, ventilating and cooling (HVAC) equipment and use of synthetic materials.

Mr. Sullivan described the rationale for the recommended policies, which would authorize the staff to issue certificates for compliant projects. He showed slides illustrating appropriate uses of synthetic materials in certain locations like steps, balustrades, gutters and fences. Common lumber had a very short lifespan for applications such as these where there was ground contact or exposure to the weather.

Dr. Solet commented that the HVAC policy should refer to the noise ordinance and explain that it worked on a complaint driven process. It should also note that noise issues increase when multiple units are installed in close proximity to each other. She asked if the staff had reviewed policies for synthetics by other municipalities. Mr. Sullivan answered that few other commissions had policies yet, but he had presented best practices at conferences. There were cost and ethical considerations for the use of tropical hardwoods. Though PVC manufacturing was not environmentally sensitive, the product lasts much longer than wood. Dr. Solet recommended hedges instead of fences. PVC introduced microplastics, were harmful to workers, and bad for landfills. She recommended putting this policy consideration on hold.

Ms. Zhang said a more sustainable option may become available in the future.

Mr. Kleespies asked if there was a less formal approach for approving synthetic materials rather than adopting a universal policy. Ms. Paris suggested the Commission continue to review applications for synthetics at public hearings.

Ms. Tobin asked for public questions.

Ms. Walker asked about acoustical screening of HVAC equipment. Mr. Sullivan said he could clarify the language about screening materials and design.

Ms. Tobin invited public comment.

Ms. Walker referenced a New York case regarding PVC in resilient flooring which went into a lot of detail about the material and its environmental impacts. She mentioned the Net Zero Action Plan and the infeasibility of retrofitting some older apartment buildings. There should be an exemption for historic buildings in the Building Energy Usage Disclosure Ordinance (BEUDO) amendments.

Ms. Meyer commented that adding individual HVAC units for every unit in a large apartment building was impractical in many cases because of the limited exterior space for them.

Ms. Saccoccio said a synthetics policy would send the wrong message.

Mr. Sullivan said the Commission had approved a number of installations already. It could be argued that it would cause a hardship to a homeowner to require wood in the historic district in applications where we know it will rot very quickly. Historic New England had adopted a synthetics policy. If commissioners were uncomfortable with it he would withdraw the draft synthetic policy from consideration.

Dr. Solet moved to continue the hearing on HVAC policies. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion, which passed in a roll call vote 6-0. (Harrington, Solet, Zhang, Tobin, Kleespies, Paris)

Minutes

Dr. Solet said she had not yet read the minutes of January 5. Mr. Kleespies moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Ms. Paris seconded, and the motion passed in a roll call vote of five in favor (Harrington, Zhang, Tobin, Kleespies, Paris) and one abstention (Solet).

Director's Report

Mr. Sullivan reported that the City Council would consider the Maria Baldwin report in the next week or two. The Ordinance Committee hearing on the proposed amendments to Ch. 2.78, Article III would be on March 7. Dr. Solet asked if the commission could attend the March 7 meeting. Mr. Sullivan replied in the affirmative and said he would re-send information about the proposed amendments.

Mr. Kleespies moved to adjourn. Dr. Solet seconded, and the motion passed 6-0 in a roll call vote. (Harrington, Solet, Zhang, Tobin, Kleespies, Paris) The meeting adjourned at 10:24 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Present on the Zoom Webinar online, February 2, 2023**

Aoife Viglianti	Cambridge Public Works
Brooke McKenna	Cambridge Traffic, Parking & Transportation
Romina Tonucci	Finegold Alexander Architects
Nick Stoutt	Cambridge Public Works
Jerry Friedman	Cambridge Public Works
Andreas Wolfe	Cambridge Traffic, Parking & Transportation
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St, 404
Deborah Fawcett	35 Norris St
John Hawkinson	—
Andreas Wolfe	344 Broadway
Gary Wolf	21 Willard Road, Weston, MA 02493
Lucy Patton	333 Walden St
Fr. Vasken Kouzouian	145 Brattle St
Lee Farris	269 Norfolk St
Susan M Shell	3 Craigie St
Dan Totten	54 Bishop Allen Dr #2
Heather Hoffman	213 Hurley St
Jon Penterman	213 Brattle St
Caroline Mortimer	200 Brattle St
Missy Carter	4 Riedesel Ave
Joan Pickett	59 Ellery St
A C	Dana St
Lori Dorian	145 Brattle St
Ruth Lepson	18 Lexington Ave
Marcel Safar	727 Massachusetts Ave
Andrea Dupree	20 Hubbard Park Rd
Michael Brandon	27 Seven Pines Ave.
Christopher Cassa	103 Gore St
Mark Boswell	105 Walden St
Marie Saccoccio	55 Otis St
Annette LaMond	7 Riedesel Ave
Margaret	39 Meadow Way
Franklin Reece	45 Garden St
Susan Osgood	41 Linnaean St. #21
Laura Nash	11 Buckingham St.
Kevin Moses	1 Aberdeen Way
Karen Falb	245 Brattle St
Laurent Bouzelmat	10 Winthrop Sq, Ste 400 Boston, MA 02110
Ann-Kristin Lund	27 Craigie St
Cathy Minassian	145 Brattle St
Eben Moulton	128 Brattle St
Robert Neer	9 Riedesel Ave
Ann	9 Riedesel Ave

Marjorie	2 Riedesel Ave
Sarah Rhatigan	Trilogy Law, 12 Marshall St Boston, MA 02108
Susan Wexler	240 Brattle St #12
Aurilee Hawley	154 Brattle St
Florrie Darwin	7 Follen St
Helen Walker	43 Linnaean St
Cynthia Broner	246 Brattle St
Julie	11 Old Dee Rd

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.