

**Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission**

March 6, 2025 – Meeting conducted online via Zoom Webinar (845 0515 1879) - 6:00 P.M.

Present (online): Chandra Harrington, *Chair*; Joseph Ferrara, Liz Lyster, Jo Solet, Yuting Zhang, *Members*; Gavin Kleespies, Paula Paris, Kyle Sheffield, *Alternates*

Absent: Susannah Tobin, *Vice Chair*

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 pursuant to Ch. 2 of the Acts of 2023. The public was able to participate online via the Zoom webinar platform.

With a quorum present, Chair Harrington called the meeting to order at 6:05 P.M. She explained the online meeting instructions and public hearing procedures and introduced commissioners and staff. After dispensing with the Consent Agenda, she opened the first hearing.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

**Case 5251 (continued): 125 Brattle St., by Ellen Williams and Lawrence Miller.** Replace windows and a door.

Mr. Sullivan introduced the case, which was a continued hearing from February 6. He shared the screen and showed slides of the property as visible from the public way.

Ellen Williams, an owner, described the supplementary application materials she had submitted to the Commission. She detailed the additional research she had done about the U-factor efficiency numbers achievable with a restored historic window with a storm window (0.36) vs. the Marvin Elevate Series fiberglass clad wood window (0.28). The new windows were twice as efficient. She compared the cost of a mechanical restoration plus new storms (\$30,000-\$34,000) to the price of the new Marvin windows (\$60,000). She said the difference in the dimension of the glass width between the existing and the new construction windows they installed on their addition was only a quarter of an inch.

Lawrence Miller, an owner, said he had reviewed the Commission's window guidelines and tried to follow the links to several technical reports, but the links were no longer working.

Ms. Williams said they had spoken to CHC staff about the guidelines in 2020 but chose not to take any action at that time. After having lived with the old windows and storms for five years they would like to replace them with the same series used in their addition. The current situation with ice forming inside the windows was untenable. She wanted to improve efficiency and make the house comfortable.

Mr. Miller said they knew they wouldn't get their money back in energy costs with the new windows in their lifetime but wanted to benefit the environment by using less energy.

Mr. Sheffield asked about the operability of the existing sash and storms. Ms. Williams said the windows were shaky but operable; the storms did not work well and were not present on every window. The four-panel bays on either side of the house did not have storms. There was no storm door.

Dr. Solet commended the applicants on their thorough research. She asked about the layout of

**DRAFT Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission—THIS DRAFT HAS NOT YET BEEN REVIEWED OR APPROVED BY THE COMMISSION**

windows in the house. Ms. Williams said there were four rooms with windows on two or more sides.

There being no members of the public with questions or comments, Ms. Harrington closed the public comment period.

Mr. Kleespies indicated that new windows did not have the same lifespan as historic wood windows. When they fail, they have to be disposed of, and new windows purchased again.

Mr. Sheffield described the difference between the installation of a replacement window unit that fits inside the existing window jambs and a new construction window unit. The glazing width of a replacement window unit could be more than a quarter inch smaller than the glazing of the existing windows. He recommended a mechanical restoration, new bronze weather stripping and new storm windows on the front of the house where the windows were visible from a public way.

[Ms. Zhang arrived].

Mr. Ferrara echoed the comments about the durability of the original windows and new storms.

Mr. Williams asked about performance and durability studies.

Mr. Sullivan spoke about the way that the seals on insulated window units eventually fail, causing clouding and condensation in the window as well as reduced efficiency. The expected life span of an insulated window unit was 25 years. He explained what was involved in a mechanical restoration of old windows. He said the Commission could consider granting a certificate hardship, if there was a particular hardship case unique to this house.

Ms. Harrington noted that the restoration costs were less than the new windows.

Mr. Sullivan said he had no objection to replacement of the door as proposed in the application.

Ms. Lyster said the environmental impacts could be looked at in two ways, U-value of the window installations or a longer-term environmental cost of disposal and manufacturing of replacement windows as repeated on a 25-year cycle.

Mr. Kleespies moved to deny the portion of the application for replacement windows, as it was not consistent with the Commission's window guidelines and would be incongruous to the historic character of the house. Mr. Sheffield seconded the motion. Ms. Harrington noted that member Yuting Zhang had joined the meeting. Ms. Zhang said she had not been present for the full discussion and would not be voting on the case. The motion passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Lyster, Solet, Paris, Kleespies, Sheffield, Harrington voting in the affirmative).

**Case 5262: 29 Mt. Auburn St., by Roman Catholic Archbishop of Boston.** Install wall sign.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and showed photographs of the church and choir school.

Tom Grave, of the Signarama sign company, explained that people get confused about where to enter the church and the choir school. He had been asked to design signs that would help clarify where people should go. The new sign would require a variance because of its location above 20 feet from

**DRAFT Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission—THIS DRAFT HAS NOT YET BEEN REVIEWED OR APPROVED BY THE COMMISSION**

grade. It would be an aluminum sign board with vinyl sign face and lettering. He noted that another sign had been installed at the corner at pedestrian level about a month ago.

Doug Lee, Director of Finance and Operations for the church, said people knock on the church office door or the school door multiple times a day looking for the entrance to the sanctuary. He noted that the church entrance is on Arrow Street while the mailing address was 29 Mt. Auburn Street.

Dr. Solet asked about the durability of the sign materials. Mr. Kleespies asked about the means of attachment. Ms. Paris asked if there was engraving in the space where the sign would be positioned. Mr. Grave answered that the materials were durable, UV resistant and guaranteed for one year. The sign would be mounted with four screws and would be reversible with no residue. There was no engraving in the niche where the sign was proposed to be placed.

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

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked if there were signs at the church office. Mr. Lee answered there were signs at both the church and school office doors.

Ms. Burks asked if there were signs on the locked doors on Bow Street. Mr. Lee said that had been considered.

Ms. Harrington asked for public comment.

Ms. Meyer said a pedestrian would not look up that high on the building for directional signage. She agreed that marking the other doors made more sense.

Ms. Harrington closed the public comment period.

Mr. Ferrara stated that the panel was an architectural feature that was repeated in several locations on the brick church. The high sign would work for identification but not well for wayfinding. He recommended smaller pedestrian level signs.

Mr. Kleespies said the sign was not obtrusive. Because it was fully removable, he considered it acceptable.

Ms. Lyster suggested waiting to determine if the new pedestrian sign would solve the problem. Was there urgency in putting up the new high sign? Mr. Lee explained that the church was celebrating its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary and they were preparing for greater activity and more visitors this year. The Commissioners made other suggestions to clarify directions to visitors including the church website, phone and sandwich boards.

Dr. Solet moved to approve a temporary certificate of appropriateness, valid for a period of one year, at which time the church can come back and report on whether it had solved their problem. Mr. Lee agreed to the temporary nature of the approval. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion which passed 5-2 in a roll call vote. (Lyster, Solet, Zhang, Paris, Kleespies in favor; Ferrara and Harrington opposed).

**Case 5263: 14 Plympton St., by The Harvard Crimson Trust.** Exterior renovation; replace windows and doors; rooftop addition.

**DRAFT Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission—THIS DRAFT HAS NOT YET BEEN REVIEWED OR APPROVED BY THE COMMISSION**

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and displayed photographs of the property, noting that the original windows had very thin profiles, unlike the existing replacement windows. He explained that the property was located in the Harvard Square Conservation District. Under the amended NCD ordinance, the Commission could not consider size or shape of the addition in determining the appropriateness of the design.

Laurence Holland, of KPMB Architecture, shared the screen and presented on behalf of the Harvard Crimson Trust. He noted that the building was not owned by Harvard University. He described the proposed renovation and rooftop addition. The replacement windows were 35 years old and needed to be replaced again. The specifications for the new windows would be equal to Kolbe Ultra window. They would be double hung, 6-over-6, with a glazing area to match or exceed the existing. Some of the black security screens would be removed. The front door would be refinished and reinstalled unless a matching replacement was more economical. The addition would connect the two parts of the building at the second floor, making the building fully accessible. The existing condition was that the elevator was at the back of the building and did not service the second floor of the front part of the building. The materials and color of the addition were not flashy. It would be clad in fiber cement or metal, depending on costs but having a similar appearance.

Ms. Harrington asked for questions from the Commissioners.

Ms. Lyster asked about the existing railing and flashing. Mr. Holland pointed them out.

Mr. Holland told Dr. Solet that the mechanicals shown on the drawings were existing. The addition would be served by an all-electric mini split system.

There being no questions or comments offered by members of the public, Ms. Harrington closed the public comment period.

Dr. Solet said the addition was well designed, recessive in its design, and would not detract from the original building.

Ms. Lyster asked if the color could be lighter and less strong. Mr. Holland said the intent was to let the existing building be the star of the show and allow the addition to recede with its dark color.

Mr. Kleespies moved to approve the application as submitted, subject to review of construction details by staff. Dr. Solet seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Lyster, Solet, Zhang, Paris, Kleespies, Harrington)

Public Hearings: Demolition Review

**Case D-1709: 24 Newell St., by 24 Newell Street LLC c/o Mike Tokatlyan.** Demolish house (1931). Consider revised design for replacement building.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and noted that the case had been heard in November 2024. The Commission had found the existing house to be both significant and preferably preserved in the context of the proposed replacement building. He explained the procedures of the demolition review ordinance. The

**DRAFT Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission—THIS DRAFT HAS NOT YET BEEN REVIEWED OR APPROVED BY THE COMMISSION**

Commission had encouraged the applicant to meet with the staff and neighbors and to come back with a revised proposal at any point during the delay period.

Evan Stellman of KDI Architecture presented on behalf of his client, Mike Tokatlyan. He said they had met with the neighbors about aspects of the design. He noted the recent zoning amendments allowed some adjustments to the setbacks. He shared his screen and walked through the site plan and elevations for the replacement building. He compared the previous proposal to the new one. A third-floor deck was eliminated and the flat roof was replaced with a gable roof above the second floor and a smaller gabled mass for the third floor. He shared perspective views.

Ms. Harrington asked for questions from the Commission.

Ms. Paris asked about outreach. Mr. Tokatlyan answered that he had two meetings on site with neighbors and shared plans and revisions.

Mr. Sheffield asked if the Commission's jurisdiction was changed by the new zoning. Mr. Sullivan answered that the jurisdiction under the demolition ordinance was unchanged by the zoning amendments but there was a message in the zoning change in favor of more housing, which could be considered when balancing the public interests.

Mr. Kleespies asked for a unit count and square footage comparison of existing and proposed. Mr. Stellman answered that both existing and proposed were one unit, with SF of 1125 and 3650.

Dr. Solet asked about the placement of the third story and the sizes of the windows on the second floor compared to the first. Mr. Stellman said the third story was pushed back from the ridge and the first floor windows at the mudroom and kitchen were smaller than elsewhere. Dr. Solet asked about window type and cladding materials. Mr. Stellman described the casement windows, and cementitious siding with both 4 and 12 inch exposures.

Ms. Zhang noted that the design language of each façade was different. Mr. Sheffield agreed. He asked about the irregular shape of the house and suggested squaring it off. He suggested a flat roof over the one-story projection on the right side.

Dr. Solet asked about operable vs. fixed windows and swing of casement. Mr. Stellman said the operable windows would provide enough ventilation.

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

Ms. Meyer asked about changes made due to the new zoning. Mr. Stellman described the adjusted setbacks.

Ms. Harrington opened the public comment period.

Ms. Meyer remarked that the massing looked top heavy at the back. The detailing was disparate like a sampler of windows and it didn't hang together well. The third floor design was unsuccessful.

Ms. Harrington closed the public comment period and turned it back to the Commission.

Mr. Sheffield reiterated his previous design suggestions and added that the pitch of the lower roof could be adjusted at the back to nestle the third-floor mass more successfully. The cladding of the right side could be more consistent with the front and left.

Ms. Zhang urged the proponents to use the dark and light cladding strategically. The lighter color cladding might make the third floor feel lighter.

Mr. Sullivan said the design had improved significantly and he did not think it was necessary to bring it back for a further hearing. Dr. Solet said she would prefer to see it come back.

Ms. Paris moved to find the existing significant building no longer preferably preserved in the context of the revised design, to be further modified to the extent possible as suggested by the members of the Commission and subject to staff review. Ms. Lyster seconded the motion, which passed 6-1 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Lyster, Zhang, Paris, Sheffield, Harrington in favor and Solet opposed).

**Case D-1721: 26 Jay St., by 26 Jay Street LLC c/o Mike Tokatlyan. Demolish 3-decker.**

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and summarized the staff memo about the history of the building and its residents. The Riverside neighborhood was slow to develop because it was marshy and poorly drained. The house was one of four 2-story homes built by Samuel Ward on this end of Jay Street before and after the Civil War. The roof was flattened around 1909 and a third story added in 1988 by the prior owner, Abigail Schirmer. Ms. Schirmer was a high school math and science teacher remembered for her activities in support of civil liberties and against apartheid and the war in Viet Nam. She and her mother, Margaret, were instrumental in founding the Cambridge Peace Commission in 1982. Mr. Sullivan recommended finding the house significant for its associations with the earliest development of Jay Street, for its continuing adaptation to meet the changing needs of its owners, and for its associations with social activist Abigail Schirmer.

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

Kathy Richman of 31B Jay Street said she had known Abby Schirmer well. She commented that Jay Street was one of few in the area that had some single-family homes.

Ms. Meyer asked if 26 Jay was a multi-family house. Mr. Tokatlyan said it was a 3-family home. Ms. Meyer questioned if the alterations affected its significance but said she would consider it significant.

Ms. Richman said it was important to keep the scale of the neighborhood, noting the current scale and density of the Riverside neighborhood.

Dr. Solet moved to find the house significant as defined in the ordinance for the reasons stated in Mr. Sullivan's report. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion.

Mr. Tokatlyan asked how the house had been allowed to change from two stories to three. Mr. Sullivan explained that the change had not required a demolition permit and was not within the jurisdiction of the Historical Commission to review.

**DRAFT Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission—THIS DRAFT HAS NOT YET BEEN REVIEWED OR APPROVED BY THE COMMISSION**

Ms. Harrington called for a vote on the first question, that of significance, the commission voted 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Lyster, Solet, Zhang, Kleespies, Sheffield, Harrington) Ms. Harrington asked the proponent to present the design of the proposed replacement building.

Mr. Tokatlyan left the meeting, but Mr. Stellman presented on his client's behalf. He shared his screen and walked through the design for a new 3-unit, 3-story residential building.

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

Ms. Lyster asked about the trellis in front of unit two and the existing trees at the back of the lot. Mr. Stellman said the trellis was for climbing ivy. Some of the trees would be removed. They would comply with the city ordinance about tree removal.

Ms. Paris asked for clarification about the second-floor deck on the front elevation. Mr. Stellman showed it in plan and elevation, explaining that it was open, but partly shaded.

Dr. Solet asked about the curb walls at the areaways. Mr. Stellman said the property was within a flood plain so the curb walls needed to be taller to protect the basement level.

Ms. Harrington asked for public questions of fact.

Ms. Richman said her understanding was that the existing house had two units.

Ms. Meyer asked about the setbacks of the roof decks from the abutting buildings. Mr. Stellman said the plan included 5' side setbacks and a 15' rear setback.

Ms. Harrington opened the public comment period.

Ms. Richman said the big garden would be gone. The new building was very close to the neighbors and twice the size of the existing building. Three units and fourteen bedrooms was big.

Ms. Meyer said the design was based on the dimensional parameters of zoning and did not draw from the architectural context of the neighborhood.

Ms. Harrington closed the public comment period.

Mr. Kleespies said he would have a hard time not finding the existing three-decker with green space around it preferable to the proposed replacement that would fill the lot to the maximum allowed.

Ms. Lyster said she was confused about the Commission's role now because of the much greater density allowed by zoning. It definitely would not fit in with the existing neighborhood context.

Mr. Sullivan noted that it was actually much less dense than zoning would allow (four stories with 30% open space and 5' minimum side and rear setbacks).

Ms. Paris said the design did not seem to be complete. There were lots of ideas, but it seemed a long way from being finalized.

Ms. Zhang noted that the design tried to break up the massing by stepping each unit over. The design vocabularies used on the building didn't all work well together. The front 1.5-story deck was too heavy. She suggested there were ways to make the building look less massive.

Mr. Sheffield said he appreciated that the street façade was narrower. The abutting buildings were non-conforming and appeared to be on the property lines. If the distance between buildings was less than five feet, the new wall must be fireproofed, increasing the cost of construction. The three units had very large rooms. He suggested creating relief in the flat facades in ways other than changing materials. He said the pergolas were very traditional compared to the very contemporary design of the rest of the building. The windows did not need to telegraph the interior plan such as at the stairway.

Dr. Solet thanked the architect members for their observations. The design didn't read as a cohesive whole. The large units, which were conducive to families, had no yard space.

Ms. Lyster said she appreciated that the building stepped back and did not max out the height allowed by zoning. The side porches on the right give a nod to the design of the existing building. She spoke from her experience in real estate that there is a value assigned to outdoor space. Usable yard space gets factored into the list price of the units.

Ms. Harrington noted the disparity in the size of these units to anything else in the neighborhood.

Several commissioners encouraged a continuance of the hearing to address some of the design feedback. Mr. Stellman said he did not have the owner's permission to agree to a continuance. Mr. Kleespies moved, in the absence of the ability to continue the hearing, to find the existing house preferably preserved in the context of the replacement proposal. Dr. Solet seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Lyster, Solet, Zhang, Paris, Kleespies, Harrington)

Ms. Paris moved to adjourn. Mr. Sheffield seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. (Ferrara, Lyster, Solet, Zhang, Paris, Sheffield, Harrington) The meeting was adjourned at 10:50 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks  
Preservation Planner



**Members of the Public  
Present on the Zoom Webinar online, March 6, 2025**

John Hawkinson	Cambridge
Ellen Williams	125 Brattle St
Lawrence Miller	125 Brattle St
Evan Stellman	KDA Architects, Somerville, MA
Jon Weintraub	14 Plympton St
Douglas Lee	29 Mt Auburn St
Tom Grave	Signarama, 100 Tenean St, Dorchester, MA
Laurence Holland	KPMB Architects, Toronto, ON
Mike Tokatlyan	358 Athens St Boston, MA 02127
Lauren Abbass	
Florrie Darwin	7 Follen St
Adrian K	602 Broadway St Everett, MA
Marie Saccoccio	55 Otis St
Kathy Richman	31B Jay St
Juliet Stone	29B Jay St
Paula Cortes	25 Newell St
Meredith Lyngbaek	55 Stearns St
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St
Catiana	Cambridge
Ashley Leake	28 Jay St
Susan Carter	41 Holden St

Note: City is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.

Note: See <https://www.cambridgema.gov/historic/permitsApplications/projectplansandstaffreports> for a link to the Zoom meeting recording.