

## **Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission**

October 3, 2019 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge Senior Center - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: Bruce Irving, *Chair*; Joseph Ferrara, Chandra Harrington, *Members*; Gavin Kleespies, *Alternate*

Members absent: Robert Crocker, William G. Barry, Jo Solet, Susannah Tobin, *Members*; Paula Paris, Kyle Sheffield, *Alternates*

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, *Executive Director*, Sarah Burks, *Preservation Planner*, Eric Hill, *Survey Director*

Public present: See attached list.

Ms. Burks explained there was difficulty achieving a quorum, but a fourth commissioner was on his way and the meeting would start as soon as he arrived. Chair Irving apologized for the inconvenience. Mr. Kleespies arrived, and Mr. Irving called the meeting to order at 7:06 P.M. He introduced Commission members and staff. He noted that alternate member Kleespies could vote on all matters. He explained the consent agenda procedures and recommended case 3335 for consideration.

**Case 3335 (Amendment): 41 Winthrop St., by President & Fellows of Harvard College.** Request to extend approval for the temporary siting of construction office trailers and a shed to support ongoing House Renewal projects.

There being no members of the public, staff or commission that requested a full hearing on the matter, Mr. Kleespies moved to approve the application per the consent agenda policy, delegating construction details to staff. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.

### Public Hearing: Neighborhood Conservation District Proceedings

**East Cambridge neighborhood, by petition of registered voters.** Consider a petition of registered voters requesting that the Commission initiate a neighborhood conservation district designation study of the East Cambridge neighborhood, approximately bounded by Monsignor O'Brien Highway, Cambridge Street, Second Street, Bent Street, B & A Railroad, and Gold Star Mothers Park.

Mr. Sullivan explained that this was a continuation of the hearing begun on July 11<sup>th</sup> to consider the petition of registered voters requesting that the Historical Commission begin a neighborhood conservation district (NCD) study for East Cambridge. He described neighborhood conservation district ordinance and explained that if the study is initiated, interim review protections would be in effect for one year. He described the study committee's job to conduct public meetings, draft of a report with recommendations to the Historical Commission and the City Council.

Bill Dines presented for the petitioners. He noted that in July the Historical Commission had asked the petitioners to do more outreach to the community groups and business owners. He reviewed a timeline of the working group's efforts including meetings with the East Cambridge Planning Team (ECPT), the East Cambridge Business Association (ECBA), City Councilor Tim Toomey, and a community meeting that the working group hosted at Sacred Heart church. He said that they had leafleted the neighborhood before the community meeting, and it was well attended with about fifty people present.

Mr. Sullivan said the Commission needed to discuss the boundaries of the study area and the review criteria to be used during the interim protection period. He displayed the map included in the

petition. It included city parks, the old Lechmere station, and the courthouse. He went around the proposed boundary and described it in detail. He described two recommended changes to the boundaries for the study period including eliminating the Lechmere station site, which had already been through a long planning board review process, and the high-rise courthouse site, which was an anomaly in the neighborhood and had been intensely controversial. He reported that the Community Development Department staff had recommended excluding Ahern Field and the Kennedy School as well as Gold Star Mothers Park. He noted that the ECBA had requested that the Business A zoning district along Cambridge Street, the Business B zoning district that included most of the County buildings, and the PUD4A zoning districts be excluded. Mr. Sullivan did not recommend excluding the Registry of Deeds building or the other old Middlesex County buildings because of their high level of architectural and historical significance. He described the proposed review criteria explaining that there were four NCDs in Cambridge, each with different regulations. The most similar in scale and architecture was the Half Crown-Marsh (HCM) neighborhood with its density and small lots. The staff recommendation was to use the HCM review criteria during the study. He added that if the Business A zoning district along Cambridge Street were to be included in the study area, he would recommend that the Harvard Square Conservation District review criteria be used for those properties.

Eric Hill, Survey Director, described the existing HCM review guidelines. He said they allowed for modernization and individualized changes to properties while conserving historic development patterns and architectural diversity. Alterations, additions and new construction were reviewed but modern architecture was not ruled out for new construction if the scale and materials were consistent with neighborhood. Ms. Burks described the HSCD criteria for signs and first floor storefront changes. She said they had worked very well in Harvard Square and did not slow down new commercial tenants trying to start their business.

Mr. Irving asked if there were questions of fact from members of the Commission.

Ms. Harrington asked if the Business A and Business B zoning districts were to be excluded from the study period, who would regulate those buildings? Mr. Sullivan answered that they would be subject to zoning and building codes as well as the demolition delay ordinance if over fifty years old.

Glenna Wyman of 25 Eighth Street asked how properties would be reviewed during the one-year protection period. Mr. Sullivan said the properties would be flagged in the permitting system and reviewed by Commission staff to determine if a hearing with the Commission was necessary or if the staff could approve the application administratively. During the study, the committee would refine the proposed guidelines for a new district and consider issues that arise from applications that were going reviewed during the study. Ms. Wyman asked if a tenant would be on the study committee. Mr. Sullivan answered that a tenant residing in the study area could be appointed to the committee by the city manager.

Charles Hinds of 207 Charles Street asked what would happen if Cambridge Street buildings

were excluded and a property owner wanted to remove historic building materials. Mr. Sullivan answered that if a demolition permit was not needed, there would be no Commission review in such a case.

Ron Peeples of Bent Street asked for clarification on reducing the boundaries of the district. Why not include Cambridge Street so that the issues surrounding the commercial buildings would be understood better by the study committee?

John Natale said he did not receive a notice of the community meeting. Mr. Dines answered that 1300 notices (combined with the notice of the October hearing) were mailed out and leaflets were distributed by the working group. Mr. Natale read his letter of opposition to the study. He wanted his building at 92-94 Sciarappa Street to be exempted. He said the petitioners were ill informed and naive. He explained that memories of rent control struck terror in his heart because of the restrictions that it put on property owners. He said he had been burnt very badly by rent control and a recent experience with the Historical Commission in Winchester. He said his house in Winchester was in a historic district but had condition problems and he wanted to demolish it. He considered the process to be very arbitrary and said it caused him to lose out on his chance to buy his dream house in Gloucester. He said the project at Spring and Fifth Street showed the extreme measures that had to be taken to preserve a dilapidated old building.

Alan Greene of 82 Fifth Street spoke in support of the NCD study. He said he had participated in the working group meetings. He said he did not want property values to go up any more than they already had and that was not his reason for supporting a district. He gave the example of 66-68 Otis Street that was badly renovated as a project that negatively impacted the neighborhood. He provided other examples that he thought were out of character with the district including 111-117 Charles Street, 308-318 Hurley Street and 207-209 Cambridge Street, which had been demolished for the new CVS.

Mr. Hinds of the ECPT reaffirmed the Team's letter of support for a NCD study. He said that Cambridge Street properties should be included.

Steve Bardige of Stearns Street endorsed the idea for a NCD study. He said the East Cambridge neighborhood was under extreme pressure. He recommended that the parks, Registry, County buildings, and the business district all be included in the study area.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street said she lived in the Mid Cambridge NCD. She said lots of historic building fabric and character was being lost across the city. History is important, she said. It tells us where we came from and gives us a regional identity. Cambridge Street has small as a small business rhythm and should be part of the study.

John Whisnant of 61 Otis St said the boundaries should be kept close to those of the petition. He said 8,000,000 square feet of development was happening near this neighborhood. Cambridge Street had many residential buildings as well as the strictly commercial buildings. He recommended keeping the open spaces in the study area.

Mark Johnson, representing DivcoWest, said the Lechmere station site had been subject of

planning since the master plan for Northpoint. The MBTA project to build a new station would start in 2021 and the conveyance of the property to the developer would occur at its completion. He said the proposal for that site was for a low-rise residential building. It was an important site linking East Cambridge and the Cambridge Crossing development. The redevelopment of the old Lechmere station site would complete the urban fabric between the old and new neighborhoods. The project had been the subject of design review processes under the planning board's jurisdiction. Adding another layer of permitting to the process now would cause unnecessary delay and complexity.

Michael Jane Buss said she supported having Cambridge Street, the parks and Lechmere station in the study area.

Jenny Rood of Gore Street said her understanding was that the working group had already studied the boundaries. She recommended that the parks and the business district remain in the study area.

Mr. Dines said he was not naive and encouraged the Commission to include Cambridge Street in the study area.

Ms. Wyman urged the Commission to keep all the original proposed boundaries. She said they were well thought out and it would not be a significant burden to property owners. She said the courthouse should remain in and the boundaries could be revisited during the study process.

Ms. Meyer noted that the HSCD guidelines provide flexibility for retail changes. She noted that Cambridge Street had a lot of untouched historic fabric.

Mr. Irving summarized the letters that had been received by the Commission including from Jason Ruth in opposition to a historic district, from Fiona Hopkins describing East Cambridge as not architecturally distinctive and encouraging higher-density housing, from Michael McNeley in support of the study, from Beth Simon in support, from Audrey Cunningham in support, and Jason Alves of the ECBA asking for the BA, BB, and PUD4A zoning districts to be removed from the study area.

Mr. Kleespies said East Cambridge is an architecturally cohesive neighborhood; it is a fantastic neighborhood. If Cambridge Street were excluded from the study area it wouldn't provide the whole picture. He said he was in favor of accepting the petition and excluding the Lechmere station and the courthouse sites. He recommended keeping the open spaces within the study area.

Ms. Harrington suggested keeping the Lechmere site in the study area.

Mr. Sullivan said the reason that he was okay with excluding the Lechmere station site was that the massing for the development had already been determined and the Planning Board had a process for design review as it goes through permitting.

Mr. Ferrara said he had served on a study committee in the past and these questions could all be worked out during the study process. He said he was in favor of many of the elements discussed.

Ms. Harrington moved to accept the petition with the study area boundaries amended as recommended by staff, and to adopt the Half Crown-Marsh NCD review criteria for residential districts and the

Harvard Square Conservation District retail guidelines for the business districts. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion, which passed 4-0 without further discussion.

Mr. Sullivan said the next step would be to recruit nominations for the study committee. He said the staff would put out a mailing to the neighborhood requesting nominations and would interview all who apply.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

**Case 4180: 20 Berkeley St., by Doug Cole & Nancy Simonian.** Install fence, expand garage, enclose deck, alter select doors and windows at rear ell, install skylight.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the application. He described the 1856 Mansard house, located in the Old Cambridge Historic District.

Robert Linn of Moscow Linn architects displayed the proposed plans for the property. He explained that the rear deck was added in 1986. He proposed that the garage would be expanded under the existing deck. The area beneath the pergola would be enclosed and the pergola moved outside of the enclosure on the deck. He described the proposed new fence located 15 feet behind the stone wall at the sidewalk. The purpose of the fence was to contain the family's dogs; it would be made of wood and stand 5 feet above the yard grade. He said a skylight over the entire center portion of the house would be very low profile and not visible; it would bring light into the house's central hall. He described the proposed window changes at the back of the house, which would not be visible from Berkeley Street.

Mr. Irving asked if Berkeley Place was a private way. Mr. Sullivan indicated that it was posted as private, but applications were reviewed there in the same way as elsewhere in the historic district.

Maria Tatar of 16 Berkeley Street said she was concerned about the proposed fence. She said it was difficult to get out of her driveway already and the fence would make it more difficult to see approaching people and cars. She said there were lots of walkers in the neighborhood and noted that the tendency in recent years had been to remove fences, not to put them up. She noted that the Sonnenscheins at 19 Berkeley Street had applied for a tall fence, which the Commission denied. She said they opted instead to put in landscaping, and they were now very glad that they did. She said they had told her they would rather not look at a fence across the street. She noted that she was speaking on behalf of about 6 people on the street.

Ms. Meyer asked about the design of the railing on the second-floor balcony. Mr. Linn explained that it would be metal with a wood cap.

Mr. Irving asked for public comment, but there was none made. He closed the public comment period. Mr. Irving asked the height of the fence above the sidewalk grade. Mr. Linn answered that it would be 5 feet high from the yard grade plus the height of the retaining wall. Mr. Linn said that his clients were open to considering other fence styles.

Mr. Kleespies noted that a lot of windows were being added to the rear of the house and it had a

very modern appearance.

Mr. Ferrara said most of the work was not very visible. The design was straightforward. He said the placement of the fence forward of the facade competed with the view of the house's facade. He asked if the fence could be pushed back beyond the front wall of the house. He noted that he also liked the idea of a planting solution rather than a fence.

Mr. Kleespies suggested that the fence not extend all the way to Berkeley Place but terminate at the rear wall. That solution would be less invasive to the neighborhood.

Mr. Irving commented that the street was mostly free of fences.

Mr. Sullivan noted that a goal of the historic district was to discourage fences that would block views of the houses. He recommended pushing the fence back to behind the front corner of the house. He noted that the visibility of the ell was very limited. The new windows were modern in appearance, but they would not be very visible from the street.

Mr. Ferrara moved to find approve the application and issue a certificate of appropriateness on the condition that the location of the fence be modified so that it would be set back behind the Berkeley Street facade and on Berkeley Place it would return and terminate at the retaining wall. He delegated review and approval of details to the staff. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion. There was no further comment, and the motion passed 4-0.

#### Public Hearing: Demolition Review

**Case D-1538: 48-50 Bishop Allen Dr., by George Rothman and Stuart J. Rothman, Trustees of Stu-Lin Family Trust.** Demolish 3-story apartment building (1868).

Ms. Burks showed slides and summarized the staff memo about the history and architecture of the building. Now an apartment house, the building had originally been constructed as three row houses in 1868. The adjacent house at 12 Douglass Street was part of the same property and had been constructed at the same time. She told the history of the builder, Gerrit Jan Bennink, as well as residents of the building over time. She described alterations that had been made to the building in the mid twentieth century. She recommended that the Commission find the building significant for its associations with Gerrit Jan Bennink and the development of Bishop Allen Drive (then Austin Street) in the 1860s.

Mr. Irving asked if there were any questions of fact regarding the question of significance or the staff report. There were no questions. Mr. Irving asked for public comment on the matter of significance.

Ms. Meyer said she agreed with staff that the building was significant for the reasons described in the report. Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Mr. Kleespies moved to find the building significant as defined in the ordinance and for the reasons described by staff. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.

Sean Hope, attorney for the Stu-Lin Family Trust, described recent planning studies for the neighborhood. The K2C2 study was followed by the Central Square Restoration zoning petition. The zoning

changes allowed for smaller setbacks and relief from parking requirements. The site was located within the Mass + Main project block. The next step in permitting would be to request a special permit from the Planning Board for no parking, a reduction in setbacks, and a height of 69'-11". He reported that the applicants had reached out to the neighbors and St. Paul's church. He noted that they had updated the drawings in response to a design review meeting with the Community Development Department.

Evan Stellman of Khalsa Design displayed the design drawings and described the proposal. The setbacks would be 5'. The seven-story building would have a corner entrance and a prominent base of limestone veneer. The middle of the building would be clad with a cementitious Cembrit planks. The top, a one-story penthouse, would be clad with a different material. The segmented bay would be clad with gray Cembrit panels.

Mr. Irving asked about the fate of 12 Douglass Street. Mr. Hope said the owners of 12 Douglass had lived there a long time and had been supportive of both Mass + Main and this project proposal. There were very few windows on the side 12 Douglass facing the new building. He noted that the new building would include 20% affordable residential space. They were planning for two 3-bedroom affordable units, but the city would select which units would be affordable. Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact.

Ms. Meyer asked how many units would be located on the top floor. Mr. Stellman answered that there would be two penthouse units. Ms. Meyer asked where the taller zoning transitioned to the smaller neighborhood. Mr. Hope answered that the transition happened on the other side of Bishop Allen Drive. Mr. Stellman said they had taken the neighborhood context into consideration when planning the design.

James Williamson of 1000 Jackson Place asked about comparative heights for this building, Mass + Main, and the new building across the street. Mr. Hope answered that the new building on the north side of Bishop Allen Drive was 45 feet tall, but the height limit on the south side of Bishop Allen was 80 feet. The lower portion of Mass + Main was also seven stories. Mr. Williamson asked if a variance was needed. Mr. Hope said only a special permit was needed under the current zoning.

Mel Downs of 360 Concord Avenue asked what St. Paul's church had said about the proposal, noting that parking was very difficult in the area. Mr. Hope said parking had not been raised as an issue by the church, but they had talked about affordable housing.

Charina Ortega of 48 Bishop Allen Drive Said she appreciated learning about her building and hadn't realized it was that old. She said the proposed seven-story building did not fit in with the context of the surrounding neighborhood of mostly three-story buildings. She said her building was one of few places with backyard space. She said she liked the current affordability of her building and that many of her neighbors there were young professionals.

Michael Madsen of 48 Bishop Allen Drive said the existing building meshes with the neighborhood. The rapid change of the neighborhood was unnerving. Historic buildings and affordability get lost with the changes. When the new building is finished, he said he would not be able to afford it. He

explained that he worked for a non-profit downtown and appreciated the Central Square location.

Ms. Meyer of 10 Dana Street said Bishop Allen is a small-scale street. She compared the project to the new building on Essex St where rents are \$6600 a month. She noted that six existing affordable units would be lost here. The design was very generic, and it would stand out as being much taller than what's around it. She said she thought it was a badly designed building.

Mr. Williamson said the city doesn't care about its existing residents. We are losing the historic character of Central Square. It's worth preserving and being careful with new construction. He said the new building reminded him of buildings on Boylston Street in Boston.

Ms. Wyman urged the Commission to preserve the existing building for its own historic value and because it's a good gateway to other three-story buildings in the area. The new building would not represent that history.

Mr. Irving said there had been a lot of comments about the massing. He asked the applicant to talk about the overlay district zoning and study processes.

Sean Hope describe the planning rationale for increased housing density near transit hubs. The current zoning regulations for the area had been eight years in the making. It would feel new and different and it would help retailers because it would bring more residents back to Central Square. The proposal was within the bounds of the allowed massing. The 70-foot height limit was a transition between the 120-feet and 45-feet height limits.

Gavin Kleespies noted that he had been a member of the K2C2 Committee. He said he supported increased density near transit and supported waivers of parking near transit. He indicated that the size of the proposed new building was okay, but the first floor was dead. There was nothing engaging at the first floor, and he encouraged the applicants to make it more interesting to the public that would be walking by. He said the existing apartments were not protected affordable units and the rent could change at any time. If the new development were built, it would make permanent affordable units.

Ms. Harrington said the existing building was much more appealing than the proposed new building. She said it would be great if we could hold on to some elements of the historical design.

Mr. Irving said he thought the new building did reference historic architecture. with the corner oriel window and projecting bays on the front. He said it walks the line well enough. Early entrants to the new zoning environment require getting used to. He asked about the first-floor features of the building. Mr. hope said there was a transformer vault with louvers, the entrance, a bike room with a storefront, and a residential unit on Douglas Street.

Mr. Sullivan said the design had improved dramatically after a design review meeting with the Community Development Department.

Mr. Kleespies moved to find the existing building not preferably preserved in the context of the proposed replacement building and as defined in the ordinance. He suggested that the applicants consult

with staff on ways to make the first floor more appealing. He said he agreed with the goals and development guidelines. He said he did not foresee a landmark study for the existing building in five months. Mr. Ferrara seconded the motion. There was no further discussion on the motion, and it passed 4-0.

#### Preservation Grants

**Case PG 20-01: 316 Western Ave.** Request of \$45,000 for new windows.

**Case PG 20-02: 20 Reed St.** Request of \$23,830 for porch restoration.

**Case IPG 20-01: 33 Garden St. by Longy School of Music.** Request for \$100,000 for stucco repairs, roofing, and windows.

Mr. Sullivan said the City Council had voted to replenish the grant account from Community Preservation funds. The available balance was approximately \$600,000. He showed slides of all three properties and described the proposed scope of work for each project. He said there was no preservation component to the proposed new windows at 316 Western Avenue and he did not recommend a grant. At 20 Reed Street, one of the three owners was income eligible for the grant program and the requested funds would cover a third of the porch restoration budget. He recommended the grant. At 33 Garden Street, the Longy School was requesting a new grant for stucco repairs, roofing and window restoration.

Mr. Irving moved to approve \$60,000 for 33 Garden Street, and \$23,830 for 20 Reed Street and not to offer a grant for 316 Western Avenue. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion. There was no further discussion and the motion passed 4-0.

#### Minutes

Ms. Harrington moved to approve the minutes of September 5, 2019, as presented. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.

#### Director's Report

Mr. Sullivan introduced Sarah Scott, a new city staff member at Community Development and a graduate of University of Pennsylvania's Historic Preservation program. He said she was working with Jeff Roberts in the zoning division.

Mr. Hawkinson asked about the library lighting project. Ms. Burks answered that it was an interior space in the historic side of the library, where the historic paint colors were dark. The library was investigating track lighting options to boost the lighting in the room.

Mr. Kleespies moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:20 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks  
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public  
Who Signed the Attendance List on October 3, 2019**

John Whisnant	61 Otis St
Ron Peeples	243 Bent St #1
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St
Bill Gray	36 Hunting St
Steve Bardige	55 Stearns St
Jenny Rood	Gore St
Michael Matson	48 Bishop Allen Dr
Charina Ortega	48 Bishop Allen Dr
Fabrizio Gentili	72 Sciarappa St
Bill Dines	69 Otis St
Sarah Scott	Community Development Department
John Natale	45 Chester St, Winchester
Alan Greene	82 Fifth St
John Hawkinson	Cambridgeday.com
Charles Hinds	207 Charles St
Michael McNeley	106 Otis St
Dan Herlihy	40 Second St
Ali Ringenburg	106 Otis St
Alexandra Offiong	1350 Massachusetts Ave
Mark Roberts	10 Mt Auburn St
Paul Chase	40 Second St
Maria Tatar	16 Berkeley St
Michael Jane Buss	22 Sixth St
Mel Downes	360 Concord Ave
Jean Spera	12 Sciarappa St
Anna Spera	12 Sciarappa St
Glenna Wyman	25 Eighth St #87
Mark Johnson	200 State St, 12 <sup>th</sup> Fl, Boston

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.