

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

**Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission**

November 5, 2020 – Meeting conducted online via Zoom Webinar (882 6389 7862) - 6:00 P.M.

Members present (online): Bruce Irving, *Chair*; Joseph Ferrara, Chandra Harrington, Elizabeth Lyster, Caroline Shannon, Jo Solet, *Members*; Gavin Kleespies, Paula Paris, Kyle Sheffield, *Alternates*

Members absent: Susannah Tobin, *Vice Chair*

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

Public present (online): See attached list.

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.

With a quorum present, Mr. Irving called the meeting to order at 6:08 P.M. He explained the online meeting instructions and public hearing procedures then introduced the commissioners and staff. He dispensed with the consent agenda and moved to the first item on the agenda.

Public Hearings: Demolition Review

**Case D-1562: 207 Lake View Avenue, by Sam Kachmar & Maggie Currier.** Demolish house (1875).

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the development history of the neighborhood. He described the house's architecture, it having been designed by William Smith, who built many of the houses on the street. He went on to tell about the diverse residents of the house including the Richardson, Murata, Moore, and Ginty families. He explained that an unusual concrete stucco had been applied to the exterior about 1930 and that the top floor of a tower had been removed in 1929-1934.

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

Mr. Kleespies asked if the concrete stucco was trapping moisture in the walls. Mr. Sullivan indicated he had not seen evidence of that.

Ms. Paris asked why the concrete had been applied. Mr. Sullivan answered that it may have been applied for fire prevention but there was no record of when or why.

Ms. Lyster asked if there were other houses of this type on the street. Mr. Sullivan answered that there were two other towered houses on the street but each house designed by Smith was unique.

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact regarding significance from members of the public.

James Williamson of 1000 Jackson Place asked if the Wyeth name on a plan in the staff report was related to Andrew Wyeth. Mr. Sullivan replied that the Wyeth family originated in Cambridge but some of the family went to Pennsylvania in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the artists were of that branch. There were Wyeth descendants in Cambridge until the 1980s.

Marie Saccochio of 55 Otis Street asked about deed restrictions on the property. Mr. Sullivan said there had been restrictions, but only for 25 years.

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

Mr. Irving asked for public comment regarding significance of the house.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana noted the interesting jigsaw capitals on the porch. She said the house had good proportions, interesting scale and was well balanced. She spoke in favor of the house being found significant.

Mr. Williamson agreed it was charming. He said he had gone to high school with John Wyeth. Any connection to the Wyeth family would enhance the significance of the house, in his estimation.

Dr. Solet moved to find the building significant for the reasons stated in the staff report. Ms. Paris seconded. Mr. Irving designated Ms. Paris to vote as alternate then called the roll. The motion passed 7-0.

Mr. Irving asked the applicants to present their design proposal for a replacement building.

Sam Kachmar, an owner and applicant, shared his screen. He exhibited photographs of the existing conditions of the house, including the thick concrete exterior. He said the weight of the concrete had compromised the structure. The brick chimney and the foundation were failing. Rodents had damaged the woodwork. He said the intent was to retain the form and shape of the existing house. He showed renderings of the existing and proposed houses, shadow studies, plans and elevations. He noted that the new house would have more windows on the rear elevation and shingles on the second floor.

Mr. Sheffield asked the height of the existing house. Mr. Kachmar replied that it was 33.5 feet. Ms. Harrington asked the height of the proposed house to which Mr. Kachmar replied, 35 feet.

Dr. Solet asked about changes to the footprint and setbacks. Mr. Kachmar said the new house would be 5' closer to the street, to be aligned with the neighboring houses. The side setback would be 5 feet from the south side lot line (increased from 4.2 feet) and 11.5 feet from the north lot line (reduced from 15 feet).

Ms. Harrington asked if the owners had considered renovating the existing house. Mr. Kachmar answered that it was their original plan to renovate the house but their structural engineer had advised against it. Maggie Currier, co-owner and applicant, said they had not realized when they bought the house that the concrete had been applied directly onto the original clapboard siding and trim.

Ms. Paris asked about the engineering report. Ms. Burks apologized for omitting it from the commissioners' packets.

Ms. Lyster asked if the new house would be clapboarded. Mr. Kachmar said it would have clapboards at the first floor and shingles above. Ms. Lyster asked if they had considered rebuilding the tower. Mr. Kachmar said it would exceed the 35' height limit. Ms. Lyster asked about the copper gutters and downspouts. Mr. Kachmar said the material was appropriate.

Mr. Sheffield asked if there would be a new masonry chimney. Mr. Kachmar indicated there would not be and that the city discouraged masonry chimneys in new construction.

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

Mr. Sullivan summarized the September 2020 engineer's report. It described moisture penetration in the foundation and wood framing, undersized and deficient framing, joists pulling away from the sills, and a deteriorated foundation. The engineer's conclusions were that the foundation was beyond repair and could collapse, that the first floor framing was in very poor condition, and that he recommended demolishing the house.

Dr. Solet asked about the soil conditions. Mr. Sullivan said it was probably clay, which does not drain well and could have contributed to the deterioration of the brick piers. Clay was more stable than peat, however. She asked if a recommendation of the Commission to restore the tower could be conveyed to the Board of Zoning Appeal. Mr. Sullivan replied in the affirmative.

Ms. Harrington asked why this house was in worse condition than other houses by the same builder. Mr. Sullivan said it might have to do with the low-lying lot. He had observed the split joists and poor condition of the masonry, but the house did not appear to be beyond repair, in his opinion.

Mr. Kleespies asked if the owners had considered jacking up the house and replacing the foundation. Mr. Kachmar said yes, but the 1.5 inch thick concrete made that option not viable. The concrete encased the original wood and the wood had both dry and wet rot. There would be nothing in good enough condition to save in a gut renovation. Removing the concrete with a jackhammer could make the structural problems worse.

Mr. Irving asked for questions from the public.

Mr. Williamson asked about the existing and proposed FAR. Mr. Kachmar answered that the existing was 0.30 and the proposed was 0.44. Mr. Williamson asked why the privet hedges were to be removed. Mr. Kachmar said that gardens had replaced hedges at many properties on the street.

Ms. Meyer asked about the stone materials at the front wall and deck. She asked about the prominence of the copper gutters and downspouts. Mr. Kachmar said he wanted to celebrate some of the utilitarian aspects of the home. Ms. Meyer asked if the number of corbels would increase since the dimension of the front gable was increasing. Mr. Kachmar said he wanted to match the same proportions and number of corbels. She asked if the ridges of the gables were the same height. Mr. Kachmar said the cross gable would be higher.

Ms. Saccoccio asked if the family was still living in the house, despite the structural problems. Mr. Kachmar said he felt uncomfortable about it, but yes, they were. He said they didn't know all the problems with the house when they bought it.

Mr. Irving opened public comment.

Ms. Meyer said that the new house should not have too much detail or be enlarged too much.

Roger Theberge of 209 Lake View Avenue said he did not oppose the demolition but had some

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

objections to the new building, especially with having it be 3' closer to #209 and the bump out addition.

Mr. Williamson asked if there could be an independent assessment of the existing building's condition. Mr. Sullivan said he was not an engineer but had seen a lot of houses of this period be successfully renovated. He agreed with observations of the engineer about the benefit of a new foundation but did not make the same conclusion about demolition.

Mr. Sullivan summarized the letters on file including those of Daniel Boyne & Karen Barss, Roger Boothe & Claudia Thompson, Linda Caswell & Roger Theberge, Genevieve & Joseph Coyle, and about twenty letters addressed to the BZA in support of proposed renovations to the house and requested zoning relief. The BZA letters reflected confusion about the project scope and whether it was a renovation, restoration, or demolition and new construction. Ms. Burks clarified that she had advised Mr. Kachmar that it was not necessary to ask the neighbors to write two letters each (one to BZA and one to CHC). The demolition hearing notice was mailed out to the same neighbors as the zoning notice.

Ms. Harrington said renovation of the existing house should be more fully explored.

Dr. Solet said the thick cement on the exterior of the house was a convincing argument for the difficulty of renovating the existing house. She encouraged the re-construction of a tower with support for the zoning relief needed for its height.

Mr. Kleespies said it would be regrettable to lose the house but he was not sure he could require the extreme measures they would have to go to in order to preserve it.

Ms. Lyster said there was value in the existing proportions of the house. Both renovation and new construction would result in a bigger building. She had no reason to disbelieve the engineer's report and recommendations. The new building's design respected the architecture but not the scale of the existing.

Mr. Sullivan said it was ridiculous to suggest removing the concrete with a jackhammer; it could be done piecemeal with a cement saw without damaging the substrate. Why had this not been attempted?

Mr. Ferrara said he had repaired his stucco house by repairing the framing from the inside. He did not object to the proposed replacement but agreed that the existing house could be renovated.

Mr. Sheffield remarked that a lot of thought had gone into the design and it fit in with the neighborhood. He shared concerns about demolishing the house and wondered if the existing could be repaired and an addition added at the back. It was important that the abutters fully understand the scope of the project. He recommended a test be made of the feasibility of sawing off the concrete.

Mr. Kachmar replied that had been his original intent. It was not regular stucco but concrete that had fused to the wood beneath. He had tried removing it and it pulled the wood away from the frame along with it. The wood beneath was punky. He said he wanted to save it and loved the style of the house, despite being a modernist. He wanted his family to be able to live there for a long time. He showed the

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

photographs of the existing house again on the shared screen. He noted where the concrete was fused to the wood shingles. There was no way to take off the concrete without destroying the wood exterior.

Mr. Irving said he was uncomfortable with the perceived lack of understanding among the neighbors about the scope of the project being a full demolition and rebuild. He indicated, however, that the fatal flaw to the building had been the application of the concrete in the early twentieth century. If renovated, the result would be a lifted frame, a new foundation, reinforced framing, new siding and windows. He said he did not object to the proposed application but encouraged the applicants to listen to their neighbors and hoped they could reach a compromise.

Ms. Shannon agreed. Mr. Sheffield said the photos were helpful and noted they had not been included in the plans mailed to the commission. Dr. Solet agreed with Mr. Irving's comments and that not much would be left of the house if renovated as described.

Ms. Harrington asked if the concrete could remain, the house lifted and a new foundation constructed. Ms. Shannon said she did not think that was feasible.

Mr. Sheffield suggested that the doors should match the existing, porch columns be salvaged or replicated, the third floor window match the existing arched window, and the downspouts moved around the corners. Mr. Ferrara suggested deleting the railing above the front porch, painting the gutters, and adding a masonry chimney.

Ms. Lyster said she did not object to demolition in this case but recommended that the front proportions be more like the existing and that the tower be restored.

Ms. Shannon moved to find the existing building not preferably preserved in the context of the proposed replacement building and urged the owners to consider the design suggestions made by the Commission. Mr. Irving seconded the motion and designated Mr. Kleespies to vote. The roll call vote was 6 in favor (Ferrara, Lyster, Shannon, Solet, Kleespies, and Irving) and 1 abstention (Harrington).

Dr. Solet recommended conferring further with the neighbors, especially because construction projects undertaken while people are working from home have an even more disruptive impact.

**Case D-1563: 25 Jackson St., by 25 Jackson St. LLC c/o DND Homes, LLC. Demolish house (1874).**

Ms. Burks showed slides and summarized the staff report about the architecture and history of the house. She indicated that the workers cottage had an unusually low foundation, perhaps due to a change in the grade level of the lot following installation of sewer lines in the neighborhood. Otherwise, the house exhibited several characteristics of the North Cambridge workers cottage, such as the front door facing the south side yard, relatively few windows on the north side, and chimneys located on the north side of the main block of the house. She described Irish and Italian families that had lived in the house.

A commissioner asked if the house was vacant. Ms. Burks replied that it did not appear to have

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

been vacant for long, but she did not see anyone at the house when she was there.

Mr. Irving asked for questions and comments from the public regarding significance of the house.

Jim Kelly of 29 Jackson Street (rear of 31 Jackson Street) said the house had been occupied until about a month ago.

Barbara Glick of 21 Jackson Street said it had been occupied as a two-family house with one family on the first floor and another on the second floor.

Jason Stonehouse of 28 Jackson said there was a dwindling number of workers cottages on the street. This one was in relatively good repair and it would be a shame to demolish it. Ms. Glick agreed.

Ms. Saccoccio said it had been renovated over the years. She agreed it was significant.

Mr. Williamson said the staff memo enhanced his appreciation for the significance of the house. His own building at Jackson Place was constructed on the former claypits and backed up to the Catholic Cemetery that was full of Irish and French-Canadian immigrants.

Mr. Kleespies said the North Cambridge workers cottage was an endangered species. The house exhibited the social history of the neighborhood and this type of dwelling. He moved to find it significant as defined in the ordinance and for the reasons described in the staff report. Ms. Harrington seconded. Mr. Irving designated Mr. Kleespies to vote as alternate. The motion passed unanimously in a roll call vote.

Trina Murphy of DND Homes, the owner and builder, introduced herself and explained that the property was vacant when they had purchased it in June. The first floor unit was in disrepair. The house had non-conforming setbacks. The foundation was very low. The windows were very low to the floor. She said they had looked at raising the roof and changing the floor levels, but after several months of study had decided to apply for demolition. The front entrance directly adjacent to the driveway was a dangerous condition. When re-designing the house they would remedy these conditions. She described the proposed redevelopment as including a 25' high front building of 1,500 square feet and a taller rear building of 1,350 square feet. She had sent a letter to the neighbors and hosted two informational meetings. The owner of 32 Jackson Street expressed concern about the additional unit, but the existing building had two units. She had also spoken to Barbara Glick earlier in the day.

Dan Anderson of Anderson Porter Design, the architect, displayed the existing and proposed plans and elevations. The existing and adjacent buildings were approximately 23' and 25' high respectively, so the proposal kept the front new building at 25' high. The first floor would be at grade level, with the ceiling of the basement being one foot below grade. They had considered moving the building on the lot, but that would either result in non-conforming setbacks or require partial demolition. The maximum square footage allowed on the lot was 2,850 square feet. They had studied renovation options, but the roof line would need to be altered and the non-conforming side yard setback addressed. It would require a lot

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

of modifications. The two new buildings would conform to the required setbacks. The three-story rear building related to the abutting three-deckers on Clay Street.

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

Mr. Kleespies asked if removal of the one-story additions to the existing house would allow room for a second building on the lot. Mr. Anderson answered that the width and square footage of the existing building (1,800 sf) were problematic. The replacement would be 3' narrower and smaller in size.

Mr. Irving asked about the existing ceiling heights. Mr. Anderson said the ceilings were 7'6" on both the first and second floors.

Mr. Sheffield asked about outreach to the neighbors. Ms. Murphy said she had sent out 35 letters, but no one attended the scheduled meetings.

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

Jim Kelly of 29 Jackson Street said that he had not received the letter. He indicated that his house was a direct abutter, set back behind 31 Jackson Street.

Jason Stonehouse of 28 Jackson Street asked if the owners had considered a design more like a workers cottage. Mr. Anderson said the client wanted a modern vocabulary, but the scale of the front house and the size of the windows did take cues from the workers cottage type. The proposed buildings would have clapboards, corner boards and trim which was congruent to the traditional building materials of the neighborhood.

Ms. Murphy explained that the flat roof would keep the height of the front building low, like the neighboring buildings.

Barbara Glick of 21 Jackson Street said the former owner was a polio survivor, so the at-grade entrance had been convenient for her. She said she had received the notice from the applicant that day.

Kelly Matthews of 31 Jackson Street said she got her packet the previous day. She said she would like to attend a future meeting with the developer to discuss.

James Williamson asked if the new units would be part of a condominium agreement. Ms. Murphy replied in the affirmative. She said not everyone wants to be a landlord and buy a two-unit property. Mr. Williamson asked how the driveway with two cars would address safety concerns. Ms. Murphy said the entrance to the front building would not open directly into the driveway.

Liza Paden of 6 Theriault Court said the proposal two separate dwelling units was becoming typical for the neighborhood. A two-story front house would allow more light to the three-story rear house. The proposed windows were not consistent with the neighborhood. She noted that the rear unit would open onto the driveway. She asked about the impact on the neighbors and how that would be addressed.

Marie Saccoccio of 55 Otis Street said it was not unusual in East Cambridge for entry doors to

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

open onto the side yard. The ceilings heights of the existing house were legal.

Mr. Williamson said it should be found preferably preserved. The design proposal needed further study. The existing structure warranted preservation.

Mr. Kelly said he knew development would happen eventually. He expressed concern about the impact of the three-story rear building on his house. The design was not in context for the neighborhood.

Mr. Irving asked if the project would need zoning relief. Mr. Anderson replied in the negative. Mr. Irving closed public comment.

Ms. Harrington said it was unfortunate not to have seen what a renovation would look like to understand why that had not been the chosen direction.

Mr. Kleespies said he did not see how the new buildings could have a positive impact on the neighborhood. He did not understand why a renovation could not work.

Dr. Solet said it was not an inexpensive property and she would like to see further consideration given to renovation of the existing building before allowing it to be town down.

Ms. Shannon said other options for the scale and design of replacement buildings could be tested.

Mr. Irving said it reminded him of Holworthy Street, where the established approach was to restore the front house and build behind it in a modern vocabulary. The blocky buildings of today are the modern vernacular, just as the workers cottages were in the mid-nineteenth century. Both reflected the best use of available materials.

Ms. Paris said the “preservation in the front and party in the back” approach was quite interesting.

Ms. Harrington moved to find the existing building preferably preserved in the context of the plans for the proposed replacement buildings, with encouragement to return with a proposal responsive to the comments and concerns of the commissioners and neighbors. Mr. Kleespies seconded.

Ms. Lyster offered an amendment to prioritize preservation of the existing house at the front, and if that were not possible to take cues from the workers cottage for design of the front building. Ms. Harrington agreed to the amendment. Mr. Kleespies seconded. Mr. Irving designated Mr. Kleespies to vote as alternate. The motion passed 7-0 in a roll call vote.

#### Preservation Grants

**Case PG 21-3: 11 Speridakis Terrace, Just A Start.** Trim repairs for 1911 three-decker. \$3,500 repairs plus \$1500 administrative fees.

**Case IPG 21-3: 536 Massachusetts Ave., by The Dance Complex.** Envelope study for 1888 commercial building. \$22,000.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and showed slides of the properties. He explained that a previous grant in 2010 had used white pine trim at 11 Speridakis Terrace. The wood was of a variable quality and some of it had rotted out in ten years. The proposal was to fix an inferior job by replacing the casings,



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

sills, trim, corner boards, and fascia with a PVC product. The request was for \$3,500 plus administrative fees to allow Just A Start to manage the construction.

Mr. Irving asked if the scope included replacement of the clapboards. Mr. Sullivan said the clapboards were holding up and did not need to be replaced.

Regarding the Dance Complex, Mr. Sullivan explained that the owner wanted to do a full examination of condition issues of the building envelope. The estimated cost for the study was \$45,000. Because they have had a prior grant, a grant of \$22,500 would need to be matched by the Dance Complex.

Ms. Paris said she was concerned about the recent requests from Just A Start to cover administrative costs but agreed that this was small money for the repairs at Speridakis Terrace. Mr. Sullivan said he had pushed back on Just A Start. The point of the preservation grant program was to leverage other funds and to pay for the extra costs of preservation materials and skilled labor but not to fully fund a project. Ms. Harrington asked if the Commission should adopt a policy. Mr. Sullivan said he would report back on the matter.

Ms. Paris made a motion to approve both grants as recommended (\$5,000 and \$22,500) by staff. Dr. Solet seconded the motion. Mr. Irving designated Ms. Paris to vote. The motion passed 7-0 in a roll call vote.

#### Minutes

The Commission considered the draft minutes of August 6, 2020 and October 19, 2020.

Dr. Solet offered a correction to the October 19, 2020 minutes on page 3 to change Mr. to Ms. Mr. Sheffield noted that he had not voted all evening. He moved to approve both sets of minutes with the corrections noted. Dr. Solet seconded. Mr. Irving designated Mr. Sheffield to vote as alternate. The motion passed 7-0 in a roll call vote.

#### Directors Report

There were not questions for the Director about his written report.

Mr. Sheffield, on a roll, moved to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Solet seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 10:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks  
Preservation Planner

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

**Members of the Public  
Present on the Zoom Webinar online, November 5, 2020**

Sam	Kachmar	207 Lake View Ave.
Maggie	Currier	207 Lake View Ave.
Roger	Theberge	209 Lake View Ave.
Liza	Paden	6 Theriault Ct.
Charles	Hinds	207 Charles St.
Barbara	Glick	21 Jackson St.
Daniel	Boyne	201 Lake View Ave.
Claudia	Thompson	206 Lake View Ave.
Trina	Murphy	DND Homes, 271 Lincoln St., Ste. 10, Lexington, MA 02421
Dan	Anderson	875 Main Street
Jason	Stonehouse	28 Jackson St
Greg	Matteosian	9 Jackson St.
Marie	Saccoccio	55 Otis St.
Ozan	Dokmecioglu	271 Lincoln St., Ste. 10, Lexington, MA 02421
Marilee	Meyer	10 Dana St., #404
Kristina	Vanstrom	60 Standish St., #3
John	Hawkinson	Cambridgeday.com
James	Williamson	1000 Jackson Place
Jim	Kelly	29 Jackson St.
Margaret	Kelly	29 Jackson St.
Gunnel	Schmidt	188 Lake View Ave
Linda	Caswell	209 Lake View Ave.
Crystal	Leslie	202 Lake View Ave.
Kelly	Matthews	31 Jackson St.
Ronnie	Millar	31 Jackson St.
J	L	2 Tenth

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.