

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

June 1, 2017 – 806 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge Senior Center - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: William King, *Chair*; Bruce Irving, *Vice Chair*; William Barry, Chandra Harrington, Jo Solet, *Members*; Joseph Ferrara, *Alternate*
Members absent: Robert Crocker, *Member*; Kyle Sheffield, Susannah Tobin *Alternates*
Staff present: Charles Sullivan, *Executive Director*; Sarah Burks, *Preservation Planner*
Public present: See attached list.

With a quorum present, Chair King called the meeting to order at 6:04 P.M. and explained the hearing procedures. He designated Mr. Ferrara to vote on all matters. He dispensed with the consent agenda procedure.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 3793: 182 Brattle St., by Lucy Maria Grimshaw Rev. Trust. Replace wood fence with composite fence of same design.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the existing wood fence around the perimeter of the property. Its design consisted of ~~was~~ 4.5' solid board fence with a semi-transparent topper for a total height of 6'. He said the fence was prominently visible on Brattle Street and Elmwood Avenue. He noted that the fence and the motorized gate at the driveway had been approved in 2003.

Joseph Chung, husband of the owner, described the existing condition of the fence, which had reached the end of its operational life at 14 years old. Even the 4" x 4" cedar posts were rotted. He said the new fence would be the same design except that it would be made of a solid composite material. He said they hoped the composite fence would last longer than the wood. He presented a sample of the material for the Commission to examine.

Mr. Irving asked if the existing fence was white cedar. Mr. Chung replied that he did not know.

Dr. Solet said she had seen some fences that used a synthetic material at the bottom rail. Mr. Chung said the bottom rail had been repaired with a synthetic but it expands and contracts at a different rate than the wood and was not a satisfactory solution.

Ms. Harrington questioned if the original fence manufacturer had done a good job.

Mr. King noted that irrigation of lawns did not help the longevity of fences.

Mr. Sullivan said that 15 years would be the maximum expected life of a cedar fence these days. He noted that Walpole Woodworkers had changed their name to Walpole Outdoor in part because of the change to composite fencing for many of their products. He showed slides of the composite Walpole fence that had been approved by the Commission at 174 Brattle Street. It was solid cellular PVC which was indistinguishable from wood when painted. The sample presented by Mr. Chung was from New England Woodworkers and had the same feel. It could also be painted. He reported that the Commission had slowly been moving into the approval of synthetic materials in specific circumstances. The Commission allowed the existing fence in 2003 as a replacement to a solid 6' stockade fence.

Dr. Solet suggested keeping a space between the ground and the bottom rail and to not allow mulch and soil to creep up over the bottom of the fence.

Mr. Barry said he could support the use of the proposed fence material because it had the same appearance as painted wood, was not shiny or reflective. It was the paintable “wood” of the future.

Mr. King invited questions or comments from the public but there were none. He closed the public comment period. He noted the Commission’s receipt of Mr. Sullivan’s position paper on synthetics and suggested that they might consider scheduling a hearing to see if they would adopt it as a policy.

Mr. Ferrara recommended that the applicants be sure that the product finish is not rough, but smooth as at 174 Brattle Street.

Mr. Irving said that when composite fences first were introduced in the 1990s, dark paints were not recommended because if they chip or get scratched the underlying white material would show. He said he thought they had improved the product and paints since then.

Dr. Solet asked if it would get hot in the sun. Mr. Sullivan said that it did not seem to.

Mr. Irving moved to approve the application as submitted. Mr. Barry seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Case 3794: 8 Craigie St., by Scott & Amy Goebel. Rebuild front steps, front walkway and driveway; change exterior paint colors.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the application to change the paint colors, rebuild the front steps and repave the walk and driveway.

Amy Goebel, an owner, said she had met with Susan Maycock of the CHC staff and they had agreed on the following exterior colors: Benjamin Moore Galveston Gray for body, Sailcloth for trim, Cottage Red for door, and Black Forest Green for shutters. The front brick walk would be repaved with new brick in a running bond pattern. The front steps would be widened so that there would be room for a planter on either end of the landing. The risers would be adjusted to 7”. The concrete driveway would be repaved with brick in same running bond. The paint on the brick end walls of the house would be removed if possible.

Mr. King invited questions or comments from the public but there were none. He closed the public comment period.

Mr. Barry asked if the same handrail would be re-used. Ms. Goebel said the landing was only 22” off the ground and she preferred not to have one. Mr. King observed that older guests would no doubt find a handrail helpful.

Mr. Ferrara asked about the edge detail on the paving. Ms. Goebel said she wasn’t sure but she wanted a clean look. Mr. Ferrara noted that a flame finish on the stone steps would be more anti-slip than a natural cleft finish.

Dr. Solet noted that there was no roof over the steps so they could get icy. Ms. Goebel said she kept electric mats on the steps in winter.

Mr. Ferrara moved to approve the application, with the condition that the stone finish be flame finish and with the owner's option of whether to install a hand rail or not, subject to review of design details by staff. Mr. Irving seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Case 3795: 29 Mt. Auburn St., by Roman Catholic Archbishop of Boston, c/o St. Paul Parish School. Install a sign for the choir school at fourth floor of building, facing west.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the church (1915-1924) and the choir school (1991). The proposed sign would be located on the west side of the school under the gable on a stucco panel.

Tom Hogan, business manager of the parish, said there was no signage on the school and the proposed location seemed the best site. He described the 5' diameter logo made of Diebond sign material.

Mr. King asked if the sign would be more visible if it were positioned on the lower panel rather than at the very top panel.

Ms. Burks explained the permitting requirements to get both a certificate from the Commission and a variance for height from the Board of Zoning Appeal.

Dr. Solet asked what Diebond was made of. Ms. Burks explained it was a synthetic, weather resistant stable material often used for signs.

Mr. King invited questions or comments from the public.

Carol O'Hare of 172 Magazine Street stated that the proposed height was more than twice the maximum allowed per the zoning regulations. It was too high to be seen by pedestrians or drivers. It was above the level that anyone would normally look. If it were placed lower to the ground, it would not have to be so large. She requested that the Commission staff require that all information be submitted to the file before advertising a case for a hearing because she had not seen all the information until that day.

Mr. Ferrara agreed that it was difficult to see on the renderings how it would look on the building.

Dr. Solet agreed that she wouldn't look that high on the building. Would the letters be readable? Would the sign be lit?

Father William Kelly replied that the letters spelling the name of the school would be readable at that height. The sign was a gift of the graduating class. He said the building's design always looked unfinished with those blank stucco panels. The sign would not be lit.

Mr. Barry said a clock would fit well at that height. He said he did not think the sign would detract from the building's architecture or the character of the district. It would not be inappropriate.

Mr. Sullivan recommended moving the lettering below the logo to let the seal have prominence. Ms. Harrington agreed as did Father Kelly.

Mr. Irving moved to approve the application with the sign to appear below the seal, subject to approval of construction details by the staff. Mr. Barry seconded the motion, which passed 5-1. Mr. Ferrara voted in opposition.

Preservation Grants

PG 17-10: 7 Temple St., by Cambridge YWCA. \$1,400. Replace curved sash.

Mr. Sullivan explained that there had been some vandalism and the curved window sash with curved glass had been broken. The cost differential between flat and curved glass was \$1,400.

Beaver Spooner of Walden Street spoke in favor of the grant for the repair.

Mr. Irving moved to approve the grant. Ms. Harrington seconded. The motion passed 6-0.

Minutes

The commissioners reviewed the minutes of February 16, 2017. Ms. Burks shared the corrections offered by John Hawkinson. Mr. Barry moved to approve the minutes as corrected. Ms. Harrington seconded, and the motion passed 6-0.

The commissioners then considered the minutes of April 6. Mr. King offered written corrections. Dr. Solet moved to approve the minutes as corrected. Mr. Barry seconded, and the motion passed 6-0.

The commissioners discussed the excerpt of the May 25 meeting containing the motion for Case 3678:

The Cambridge Historical Commission approves in principle a Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as presented on May 25, 2017 [shown on plans by Prellwitz Chilinski Associates dated April 11, 2017, and plans of the same date described as revised May 25, 2017] with respect to its massing, scale, and general exterior design, finding that demolition and replacement of the Corcoran's/Urban Outfitters building conforms to the language of the Harvard Square Conservation District guidelines for demolition, and that the proposed infill replacement building, and the renovations and additions to the other buildings conform to the guidelines for new construction and additions in such district, subject to further Commission review and approval of the following features:

- The entrances of the Abbot Building and 18 Brattle Street;
- The cornice returns of the Abbot Building;
- The walled-up window openings in the west elevation of 18 Brattle Street;
- The number and design of the storefronts and associated signage;
- The cladding material of the penthouse;
- The design and material of the rooftop patio railing;
- Construction materials and details throughout; and
- Exterior restoration details and methods.

And with the further understanding that the applicant should return to the Historical Commission for final approval when Planning Board review has been substantially completed.

Mr. Ferrara noted that he had voted on the motion but probably should not have since he had missed the December 2016 meeting on the case and had arrived late on May 25. He suggested that his vote not be recorded. Dr. Solet asked if the items listed as requiring further review and approval were to come back to the full Commission or just to the staff. Mr. Sullivan said that they would come back to the full Commission. Mr. King asked about the reference to the plans of April 11 and May 25. Mr. Sullivan

said that the plans distributed at the meeting were dated May 25, 2017 though he had compared them to the set submitted earlier and didn't spot any differences.

Ms. Harrington moved to approve the excerpt of the May 25 minutes as revised. Mr. Irving seconded, and the motion passed 4-0, Ms. Harrington, Mr. Irving, Mr. King, and Mr. Barry voting in the affirmative and Mr. Ferrara and Dr. Solet not voting.

New Business

Mr. King asked if the Commission wanted a hearing on a policy regarding use of synthetic materials. The Commission agreed.

Mr. King noted the *Globe* had printed an article about the proposed new Church Street mixed use building (including a theater). Mr. Hawkinson had emailed a suggestion that the Commission and Planning Board have a joint hearing at which the design proposal would be presented. Mr. Sullivan said a joint hearing had been tried about 15 years ago and it was not a great success from a procedural point of view because the two boards had different jurisdictions and different issues to address. Liza Paden had suggested that the project could be presented to both boards together, but did not recommend having deliberations at a joint hearing. Mr. Barry noted that applicants might prepare and present information differently to the two boards, making a joint hearing difficult to plan. Ms. Burks recommended that the public outreach meeting (required by the Planning Board) be scheduled prior to the Historical Commission's hearing so that use and programmatic issues could be discussed by the public and the applicant before a design was brought to the Historical Commission. Dr. Solet noted that the design guidelines and procedures of the Harvard Square Conservation District might be new or revised so it might be beneficial to have the two boards come together to discuss procedural issues. Mr. Sullivan said the study committee had not yet been appointed but the staff of both the Historical Commission and Community Development Department would be involved. Mr. King stated that the consensus of the Commission was not to change its normal procedures with respect to the Church Street case.

Mr. King announced that after 44 years on the Commission and upon his 85th birthday on June 3 he planned to write the City Manager and offer his resignation from the Commission. He said he would be resigning as chair right away but would continue to serve as a member until a replacement was found or until such time that the manager indicated he should go. He said that he had served over those years with all but five of all the members of the Commission ~~over those many years~~ since its establishment in 1963. He reported that Susannah Tobin had been appointed as a full member by the manager on May 22. He would continue to serve as a member with Bruce Irving as his chair if the others on the commission agreed.

Mr. King moved to nominate Mr. Irving as the new chair. Mr. Irving accepted the nomination. Mr. Barry seconded the motion. He added that Mr. King had been extremely diplomatic and patient with

the commissioners, applicants, and the public. He was sorry to see Mr. King retire but understood. The motion passed 6-0.

Mr. Ferrara said it had been an honor and a pleasure to serve under Mr. King's leadership. He was always patient and dedicated. The Commission was the best-functioning public body he had ever seen. Mr. King said he was proud of the fact that the Commission was the only board that had all its members reappointed when Robert Healy refreshed all the boards and commissions about ten years ago.

Ms. Harrington said she could remember her interview for the Commission. She knew right away that it was a board that she wanted to serve on. She said she had learned a lot from Mr. King.

Dr. Solet regretted that they had not had the opportunity to recognize Bill's long tenure at the recent Preservation Awards program. During her time on the Commission and under his leadership they had seen many changes including the demise of rent control which flooded the Commission with cases anticipating condo conversions and other changes to the housing stock. The Commission had met during major snow storms, worked past midnight, been cyberbullied and sued, all the while contributing to restorations, adaptive reuse of old industrial buildings and preservation of numerous buildings important to the city's history. The Commission had permitted demolition and opened the path for new buildings that have themselves drawn admiration, for example, the replacement of MIT's Building 20 by the Stata Center. She would miss Mr. King's dignity, restraint and patience as Chair and hoped they would all remember the example he had set as they encountered the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Mr. Barry said the Commission had a great reputation of being helpful and supportive to applicants, but was clear about its goals and design character that it was protecting.

Mr. Irving noted the high bar set by Mr. King for patience and respect. He said it would be hard to live up to but he took the responsibility very seriously.

Mr. Sullivan said he started as the Executive Director in 1974. When Mr. King started in 1973, the Commission heard only seven cases over the course of the entire year, met at 4:00 in the afternoon and was often home in time for cocktails. He and Bill had been connected at the hip all those many years and he could not imagine a better mentor.

Ms. Burks said how much she had enjoyed working with the Commission with its wide mix of cases and how much she had learned from Mr. King and Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Barry moved to adjourn. Dr. Solet seconded the motion, which passed 6-0. The meeting adjourned at 8:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed the Attendance List on June 1, 2017**

Amy Goebel	8 Craigie St
Tom Hogan	29 Mt Auburn St
Rev. William Kelly	29 Mt Auburn St
Paul Loughlin	29 Mt Auburn St
Joseph Chung	182 Brattle St
Beaver Spooner	329 Walden St
John Hawkinson	cambridgeday.com

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.