

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

November 2, 2017 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge Senior Center - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: Bruce Irving, *Chair*; William Barry, Robert Crocker, Chandra Harrington, Jo M. Solet, *Members*; Gavin Kleespies, Paula Paris, Kyle Sheffield, *Alternates*

Members absent: Susannah Tobin, *Vice Chair*; Joseph Ferrara, *Member*

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

Public present: See attached list.

Mr. Irving called the meeting to order at 6:05 P.M. He introduced two new alternate members, Paula Paris and Gavin Kleespies, and reviewed hearing procedures.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 3762 (amendment): Cambridge Common. City of Cambridge, owner, c/o Cambridge Arts Council. Request to extend the approval for temporary banners through April 2018.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides of the existing banners and summarized the request to keep them installed until spring.

Lillian Hsu, Cambridge Arts Council, described the series of three temporary public art projects that had been curated on the Common in May-September 2017. Only this installation with the banners was proposed to be extended. She clarified for Ismail Fenni that the installation was not to be permanent.

[Mr. Barry arrived].

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Dr. Solet moved to extend the approval of the banners through April 2018. Mr. Crocker seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with all alternates voting and Mr. Barry not voting.

Case 3850: 139 Main St., by MIT 129 Main Street Leasehold LLC, c/o Seth D. Alexander. Repair masonry, replace windows and doors, create new window openings on the west side, and other exterior renovations and alterations as described in plans.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the history of the 1874 Luke Building, the oldest remaining building in Kendall Square, originally used for commercial space on the ground floor and grain and hay storage on the upper floors. The landmark was renovated and additions built in 1989. The building had recently been purchased by MIT, which was building a tower on the vacant lot next door.

Jim Batchelor of Arrowstreet Architects presented the existing conditions and architectural drawings and renderings for the proposed exterior renovation. The proposed changes were intended to be subtle. The entry doors would remain in the same location. The non-original windows on the upper floors would all be replaced but would retain the same configuration of lights. The railing at the roof terrace would be replaced. The first floor windows would also be replaced, and would have nine lights to recall the character of the original divided light windows without exactly replicating them. He noted that the west elevation, facing the passageway, had no windows on the first floor. He proposed adding four new windows in that location, a change that would require a special permit because of non-conforming set-

backs. He noted that trees would be planted in the passageway. Louvers would be added on the penthouse. A potential landscape feature proposed for the rear addition (1989) consisted of vines supported by metal brackets attached to the building. The vines would help screen the parking garage. He showed conceptual sign ideas and described lighting at the roof terrace.

Ms. Harrington asked why the first floor windows would not match the original pattern. Mr. Batchelor replied that the larger panes worked better in today's world, but they would still be divided lights and retain the spirit of the original. He considered it a contemporary change for a contemporary use.

Dr. Solet asked if the two commercial units on the first floor would be accessible. Mr. Batchelor replied that the main entrance to the building was accessible and the spaces would be accessed through interior halls. Dr. Solet asked if there was an accessible second means of egress. Mr. Batchelor said there was not, but code did not require one.

Mr. Sheffield asked if the front doors or the interior doors would be the main entries for the two commercial spaces. Mr. Batchelor said he did not yet know. Mr. Sheffield asked about the current and proposed roof railing. Mr. Batchelor said the existing had large vertical posts and horizontal railings. The intent was to create a new railing with a lighter expression. Mr. Sheffield asked about the entrance canopies. Mr. Batchelor replied that the existing canopy was dated and deteriorated and would be replaced with a clean and simple black metal canopy with a solid roof. The address would be on the canopy. Mr. Sheffield asked about the height of the vine structure. Mr. Batchelor said it would be staggered but taller than the garage level of the addition. Ken Williams of MITIMCO said the vines would be retain their leaves in winter and be shade tolerant.

Ms. Paris asked about the windows on the upper floors. Mr. Batchelor said the window openings would remain the same size. The window sash would be replaced, but were not original. The configuration of lights would remain the same.

Mr. Kleespies asked if MIT also owned the lot behind the building. Mr. Williams said it did not, but the Institute did have an agreement with the owner for public access.

Mr. Barry and Mr. Sullivan asked about the driveway and access to the parking spaces. Mr. Batchelor explained that the driveway was located in the last bay of the building. A small flashing warning light would be added. There are eight parking spaces in the garage.

John Hawkinson of Cambridge Day commented that the plans made it hard to distinguish what was different between the existing and proposed and historic conditions.

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Ms. Harrington said the first floor windows should match the original pattern. Mr. Barry agreed that the proposed pattern was too different from the rich visual texture of the original. It was a great opportunity to restore an original feature. Mr. Irving agreed.

Mr. Sheffield said he was interested in the details of the roof railing but was willing to delegate

approval of the details to staff. He suggested that the cable railing be made as minimal as possible. It should not be heavy, flashy stainless steel.

Mr. Barry moved to approve the application as presented with the condition that details of the signs, masonry restoration, original window pattern, railings, vines, etc. be approved by staff. Ms. Harrington seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with alternates Kleespies and Sheffield voting.

Case 3851: 23 Hawthorn St., by 23 Hawthorn Street Nominee Trust c/o Jacquie McCoy. Construct a detached masonry outdoor fireplace in the southwest side yard.

Ms. Burks reported that the application had been withdrawn for reconsideration of the design.

Public Hearing: Demolition Review

Case D-1471: 140-142 Prospect St., by Islamic Society of Boston. Demolish double house (1844).

Ms. Burks showed slides and summarized the staff memo about the history and architecture of the house, which had been found significant in a 1992 demolition hearing.

Mr. Irving explained that the Commission would first take questions and testimony about the significance of the building. If the Commission found it significant, the hearing would move on to the proponents' proposed replacement building and consider if the existing was preferably preserved or not.

Ms. Harrington asked how the front porch had been allowed to be removed. Mr. Sullivan explained that a porch removal would not have triggered a demolition permit.

Yousef Abouallaban, Trustee of the Islamic Society of Boston, thanked the Commission for hearing the matter and thanked the staff for the slides. He reported that the house was in worse condition than it looked. He noted that the previous owner had removed the porch. The house was infested with rodents. Their architect was prepared to make a presentation about the proposed replacement.

Dr. Solet said she was as convinced as the Commission was in 1992 that the house was significant, and so moved. Mr. Sheffield seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with alternates Kleespies and Paris voting.

The chair asked the proponents to make their presentation about the project and the design of the proposed new building. David Choi, the architect, described his background in historic preservation. He presented slides showing architectural details in the neighborhood context. He noted that the basement of the house floods, and then presented the proposed replacement. The design included basement parking and ten residential units. The parking would be accessed from Scouting Way at the back of the lot, not from Prospect Street. He had designed a colonnade inspired by the original front porch as a covered pedestrian passage through the site. Most of the units would have two bedrooms. The top (5th) floor would have dormers similar to the adjacent Scouting Way apartments.

Mr. Sheffield asked if there was a street elevation showing the neighboring buildings. Mr. Choi said he had a Sketchup model on his laptop, but the technology setup for the meeting did not allow for that so he did not bring it. He said that the existing building was dwarfed by the two adjacent buildings.

The proposed building was 48' high.

Mr. Sheffield asked about the height of the St. Mary's gym next door. Mr. Choi estimated that it was about 51' high and that Scouting Way was 38' tall.

Dr. Solet asked about the proposed materials. Mr. Choi said they might use recycled content PVC boards with a robust coursing. His clients were open to suggestions and wanted the neighbors' approval of the project, consistent with Sharia law. He was proud to represent the Islamic Society of Boston on this project. They had reached out to the Cambridge Housing Authority and other neighbors about the project. The mosque at 204 Prospect Street hosted interfaith outreach programs several times a year.

Mr. Irving asked how the building would be used. Mr. Abouallaban said two or three of the apartments might house employees. Two could be affordable units. The rest would be market-rate rentals to produce income for the Society. He described their community engagement efforts. The Society bought the house in 1993 as a residence and office space, but maintenance was more than they could handle.

Mr. Barry asked if the design was zoning compliant. Mr. Choi said that it would require variances and a special permit for height, FAR, and setbacks. The parking would meet the zoning requirements.

Paula Paris asked about the colonnade design. Mr. Choi answered that it was not fully fleshed out. The columns would probably be Doric or Ionic in design. It was proposed in deference to the historic context of the existing building.

Mr. Barry asked if they had studied retaining the existing building and adding to it. Mr. Choi said they had studied every possibility from 2 to 15 units. Mr. Abouallaban said the foundation needed to be replaced. He did not want to have a run-down building in front and a new building behind it. Mr. Choi said the program decisions came down to the economic feasibility of the project for the non-profit owner.

Mr. Sheffield asked if they had considered a new building with the same massing as the old that would give the same presence on the street. He noted that the foundation could be replaced without demolishing the building. Mr. Choi said he would like to preserve the pediment on the left side. He noted that the brick office building next door had a very noisy chiller. Dr. Solet encouraged the Society to file a complaint about violation of the noise ordinance.

Mr. Fenni said it was hardship that had pushed the Society to consider the project. The Society needed an income to balance its expenses.

There being no public comment or questions, Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Dr. Solet asked about zoning. Mr. Sullivan indicated the requested relief was substantial and would depend upon getting the support of neighbors.

Mr. Kleespies acknowledged that the condition of the house was poor but noted that its scale related to a whole group of buildings of the same period in that area and shouldn't only be compared to the old gym and the Scouting Way apartment building. Mr. Sheffield agreed. It was a very ambitious project. He asked for a more reasoned presentation about why the proposed scale, materials, etc. work for the site.

Mr. Barry asked for more information about the proposal. He asked why an as-of-right proposal was not feasible. The project was very imposing and he wanted to hear a clear argument for why the proposal worked better than other options. The pedestrian connection through the lot was a plus.

Mr. Irving said he would like to see a preservation option for the front block of the house with an addition behind it. On a 6,000 sf lot, an as-of-right FAR of .75 would be a sizable project.

Dr. Solet asked about outreach to the neighbors. Mr. Fenni said they had had meetings with neighbors, many of whom supported the project moving forward.

Mr. Sullivan explained the demolition delay procedures and noted that the applicants could return at any point during six month delay if they had a revised proposal that they wanted the Commission to consider. At the fifth month, the Commission's policy was to have a hearing regarding landmark potential. New housing would be a public benefit, but good design was also in the public interest.

Mr. Abouallaban thanked the Commission and said that the Society wanted something nice and healthy for the neighborhood. The decaying building was not healthy. They wanted the project to benefit the community and would need to show that for fundraising. Mr. Irving thanked the applicants for understanding that the Commission's intention was to provide helpful advice. Mr. Barry said that for the right project the Commission could provide support for zoning relief. Mr. Irving noted that in the Commission's experience, new and old design styles could marry well.

Mr. Barry moved to find the existing building preferably preserved in the context of the proposed replacement design. Dr. Solet seconded the motion, and the motion passed 7-0 with alternated Paris and Sheffield voting.

Preservation Grants

PG 17-1: 15 Carlisle St., by Just A Start. \$50,000 and requesting additional \$23,350. Strip, reside, and windows.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the 1880s house with a slate roof and many original details. The Commission had previously approved a grant of up to \$50,000 to restore the exterior of this owner-occupied building. The prices came back higher than anticipated and JAS needed an additional \$23,350 to keep restoration of the right elevation in the project; otherwise the siding would remain there.

Mr. Kleespies asked if the house would remain affordable in the future. Mr. Sullivan said that Just A Start would require that.

Mr. Sheffield said that he knew how expensive these projects were and was supportive of the supplemental grant. The house was unique in the neighborhood.

Dr. Solet asked about the recapture clause in the grant contract. Mr. Sullivan said it was five years, but he could probably strengthen that given the size of the grant.

Mr. Irving moved to approve additional funding with a stiffer recapture clause with a longer term. Ms. Harrington seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 with alternates Paris and Kleespies voting.

Minutes

The Commission reviewed the minutes of October 5, 2017.

Dr. Solet offered corrections on pages 1 and 7. She moved to approve the minutes as corrected. Ms. Harrington seconded. Only three members who had been present at the October meeting were present, which was not a quorum, so the matter was deferred to December.

Ms. Harrington moved to approve the July minutes as submitted. Mr. Irving seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.

Director's Report

Dr. Solet asked about the bluestone sidewalk restoration on Brattle Street. Mr. Sullivan answered that it was about 80% done and would be completed in 2018.

Mr. Barry asked about the sculptures at 168 Brattle Street. Mr. Sullivan explained that they had been allowed with a temporary certificate conditioned on their removal when the property changed hands.

Dr. Solet asked about Omeka Training (for the digitization project), and asked the staff to forward the Instagram link.

Mr. Sheffield said he would like to discuss revisions to submission requirements at the next meeting.

Mr. Sheffield moved to adjourn. Ms. Harrington seconded. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 8:42 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed the Attendance List on November 2, 2017**

Lillian Hsu	344 Broadway, Arts Council
John Hawkinson	jhawk@mit.edu
Jim Batchelor	Arrowstreet, 10 Post Office Sq, Boston 02109
Ken Williams	238 Main St
Allen Breed	238 Main St
Dan Boyd	Leggat McCall, 10 Post Office Sq, Boston 02109
Ismail Fenni	Islamic Society of Boston, 204 Prospect St
Anwar Abdulla	231 Western Ave
Amr Elfass	204 Prospect St
Karim L Razazz	204 Prospect St
Helal Alwaz	29 Kandazian St, Watertown 02472
David Choi	25 Wellington St #1, Arlington 02476
Ronald Bejam	172 Cushing St
Yousef Abouallaban	204 Prospect St

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.