



City of Cambridge Conservation Commission

147 Hampshire Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
Ph. 617.349.4680

Jennifer Letourneau, Director

jletourneau@cambridgema.gov

Public Meeting – Monday, March 10, 2025, at 7:00 PM Zoom MEETING MINUTES

The following meeting minutes were taken by Lena Frappier and are respectfully submitted.

Present Commission Members: Jennifer Letourneau, Director; David Lyons, Chair; Kathryn Hess; Erum Sattar; Khyati Saraf; Jim Gerstle, Associate

Absent Commission Members: Elysse Magnotto-Cleary, Vice Chair; John Leo; Lorie Graham; Sean Bedingfield, Associate

Attendees: Kara Falise, DPW; Lena Frappier, DPW; John Rockwood, Echo Tech; Guillermo Beltran, Echo Tech; Mariana Souza, Echo Tech

David Lyons opened the meeting stating all commission members are present.

7:00 – Request for Certificate of Compliance

DEP File #123-217

North American Development

56 and 58 Magoun Street Redevelopment

Jennifer Letourneau introduced that this is a floodplain only order of conditions that we issued. Looking at the pre-construction storage volumes to the post-construction storage volumes, the only one-foot increment that they were in was between 18 and 18.4. She stated the original square footage was 2852.70 square feet and the volume was 1141.08 cubic feet. Post-construction in the same range they have an area of 3,030.70 square feet and a volume of 1212.28 cubic feet. Jennifer stated this was to confirm that there was no flood storage loss and the plan before us has been surveyed and stamped. The order of conditions is still valid and the request for a certificate of compliance was submitted more than 30 days prior to this order being expired therefore, it meets all the prerequisites for a certificate of compliance before you tonight.

John Rockwood from Echo Tech stated it was a floodplain only project and the post-construction condition shows more flood storage within the flood area than there was under pre-construction conditions the site stable. John stated it was one house, and they constructed two houses and provided all the necessary compensatory storage on the site.

Jennifer thanked John and stated that she has also been out to the site and concludes the same.

David stated he remembered permitting this location and asked for a reminder how they obtained the increase in flood storage.

John replied that they created a swale out behind the second unit. He pointed out that on the plan there is an 18.4 contour that comes in off the back, swings around, goes in front of the house and goes down off the front of the lot, just in front of the front right corner of 56. That's the floodplain elevation. What we did is extend the contours to provide a connection through that area to the south of the houses and to the east of the rear house will flood during the hundred-year event. John stated it's been excavated to a lower elevation, and we provided the connection at the lower elevation to an adjacent area that's at 18 so anything above 18 can get onto the site and get into that area.

Jennifer also pointed out the 18 contours on the plan that loops around to 18.4 and the infiltration system that is subsurface.

David asked if they were dry wells.

John responded that they are Cultec chambers and stated the driveway has a catch basin and drains away from the road out to the catch basin between the two houses that also goes into the infiltration system.

Kathryn Hess questioned what kind of controls are in place concerning landscaping and the change in topography.

Jennifer responded that landscaping by its nature would probably be a grade, but anything that would be a structure would require permitting. There is an O&M plan submitted by the development team that is provided to the property owners. She also stated the project team will be submitting elevation certificates for each of them and those live with the property as well.

Erum Sattar also remembered permitting this location and asked to confirm that the regrading was done because of the additional structure.

Jennifer supplied confirmation.

David asked if the basements were finished.

Kara Falise stated this project was permitted in advance of our formal climate resilient zoning petition so these houses did not fall under the climate change resiliency flood zoning, but because they needed a special permit through the planning board as well there were provisions taken to make sure that those basement spaces were, one, aware of the potential flood elevations and two, had some resiliency measures taken. She stated the review of those would have been completed as part of their building permit and then their certificate of occupancy to make sure that things they committed to for those measures were installed as part of the construction.

John added that both houses have window wells, and the rim of the window wells are above the pertinent floodplain elevation that was required. He stated the secondary access, or egress is inside the house and the window well represents a secondary access and egress or emergency egress.

Kara stated as a reminder, those flood elevations are higher than the FEMA flood, which is what is jurisdictional under the Conservation Commission's flood review so those are even more protection against a higher flood than just the FEMA 100 year.

Erum asked to confirm that the basement was originally unfinished and asked if that was part of the permitted project.

Kara responded that the front house was renovated, and the rear house was new construction, and improvements may have been made to the basement. She stated that she did not recall specifically, but as part of the floodplain special permit those basements were reviewed for protections by the planning board. Kara stated at that point, they were leaning on precedents to make basement resiliency suggestions, now that has all been codified in the zoning code, but this building permit came in advance of that.

7:13 – The commission unanimously approved to close public comment.

5 – In Favor, 3 – Absent

7:14 – The commission unanimously approved to issue the certificate of compliance

5 – In Favor, 3 – Absent

7:15 – Administrative Topics

Meeting Minutes Approved– February 10, 2024

5 – In Favor, 3 – Absent

Jennifer updated that a revised draft of the submission policy has not been sent out yet and asked Kara to help explain the model floodplain bylaw they are working on.

Kara stated that a more meaningful discussion could happen in the next two weeks, but they will be in front of the city council this next week with the proposal to incorporate the state's recommended standard bylaw into our current municipal code as a zoning bylaw. There was a lot of back and forth whether it should be a regulation or a zoning code, and we had it in and out of zoning about seven times over the past two months. The law department and the zoning staff have come back and now they think it belongs in zoning. Because it is a change to the zoning, we'll have to go to the city council for approval. We are meeting with the health and environment subcommittee to review the proposed changes next week and then we'll have an update and draft of the revisions.

Jennifer added that the maps and the flood insurance study have not been changed specific to Cambridge since 2023 so the effective dates of both the maps and the flood insurance study will have a 2023 date on them.

Kara stated it's worth noting the flood elevation 18.4 has not been revised as part of the FEMA reissuing of the maps. What has changed is where FEMA thinks that elevation of water, 18.4, would impact. There are some changes to what the limit of the floodplain mapping is. She added that FEMA maps are jurisdictional where the line is physically drawn, which is different than the city's flood maps, which is specific to the elevation. If a parcel is touched by that FEMA line, it is subject to FEMA jurisdictional regulations. Kara noted the area of Mooney Street where the flood map has been pulled to the other side of the train tracks. She stated now that the city has flood resiliency standards, we have a level of control over structures that are built in that neighborhood regardless of if they land in the FEMA floodplain.

Jennifer noted that the public meeting associated with this that FEMA is supposed to hold for the public has not been scheduled. The date that we need to have these adopted is July 8th, 2025. She added if you are following along with the continuing permitting and public process associated with the MBTA Redline Access Tunnel, a public meeting has been set by the MBTA for the neighborhood March 18th.

7:26 – Meeting Adjourned

5 – In Favor, 3 – Absent