

## **Minutes of the Avon Hill Neighborhood Conservation District**

Monday, August 28, 2023 - 5:30 PM

Commissioners Present: Constantin von Wentzel, *Chair*, Mark Golberg, *Vice Chair*, Heli Meltsner, McKelden Smith, Freweyni Gebrehiwet, *Members*, Lee Campbell, *Alternate*

Commissioners Absent: Theresa Hamacher, *Alternate*

Staff Present: Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner

Members of the Public: see attached sheet

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This meeting was held via online zoom webinar, <https://tinyurl.com/AHAug23>, with remote participation and was closed to in-person attendance. The public was able to participate online via the Zoom webinar platform. The meeting ID was **831 2445 2729**.

Commission Chair Constantin von Wentzel made general introductions, explained the procedures, and called the meeting to order at 5:33.

### Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

**AH-803: 112 Upland Road, by Andrew and Marie-Emmanuelle Hartness.** Enclose off-street parking space with pergola and garage door; construct trash enclosure.

Ms. Allison Crosbie, preservation administrator, gave a brief history of the property. She described the existing condition of the parking space and explained that a previous owner was granted a variance to construct a garage in 1984, prior to the establishment of the Avon Hill Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD). According to Inspectional Services, variances run with the property so the applicant is not required to apply to the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA).

Mr. Andrew Hartness, the applicant, described the current parking space as 10 feet wide with permeable brick paving, and a pergola-type structure spanning the two brick walls (built without a permit or Commission review). He explained his intent to create a “vegetal curtain” with ivy and other plantings set in the pergola structure and said that the width of cars and trash cans today cannot both be accommodated in the current space. He stated that he is an architectural illustrator and has been restoring his home while being respectful of the history, including the original windows and woodwork, and he replaced a column base while preserving the original column. He also described the carport as not original to the house and a spatial anomaly. He said his design included a transparent membrane under the central portion of the pergola to allow light to filter through. He noted that the addition of plantings will help soften the space with greenery. He also designated an area adjacent to the garage for the trash receptacles with an enclosure and showed elevations of the proposal. Mr. Hartness also presented views from his two adjacent neighbors to show how their views are obscured by vegetation. He then showed other examples of garages with plantings in Cambridge. He explained that he had considered not putting in a door, but the car had been broken into.

### Commission Questions

Commissioner Lee Campbell asked if the portion of the pergola that lets light in will also let rain come through. Mr. Hartness replied that it won't be open to the elements, it will be a transparent polycarbonate layer.

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Commissioner McKelden Smith asked what kind of doors are being proposed. Mr. Hartness answered that he hadn't made a final decision and would defer to the Commission.

Vice Chair Mark Golberg asked Ms. Crosbie what specifically is the Commission reviewing. Ms. Crosbie replied that enclosing the parking space creates an accessory building between the sidewalk and the front of the house which is subject to review by the Commission. She also stated that the proposed garage door along the edge of the sidewalk creates a fence-like element and referred to the Commission guidelines that call for conserving vistas into and through properties. Regarding the trash enclosure, Ms. Crosbie stated that she had discussed with the applicant making the height of the enclosure 4 feet which then does not require Commission review, and Mr. Hartness agreed.

Commissioner Heli Meltsner asked for clarification as to what constitutes the pergola. Mr. Hartness referred to the wood beams across the top of the brick walls which will have plantings installed between them. Mr. von Wentzel asked to confirm that the structure has a roof with a transparent center and plants, and there will be drainage to the side. Ms. Crosbie confirmed that is correct.

### Public Questions and Comments

Ms. Ruth Ryals of 115 Upland Road stated that the proposal will be an improvement because it just looks odd.

Ms. Crosbie read a letter received by the Commission from Mr. Robert Welch of 105 Upland Road in support of the project.

### Commission Comments

Ms. Meltsner commented that this is an ingenious method to soften what was not appropriate to begin with. Regarding the garage door, Ms. Meltsner considered what would be less intrusive and believed it should be visually separate from the Colonial Revival house. Ms. Meltsner also stated that since the applicant didn't provide a specific detailed garage door, the applicant should return with a fully fleshed out proposal, although the Commission has relegated final design to staff review in other cases.

Mr. Campbell agreed with Ms. Meltsner, that it is an improvement and advised that the garage door should avoid looking like a wall.

Commissioner Freweyni Gebrehiwet concurred with Ms. Meltsner and Mr. Campbell and said the project was good for the street.

Mr. Smith agreed that this is an improvement and liked the addition of the plants. Mr. Smith also remarked that the variance for the garage in the 80s should never have been approved.

Mr. Golberg concurred and asked if the Commission can impose conditions regarding the upkeep of the plantings. Ms. Crosbie answered that the plantings are not under the Commission's jurisdiction.

Mr. von Wentzel advised the applicant that stormwater drainage can be problematic and hopes that it won't be difficult to drain. Mr. von Wentzel also expressed concern that there was no specific garage door to review.

Mr. Hartness stated that he was considering a dark green color for the door. Mr. Golberg suggested adding glazing. Ms. Meltsner suggested using a green shade that is not too dark, so it's doesn't look heavy.

Mr. Campbell asked if the door will extend into the sidewalk. Ms. Crosbie said that there can't be any intrusion for any amount of time into the sidewalk which is a public way.

Ms. Meltsner motioned to approve the pergola structure with plantings as appropriate for the existing condition and to continue the review of the garage door to the next hearing. Mr. Hartness agreed with the continuance. Mr. Smith seconded, and the motion passed 5-0 (Ms. Meltsner, Mr. Smith, Mr. Golberg, Mr. Campbell, Ms. Gebrehiwet)

The meeting adjourned at 6:22.

Respectfully submitted,

Allison A. Crosbie  
Preservation Administrator

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Andrew Hartness, applicant	112 Upland Road
Marie-Emmanuelle Hartness, applicant	112 Upland Road
Ruth Ryals	115 Upland Road

Addresses are in Cambridge unless otherwise specified.