

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

December 7, 2023 – Meeting conducted online via Zoom Webinar (820 6183 1187) - 6:00 P.M.

Members present (online): Bruce Irving, *Chair*; Susannah Tobin, *Vice Chair*; Chandra Harrington, Liz Lyster, Yuting Zhang, *Members*; Gavin Kleespies, Paula Paris, *Alternate Members*

Members absent: Joseph Ferrara, Jo Solet, *Members*; Kyle Sheffield, *Alternate Member*

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

Public present (online): See attached list.

This meeting was held online with remote participation pursuant to Ch. 2 of the Acts of 2023. The public was able to participate online via the Zoom webinar platform.

With a quorum present, Chair Irving called the meeting to order at 6:03 P.M. He explained the online meeting instructions and public hearing procedures and introduced commissioners and staff. He designated Ms. Paris to vote as alternate.

Mr. Irving recommended **Case 5045** (1 Brattle Square, by BCSP 9 OBS Property LLC. To alter the exterior retail façade including changes to the masonry knee wall for doors and windows and construction of a ramp) for the consent agenda and asked if anyone had objections to approving it without a full hearing. There being no objections raised, Ms. Harrington moved to approve Case 5045 per the consent agenda procedure, delegating construction details to staff. Ms. Paris seconded the motion, which passed 6-0 in a roll call vote. (Harrington, Lyster, Tobin, Zhang, Irving, Paris)

[Mr. Kleespies arrived.]

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 4930 (Revised): 1627 Massachusetts Ave., by HRI 1627 Mass Ave LLC c/o Homeowners Rehab, Inc. Review revised design for the renovation of the existing building, demolition of the ell, and construction of an attached residential addition. Confirm approval of certificate of appropriateness.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and displayed photographs of the designated landmark. The Commission had approved a schematic design for the proposed project in March 2023. Homeowner's Rehab had worked with CDD's urban design staff to refine the design and the Planning Board had signed off under the Affordable Housing Overlay. The applicant had returned with the current proposal for restoration and re-use of the Saunders House and construction of an attached new building on the parking lot for affordable housing.

Eleni Macrakis of Homeowner's Rehab introduced the project and described the public meetings to date. Michelle Apigian of ICON Architecture described the details of the building design and site plan. She described changes to the design since March including changes to the cornice lines and materials to break up the visual massing into two vertical pieces with widths comparable to the historic house. The corner bay had been lowered and colors had been developed in consultation with staff.

Mr. Irving asked for questions from the Commission.

Ms. Lyster asked about the yellow markings on the Mellen Street elevation. Ms. Apigian explained that they were intended to show the increased amount of glazing on the new building.

Ms. Zhang asked about the canopy at the main entrance to the new building. Ms. Apigian said it would be a wood-like material and showed the dimensions of it in plan.

Mr. Irving opened the floor to questions of fact from the public.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked about the penthouse color and cornice. Ms. Apigian said both the color and cornice had been lightened on the top floor.

Li Ting Hu of 1617 Massachusetts Avenue asked about the location of trash storage and the transformer. Ms. Macrakis said the trash containers would have lids and the area would be fenced and kept clean. The transformer posed no danger, and its ultimate location would be determined in consultation with the engineers at Eversource.

Mr. Irving asked for public comment.

Ms. Hu said the trash should be located inside, not outside near the neighbors. She expressed concern about the appearance, smell and rodents. She also expressed concern about noise at the back door and the loss of a tree in the back of the property.

Ms. Meyer advised HRI to check property lines and ownership of trees before cutting them down.

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Ms. Zhang remarked that the massing of the new building had improved. She suggested that the canopy at the main entrance be lightened up and the materials palette simplified a bit.

Mr. Sullivan recommended that the Commission confirm the approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness and delegate further design details to staff.

Mr. Kleespies so moved. Ms. Lyster seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Harrington, Lyster, Tobin, Zhang, Irving, Kleespies, Paris)

Public Hearing: Demolition Review

Case D-1670: 38-40 and 48 Banks St., by Lubavitch of Cambridge, Inc. Partial demolition of 38-40 Banks St. and relocation and partial demolition of 48 Banks St.

Mr. Hill presented the staff report about the history and architecture of the buildings at 38-40 Banks Street, a Queen Anne house of 1892, and 48 Banks Street, a two-story vernacular Italianate workers cottage of 1862, moved in 1866 and again in 1893. He indicated that the buildings were significant both architecturally and for their associations with the development of the Kerry Corner neighborhood.

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact regarding the significance of the existing building.

Thomas Serwold of 30 Banks Street asked if the slater who owned 48 Banks Street had worked on other buildings in Cambridge. Mr. Hill replied that John Blevins had completed many slate roofs in Cambridge, including city commissions for fire houses and schools.

Alan Joslin of 36 Banks asked about the criteria for assessing the significance of the buildings.

Mr. Kleespies moved to find the buildings at 38-40 and 48 Banks Street significant for the reasons cited in the staff report. Ms. Lyster seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Harrington, Lyster, Tobin, Zhang, Irving, Kleespies, Paris)

Mr. Irving then transitioned the hearing from the discussion of significance to that of whether the buildings were preferably preserved, in light of the partial demolition, relocation, and alterations. He invited the applicants to present the design proposal.

Sarah Rhatigan, the attorney for applicant Harvard Chabad, introduced the project. She said Rabbi Zarchi and his wife, Elkie, ran the non-profit. The property is not owned by the university. The house at 48 Banks Street would be moved toward the street. The eaves of the two houses would be removed and replaced with a connecting addition. The project would require zoning relief. Harvard Chabad also owns the three-decker residence at 54-56 Banks Street, but it would be unchanged by the project.

Jason Jewhurst of Bruner Cott Architects presented the design proposal. Chabad had served the community for over 25 years. The existing buildings were inadequate for the present Programs. There were many small homes in the neighborhood but also some larger buildings. Only the front plane of the roof of 48 Banks had the patterned slate, which would be retained. The addition would be 35' tall, similar to the height of 54 Banks. The existing house at 38-40 Banks was slightly taller and would remain so. The connections to the houses were recessed behind their facades. He noted the roof terrace at the third-floor level of the addition. He described the proposed materials of terracotta tile, glass and metal shades, providing a conversation between new and old. The colors would be warm and complementary to the neighborhood.

Mr. Irving asked for questions from the Commission.

Ms. Paris asked if there would no longer be an entrance at 38-40 Banks. Mr. Jewhurst answered that there would be a porch but no entrance or steps. Ms. Paris asked the same of 48 Banks. Mr. Jewhurst said there would be a door at that porch, but it would be mainly used for egress.

Ms. Lyster asked about floor-to-floor heights. Mr. Jewhurst said the first story would be 12', the second story 13-14', and the third story 10-11'. All the floors would be continuous across the three buildings by adjusting the existing floor heights in 38-40 and 48 Banks.

Ms. Harrington asked about the relative size of the addition. Mr. Jewhurst said the addition would be between 10,000-12,000 square feet and the total project would be between 17,000-18,000 square feet.

Mr. Kleespies asked about the as-of-right potential for the site, noting that something could be built there without review by the Commission.

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

Ms. Meyer asked about the new dormer on 38-40 Banks, whether that building would be visible from Green Street, and about the railing for the porch. Mr. Jewhurst showed the elevation of the dormer, answered that 38-40 would not be visible from Green Street and said the railing was undetermined.

Darmon Wing of 701-703 Green Street asked about the non-residential use in a residential zoning district. Ms. Rhatigan answered that religious uses, including office use for the Rabbi, were allowed in all zoning districts. Joan Wing asked if the Commission was tasked with preserving the context of the historic buildings. Mr. Irving answered that the Commission would consider the context and streetscape.

Deborah Epstein of 36 Banks Street asked about the extent of demolition. Would the whole interior of the buildings be demolished? Mr. Jewhurst noted that 48 Banks would be lowered toward grade and the floors and interiors would be modified in both buildings.

Mr. Irving opened the public comment period.

Avishay Ben Sasson-Gordis of 4 Athens Terrace said he appreciated the programs offered at Chabad. His kids attended events there and he was excited about the addition.

Ori Porat of 24 Myrtle Avenue remarked on the preservation of the old buildings in the proposed design. He said the Chabad was itself an important part of Cambridge history. He hoped the City would accommodate its growth; the square footage was very needed.

Mr. Joslin explained that he and his wife, Deborah Epstein, lived next door at 36 Banks. They are both architects and members of the Kerry Corner Neighborhood Association, which worked with Harvard in 2006 to rezone the area in a way that would preserve the character and scale of the neighborhood. He said the proposal would result in the near total loss of the historic structures, leaving only parts of the roofs and side walls. The result would be a historic pastiche but not meaningful preservation. Ms. Epstein said the new dormer would shade their south-facing roof. The project was too much mass on a constricted site. She hoped the addition would be reduced in size to reflect the current uses at the Chabad in the tent rather than doubling the size of the space.

Emily Jacobstein of 6 Chauncy Lane said her family was at Chabad nearly every day. She expressed her enthusiasm for the proposal, which was beautifully and thoughtfully designed.

Kelila Kahane of 145 Pearl Street said her toddler attended pre-school across the street. She noted rising anti-Semitism in the country and said she hoped the community would embrace the project.

Nathaniel Kay of 24 Clary Street said he was a new resident but had been welcomed at Chabad. The tent was inadequate. He said he liked the mix of new and old in the design.

Jesse Lempel of 1008 Massachusetts Avenue said he had experienced Harvard Chabad first as a student and now as a young professional. There was a need for more indoor space.

Doris Jurrison of 22 Banks Street said she would like to see more of the historic buildings maintained. The current design looked too institutional.

Berl Hartman of 28 Banks Street said she and her husband were Jewish and wanted the Chabad House to survive and prosper. She acknowledged that it needed more indoor space but expressed concerns about the massiveness of the proposed addition and the extent of demolition of the existing houses. She said she hoped the design would be modified to be more in keeping with the size and character of the neighborhood.

Talya Housman of 322 Harvard Street spoke in favor of the project, noting that it would include a Mikveh, a Jewish ritual bath, which had never before been available to women in Cambridge.

Laura Cohen of 25 Rockingham Street said the project was well scaled, tasteful, and creative. It would enhance and bring forward the historic buildings. It was an exciting proposal and in keeping with

the Harvard and Cambridge context. She noted that the existing condition was parking in the front and the proposal would be more attractive.

Sara Yoffe of 50 Follen Street said she was a lifelong Jewish resident of Cambridge with a family of builders and architects. The Zarchi family cultivated a strong community at the Chabad house. The new Jewish community center would offer a refuge to the Jewish members of the Cambridge community and urged the Commission to approve the application.

Mr. Serwold said the Chabad needed more indoor space, but the proposal would not match the size and scale of buildings in the neighborhood. He hoped the project could conform to zoning.

Julia Book Motzkin of 95 Prescott Street said the roof of 48 Banks was in poor condition. Bringing the building forward and restoring the slate roof would be beneficial. The existing parking in the middle of the site was not attractive. The same number of people used the site now, but in a tent. By moving the space indoors, it would be quieter and more kid friendly. The design was attractive and well planned.

Flo Cleary Braunstein of Arlington said the contrast of the new building's design to the historic houses would allow the historic buildings to stand out and be appreciated. She said her family had found a home at Harvard Chabad and her kids would be safer inside.

Elizabeth Foote of 29 Surrey Street said she loved Kerry Corner and its green spaces. She wanted to see a softer design that would be more compatible with the historic nature of the neighborhood.

Ms. Meyer said the joining of the buildings was an interesting aspect of the design. Lowering 48 Banks had a negative impact on the building. She wondered about mechanical units and the view from Green Street. The big deck on the back could be very noisy. The scale was a little too big.

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Mr. Sullivan explained the demolition review process and the Commission's task to determine the public interest in letting the proposal move ahead or in delaying demolition and seeking an alternative plan with greater preservation. He noted that the organization had been in the neighborhood for a long time and was an existing religious institutional use.

Mr. Kleespies noted that a new building would be there a long time. It was a large site and this was a good and reasonable proposal offering more preservation than a full demolition. It would integrate and use the historic buildings. It was only a three-story addition, not ten.

Ms. Lyster asked about the FAR. Ms. Rhatigan answered that zoning allowed .75 FAR and the existing was .80. The proposed addition would be 1.84 FAR on the combined parcel. Ms. Lyster said she appreciated that 48 Banks would be brought forward but understood the critiques that only the walls of the buildings would be preserved. The mass of the addition looked too big from the back on Green Street. She asked if all the space was needed now or if it was aspirational. Mr. Jewhurst answered that the space reflected the current programs and community. Ms. Lyster asked if the height could be reduced or somehow to allow the addition to recede further. The proposal did not go far enough in preserving the historic buildings. The bulk could be adjusted without losing square footage.

Ms. Harrington commented that the building was a little too large, especially the rear elevation facing Green Street. It was out of scale with the neighborhood.

Mr. Irving said the possibilities could be bigger and clunkier and less sympathetic to the historic context. He wouldn't favor a delay because he had heard from many of the attendees about the public benefits of the project.

Ms. Tobin asked if the proponents had any possible alternatives to offer. Mr. Jewhurst said the square footage had been tightened already to a point where it would barely meet the needs of the Chabad. This proposal represented the tightest and smallest and most deferential alternative.

Rabbi Zarchi addressed the Commission. He said the Harvard Hillel on campus was owned by the university. This Chabad had brought the community to people of all faiths. Thousands of people had found a home where they felt welcomed and loved. There were hundreds of houses of worship in Cambridge and very few of them were Jewish. There was an urgent need for the project. Everyone deserved a space to live and worship as they saw fit.

Ms. Zhang said the datum on the front could be improved by taking cues from the windows of the existing buildings. A delay could be short and allow a chance to make a better project.

Ms. Lyster asked the applicant if he would consent to a continuance. Rabbi Zarchi agreed. Mr. Kleespies moved to continue the hearing to the January 4 meeting. Ms. Paris seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Harrington, Lyster, Tobin, Zhang, Kleespies, Paris, Irving)

Minutes

The Commission considered the November 2, 2023 minutes. Ms. Harrington suggested a correction on page one, deleting, "if." With no other changes, Ms. Harrington moved to approve the minutes. Ms. Paris seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Harrington, Lyster, Tobin, Zhang, Kleespies, Paris, Irving)

Executive Director's Report

Mr. Sullivan reported on the amendments made by City Council to the NCD and Landmarks ordinance, Article III of Ch. 2.78 of the City Code. He noted that there would be a commissioner training session for NCD commissioners next week. The Council had placed the proposed NCD for East Cambridge on file, effectively killing it. The Markham Building landmark proposal was scheduled for consideration on December 18.

Ms. Paris asked about the bell at St. Augustine's church. Mr. Sullivan showed a photo of the bell, which was inscribed, "In memory of my sister. 1887 F. S. G." Rev. Frederick Gushee has built the church as a mission of St. Peter's in Central Square.

Ms. Paris moved to adjourn. Ms. Harrington seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Harrington, Lyster, Tobin, Zhang, Kleespies, Paris, Irving) The meeting adjourned at 9:25 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Present on the Zoom Webinar online, December 7, 2023**

John Hawkinson	Cambridge
Sarah Rhatigan	Trilogy Law
Eleni Macrakis	Homeowner's Rehab
Michelle Apigian	ICON Architecture
Alex Eastland	
Joe Daigneault	ICON Architecture
Karen Greene	Bruner Cott Architects
Patrick Sardo	Bruner Cott Architects
Rabbi Mendy Raskin	Harvard Chabad
Joshua Sydney	
Rabbi Hirschy Zarchi	Harvard Chabad
Jason Jewhurst	Bruner Cott Architects
Susan Twomey	Homeowners's Rehab
Kate Gilmore	Homeowner's Rehab
Eric Potkin	Beacon Capital
Mark Eclipse	PCA Design
Patrick Sardo	156 Porter St, East Boston, MA 02128
Joan Pickett	59 Ellery St
Debby Galef	93 Hammond St
Grace/Feven Seifu	95 Dunster St
James Zall	203 Pemberton St
Tom Serwold	30 Banks St
Deborah Epstein	36 Banks St
Berl Hartman	28 Banks St
Amy Wagers	30 Banks St
Elizabeth Foote	29 Surrey St
Doris Jurisson	22 Banks St
Alan Joslin	36 Banks St
Emily Anne Jacobstein	6 Chauncy Ln
Kelila Kahane	145 Pearl St
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St #404
Kiran Lang	18 Indian Ridge Rd, Newton MA 02459
Anna Linder	387 Harvard St
Mary Akerson	26 Fayette St
Mimi	1617 Massachusetts Ave, #2
David Friedman	104 York Ter, Brookline, MA
LT Hu	1617 Massachusetts Ave
Mary Pankowski	Harvard campus
Samuel Rosenblatt	632 Christian St
Noam Tanner	47 Sacramento St, #2
Laura Cohen	25 Rockingham St
Peter Wohlauer	24 Ellsworth Ave, #1

Joan Wing	703 Green St
Sarah Better	1008 Massachusetts Ave
Ori Porat	24 Myrtle Ave
Talya Housman	322 Harvard St
Marian Stoltz-Loike	17920 Tudor Rd, Jamaica, NY 11432
Marc Levy	3, Potter Pk #1
Yefim Luvish	6 Cambridge Ter
Ira Greenstein	na
Jesse Lempel	1008 Massachusetts Ave
Thomas Serwold	30 Banks St
Sara Yoffe	50 Follen St
Esther Leah Grunblatt	8 Museum Way
Itzhak Gartenberg	356 Meadow Lane
Elizabeth Shneider	
Sara Wolfensohn	64 Garfield St
Jonah Spielman	5 Concord Avenue
Jordan Jakobovitz	320 Harvard St
Julia Book Motzkin	95 Prescott St
Avishay Ben Sasson-Gordis	4 Athens Ter
Flo Cleary Braunstein	9 Piedmont St, Arlington, MA 02476
Nana Zarchi	245 Hampshire St
Laura Rabinowitz	145 East 74 th St NY, NY 10021
Joseph Weinstein	94 Beacon St. Apt. 31, Somerville, MA
Dov Kahane	330 West 72nd Street, Apt 6B
Josh Brown	950 Massachusetts Ave
Zachary Yoffe	126 Oxford St
Neil Mayle	
Josh Kaplan	64 Linnean St
Jon Katzman	345 Harvard St
D C	54 Trowbridge St
Elkie Zarchi	54 Banks St
Nathaniel Kay	24 Clary St, 2R
Dave Katz	53 Bowdoin St
Jason Forney	225 Friend St Boston, MA
Mushka Marasow	38 Pearl St
Ben K	na

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.