

## MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION

Monday, April 1, 2019, 6:00 PM, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Meeting Room, City Hall Annex, 344 Broadway, Cambridge

Commission Members Present: Tony Hsiao, Vice Chair, Lestra Litchfield, Charles Redmon, *Members*; Margaret McMahon, *Alternate*

Commission Members absent: Monika Pauli

Staff present: Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public: See attached list

---

Tony Hsiao, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM. Mr. Hsiao made introductions and explained the meeting process.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

**MC5606 (continued): 17 Ellsworth Avenue, by Maureen O'Connell.** Remove portion of existing structure, restore remaining structure, and construct new single family residence in rear of house – binding review.

Kyle Sheffield, the architect, summarized the project, noting that at the previous meeting the front restoration was received favorably, but there were concerns over the massing of the rear addition and was asked to step back and look at the neighborhood more expansively, specifically the typology and density of the surrounding area. Mr. Sheffield went over the history of the house as an Italianate style along with many of the adjacent homes on the street. He noted the one of the main issues is the proximity of the proposed residence to the property line at the north edge. Mr. Sheffield noted that most houses were justified to the north side of the property such as 15 and 15 A Ellsworth Avenue. Mr. Sheffield explained his analysis of Italianate houses and that #17 main house footprint is 1400 square feet, he looked at the lot coverage and density, then looked at the volume and FAR, noting that #17 is .65 FAR, #9 is .5 FAR, #11 is .95 FAR, #13 is .5 and #19 is .75 FAR. Mr. Sheffield went on to state he has shrunk the proposed building by 3 feet, reducing the FAR by 10%. He also provided more open space on the north side and more space between the two buildings. Mr. Sheffield stated that his massing studies show that joining the proposed building to the existing, a larger undesirable massing is created. By removing the interstitial connection between the 2 buildings creates a more desirable massing. Mr. Sheffield noted the change in grade on the site creating a low point in the rear. He reduced the width of the proposed house by 3 feet, created a bay of the back of the house, wraps the corner and becomes part of the roof. The existing vegetated buffer will be regenerated with new plantings, the back of the structure will align with the back of #19. The design also maintains the existing view corridor along the back that extends the length of the block. Showing a site plan, Mr. Sheffield explained that the existing trees that are nearing the end of their lifespan will be replanted. Trees that attract birds are proposed as per #19's wishes. Mr. Sheffield did not provide the requested 3-dimensional model but did document the massing of the existing buildings in the neighborhood. He hopes the data he presented is considered.

Mr. Hsiao asked about the reduced FAR. Mr. Sheffield replied that the total proposed was .75 and now by reducing 500 square feet, so the FAR is now .69. The proposed footprint is now 26.5%.

Mr. Hsiao asked if the height was adjusted. Mr. Sheffield responded yes but it has been a battle with the water level, he has reduced the floor joist trying to capture 6 to 8 inches. The roof was lowered by 4 ½ inches. Mr. Hsiao noted that the difference in elevation is more than 2 feet.

Ms. Litchfield asked how much space is gained on the north side. Mr. Sheffield answered 1 foot gain. Ms. Litchfield asked how much on the south side. Mr. Sheffield answered 2 feet gained on 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, back line is the same.

#### Public Questions

Ms. Deb Haverty of 19A Ellsworth Avenue asked if the building is still historic and didn't the Commission ask the applicant to consider attaching the units. The back looks so different. Mr. Hsiao responded that there is no strict requirement for how the addition looks.

Ms. Chantal Eide of 20 Ellsworth Avenue stated that the massing options show no articulation to massing. Mr. Sheffield responded that he was focused on looking at the impact of different massing options. Mr. Sheffield explained he was transitioning away from a strong Italianate style by trying to mask the larger massing. Typical Italianate homes had primarily bays, sometimes 2-story, very small front entries, so trying to mask the massing doesn't seem to work as well with that style.

Mr. Redmon noted the layout of 19A Ellsworth. Mr. Sheffield responded that he looked at a reduced footprint with buffer between the 2 buildings, and that pushing them together doesn't seem to work, not worth the effort. Mr. Sheffield stated that he is trying to take advantage of the grade, the floor levels of both houses are different so that joining the 2 buildings would be challenging, noting that 19 and 19A are on the same elevation.

Mr. Doebel of 66-68 Dana Street expressed concern over blockage of light and air flow as well as the proposed large windows overlooking the property. Mr. Sheffield went over his shadow studies in winter and in June. Mr. Sheffield also said that they will hold onto as many trees as they can and will be planting additional trees. Mr. Sheffield also stated that a 6-foot privacy fence would be installed.

#### Public Comments

Mr. Doebel stated that the sun can still be blocked. Mr. Sheffield answered that #15A Ellsworth is already blocking sunlight. Mr. Doebel said he would like to see additional studies, Mr. Sheffield responded he would work with him. Mr. Doebel said he is not happy about putting 2 units on the lot. Mr. Sheffield stated that there are multi-family units. Mr. Doebel was concerned that this would set a precedent that would change the character of the neighborhood. Mr. Sheffield stated that #9 has 3 units. Mr. Sheffield also stated that he is trying to work with the grade and that he is not trying to create a precedent, he feels that two smaller buildings that are in concert with each other is better than one large building on the site.

Ms. Deb Haverty stated that fencing is not a cure-all especially with gardening and watching the birds. Fencing is definitely a concern.

#### Commission Comments

Mr. Hsiao appreciates the presentation addressing the scale and massing, but the fundamental concern is the idea of 2 buildings.

Ms. Litchfield said a 3-dimensional massing model within the context is critical, other applicants have been able to produce one for review. It is difficult to consider the options otherwise, it's a good faith effort that is important. The drawings are not the same as a model, they exaggerate the massing, that porches, etc. can soften the massing. Ms. Litchfield stated she looked at last month's minutes and not having the model makes a huge impact on her ability to weigh in.

Ms. McMahon stated that the new proposal is an improvement, but the model would have been better.

Mr. Redmon stated he thinks instinctively that having 2 separate buildings is a better option.

Ms. Litchfield stated there wasn't a good faith effort. Mr. Sheffield replied that the data analysis was a big part of the study and that they could not complete the 3-dimensional model on time. Ms. Litchfield responded that the model would have helped his case. Mr. Hayes responded that the attached scheme would have added more lot coverage.

Ms. Litchfield stated that the two attached options do look too big but there might have been another option. Mr. Hayes responded that they did look at other options but when it added more footprint, they didn't move forward with it. Mr. Sheffield said the biggest concern was separating the consideration of working with the grade of the site and the significant grade change from the street. With the attached schemes, the issue was that you would have a split in elevations if you want to be cognizant of back massing and how it affects the neighborhood.

Mr. Hsiao stated the applicant is dealing with a sensitive case and has been very analytical, but his colleague is saying that the model would have reinforced his stance and alleviate neighbor concerns. Mr. Hsiao also stated that the smaller massing matters in a dense setting, the applicant has addressed a lot of concerns and the contemporary articulation is fitting, making it different works, but there is not sufficient information to make an informed decision.

Mr. Redmon agreed a model is necessary.

Mr. Hsiao stated that it would be better if the applicant returned with the scheme in model form, also stated that the applicant is going in the right direction and that the wrapped bay is a clever way to deal with space issues.

Ms. Litchfield moved to continue the review when the applicant presents a model with surrounding neighborhood context with front and back building options with variations, and that the variations can be just massing. Mr. Redmon seconded the motion which passes 4-0.

**Case MC-5623: 356 Harvard Street, by David Blumsack.** Alterations to front entry porch.

Ms. Crosbie explained that the applicant already had a building permit to repair the porches, but during the repair, it was determined that the columns were too rotted to keep, but the additional alteration was not reviewed by the CHC. So the columns were replaced with a different material, the Ionic capitals were replaced with Doric, and the number of columns was reduced.

The applicant, David Blumsack, stated that he could install similar capitals if the Commission desired. Ms. Litchfield asked if the new columns are fiberglass. Mr. Blumsack replied yes. Ms. Litchfield noted that the balustrades were massive.

No public comments or questions.

Mr. Redmon stated that the corner column has to get installed first to make it work.

Mr. Hsiao said the applicant will need to look at the dimensions to see how it will work. Mr. Hsiao stated that he appreciates the effort to bring back the look of the original, but that the balustrade is massive.

Ms. Litchfield stated that the 3<sup>rd</sup> column is important, but go with what works.

Mr. Redmon encouraged the applicant to reconsider the balustrade. Ms. Litchfield agreed that a light touch would be more appropriate.

Ms. Litchfield moved to approve with the condition that the applicant work with CHC staff. Mr. Redmon seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.

**Case MC-5625: 97-97A Inman Street, by Ellen K. McLaughlin.** Remove asphalt shingles and original siding, and install non-historic siding.

Ms. Crosbie showed slides of the property and explained previous alterations to the exterior.

The applicant's brother-in-law explained the project and that the porch would be restored later, but that now they would like to replace the siding and rebuild the front bays. He submitted a photo of a house on Amory Street to show a more accurate depiction of the desired look.

The applicant would like to use Hardieboard to look like clapboard, with Azek trim.

Ms. Litchfield asked if the applicant will follow the details, such as the pediment. The applicant replied no, they did not think it looked right.

Mr. Hisao noted that Hardieboard is already on the side.

#### Public Questions

Mr. Jack Walsh of 84 Antrim Street stated the Hardieboard looks great, he wished he had Hardieboard.

Mr. Redmon stated that the Commission doesn't care for Hardieboard. Ms. Litchfield added that the applicant has come to the Commission later in the process and that Hardieboard has a different profile and encouraged the applicant to consider having wood on the front.

The applicant stated that she wants to have paneling. Ms. Litchfield said that the two lower bays are shiplap. She noted that it is a gift to know what this house originally had and to not go with it is a missed opportunity, it would be lovely if the applicant brought the house back to its original look and to consider the pediments and some sort of banding between the upper and lower stories. She also encouraged the applicant to look to the next door neighbor's house for inspiration. The applicant said her sister lives next door.

Mr. Hsiao explained that this review is non-binding and that the Commission is advising that the applicant has a home with good bones and she has an opportunity to do something special.

Ms. Litchfield asked the applicant if she is restoring the second floor porch. The applicant responded no. Ms. Litchfield encouraged the applicant to consider the front façade with cornerboards.

Mr. Hsiao explained that details matter. The applicant has a beautiful home and that the investment will add to the value of the house. The current drawing is stripped of details and has no depth.

Ms. Litchfield moved to accept the application as submitted with the following recommendations:

- Use wood siding on the front,
- Restore bay windows with historic detailing,
- Consult with CHC staff

Mr. Redmon seconded the motion and it passes, 4-0.

Mr. Hsiao adjourned the meeting at 7:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Allison A. Crosbie  
Preservation Administrator