

MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT ARCHITECTS COMMITTEE

Monday, March 1, 2021, 6:00 PM, online Zoom meeting

Commission Members present: Tony Hsiao, *Chair*, Lestra Litchfield, *Vice Chair*, Charles Redmon, Monika Pauli, *Members*, Margaret McMahon, *Alternate*

Staff present: Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator, Sara Burks, Preservation Planner
Eric Hill, Survey Director

Members of the Public: See attached list

Meeting held via online zoom webinar, <https://tinyurl.com/MCNCDmar2021>.

Due to statewide emergency actions limiting the size of public gatherings in response to COVID-19, this meeting was held online 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 824 2671 6742.

Commission Chair Tony Hsiao called the meeting to order at 6:05pm and made introductions and explained the meeting procedures.

Case MC-6115: 16 Lee Street, by Dale Eierman. Replace slate roof with asphalt shingles.

Preservation Administrator Allison Crosbie presented slides of the property.

The applicant was called to present the application and was not present. Vice Chair Lestra Litchfield asked if the application can still be reviewed without the applicant present to answer questions. Ms. Crosbie replied that since the review is non binding the Commission can continue reviewing the application.

No public comments or questions

Commission member Monika Pauli asked about the ridgeline and if the applicant was going to use metal or asphalt. Ms. Crosbie replied that judging from the portion of the roof that is already covered in asphalt, that the applicant will continue to install in the same manner.

Commission member Charles Redmon motioned to reject the application as submitted with the recommendation to look at alternatives such as faux slate and to look at flashing at the roofline intersections to create more authentic details. Ms. Litchfield seconded, and the motion passes 5-0.

Case MC-6102: 14 Bigelow Street (Continued), by Reed Shea and Avia Navickas. Construct two new entrances and window well, alter existing front porch/entry, construct addition in rear.

Ms. Crosbie briefly summarized the property background.

Mr. Reed Shea, the applicant, summarized his project goals and described the revised drawings, showing a 3-dimensional drawing of the house with proposed new entrances, explaining the inspiration from 31 Maple Avenue.

Mr. Hsiao asked about the slope of the roof. Mr. Shea responded that the roof will be remain unchanged.

Ms. Litchfield asked about the south elevation and how the addition interfaces with the existing massing, does the plane of the addition meet the existing façade from one side of the bay to the other. Mr. Shea replied that the addition would be a little more to the south.

Commission member Monika Pauli asked if there is a picture of that side of the house. Mr. Shea showed an image.

Mr. Hsiao asked about the siding. Mr. Shea answered that he would like to remove the existing shingles and restore the clapboards underneath, he has started to look at the condition of the clapboard. Mr. Hsiao noted that 16 Bigelow St. is a good clue as to how to restore the exterior siding.

Mr. Redmon asked about addition. Mr. Shea said alterations were made in response to conversations with the neighbors.

Ms. Pauli asked about the railing. Mr. Shea replied that he wanted to maintain the railing as is and add a simple metal rail on top to meet code.

Public Questions

Ms. Crosbie read a letter from Michael and Sylvie Potts, of 12 Bigelow Street. Mr. Shea responded with measurements from proposed foundation to property lines, headroom measurement of basement entrance, and he does not plan to change the parking situation.

Public Comments

Ms. Crosbie read a letter from Pierre and Marie Humblet of 13 Bigelow Street.

Commission Comments

Mr. Redmon asked why is the addition as wide as it is. Mr. Shea replied it was to accommodate the needed bedrooms for his growing family. Mr. Redmon noted that it's bulking up the house more than it was originally and that he could still accommodate a second bedroom with less width. Mr. Shea remarked that the rear of the lot is tight and does not impact view from public way, and he wants to make better use of the space on the property.

Mr. Hsiao thanked the applicant for advancing the design proposal, but noted that is worth re-examining the addition as most additions are typically subservient to the main house, the house width is the clue to what makes the house elegant, and that 16 Bigelow has a narrower footprint in the rear. Mr. Hsiao noted that the narrower width would sit better with the neighbors. He also stated that he liked the approach with the railing to downplay the added metal rail.

Ms. Litchfield agreed with her colleagues and is glad to see now how the porch and stairs are proposed to be supported, that the image of 31 Maple Avenue is helpful, and she agrees with the commission's comments on the massing. She also stated that if the clapboards cannot be restored, they should be replaced with wood, the Commission does not approve of fiber cement siding.

Mr. Hsiao emphasized the importance of the details to making this work.

Ms. Pauli agreed with the Commissioners. She asked about the columns, noting that the columns on the porch have bases. Mr. Shea stated that the columns below would be simpler. Ms. Pauli said that was appropriate.

Mr. Hsiao looked at the plot plan noting that the addition is wider than existing, and that to capture more space the addition should go deeper not wider. Mr. Hsiao also noted that the drawings are difficult to understand, that the applicant should look at the survey and hold the width. Mr. Shea answered that the addition does come in a few inches, but that he will work on this to address neighbors' concerns and noted that keeping the same plane as the existing façade doesn't give them what they would like.

Mr. Hsiao stated that the Commission bases their review on appropriateness on the fact that this is a National Register property, and that Mr. Shea should hold the line to where it is but can go back further.

Mr. Redmon asked the applicant to return with a landscape plan, and to show the existing columns in the drawing with bases. Mr. Shea replied that he will show the bases, he didn't intend to remove them.

Ms. Litchfield motioned to continue the hearing to next month and that the applicant to look at the massing of the rear addition, north side, and pull the line of north side elevation back 4 feet to original line of house. Mr. Redmon seconded, and the motion passed 5-0.

Case MC-6112: 12 Fayette Street, by 12 Fayette Street Ventures LLC. Construct new building in rear of lot, alter rear portion of existing structure, reconfigure windows, remove chimney.

Ms. Crosbie presented slides of the property.

Ms. Alison Hammer, the architect, made introductions.

Sean Hope, zoning lawyer, stated the review is binding because the new construction is over 750 square feet, that no variance or special permit is required, and that the back lot could be developed by right for several units, but they are only proposing a single unit in the rear.

Ms. Hammer went over the neighborhood context, that the new house is intentionally being kept away from the neighbors, that the proposed ell shape makes the design more internal to the site; they will be removing the garage and all of the paving, and will be using permeable paving material, they will remove 11'-3" of the back of the house and put in a covered deck, and remove a dead tree in front with arborist guidance.

Ms. Hammer presented elevations of the house and noted that it is currently a 3-family house. They propose to raise the sill of one of the windows on the front façade for a kitchen counter,

and they propose to remove the chimney, restore/maintain details and trim on the house and replace windows with wood in same style, change window configuration on right side of house, remove portion of rear of house, construct roof deck. On the left side are two non-functioning windows that will be removed but they will keep the exterior detailing.

For the new structure, Ms. Hammer explained the design includes a standing seam metal roof, a premium fiber cement siding that allows for mitering at the corners, windows are copper coated finish. Because of the slope, the new house is lower than the existing house. The windows of the new house have changed. The landscape design creates a garden setting, a “woodland garden setting.”

Scott Zink is introduced, explaining he has 17 years experience in Cambridge, and explained that they did have in person discussions with neighbors.

Commission Questions

Mr. Hsiao asked how many sf is the new house. Ms. Hammer replied about 2939 gs. How tall? No more than 35 feet above the grade.

Mr. Hsiao asked about the slope. Ms. Hammer answered that there is about a 6-foot drop sloping down from the existing house.

Mr. Hsiao asked about drainage. Ms. Hammer said they are removing all the impervious paving and replacing with permeable paving. Mr. Hsiao asked if it will be a passive house. Mr. Zink answered that the new house might be.

Ms. Pauli asked about a full basement in the new house. Ms. Hammer answered it will be a habitable basement level with family room and 2 other rooms.

Ms. Litchfield asked about the number of units in the existing house. Ms. Hammer replied it will be converted from a 3-family house to a single family.

Ms. Hammer showed elevations of the existing and new houses.

Mr. Hsiao asked about distance between the houses. Ms. Hammer replied the closest distance is 12 feet, but it varies.

Mr. Redmon asked about the entrance to the new house. Ms. Hammer showed the entrance with a cover over the entry door.

Mr. Hsiao asked about the landscape plan and fences. Ms. Hammer described the different fence types.

Public Questions

Alan Speight of 33B Antrim Street asked about the total square footage. Ms. Hammer said she wasn't sure how to calculate, probably in the 3500 to 4000 sf range.

Mr. Hope stated that basement space is exempt from being counted as sf per zoning.

Ms. Heather Speight of 33B Antrim Street asked how much are they expecting to sell the houses for. Ms. Hammer replied she couldn't answer that. Mr. Collins, one of the applicants, answered they don't know at this point, that they can look at typical square footage in the

neighborhood. Mr. Hope stated that it would be consistent with other neighborhoods, that it's out of their control. Mr. Hsiao explained that this was out of the Commission's purview.

Public Comments

Hugh Russell of Corliss Place stated that he is not opposed to infill, that his home is infill. He thinks the design has made progress but needs more progress. The proposed colors are depressing, he would like to see the new house lower and create a relationship with the existing house, the top floor story is exaggerated, the landscape plan didn't take into account the existing trees on the other properties, a proposed tree is five feet away from neighbor's trees, he is concerned with drainage and flooding.

Alan Speight stated that he lives directly behind the proposed house, the proposal is out of scale, out of character, 35 feet is too high. He noted that he has a small deck, the property values will be decline, they should take off the top story because it's blocking views and sunlight, the house has no connection with the neighborhood, there are serious drainage issues, they have to use a water pump in the summer time. A carriage house style would be more appropriate.

Gao Wen Shao of 9 Fayette Street understands her neighbors' concerns. The proposed house is monolithic, blocky in terms of height and aesthetics, and echoes previously mentioned drainage issues, and thinks the house will be very visible.

Amy Meltzner's husband believes the design team could create a carriage style that would be more in character with the neighborhood, and there is no need for a full basement.

Regina Barzilay read her comments from a letter submitted to the Commission.

Hallie Speight supported comments by the other abutters, their deck is their refuge, the new house will affect their quality of life, it's out of scale.

John Pitkin of 18 Fayette Street sympathizes with the abutters, and recalled 24 Clinton Street where they first proposed a separate building. He urged the retention of connectivity between green spaces for wildlife, ecological value.

Katherine Ellin of 2 Corliss Place stated that she will be looking out her windows right into the new house, she appreciates the collaborative effort of the developers, it's not her property, but what happens on the site will affect everyone.

John Gorman of 14 Fayette Street lives in an apartment on the first floor and 12 Fayette blocks a lot of light, lopping off the back will actually give him more light. He likes the proposal but thinks it should be less massive and have some relationship to the existing house.

Ms. Crosbie read three letters of comments into the record.

Commission Comments

Mr. Redmon noted the number of concerns expressed over the bulk of the proposed house. He stated that the Commission typically likes to see what alternatives were explored before reaching the final design. He noted the third floor looks awkward with the ell form, that it

would work better as a rectangle. He is not as concerned with the scale and style of the house but prefers to see more attention to details to make the house less plain.

Ms. Litchfield noted that the contemporary style doesn't bother her, but it is so flat, more detail would be better. She expressed concern with the height at 35 feet, even the 6-foot drop in grade doesn't diminish the heft of the building, the third floor is out of proportion to what a mansard style really is. She understands it's not very visible from a public way, it's incredibly dense, mostly because of infill, she's not averse to a new structure but it should be subservient to the original building, this looks like excessive infill.

Ms. Pauli asked for confirmation that the project meets all allowable zoning. Ms. Hammer replied yes. Ms. Pauli noted that the style doesn't bother her, but it is very dominant and mismatched with the original house. If the new house was made smaller and simpler in shape, then it could work.

Commission member Margaret McMahon stated that the proposal was too bulky and competes with the existing house, it's an insensitive addition.

Mr. Hsiao reiterated the concerns over bulk, scale, and massing. He stated that he would like to see a landscape plan that includes adjacent parcels, and previous design iterations. He also noted that the Commission often asks for a physical model and recommended considering pushing the house further down to mitigate bulk and massing. He stated that he has no issue with the contemporary style, but it comes down to details. Mr. Hsiao also noted that sustainability is a big concern in Cambridge and perhaps this project could integrate those practices, it could be a signature project.

Mr. Hope responded to public comments, stating that the building is 3 stories, not 4, the 35-foot height is by right, and is within the 34-foot setback, the canopy of mature trees will mitigate views. And regarding excessive infill, the proposed single-family home with 3,000sf is not atypical for the area, the size is consistent with modern living. The front building is a 3-unit rental property, this project will reduce density, the garage is not the best use of the land, and the project is consistent with guidelines of the MC NCD.

Ms. Hammer stated that they look forward to working with CHC on appropriate color palettes, they will look at the details, and take to heart the comments on massing and share the previous design iterations.

Mr. Zink mentioned a passive house project on Bow Street.

Mr. Hsiao reiterated for next meeting a further enhanced proposal, a landscape plan that includes more surrounding context, a physical model that can be a simple massing model, and treescape to understand how to preserve the existing canopy. Mr. Hsiao also asked for elevation/sectional drawings that show existing and new buildings together to understand the relationship.

Ms. Hammer proceeded to show a computer 3-d rendering. Mr. Hsiao stated that would work.

Ms. Litchfield asked for a view from the driveway, Ms. Hammer complied, Ms. Litchfield stated this shows how massing is overpowering, there should be some relationship between buildings.

Mr. Redmon asked for a view from south showing both buildings, noting the gray tone makes the building look bulkier.

Mr. Hsiao stated he doesn't mind the varied windows but suggested looking at relationship of penthouse and views. The view of the new house between neighbors, the setback mitigates the bulk.

Ms. Litchfield stated that excessive infill is not about footprint and number of units, it's about context, massing, a lot of nuance, it's not about numbers.

Mr. Redmon motioned to continue the hearing to next month to address the issues raised this evening (bulk, massing, scale, details, overall form, drainage, landscape and adjacencies), show alternative approaches, Ms. Litchfield added landscape plan that includes abutters, cross sections with elevations showing both buildings together. Ms. Litchfield seconded, and the motion passes 5-0. The applicants agreed to continue the hearing.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:46pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public Present on March 1, 2021

Panelists:

Alison Hammer, architect
Sean Hope
Scott Zink
Reed Shea

ahammer@hammerdesign.com
sean@hremassdevelopment.com
scott@zredevelopment.com
14 Bigelow Street

Attendees:

John Gorman
Sonia Sake
Gao-wen Shao
Marie Humblet
Hallie Speight
Allen Speight
Hugh Russell
Helen Snively
Katherine Ellin
Amy Meltzer
Heidi Samojluk
John Pitkin
Regina Barzilay

14 Fayette Street
32 Carleton Road
9 Fayette Street
13 Bigelow Street
33 Antrim Street
33 Antrim Street
1 Corliss Place
1 Fayette Park
2 Corliss Place
45 Antrim Street
33 Antrim Street
18 Fayette Street
39 Antrim Street