

## MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION

Monday, October 4, 2021, 6:00 PM, online Zoom meeting

Commission Members present: Lestra Litchfield, *Vice Chair*, Monika Pauli, *Members*, Margaret McMahon, *Alternate*

Absent: Tony Hsiao, *Chair*, Charles Redmon, *Member*

Staff present: Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator, Sara Burks, Preservation Planner

Members of the Public: See attached list

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Meeting held via online zoom webinar, <https://tinyurl.com/MCoct2021>.

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 **857 8550 8976**.

Commission Vice Chair Lestra Litchfield made introductions and explained the meeting procedures and called the meeting to order at 6:10 pm.

**Case MC-6275: 52 Fayette Street, by Peng Chen.** Replace front porch.

Ms. Crosbie showed slides of the house, noting that this is a non binding review.

Ms. Nancy Su, the owner, explained she had been before the Commission earlier in the year for a non-binding review of replacing the siding with vinyl. She has since changed her mind and is following the advice of the Commission to repair/repaint the existing clapboard siding. She noted the deteriorated condition of the porch and her concern for public safety. She would like to replace the porch and construct a new one per code regulations.

### Commission Questions

Ms. Litchfield asked if the half columns in the rear were being maintained, noting that the drawing doesn't show them. Ms. Su replied that they would remain. Ms. Litchfield asked for confirmation that the new columns would be full height, no boxes. Ms. Su replied yes, the box railing does not meet code height. Ms. Litchfield asked how high is the porch, explaining that if the porch is not more than three feet high, the code does not apply. Ms. Litchfield asked if the dentil detailing will be retained. Ms. Su answered she would like to try to replace it. Ms. Litchfield asked what kind of composite material is being considered. Ms. Su replied that it will be synthetic but is not sure yet exactly what it will be.

Commission member Monika Pauli asked about the drawing which looks like square columns are being proposed. Ms. Su answered that they are working with an architect and the drawing had not been updated. Ms. Pauli asked about the railing and noted that a pipe railing above the existing railing could help people who need to hold onto something.

No public questions or comments

### Commission Comments

Ms. Litchfield referred to 46 Fayette Street where the columns are set on boxes, noting this could be a good compromise. Ms. Sarah Burks, preservation planner, showed a screenshot of the porch. Ms. Litchfield explained that when the column heights change, the whole proportion changes. She also stated that she understands the porch is in front shape, she had to replace her own porch, but recommended that the columns remain on box bases, that the full height columns will look funny and not proportional, they will need to be thicker.

Ms. Pauli commented that it is a beautiful porch which is why they are debating this. She also commented that the finials are a great detail and should be reused. She reiterated that it's crucial to get the proportions right or it will look odd. She suggested working with her architect as well as CHC staff and that perhaps they could come back for an architects committee review. She also stated that replicating the half wall would be easier, and if it is eliminated she could have staff review it or an architects committee review.

Ms. Litchfield agreed with Ms. Pauli and noted she has no problem with fiberglass columns as long as they are high quality.

Ms. Su asked for clarification, that she should just keep the boxes under the columns. Ms. Litchfield replied yes, that it will be easier to replicate what's there.

Ms. Su noted that the porch accumulates snow because it's closed in by the half wall and stated that she needed to move ahead with the project before the winter.

Ms. Pauli motioned to disapprove the proposal as presented and recommended exploring ways to replicate the porch in a manner that maintains the proportion and that staff review the revised design. Ms. McMahon seconded, and the motion passed 3-0.

**Case MC-6285: 12 Leonard Avenue, by Martina and Karsten Bahlmann.** Alter fenestration on front façade.

Ms. Crosbie presented slides of the property, noting this is a non binding review.

Mr. Jacob Levine, the architect, described the proposal to enlarge the windows on the third floor on the front façade to provide more light. The windows would enlarge from 24 by 36 to 36 by 52 inches.

### Commission Questions

Ms. Litchfield asked if the two windows to be altered are original. Ms. Martina Bahlmann, the owner, replied they are replacements. Ms. Litchfield asked if the windows are the same size as the windows on the other floors. Ms. Bahlmann replied no they are slightly different, a little smaller.

### No Public Questions or Comment

### Commission Comments

Ms. Litchfield noted that since the windows are replacements she is not concerned and thinks it will look better.

Ms. McMahon concurred with Ms. Litchfield.

Ms. Pauli also felt the proposal was fine.

Ms. McMahon motioned to approve the proposal as presented. Ms. Pauli seconded, and the motion passed 3-0.

**Case MC-6284: 2 Ellsworth Park, by Sara Toomey and Nien-he Hsieh.** Alter fenestration and door on front façade and construct roof overhang over rear side entrance.

Ms. Crosbie presented slides of the property, noting this is a non binding review.

Mr. Nien-He Hsieh, the owner, explained the window alterations will allow more light into the interior, the relocation of the entrance door will improve the function of the entry space to the first-floor unit.

Mr. Philip Kramer, the architect explained that he thought keeping the window brow wouldn't work with the new proportion and went over the reconfigured location of the front door.

#### Commission Questions

Ms. Litchfield noted that the older photo showed another brow over the first floor. She asked about the door location, expressing concern that the space looked a little tight, and asked about the new window - will it be the same size and align with the other window sill. Mr. Kramer replied that it won't be the same size, not as wide and the sill will be higher. Ms. Litchfield asked if the front door is being replaced. Mr. Hsieh said yes, it is not original to the house, and that it might possibly have a half light.

Ms. Pauli asked if the existing windows have already been replaced. Mr. Hsieh answered yes.

Ms. McMahon had no questions.

Ms. Litchfield asked if the new window will be fixed or operable. Mr. Hsieh replied it would be single light and fixed. Regarding the proposed roof overhang, Ms. Litchfield also asked if it would be supported with brackets. Mr. Kramer replied no brackets, it would be cantilevered.

#### No Public Questions or Comments

#### Commission Comments

Ms. Pauli stated that she had no problem with the proposed roof, it makes sense. She also stated that she thought the new door and window configuration could be improved, it didn't quite feel right as drawn, and suggested looking at a door with sidelights and bring back the hood, or the brow over the second floor, there was something nice about that original detail. She also thought the third-floor brow could be retained.

Ms. Litchfield noted that the door no longer lines up with the second floor door and suggested leaving the door where it is and described how historically there were rectangular stained glass windows that brought light into the interior. She also noted that you want the sills at the same height, or they should be dramatically different. She stated the brow on the second floor should not have been removed, the third-floor brow is not as significant. And she had no concern regarding the proposed roof overhang. She suggested lining up the doors and deciding if the new window is just decorative.

Ms. McMahon agreed with aligning the doors and she also thought the window should be decorative.

Mr. Charles Mahoney, the contractor, explained that moving the door helps with the entry into the first-floor unit, right now the door is right at the bottom of the stairs. The new door location would create more space. Mr. Kramer showed a floor plan to clarify.

Ms. Pauli suggested a fake double door where only one door actually opens. Mr. Kramer noted that it wasn't allowed in some towns and wasn't sure if it was allowed in Cambridge. Ms. Litchfield commented that even with the double door it would still be off center. Mr. Kramer added that it would be hard to get of the existing wall. Mr. Mahoney suggested that moving the door to the left will help things line up better.

Ms. Litchfield stated that she understood why the door should move but she recommended a decorative window that is not as big as the proposed window. She mentioned a house at the corner of Harvard and Lee Streets that has a stained glass window. Ms. Pauli suggested the window could be oval. Ms. Litchfield agreed that oval would be a good alternative and told the applicants they could work with staff.

Ms. McMahon motioned to approve the proposal with the recommendation that the applicant reconsider the shape and size of the proposed window and consult with CHC staff. Ms. Pauli seconded, and the motion passed 3-0.

**Case MC-6274: 123 Hancock Street, by Sam Wolff.** Reposition existing building on site, remove rear addition and extend existing dormer. Construct 2 new attached dwelling units.

Ms. Crosbie presented slides of the property, noting that it is a binding review.

Mr. Sam Wolff, the owner, explained that the existing house, which he loves, is on the property line, and he proposes to pivot the structure on the front right corner and move it forward, remove the addition in the rear, and construct two units in the back. He intends to keep the existing house as the focal point, and not affect the view as you come up the street. He also proposed to remove a bump-out and extend an existing dormer.

Ms. Heather Souza, the architect, presented a site plan comparison of existing and proposed, showing how swinging the building would respect the side setback and she delineated two areas to be removed, and reiterated the importance of street facing façade. She then presented solar sun/shade studies and possible impacts.

#### Commission Questions

Ms. Litchfield asked if they considered two units instead of three. Mr. Wolff replied that they did consider it, but it was more logical to have three. Ms. Litchfield noted that there is very little open space in the plan. Mr. Wolff responded that they meet the open space requirement and noted that they did not include a third floor which could reduce the footprint. Ms. Litchfield asked about a landscape plan. Mr. Wolff said it was not fully developed, they intend to screen the back, maintain trees, landscape the front, and provide screening on the park side. Ms. Litchfield asked if they explored other styles besides mansard style, noting it's very different from Greek Revival. Mr. Wolff answered that they did not want to do Greek Revival, it wouldn't look right. Ms. Litchfield responded the same could be said for Second Empire style and asked if

they considered a modern approach. Mr. Wolff answered that they looked at a lot of buildings and different styles but thought this worked the best. Ms. Litchfield referred to the elevation that faces the park and noted it's an extruded mansard, then asked if they are replacing the chimneys. Mr. Wolff said they will be decorative. Ms. Souza mentioned they are not functioning.

Ms. Pauli asked if they considered keeping the house where it is, it's a special house. Ms. Souza replied that they looked at everything and that there are water issues to consider as well as the adjacent carriage house and thought it would be better to be placed within the setback.

#### Public Question

Mr. Josh Tenenbaum, of 129 Hancock Street, expressed his appreciation for Mr. Wolff reaching out to him regarding the project. He asked if it's really necessary to move the house and stated he was concerned about the loss of the two trees if the house is moved. As for water issues, he stated he would work on water issues in order to save the trees. Mr. Wolff stated that he spoke with experienced house movers and that it would be necessary to move the trees. He also spoke with the City arborist who noted that the tree to the right of the house has bolts holding it together and felt that they could remove the trees. Mr. Tenenbaum replied that he would rather see the trees preserved. Mr. Wolff said he thinks it's better to get the house out of the setback and noted that a lot of water comes into 123 Hancock.

#### Public Comments

Mr. Tenenbaum stated that preserving the trees is important to the character of the street. He also referred to the modern alteration at the corner of Hancock and Harvard Streets.

#### Commission Comments

Ms. Litchfield stated that the proposal felt like excessive infill and even though the applicant maintains they have met open space requirements, she would like to see a little more. She also appreciates keeping the building at two stories and lower than the existing house, but it looks crowded. She also noted that the entry to the rear units looks awkward. She referred to the elevation facing the park and described it as a massive extrusion, it's unrelenting and just keeps going. She suggested a more varied plane would be better and to consider a more contemporary approach, noting that the proposed materials are all contemporary. She mentioned an example on Broadway where the new building in the rear is a contemporary design. She also noted that she understands it must be difficult, but she has trouble with the amount of infill and the articulation of the façade facing the park and the use of a mansard style.

Ms. McMahon commented that the existing house is charming and that the proposed mansard addition is too heavy and goes against the spirit of the house, she does not like the design.

Mr. Wolff responded that he knows some of the people who lived here. He stated that the contemporary addition to the Greek Revival down the street was not liked by people he spoke with. And he noted the same thing with the addition referenced on Broadway. He also stated that they have thought this through, and one of the driving factors was not to have a third floor.

Ms. Litchfield replied that moving the house and creating three units is a lot, it would be nice to have some yard space, two smaller units or one unit would create a more livable city space. Cambridge is losing its yards. She advised to be mindful that yards and trees are valued in the city. Ms. Litchfield stated that this case should be continued, that the Commission needs a landscape plan, and she loves the tree to the left, and reiterated that the park facing elevation can use something to make it look less unrelenting.

Ms. Pauli agreed with the Commissioners and expressed concern with the choice of materials and the loss of the front yard and trees.

Ms. Litchfield asked about the rear units, is there a finished basement and light wells. Ms. Souza answered yes. Ms. Litchfield asked about bedrooms in the basement. Mr. Wolff explained that each unit has a room in the basement that can function as a bedroom if desired. Ms. Litchfield stated it's so massive, maybe not pushing the existing building forward, just pivoting it, the massing of the addition is just too big with such a delicate house. She also mentioned that they reviewed 8 Ellery Street, another Greek Revival but not as petite, the original design was similar in footprint and higher elevations, but after several rounds, they created a detached single-family home with a garden space. She asked the applicant to really think about the massing of these three units and whether you really need three, maybe just one going across the yard.

Mr. Wolff stated that they looked at the things Ms. Litchfield mentioned but the second floor of the existing house is a challenge with the eaves, there is very little space, and knows 5 units are not appropriate. Mr. Wolff explained that the Greek Revival unit space is not going to be as good as the new units. It will be kid bedrooms, and the dormers are really small, but we don't want to change that, but with the project we need two units with a second story that really work making it economically feasible. We know the site doesn't support 4 or 5 units.

Ms. Litchfield noted that the Commission was formed to prevent townhouse infill and that the Commission needs to see a landscape plan and the other options considered, your thought process to see how you arrived at this, and encourage to trim the footprint, consider the park next door, there isn't really outdoor space with 7 feet on one side. Mr. Wolff stated that there is outdoor space and that this is the best solution and can show the process, but this is the best solution. Ms. Litchfield responded that seeing their process would really help and figure out how to make it better.

Ms. Pauli said they would like to see how cars would park and fit in the space and also see the curb cut. Ms. Pauli asked if they have a 3-d model, it would be very useful. Ms. Souza answered that it's very rudimentary.

Ms. Litchfield stated that they need a 3-d model, we always ask for that, especially for the inner courtyard and to show the house next door and the parking lot in the back. It will help to visualize, and it can just be massing and include the house next door and the parking lot. It would be great if the house didn't have to come forward.

Ms. Litchfield motioned to continue the case and the applicant to return with a landscape plan, a 3-d model, examples of other design options that were explored that arrived at the final design, look at reducing the footprint of the new units, look at not moving the existing building forward. Ms. McMahon seconded, and the motion passed 3-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

**Members of the Public Present on October 4, 2021**

## Panelists:

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## Attendees:

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