

Approved 10/7/10

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

August 5, 2010 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: William B. King, *Chair*, M. Wyllis Bibbins, Joseph Ferrara, Chandra Harrington, Jo M. Solet
Members absent: Shary Page Berg, Robert Crocker, Bruce Irving, Frank Shirley, Susannah Tobin
Staff present: Charles Sullivan, Sarah Burks
Public present: See attached list.

Chair King called the meeting to order at 6:04 P.M. He designated alternate Joseph Ferrara to vote on all matters. He described the consent agenda procedure, reviewed the agenda items, and asked if there were any cases that a member of the public, commission, or staff would recommend for approval without a full hearing.

Mr. Sullivan recommended Cases 2555 and 2562 for approval per the consent agenda procedure and subject to staff review of details.

Mr. King asked if anyone present objected to action on those two cases without a full hearing. Hearing no objections, Dr. Solet moved to approve the following cases per the consent agenda policy, and authorized the staff to review and approve construction details:

Case 2555: 1450 Mass. Ave. / 3 Church St., by First Parish in Cambridge. Install temporary banner.
Case 2562: 1400 Mass. Ave., by Harvard Cooperative Society. Replace windows on front of building.

Mr. Bibbins seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Public Hearings: Demoiition Review

Case D-1204: 23-25 Cottage Park Ave., by Cottage Park Realty, Inc. Demolish Quonset hut storage building (erected 1946).

Ms. Burks showed slides and summarized the origins of the Quonset hut and the history of this example. It was a large utility building, measuring 40' x 100', which because of its exceptional size was sometimes called an Elephant hut. It appeared to be an early example, based on the architectural details such as the direction of the corrugated steel cladding. She described its relationship to the J. H. Emerson Company.

Bruce Biewald of 101 Chilton Street said that he and his wife were owners of the Synapse company and were prospective buyers of the Emerson property.

Mr. King reviewed the events of last month's meeting, when the Commission considered a petition to initiate landmark proceedings for the Emerson Co.'s brick building across the street. The Commission agreed with the petitioners that the brick building would be better as a rehab project than a teardown, but, not seeing any immediate threats, the Commission declined to initiate a landmark study at that time. The Quonset hut was not before the Commission last month, but its presence was noted.

Mr. Biewald explained his proposal to rehab the brick building for his consulting company. He described the documents in the zoning file for 23-25 Cottage Park Avenue, which indicated that the Quonset hut was only granted a temporary variance in 1946 and that had specified that the hut not be used for parking.

Ted Galante, architect for Synapse, said they had initially proposed a reuse of the Quonset hut for parking and screening the parking from the abutter's property.

Mr. Biewald said he was caught between the zoning requirement that the Quonset hut be taken down and the Historical Commission's interest in it as a historic building. He asked for resolution of the situation so that he could proceed with negotiations with the property owners.

Mr. King explained the demolition delay review process and permit procedures. Before expiration of a demolition delay, the Commission could consider a landmark study.

Mr. Galante said that a demolition delay would cause the real estate deal to fall apart, due to Synapse's overcrowding in their current offices.

~~Ms. Solet~~ Dr. Solet and Mr. King noted that the potential buyers might look into the possibility of a certified rehab or a preservation restriction, which could carry tax benefits if the building were determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Mr. Sullivan asked about the proposed replacement project for the Quonset hut lot. Mr. Galante said the number of parking spaces on the site would need zoning relief whether the hut was demolished or re-purposed.

Mr. King asked for public comment on the hut's significance.

James Williamson of 1000 Jackson Place spoke in favor of finding the hut significant, based on the history and associations outlined in the staff memorandum.

Michael Brandon of 27 Seven Pines Avenue said he had no doubt about the hut's architectural and historical significance.

Mr. King closed public testimony about significance.

Dr. Solet moved to find the Quonset hut significant for the reasons stated in the staff report. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Mr. King asked for public comment about whether the hut should be found preferably preserved.

Mr. Williamson said the hut was unique in Cambridge, and he would sympathetic to a plan for reuse.

Mr. Sullivan read a letter from John Angier of 21 Cottage Park Avenue, who described the hut as a buffer and not an eyesore. The letter indicated Mr. Angier's interest in knowing what was proposed to replace the hut.

Mr. Brandon said that some neighbors considered the Quonset hut to be an eyesore, but they were interested in being consulted about the replacement. He noted that one abutter, Karen Sedat, had indicated to him that she wanted to see a residential property replace it that would conform to zoning requirements. Mr. Brandon suggested that the hut be found significant and preferably preserved; the commission could revisit the matter in five months when more information about the replacement plan might be available. He asked if the Seabee Museum in Rhode Island had an example of an Elephant hut. Ms. Burks replied that the museum did not.

Mr. Biewald said the condition of the hut was bad. There were holes in the side. It was rusted and falling apart. The brick building's rehab could be great, but the Quonset hut was lying fallow.

Mr. King explained that in his opinion it would be better to preserve a significant building until more detail was available on the proposed replacement. In an urban setting, vacant land was not preferable to a significant building. If it were found preferably preserved, the Commission could decide to terminate a demolition delay if it

received a more refined plan for the replacement. He encouraged the owners or potential buyers to develop the details and return to the Commission.

Mr. Ferrara said that a finding of preferably preserved would give more certainty to potential buyers, indicating that the building was preferable to a parking lot.

Mr. Biewald said he would be afraid to buy the property if there was no certainty that he could get a building permit for the rehab of the brick building because there was insufficient parking on the site.

Mr. Ferrara moved to find the Quonset hut preferably preserved as defined in the demolition delay ordinance and for the reasons stated in the staff memorandum. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion.

Mr. Sullivan suggested that the motion be expanded to encourage the owner to return to the Commission with a more refined plan for the proposed parking lot and to investigate the possibility of donating the hut to a museum. Mr. King suggested that the motion request the owner to consider alternate uses for the hut.

Mr. Ferrara so amended his motion.

Ms. Harrington seconded, and the motion passed 5-0.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 1956 (Amendment): 1131 Massachusetts Ave./1 Remington St., by Richard Monagle. Request to approve previously completed work including installation of electrical transformer, freestanding banner sign, and amending the entrance canopy design.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and reviewed the case history. The project was approved in 2009 and was recently completed. Three elements, the entrance canopy, the banner sign, and the pad-mounted transformer were constructed without prior approval and were in violation of the project's Certificate of Appropriateness.

Richard Monagle, an owner/developer, and Jeff Taccio of the Hotel Veritas described the design of the blue barrel shaped awning, with brass hardware and end posts. They said the awning counted as FAR and they would be requesting Board of Zoning approval for it. They requested an amendment to the Certificate of Appropriateness for the awning and sign and requested a Certificate of Hardship for the transformer, which was a change from the written application.

Sean Hope of the Hotel Veritas said a new sign was needed for compliance. He asked for the Commission's recommendations. Dr. Solet recommended that the sign include the word "Hotel" so that the building was not confused for a university-owned building.

Mr. King asked how the sign compared to others in the vicinity. Mr. Monagle answered that most other signs were horizontally oriented, but the vertical sign felt appropriate to the setting. Ms. Burks noted that the zoning code set a limit for freestanding signs at 15' high and 30 s.f. in area.

Mr. Hope said the transformer was essential to powering the hotel and other properties along Massachusetts Avenue. It was not just for the hotel. The hotel owners did not prescribe the present location for the transformer and had inadvertently missed the Commission's review process.

Mr. Taccio described the discussions they had had with NSTAR. Pole-mounted transformers on Remington Street were supposed to be moved to an underground vault, but then they were told it was to be a pad mounted unit on grade. They felt it was not possible to say no to NSTAR, since the power was needed for the building and

the project couldn't be finished without it. The Pole & Conduit Commission had approved elimination of the pole transformers and putting conduit in the ground, and the hotel had then been able to open before Harvard commencement. He proposed landscaping and a fence to distract the viewer from the transformer.

Bill Zamparelli of NSTAR Community Relations said he was somewhat familiar with the story but had not been able to meet with the project engineer. He said the pole transformers were often relocated to manholes, but the transformer on the Veritas Hotel property was dedicated to the hotel's needs. Transformers must have 10' around them to allow room for maintenance. Given the size of the parcel and the other structures on the site, he said he was not sure there were any other possible locations. NSTAR had made a significant effort to meet the hotel's desire to open prior to commencement.

Dr. Solet asked if there was a less prominent location where the transformer could have been located. Mr. Sullivan said the drawings on file showed 15' of undisturbed ground at the corner of the lot. Mr. Monagle said that the storm water retention tank had been located underground at that location.

Mr. King asked for public comment.

Mr. Williamson asked if the canopy could be cantilevered, and Mr. Monagle replied in the negative. Mr. Williamson asked about the direction of the lettering on the banner sign, and Mr. Monagle answered that the sign professionals had suggested the layout. Mr. Williamson asked if there was any other space on the property for the transformer, and Mr. Monagle replied that if they had known earlier how large the transformer would be, they would not have put other structures underground in that location.

Mr. Brandon asked if the transformer could be on public property; Mr. Monagle did not know. Mr. Zamparelli said that if the transformer was dedicated to the hotel, it had to go on private property.

Dr. Solet noted that this was not the first time that the Historical Commission had not been informed about an issue involving NSTAR in a sensitive historic area.

Mr. Brandon questioned whether it was appropriate to allow the hotel to alter its application for the transformer from a Certificate of Appropriateness to a Certificate of Hardship, and whether the hotel had actually demonstrated a hardship. He noted that it was possible to pay the city to not have a storm water retention tank.

Mr. Williamson commended the design of the hotel but expressed dissatisfaction with the design, size, and material of the sign. He supported a canopy, though one without posts would be more elegant. He suggested the Commission allow time for the proponents to investigate mitigation options for the transformer.

Dr. Solet asked if the transformer could lie flat. Mr. Zamparelli said another model might, but not this one.

Mr. Sullivan recommended that the canopy be found appropriate and approved with an amended Certificate of Appropriateness. He suggested that the sign was incongruous to the Harvard Square Conservation District based on its size. If the proponents would modify the sign to conform to zoning requirements of size and height, then it would be automatically granted a Certificate of Nonapplicability per the district's guidelines. Regarding the transformer, he suggested that lack of foresight should not be deemed a hardship. A pad-mounted transformer would set a bad precedent for the district. He encouraged the proponents to study engineering solutions to the problem. He recommended that the Commission deny the Certificate of Hardship for the transformer.

Mr. King agreed. The sign should be viewed in context of the neighboring properties and their signs. The transformer, even if a financial hardship were proven, would be deleterious to the district as a whole.

Mr. Bibbins objected to the sign not just because of its size but the heaviness of the design. A lighter stroke might be appropriate. It was at odds with the building. Mr. Ferrara agreed with the previous comments.

Mr. Hope asked for a continuance on the transformer part of the application, to allow time to investigate alternatives. Mr. Taccio said approval of a Certificate of Hardship would not create a precedent for transformers in the district generally.

Mr. Sullivan recommended denying the application and allowing no more than three months to reapply.

Dr. Solet moved to approve an amendment to the Certificate of Appropriateness for the canopy, as applied, and to deny an amendment to the Certificate of Appropriateness for the sign and the transformer, but to suspend enforcement of the violation for up to three months. If no word was received from the owner within three months the matter would be referred to the Law Department. Mr. Ferrara seconded. The motion passed 4-0, with Ms. Harrington not voting.

Mr. Ferrara moved that the preceding vote be considered a denial of the request made at the meeting for a Certificate of Hardship for the transformer, without prejudice for reapplying. Mr. Bibbins seconded, and the motion passed 5-0.

Mr. King called for a brief recess. He reconvened the meeting at 8:50 P.M.

Case 2551: 16 Garden St., by Edward Guleserian/Commander Realty Associates. Install 3 flag poles for American, Massachusetts, and Sheraton flags.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the application for three flagpoles.

Michael Guleserian, General Manager of the Sheraton Commander Hotel, stated that in the previous case he agreed that it was important for a building that did not look like a hotel to call attention to itself. In the present case, the Sheraton Corporation's brand standard was that the American, state, and Sheraton flags be flown at its hotels. He noted that the American flag had been flying on the roof of the building, but it blew off in a storm and ended up on Waterhouse Street. He did not think it was safe to reinstall it at that location. Two flags were flying on the building, attached with brackets to hold the poles at a 45° angle. He described the proposal for three freestanding poles. The Harvard flag might be flown during commencement, or the Cambridge flag could be flown.

Dr. Solet asked if a third bracket on the building would meet the brand requirements. Mr. Guleserian said that was one option. The freestanding flag poles would also help identify where the hotel property starts.

Dr. Solet asked if the flags would be taken down at sunset. Mr. Guleserian answered in the negative. If the flags were lit, it was not necessary to take them down at night. The flags would be lit from below. He said only the American flag could be lit if that were the Commission's preference.

Mr. Sullivan reported that the Sheraton flag would be considered a sign per the zoning ordinance. The maximum area for a sign was 30 square feet and poles over 15' would need a variance. City, state, and American flags were exempted signs per zoning.

Mr. Williamson said the installation should be as modest as possible.

Mr. Ferrara moved to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the installation, subject to staff approval of details. Mr. Bibbins seconded. The motion passed 4-1, with Dr. Solet opposed.

Case 2560: 155 Brattle St., by Jack & Beth Meyer. Remove existing fencing and install new fencing.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the existing fence. He showed slides of other fences nearby.

Jack Meyer, an owner, explained that they had installed a mockup of the proposed new fence, which was visible on the far right of the slide. Where the mockup used plywood, there would be granite in the real fence.

David Bortell, the fence contractor, explained that the granite posts would be positioned every 9'. The granite curb would be 6" high.

Mr. Ferrara asked why they did not want to replicate the existing fence. Mr. Meyer replied that the existing fence was difficult to maintain. The wood bottom rail rots quickly and gets dirty. The new fence would be the same height as the existing. The top of the pickets would match those on the fence across the street. They had considered wood posts on granite bases, but it would require more maintenance. Mr. Bortell described the composite material that would be used instead of wood. The color was integrated into the material.

Ms. Harrington moved to approve the application. Dr. Solet seconded, and the motion passed 5-0.

Case 2558: J.F.K., Dunster, Linden, and Plympton streets, by City of Cambridge. Repave streets; construct/install curb extensions, pay and display parking equipment, bike racks, bike lane, lighting fixtures, pedestrian crossings and pave sidewalks with wire cut bricks and concrete pedestrian ramps.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the existing conditions on the ladder streets. The sidewalks were very narrow and had many obstacles, making them impassible in places.

Kathy Watkins of the Public Works Department distributed handouts. She described the project area and proposed improvements. There were a wide variety of existing materials. She described the scope of work including lighting, pay-and-display meters, and new pavement. The sidewalk space would be kept as open as possible.

Mr. Bibbins asked how the wire cut bricks were holding up elsewhere, and Ms. Watkins replied that they were doing well. Dr. Solet noted that they were prone to discoloration from salt, and Ms. Watkins agreed that this had occurred mostly in plazas. Owen O'Riordan, the City Engineer, said the city had tried different types of ice-melt in these areas.

Mr. Ferrara asked how the lighting fixtures were chosen, and Ms. Watkins replied that the 1907 fixtures had been installed on lower JFK Street three years ago, and that Washington fixtures were standard in Harvard Square proper. It also depended on the amount of sidewalk space, cost, etc.

Dr. Solet noted that LED lights can affect people's sleep.

Mr. Williamson asked why the sidewalk material would change, and Ms. Watkins explained that there had been extensive discussion about paving materials during the Harvard Square Improvement Study process. Mr. Williamson suggested that the acorn lights be used along the edge of Winthrop Park. He expressed a preference for molded bricks and dislike of concrete pavers at crosswalks.

Mr. King asked if new street trees were proposed, and Ms. Watkins answered that there would be new tree wells on JFK Street. He noted it was harder to walk on molded brick sidewalks.

Mr. Bibbins expressed disapproval of wire-cut bricks. They were very dark and did not have the same warm tone as molded bricks.

Mr. Ferrara said he was impressed by the diligence of the design and planning for the project. He moved to approve the project, subject to staff review and approval of details. Dr. Solet seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Denise Jillson, of the Harvard Square Business Association, expressed support for the project, though she said there had been some compromises for cost and improvements to accessibility.

Marie Trottier, Accessibility Compliance Officer at Harvard University, described the many accidents that occur in the Harvard Square area to people, including students.

Case 2539: 12 Concord Ave., Unit #1, by Natalie Klavans. Replace two windows on first floor.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the application for the first floor condo to install two new Marvin clad windows. He noted the recent application for the third floor unit to install similar windows. He recommended approving a Certificate of Appropriateness based on the context of the other windows existing on the building.

Mr. Bibbins noted that the replacement windows would decrease the glazing area.

Mr. Sullivan agreed it would decrease to some extent. The window type would become the standard for this particular building.

Dr. Solet said the existing storms did not look to be in bad condition.

There was no public comment or questions about the application.

Dr. Solet moved to approve the application, and to authorize the staff to approve window replacement for the other units in the building.

Mr. Ferrara seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Determination of Procedure: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 2574: 30 Holyoke St., by Roy McDonald for the Owl Club. Change window to double door on rear elevation; add railing to 2nd floor deck.

Mr. King recused himself because he was a former member of the Owl Club and had never formally resigned.

Mr. Bibbins, the next senior member, assumed the chair.

Mr. Sullivan described the three windows on the rear elevation and the proposed new door onto the new roof deck. He noted that very little detail had been provided with the application and said he was dubious about the pipe railing design.

Mr. Ferrara said it was hard to comment on the proposal without additional detail. He moved to find the application incomplete and asked for further information on the support for the balcony, the railing details, and the French door details.

Ms. Harrington seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.

Mr. King resumed the chair.

Preservation Grants

PG 11-01: 25 Wendell Street, by Homeowners Rehab, Inc. Requesting \$46,750 for aluminum siding removal and exterior restoration.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the request for \$46,750 to remove siding and restore original details such as clapboards and trim. He recommended approving the grant, contingent on receiving the necessary appropriation from the City Council for the grants program.

There was no public comment or questions.

Dr. Solet moved as suggested by Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Ferrara seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Executive Director's Report

Mr. Sullivan reported on the discussion that took place at the Community Preservation Act hearing the previous week.

Mr. King suggested that the Commission review its policy on temporary signs, particularly for religious structures. He recommended new language for approving signs to be posted for not longer than six weeks at a time and not in excess of three months total during the calendar year. The staff agreed to distribute the language of the current policy and proposed new language.

Dr. Solet moved to adjourn, and Ms. Harrington seconded. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 10:37 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 8/5/10**

Michael Brandon	27 Seven Pines Ave
Charles Teague	23 Edmunds St
Paul Champagne	1400 Massachusetts Ave
Michael Gulesarian	16 Garden St
Karin Lin	21 Harrison Ave
Jack Meyer	155 Brattle St
David Bortell	155 Brattle
Bruce Biewald	101 Chilton St
Ted Galante	56 JFK St
James Williamson	1000 Jackson Pl #45
Bill Zamparelli	101 Linwood St, Somerville 02143
Sean Hope	130 Bishop Allen Dr
Richard Monagle	358 Putnam Ave
Owen O'Riordan	City Engineer
Kathy Watkins	DPW
Marie Trottier	Harvard University
Denise Jillson	Harvard Square Business Association

Town is Cambridge unless otherwise indicated.