

Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Mon., Dec. 3, 2012 at 6:00 PM, McCusker Center, 2nd Fl., 344 Broadway, Cambridge

Commission Members present: Nancy Goodwin, *Chair*; Tony Hsiao, *Vice Chair*; Lestra Litchfield, Carole Perrault, Charles Redmon, *members*; Monika Pauli, *alternate*

Commission Members absent: Sue-Ellen Myers, *alternate*

Staff present: Eiliessh Tuffy

Members of the Public: See attached list

Chair Goodwin called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

MC-4197: 19 Maple Ave., by Meredith and Sam Wolff. Replace windows throughout the residence.

This 1897 single family residence, which falls within the Maple Avenue National Register District, is subject to binding review under the district order. The house was designed by Boston architects Edward E. Jordan & William E. Goss for real estate broker Elmer Bright. Bright had an office in Boston, but had the house on Cambridge's Maple Avenue built as his residence.

The property was recently purchased and staff previously signed off on renovation work to occur on the interior and rear elevation of the building. The current work under review is for the proposed replacement of most of the windows throughout the residence with Marvin replacement sashes that are clad on the exterior.

The property owner stated that there were already 12-13 vinyl replacement windows installed in the house, including the roof dormer windows on the front elevation facing Maple Avenue.

Ms. Perrault asked if there were storm windows in place and whether the owner had considered all-wood replacement windows. Staff noted that there were storm windows on the house. The owner said he had bid out wood window repair, but decided against it.

Ms. Pauli asked if the arched window on the front elevation was staying in place, and the owner confirmed that it was. She also pointed out that the window details submitted with the application showed vinyl. The owner said the window he proposed to use would be clad in aluminum.

The Commission asked again if the owners had considered using wood replacement windows on the front façade and installing new storm windows. The owner said he did not like the look of a wood window if it would be behind a storm. The Commission explained their role to uphold the district guidelines which state a preference for retaining historic building fabric.

Questions and comments were received from the public.

Ms. McMahon of 14 Highland Avenue said that, as a new owner within the district, it was his responsibility to maintain the historic house.

The Commission offered their comments.

Ms. Litchfield said that from the outside you might think the windows would look the same if they install new insulated sashes with simulated divided lights, but the width of the muntins on replacement windows are much thicker and less delicate than the original wood muntins. She also pointed out that, while it was standard practice to deny windows like this perhaps they could consider them for elevations other than the front of the building given their limited visibility.

Ms. Perrault, in support of retaining and repairing the historic wood windows, commented that the quality of new wood replacement windows is far inferior to old-growth wood windows found in historic buildings.

Mr. Hsiao noted that the Commission recognized that the new owners were taking great efforts to improve upon the building. In this instance he felt that perhaps the suggestion of a middle position – allowing high quality insulated replacement windows on the less visible side elevations -- might be appropriate. At the same time, he felt the work to the front of the house should be viewed as a true restoration and that any window replacement should be replacement in-kind.

Mr. Wolff said he was surprised because the previous owners thought they had opted out of the district designation. Staff and the Commission pointed out that this was not the case, that the district had been in place since 1982, and the Commission has had binding authority over exterior changes to National Register properties since 1992.

Mr. Redmon moved to reject the application as submitted because installing replacement windows were not consistent with the Commission's goal of preserving original historic building fabric, particularly within National Register districts. Mr. Hsiao seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

MC-4198: 269 Harvard St., by 269 Harvard St. Condo Trust. Replace existing canopy and renovate main entryway.

This apartment building was originally designed by architect J.G. Danielson and completed in 1964. The red brick structure is four stories in height with a full finished basement level. The current proposal is to redesign the existing canopy over the Harvard Street entrance and resurface the entry stairs in a new material. The architects stated that the goal of the new design was to create a new entry that was modernized and sleeker in appearance.

Mr. Redmon asked if there were downspouts worked into the design and whether lighting elements had been considered. The project architect, Ms. Whittaker, said there were two downspouts shown in white in the rendering.

Ms. Litchfield asked if the support cable had to go up so high on the exterior wall. Ms. Whittaker said they had worked with a structural engineer to calculate the necessary support and anchor locations for the new canopy roof.

Staff inquired about the existing condition of the front landing. Ms. Whittaker said that some slate had lifted and needed to be replaced.

No questions were received from the public.

Comments were received from the public.

Ms. McMahon of 14 Highland Avenue said she felt this was an elegant solution.

Staff commented that the specs should call for any canopy anchors to be secured through the mortar joints as opposed to through the face of the bricks.

Mr. Redmon asked if the new cladding for the stair landing was something like a Kynar polymer resin product. The project architect said the final selection had not been made but that it would be of a neutral color. Ms. Goodwin said she would almost prefer to see a polished stone cladding on the knee walls. Ms. Pauli said the side walls are like benches, to which the project team stated that they are often used in that fashion, particularly to set things down while people get their front door keys.

Mr. Redmon made a motion to approve the application, adding the recommendation of the Commission to further study the following details:

- scale of the canopy in relation to the simple architecture of the building,
- canopy lighting features, and
- the appearance of the canopy roof as viewed from above in the interior stairwell.

Mr. Hsiao seconded the motion, which passed with 5 votes in favor and 1 dissenting vote against.

MC-4200: 459 Broadway, by City of Cambridge. Affix metal art installation to façade of high school building.

The Cambridge Arts Council presented renderings of a conceptual design for exterior artwork that is proposed to be installed on the exterior of the high school building, facing the grass courtyard area surrounding the main entrance of the school. The Commission's review over this project, which affects a publicly owned building, is binding. The art is based on students' notes and the illustrative sketches that were found in their notebooks. The nature of the review, however, does not relate to the content of the artwork but rather the method of installation and any potential impact it might have on the structure itself.

The section of exterior wall that was selected for the installation is on the 1970s portion of the building, which was designed by architect Eduardo Catalano. This contemporary wing of the building was constructed using a cast concrete exterior wall, portions of which were recently repaired as part of a complete exterior renovation of the high school.

Ms. Hsu of the Arts Council said that the artwork would be a flat sculptural piece made from laser-cut aluminum. It would be anchored to the concrete wall using stainless steel pin anchors.

Several comments about the high school structure and installation precautions were voiced by the Commission members.

Mr. Redmon pointed out that, during the recent exterior renovations it was discovered that the concrete walls were thinner than they should have been in certain areas.

Ms. Goodwin added that, with the use of pin anchors, special care should be taken to avoid penetrating any underlying waterproofing membranes that may exist.

Ms. Perrault asked if the Council had explored using artwork that could be changed out more frequently so as not to run the risk of having a dated piece of sculpture affixed to the building. Ms. Hsu said that based on the details of the contract and the funding criteria it would have to be a permanent installation. Ms. Perrault asked if they had thought about using a freestanding support rather than attaching the art to the building. Ms. Hsu said cost was an issue that would have prevented building an anchored base for the piece. Ms. Pauli said the artwork could always be painted on the concrete wall instead.

No questions were received from the public.

Comments were accepted from the public. Ms. McMahon said that the colors of the artwork in the renderings seemed dated.

Mr. Redmon asked if there would be any text to explain what the actual artwork is based on and how the illustrations were selected. Ms. Hsu said a plaque would be a good idea, because on it you could show the entire notebook page from which the selected artwork was taken. This could provide context for the viewer.

Mr. Redmon made a motion to accept the conceptual design and installation proposal as submitted. Mr. Hsiao seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Minutes

Mr. Redmon made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 2012 meeting. Mr. Hsiao seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy
Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public who signed the attendance sheet, December 3, 2012

Beth Whittaker	374 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210
Parker Lee	374 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210
Linnea Haines	269 Harvard St., #5, Cambridge, MA 02139
Sam Wolff	19 Maple Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139
Tuny McMahon	14 Highland Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139
Elizabeth G.	42 Irving Street, Cambridge, MA 02139
Chris D.	269 Harvard Street, Cambridge, MA 02139
Lillian Hsu	344 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02139
Kent Morrison	269 Harvard Street, Cambridge, MA 02139