

Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Monday, December 2, 2013, 6:00 P.M., McCusker Center, 2nd Fl., 344 Broadway, Cambridge

Commission Members present: Nancy Goodwin, *Chair*; Tony Hsiao, *Vice Chair*; Carole Perrault, Charles Redmon, *Members*; Margaret McMahon, Sue-Ellen Myers, Monica Pauli, *Alternates*

Commission Members absent: Lestra Litchfield, *Member*

Staff present: Sarah Burks, Kathleen Rawlins

Members of the Public: See attached list.

Chair Nancy Goodwin called the meeting to order at 6:02 P.M. and explained procedures.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

MC-4387: 14-16 Myrtle Avenue, by Lily Lee. Construct dormer.

Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner, showed slides and summarized the case. The proposed dormer added less than 750 sq feet of space, making the commission's review of the case non-binding.

Frank Benesch-Lee, an owner, stated that a previous owner had installed the tall antenna at the back of the property in 1985 for Hamm radio communication; although not in use, it appeared to be stable and he had no plans to remove it. He explained that on purchasing the property about a year ago, the new owners stripped out the second floor kitchen and now proposed to build a new kitchen on the third floor with a dormer that conforms with the dormer guidelines (which would not increase the FAR). The front edge of the dormer would be set back 3' to 4' from the side wall of the house; similar fascia boards and roof materials would be used on the dormer as on the main house. Mr. Benesch-Lee asked the commissioners for guidance in choosing an appropriate window.

Carole Perrault noted that the top of the dormer was at the same height as the main ridge; Mr. Benesch-Lee stated that had been the architect's recommendation, since the interior ceiling height was low. The ridge beam would be reinforced if necessary. Ms. Perrault asked if the owners had considered a more traditional looking dormer, such as a gable. Mr. Benesch-Lee explained that there was insufficient space for a gable and that the flat roof configuration was similar to other dormers in the neighborhood. He and his wife wanted the dormer to be set back as far as possible and to show a very low profile, thus minimizing the impact on their neighbors. He told Monika Pauli that the couple wanted to restore the original front porch in the future.

Rhonda Roselli, 17 Myrtle Avenue, wanted to know the dormer's dimensions and how visible it would be from the second floor of her house directly across the street. Mr. Benesch-Lee showed her the elevations and rendering to clarify the dormer design.

Nirmal Daniere, 18 Clinton Street, asked why the dormer was not centered. Mr. Benesch-Lee said that was a result of the interior layout, the attempt to be less intrusive, and placement of the framing rafters. The final spot depended on the location of the rafters, but would be no more than 3' to 4' from the back of the house.

To achieve a cleaner solution, Charles Redmon suggested placing the dormer over the group of three second floor windows and lowering it from the ridge. He also said that reducing the width of the fascia

board would be more proportional to the size of the donor. Messrs. Redmon and Hsiao recommended rectangular 2-over-2 windows, matching the style of the other windows.

Mr. Hsiao moved to approve the application, with the suggestions outlined by Mr. Redmon. Mr. Redmon seconded, and the motion passed 4-0, with Ms. Goodwin, Mr. Hsiao, Mr. Redmon and Ms. Perrault voting.

MC-4388: 15A Ellsworth Avenue, by ZLP LLC. Change single entrance to double; raze right side addition; enclose two-story rear porch.

Ms. Burks showed slides of the house and remarked on the limited visibility of some of the proposed changes on the sides and rear of building. The commission's review of the case was non-binding.

Warren Zhu, the proponent, proposed to change the single entrance door to two doors; demolish the "bump out" on the right side of the house; remove a two-story enclosed porch at the rear and replace with an addition of the equal size, to be visible from the front on the right only; add rear stairs from the second floor; possibly construct a new porch roof, remove the chimney, and add two skylights.

Kyle Sheffield, 15 Ellsworth Avenue, asked if the space resulting from razing the small side room would be left open or become parking. Mr. Zhu said one parking place already exists, another may be added. Mr. Sheffield asked for the dimensions and appearance of the rear addition; the rear additions on neighboring houses extended approximately the same distances, and he hoped this addition would be in keeping. Several other bracketed Italianate houses were extant on the street; no. 15A had been affected by an adjacent triple-decker, which only increased the importance of 15A to the rhythm of the streetscape.

Robert McCallum, 18 Ellsworth Avenue, expressed concern about the double entry and increased parking in the side yard. Frankie Lieberman, 24 Ellsworth Avenue, stated that there were thirteen bracketed Italianate houses on the odd side of the street, all of which had side-hall entries with single doors.

Ms. Goodwin said that the application materials submitted to the commission were incomplete. By mistake, the permit set of drawings had not been distributed to the commission, but only an incomplete set. Also, the description of work on the application was incomplete and did not include the full scope of work. After some discussion on how to proceed, Mr. Redmon moved that the case be continued and requested that Ms. Burks review the plan set already submitted, then discuss with Mr. Zhu what additional information was needed (such as floor, site plans, and parking). Mr. Hsiao seconded the motion, which passed 4-0, with Ms. Goodwin, Mr. Hsiao, Mr. Redmon and Ms. Perrault voting.

The architect for 284 Harvard Street not being present, the commission moved to the next case.

MC-4384: 99 Prospect Street, by Christ the King Presbyterian Church. Install fencing at right side to screen air conditioning equipment.

Ms. Burks explained that the church was a National Register property within the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District and therefore the commission's review of the case was binding. No representative from the church was present.

The church had installed the air conditioning equipment after discussions (primarily by telephone) with Eiliesh Tuffy. Ms. Burks had been unable to find any written documentation regarding the work. The units, on the right of the building, were set well back from Prospect Street, although originally were proposed to be installed even farther back. Ms. Tuffy had recommended screening the units with fences.

The church proposal included a wooden fence on the front and a chain link fence between the units and the Whole Foods to protect the equipment from snow plows pushing snow against them.

Mr. Redmon suggested painting the equipment black, except for the grill. Ms. Goodwin wondered open fencing was required for ventilation of the unit and suggested a pickets rather than chain link; Mr. Redmon noted pickets would resist snow better than chain link. Mr. Hsiao wondered if the fence was drawing more attention to the unit and agreed with Mr. Redmon's idea to paint the units black.

Ms. Burks noted that mechanical permits for air conditioning equipment did not get sent to the Historical Commission for approval, making this type of work difficult to monitor.

Mr. Redmon moved to find that there was insufficient information provided and no one present to answer questions and to continue the case to January 2014. Ms. Goodwin designated Ms. Myers to vote. Ms. Myers seconded, and the motion passed 5-0, with Ms. Goodwin, Mr. Hsiao, Mr. Redmon, Ms. Perrault and Ms. Myers voting.

MC-438: 284 Harvard Street, by Hallmark Condo Trust. Replace all windows.

Ms. Burks showed slides and summarized the application. She described the modern apartment building, constructed in 1971.

Jim Michael, project architect, said that the existing windows were aluminum sliders with exterior screens. The owners proposed to replace all the windows with aluminum clad casements, in the original color of anodized dark bronze. Screens would be on the interior. Mr. Michael explained to Ms. Perrault that finding new sliding windows would be expensive, since it was no longer a stock product. In addition, sliders were not effective for proper air infiltration and required exterior screens, which were prone to breakage. The dimensions of the window openings would be maintained. Ms. Burks asked if there was adequate clearance on the ground floor for the casement window operation away from the sidewalks. Mr. Michael answered that the only two casements on the ground floor were setback behind a planting bed and were not close to the sidewalk. All ground floor windows would be tempered glass.

Mr. Michael told Ms. Pauli that no changes were to be made to the front entrance at this time.

Frances Fox Spinks, 17B Bigelow Street, said that interior screens eliminated ice build-up, as well as potential hazards to children and passersby by falling screens.

Ms. Perrault noted the flatness of sliders was an aspect of the original design and modern style of the building. She expressed concern that casement windows would negatively affect the integrity of the design. Mr. Michael said he believed that if high quality casements had been available during construction, the builders would have used them.

Mr. Redmon opined that open windows might add interest to the façade; Mr. Hsiao concurred that it was not a sacrosanct example of the style and supported the change to casement windows to allow for better air flow.

Mr. Redmon moved that the application be approved, as submitted. Mr. Hsiao seconded, and the motion passed 5-0, with Ms. Goodwin, Mr. Hsiao, Mr. Redmon, Ms. Perrault and Ms. Myers voting.

MC-4386: 24 Clinton Street, by 24 Clinton Street Trust. Remove ell and build addition; restore original house with minor fenestration changes.

Ms. Burks reviewed the case history. The house was built in 1855, probably by the owner, Benjamin Gault, who was himself a carpenter. In the spring of 2013, the owner had proposed removing the ell and construct a second detached single family house behind the existing; the application had been approved and a binding Certificate of Appropriateness issued. She noted that the approval included binding review of the exterior renovations of the front building and landscaping plan. The neighbors had appealed the decision to the Historical Commission, which upheld the decision of the Mid Cambridge commission. The current application and new design had evolved through discussions between the owner and the neighbors.

The applicant, Mahmood Firouzbakht, explained that, in spite of the Historical Commission's decision to uphold the decision, he did not wish to go ahead against such strong neighborhood opposition. Joan Pickett, of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Association, facilitated meetings with the neighbors, who expressed their preference for a large ell (rather than detached houses). In spite of possible difficulties, including the requirements of the zoning board and the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Association, he decided to seek a design that would please his neighbors and began to work on a new plan with architects Kelly Speakman and Mark Boyes-Watson.

Ms. Speakman presented the new proposal. The existing rear ell and a dormer on the back of the main building will be removed, and a new addition constructed. The front house would be restored, including improvements to the front and rear, siding removal, restoration of brackets and trim, and a foundation for the front bay window. The design would preserve more of the back yard by having a larger rear set back. The new addition would have a flat roof and be lower than the previously proposed detached building (22.7' from average grade).

Ms. Burks asked about the dimensions of the project, in order to determine if there were any triggers for binding review. Ms. Speakman reviewed the project's dimensions. Demolition of the ell and dormer was 705 square feet. The existing house was non-conforming for FAR with 3, 823 square feet. The total square feet of the finished project would be 4, 078 square feet, for a net increase of 255 square feet.

Ms. Speakman told Mr. Hsiao that the bay window in the addition would be trimmed with MDO panels similar to the design of the bay on the existing house. Messrs. Hsiao and Redmon suggested centering the entrance to the rear addition.

Ms. Perrault commented on the number of windows on the rear elevation of the addition. Ms. Speakman explained that the rear windows would allow for views of the backyard while allowing the windows on the sides to be small and high to maintain privacy for the neighbors. Ms. Perrault asked about paving material and Ms. Speakman answered that it would likely be pavers. But overall there would be more lawn and less paved area on the lot.

Frankie Lieberman, 24 Ellsworth Avenue, offered a heartfelt thank you to Mr. Firouzbakht for listening to and working with the neighbors.

Joan Pickett, 59 Ellery Street, president of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Association, also thanked Mr. Firouzbakht for reaching out to the neighbors and being responsive to their concerns. The neighborhood's opinion of the project had been completely reversed; animosity had been eliminated through the collaborative process.

Francis Spinks, 17 Bigelow Street, voiced his appreciation for the new scheme, which preserves the collective open space of the back yards. He commended Mr. Firouzbakht for his kindness in working with the neighbors.

Pat White, 20 Clinton Street, no. 5, said she was also pleased with the new project. Mr. Firouzbakht had listened well, "took good notes," and was responsive to neighbor comments.

Steve Nill, 26 Clinton Street, were also supportive; what Mr. Firouzbakht had done was extraordinary.

Margaret McLallen, 31 Bigelow Street, spoke out in support of the project on behalf of the pleased and grateful abutters.

Ms. Goodwin expressed her appreciation of the new design and of the remarkable turnaround of opinion. She thanked the neighbors for their willingness to work toward a solution.

Ms. McMahon said the new design was an admirable solution; and one that Mr. Firouzbakht had not been required to achieve.

Ms. Perrault said that the lower height of the new addition allowed the front house to remain the primary mass, which was an appropriate way of designing an addition.

Mr. Hsiao approved of the overall design, but thought there was still room for refinement. The number of window types and different proportions on the addition were very busy; the goals could be achieved with a calmer scheme. He encouraged the architects to view the addition as a modest structure with its own integrity; the design could be simplified to better complement the existing house. Mr. Hsiao pointed out that the front bay was tall and slender, while the new bay was wide and squat and suggested that the new bay be made more slender. He said the overall approach was excellent.

Mr. Redmon asked if there were still window wells proposed for the front house.

Ms. Perrault said that the entry door to the second unit should be centered under the bay. Ms. Speakman and Mr. Firouzbakht agreed that the interior layout could be adjusted.

Mr. Firouzbakht agreed to study making these design changes as long as those changes would not require him returning to the Commission.

Mr. Redmon moved that the application be approved as submitted, with the inclusion of suggestions for improvement as stated. Ms. Hsiao seconded the motion. Ms. Goodwin designated Ms. Pauli to vote and the motion passed 5-0, with Ms. Goodwin, Mr. Hsiao, Mr. Redmon, Ms. Perrault and Ms. Pauli voting.

Ms. Pauli moved to adjourn and Mr. Redmon seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen L. Rawlins
Assistant Director

Members of the Public
(who signed the attendance sheet)

Frankie Lieberman	24 Ellsworth Avenue
Maureen O'Connell	17 Ellsworth Avenue
Frank Benesch-Lee	14 Myrtle Avenue
Kyle Sheffield	13 Ellsworth Avenue
Warren Zhu	25 Highland Avenue, B
Robert McCallum	18 Ellsworth Avenue
Pat White	20 Clinton Street, no. 5
Nirmal Danieri	18 Clinton Street
Francis Fox Spinks	17-B Bigelow Street
Margaret McLallen	31 Bigelow Street
Jim Michael	63 Mansfield Street, Sharon, Mass. architect, 284 Harvard St.
Mahmood Firouzbakht	7 Crescent Street
Kelly Speakman	Boyes-Watson Architects, 30 Bow Street, Somerville, Mass.
Joan Pickett	59 Ellery Street
Marie Woolf	26 Clinton Street
Steve Nill	26 Clinton Street