

MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION

Monday, October 3, 2022, 6:00 PM, online Zoom meeting

Commission Members present: Charles Redmon, Katinka Hakuta Monika Pauli, *Members*

Absent: Tony, Hsiao, *Chair*, Lestra Litchfield, *Vice Chair*,

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

Members of the Public: See attached list

Meeting held via online zoom webinar <https://tinyurl.com/MCoct2022>

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 845 4186 9045.

Commissioner Charles Redmon chaired the meeting, made introductions, explained the process, and called the meeting to order at 6:05.

Case MC-6563: 36 Magnolia Avenue, by Fan Wang and Marc Wagner. Alter fenestration and entrances; enclose porch; construct dormers, window wells, and deck; install fiber cement siding.

Ms. Allison Crosbie, preservation administrator, presented slides of the property and history, noting that it's a non-binding review but the project will require zoning relief.

Mr. Alex van Praagh, the project architect, described the proposed alterations to the house to create two units, and the need for more usable space on the third floor with proposed dormers, window wells for egress from basement, and extension of the driveway. He also proposed to re-side the building with fiber cement and reconfigure some of the windows and replace all windows with Marvin Integrity windows. Mr. van Praagh also presented 3-d views of the proposal.

Commission Questions

Commissioner Monika Pauli asked if the building is already 2 units. Mr. van Praagh replied yes and will remain a 2-family residence.

Mr. Redmon asked about the basement level. Mr. van Praagh answered that currently it is used for storage and mechanical equipment and that it will be renovated as part of unit #1 with the first floor. Mr. Redmon asked why the units are so large. Mr. van Praagh responded that his clients want to create 3 bedrooms and a den that has the flexibility to be a bedroom. Mr. Marc Wagner, one of the owners, noted that with Covid, having more separate spaces makes sense, especially since more people are working from home.

Ms. Pauli asked if the units will be rentals or condos. Mr. Wagner replied that it's to be determined, they might convert them to condos. Ms. Pauli asked if both chimneys are to be removed. Mr. van Praagh answered yes.

Ms. Fan Wang, one of the owners, explained that they are enclosing the porch and changing the entrance to make better use of the yard.

Commissioner Katinka Hakuta asked if they considered maintaining the chimneys above the roofline. Mr. van Praagh replied that with the new heating system and the desire to create more flexible spaces, the fireplaces need to be removed and hadn't considered keeping it above the roofline. Ms. Wang remarked that the chimneys are in disrepair.

Public Questions and Comments

Mr. Ori Porat of 24 Myrtle Avenue described his frustration communicating with the owners and expressed concerns with the design and the owners' history managing other properties and the potential lack of responsiveness to issues that might arise during construction. Mr. Porat also questioned the accuracy of the measurements in the drawings. Mr. van Praagh responded that he made the measurements himself and assured Mr. Porat that they are accurate.

Ms. Tia Chapman and Mr. Alberto Pierotti at 6 Myrtle Avenue expressed concern over the proposed expanded massing of the project especially the enclosure of the porch that they explained would just wall over their side of the house. They also stated that grabbing more space seems rather unkind. Why is more space needed since it's already very generous?

Mr. Sheraz Choudhary of 2 Myrtle Avenue concurred with the previous public comments, noting that it's a cohesive community and he is concerned with creating more bedrooms. The proposal goes against the character of the neighborhood. He also mentioned that there's a broken window in the top floor since 2020. The owners have let the property go. There appears to be a lot of renters living there right now, and there's zero maintenance. He also added that he didn't understand why nothing has been done to fix problems with the property.

Ms. Crosbie then read out five letters opposing the project from Ori Porat of 24 Myrtle Avenue, Tia Chapman of 6 Myrtle Avenue, Brian Roughan of 19 Myrtle Avenue, and Rhonda Roselli of 17 Myrtle Avenue,

Ms. Claudia Rizzini of 2 Myrtle Avenue stated that she confirms and endorses the previous comments, specifically the size of the proposal, adding that it's already a very large building, and the proposed skylights will diminish the light that she gets through her window. And the removal of the porch is also a great loss and reiterated that this is a closeknit community, and she echoed the concerns over the lack of maintenance such as the overgrown vegetation, the trash, and the sidewalk not shoveled in the winter forcing her to walk around it.

Ms. Hakuta asked if the owners could address the shingles and FAR. Ms. Wang responded that the shingles are not sound, and they chose Hardieboard because of its durability. Ms. Hakuta asked about the shingles underneath the existing siding. Ms. Wang said she is not aware of shingles underneath the siding. They have tried to do repairs, but contractors say it's beyond repair. Regarding the FAR, Ms. Wang stated that in the original plan the attic has three bedrooms already, but the height is very low, and they would like to make best use of the

space. The enclosure of the porch is by right as is the basement space. Mr. Wagner noted that they are adding a minimal amount of additional square feet. Mr. van Praagh explained that the property is zoned for .75 FAR, the existing FAR is .95, and the proposed is .98.

Ms. Wang asked to address some of the neighbors' concerns regarding the porch enclosure and bedroom count. Ms. Crosbie said yes. Ms. Wang stated that the house is an awkward shape, they have owned it for 4 years and been through several plans and tried to work with the neighbors. The current plan is the best they could come up with. The house currently has three bedrooms on the third floor. The proposed is 7 bedrooms and a private space for working from home. Regarding the porch, they want to make it more inviting. And for parking there is one space, and they want to fit two small cars and relieve street parking. She added that trying to be a part of the community has been very hard and clarified that the house is leased for a year, not month to month as someone mentioned. The house is in poor condition so a family would not be comfortable living there. The goal is to make two units that are comfortable.

Mr. van Praagh expressed surprise at the personal nature of the public comments. Their plan now is to develop the building into two condos and that's not a crime. He explained that he has designed condos for families, and it can foster neighborhood interaction. Additional people doesn't mean more traffic, and people like to walk. He also mentioned that he had concerns about the porch and could look at partially enclosing it and reconfiguring the steps with a landing that allows the outdoor/indoor transition. He also stated that the owners are trying to work with the building envelope, and it would be nice to reset the conversation and come to a resolution.

Commission Comments

Ms. Pauli called attention to the old photograph of the house and noted that some of the features could be brought back. She also remarked that dormers are not the end of the world, many houses have them, but the porch should remain with the original details brought back as well as the windows on the second floor. She added that she had no issue with the basement if done well. She noted that the house fills the corner, it's an important house, and it's the first one you see. It could be a beautiful house and it can be made very desirable for someone to buy it and care for it.

Ms. Hakuta noted that the porch visually ties into the neighborhood and creates the face of the house especially on that corner and noted that you wouldn't know where the front entrance is without the porch, and it should be retained. She also concurred with Ms. Pauli's comments and encouraged the applicants to look at other houses in the neighborhood, and reconsider the windows, shingles, and the chimney.

Mr. Redmon agreed with the Commissioners, noting the building is very permeable and located on a strategic corner, the proposed modifications make it less permeable with no voids and openings, and it make the walls push out. The result devalues the prominence of the corner and cuts off any connection to the neighborhood.

Ms. Hakuta motioned to disapprove of the proposal as submitted noting that the loss of the porch and the construction of window wells would diminish the character of the building and the neighborhood, and recommended maintaining the porch and the chimneys, restoring the

architectural details of the exterior that have been covered up with the current siding including the brackets, the decorative truss in the gable, and the wood shingle siding, and replace windows with historically appropriate windows, and submit to CHC staff for review. Ms. Pauli seconded, and the motion passed, 3-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public Present on October 3, 2022Panelists:

Alex van Praagh, architect
Marc Wagner and Fan Wang, owners

Antrim Street
70 Lincoln Street, Boston

Attendees:

Ori Porat
Tia Chapman
Sheraz Choudhary
Brian Fell
Julie Baine
Boya Guo
Rhonda Roselli
Patricia Mian
Leicia Chan

24 Myrtle Avenue
6 Myrtle Avenue
2 Myrtle Avenue
1 Park Avenue
27 Myrtle Avenue
94 Lexington Ave, unit 2
17 Myrtle Avenue
32 Magnolia Avenue
32 Magnolia Avenue, unit 2