

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

February 1, 2024 – Meeting conducted online via Zoom Webinar (832 5359 2942) - 6:00 P.M.

Members present (online): Bruce Irving, *Chair*; Joseph Ferrara, Chandra Harrington, Liz Lyster, Jo Solet, Yuting Zhang, *Members*; Paula Paris, *Alternate*

Members absent: Susannah Tobin, *Vice Chair*; Gavin Kleespies, Kyle Sheffield *Alternates*

Staff present (online): Charles Sullivan, *Executive Director*, Sarah Burks, *Preservation Planner*

Public present (online): See attached list.

This meeting was held online with remote participation pursuant to Ch. 2 of the Acts of 2023. The public was able to participate online via the Zoom webinar platform.

With a quorum present, Chair Irving called the meeting to order at 6:04 P.M. He explained the online meeting instructions and public hearing procedures and introduced commissioners and staff. He designated Ms. Paris to vote as alternate.

Case 5065: 123 Brattle St., by Gene & Margaret Blumenreich. Construct one-story addition at rear.

Mr. Sullivan recommended the following case for the consent agenda: **Case 5065: 125 Brattle Street**, by Gene & Margaret Blumenreich for construction of a one-story addition at the rear of the house. He indicated that the house was set far from the road and the addition would not be visible from any public way. Mr. Irving asked if anyone had objections to approving the case without a full hearing. Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked if the plans would be reviewed by staff if approved by the consent agenda. Mr. Irving answered in the affirmative. Dr. Solet asked the applicants if they would prefer to have a full hearing and benefit from the input of the Commissioners. Mr. Blumenreich answered that they would be comfortable dealing with the staff instead. Dr. Solet moved to approve a certificate for Case 5065 per the consent agenda procedure, delegating approval of details to staff. Ms. Paris seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Harrington, Lyster, Solet, Zhang, Irving, Paris)

Public Hearing: Demolition Review

Case D-1675: 315 Rindge Ave., by Anne L. Sirois, Tr. Of the Barbara J. Trant Trust. Demolish workers cottage.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and displayed images of the property while summarizing the written staff report. The 1½-story worker's cottage was constructed before 1852 on the opposite side of the road by Peter Dorey, an Irish-Canadian immigrant to North Cambridge. It was relocated in 1857 to its present site after the wall of an adjacent clay pit collapsed. Rindge Avenue was widened in 1870 and the front yard was reduced by approximately three feet. The home was purchased by the Trant family about 1900 and has been in that family's ownership until the present. The last occupant, Barbara Trant, passed away in 2022 and the property is to be sold. The staff found the building to be significant as a brickyard workers cottage and for its relationship to the brick industry of North Cambridge and the working-class immigrant population of the Race Course neighborhood.

Mr. Irving asked if there were questions of fact from the commission and then from the public.

Dr. Solet complemented the well-researched report.

Ms. Harrington concurred and noted that the house was at the entrance to the Race Course neighborhood.

James Williamson of North Cambridge asked about the outbuilding behind the house. Mr. Sullivan explained that it was a two-car garage constructed of wood and covered with asphalt shingles. He said he did not consider the garage a significant building.

Mr. Irving opened the public comment period regarding the building's significance.

Mr. Williamson said he was pleased to hear the report since he spent so much time in the area.

Anne Sirois, the representative of the family trust, said that she had been trying to sell the property. She said she could not afford to fix the structural problems of the house or to replace the foundation. Mr. Sullivan explained the review process. A delay, if imposed, would be for up to one year.

Mr. Irving said the Commission would take things one step at a time, the first step being a vote on whether to concur with the staff opinion of significance.

Dr. Solet moved to find the building significant as defined in the ordinance and for the reasons stated in the report. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Harrington, Lyster, Solet, Zhang, Irving, Paris)

Housen Zhang, an architect and proposed buyer of the property, presented his design for the replacement building, two attached three-bedroom homes with garages at the ground-floor level and gable roofs. He displayed plans and elevations of the existing and proposed conditions. The project would comply with the requirements of the zoning code. He described the proposed exterior materials, a combination of board siding, stucco, and brick veneer.

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact, first from the commission and then from the public.

Ms. Paris asked for further explanation and comparison of the existing and proposed elevations. Mr. Zhang said he chose the double gable design in response to the cross gable design of the existing. Ms. Paris asked about the depth of the front setback. Mr. Zhang said the front setbacks would be at least 15' as required by zoning. One building was set back further to break the massing.

Ms. Harrington asked if he had considered keeping the existing building. He said the existing house had nonconforming setbacks and would require zoning relief to make additions. He said the ceiling heights were low and the house had structural problems. Ms. Harrington asked if the garages could be oriented differently. Mr. Zhang said the turning radius made that difficult.

Ms. Lyster asked for a height comparison between the existing and proposed. Mr. Zhang said he did not know the height of the existing house, but it was less than the proposed, which would be just under 35 feet. She asked if the driveways would be deep enough for a second car outside of the garage. Mr. Zhang said a small car might fit. Ms. Lyster asked if other materials might fit in with the neighborhood better. Mr. Zhang said the materials on the street were dynamic, so they had selected a variety of cladding materials for the new building.

Mr. Ferrara also asked if the garages could be oriented to face away from the street. Mr. Zhang

explained that it would be difficult to make the turn for side-facing garages.

Dr. Solet asked if it would be difficult to back out onto the busy street. Did other houses have garages facing the street? Mr. Zhang said the view of the driveways was open to the street.

Ms. Zhang asked if the units would be rented or for sale. Mr. Zhang said that decision had not yet been made.

Mr. Williamson noted that there were bus stops on both sides of the street. How would people get in and out of the driveway on the busy street. Mr. Zhang said the drivers would need to use caution. Mr. Williamson asked if the height of the building stepped up in the back and if there would be a net loss of open green space. Mr. Zhang answered that the height does increase at the back and thus breaks up the side elevations. The open space requirements of zoning would be met.

Ms. Meyer asked about the square footage of each unit. Mr. Zhang said each would be about 1700 square feet. Ms. Meyer asked about rotating the building ninety degrees. Mr. Zhang explained the required setbacks were 15' front, 25' rear, and 10' at the sides. Ms. Meyer asked if the roof would be designed for solar panels. Mr. Zhang answered in the affirmative.

Mr. Irving opened the public comment period.

Ms. Meyer was pleased to see the use of the gabled roofs in reference to the existing building. She expressed concern about the number of materials. The stone veneer looked like cinder block in the renderings. She suggested brick. The black roof looked severe. It looked difficult to get in and out of the driveways. She hoped the architect would reconsider the orientation on the lot and the exterior materials.

Mr. Williamson wondered what the Public Works and Traffic departments would say to the plan. He was sympathetic to the current owner's comment about not being able to afford to restore the house. He suggested a more conservative traditional townhouse design.

Ms. Sirois noted that the new Jefferson Park buildings were modern and that there were other modern homes in the Race Course neighborhood. She had no trouble getting in and out of the driveway.

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Dr. Solet said the proposed design did speak to the historic architecture. She questioned the desirability of the front balconies and asked about the material for the railings. Ms. Zhang said it would be a glass or metal railing. Dr. Solet said the proportions of the houses were good and left nice sized back yards but said she wasn't sure about the variety of materials.

Ms. Harrington noted that three bedrooms units were refreshing to see and good for families.

Ms. Paris concurred. Having it go from a single family to a duplex was beneficial. She agreed with Ms. Sirois that there was precedent and context for contemporary design in the neighborhood. She noted it was a busy street, but that was just the way it is.

Ms. Lyster said it would be helpful to have an accurate rendering. Other houses were closer to the street. She recommended moving the balconies to the back and taking another look at the materials.

Ms. Zhang said she appreciated the architect's sensitivity to the pitched roofs and proportions of

the units. She noted the thick profile projecting at the center of each gable. She suggested that the construction details and materials could benefit from further study.

Mr. Ferrara said the left driveway was problematic because people would likely try to park in it, and it wasn't deep enough for that. He agreed about the number and variety of the materials.

Dr. Solet cautioned not to bring the building closer to the street because of noise and particulates from the traffic exhaust.

The commission discussed the options for a motion. Mr. Zhang summarized that the garages were beneficial by hiding the cars away. The neighborhood was very dynamic in age and style of buildings. The sides of the buildings had less variety of materials. The constraints of the site made it difficult to make big changes in the plan.

Ms. Lyster asked if the applicant would agree to a one-month continuance. Mr. Zhang and Ms. Sirois consented.

Dr. Solet moved to continue the hearing to March 7. Ms. Lyster seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Harrington, Lyster, Solet, Zhang, Irving, Paris) Dr. Solet suggested more perspective views, a streetscape, and material study.

Executive Director's Report

Mr. Sullivan reported that he had polled members with expired terms to see if they would serve if reappointed. All had said yes. The City Manager will be seeking some turnover. The membership of the Planning Board changed quite a bit last year. He thanked all the commissioners for serving through a tough couple of years and for their willingness to continue. The staff was considering potential landmark properties with an emphasis on significance to the history of minority communities. He also reported on recent research in the Old Burial Ground.

Dr. Solet asked about Revolution 250th observance planning. Mr. Sullivan said that Gavin Kleespies was the city representative on the state committee. He suggested reaching out to Mr. Kleespies for more information or with offers to help.

Minutes

The Commission considered the minutes of the January 4, 2024 meeting. Dr. Solet said she had been shocked to see how many out-of-town attendees had been at the last meeting. She suggested adding to the minutes that Zoom recordings were available online. She asked if the applicant had refused to consent to a continuance. Ms. Burks answered she would listen to the recording and make sure his remarks were accurately stated. Dr. Solet moved to approve the minutes. Ms. Lyster seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Harrington, Lyster, Solet, Zhang, Irving, Paris)

Ms. Lyster moved to adjourn. Mr. Ferrara seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. (Ferrara, Harrington, Lyster, Solet, Zhang, Irving, Paris) The meeting adjourned at 7:54 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Present on the Zoom Webinar online, February 1, 2024**

Edward Pitts	for 125 Brattle St.
Anne Sirois	315 Rindge Ave.
Housen Zhang	for 315 Rindge Ave.
Gene & Margaret Blumenreich	125 Brattle St.
Suzanne Blier	5 Fuller Pl.
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St.
Anne Sirois	
Liza Paden	6 Theriault Ct.
Charles Fineman	75 Winter St.
Betty Saccoccio	55 Otis St.
John Hawkinson	—
James Williamson	Cambridge

Note: City is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.

Note: See <https://www.cambridgema.gov/historic/permitsApplications/projectplansandstaffreports> for a link to the Zoom meeting recording.