

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

May 1, 2025 – Meeting conducted online via Zoom Webinar (851 7788 4671) - 6:00 P.M.

Present: Chandra Harrington, *Chair*; Susannah Tobin, *Vice Chair*; Liz Lyster, Jo Solet, *Members*; Gavin Kleespies, Paula Paris, Kyle Sheffield, *Alternates*

Absent: Joseph Ferrara, Yuting Zhang, *Members*

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

Public present: 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 Harrington called the meeting to order at 6:11 P.M. She explained the meeting instructions, public hearing procedures and introduced commissioners and staff. She dispensed with the consent agenda. She indicated that public comments would be limited to three minutes.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 5288: 145 Brattle St., by Holy Trinity Armenian Church. Replace non-original windows.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and displayed photos of the William Brewster House, designed by Andrews & Jaques Architects and built in 1887. The house is now the rectory of the Armenian Church. He noted that the windows on the first and second floors had been replaced previously and were failing.

John Marsoobian, of Twin Peaks Construction, presented on behalf of the church. He noted that the house was setback from the street by approximately ninety feet. The church had owned the house since the mid-1950s. He described the scope of the project as interior renovation, exterior repairs, painting, and replacement of windows. He said the proposed window was a Marvin Ultimate wood window with exterior aluminum cladding. He said the window to the right of the front door had previously been replaced but did not adequately match the diamond pattern on the left side. The Marvin windows would be a better match to the diamond pattern in the top sash. He described the other windows on all sides of the building.

Mr. Sheffield asked if the replacements would be insert units or full replacement. Mr. Marsoobian replied that they would be insert units and the existing trim and sills would be maintained on the exterior. The existing vinyl windows were also inserts and the existing frames, sills, and trim are original.

Ms. Paris asked about the estimated life span of the proposed units. Mr. Marsoobian said the clad windows would outlive a new all-wood window product.

Ms. Harrington called for questions of fact from the public.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked if the windows on either side of the front door had leaded glass. Mr. Marsoobian answered that they have wood muntins creating the diamond pattern, not lead canes. The new window in location #1 would be have a wood exterior to best match the one opposite. He said storm windows would remain if in good condition.

Ms. Harrington called for public comment.

Ms. Meyer said she was interested in whether interior or exterior storms would be used.

Ms. Harrington closed the public comment period.

Mr. Kleespies complimented the applicants on a good proposal.

Dr. Solet recommended that the second-floor window in opening #16 (above #1) also be an all-wood unit, not clad.

Mr. Kleespies moved to approve a certificate of appropriateness for all-wood units in openings 1 and 16 and aluminum-clad units elsewhere. Dr. Solet seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Lyster, Solet, Tobin, Paris, Kleespies, Sheffield, Harrington)

Case 5289: 1430 Massachusetts Ave, by GH Holdings LP. Install internally-illuminated projecting sign.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and illustrated the evolution of the College House building from the 1840s to the present. He described the preservation restriction donated in the 1980s and indicated that the sign limitations in the restriction were more stringent than the Harvard Square Conservation District so the proposed blade sign required Commission approval. The wall sign met with the guidelines of the restriction and did not need a vote of the Commission.

Craig Murphy, of CRG Graphics, presented on behalf of the applicant. The new tenant would be Charles Schwab. He said his team would be responsible for installation. A blade sign would provide a welcoming effect for pedestrians approaching the office.

Ms. Paris asked if the blade sign would be internally illuminated. Mr. Murphy replied in the affirmative. Only the letters would be lit.

Dr. Solet asked why the wall sign was gray and the blade sign blue. Mr. Murphy answered that blue was used on Charles Schwab's square logo but not for rectangular logos. She asked if the size of the blade sign matched the height of the granite lintel. Mr. Murphy said the lintel was 20" and the blade sign would be 24". He noted that the minimum height to the bottom of a blade sign must be 8 feet. Dr. Solet asked if the blade sign would block the wall sign. Mr. Murphy replied in the negative.

Mr. Kleespies said the wall sign would be very visible to drivers of automotive vehicles. Mr. Murphy said the blade sign was tailored for pedestrians arriving to the office.

Ms. Harrington called for questions of fact from the public.

Marie Saccoccio of 55 Otis Street asked if a hardship needed to be demonstrated or if the Commission was just looking at design. Mr. Sullivan answered that it was a matter of the appropriateness of the design.

Ms. Meyer asked if the wall sign was taller than the height of the lintel. Mr. Murphy said they were the same height.

Susan Carter of 41 Holden Street asked if there were other blade signs on the building. Mr. Sullivan answered there had not been others installed on the Massachusetts Avenue elevation since the donation of the restriction.

Ms. Harrington called for public comment.

Ms. Saccoccio said she did not support the installation of a blade sign. It would set a bad precedent and would distract and distort the view of the building.

Mr. Sullivan said the strict sign guidelines for the building had not served the building well. This storefront had been vacant for quite some time. Dozens of other projecting signs such as this one had been approved elsewhere in the Harvard Square Conservation District. He recommended that the top of the blade sign be positioned at the midpoint of the lintel and to approve the certificate.

Dr. Solet objected to the blue color, indicated it was not befitting of the classy building.

Mr. Kleespies recalled Ruggles Pizza that had once occupied the building. He said the blade sign was not offensive or overly large. He said it was not inappropriate for a commercial building. He disclosed that he worked for a company that used Charles Schwab but it did not sway his opinion.

Ms. Paris noted that there is a Black History Trail marker in the recessed entry of College House.

Ms. Harrington agreed with Mr. Kleespies that the sign was appropriate for the commercial building. Blade signs were good for pedestrian traffic.

Dr. Solet said the two colors of the signs could be confusing to customers.

Ms. Lyster moved to approve the application for certificate of appropriateness on the condition that the blade sign be lifted to the midpoint of the lintel, with staff approval of details. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion, which passed 6-1 in a roll call vote. (Lyster, Tobin, Paris, Kleespies, Sheffield, and Harrington voted in favor and Solet voted opposed.)

Public Hearing: Demolition Review

Case D-1728: 37 Brookline St., by 37 Brookline Landowner, LLC c/o Just-A-Start. Demolish 3-decker (1907).

Mr. Sullivan explained the demolition review process, which consisted of two parts to the hearing: whether the existing building is significant and whether it is preferably preserved or not. He summarized the staff report about the three-decker residence originally constructed in 1907 on Blanche Street and relocated to its present site in 1991 by MIT as a settlement with Peter Valentine over the redevelopment of Blanche Street as part of University Park. There were three holdouts in the neighborhood: Peter Valentine, Bill Noble, and Bill Flynn. Rent Control was then in effect and required a permit to move or alter the buildings. The Tenants Alliance had participated in a twelve-year discussion with MIT about providing affordable housing in the neighborhood. He noted the particular angle of the building on its lot, a detail that Mr. Valentine had specified. The home at 38 Green Street had also been relocated to 188 Franklin Street. Mr. Sullivan described Peter Valentine, a self-described philosopher and artist, and the art that he had painted on his fence and house. Valentine died in 2022, and his heirs tried to find a buyer who would re-use the house for a community purpose. They ultimately sold the property to Just-A-Start who propose to redevelop the lot for affordable housing. He said he had met with the proponents and their architects and encouraged a design that would evoke the aesthetic precedent of Valentine. The fence had been professionally photographed and portions of it were in storage until a new location could be found

for its re-use or exhibition. He recommended that the building be found significant for its associations with the artist and community activist Peter Valentine and with the twelve-year fight to preserve affordable housing in Cambridge.

Mr. Kleespies said generations of people in Cambridge had grown up in the neighborhood and were familiar with the unique property. He said it was unquestionably significant.

Ms. Paris agreed.

Ms. Harrington called for questions of fact regarding the report and matter of significance. There being no questions, she opened the public comment period regarding the building's significance only.

Esther Hanig of 136 Pine Street objected to finding the house significant. She said Mr. Valentine had acted for his own benefit and had not supported affordable housing initiatives.

David Sullivan of 16 Notre Dame Avenue said he had served as a city councillor during the University Park development era. He said he opposed finding the building significant. Valentine was an interesting character but was no hero of affordable housing. The property was not historic but was a detour into an irrelevant episode of Cambridge history. He said the ordinance was not clear that a vote for significance was not an automatic trigger for delay of demolition.

Mr. Sullivan said the Commission had 45 years of practice with the ordinance and making bifurcated determinations regarding significance and preferably-preserved status.

City Councillor Cathie Zusy stated that the building was significant in her opinion. Peter Valentine was legendary; his house was legendary; and his fence was extraordinary. She said she was at peace with its demolition for thirteen new affordable housing units. She commended Just-A-Start for their community engagement to date.

Marie Saccoccio said she considered the building significant for its associations with Valentine.

Lin Wang of 100 Landsdowne Street said he did not understand why the building would be considered significant. Did Valentine contribute to the art, science or politics of the city?

Justin Saif of Hurley Street said the standards for historical significance should remain high.

Robel Muluallem of 812 Memorial Drive said he didn't know Valentine, but the significance of the building was obvious. He spoke about his challenges as an immigrant and his experience interacting with the property. It was a beacon of hope to him. The esoteric transcendental knowledge conveyed through the art on the building and fence impressed him and he was thankful that he had seen the meeting notice and attended the meeting.

Monica Raymond of 59 Brookline Street indicated there was still a lot of inspiring text painted on the building.

Ms. Harrington closed the public comment period on the matter of significance.

Mr. Kleespies said the significance wasn't about Peter Valentine as a character but the impact the house has on everyone who walks by. It is one of few physical examples of political activism in Cambridge and one of the few examples of counter-culture in Cambridge. Others had disappeared. It wasn't a

question of whether Valentine was a nice person or not.

Ms. Lyster moved to find the existing building significant as defined in the ordinance and for the reasons stated in the report. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Lyster, Solet, Tobin, Paris, Kleespies, Sheffield, Harrington)

Ms. Harrington introduced the second part of the hearing and invited the applicant to present the proposal for a replacement building.

Carl Nagy-Koechlin, Executive Director of Just-A-Start, introduced the team of Nicole Benjamin-Ma of VHB Consultants, Yolanda Gilibert of Just-A-Start, and Iric Rex of Davis Square Architects.

Ms. Gilibert described community engagement per the Affordable Housing Ordinance (AHO).

Mr. Rex shared his screen and described the existing site plan and house. Re-use options had been studied were found infeasible. Flood resiliency required a higher first floor. Re-use of the building would mean fewer units on the site. He described the context of nearby buildings, many of which were four or more stories. He pointed out the angle of the existing house that was repeated on one wall of the new building. He presented the architectural drawings for the replacement building. The front setbacks at the corner were larger than the side setbacks, providing visibility for the busy intersection and robust planting areas along the streets. He described the accessible entries and back patio. He noted that the architectural styling was contemporary, but the angle and colors recalled the existing building. A three-story portion was designed to transition to the lower-density abutter. A roof deck would provide community open space. The mechanicals would not be very prominent because of the parapet. He noted space at the corner for a mural on the building, which could change over time.

Ms. Lyster asked about the size and use of the patio and roof deck. Mr. Rex said the patio was about 8' deep; both patio and deck were shared amenities for the residents. Ms. Lyster asked if the triangular space was living space. Mr. Rex said it was within the living room on most levels. Ms. Lyster asked if re-use of the fence as a mural had been considered. Ms. Gilibert said the potential for the fence or use of its imagery was still being considered.

Dr. Solet remarked on the thoughtfulness of the design. She asked how close the building would be to its abutters. Mr. Rex said the front setbacks provided room for landscaping and storm water storage. The side setbacks were small, but the shadow impacts were minimal.

Mr. Kleespies thanked the team for the design cues relating to the existing building but said he would like to see greater effort toward historic preservation. Could the facades of the existing building be re-used? Mr. Rex said current codes would make that very difficult.

Ms. Harrington asked why the ramp did not start at the corner. Mr. Rex said the grade to the south was higher, allowing for a shorter ramp.

Ms. Harrington called for questions of fact from the public.

Mr. Muluallem asked why the fence had been removed and not re-used. Councillor Zusy answered that museum curators and conservation professionals had been consulted about the fence. The most

significant panels had been retained and were in storage. They were wrapped in mosquito netting for two years to trap any bugs that may be in them. The fence had been well documented in photographs and video. Clapboards on the house could also be removed and preserved. Ultimately, the art might be exhibited or otherwise made available to public view. Mr. Muluaem asked why the new building design had not been more creative. The thirteen resident families need inspiration too.

Ms. Carter suggested interpretive panels about the property could be installed in the park across the street.

Mr. Saif asked about the costs for the property and design. Ms. Gilibert answered that the property had been purchased below market cost for \$1.7M, design costs were \$400,000 and the total development cost would be \$10M.

Ms. Raymond asked if the roof space could be accessible to residents and used as a garden. Mr. Rex said roof plantings were being studied but much of the upper roof would be used for mechanical units and solar panels. Ms. Raymond asked if they were committed to the landscaping plan. Mr. Rex said there was still room for adjustment of the landscape design.

Ms. Saccoccio asked if the design would have differed if they had known the Commission would find it significant. Mr. Rex said it had been designed with that understanding based on staff advice.

Ms. Harrington opened the public comment period.

David Sullivan said it was a great project and commended the design. He said he supported both historic preservation and affordable housing. He cautioned the Commission from overreach or imposing difficult conditions on projects such as this because a super majority of the Council was very focused on removing obstacles to housing development.

Ned Melanson of 163 Allston Street spoke in support of the project. He thanked Councillor Zusy and the team's efforts to preserve the fence. The project should proceed without a delay.

Cathleen Higgins of 345 Norfolk Street gave a strong recommendation that the demolition be allowed without a delay. The project would provide thirteen units at a great location.

Brendan Hickey of Concord Avenue said it was not in the public interest to delay affordable housing. He said he wished the new building was larger.

Jessica Sheehan of Plymouth Street agreed. A delay would increase the cost of the project.

Ms. Wang said she was a housing attorney and worked with low-income clients. The public interest for housing was too great to focus on the fence. It was more important to give people a place to live.

Neil Miller of 425 Massachusetts Avenue said the public interest was in letting more people live in the neighborhood. He said he liked the fence, but the house was not worth preserving. Historic preservation was important, but this building wasn't as important to the community as housing.

Mr. Saif expressed his strong support for letting Just-A-Start move forward. Housing thirteen families was better than one. Further delay would add to the project cost. Other options were studied by Councillor Zusy, but no better option was possible.

David Hattis of 393 Broadway gave his support for the development of affordable housing. A delay could disrupt funding cycles. This is what Valentine's family wanted.

Ms. Raymond said the landscaped area should be usable space for the residents. A grill, or swing set or vegetable garden would be useful.

Ms. Saccoccio said she was shocked to hear a former city councillor question the jurisdiction of the commission. She encouraged the Commission to do its job. She had heard no one say they opposed affordable housing, but there were different ways to go about it.

Mr. Nagy- Koechlin reiterated his appreciation for the productive relationship they have had with CHC staff and the community.

Amber Bemak of Northampton, Mass. said she was Peter Valentine's niece. She described the work she was doing to produce a film about him. She said she was experimenting with photogrammetry and creating a three-dimensional experience of the fence. His family thinks it would be meaningful to remember Peter by providing a place for thirteen families to have housing security.

Ms. Meyer said people continue to conflate support for historic preservation with opposition to affordable housing; the two could work together. Finding a building significant does not mean the Commission will automatically impose a delay. It doesn't mean the Commission is anti-housing to have a hearing to discuss a demolition proposal. She expressed support for the scale and colors of the new building. She said it was a great project.

Councillor Zusy said the house had been considered for re-use as an arts center but the committee could not find funding for that kind of project. She said she has come to embrace this project. The affordable housing will be a nice way of honoring Peter.

Mr. Sullivan said he attended many of the committee's meetings. There was no plausible outcome to preserve the house. Converting the existing building would require so much reconstruction that it would lose its character-defining features. The essence of Valentine's work would be lost. He said he had been clear from the start that he considered the house significant but had worked productively with Just-A-Start in their development and design study for the new building.

Dr. Solet said more green space for the kids who would live in the building would be valuable. A family art space inside would be terrific.

Mr. Kleespies said it was not about Peter but about valuing people's experiences with counter-culture. When all the magical places are gone, Cambridge will not be the same. He expressed support for thirteen affordable units on the site but said the design needs to be reworked. A delay did not have to be as long as a year, but could allow time for some design changes.

Ms. Lyster said two things were missing: a mural with Valentine's art and a larger patio for the use of the residents. She noted that threats to the Commission's jurisdiction were not helpful.

Mr. Sheffield said he appreciated the discussion and the design approach. It's a challenge to design affordable housing that feels like a home. It requires creating a sense of place for the people who

need it the most. He said a facadectomy of the existing walls was not feasible. The physical elements of the existing building did not have to be reused. The design moves incorporating the colors and angles are meaningful. There should be an interpretative explanation of why the building is designed as it is. A plaque could be installed for the public to see. The new residents will create their own memories. The design creates an elevated experience for the residents.

Ms. Lyster moved to find the existing building not preferably preserved in the context of the replacement building for affordable housing, with the condition that some form of explanation be made on the site to explain the design within the historic context of the property. Mr. Sheffield seconded.

Dr. Solet said she would like to be kept up to date by staff on the progress of the project.

The motion passed 6-1 in a roll call vote. (Lyster, Solet, Tobin, Paris, Sheffield and Harrington voted in favor, and Kleespies voted opposed).

Ms. Harrington called for a five-minute break and then reconvened the meeting.

Preservation Grants

Case PG 25-2: 8 Bigelow Street, by Homeowners Rehab. \$25,000 for new gutters.

Case IPG 25-7: 8 Inman St, by St. Mary's Church. \$100,000 for stained glass window restoration.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and showed photos of the two properties. The building at 8 Bigelow had been affordable housing for many years. The grant would cover the extra cost of getting historically appropriate gutters. He described the stained-glass windows in St. Mary's Church which had originally been a Unitarian Church and was moved from Lafayette Square. The windows were not religious designs but were unusually made with both leaded glass and fields of mosaic glass pieces. The total project cost was \$235,000. He recommended a \$50,000 outright grant (the first for the church) and a grant of up to \$50,000 more that would require that the church match the funds. The grant fund balance was \$495,000 for the remainder of the fiscal year, so there was money available for both.

Ms. Paris moved to approve the grants to both properties as described. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Lyster, Solet, Tobin, Paris, Sheffield, Harrington, Kleespies)

Minutes

The Commission discussed the draft minutes of the April 3 meeting. Dr. Solet offered corrections on pages 2 and 3 then moved to approve the minutes as corrected. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Lyster, Solet, Tobin, Paris, Sheffield, Harrington, Kleespies)

Director's Report

Dr. Solet asked if the window guidelines and the city's website list of Commissioners had been updated. Mr. Sullivan said they were in progress.

Mr. Sullivan reported on the interviewing of applicants for the commission. He said he did not know how much turnover of membership on the commission the manager would want to see. He reported on historic markers and the hiring process for a new archivist.

Ms. Lyster said the demolition discussion stayed on track better this time and thanked the chair and staff for the good explanations of process and the added slide in the Powerpoint.

Mr. Sheffield moved to adjourn. Ms. Paris seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Lyster, Solet, Tobin, Paris, Sheffield, Harrington, Kleespies)

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

Members of the Public Present on May 1, 2025

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|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| John Hawkinson | Cambridge |
| Marilee Meyer | 10 Dana St. |
| Perry Brauner | Charles Schwab |
| Amy Tetreault | 1414 Massachusetts Ave. |
| Anna Wason | Davis Square Architects |
| Nicole Benjamin-Ma | VHB |
| Craig Murphy | CRG Graphics |
| Ted Chryssicas | NMRK |
| John Marsoobian | Twin Peaks Construction |
| Iric Rex | Davis Square Architects |
| Yolanda Gilibert | Just-A-Start, 430 Rindge Ave. |
| Carl Nagy-Koechlin | Just-A-Start, 430 Rindge Ave. |
| Stan Lee | |
| Robel Mulualem | 812 Memorial Dr. |
| Theo Smith | 8 Inman St. |
| Amber Bemak | 34 Harlow Ave., Northampton, Mass. |
| Lin Wang | 100 Landsdowne St. |
| David Sullivan | 16 Notre Dame Ave. |
| Ned Melanson | 163 Allston St. |
| Esther Hanig | 136 Pine St, #2 |
| James Zall | 203 Pemberton St. |
| Cathleen Higgins | 345 Norfolk St. |
| Jean Hannon | 7 Woodrow Wilson Ct. Apt. 45 |
| Justin Saif | 259 Hurley St. |
| Patrick Verbeke | 91 Sidney St., Ste. 712 |
| Monica Raymond | 59 Brookline St. |
| Ann Tomsho | 700 Huron Ave. |
| Jessica Sheehan | Plymouth St. |
| Marie Saccoccio | 55 Otis St. |
| Adam Yeh | 1920 Ballenger Ave. |
| Cathie Zusy | 202 Hamilton St. |
| Catiana Jean-Pierre | Cambridge |
| Marc Levy | 3 Potter Park #1 |
| Connor Ring | 430 Rindge Ave. |
| Susan Carter | 41 Holden St. |
| Luke Quinn | 269 Lowell St. |
| Kathleen Moore | 9 Doane St. |
| Daniel Hidalgo | 79 Norfolk St. |
| Hannan Rose | 28 Ellsworth Ave. |
| Matt Martin | 16 Acorn St. |
| Brendan Hickey | 54 Concord Ave. |
| David Hattis | 393 Broadway |
| Michael Rogove | 65 Sparks St. |
| Neil Miller | 425 Massachusetts Ave. |

Note: City is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.

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