

## MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION

Monday, March 2, 2020, 6:00 PM, 4th Fl. Meeting Room, City Hall Annex, 344 Broadway, Cambridge

Commission Members present: Tony Hsiao, *Chair*, Lestra Litchfield, *Vice Chair*, Charles Redmon, Monika Pauli, *Members*, Margaret McMahon, *Alternate*

Staff present: Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public: See attached list.

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Chair Tony Hsiao called the meeting to order at 6:03 pm. Mr. Hsiao made introductions and explained the meeting procedures.

### Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

**Case MC-5888: 23 Myrtle Avenue, by Ann Fullerton o/b/o Martin A. Wartak and Michelle M. Matz.** Exterior alterations including front porch and entrance, new roof and window configuration, replace siding, demolish chimneys.

Ms. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator, introduced the property and showed slides of the Queen Anne style house constructed in 1892, one of 9 structures by the same builder on the street.

Ms. Ann Fullerton, architect for the applicants, presented the proposed project, explaining that the house is in poor condition, including the porch and stairs which were replaced not in kind. The proposed renovation includes a powder room on the first floor, since there is none currently. Ms. Fullerton went on to say that the project does not add to the existing footprint. The applicants are applying for a Variance for 65 gsf, the new entry will be in the same zone. On the second floor she is proposing to box over the porch to create a bedroom, explaining that the owners need a three -bedroom home, and there is also a rental unit in the building which limits where to expand. Ms. Fullerton stated that the owners are looking for a spare aesthetic with lots of glazing because there are a lot of trees on the property (planted by previous owner M. van Valkenburgh). She explained the design to box out the powder room with a raised planter at the sidewalk and the entrance with corner stairs are in response to the existing street tree locations. The design also includes a planter in front of the living room. She explained that the owners care about the pedestrian experience and have hired Pemberton Gardens for the front and back of the house. The proposed skin of the building is a stained hardwood with aluminum framed windows, and painted metal panels in two colors, and a standing seam metal roof. She also mentioned that the existing roofline will not change, and the window positions are staying the same with some new window openings.

Mr. Hsiao asked if they are retaining anything. Ms. Fullerton replied that they are stripping all the sheathing. Vice Chair Lestra Litchfield interjected that there is no cladding to be retained. Ms. Fullerton answered that the siding is cedar and to replace or repair it would be prohibitive.

Commission member Monika Pauli asked how long the owners have lived there. Ms. Fullerton replied 17 years, but she explained that tastes evolve and they would now like a modern aesthetic.

Commission member Charles Redmon asked if the owners had considered demolition. Ms. Fullerton replied that there is still value in the structure. Mr. Wartak, one of the owners, stated that they value the house but they have aging parents and the house does not have a powder room on the first floor to accommodate them. He went on to say that they love the street and the neighborhood and are attached to the community, and that they are just making changes that will work for them.

Ms. Litchfield stated that she understands that it's their house but urged them to understand that there is value to the experience of walking down the street in a neighborhood with a strong historic character.

Mr. Redmon asked for more information on the panels. Ms. Fullerton replied that they will be 10-inch face horizontal and large-scale vertical panels around the windows. Mr. Redmon asked about the finish. Ms. Fullerton responded powder coated, industrial finish. Mr. Redmon asked if there are any sustainable features. Ms. Fullerton answered not beyond the Stretch code, that solar is not an option given the amount of shade, and no geothermal because the backyard is not big enough to accommodate. She also mentioned that they need a drywell.

Mr. Hsiao asked about plantings. Ms. Fullerton replied that they are keeping as many plants as possible, and new plantings will be low-maintenance, and that the front yard needs irrigation.

Mr. Hsiao asked if she has looked at the existing street trees and potential impact of the construction on them. Ms. Fullerton replied that there is enough room for a hoist, and the construction should not impact the trees. Mr. Hsiao asked about the roof profile. Ms. Fullerton answered that they are retaining the same slope on one side.

Ms. Pauli asked what is the surface material at the roof gable. Ms. Fullerton responded that it will be gray metal panels, horizontal 10-inch face, to provide some variation from the wood panels. Ms. Pauli asked if they are the same as the other metal panels. Ms. Fullerton answered that the other panels are larger. Ms. Litchfield asked if they are different colors. Ms. Fullerton responded yes, 2 different colors.

Mr. Hsiao asked if they have looked at built examples of this type of building. Ms. Fullerton replied they looked at 20 Madison Street located near the Observatory composed of cedar clapboard and metal panels, and 139 Walden Street that has a darker stained finish. The Commission members look at images of these buildings on their phones. Ms. Litchfield commented that these are new construction.

Mr. Redmon asked to confirm that there are 2 types of metal panels, 10-inch strips and large panel strips. Ms. Fullerton answered yes.

Mr. Hsiao asked to see the context again. Ms. Crosbie switched to slides of the streetscape. The owner interjected that Michael Van Valkenburgh planted 15 trees.

Mr. Redmon asked about the chimneys. Ms. Fullerton replied that one will remain, its location to be determined. Ms. Crosbie and Mr. Redmon both pointed out that the drawings don't show any chimney. Ms. Fullerton responded that she is still working on the location.

#### Public Comments

Mr. Ray Sherwin of 22 Myrtle Avenue expressed support for the project noting that he did not think that it has any negative impact. He also spoke on behalf of the owners of 22 Myrtle Avenue and that they too support the project.

Mr. Hsiao read 4 letters from abutters into the record, 2 in support and 2 opposed.

#### Commission Comments

Commission member Margaret McMahon stated that the proposal is disruptive to the nature and character of the street, that currently the street is homogeneous but not boring, there is a consistency that creates a very pleasant experience.

Ms. Litchfield stated that she had to agree with the Commission's comments, that she understands the desire to be expressive but buying into the district brings a responsibility, an understanding that the house is part of a patchwork and tells the story of the neighborhood. She explained that the Commission does approve modern additions and new construction. This proposal takes off everything and that is a heartache for the Commission; it would be a huge loss to the neighborhood and street. She also stated that she would prefer that they knock it down since they are essentially demolishing the house and asked what would they do differently. Mr. Wartak answered that they do like the interior.

Ms. Crosbie asked the owners what is it about the interior that they like and are keeping. Ms. Matz, one of the owners, replied some of the molding and the doorways and trim. Ms. Litchfield stated that she is surprised that they like those details but not the exterior. Mr. Wartak explained that they are going to keep some of those a

Ms. Litchfield said this will impact the experience of walking down the street. Mr. Wartak responded that there are other modern houses. Ms. Litchfield replied yes, but this is the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District.

Ms. Fullerton asked the Commission what is the percentage of modern houses in Cambridge. Ms. Crosbie replied she would have to get that information.

Ms. Pauli noted that there is a lot of original fabric on the house. Ms. Fullerton replied that a lot of the details are rotting.

Mr. Redmon noted that it's odd to be using metal panels, Ms. Fullerton responded that they are still discussing the metal, that it's not an industrial building, that right now it's undefined.

Mr. Hsiao stated that the Commission's charge is to look at the appropriateness from the right of way, that they can't comment on the interior. He stated that this house and location are important but what has been presented is moving away from that. Modern interventions succeed as secondary buildings, as completely new, or an addition to an existing house that sensibly handles the thread that connects them. There is nothing left to this house exterior, it's radically different, and a new house would be more understandable. With this you're neither

here nor there, “neither fish nor fowl.” Mr. Hsiao encouraged Ms. Fullerton to show the rendering in the actual site because it would be more revealing, and would show how those proportions are working, and the window placement. As presented, this is a radical departure from the historic neighborhood and not an appropriate response to it.

Mr. Redmon motioned to reject the proposal as submitted, Ms. McMahon seconded, and the motion passed, 5-0.

Mr. Wartak asked the Commission for examples of projects with modern features that were approved. Commission members mentioned the corner of Harvard and Hancock and one on Maple Avenue. Ms. Crosbie said she could send him more information after the meeting. Mr. Wartak asked if the Commission would consider demolition. Mr. Hsiao replied that they would have a better argument for demolition.

**Case MC-5890: 19-21 Line Street, by Stuart Vose.** Reduce size of 1 window opening.

Ms. Crosbie presented slides of the property and the location of a proposed window alteration on the left side of the house. Mr. Patrick Buckley, contractor for the applicant, described the project as a kitchen renovation in a limited space. He is proposing to reduce the size of an existing window in order to move a sink in front of it.

#### Commission Comments

Mr. Redmon suggested installing a solid panel on the bottom of the window so the exterior stays the same while the sink can be accommodated. Mr. Buckley agreed that it was worth looking at.

#### No Public Comments or Questions

#### Commission Comments

Ms. Litchfield motioned to approve of the application with the recommendation that the window sill frame is kept with a panel installed at the bottom of the window interior. Ms. McMahon seconded, and the motion passes 5-0.

**Case MC-5891: 15-17 Lee Street, #7, by Curtis Hall.** Construct new window opening.

Ms. Crosbie showed slides of the property which is listed on the National Register and noted that the review is binding

Mr. Curtis Hall, the owner, explained that he is proposing to install a window in their bathroom also used by their 4-year old daughter, located on the right side of the structure. The proposed window is a pushout window for ventilation.

#### No Commission or Public Questions

#### Commission Comments

Ms. Litchfield stated that the proposed design was sensitive to the existing architecture. Mr. Redmon concurred.

Mr. Redmon moved to approve the application as presented. Mr. Hsiao seconded, and the motion passes 5-0.

Minutes

Ms. Litchfield motioned to approve the February 3, 2020 minutes, Ms. McMahon seconded, and approved, 5-0.

Mr. Hsiao adjourned the meeting at 7:06 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

**Members of the Public Present on March 2, 2020  
(who signed the attendance list)**

Ann Fullerton, architect	23 Myrtle Ave (Honeycomb D+B)
Curtis Hall, owner	15 Lee Street, #7
Michelle (Matz) Wartak, owner	23 Myrtle Avenue
Martin Wartak, owner	23 Myrtle Avenue
Patrick Buckley, contractor	19-21 Line Street (Keltic Colors)
Kevin McCarthy, contractor	19-21 Line Street (Keltic Colors)

Note: All addresses are located in Cambridge and/or Massachusetts unless otherwise noted.