

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

March 1, 2018 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge Senior Center - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: Bruce Irving, *Chair*; Susannah Tobin, *Vice Chair*; William Barry, Robert Crocker, Jo M. Solet, *Members*; Paula Paris *Alternate*

Members absent: Joseph Ferrara, Chandra Harrington, *Members*; Kyle Sheffield, Gavin Kleespies, *Alternates*

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

Public present: See attached list.

Mr. Irving called the meeting to order at 6:06 P.M. He made introductions, reviewed hearing procedures, and dispensed with the consent agenda.

Public Hearing: Landmark Designation Proceedings

Case L-119: 135 Western Ave. Bluepower, LLC, owner. Consider study report and make recommendation to City Council.

Ms. Burks showed slides and summarized the staff report. She noted that the report had been drafted over a year ago but the hearing was delayed for the purpose of allowing the owner time to consult an architect about a preliminary concept for an addition to the building.

Jai Khalsa, of Khalsa Design Associates, presented a massing study for an addition to create a rear unit. He emphasized that the plans were not detailed yet but very preliminary. He said the addition was intended to be zoning compliant. He said he personally was very fond of this house. He displayed renderings of the existing house and proposed conditions with the addition and a dormer.

Mr. Sullivan clarified that the designs were not part of an application for certificate, but shown for discussion purposes and possibly for reference in the landmark report as an acceptable massing study but with the requirement that an application and detailed drawings would still be needed before an addition would be approved by the Commission.

Dr. Solet asked if the concept was to keep the existing ell and expand it. Mr. Khalsa replied in the affirmative saying that a new roof would overlay the ell.

Mr. Barry asked if the roof plane could be non-continuous between the main roof and addition.

Mr. Irving asked if there were questions of fact from the public. There being none, he opened the floor to public comment.

Allison Crump of 9 Kinnaird Street expressed strong support for designation. She was delighted that the new owners were continuing the upkeep of this important house. She noted that the Cambridge Heritage Trust had made a grant to a previous owner, Mary Alice Johnson, to stabilize the columns as an emergency fix until funds were available for a more complete repair and renovation. The CHT grant predated any grant from the CHC preservation grant program. She spoke in favor of leaving the roof of the main block undisturbed. She objected to the dormer and co-planar roof of the addition, as shown in the current rendering, but agreed that the design for an addition could be adjusted to be not incongruous.

Mr. Sullivan recommended approving the massing model as proposed within the context of the

landmark report with the exceptions of the co-planar roof, dormer design, light wells, entrances, fenestration, which would all come back to the Commission for design review as part of an application for a certificate of appropriateness at some point in the future. Mr. Barry so moved.

Ms. Burks noted that an owner was present and might wish to make a statement.

Steve Dai of Blue Power LLC noted that said the company had invested money soon after purchasing the property to make repairs. The company's intention was to maintain the beauty and history of the property. It did, however, want to better utilize the back of the house and lot to create a second unit. The addition would use the best materials and compatible design.

Dr. Solet noted that reference to *Building Old Cambridge* needed to be updated on page 7 of the report. She seconded the motion. Mr. Irving designated Ms. Paris to vote on all matters as alternate. The motion passed 6-0.

Case L-122: 101 Rogers St. (The Blake & Knowles Foundry building) City of Cambridge, owner. Consider study report and make recommendation to City Council.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the report. He noted that a 70' high apartment building was currently under construction at the corner of Rogers and Binney streets. On the other side of the foundry was Verizon's switching building. When originally built, the foundry had no upper floors; it was all open inside and there was a traveling crane to assist with the pouring of molten metal into molds. The original floors were dirt to prevent splashes and burning by the molten metal. He described the history of the Blake & Knowles Company and named subsequent owners. The building had been adaptively re-used in 1983 for office space and upper floors added at that time. He showed slides of the heavy timber framing and explained that though archaic by 1890, the heavy slow-burning timbers were actually a fire retarding technique for industrial buildings. The City had acquired the building as part of a mitigation package for a large project by Alexandria in the Kendall Square area. There had been controversy about the first proposal for re-use of the building and the Commission had initiated a landmark study to ensure it would be protected in future plans.

Dr. Solet commented that the report was very interesting, especially the portion about the women workers at the foundry and the legislation that resulted from that debate about women in traditionally male jobs. She noted that a pay equity bill was in the legislature now and it would be very fitting if the landmark and the bill were both passed this year.

Tom Evans of the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority (CRA) reported that the city and the CRA had combined resources to commit over \$30 million toward the renovation of the building. He explained that the CRA was currently seeking an operator. The program for the building were that 40% of it would be leased at market rate and 60% of it would be allotted for community use including things like a theater, STEAM education, etc. He described some anticipated changes, such as lowering the first floor to meet grade for better accessibility and division of the interior spaces. Cambridge Seven Associates had

been contracted to provide design services. He requested that the hearing be continued for a month to allow time for the architects to review the report, consider the design guidelines and make any comments before sending it to the City Council.

Mr. Irving asked for public questions of fact and public comment.

Marie Elena Saccoccio of 55 Otis Street explained her research on the women workers at the foundry. She first found articles about the Polish women of East Cambridge who were doing heavy work there. The women were paid lower wages, which the business owners liked but upset the unions of male workers. Two warrants were granted to investigate the working conditions of the mixed male/female workplace and if it was suitable for women employees. The sexism of the whole thing is hard to imagine today but was a very interesting episode in history. The men claimed they were upset about the conditions of the worksite for the “fairer sex” but it really boiled down to jobs and wages. She said the building was one of the most significant in the city because of this history. She remarked on the interior features of the building and said she hoped that it could be protected. A Friends of the Foundry group was organizing. Maybe a non-profit could accept enforce an interior preservation restriction on the building.

Heather Hoffman of 213 Hurley Street agreed that the building was incredibly significant and also beautiful. She expressed annoyance that it would be blocked from view by the new apartment building. She indicated the report was incorrect in saying that 10,000 sf of space in the building was specified in the zoning amendment for Alexandria. She said the entire building was supposed to be used for community purposes. She said the Commission should support the goal expressed in the zoning.

Betty Saccoccio of 55 Otis Street said the exposed wood framing was gorgeous and the architectural plans should keep the framing intact and visible. It should not all be boxed in behind drywall.

Barry Zevin, a member of the CRA board, said he would appreciate protection for the interior.

Mr. Sullivan said that although landmark status would not allow the Commission to regulate the interior, it would give the Commission a seat at the table in the city process for designing the project. He did not think it was realistic to expect the city to give a preservation restriction to the National Trust or Historic New England because of the cost. He did not think the interior framing was threatened because it could be a positive feature for the types of uses in the program. Cambridge Seven designed the Conductors Building restoration in Harvard Square and know how to celebrate an industrial interior.

Mr. Evans said the city had encouraged the CRA to show off the industrial heritage of the building and its design features. The women’s labor history could be featured in the building also. He said he would send the Commission the language in state statute about a public-private partnership for a demonstration project.

Mr. Barry commented that the 1980s entry addition was not appropriate and he would support its removal. Mr. Sullivan agreed it was expendable.

Mr. Irving asked if there was any remnant of the core rooms. Mr. Sullivan said there was not.

Ms. Tobin moved to continue the hearing to April 5 at the request of the CRA. Mr. Crocker seconded the motion, which passed 6-0. [Mr. Crocker left].

New Business

40 Cottage Street. Robin Chase and Roy Russell, owners. Discussion about owners' letter to City Council regarding the landmark recommendation of the Commission.

Mr. Sullivan reported that the City Council had considered the landmark recommendation on February 5 and had an extended discussion on the matter. The measure was charter-righted. On February 26 the Council ordered that 44 Cottage Street be designated a landmark, but did not vote on 40 Cottage Street. The owners of 40 Cottage Street submitted a letter agreeing to consult with the Historical Commission staff about fundamental changes to the house. He read an excerpt of the letter. One councilor suggested a protocol similar to the one the Commission had with Harvard and MIT. The Council continued the matter for a week to allow time for the Commission to comment on the proposed arrangement. Mr. Sullivan said he did not think that a reciprocal exchange of letters was appropriate for this situation. Harvard and MIT were both long-term institutions but the ownership of a private home implied a shorter timeline and the protocol would have no impact on actions of future owners. He said the term "fundamental changes" in the letter was unclear and he'd like more specificity about what that meant before agreeing to consult with the owners about them.

Mr. Barry said the letter would be a new type of arrangement and it would be better to use the existing landmark process rather than create precedent for something less formal.

Mr. Sullivan said he did not think that a majority of councilors would vote in favor of designation. He recommended that the Commission communicate its preference for landmark designation but if the votes for that were not there, to accept the owners' offer to confer with staff in the future.

Dr. Solet said she was dumbfounded when she read the letter. It claimed that there were only fourteen private homes protected by landmark regulation when in fact there were hundreds of homes protected in the same way in historic districts and neighborhood conservation districts. Her personal experience as a homeowner in a historic district was that the advice of the Commission was very valuable and in no way onerous. She asked if a preservation restriction had been discussed with the owners.

Mr. Sullivan replied in the negative. He noted that if demolition were proposed in the future the Commission's review process would start anew.

Ms. Tobin agreed with Mr. Sullivan that there should not be a reciprocal exchange of letters such as with MIT and Harvard.

Owner Roy Russell was present but indicated he did not have any comments.

The chair asked Mr. Sullivan to share the Commission's comments with the Council.

Minutes

Dr. Solet offered a tense change on page 6 and an addition on page 7. Paragraph 6 should include

her recommendation that the mural use an eagle in a creative way, since there was an eagle in the bank's logo.

Mr. Irving suggested the word "really" be moved on page 6, paragraph 2.

Mr. Barry moved to approve the minutes as corrected. Ms. Paris seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Mr. Irving acknowledged the letter received from Daryl Janes of Linnaean Street.

There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Barry moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:50. Mr. Irving seconded, and the motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed the Attendance List on March 1, 2018**

Betty Lee Saccoccio	55 Otis St
Kathleen Ranelli	58½ Spring St
Marie Elena Saccoccio	55 Otis St
Allison Crump	9 Kinnaird St
J. S. Khalsa	149 Sherman St
Victoria Kennedy	7 Eustis St
John Hawkinson	jhawk@mit.edu
Barry Zevin	67 Hampshire St
Tom Evans	255 Main St
Beaver Spooner	329 Walden St
Heather Hoffman	213 Hurley St

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.