

RECEIVED

SEP 01 2015

Hand delivered to the Cambridge Historical Commission

831 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140
Charles Sullivan, Executive Director

CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Date:
31 August 2015

Re:
Hearing regarding proposal to renovate 41 Gibson Street, Cambridge, MA 02138

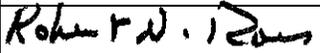
The Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Historical Commission met on 17 August 2015 to consider extensive changes to the property at 41 Gibson Street (formerly Barbara Ackermann's house).

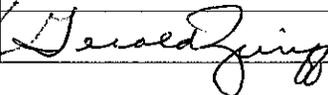
We, the undersigned, do not believe that the conduct of the meeting served the stated purpose of the Cambridge Historical Society: namely, to "preserve, conserve, and protect the distinctive features of the Half Crown-Marsh neighborhood through identification, conservation, and maintenance of its areas, sites, and structures."

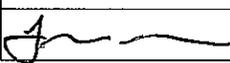
Consequently, we, the undersigned, respectfully request that the Cambridge Historical Commission direct the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Historical Commission to re-open discussion of the many proposed structural changes to 41 Gibson Street approved in totality by the Half Crown-Marsh Commission.

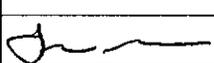
Reasons for this petition are outlined in the attached correspondence.

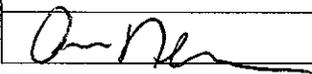
Respectfully submitted by the following registered voters and Fran Adams, owner and resident of 10 Kenway Street:

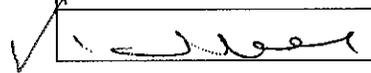
Signature	Printed Name	Address
	ROBERT N. ROSS	10 KENWAY STREET

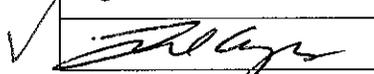
Signature	Printed Name	Address
	Gerald Zuriff	120 Foster St.

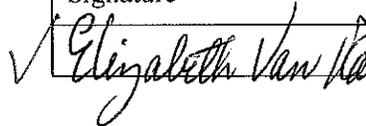
Signature	Printed Name	Address
	FRANCIS NECZYBOR	114 FOSTER ST.

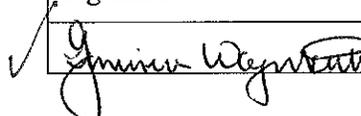
Signature	Printed Name	Address
	FRANCIS NECZYBOR	9 DOANE ST.

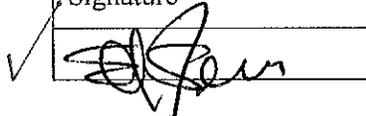
Signature	Printed Name	Address
	Ann Neczybor	114 Foster St

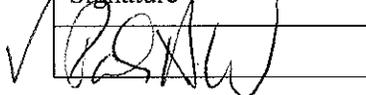
Signature	Printed Name	Address
✓ 	Kathleen Moore	9 Deane ST

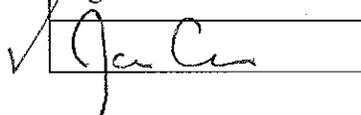
Signature	Printed Name	Address
✓ 	Ted Wajendrecht	43 Gibson St.

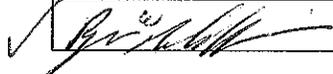
Signature	Printed Name	Address
✓ 	Elizabeth Van Raast	120 Foster St.

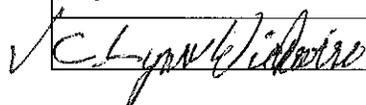
Signature	Printed Name	Address
✓ 	Genevieve Wajendrecht	43 Gibson St.

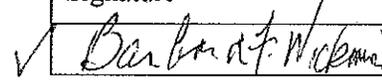
Signature	Printed Name	Address
✓ 	Edward Serves	100 Foster ST

Signature	Printed Name	Address
✓ 	PATRICIA A. WANNER	100 Foster St.

Signature	Printed Name	Address
✓ 	Jay Connor	98 Foster

Signature	Printed Name	Address
✓ 	Reza Mahdavi	140 Foster Street

Signature	Printed Name	Address
✓ 	C. Lynn Wickwire	40 Gibson St., Cambridge

Signature	Printed Name	Address
✓ 	BARBARA F. WICKWIRE	40 GIBSON ST., CAMBRIDGE

Signature	Printed Name	Address

Signature	Printed Name	Address

Signature	Printed Name	Address

Signature	Printed Name	Address

ROBERT N. ROSS, PH.D.
10 KENWAY STREET
CAMBRIDGE, MA 02138
TELEPHONE: 617.945.5084
MOBILE: 617.501.3800
EMAIL: Rn01ross@gmail.com

20 August 2015

Charles Sullivan, Executive Director
Cambridge Historical Society

Re: 41 Gibson Street, Cambridge

Dear Mr. Sullivan:

The Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Historical Commission met on 17 August 2015 to consider extensive changes to the property at 41 Gibson Street (formerly Barbara Ackermann's house).

I do not believe that the conduct of the meeting served the stated purpose of the Cambridge Historical Society: namely, to "preserve, conserve, and protect the distinctive features of the Half Crown neighborhood through identification, conservation, and maintenance of its areas, sites, and structures."

Consequently, I am respectfully requesting that the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Historical Commission re-open the discussion of the many changes the Commission approved in totality.

My reasons for making this request are detailed below.

First, I think that adding the proposed balcony to the flat roof on the Kenway Street side of the house is a design error that does a great injustice to the historical character of the house. The Commission acknowledged that the house is a rare example of an Empire Mansard style. The construction of such a balcony would obscure significant architectural elements of the building: (a) the existing window would be made into a door to the balcony; (b) the door would interrupt the flow of the dentil molding of the cornice so that there would be an awkward run of only a few feet from the door to the corner of the house; (c) the mandatory railing of the balcony would further degrade the design of that portion of the house and emphasize the intrusion of the balcony; and (d) if the existing slightly pitched roof is not removed and rebuilt, leveling the floor of the proposed balcony would require a broad

fascia board to fill the space between the top surface of the balcony floor and the bottom surface of the existing roof. The resulting broad expanse of fascia board would underscore, and make more visually massive from both Gibson Street and Kenway Street, the intrusion of this balcony and its adnexa, which are totally out of keeping with the graceful design of the existing house. Finally, I object to building the proposed balcony on the grounds that it faces into our bathroom and directly overlooks our patio.

However, although I cannot agree with the decision of the Commission to permit construction of this balcony, I would draw particular attention to the process that led the Commission to its decisions regarding this house.

For this reason, I am requesting that the discussion of 41 Gibson Street be reopened.

The presentation by the owners was sorely lacking in detail (for example, what does "Victorian style railing" mean in actual fact? What does "restoration of the windows" mean?). I wish the Commission had pressed the owners for details. The Commission did not.

The presentation focused on the details (which are important) but ignored the larger issues of the plot plan (not submitted by the owners) and, of course, the driveway issue. The driveway question was simply kicked to the Zoning Board of Appeal (ZBA) as if the ZBA would not have benefitted from an opinion from the Historical Commission. In fact, the ZBA code (6.35.1 (5) explicitly states that consideration of a curb cut and off-street parking will consider (and I quote)

"Impact of the parking requirement on the physical environment of the affected lot or the adjacent lots including reduction in green space, destruction of significant existing trees and other vegetation, destruction of existing dwelling units, significant negative impact on the historic resources on the lot, impairment of the urban design objectives of the city as set forth in Section 19.30 of the Zoning Ordinance, or loss of pedestrian amenities along public ways."

It was irresponsible of the Commission not to give guidance to the ZBA on this crucial question.

My chief disappointment, however, is with how the Commission conducted its business during the public hearing.

(1) The Commission, I would say, pretended to have concerns, but voiced them in such a careless way that the "concerns" simply disappeared from the discussion and the final vote. The very first comment from the Commission

was about the car drawn to the left of the house (looking from Gibson) as if there would be a driveway there. When the owner responded by saying that the car should not have been drawn there, the Commission did not follow up with the obvious question of how the car came to be placed there in the drawing, or whether a driveway would be put anywhere on the property. A second example is the absence of a site plan. The Commission made a pretense of caring that there was no presentation of an overall plan for the property: driveway, other structures, landscaping, etc. **But in the end, that omission of what the Commission seemed to think was a critical piece of data had no impact on the deliberations of the Commission or the final vote.**

(2) The deliberations of the Commission were remarkably devoid of nuance. Renovating a house like this one is a complicated undertaking. There was **little serious discussion of how the renovation would serve to protect this historically valuable asset, namely a rare example of notable Cambridge architecture.** Instead, the owners were permitted to make windows into doors, change windows, move windows, and enclose a graceful arch on the distinctively deep and generous porch in order to enclose a mudroom.

(3) It was my strong impression that the Commission was not taking its mission seriously during the meeting. The fact that one member of the Commission left the room to take a number of telephone calls and, on returning never asked what she might have missed, suggests to me that **she had more important things on her mind than the issue before the Commission.** In addition, when the Commission requested any clarifying information from the presenter, the conversation took place at the Commissioners' table, with the presenter's back to the public. Despite a request that the public be allowed to hear those private conversations, **the Chair did not make it possible for the public to be a party to what was transacted essentially in private, and thereby effectively excluded the public from making informed comment.**

(4) The Commission, which has the mission of protecting the values of the neighborhood, elicited questions of fact and comments from the public. Eight immediate neighbors (representing 6 properties) repeatedly voiced concerns about proposed changes to the house (notably removing or changing windows and inserting doors, introducing a second-floor balcony) or concerns about probable changes upon which the proposal was silent (notably placement of the driveway and impact on existing greenery and greenery that would be unavoidably destroyed during the construction process) but the Commission did not engage the public in any discussion of these voiced concerns. In short, **the Commission did not respond to any of**

the issues raised by the concerned public, despite the fact that the neighbors will live for many years with the results of the Commission inaction.

(5) The vagueness of the deliberations, the unresponsiveness to the public, and the failure of the Commission to take its guardianship role seriously are all reflected in the "motion" to be voted on. I doubt that anyone could have paraphrased the rambling discourse that stood in place of a motion to vote on the proposal. Nevertheless, the "motion" to accept the proposal in its entirety was promptly seconded (in fact, by the very member of the Commission who had left the room several times to take her telephone calls) and passed with little further discussion either among Commissioners or with further comment from the public. In other words, **the public had no opportunity to respond to possible misperceptions and misstatements by the Commission prior to their putting the question to a vote.**

(6) The fact that the vote was an undifferentiated yes or no suggests, further, that the outcome of the vote was a foregone conclusion. The Commission had several courses of action open to it and chose to take the course of least resistance – approve the project in totality – despite the fact that the Commission has sometimes given provisional or partial approval to an owner's proposal. **The public hearing was not a serious forum in which to balance the interests of the owners and the neighbors or to protect the interests of the larger Cambridge community.**

I look forward to hearing your response to this request.

Sincerely,

Robert N. Ross

cc:

For the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

James Van Sickle, Chair
Judith Dortz, Vice Chair
Marie-Pierre Dillenseger
William King
Deborah Masterson
Dr. Peter Schur
Charles Smith

For the Cambridge Historical Society

Ted Beaty, President
Leland Cheung, Cambridge City Councilor



RE: Historical Commission

Ted Wagenknecht <tw@appliedfr.com>

Mon, Aug 24, 2015 at 2:11 PM

To: Robert Ross <rn01ross@gmail.com>, Marie-Pierre Dillenseger <mpdillenseger@gmail.com>, Frank Neczypor <fmneczypor@outlook.com>, Elizabeth Van Ranst <elizabeth.vanranst@verizon.net>

Below is the letter written to Leland Cheung (sent direct via email), and to Sullivan, head of the Cambridge Historic Commission. Rob has already written- who is next?

Best,

Ted

Dear Mr. Sullivan- attached is a letter written to Leland Cheung asking him to revisit last week's Half Crown-Marsh Historical Commission decision regarding 41 Gibson Street. I am writing you to encourage you to do the same. Both myself and my concerned neighbors would like the Historical Commission to step-in and revisit this decision.

Best,

Ted

Leland Cheung

Cambridge City Councillor

Via email

cc: Charles Sullivan

Re: 41 Gibson Street Historical Commission Application for Change

Dear Councillor Cheung,

My name is Ted Wagenknecht, and I am one of your constituents living in the Half Crown-Marsh conservation

district at 43 Gibson Street, Cambridge. I am writing you for your help (based on your promise to your community) in creating a neighborhood that lives up to your promise of "inclusionary zoning" for all.

Last week on the 17th of August, our local "Half Crown-Marsh Historical Commission" held a "hearing" on proposed changes to one of the most historical homes in our area, 41 Gibson St, the former home of Barbara Ackermann, the first female mayor of Cambridge. While I believe our city should claim this property as a special "historical" home, I will leave that aside (with the hope that YOU will take that up on your own) and speak solely to what I believe is one of the most ridiculous examples of how this neighborhood "commission" is failing (miserably) to live up to the needs of the neighborhood and the city.

On the 17th, 6 of the 7 (85.7%) homeowners who are abutters of the subject property (41 Gibson Street) took time out of their lives to appear at the "Commission" meeting to express their (overwhelmingly negative) views on the proposed changes to the Ackermann home. These views were all but ignored by the "Commission"- led by two "alternates"- who refused to allow us, as the concerned public, to express our dismay at the proposed changes to the property, and who- despite numerous actions that showed no care about the input of these 86% of neighbors, allowed the proposed plans- many of which destroy this historical home- to continue (un-abated).

I am writing to ask for YOU to step-in and STOP this action by the "Commission", and require a "revised hearing". Our reasons are several-fold: the "Commission", which voted 3 to 2 to "approve" these plans, included: a) 1 member who spent the majority of the meeting on her cell-phone answering calls, (and thus not listening to the concerns of the public during the meeting), and a Chair and Vice-Chair who are "Alternates"; b) the architect representing the proposed property owners severely mis-labeled his drawings, in which the east-facing façade was labelled "north facing" and all others were wrongly labelled, leading the "Commission" to be severely confused; c) the new property owner FAILED to deliver a "site plan" which is required by the "Commission" to make a decision, adding to the "confusion" of the commission, and potentially allowing un-approved or un-documented changes to be made to the site over time; d) several previously un-announced changes were added during the meeting: (the addition of "zoning inappropriate" air-conditioner units within plain sight of the street, and a "deck" (previously downplayed as an aesthetic and non-usable space, but described to the "Commission" during the hearing as a substantial addition of outdoor space) on the second floor of the proposed property that completely ignores the historical profile of the home), and were announced only during the "hearing", which were all ignored and accepted by this "board" in their ultimate "decision".

Further, the failure of the applicant to include a site plan for review by the "Commission", and the Commission's failure to require such a site plan to be provided before rendering an approval, could allow for the ultimate inclusion of elements that define "EXCLUSIONARY ZONING"- namely- the applicant wants to develop a parking space on the Gibson side of their lot, which, in addition to not conforming to the zoning requirements for such an addition, would eliminate street-level parking that is used and needed by the numerous rental tenants in the neighborhood, (parking which is already lacking). Further, this proposed parking space would "pave over" significant marshland greenspace that everyone in the neighborhood enjoys, and which was carefully cultivated by Barbara Ackermann for decades. Despite unanimous rejection by the neighbors in attendance, because the "Commission" failed to withhold approval or express their concerns over this element (which, while not binding, is their right and duty to do) plans for a parking space addition and other exterior site-related elements will likely go directly through the "historical commission" to the next level of decision makers (who are even further removed from the sensitive nature of these matters).

Why did the Commission NOT incorporate their comments on this element of the plan in their decision despite their overwhelmingly (based on their own statements during the hearing) negative opinion on the development of a driveway on the "Gibson Street" side of their property? Because the Cambridge appointed "liason", Samantha Paull, failed to allow the "Commission" to express this opinion, having mis-interpreted and mis-understood the mandate of the Commission to not include purview over items such as these. This further added to the Commission's confusion about what they can and cannot comment on (for your reference the Order by which the Commission was established allows the Commission to make comments on certain elements like driveways, walking paths, etc, although this opinion is not binding on the City Council). When this liason's uninformed opinion is combined with the fact that the new property owners FAILED to submit a site plan to the "Commission", and failed to deliver a "real and authentic" "PLAN" for their property (having excluded items like landscaping and development mitigation, because, again, they had been told by Ms. Paull that each was "beyond the scope of the (Commission)" (which is false)), one cannot help but to believe that neither the Commission nor Ms. Paull had any idea what they were doing in this meeting. Their knee-jerk reaction was to simply approve the plans full-stop- (including items altered last minute at the meeting, plans mis-labeled by the architect, without a site plan, without a property plan, and knowing full well that certain items (those most directly related to EXCLUSIONARY ZONING ELEMENTS) had been purposefully "excluded" at the suggestion of the liason, and that 6 out of 7 bordering neighbors objected to these plans). This was not an organized process- this was a calamity. Adding insult to injury was the seconding voter-- the lady who spent half of the meeting talking on her cell phone outside the building.

Our neighborhood is a beautiful example of what makes Cambridge special with respect to architectural differences, what allows West Cambridge to be a leader in inclusionary zoning, and what allows us to be a leader in architectural "difference": This farce of a "Commission"- led by a liason who was confused as to the Commission's role and rights in the process, and who allowed the applicant to submit an incomplete application- ignored all of these principals and paved the way for these new owners to radically change the landscape of this neighborhood, including eliminating parking for rental units on our block, and permitting the construction of a new deck that looks straight into the bathroom of a neighbor.

Leland, please stop this "Commission" from approving these plans. Where else have you seen 6/7 of all homes abutting a property raise such strong objections to plans of change? Please call for a second hearing- attended by yourself and others of the city's highest historical commission- to set right this obvious and glaring mistake by the Half Crown-Marsh Historical Commission- and let us work together to replace this "Commission" with citizens who will actually preserve our historical properties.

Sincerely,

Ted Wagenknecht

43 Gibson Street, Cambridge

Theodore H. Wagenknecht, CFA

Portfolio Manager