

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

November 4, 2010 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: William B. King, *Chair*; Bruce Irving, *Vice Chair*; M. Wyllis Bibbins, Robert Crocker, Chandra Harrington, Jo M. Solet, *Members*; Shary Page Berg, Joseph Ferrara, *Alternates*

Members absent: Frank Shirley, *Member*; Susannah Tobin, *Alternate*

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, Sarah Burles

Public present: See attached list.

Chair King called the meeting to order at 6:05 P.M. and made introductions. He designated alternate member Berg to vote. He reviewed the hearing procedures and consent agenda policy.

Mr. King recommended Case 2613 to be approved per the consent agenda policy. Dr. Solet so moved. Mr. Crocker seconded, and the motion passed 7-0.

Public Hearings: Landmark Designation Proceedings

Case L-73: 1991 Massachusetts Ave., St. James's Episcopal Church, owner. Consider landmark study report and make recommendation to City Council.

Mr. Bibbins recused himself and left the table because of a former professional relationship with the church.

Mr. Sullivan reviewed the history of the property and described the historic and architectural justification for designation. [Mr. Ferrara arrived]. He described previous landmark studies in the 1990s and 2005. In 2005, the Commission decided not to pursue landmark designation because of a preservation restriction held by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). He described the timeline of the current development proposal. He described the Commission's conditional approvals of the condominium project and the church's responses to those conditions. He explained that landmark designation would require continued Historical Commission approval of exterior alterations to the landmarked property. He reviewed the general standards and the proposed designation order which would incorporate the October 25, 2010 drawings referenced in a Certificate of Appropriateness, a draft of which was attached to the report. He described the remaining conditions: that the final color of the trim be approved by the Historical Commission, the landscape plan be approved by the staff in consultation with Shary Berg, and the construction details be reviewed and approved by the staff.

Mr. King pointed out that the 2005 agreement between the Historical Commission and the church was discussed earlier in the designation process. This agreement had acknowledged the significance of the Knight's Garden and views of the church from Massachusetts Avenue. The Commission asked how those considerations were addressed by the development proposal, and the church made a compelling case that it was in the greater public interest to allow the development project because it would provide financial resources to care for its historic sanctuary. Mr. King said the landmark report was not explicit that all those things were well considered by the Commission, but it was in the Commission's record that it had done so. He noted that the City Council typically refers landmark orders to the Ordinance Committee for a public hearing. He suggested a few changes to the proposed council order, and submitted the written recommendations to the staff.

Mr. King asked for questions or comments from the Commission.

Ms. Berg said the oak trees on Beech Street would be vulnerable during construction.

Mr. King asked for questions from the public.

Elaine Callahan spoke on behalf of Jackie Kelly. She asked about the appeal period for a Certificate of Appropriateness. Mr. King indicated that the appeal period followed the filing of the certificate with the City Clerk.

Michael Brandon of the North Cambridge Stabilization Committee asked if a certificate had been approved on October 29, 2010 at the Commission's site meeting. He asked the status of the project with MHC.

Mr. King replied that the Commission had reviewed the landscape plan and the materials mock-up at the site and had voted to approve a conditional certificate of appropriateness, which had been drafted but not yet filed with the city clerk. Mr. Sullivan said an MHC staff member had met on site two weeks earlier and indicated that he was satisfied with the project as proposed.

Mr. Brandon said he did not approve of the project. He described the physical problems with the historic sanctuary building such as a leaking roof, windows in need of restoration, and missing fire protection equipment. He said those repairs should be made sooner rather than later. He spoke in support of the landmark designation. He noted that the banners at the entrance were not appropriate and should have been reviewed during the study period.

Mr. King noted that there were banners on the church when the study was initiated. The Commission would inquire of the church whether they had changed and noted that construction signs were exempt from review.

Rev. Holly Antolini of St. James's Church described anticipated alterations to the new garden, including temporary installation of tents, replacement of plantings as needed, and possible installation of a columbarium.

Mr. Sullivan said the Commission could exempt tents and other temporary structures. Trees and plant materials were not typically subject to the Commission's jurisdiction. A columbarium would require approval.

Mr. Brandon suggested that a limit be placed on the number of church functions that could be held within the new garden. Mr. King acknowledged the suggestion but said he was satisfied with the language of the church's commitment to keep the garden open to the public with limited reasons for closure.

Dr. Solet moved to adopt the landmark study report and the amended city council order and to forward them to the City Council with a recommendation for designation. Ms. Berg seconded the motion. Mr. King designated Mr. Ferrara to vote, and the motion passed 7-0 with both alternates voting and Mr. Bibbins not voting.

Mr. Bibbins returned to the table.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 2624: 41 Sacramento St., by John Morway. Remove rear ell and front vestibule, install new windows and restore building exterior.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the 1854 house, the first Cambridge residence of William Dean Howells. He noted that the property had been designated a landmark last year. He displayed a 1920s photograph of the house in its original configuration and described the numerous alterations.

John Morway, the property owner, indicated that he was using the photograph, Howell's own descriptions, and the two other Cambridge houses of this type as guides for his restoration. He wanted to remove an addition to the ell and rebuild it. He planned to eliminate the non-original windows on the east side of the front elevation.

Mr. King asked if the front steps would remain as steep. Mr. Morway replied that they would, probably. Howells had described a retaining wall, but Mr. Morway had not yet figured out what to do about the grade yet.

Mr. Ferrara asked about the windows on the ell. Mr. Morway replied that they would be shorter than the windows on the front of the house. The trim at the eave of the ell would mimic that on the front portion of the house, but lower.

Dr. Solet suggested solving the kitchen window/counter height issue by constructing a well between the counter and the double-hung window.

Mr. Morway said the mudroom at the back of the house would be the family's main entrance. He would add an elevator for his 92-year-old mother.

Mr. Sullivan asked about clapboards, window trim, cornice, dentils, windows and whether drawings had been prepared for the building permit. Mr. Morway said he was replacing the clapboards, duplicating window trim, scraping and painting the cornice and dentils where they were sound, and installing new windows. He would prepare drawings of the new entrance but not of the front part of the house where he was restoring the original.

Mr. King asked if there was a chimney. Mr. Morway replied there was one in the back for a furnace but not one on the front block of the house for a fireplace.

There were no comments or questions from the public, so Mr. King closed the public comment period.

Mr. Sullivan said the proposed restoration was extraordinary for a house that had been all but written off. He recommended that the work needed to be better documented and suggested that the Commission approve a Certificate of Appropriateness in principle, pending submission of details of the rear demolition, addition, windows, trim, and site plan. It was not the Commission's practice to approve projects based on an oral description of intent.

Ms. Harrington said the drawings and details should come back to the full Commission.

Mr. King recommended toning down the trim on the ell to keep it subsidiary to the trim on the front block. Mr. Ferrara agreed.

Mr. King said the Commission could applaud the concept described by the applicant, but find the application incomplete and wait on approval of a certificate until further details were provided.

Mr. Bibbins said the photographs were descriptive for the restoration aspects of the project, but further details were needed on the volumetric aspects. Dr. Solet agreed. She asked for more information about the front door.

Mr. Ferrara moved to express enthusiastic support for the proposal and to continue the hearing to the next meeting, with the owner's consent, at which point the Commission could review drawings and details to be submitted by the applicant. Mr. Morway agreed to the continuation, but was concerned that he would not be able to start construction in the winter months. Mr. Irving seconded the motion. Mr. King designated Mr. Ferrara to vote, and the motion passed 7-0.

Public Hearings: Demolition Review

Case D-1208: 18 Reservoir St., by 18 Reservoir Street LLC. Demolish existing house for open space.

Mr. King reviewed the demolition delay ordinance and hearing procedures.

Ms. Burks showed slides and summarized the staff memo. The Colonial Revival house was built in 1949 on the same location as an earlier carriage house that serviced the former Gothic Revival house at 64 Highland Street (demolished 1963). She summarized the application to demolish the house and landscape the lot as a continuation of the yard of 12 Reservoir Street. She described the limited visibility of the house from different public ways.

James Rafferty, the property owner's attorney, explained that the three lots were not officially under common ownership. The owner of 18 Reservoir was the 18 Reservoir LLC, the center lot at 14 Reservoir was owned by the 14 Reservoir LLC, and 12 Reservoir was owned by James Bailey. Zoning would allow, as of right, a house three times the size of the existing house. He described the conceptual landscape plan. The landscape would be simpler than the formal gardens at 14 Reservoir Street, but the details were not yet formalized. The yard would be open to view. Preserving the house for six months would be a burden to the owner and the public benefit would be unclear.

Mr. Bibbins noted that 18 Reservoir Street was difficult to see from the public way.

Mr. King said he would have trouble finding the house significant.

Dr. Solet noted that the owner could change his mind and redevelop the lot after the house was demolished. Mr. Rafferty acknowledged the point, but noted that there was a pattern of development of open space at the 14 Reservoir Street lot.

Mr. Ferrara said he found the replacement plan appealing and would not vote to find the house significant.

Mr. Bibbins moved to find the building not significant. Mr. Irving seconded the motion. Mr. King said the record would show that the Commission noted that the house was barely visible from a public way. He designated Ms. Berg to vote on the motion, and the motion passed 7-0.

Case D-1209: 180 Franklin St., by John Kennedy. Demolish 1-1/2 story commercial building.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the building, built in 1929 as a photo processing lab. The 1½ - story brick building was 12 bays deep and 3 bays wide with minimal architectural detail. He described the residential neighborhood context and the parking lot on the side of the building. He described the growth of personal photography and commercial photo finishing services. The mechanized processing in this building was designed to develop 1000 rolls of film per hour. Photographs were also printed and framed in the same building. The Belluche lab occupied the building for over 30 years and was succeeded by a printer. It was converted to offices circa 1990.

John Kennedy, the owner, explained that he had initially planned to renovate the building, but the architect and builder had advised him to raze it. He noted that there were no features of the photo lab remaining inside.

Mark Boyes-Watson, the architect, displayed a site plan and described the residential C-1 zone and surrounding buildings. He described the proposed change of use to five residential units in three buildings. He displayed the proposed placement of the buildings, including a two-family townhouse at the street, a single-family at the street, and a two-family townhouse behind. Each building would be 2½ stories with each unit being approximately 1300 square feet. The existing building with a deep basement would not lend itself well to residential conversion. The non-conforming building was ill-configured for residential use and was not in good condition.

Dr. Solet asked for more information about the proposed design of the buildings. Mr. Boyes-Watson said they would be traditional in massing but contemporary in elevation.

Mr. King asked for questions from the public.

Maryann Taylor of 55A Brookline Street asked if there would be shadow cast on her property. Mr. Boyes-Watson described the rotation of the sun and the position of the buildings. He concluded that there would not be an impact on the sunshine at her house.

Larry Papalambros of 117 Auburn Street expressed concern about privacy and asked about balconies.

Stan Lee of 55B Brookline Street noted that there was a gate at the back corner of the parking lot which provided emergency egress for his building. Mr. Kennedy answered that there would still be room for the gate and emergency egress. Ms. Taylor noted that there was also a gate from the back of 107 Auburn St. onto the parking lot.

Mr. Kennedy submitted a letter of support from Jonathan Silverstein of 107 Auburn Street.

Dr. Solet moved to find the building significant for the reasons specified in the staff report and as defined in the ordinance. Mr. Irving seconded. Mr. King designated Mr. Ferrara to vote, and the motion passed 6-1. Mr. Bibbins voted in opposition.

Dr. Solet noted there wasn't much information provided about the proposed replacement buildings.

Mr. King said he would vote to find the existing building preferably preserved until more information could be provided on the proposed replacement. A well-designed townhouse project might be very appropriate for the site.

Mr. Boyes-Watson described the time constraints for the project and noted that the significance of the building was marginal, even to the staff. Mr. Sullivan said there had been a miscommunication about the building's significance, which became more evident when an article was found describing the building's use and design.

Dr. Solet recommended that the owner speak to the neighbors and answer their questions before returning in December with more information about the replacement buildings.

Mr. Irving moved to find the building preferably preserved. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 with Mr. Ferrara voting.

Determination of Procedure: Landmark Designation Proceedings

Case L-97: 40 Norris St. (former Ellis School/North Cambridge Catholic High School). Petition received to initiate a landmark designation study of property

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the former school and its residential context. The current owner's proposal for 38 units of housing was scheduled to be heard by the Planning Board. Exterior alterations were proposed to include the addition of skylights and the removal of a fire escape. A valid petition for landmark study had not been received in time to advertise the matter for a public hearing.

Young Kim, a petitioner and resident of 17 Norris Street, said the neighbors were deeply concerned and wanted to work with the developer on the design of the building. He expressed concern about the roof windows and their effect on the slate roof. He described the similar Carr School by the same architect in Somerville, which had been converted in 1980 under the supervision of the city.

Dan Berkow of 13 Norris Street expressed concern about the roof and the developer's intent to add extra floors in the attic. The Carr School had been converted into 20 units and the attic was not developed. He said the density of the project was a concern to the neighbors.

Mr. King described the landmark study process and interim protections. He said the Commission should schedule a public hearing for the December meeting.

Michael Brandon, of 27 Seven Pines Avenue and the North Cambridge Stabilization Committee, expressed support for the petition. He believed the developer needed a variance for the project because it was in a Residence B zone. The Commission's involvement would be helpful with the design. The Inspectional Services Department had stopped work that exceeded the interior demolition permit.

Mr. Irving moved to schedule a public hearing for December 2 to consider the initiation of a landmark study. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion. Mr. King designated Ms. Berg to vote, and the motion passed 7-0.

Mr. King expressed interest in seeing the interior of the building. He stressed that the Commission did not have jurisdiction to regulate alterations to the interior spaces.

Determination of Procedure: Neighborhood Conservation District Business

Consider letter from George Kent regarding the project at 45 Foster Street in the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District.

Mr. Sullivan said he had just telephoned Mr. Kent, who said he was not aware that the matter was on the agenda. How did the Commission want to proceed? He noted that there was no formal process for hearing Kent's concerns as an appeal, but as a member of the public, he could ask to address the Commission about them.

Mr. Irving moved to acknowledge the receipt of Mr. Kent's letter of October 16, 2010 and to invite him to address the Commission at the meeting on December 2, 2010. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion. Mr. King designated Mr. Ferrara to vote, and the motion passed 7-0.

John Greenup, the owner of 45 Foster Street, said that if the Commission heard Mr. Kent's appeal on the decisions delegated to the staff it would be exposing all applicants up to the possibility of appeals outside the procedures outlined in the ordinance. Mr. Sullivan said that allowing Mr. Kent to address the Commission would not affect Mr. Greenup, because it had been made clear to him that his letter could not be considered as an appeal.

New Business

Determination of Procedure: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 2637: 8 Traill St., by Richard R. Beaty. Change exterior paint color.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and explained that the house had previously been stained green. He reported that the property owner had been consulting with staff member Susan Maycock about new exterior colors, but they had not yet reached agreement. He recommended delegating the approval of colors to the staff.

Dr. Solet moved to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for changes to the exterior paint or stain colors, subject to the approval of the staff and the ten day notice procedures. Mr. Irving seconded the motion. Mr. King designated Ms. Berg to vote, and the motion passed 7-0.

Case 2638: 136 Brattle St., by Carin Knoop. Install removable handicap ramp on an as-needed basis.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the application for a temporary ramp at the right side of the entrance. He recommended that the Commission grant a temporary Certificate of Hardship for the ramp for the duration of the mother's occupancy, subject to the approval of details by the staff and the ten-day-notice procedures.

Mr. Ferrara so moved, Dr. Solet seconded, Mr. King designated Mr. Ferrara to vote, and the motion passed 7-0.

Minutes

Mr. Irving moved to approve the October 7 minutes as submitted. Dr. Solet seconded. Mr. King designated Ms. Berg to vote, and the motion passed 7-0.

Mr. Irving moved to adjourn, and Mr. Ferrara seconded. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 9:25 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 11/4/10**

John Morway	47 Prentiss St
Chris Dindal	625 Mt Auburn St
Mark Yoder	21 Haskell
Jeff Zinsmeyer	8 Berkeley St
Holly Antolini	1991 Mass Ave
John Hixson	41 Norris St
Young Kim	17 Norris St
Lilla Johnson	23 Rice St
Jessica Rabban	35 Norris St
Lois Carna	13 Norris St
Dan Bertko	13 Norris St
Rich Clarey	15 Brookford St
Michael Brandon	27 Seven Pines Ave
Elaine Callahan, for Jackie Kelley of	42 Blake St
Stan Lee	55B Brookline St
Maryann (Mimi) Taylor	55A Brookline St
Charlotte Karney	41 Granite St
Larry Papalambros	117 Auburn St
Mark Boyes-Watson	30 Bow St, Somerville 02143
Theresa Norris	25 Aum (?) St
Rebekah Bjork	20 Concord Ave
John Greenup	65 Sparks St

Town is Cambridge unless otherwise indicated.