

Approved 6/2/11

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

April 29, 2011 – Christ Church Cambridge, 0 Garden Street - 8:30 A.M.

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

Members absent: Robert Crocker, *Member*; Susannah Tobin, *Alternate*

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, Sarah Burks

Public present: See attached list.

Chair King called the meeting to order at 8:35 A.M. and made introductions. He explained that the public hearing on April 7 had been continued to May 5 and this site visit had been scheduled for the interim.

Case 2685: 0 Garden St., by Christ Church Cambridge. Alterations at sanctuary entrance for accessibility including grade changes, sloped walkways, raised garden beds, paving, and alterations to doors; two lights.

Charles Sullivan distributed images of the church over the years from 1792 to the 1930s. He described the grading around the entrance and how it had changed very slightly over time. He explained that in 1977 a Certificate of Appropriateness was issued to Christ Church to restore the front doors of the vestibule to duplicate as nearly as possible the swing, paneling and proportions of the original design. The front pair was approved to be full-height, round-headed doors opening inward and the side pairs of doors were approved to retain their outward opening for egress with rectangular doors and fixed, arched transoms. He summarized the current application to change the front doors to open outward and to change the grade around the tower so that all three doorways would be accessible. He pointed out the prominent water table around the foundation of the building and noted that it would be covered by the change in grade around the tower.

Bill Bibbins noted that the church was more significant than many buildings the Commission reviews. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards would address many of the issues faced in this case.

Mr. Sullivan agreed that it was a building of national significance, being one of three religious buildings designed by Peter Harrison and a rare example of an architect-designed building of the Colonial period.

Reverend Joseph Robinson described some historic events in the life of the church.

Mr. King indicated that minor modifications had been made to the church over the years. The church did not have to remain exactly as Peter Harrison designed it.

Frank Shirley, the architect, noted that the Victorianization of the church interior (polychrome paint and angels painted on the ceiling, etc.) began to be reversed in the 1920s.

Charlie Allen noted that the church was probably originally meant to be covered in roughcast (stucco), but was left with wood siding as a cost saving.

Jo Solet reported that she had heard from persons with disabilities on Farwell Place that the sidewalk at the back of the church was not well maintained in winter, making it difficult to get to the front door.

Jonathan Austin, chair of the property committee, noted that the front doors were nicely framed by the semi-circular drive. Everyone should be able to enter the main entrance.

Rev. Robinson explained that the exit of the congregation out of the church at the end of the service was a theological act; it was their “procession into the world.” The side doors of the tower had only been opened about five times in the five years that he had been at the church. The existing accessible entrance was through the Parish House to the front of the sanctuary via a very circuitous route. He led the Commission through the Parish House to the sanctuary. It was noted that the aisle near the organ was not 36” wide.

The Commission moved outside to view the areas of the water table that would be removed in the current proposal. Mr. Sullivan noted that it was unusual to have the foundation extend beyond the walls. Mr. Bibbins said the water table unified the whole building. Mr. Irving added that it gave the building a foot.

Mr. Shirley said he was not convinced that the water table had been designed by Peter Harrison. Harrison never visited the site, but had designed the church from a distance after the congregation had already set the dimensions. He noted that there was a fourth church designed by Harrison. This church was the only example where the foundation was so configured.

Dr. Solet asked if the church had considered making just one side door accessible.

Mr. Austin asked if the Commission was concerned about the removal of original historic fabric or about the detail of the design. Mr. Bibbins replied that both were important considerations.

Mr. Austin clarified his April 7 remarks: the cost of the project wouldn’t trigger accessibility improvements; the church wanted to have a universally-accessible design. They wanted a subtle design that would not draw attention to the fact that it was an accessible entrance but looked as if it could have always been there.

Mr. Sullivan said the Commission had never denied an accessibility application.

Mr. Shirley said the church had asked him to address the front entrance first. The congregation wanted the front doors to be open to all. The front of the church had lost its vibrancy with the haphazard parking and lack of maintenance. He demonstrated that the water table was deteriorating. He said the proposed design was very subtle and would make the church come alive.

[Mr. Irving left].

Dr. Solet questioned why a mobility-impaired individual would come all the way around the tower to the front doors if the side doors were equally accessible. She noted that if the doors opened out, they would further impede the walkway. Mr. Bibbins agreed, noting that the side doors only opened 90 degrees.

Reverend Robinson said outswinging doors made an obvious sign that the church was open to the public and could be seen from a distance. He said he was uncomfortable with Mr. Bibbins’ participation on the case because he had represented the church in the 1977 application.

Mr. Sullivan said that the doors would have to be moved to the front of the jambs to make them swing outward. This would inappropriately make them co-planar with the façade; the shadow lines would be lost and the definition of the façade reduced.

The Commission moved to the sidewalk to better visualize the proposed changes. Mr. Sullivan noted that the semicircular drive had been there a long time, but there were more granite posts and curbing than before. All the changes since the church was included in the historic district in 1963 had been approved by the Commission.

Dr. Solet suggested that the additional lighting be low to the ground. Ms. Berg offered an alternative: move the new lights further to the sides and away from the building. Mr. Shirley said the new lamp posts were desired for improved security but that the light source should not be visible from the pulpit through the windows. Low lights at hip level had been considered but were ruled out due to concern about vandalism.

Dr. Solet asked if there were parking guidelines or restrictions.

Rev. Robinson replied that parking on the brick walkway was typical in his observation. There were no official restrictions.

Dr. Solet moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Harrington seconded, and the motion passed 6-0. The meeting adjourned at 9:47 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 4/29/11**

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| Frank Shirley | 75 Henry St |
| Charlie Allen | 91 River St |
| Jonathan Austin | 38 Cameron Ave |
| Rev. Joseph Robinson | 0 Garden St |
| Steven Spandle | |

Town is Cambridge unless otherwise indicated.