

Approved 9/8/11

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

June 2, 2011 – Cambridge Senior Center, 806 Massachusetts Ave. – 6:00 P.M.

Members present: William King, *Chair*; Bruce Irving, *Vice Chair*; M. Wyllis Bibbins, *Members*;
Shary Page Berg, Susannah Tobin, *Alternates*

Members absent: Robert Crocker, Chandra Harrington, Jo Solet, *Members*; Joseph Ferrara, *Alternate*

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, Sarah Burks

Public present: See attached list.

Chair King called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM and made introductions. He designated alternate members Susannah Tobin and Shary Berg to vote on all matters. He described the consent agenda procedure and asked if there were cases for which members of the staff, Commission, or the public would like to dispense with a full hearing. The following cases were identified for the consent agenda procedure, and no objections were registered:

Case 2716: 61 Church St., by Storey Properties, LLC. Alter configuration of brick piers, storefront glazing, and doors on first floor.

Case 2726: 18 Mason St., by Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. Install cooling condenser at rear of Radcliffe Gymnasium with acoustical enclosure; extend existing chain link fence.

Vice Chair Bruce Irving moved to approve cases 2716 and 2726 per the consent agenda procedure and subject to approval of construction details by staff. Ms. Tobin seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 2715: 1374 Massachusetts Ave., by Cambridge Savings Bank. Internally illuminated blade sign.

Mr. King disclosed that he was an honorary trustee and that he and Mr. Bibbins were both incorporators of the bank. He said they would ordinarily recuse themselves, but if they did so there would not be a quorum. He said the Commission could ask the applicant to withdraw or continue its application but if 45 days were to expire without the applicant's withdrawal or continuance, Chapter 40C would require that a Certificate of Hardship be issued for the requested alteration. He suggested that if there were no objections from anyone present, the mandatory participation clause would apply and he and Mr. Bibbins could participate in the deliberation and vote.

There were no objections made from anyone present.

Charles Sullivan showed slides and summarized the application.

Kevin Duggan, of Metro Sign & Awning, described the proposed blade sign. Only the letters, not the entire face, would be illuminated from inside. He indicated the bank's desire for a sign near ground level, which it did not currently have. It would be a smaller blade sign than the Citizens Bank sign around the corner.

Ms. Berg asked about the decorative cap. Mr. Duggan explained that it was designed to simulate the architecture of the bank. Ms. Berg said that signs should look like signs and buildings should look like buildings.

Mr. Bibbins asked about the materials of the sign. Mr. Duggan said that the cabinet would be made of aluminum and the sign would be vinyl.

Mr. King asked for questions of fact from the public, but there were none asked.

Bob Riley of 15 Brattle Circle recommended approval of the sign.

Harvey Kaufman of 21 Clary Street asked if there was precedent for blade signs in Harvard Square. Mr. King answered that there were several examples on the same block. He closed the public comment period.

Mr. Irving moved to approve the proposed sign material, lighting and size but to condition approval on the frame color being a similar brown color as the adjacent spandrel, elimination of the dentils in the crown, and subject to the approval of staff. Ms. Berg seconded, and the motion passed 5-0.

Case 2717: 1131 Massachusetts Ave./1-5 Remington St., by Veritas at Harvard Square, LLC. Application for Certificate of Hardship for existing transformer, installed previously in violation of Case 1956.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and reviewed the history of the case. He described the existing transformer cabinet, which had been installed without approval of the Commission. No resolution to the violation had been made by the applicant, so the city had filed a complaint in Superior Court. The case was in abeyance until the current application for a Certificate of Hardship had been considered by the Commission at a public hearing. He had hoped to receive a technical report from the applicant indicating why this location and this transformer model was required and what other options had been evaluated. A proposed screen had been submitted to the Commission.

James Rafferty, attorney for the applicant, displayed a picture of the property before it was redeveloped. He explained that three pole-mounted transformers on the opposite side of Remington Street serviced the area before the new transformer was installed. The transformers were replaced by NSTAR with the pad-mounted transformer with the permission of the Pole & Conduit Commission. NSTAR had pursued the installation with an easement from the property owner. The owners did not know that the transformer was not on the plans approved by the Historical Commission or that they needed to come back to the Commission for approval. The work was not done furtively or knowingly by the owner as outside the rules of the Commission. He had received permission from NSTAR to summarize the meeting that took place to study alternative sites and that they had confirmed that there were 4 properties being served by the transformer. The equipment needed to be accessible for “hotstick” maintenance equipment. There were physical limitations of the site and substantial costs to changing the installation. He requested the Commission grant a Certificate of Hardship for the installation due to these physical and financial hardships, and offered to screen the transformer cabinet with plantings and fencing. The removal of the pole-mounted transformers could be considered an improvement to the streetscape. He submitted materials from the Pole & Conduit Commission and the Harvard Square Conservation District designation order.

Mr. King asked the staff what findings were necessary for the issuance of a Certificate of Hardship.

Mr. Sullivan read from Chapter 40C, the same language which is incorporated into Chapter 2.78 of the City Code with respect to procedures in neighborhood conservation districts. Certificates of Hardship can be issued if the hardship does not affect the district generally, and if the work will not cause “substantial detriment to the public welfare and without substantial derogation from the intent and purpose of [the legislation].”

Mr. Rafferty then read some of the goals from the Harvard Square NCD designation order

Richard Kattman, a landscape architect, described the existing conditions. The cabinet was painted brown and there was a 3’ high steel fence at the edge of the property. There wasn’t much space between the curb and the concrete pad, so he proposed removing the fence, building a trellis the same height as the transformer, and plant-

ing holly and evergreen euonymus bushes and wisteria vines to help screen it from the sidewalk. The existing tree and some shrubs would be relocated.

Ms. Burks asked which properties were serviced by the transformer. Mr. Rafferty said the site plan showed four 4" conduits across Remington Street. The properties to receive the conduit were not listed.

Mr. King asked for more information about alternative sites, like the garage. Mr. Rafferty answered that the garage ramp's 21% slope was too steep for NSTAR's trucks.

Harvey Kaufman of 21 Clary Street said the transformer was very heavy and shouldn't go on the roof.

Richard Monagle of 1770 Massachusetts Avenue said that NSTAR had initially said the transformer would go in a vault below Massachusetts Avenue, then later they decided to remove the pole-mounted transformers. He said he did not remember a basement location ever being proposed.

Mr. King said that he would not have voted in favor of the project had the transformer been proposed for its present location. He wanted to be sure that every alternative was considered.

Ms. Berg said it might be reasonable for the hotel to have its own transformer, not servicing additional properties, located in the side yard.

Mr. Rafferty said the decision-making had been done with the understanding that the utility was making the necessary permit approvals. Millions of dollars had been spent on the project, and moving the transformer now would cause substantial hardship to the owners.

Mr. Riley said NSTAR showed no interest in solving problems and he had ended up taking them to court.

Mr. Kaufman said the size of the transformer benefited NSTAR, not the hotel.

Mr. King closed public testimony. He said that the Commission had agreed that the hotel design met several goals of the district. He would like to see NSTAR come to the table and participate.

Mr. Sullivan said that the Commission and staff spent a lot of time reviewing all aspects of the exterior design. The staff was not notified of the recent site visit by NSTAR. There must be alternative designs for transformer(s). If one of the arguments for hardship was that it would be very costly to pursue an alternative design, then those alternatives must exist and an estimate of the cost must be known. What are those alternatives and cost comparisons? Not enough information had been made available.

Mr. Rafferty asked for feedback on the proposed screen. Mr. King said that if the transformer had to stay, this was a good attempt at screening it. He still questioned the need for the transformer in its current location.

Mr. Irving asked if a different type of transformer could be installed. What was beneath it? Mr. Monagle replied that the storm water retention tank was underneath the existing location.

Jeffrey Taccio, attorney for the applicants, indicated that Harvard Square utility work had to be done in the middle of the night. NSTAR could probably compel the owner to pay for any changes to the installation.

Ms. Berg noted that if a smaller transformer, for service to the hotel only, were installed, then perhaps it could be lowered or relocated. Mr. Irving agreed.

Mr. Rafferty noted that NSTAR already had the easement, and lacked incentive to revisit the matter.

Ms. Tobin said there must be some benefit to NSTAR to have the larger transformer in place.

Mr. King indicated that without the owner of the structure present and without other information about the case, he could not make a determination on the request for a Certificate of Hardship.

Mr. Rafferty asked if the Commission would continue the case so they could try to get NSTAR to participate in the discussions. Mr. Sullivan suggested that the applicant seek the opinion of an independent electrical contractor on the technical issues.

Mr. Irving moved to continue the hearing to not later than the September 8 meeting. Ms. Berg seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Public Hearing: Demolition Review

Case D-1226: 17 Clary St., by 17 Clary St., LLC. Demolish house (1891).

Mr. King explained the purpose and procedures of the demolition delay ordinance.

Ms. Burks showed slides and reviewed the history and architecture of the house.

Campbell Ellsworth, the architect and developer, said he did not take the demolition request lightly and always tried to maintain an existing house on a site, but could not find a workable solution in this case. He distributed renderings of the proposed project. He described the high density of the buildings in the neighborhood, some with more than .75 FAR. He noted that he had sent letters to the abutters to explain his project. He had received two responses with general concerns about trees and parking. He noted that the existing house's roof ridge was approximately 35'6". The new construction would not exceed 31'. The existing house was non-conforming ~~on~~ with only a 3' side setback. There was very little original detail remaining inside the building. His replacement project would not require zoning relief. There would be parking for all 5 units in the courtyard. Entries for two of the units would be on the street. The heights of the units would vary. Each unit would have private garden space. He described the proposed materials of shiplap cedar or Hardie planks and Hardie panels with battening on the bays. He described his goals for efficiency of the units. He displayed a photo montage of the proposed streetscape.

Lisa White of 4 Houghton Street said the property had been used as a dump. She welcomed a new project, although she expressed concern about losing tall trees and having more competition for on-street parking. She asked how cars would maneuver in the courtyard if there was a lot of snow.

Mary Moreira of 6-8 Houghton Street said that anything would be better than the existing conditions. She had similar concerns about trees, which provided shade and privacy. She hoped there would be pest control measures taken before demolition.

Michael LaVigne of 4 Houghton Street expressed support for the modern design. He did not object to the demolition. He noted that a fire that destroyed the barn at 17 Clary could have taken out the whole neighborhood, if not for the quick response of the fire department. There was no redeeming value to the house.

Harvey Kaufman of 21 Clary Street noted the limited parking on the dead-end street. He asked about snow removal. The house had not been maintained and had no historical significance.

Mr. King read an e-mail received from Alex Steinbergh, trustee for 6-8 Clary Street and 355-365 Prospect Street. The e-mail expressed support for the project.

Mr. King noted an increasing tension between old houses and a desire for green new construction. He questioned the significance of the existing house. He commended Mr. Ellsworth for a well-conceived design.

Mr. Bibbins said the existing site arrangement was not preferable to the proposed.

Mr. Irving moved to find the existing house significant for the reasons set forth in the staff memo. Ms. Tobin seconded, and the motion passed 3-2 with Mr. King and Mr. Bibbins voting in opposition.

Ms. Berg moved to find the existing house not preferably preserved in the context of the proposed re-placement project. Mr. Bibbins seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Mr. King called for a brief recess at 8:35 P.M. and reconvened at 8:40 P.M.

Case D-1227: 2-10 Brattle Circle, by Brattle Circle Series E Trust. Demolish rear additions of 2 Brattle Circle. (1857), and free-standing house (1940) and garage/studio at 10 Brattle Circle.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and summarized the staff memo on the subdivision of the site, which once contained Mount Auburn Cemetery's ~~its~~ superintendent's house and greenhouses. He described the four structures on the former Galvin property including the old superintendent's house (#2), Galvin's own home (#10), a converted barn (#6-8) and a garage/studio fronting on Mount Auburn Street. He described the architectural and real estate development career of William Galvin. Over the years, the site became very dense with many apartments in the buildings. He described the large rooms and generous light in Galvin's own home of 1940 at the center of the lot. Little maintenance had been performed since Galvin's death in 1983 and the condition had deteriorated.

Lauren Harder, an owner, reported that they had met several times with the neighbors about the proposal.

Mark Boyes-Watson, the architect, displayed site plans and a model to describe the proposed project. The main block of #2 would be restored. The rear additions and the other three buildings would be razed. He described the proposed parking accommodations. The new buildings would be connected by single-story connectors.

Mr. King asked if other Brattle Circle properties had rights to the courtyard between #2 and #10. Mr. Boyes-Watson answered in the negative. There were 12 existing units with 9 parking spaces and the proposed project would have 10 units with 13 parking spaces.

Joan Pinck of 234 Brattle Street indicated that she expected about 15-20 cars for the 10 proposed units.

Gary Seligson of 220 Brattle Street said that parking was his only concern. The previous occupants had very few cars, some of which were not even operable.

Sebastian Martellotto of 457 Mt. Auburn Street worried that there would be more traffic turning off Mt. Auburn Street. He was concerned about lights, noise, privacy, and windows. He asked about impact to trees.

Mr. Boyes-Watson said there was a 5' setback between the driveway and the property line, which would be planted. The overgrown yews would be removed. The tree in the courtyard would be saved.

Dan Pinck of 234 Brattle Street asked about utility requirements. He expressed concern about the construction noise and hours.

Mr. King asked what other permits were needed for the project. Mr. Boyes-Watson answered that the project would require townhouse and parking special permits from the Planning Board as well as variances from the Board of Zoning Appeal. The proposed conditions would be in greater zoning conformity than the existing

conditions, but would still need relief. If all approvals were granted, construction could start in the fall and last for about a year.

Mr. King asked about #2. Mr. Boyes-Watson said materials would be saved or replaced in kind, except possibly for the roofing.

Martin Hill, an owner, explained that trucks and machinery would use both Brattle Street and Mt. Auburn Street for access to the site.

Mr. King closed the public comment period.

Ms. Berg suggested that photographs be taken to document the buildings after the yews were removed. Mr. Hill said he had hired a photographer to document the project a couple times a week.

Ms. Tobin moved to find the buildings significant for the reasons in the staff report and as defined in the ordinance. Mr. Irving seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Mr. Irving moved to convey approval in principle for the project but to find #2 and #10 preferably preserved until such time that the other permits required for the replacement project are granted. He further moved to find #6-8 and the garage/studio not preferably preserved. Ms. Tobin seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

New Business, Determination of Procedure: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 2725: 0 Garden St., by Christ Church Cambridge. Remove, reposition, and/or replace board siding on wall areas, belfry, and tower. Strip and repaint.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides of Christ Church. He explained that some of the board siding was failing. Three partial replacement jobs had been carried out since the 1920s. The 1980s shiplap siding had been installed upside down, allowing water to penetrate behind the boards. The building showed its age and character by the incremental replacement of siding over time, existence of multiple layers of paint, etc.

Charlie Allen of Charlie Allen Restorations explained that the church was committed to making an appropriate, long-lasting restoration. The 250th anniversary of the church will be celebrated in the fall, so the time seems right to do a significant restoration. He proposed that the old siding be stripped of paint to reveal damaged areas. He proposed replacing all the siding beneath the windows on the west side, where in the past, narrow boards and Dutchmen had been used and where many boards had been installed upside down. The new materials would be 13-15" wide vertical-grain western red cedar. There had been a lot of wood shrinkage between the spring arch and the window sill. The gaps had been caulked. He recommended removing the boards and reinstalling the sound boards with a tighter fit. The front of the building had tongue and groove boards, except for the bottom 5 boards which were shiplap and installed upside down. He proposed replacing them with tongue and groove boards. The belfry's sheathing and cladding had been replaced in 1926. The top of the tower was worse than the bottom but overall it needed 80% replacement. He proposed residing the tower with 11" wide boards. He said he would use 30-pound felt paper and metal flashing. The water table would be flashed all the way around the building. The goal was not to make the building look perfect but to look better. The beads on the boards could not be seen now because of all the paint. He described methods to remove the boards safely. The work would take 15 weeks, so he wanted to start as soon as possible.

Mr. Sullivan said he agreed with the approach, except for removing the old siding in order to tighten the joints. The boards would be very brittle and could easily split. The project could result in having not much existing material re-used. The existing siding on the tower was not as old as that on the sides of the building, so he did not object to replacing all of that. He did not object to replacing the boards below the windows on the sides of the building. He suggested doing it all incrementally and only removing what had to be removed.

Mr. Allen suggested a field test and field decision as to whether or not to proceed. He said the window sills would be stripped, but not all of the trim. A non-toxic peel-away product would be used. No heat and no flame would be used.

Mr. King cautioned the church from rushing the project just because of the anniversary. Mr. Allen said he was only planning to work on the tower and west side, but not on the east side or the back.

Mr. Irving moved to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work, including removing the siding up to the window sills, leaving the boards above the sills in place, replacing all the siding on the tower, stripping paint from the siding and trim as proposed, leaving representative sections of paint as a historic record. He delegated approval of methods and final scope to the staff, all subject to ten-day notice procedures. Ms. Tobin seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Minutes

Mr. King made a correction to the April 7 minutes, page 5, paragraph 10, which should read "...did not want its wall used..." Mr. Bibbins made a correction on page 3, which should read, "...and had volunteered to assist in some of the work done there."

Mr. Irving moved to approve the April 7 minutes as corrected. Ms. Berg seconded and the motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Irving moved to approve the April 29 minutes as submitted. Ms. Berg seconded and the motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Irving moved to adjourn, and Ms. Tobin seconded. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 10:35 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 6/2/11**

Kevin Duggan	Metro Sign, 170 Lorum St., Tewksbury 01876
Harvey Kaufman	21 Clary St
Steve Allen	221 Hampshire St
Gary Seligson	220 Brattle St
Sebastian Martellotto	457 Mt Auburn St
Michael LaVigne	4 Houghton St
John Horst	10 Garden St
Mark Verkennis	1350 Massachusetts Ave
Judith Giordano	15 Brattle Cir
Robert Riley	15 Brattle Cir
Joan Pinck	234 Brattle St
Dan Pinck	234 Brattle St
Rich Monagle	1770 Mass Ave
Campbell Ellsworth	267 Norfolk St
Lisa White	4 Houghton St
Michael LaVigne	4 Houghton St
Mary Moreira	8 Houghton St
Lauren Harder	10 Samoset Rd
Martin Hill	10 Samoset Rd
Mark Boyes-Watson	30 Bow St, Somerville 02143
Luu Mandjes	226 Brattle St

Town is Cambridge unless otherwise indicated.