

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

July 11, 2019 - 806 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge Senior Center - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: Bruce Irving, *Chair*; Susannah Tobin, *Vice Chair*; Joseph Ferrara, Chandra Harrington, Jo Solet, *Members*; Gavin Kleespies, Paula Paris, *Alternates*

Members absent: William G. Barry, Robert Crocker, *Members*; Kyle Sheffield, *Alternate*

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, *Executive Director*, Sarah Burks, *Preservation Planner*; Eric Hill, *Survey Director*

Public present: See attached list.

With a quorum present, Mr. Irving called the meeting to order at 6:03 P.M. He introduced the commission members and staff. Alternate member Gavin Kleespies arrived. The Chair noted that Mr. Kleespies could vote on all matters. The Chair then dispensed with the consent agenda procedure.

Public Hearing: Neighborhood Conservation District Designation Petition

East Cambridge neighborhood, by petition of registered voters. Consider a petition of registered voters requesting that the Commission initiate an NCD study of the neighborhood approximately bounded by O'Brien Hwy, Cambridge St, Second St, Bent St, B&A Railroad, and Gold Star Mothers Park.

Mr. Sullivan gave a short introduction to the matter, describing the petition process, examples of existing NCDs in Cambridge, and the enabling law and ordinance. He noted that a historic district study was started in the 1970s but was abandoned due to strong neighborhood opposition. The demolition delay ordinance was adopted in 1979 and there had been little demolition activity in East Cambridge until recent years with an uptick in development activity in the neighborhood. [Ms. Tobin arrived]. Mr. Sullivan reported that he and the Survey Director, Eric Hill, had been working with a small group of interested petitioners for several months to explain the process and discuss possible boundaries. The onus was placed on that working group to do the grassroots advocacy with the larger neighborhood to provide information and solicit support for a district study. He said the historic district study in the 1970s had demonstrated that parachuting into a community and suggesting a district was the wrong approach. The proposal must originate from within the neighborhood. He indicated that the Commission could accept or deny the petition or continue the hearing for further discussion. If the Commission were to accept the petition and initiate a study, an interim protection period of up to one year would take effect. A study committee would be made up of four individuals from the neighborhood and three from the Historical Commission. All meetings of a study committee would be open to the public.

Bill Dines of 69 Otis Street displayed a Powerpoint slideshow and presented information about the history and architecture of the neighborhood, changes from manufacturing to the information age in nearby Kendall Square, and recent developments within the residential neighborhood. [Ms. Paris arrived]. He said the petitioners were concerned about the character of the neighborhood changing with the major renovations and demolition and new construction projects taking place there. He said the housing stock was vulnerable. The demolition delay and landmark ordinance would not be able to protect buildings that were not of landmark quality. There were no design standards for developers to follow to guide change to the historic buildings in the neighborhood. He gave 66-68 Otis Street as an example of a renovation that

resulted in the removal of historic architectural features before a landmark study stepped in to protect it. He described the boundaries of the study area proposed in the petition. The intent was to include the residential properties on both sides of Cambridge Street but they were cognizant of the different needs in the business district along Cambridge Street. He described ideas for potential design guidelines and showed examples of 94-96 Sixth Street and 102 Thorndike Street as examples of sensitive renovations.

Mr. Irving introduced Ms. Paris and Ms. Tobin. He asked if there were questions of fact from the Commission.

Ms. Harrington noted that redevelopment activity was happening everywhere in Cambridge. She asked the petitioners how an NCD would assist the existing residents of the neighborhood to stay.

John Whisnant of 61 Otis Street said he would stay in the neighborhood with or without a district, but a district would help to preserve the historic character of the area.

Elizabeth Tyree of 106 Sixth Street said her family often receives letters from developers with offers to buy their property. She said she did not want to leave. Renters were more likely to be impacted by rising prices and forced to leave than existing owners.

Fabrizio Gentili of 72 Sciarappa Street said he did not want to see displacement in the neighborhood. As a member of the working group he was willing to do the grassroots outreach to support the study.

Mark Rogers said his family owned several commercial properties on Cambridge Street. The extra costs of operating in a regulated district would get passed down to the tenants. He said his family takes pride in their properties and had renovated them carefully and consulted CHC staff when they had questions. He said a district wasn't needed. He objected to additional hurdles and costs. The neighborhood had done fine without a district. Most owners were responsible.

Anthony Gargano of 149 Cambridge Street said he had yet to speak to any business owners on Cambridge Street who would support the district idea.

John Natale, a property owner on Sciarappa Street and resident of Winchester, said he had not been contacted by the working group. He said he was happy with the status quo and did not want intrusion on his property rights.

Loren Crowe of 8 Museum Way said an NCD would cause property values and rents to go up. Renters would get priced out and displaced.

Jay Wasserman of 34 Second Street said not everyone in the neighborhood could afford to use historically appropriate building materials. The added costs would be a burden.

Alexandra Whisnant of 61 Otis Street said that she would not want to remain in the family home if developers continued to destroy the other houses on the street.

Mr. Irving asked why the courthouse was included in the proposed study area. Mr. Whisnant said the courthouse site already had an approved project design, though it was dependent on parking in the

garage being approved by the City Council.

Mr. Kleespies asked if the Commission wanted to discuss the study area boundaries in detail.

Dr. Solet said she shared concerns for renters but it seemed likely that rents would rise whether a renovation was historically sensitive or not.

Mr. Dines agreed. He said that units at 66-68 Otis Street rented for \$8,000 a month. The condo sales prices there had also been very high.

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact from the public.

Mr. Wasserman asked to discuss the boundaries.

Mr. Sullivan described the intent to include all the house lots. He described the potential boundaries of the district study area in detail. He apologized that the staff memo was sent out very late the previous night and acknowledged that not everyone had yet a chance to read it. He said the neighborhood is worthy of study and the boundary could be adjusted. It was up to the CHC to consider public testimony and decide whether to start the study. The Commission should discuss the review criteria for applications that would be filed during the study period.

Mr. Irving said there had been a lot of information brought in very recently to the Commission. The Commission was not under any obligation to make a decision right now. The hearing could be continued. He opened the public comment period, restricting comments to three minutes per speaker.

Mr. Rogers of 390 Cambridge St said he was a member of the East Cambridge Business Association. He asked the working group to make a presentation to the Business Association. He also asked for a delay of the Commission's decision on the petition.

Ms. Tyree indicated that one of her concerns was how stringent the review process would be. She said she needed to repair her foundation and was worried that she would be delayed from doing so for a year.

Chuck Hinds of the East Cambridge Planning Team and a property owner on Charles Street read a letter from the Planning Team to the Commission. The neighborhood needed to have a proactive process and he asked the Historical Commission to start the NCD study. He said his 85-year old father had been opposed to the historic district proposal of the 1970s but now could understand the benefits of an NCD. He said that Cambridge should have a property tax incentive to fix up historic properties as they have in Dallas, Texas.

Mr. Natale said he had been brutalized by rent control policies. He did not want that to happen again. He noted the upcoming case on the agenda for 168 Brattle Street and said it looked far too restrictive about small details on the property. He said dilapidated buildings should be knocked over.

Dr. Solet noted that the case for 168 Brattle Street was a historic district case, which was a more restrictive type of district than was being proposed for East Cambridge.

Heather Hoffman said she strongly supported a study. An NCD might turn out to be a good thing

or it might be horrible, but the study process would help to find out.

Mr. Whisnant said he had purchased his house in 1984. He and his wife liked the neighborhood and considered it an historic area just waiting to wake up. Now East Cambridge was waking up. Artificial siding is coming off the buildings and they are being renovated. However, faceless LLC's are buying up the properties and only economics drive their projects. He said East Cambridge needs an NCD to protect the history of the neighborhood.

Mr. Crowe said adding value to properties would be done at the expense of renters. Renters had not been informed of this meeting. NCDS could be more restrictive than zoning. Further infill was one way to address the housing crisis. He said everyone liked the neighborhood, which had not all been built or conceived of at one time. An NCD did not leave any room for modernity. He asked that the courthouse and Lechmere Station be removed from the proposed boundaries.

Marilee Meyer said history is incredibly important. It is part of our identity. NCDs have flexibility and are not as strict as 40C historic districts. Citywide up-zoning is currently under consideration. NCDs are an important tool for preservation but not inflexible. The Cambridge Street corridor was a different animal.

Michael McNeley of 106 Otis St said he and his wife were new owners in the neighborhood. He said he was a renewable energy developer and always researches what is allowed in a community where he is working. Having an NCD would clarify the building process for owners and applicants. A standard set of design guidelines would be helpful.

Mr. Wasserman said more notice was needed to the neighborhood. There were already requirements for going to the Planning Board and BZA. The proposed boundaries don't make sense. Why is the One First Street building not included? The city already has demolition review. The study wasn't free because there would be interim restrictions.

Connie Bennett of 106 Sixth Street said it had taken her 10 years to be able to buy her home. She liked the mix of old and new together but she did not like the new to overshadow the old. Rules must make sense and benefit everyone. She said she couldn't afford much for construction.

Mr. Gentili said East Cambridge had a lot of courtyards and back houses. It was still more affordable than other parts of Cambridge. The value to this type of architecture and housing was that multi-generational families could be accommodated.

Melvin Downs of Concord Avenue said he had 200 favorite houses in Cambridge. He was starting to see those X's on buildings all over town. It was like a plague. We have so much historic value here and a lot of it is getting thrown away. There is so much beauty here--I don't want to lose it, he said.

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Mr. Sullivan noted that several emails had been received. He read the emails and summarized the comments.

Mr. Hill said the neighborhood was experiencing a lot of renovation projects and house flipping. The boundary needed further discussion before being finalized.

Ms. Harrington said there was no harm in a study. It would be a fact-finding process. She said she hoped people understood that not every district study does not result in a final designation by the City Council. She said the Commission should look at how the Cambridge Street corridor might get treated with different guidelines from the residential properties.

Dr. Solet said she hoped people would see the Historical Commission as a help and not a hindrance. The Commission could be used as a resource.

Mr. Kleespies said East Cambridge had maintained a cohesive identity. The collection of buildings was greater than the individual parts. There would still be developers working in the neighborhood, and there would still be a housing crisis. A district would not change those things. Most developments don't result in additional housing units. There seemed to be undo anxiety about the amount of regulation. It would not be as restrictive or detailed as the type of regulation in the Old Cambridge Historic District.

Mr. Irving asked what were the proposed review criteria?

Mr. Sullivan summarized the standards and principles described in the memo. He said the commercial business district on Cambridge Street could be treated as in the Harvard Square Conservation District. Zoning-compliant signs and storefront alterations could be approved by staff. He recommended continuing the hearing to August or September.

Mr. Irving agreed that more time was warranted to absorb the information. He recommended continuing to at least September. He said he did not see the Commission playing a part in the courthouse project. He said he hoped the property would be removed from the study area.

Ms. Paris commented to the working group that they should focus on outreach to more constituents, with community meetings for the business owners and renters.

Dr. Solet made a motion to continue the hearing to the September 5th meeting with the hope that the working group would reach out to more people. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion which passed 7-0.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 4142: 82 Mt. Auburn St., by 45 Dunster Street LLC, owner o/b/o Dig Inn restaurant, tenant.
Install kitchen exhaust fan and associated duct work on west side wall.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the building. The J. Press store on the first floor had closed and the space was being renovated for the Dig Inn restaurant.

Paul Gibbs described the proposed work on the exterior of the building including ducting and a kitchen fan.

Dr. Solet said the fan shown in the application would not meet the requirements of the noise ordinance. She noted that the location was adjacent to a tall glass building.

Mr. Gibbs said the applicants could order a quieter fan. The ductwork was proposed to be stainless steel. The fan would not run continuously but only while the restaurant is operating. He noted the restroom exhaust louver on the plans.

Mr. Sullivan asked if a fan on the top of the stack would be less noisy at street level. Mr. Gibbs answered that it was possible to do this but more difficult to install. Utility set fans could be made quieter.

Mr. Ferrara asked why the fan and ductwork could not be located at the back of the building. Mr. Gibbs answered that the kitchen location and ceiling height prevented that as a location.

Mr. Kleespies asked if the mechanicals had to be stainless steel or if it could be colored to blend in with the building. Mr. Gibbs answered that they could build a chase and paint it to match the building color.

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact from the public.

Sheila Deery said she was concerned about the appearance of the mechanicals. Had the abutters been notified? Ms. Burks described the public notice for the case. Ms. Deery said she was also concerned about the noise and smells of the restaurant equipment. She expressed concern about the structural integrity of the building due to the interior demolition work. Natural illumination was needed but they were blocking up windows. Will the ductwork damage the masonry walls?

Mr. Irving noted that the Commission's jurisdiction did not extend to the interior of the building. He opened the public comment period.

Ms. Deery said the ownership of the building should be checked to make sure there had not been a hostile takeover of the building.

There being no other public comment, Mr. Irving closed the public comment period. He noted that the applicant seemed uncertain about the location of the fan. Mr. Gibbs said it would be located as shown on the plans. Mr. Irving said that if a chase were to be built, the Commission would need to see what that would look like.

Dr. Solet suggested a continuance given the number of questions and suggestions made. The applicant should return with a final selection for a fan.

Mr. Gibbs consented to a continuance of the hearing to the next meeting.

Dr. Solet moved to continue the hearing to August 8. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion, which passed 7-0.

Case 4143: 168 Brattle St., by The Kung Family Trust. Restore porch and expand deck, install blue-stone paths, repave driveway and parking area, install fence and gate, rear landscaping changes, reconstruct sheds, install exterior lighting.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the Sarah Bull House.

Patricia Kung, an owner, described the work that had been done already on the house including stripping off the old paint and repainting, restoring the wood windows, and adding a window in the

laundry room. She said they wanted more green space in the backyard but would need to move the parking to the side. The original front of the house faced the river while the back of the house faced Brattle St. The proposed changes would make the house work better for her family.

Cynthia Smith, landscape architect at Halverson Design, said they had been working with carpenter Rich Friberg and landscape designer Michael Hanlon. She described the proposed plans to repave the driveway in concrete with dark grey aggregate, repave the walkway with bluestone, add a deck around the poet's corner (bay), sod the rear yard, which was currently paved, and rebuild the storage sheds.

Dr. Solet asked about the size of the parking court. Mr. Hanlon said it would be 46 feet wide by approximately 60 feet long. Dr. Solet asked why so much space was needed for three cars. Mr. Hanlon explained that the cars needed space to turn around. He added that all water would stay on the site and drain into a catch basin. Dr. Solet asked about the fence location and detail near the parking court and adjacent to the balustrade. Mr. Hanlon said the fence could slope down near the balustrade of the deck and be screened with landscaping.

Mr. Ferrara asked about the styles of the two balustrades and how they intersected.

Mr. Sullivan asked about the landscape lighting. Ms. Smith said lighting would be kept to a minimum with a couple of small fixtures near the driveway.

Mr. Irving asked about the location of air conditioning compressors. Mr. Hanlon said they would be located at the far-left rear corner and would back up to the compressors of the neighbor.

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact from the public. There being no questions, he opened the public comment period.

Ms. Hoffman said the parking area was larger in area than many house lots in East Cambridge. That would be a lot of impermeable paving. Mr. Hanlon noted that the lot had very sandy soil and water would percolate down quickly.

Ms. Meyer said houses that get too cleaned up result in a washing away of the historic patina and a resulting change in the character of the area.

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Mr. Sullivan observed that the property had been neglected by the previous owner. The Kungs had done a good thing by removing the many layers of paint on the house. He recommended that the Commission approve the certificate of appropriateness and delegate review and approval of the details of the fence and balustrade to the staff.

Mr. Ferrara suggested moving the fence back beyond the poet's corner. Dr. Solet agreed that this would be a good idea. She asked whether the paint color had always been yellow.

Ms. Kung answered that the trim had always been white but she was not sure what the original color of the body of the house had been.

Mr. Ferrara moved to approve the certificate of appropriateness and to delegate review and

approval of details of the fence/balustrade intersection to staff. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion which passed 7-0.

Public Hearings: Demolition Review / Landmark Designation Proceedings

Case D-1524: 115 Spring St., by Xiaoguang Wang. Demolish and reconstruct the additions and main roof of the house (1826).

Ms. Burks showed slides and described the history and architecture of the house. There were no questions or public comments about the report. The staff recommendation was to find the house significant.

Dr. Solet moved to find the house significant for its associations with the early residential development of East Cambridge by the Lechmere Point Corporation, for its associations with the broad architectural economic and social history of the city, and as an early example of a wooden Federal style house. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion, which passed 7-0.

Robert Richards of All Trades Construction explained that it was easier to lift the roof 18 inches and leave the house sitting on its foundation than to lift the house from its foundation. The second-floor framing would be raised to gain additional headroom on the first story. Three or four clapboard courses would be added between the first floor and the second floor windows. The existing roof framing was inadequate and he recommended rebuilding it. He noted that there was brick infill between the studs of the walls which he had never seen in a house before. Mr. Sullivan explained that that brick infill was called nogging and was a form of insulation in early house construction. He said he would like to photograph the condition before it was removed. Mr. Richards said the bricks would be removed and modern insulation put in. He proposed that the ridge of the ell would be lifted to match the height of the main roof.

Mr. Kleespies asked if the ells would be demolished. Mr. Richards answered that the ells would be rebuilt on their same footprints. Mr. Kleespies asked about a window well. Mr. Richards said there would be an window well for egress from the basement. A new full basement would be constructed and the new foundation would be sistered to the existing.

Ms. Harrington asked if the house was to remain a single family. Mr. Richards replied yes.

Mr. Irving asked for questions from the public.

Ms. Meyer asked how much new construction was being added. She asked what would happen if the ridge of the ell was dropped below the ridge of the main house. Mr. Richards explained that the ells would simply have a lower ceiling height.

Mr. Irving opened the public comment period

Ms. Hoffman asked if there was any new floor area being created. The owner, Cathy Wang, answered that the dimensional table had already been approved by the Inspectional Services Department. Ms. Hoffman said she was curious because she had been at the BZA hearing.

Mr. Kleespies said it looked like the applicant was doing a good job. He thanked her for keeping

the same character of the house.

Mr. Ferrara agreed. He moved to find that the affected portions of the building including the eaves and the roof were not preferably preserved in the context of the proposal for reconstruction. He further moved to delegate construction details of the project to the review and approval of staff.

Dr. Solet asked whether removal of the brick nogging would have a structural impact on the house. Mr. Sullivan answered that it would not.

Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion which passed 7-0.

Public Hearing: Commission Policies & Regulations

Consider adoption of an *interim policy* regarding applications for **Small Cell Wireless Installations** including design standards and delegating to staff the approval of compliant applications.

Ms. Burks reported on the Pole & Conduit Commission meeting she had attended. The P&C Commission had adopted a revised draft as its Interim Policy. She said there were comments made at the hearing by the public and by representatives of the telecom providers. The policy was likely to be revised further, but it was important to have a policy on record or else the phone companies could install anything they wanted.

Dr. Solet noted the requirement not to put a small cell installation on a double pole and that exposed wiring was only allowed on wood poles. She asked if there would be multiple cooling fans if multiple providers were accommodated on a pole. Ms. Burks explained that the companies that installed equipment for multiple providers put all the equipment in one equipment cabinet (sometimes called a shroud). The cooling fan would be located inside that equipment cabinet. Dr. Solet said she did not want additional exposed wires added to wood poles. Ms. Burks explained that the wires could not be located inside a solid wood pole, and that was why a distinction was made between wiring on wood poles vs. hollow metal poles. Dr. Solet displayed photographs of the very messy wires and garbage bags located on ~~poles on her street~~Berkeley Street in the Old Cambridge Historic District. She said it was very unsightly. What could be done about it?

Mr. Kleespies described his experience moving a school building in Illinois. The wires on the utility poles were the property of multiple entities and it was a real headache to try to get them all to come out and move them.

Mr. Sullivan said the existing conditions were grandfathered. He suggested that Dr. Solet could handle the matter politically and try to get legislation requiring that the utilities clean up their poles and wires. He said it was important that the boards have consistency in their policies on Small Cell Installations. He recommended that the Historical Commission adopt the same Interim Policy that the P&C Commission had passed.

Ms. Paris moved to adopt the Interim Policy as presented. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion, which passed 6-1. Dr. Solet voted in opposition, saying the policy was inadequate.

Preservation Grants

Case IPG 17-8: 5 Magazine St., by First Baptist Church (#4). \$56,000 to re-allocate prior-approved grant from boiler replacement to roofing and masonry restoration.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the church building, which had been constructed in 1881. He explained that two congregations were now sharing the church building. The grant money was needed for repair of the brick buttresses and sandstone window sills and lintels. The Commission had previously approved \$56,000 for the replacement of a boiler. He asked if the grant could be reprogrammed for the exterior masonry repairs instead of the boiler.

Dr. Solet made a motion to approve the reallocation of the grant money for the exterior masonry repairs. Mr. Kleespies seconded the motion which passed 7-0.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed the Attendance List on July 11, 2019**

Loren Crowe	8 Museum Way
John Hawkinson	jhawk@alum.mit.edu
Anthony Gargano	149 Cambridge St
Brian Stager	508 Cambridge St.
Kevin Gaughlin	24 Granite Pl, xx 02186
B. Whisnant	61 Otis St
Alexandra Whisnant	61 Otis St
Robert MacLean	61 Otis St
Klara MacLean	61 Otis St
Paul Chase	40 Second St
Dan Herlihy	40 Second St
Charles Fineman	75 Winter St
Bill Dines	69 Otis St
John Whisnant	61 Otis St
Fabrizio Gentili	72 Sciarappa St
Charles Hinds	207 Charles St
Xiaoguang Wang	293 Concord Ave
Steve Bardige	55 Stearns St
Jay Wasserman	34 Second St
Paul Gibbs	PGF Advisors, Sandwich, MA 02563
Ian Cole	80 Winter St #1
Aubrey Cole	80 Winter St #1
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St
Diana Prideaux-Brune	10 Museum Way
Elizabeth Tyree	106 Sixth St
Carmen Bennett	106 Sixth St
Robert Richards	406 Granite St, Quincy, MA 02169
John Natale	45 Chester St., Winchester, MA 01890
Michael McNeley	106 Otis St
Heather Hoffman	213 Hurley St
Mark Rogers	390 Cambridge St
Sheila Deery	address not provided

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.