

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

February 4, 2021 – Meeting conducted online via Zoom Webinar (843 8563 5131) - 6:00 P.M.

Members present (online): Susannah Tobin, *Vice Chair*; Joseph Ferrara, Elizabeth Lyster, Caroline Shannon, Jo Solet, *Members*; Kyle Sheffield, *Alternate Member*

Members absent: Bruce Irving, *Chair*; Chandra Harrington, *Members*; Gavin Kleespies, Paula Paris, *Alternates*

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

Public present (online): See attached list.

Due to statewide emergency actions limiting the size of public gatherings in response to COVID-19, this meeting was held online with remote participation and was closed to in-person attendance. The public was able to participate online via the Zoom webinar platform.

With a quorum present, Ms. Tobin called the meeting to order at 6:05 P.M. She explained the online meeting instructions and public hearing procedures then introduced the commissioners and staff. She designated Mr. Sheffield to vote on all matters and dispensed with the consent agenda procedure.

Public Hearings: Landmark Designation Proceedings

Case L-133: 137 Allston Street, Saint Augustine’s African Orthodox Church. Consider staff report and make recommendation to City Council.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen to show photos of the site. He described the historical development of Cambridgeport and the founding of the church. He highlighted individuals ~~that~~ who were associated with the construction of the building and the founding of the African Orthodox denomination. He described the architecture of the building and changes that had occurred over time and outlined the proposed guidelines for restoration and potential future alterations.

Dr. Solet asked if the structure that covered the stair to the basement was ~~anticipated~~ to be removed. Mr. Sullivan said it was not a significant feature and the guidelines would not discourage its removal. Dr. Solet asked where new mechanicals might be located. Mr. Sullivan said there were areas where condensers could be placed unobtrusively. He noted that the report guidelines may not foresee all eventualities and was not a master plan. Dr. Solet complemented the staff on the quality of the report and noted that the city’s standards for landmark designation were high.

Ms. Tobin asked if there were public questions of fact.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked about the seating capacity of the church and the relocation of the entry. Mr. Sullivan said the church was designed to hold 400 people; ~~and that~~ the entrance, originally on the side of the building, could more easily be made accessible if it were moved back to that original location.

Ms. Tobin opened the discussion to public comment.

City Councillor and former Mayor Denise Simmons spoke in support of the designation. The church was a direct link to Cambridge’s rich history and the vibrant home of Cambridge’s West Indian community since the 1920s. She was impressed with the community fundraising efforts and the plans to restore the building as a neighborhood hub. She noted the span of historic events that had taken place

since the founding of the congregation by Bishop Maguire. It was one of Cambridge's premier historic sites and landmark designation would elevate the stories of the people involved in the church.

Former Mayor Henrietta Davis said the grassroots work done by the church and its neighbors had highlighted the importance of the building. She recognized the Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association for its efforts. It was important in the diverse neighborhood to see how a building can help tell the story of the people important to the history of the City. She asked the Commission to support the designation.

Prof. Kris Manjapra of 130 Hamilton Street said the property was a place with memory associations as well as being important to the city's future. He said they had started a podcast series from the church and revitalization was underway. Two grant applications had been completed, one to the National Trust's African American Cultural Action Fund and the other to the Mass. Cultural Commission.

Rev. Charles Eccles, Curate and Pastor of St. Augustine's, said he was happy to have the church recognized as a nationally significant site. He thanked individuals who had helped with the organization of the restoration and revitalization efforts. He described his own history and his family's history with the church. His mother was the first Black woman to be ordained in the African Orthodox denomination. It was a large undertaking to restore the church, but he was confident they would accomplish it.

Cathy Zusy of the Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association reported that over 270 people had contributing funds to restore the church. She thanked the Commission for its Institutional Preservation Grants. She encouraged the landmark designation as the next step.

Ms. Meyer said the church was a beacon representing what cultural communities can do. It would remind people of the importance of multiculturalism in the city.

Marie Saccoccio of 55 Otis Street said churches reflect the history and culture of a community. She recalled attending choral rehearsals at the church.

Gabriel Cira of 189 Hamilton Street described grants from the Commission and the National Trust. He looked forward to achieving universal access to the building. Historic preservation had relevance when there was a social connection with a property.

Jason Stonehouse spoke in support of the proposal. The church was a living connection to the Afro-Caribbean history of Cambridge. He noted that an African Methodist Episcopal church on Harvey Street had been demolished a number of years ago.

Ms. Tobin closed the public comment period and asked for comments from the Commission.

Dr. Solet asked if the house next door was related to the church, observing that it was clad with the same shingles. Mr. Sullivan said there was no current relationship to the church. Dr. Solet said she was grateful for the additional history shared by the public speakers. She moved to approve the report and to forward it to the City Council with a positive recommendation for designation. Ms. Shannon seconded the motion, which passed 5-0 in a roll call vote.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 4472: 185 Charles Street, by Vipul Chitalia. Construct rear addition.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen, showed slides and explained that the property was located in the East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD) study area.

Dr. Vipul Chitalia, property owner, shared his screen and described the existing and proposed conditions. The addition would be at the back of the house, closing in the porch to expand the kitchen and building an office on the second floor. He showed plan and elevation views.

Mr. Ferrara asked if any changes were proposed for the front of the house. Dr. Chitalia said there ~~would were~~ not. Mr. Sheffield asked for clarification about whether the addition stepped back from the side wall of the house. Dr. Chitalia said the plan was incorrect and there would be no setback.

Ms. Tobin asked for questions of fact from the public.

Ms. Meyer asked if the addition would impact the existing garage. Dr. Chitalia answered that it would not. A car would still have room to turn around. The addition would not extend beyond the deck.

Ms. Tobin closed the public comment period.

Mr. Sheffield said it was a tight site. The local symmetry being proposed was understandable. It was okay to not set back the addition. He said he appreciated the design's restraint.

Ms. Shannon moved to find the application appropriate and approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the project, as described. Mr. Sheffield seconded the motion, which passed 5-0 in a roll call vote.

Liz Lyster noted that she had joined the meeting but did not offer comment. Ms. Tobin recognized her and indicated she would be included in the vote on the next case.

Case 4473: 40 Willard St., by Cambridge Skating Club. Replace outdoor lighting fixtures.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and showed slides of the Skating Club, explaining that there were views from Mt. Auburn Street and Longfellow Park. The views of the skating pond/tennis courts from Willard Street were limited due to the high fence but the light fixtures would be visible.

Andus Baker, President of the Cambridge Skating Club, introduced Doris Jurison of the Cambridge Tennis Club (seasonal tenant) and Glen Heinmiller of Lam Partners, lighting designers. The clubs had a seventy-year relationship. ~~The~~ clubs had reached out to the abutters in advance. He shared his screen and described the proposal. The goals were to improve lighting for tennis and skating, eliminate light trespass onto neighboring properties, and allow for greater light control and dimming. Only tennis required full light levels. He noted that the fixtures come with a higher Kelvin temperature, but they had asked the manufacturer to lower it to 4,000 Kelvin, which was the same as the existing and more historically sensitive. The 40 x 14 inch component boxes would be located in the basement, and would not be visible. He explained the difficulty and expense of replacing ~~burned-out~~ the existing metal halide bulbs because it required a lift truck and the bulbs lost their luminosity very quickly. Three of the five tennis courts were not suitably lit for night play under the current conditions. The new LED bulbs would last indefinitely, being more reliable and less expensive. The new fixtures would be shielded and tightly aimed at the right places. There would be two to three fixtures per pole.

Mr. Ferrara asked if the height of the standards was changing. Mr. Baker replied it would not.

Ms. Lyster asked how the fixtures would be shielded. Mr. Baker said the light would be directed down and precisely aimed. Mr. Heinmiller said the design had been computer modeled and there would be zero light trespass. Mr. Baker said they had looked at five companies and chose Musco's proposal because of their experience. If there were adjustments needed ~~they~~ Musco would come back and do them.

Dr. Solet described the spectrum issues with the LED street lights. They were whiter and bluer and could affect people's sleep. She asked when the lights ~~were~~ would be turned off at night. Mr. Baker said they ~~were~~ are turned off at 10:30 during the tennis season. In winter, ~~the~~ skating did not require full lighting levels. The light fixtures were standard at 5500-6000K but they had requested that they be lowered to 4000K which was the same as the existing metal halide lights that were existing.

Ms. Jurison said the opportunity to be outside and physically active had proved to be very important and beneficial during COVID. Mr. Heinmiller said the controls would allow light levels to be lower than existing and there would be less light bouncing up into the sky.

Mr. Sheffield asked if additional shielding could be added to the fixtures. Mr. Heinmiller answered in the negative.

Ms. Tobin asked for public questions of fact then comment.

Suzanne Blier of 5 Fuller Place asked how the lighting would compare to the Harvard Stadium. Mr. Heinmiller said it would not be like a college sports field which had much taller poles and a larger area to light. He noted that the club's activity area was depressed below street level, which would help control the light. Ms. Blier said the changes were positive and she supported ~~them~~ it.

Ms. Tobin closed public comment.

Mr. Sullivan noted that the Commission's jurisdiction in the historic district was usually restricted to the fixtures themselves. However, when amending the Harvard Square Conservation District guidelines, light temperature was an added criterion for review. He noted that the club already had fixtures at 4,000K so they could maintain that. The new opportunity to aim and dim the light was beneficial.

Dr. Solet said that was an interesting interpretation, somewhat akin to replacing a fence at the same height.

Mr. Ferrara said he appreciated the thoughtful proposal and consideration of the neighbors. The structures and improved control of the light were an improvement.

Ms. Lyster moved to approve the application as submitted. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ferrara and passed with five affirmative votes and one abstention in a roll call vote. (Lyster, Ferrara, Sheffield, Shannon, Tobin in favor; Solet abstaining)

Public Hearings: Demolition Review

Case D-1563 (continued): 25 Jackson Street, by DND Homes, LLC. Demolish house (1874). Review revised design proposal for redevelopment.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and showed slides of the house. He reported that in November the Commission had found the house to be significant and preferably preserved. The applicants had returned

with a revised proposal to see if the Commission would amend its finding. Ms. Burks reviewed the finding of significance of the house as a representative example of the North Cambridge workers cottage and for its associations with the Irish and Italian immigrant families that had resided there.

Dan Anderson of Anderson Porter Architecture said they had spent a lot of time studying the existing building. It would require a gut renovation, and with the first floor below grade it would need to be lifted three or four feet. Only some framing would remain after removing non-conforming additions and changing the floor levels and roof height. He described the cost analysis between re-use and new construction. The best option was to replace the building.

Trina Murphy of DND Homes said she had meet with neighbors and heard their strong preference for a flat roofed house due to concerns about shadows.

Mr. Anderson shared his screen and showed the architectural drawings and shadow studies for the pitched roof proposal. Their preferred design was for both front and rear buildings to be 2-story, flat-roofed with clapboard siding, corner boards, and natural wood accents.

Ms. Lyster asked for a reminder of the guidance provided by the Commission in November. Ms. Burks answered that the Commission had encouraged preservation of the existing house, or, if that was not possible, to maintain a traditional workers cottage form in the front and modern style in the back.

Ms. Shannon asked what the height difference would be between the flat and pitched roofs. Mr. Anderson answered that the flat roof would be 25' high and the ridge of the pitched roof would be 28'8". Ms. Shannon said she would like to see the shadow studies. Mr. Anderson displayed the shadow studies for a pitched-roof front house and flat roof for the rear. Ms. Shannon said she did not think a flat roof in the front would change the shadow situation much since it was mostly the rear building causing the shadows on the neighboring house at 31 Jackson Street.

Dr. Solet asked if the movement of the structure to provide a conforming setback improved the shadows cast. Mr. Anderson replied in the affirmative.

Ms. Tobin asked for questions of fact from the public.

Ms. Meyer noted that the non-conformities were grandfathered. She asked which neighbor had concerns about the shadows. Ms. Murphy said all the abutters preferred the flat roof option.

Mr. Brandon asked why the setbacks had to change. Mr. Anderson said any change to the height would trigger the need to fix the non-conforming setbacks. Mr. Brandon asked if there had been a structural engineering report. Mr. Anderson replied in the negative.

Ms. Tobin opened the public comment period.

James Williamson of 1000 Jackson Place said the turning radius looked tight for the parked cars.

Kelly Matthews of 31 Jackson Street expressed her strong preference that the front house have a flat roof and that the rear building be two stories not three.

Jason Stonehouse of 28 Jackson Street asked to see a shadow study of the flat roof option.

Barbara Glick of 21 Jackson Street expressed support for flat roofs. New houses had already been

built on the other side of her property and she felt sandwiched in.

Ms. Blier noted that much of Cambridge was built prior to zoning and did not conform to dimensional requirements. The flat roofed design did not fit the neighborhood context and demolition would not be environmentally friendly.

Mr. Williamson said he sympathized with the comments of the abutters. New construction in the neighborhood resembled tightly packed pillboxes in what was already a dense neighborhood.

Ronnie Millar of 31 Jackson thanked DND Homes and Mr. Anderson for the communication and design work they had done in the last few months. He supported the flat roof option. There were similar buildings next door and across the street. The shadows from both buildings would impact his house.

Mr. Brandon asked the Commission to make sure the existing house could not be renovated before allowing demolition. He recommended double-hung windows and parking improvements.

Steve Seidel of 33 Jackson asked that the impacts on abutters be taken into consideration. The creation of a second building would change the character of the area. Mr. Anderson pointed out that there were many examples of properties with houses at the front and rear of lots, as at 29 and 31 Jackson Street.

Jim Kelly of 29 Jackson Street said he appreciated the lowered height of the rear building and supported a flat roof for the front building also.

Ms. Tobin closed the public comment period.

Mr. Ferrara noted that the submitted design responded to the Commission's comments about desired architectural character of the front house but if shadows are the driver for the neighbors and the applicant, then the Commission should see the shadow studies for the flat roof proposal. Ms. Lyster agreed. She said it would be a shame if the flat roof design actually created greater shadows. The Commission's responsibility was to determine what was in the public's interest, not always to require the preservation of the old building. The neighbors needed to see the shadow study too.

Ms. Shannon said she could go either way and was sympathetic to the neighbors' concerns.

Dr. Solet asked what was driving the height in the first place. Would the basement be living space? Mr. Anderson said the existing house's first floor was below grade level, which was a durability problem. Yes, there would be living space in the basement.

Mr. Sheffield said the height of the eave line would have the most impact on shadows.

Ms. Tobin asked if the applicants would be willing to continue the hearing and come back March 4. Ms. Murphy agreed. Mr. Anderson asked for some response as to preservation versus replacement.

Mr. Sheffield said the neighbors' concerns should be top priority. There were other possible roof forms, stylistic choices, and conversations between front and back buildings that he would be open to considering. The two buildings should relate to each other and be compatible with their surroundings.

Ms. Tobin noted that no motion was necessary as the previous determination of significance and preferably preserved status had not changed and the owner consented to continue and return next month. [Mr. Sheffield left the meeting].

Case D-1568: 46-50 Jay Street, by Janet Williams on behalf of SGL Development. Substantially demolish 3-family house (1887).

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and showed slides of the property while Ms. Burks summarized the staff memo about the history of the property. The area, developed by George and Newell Chamberlain in the 1870s-1890s, contained several similar flat-roofed, multi-family homes designed by architect John H. Webber. One interesting feature of the house was that each of the three units had its own entry, one on the front and one on each side. The staff recommended that the building be found significant as an example of moderate-income housing of the 1880s in this subdivision in Riverside.

Mr. Sullivan remarked on the improvements in building technology at this time that allowed for flat roof construction. This innovation enabled the three-deckers so prevalent in Cambridge and Boston.

Ms. Burks noted that the property had changed hands in the last week, so Adam Siegel of SGL Development would be presenting.

Adam Siegel, an owner, noted that the interior plans were interesting but awkward with three staircases and bathroom doorways on stair landings. He shared his screen and displayed the existing site plan. He pointed out the garage and above-ground pool at the rear of the site. The remainder of the front house would become a single-family unit and a two-family unit would be constructed at the back.

Annem Chan Waiy of An Duo Architecture displayed drawings on the screen. She described the proposed materials as a combination of wood, fiber cement and standing-seam metal siding.

Ms. Tobin asked if there were questions of fact regarding the significance of the existing building. There were none. She asked for public comment regarding significance.

Ms. Meyer said the porches kept the existing house from being a simple box in form.

Ms. Tobin closed the public comment period.

Mr. Ferrara said it was an unusual house form in Cambridge. Dr. Solet said she considered it significant due to rarity. It was interesting to compare it to the more familiar three-decker form. She moved to find the existing building significant as defined in the ordinance, for the reasons described in the staff report, and as an example of the flat-roof building technology of the 1880s. Ms. Shannon seconded, and the motion passed 5-0 in a roll call vote.

Ms. Waiy described the design in more detail and answered questions about the materials, location of the head house, and cantilevered bay on the rear elevation of the front house. Mr. Siegel pointed out the private open spaces for each unit.

Ms. Tobin asked for questions of fact from the public.

Ms. Meyer asked about the size of the proposed units, sloping roofs, and ceiling heights. Mr. Siegel answered that the units were all about the same size. The first-floor ceiling heights would be 10' and the second floor would be less than 9'. Ms. Meyer asked if the property was bought with the intention of demolition. Mr. Siegel replied that the intention was to demolish about half of the house and reimagine the development of the site.

Ms. Tobin asked for public comment.

Andrea Slate of 61 Kinnaird Street said she supported the project. She would not mind seeing the proposed new buildings in her neighborhood.

Ms. Meyer said she saw a domino effect of redevelopment in the area. She disliked the modern design elements such as the angled roof and winged windows. She noted the presence of a twin to the existing house next door.

Mr. Sullivan read a letter received from J. Wilson, who did not support the application.

Ms. Saccoccio said snow would collect in the V roof. She was distressed that the house would no longer match its neighbor. She said the existing house was interesting.

Ms. Tobin closed the public comment period.

Mr. Ferrara said it was a very interesting proposal. He appreciated the effort to reflect the buildings on each side, but not to replicate them. He was torn about splitting up the twin houses. The drawings for the rear building were not as well developed. He recommended some adjustments to the front building. Ms. Lyster said that roof decks don't add a lot of value and it might be good to eliminate the head house. She noted that cedar weathers very quickly and could end up looking badly soon.

Ms. Shannon noted that the head house was set back considerably. She supported the proposal but recommended moving the door of the head house to minimize its appearance.

Dr. Solet asked about drainage of the V roof. Mr. Siegel said there would be an internal drain on the low side. The roof actually did pitch to one side. Ms. Solet noted that people with roof decks had found them to be great amenities during the pandemic.

Ms. Burks noted that the relationship of the house to its twin would be easier to visualize if the three bay façade was maintained. She suggested pushing the grouping of windows on the top floor to the left, to center over the first floor window in the left bay.

Mr. Ferrara spoke in favor of the asymmetry but liked the idea of pushing the head house door back. He moved to find the existing house not preferably preserved in the context of the redevelopment proposal. Ms. Lyster and Dr. Solet suggested modifications to the motion to delegate to staff the review of window placement, the head house, and materials. Mr. Ferrara amended his motion. Ms. Lyster seconded, and the motion passed 5-0 in a roll call vote.

Mr. Sullivan noted that partial demolition could be a tricky structural undertaking for the contractors and cautioned against going to far and ending up with an illegal demolition.

Preservation Grants

Case PG 21-4: 71 Bolton St. by Just-A-Start. \$50,000. Exterior restoration.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and showed slides of the historic workers cottage and grouping of modern townhomes built as affordable housing in 1996. The workers cottage had retained its original design and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a representative example of this North Cambridge building type. When it was restored in 1996 the quality of the pine trim was poor, and it had

failed. The contractor had used finger-jointed clapboards, which were not allowed but it went unnoticed. He said there was a responsibility to fix what was not done well the first time.

Dr. Solet asked if the affordable condominium owners had a monthly fee to fund maintenance and management of the buildings. Whoever the contractor was in 1996 should get a reprimand.

Ms. Shannon moved to approve the \$50,000 grant. Ms. Lyster seconded the motion, which passed 5-0 in a roll call vote.

Minutes

The Commission elected to defer consideration of the minutes until the March meeting.

Ms. Lyster moved to adjourn. Ms. Shannon seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

The meeting adjourned at 11:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

Members of the Public
Present on the Zoom Webinar online, February 4, 2021

Vipul C. Chitalia	185 Charles St
Andus Baker	40 Willard St
Dan Anderson	Anderson Porter Architects, 875 Main St
Armando Rapaj	Architect for 185 Charles St addition
Annem Chan Waay	An Duo Design, 19 Hancock St, Arlington
Doris Jurisson	Cambridge Tennis Club
Glenn Heinmiller	Lam Partners, 84 Sherman St.
Adam Siegel	SGL Development, 810 Memorial Dr.
Trina Murphy	DND Homes, 271 Lincoln St., Lexington
Kris Manjapra	130 Hamilton St.
Gabriel Cira	189 Hamilton St
Jim Eggleston	39 Jackson St.
John Hawkinson	Cambridge Day
Stephen Farnum	47 Jay St.
Susan (Andrea) Slate	61 Kinnaird St.
Suzanne Blier	5 Fuller Pl
Decia Goodwin	175 Chestnut St.
Madeline Jacquet	8 Willard St
Marie Elena Saccoccio	55 Otis St
Denise Simmons	188 Harvard St
Stas Maltsev	
Kelly Matthews	31 Jackson St
Cathie Zusy	202 Hamilton St
Karen Griffith	43 Jay St
Rev. Charles Eccles	62 Allston St
Heather Hoffman	213 Hurley St
Jim Kelly	29 Jackson St
Barbara Glick	21 Jackson St.
James Williamson	1000 Jackson Pl
Steve Seidel	33 Jackson St
Adam Seidel	33 Jackson St.
Jeff Myers	134 Reed St
Henrietta Davis	120 Chestnut St
Betty Saccoccio	55 Otis St
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St, #404
Jason Stonehouse	28 Jackson St
Antonio Ortega	60 Allston St
Greg Matteosian	9 Jackson St.
Ronnie Millar	31 Jackson Street
Michael Brandon	27 Seven Pines Ave.

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.