

Approved 2/25/13

Minutes of the Avon Hill Neighborhood Conservation District

Monday, January 28, 2013 - 5:30 P.M. - 831 Massachusetts Ave., Basement Conference Room

Commissioners Present: Art Bardige, Theresa Hamacher, and Catherine Henn, *Members*;
Mark Golberg and Heli Meltsner, *Alternates*

Commissioners Absent: Robert Crocker and Maryann Thompson, *Members*; ~~Heli Meltsner,~~
Alternate

Staff Present: Sarah Burks

Members of the Public: see attached sign-in sheet

With a quorum present, Chair Theresa Hamacher called the meeting to order at 5:34 P.M. and thanked everyone for coming out in the snowy weather. She made introductions and reviewed the hearing procedures. She designated alternates Mark Golberg and Heli Meltsner to vote on all matters.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

AH-441: 6 Hillside Pl., by Cambridge Nursery School. Exterior renovations; removal of later additions; construction of 2-classroom addition.

Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner for the Historical Commission, explained the aspects of the application that required the binding review of the full commission. She showed slides taken from the public ways of Bellevue Avenue and Avon Hill Street and briefly described the history and multiple locations of the Cambridge Nursery School.

Mark Hammer, of Mark Hammer Architects, explained the existing conditions. The building was raised 3' above grade, there was no accessible toilet, the stair and door widths did not meet code. The redesign would allow the building to be more open and for the two classrooms to adjoin each other. It would separate the classrooms from the kitchen and office spaces, provide more storage, and put everything on the same floor height. The additions would increase the floor area by 275 square feet and create a full basement under the addition. The chimney would be demolished. The project required zoning relief from the Board of Zoning Appeal because the existing building was non-conforming and the requested conditions were also non-conforming.

Don Di Rocco, of Mark Hammer Architects, explained that the projecting wing was in poor condition now with a crumbling foundation. The windows in the rear block would be lowered because the floor height was being lowered. The proposed new windows would be simulated divided light, aluminum clad by Windsor Windows. Most were 9-over-1 in configuration.

Mr. Hammer said the intent was not to make a major visual change to the building's design.

Catherine Henn asked if they had considered not using clad windows. Mr. Di Rocco clarified that they were aluminum clad, not vinyl clad, and were selected for the ease of maintenance by the school which was still run as a parent cooperative organization.

Ms. Hamacher opened the floor to questions of fact from members of the public.

Joel Shapiro, of 102 Avon Hill Street, asked if the new projecting gable wing would be located to the right of the old one. Mr. Hammer replied in the affirmative.

Blue Magruder, of 84 Avon Hill Street, asked how much of the playground would be lost.

Janet Kovner, the Executive Director of the nursery school, explained that not much of the playground would be lost. The additions were only 275 square feet. The swings would be removed because they would no longer be a grandfathered condition, and did not otherwise meet the space requirements of code.

Ms. Hamacher asked for public comment.

John Reed, of 48 Bellevue Avenue, asked how far the new enclosed stair would be from his property line. Mr. Hammer replied that it would be 2'-6" to the fence, which was about 8" closer than the existing condition. Mr. Reed asked if the roof of the stair could be lowered. He commented that its design resembled an outhouse.

Ms. Hamacher closed the public comment period.

Ms. Henn remarked that the proposal was well thought out and the design was consistent with the existing architectural design. She noted that the public visibility of the school was limited and from a far distance.

Mr. Golberg said the impact to the public's view of the school was small. The project was well designed.

Ms. Meltsner noted that the design would retain the vernacular shapes, asymmetry, and materials of the original, which would maintain the feeling of the original.

Mr. Bardige remarked that the school had a vernacular, cabin-in-the-woods feeling to its design.

Ms. Hamacher noted the distance from the public way and said the changes would have a minimal impact on the public view. She noted that the Commission did not usually encourage aluminum clad windows.

Ms. Meltsner asked about the existing windows, noting that the casings looked thin. Mr. Di Rocco answered that the existing casings were thin and the new would match the casing and sill (1.5") details. The proposed Windsor Windows had a putty profile for the muntins. The existing windows were of mixed styles and ages and were in poor condition. The one original window remaining that was visible from a public way was in the gable end facing Bellevue Avenue. Ms. Meltsner recommended repairing that window and putting a storm window on it.

Ms. Burks offered the staff comments and recommendations. She noted the high significance of the building, as the oldest operating nursery school in the U.S. She commented that the proposal included extensive alterations to the original building including dropping the floor heights and dropping the window heights. She asked if there were ways to modify the grade so as to make these changes to the building unnecessary. She recommended using half screens on the windows instead of full screens.

Mr. Shapiro commented that the materials of the roof and windows should be appropriate in appearance. Slick new age materials would not be appropriate.

Ms. Meltsner asked about the roof shingle proposed. Mr. Hammer replied that it was an architectural shingle, but not something that was too bulky or busy looking. Ms. Meltsner recommended keeping the shingle simple in design, similar to a three tab though without requiring a three tab shingle if the architectural would last longer.

Mr. Golberg asked about the cladding material. Mr. Hammer replied that they would be cedar shingles, probably red cedar. They would be stained.

Mr. Bardige said the chimney was not very visible from the public way.

Ms. Hamacher noted that the commission had required other applicants to retain or replicate the chimney from the roof up.

Josh Humphreys, of 11 Granville Road, commented that faux chimneys could have a false "Disneyish" look to them.

Ms. Henn moved to approve the application, as presented, on the understanding that the new wall shingles are to be of red cedar and that the stair addition at the rear can be lowered in height if possible and on the following conditions,

- that the chimney, if removed, be replicated above the roof with details to be approved by staff
- that the wood window on the second floor of the north gable end be retained and protected with a storm window, and
- that details be reviewed and approved by the Commission staff, including the roof shingles, window details and other construction details.

Ms. Meltsner seconded the motion, which passed with a vote of 5-0.

Mr. Hammer noted that the Board of Zoning Appeal hearing was scheduled for February 7.

Staff Report

Ms. Burks reported on the commencement of work at 12 Avon Place, which was reviewed by staff as a non-binding case. She noted that Adrian Catalano was nearly done with the project at 38-40 Arlington Street and they had already gone up for sale.

Elections

Ms. Hamacher noted that she and Mr. Bardige were willing to host a small cocktail party for neighborhood residents interested in learning more about serving on the commission. They could do this in March. She asked the staff to provide a list of applicants' names from past cases as a starting point. She asked if there were nominations for chair and vice chair.

Mr. Bardige nominated Constantin von Wentzel for chair. Ms. Hamacher reported that she had spoken to Mr. von Wentzel about it and he was willing to serve as chair, if elected. She recommended re-electing Mr. Bardige as Vice Chair.

Ms. Henn recommended electing Mr. von Wentzel as chair, pending his appointment by the City Manager as a full member. Ms. Burks explained that it could take some time to find and interview interested new members and to get appointments and reappointments made by the manager.

Mr. Bardige asked Mark Golberg if he would be willing to serve as Vice Chair. Mr. Golberg expressed his willingness but noted that his attendance was spotty due to work commitments. He said he would make every effort to be present, if elected. Mr. Bardige noted that he had committed to sticking to the two three-year terms and would step away if replaced. He also expressed a willingness to become as an alternate member if so appointed.

Ms. Hamacher moved to elect Constantin von Wentzel as Chair and Mark Golberg as Vice Chair. Mr. Bardige seconded the motion, which passed 4-0. Mr. Golberg abstained from voting.

Ms. Henn moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Golberg seconded the motion, which passed 5-0. The meeting adjourned at 6:45 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
that Signed Attendance Sheet
January 28, 2013**

Mark Hammer	21 Bishop Allen Dr
Don Di Rocco	21 Bishop Allen Dr
Janet Kovner	6 Hillside Pl
Joel Shapiro	102 Avon Hill St
Sue Reed	48 Bellevue Ave
John Reed	48 Bellevue Ave
Blue Magruder	82 Avon Hill St
John Hurwitch	82 Avon Hill St
Josh Humphreys	11 Granville Rd

Addresses are in Cambridge, unless otherwise specified.