

Approved 10/28/13

Minutes of the Avon Hill Neighborhood Conservation District

Monday, September 23, 2013 - 5:30 PM - 831 Massachusetts Ave., Basement Conference Rm.

Commissioners Present: Constantin von Wentzel, *Chair*; Art Bardige, Robert Crocker, Theresa Hamacher, Catherine Henn, and Heli Meltsner

Commissioners Absent: Mark Golberg, *Vice Chair*; Maryann Thompson

Staff Present: Sarah Burks

Members of the Public: see attached sign-in sheet

With a quorum present, Chair von Wentzel called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M. He made introductions and reviewed the hearing procedures. He designated alternate member Heli Meltsner to vote on all matters.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

AH-459: 15 Raymond St., by John & Julia Bagalay. Construct rear 2nd floor addition on rear elevation.

Ms. Burks showed slides and described the Colonial Revival home designed by architect Lois Lilley Howe in 1922. She described the limited visibility of the location for the proposed addition on the second floor of the rear elevation.

Judy Bagalay, an owner of the property, explained that the addition was to enlarge a bathroom. She noted that it was a birthday gift for her husband. The existing windows at the location would be relocated to the new exterior walls of the addition. Clapboards and trim would match the rest of the house. A downspout would be relocated.

Philip Hresko, the architect, reviewed the plans and elevations for the project. The addition would be slightly setback from the corner of the house so that it would not intersect with the gable return.

Ms. Meltsner asked if the existing windows were to be re-used or matched in the addition. Ms. Bagalay answered that the existing windows would be re-used and would have storm windows also.

There were no questions from members of the public present.

Mr. Crocker commented that the addition would be an improvement over the existing deck.

Ms. Meltsner commented that it was a good idea to re-use the windows and if the design for the addition was appropriate to the design of the house.

Ms. Hamacher noted that it would be minimally visible from the public way. She suggested that lots of insulation be used to keep the space comfortable. Mr. Hresko said there would be isonene insulation and radiant floor heat.

Ms. Burks noted that an e-mail had been received from neighbor Naomi Kline, of 43 Linnaean Street, who had initially objected to the addition and complained of an exterior light that shone into her apartment. She and the Bagalays had met and resolved the issue and Ms. Kline had written again to indicate that she no longer had an objection to the addition.

Ms. Henn moved to approve the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness because the addition would retain the character of the house, preserve and re-use the windows, and be minimally visible. Mr. Bardige seconded the motion, which passed in a vote of 5-0. (von Wentzel, Crocker, Henn, Bardige, Hamacher)

AH-460: 75 Washington Ave., by the 75 Washington Avenue Trust. Demolish existing dwelling and landscape the site for open space.

Ms. Meltsner recused herself because she is an abutter of 75 Washington Avenue. She left the commissioner table and joined the audience.

James Rafferty, attorney for the owners, introduced Kathleen O'Connell and Edward Hoff, of 17 Hillside Avenue, who had purchased 75 Washington Avenue which abuts their house.

Ms. Burks showed slides and presented the staff report on the history of the property and the existing building. She noted that only one corner of the house was visible down the narrow driveway and that the house was in good condition, but it had been vacant for a year. The house was built in 1954 by architect Edward A. Cuetara for his own family's residence. It was built as a one-story house, then in 1962, a second floor was added with a gable roof, which negatively impacted the significance of the original International Style design. The building included an apartment on the far end of the building with a separate entrance. She noted that before Cuetara built the home, the property had originally been the side yard and garden for the large mansard house at 81 Washington Avenue, owned by Walter & Nellie Quinby. She described a masonry wall that divided the two properties and still retained two large decorative urns. She noted that the lot was just outside of the boundary of the Avon Hill National Register District.

Mr. Rafferty said the house was very minimally visible from a public way and was not characteristic of the district. He described the landscaped plan that had been submitted as a concept plan for future landscaping of the lot, if demolition was permitted. The Hoffs had purchased the property with the intent of demolishing the house and keeping the yard as open space for the immediate future, but might decide to return to the Commission some day with a new proposal. He noted that the driveway was 50-70' long. No grading changes were proposed other than to fill in the cellar hole.

Ms. Henn asked about the retaining wall between the 17 Hillside Avenue and 75 Washington Avenue properties. Mr. Rafferty said the wall was between 6 and 8 feet tall. Mr. Hoff said there were steps up to the property at 75 Washington Avenue. There was no plan right now to change the access to 75 Washington Avenue, but it might be improved at some point in the future. Ms. Henn asked if the driveway would remain and Mr. Rafferty replied in the affirmative.

Ms. Burks asked if a survey had determined whether the decorative urns were on the 75 Washington Avenue or the 81 Washington Avenue property. Mr. Rafferty replied that he thought they belonged to the Isaacsons at 81 Washington Avenue.

Neil Goodman, of 71 Washington Avenue, said it was his understanding that the lot at 75 Washington Avenue had been a rose garden and there had been steps down from the yard of 81 Washington Avenue.

Mr. Bardige said the driveway would be an orphan without the house. He suggested that the driveway paving be removed. Mr. Rafferty noted that the driveway was needed to provide access to landscapers who would maintain the property.

Mr. Goodman asked about demolition and removal of debris. Mr. Rafferty answered that the city had a proscribed method of dealing first with abatement of any hazardous materials and pests, then cutting and capping utilities, and then demolition of the building. He said notice would be sent to the abutters, as required.

Ms. Burks asked if the foundation would be removed and the basement hold filled in. Mr. Rafferty replied affirmatively.

Blue Magruder, of 82 Avon Hill Street, submitted a photo of the existing house in disrepair. The fence was rusty. She asked if the fence would be replaced.

Mr. Hoff said that if the fence was on the 75 Washington Avenue property, he would be happy to replace it. He said he would consult with her about it.

Heli Meltsner, an abutter at 74 Avon Hill Street, said that she thought it was a good proposal. She would be delighted to have the open space and not to see the house there. She said the integrity of the house was destroyed by the later additions. She noted that it was not in the National Register district and was barely visible from a public way.

Mr. Goodman said he would be happy to see the house go. He said was pleased it would be open space instead of being developed by a stranger. He had some concerns about the removal of the debris and size of trucks brought in.

John Hurwitch of 82 Avon Hill Street, said he would be happy to have the house gone.

Mr. Rafferty noted for the record that the lot might not forever be left as open space. The land does have value as a buildable lot, and his clients could come back in the future with an application to build there.

Ms. Henn said that should a proposal come in the future for construction, it would be subject to the Commission's review.

Mr. von Wentzel said the Commission needs to strike a balance between preserving the visual forms of the district and the diversity of styles.

Mr. Rafferty said the house did not contribute much to the district because of its lack of visibility. He commended his client for being willing to landscape the lot and take the risk of future objections to redevelopment of the lot.

Ms. Burks noted that the siting of the house in the middle of the block, largely out of view from a public way, had been an intentional element of the house's original design. Many Mid Century Modern homes made use of private sites to allow outdoor living spaces and transparency of the building. She agreed that a number of factors made this house less significant than it might otherwise be including the loss of integrity to its original design. But it was not to say that all modern houses in the district were not significant or that all houses set back from the street did not contribute to the character of the district.

Mr. Bardige said the potential future re-use of the lot did not change his opinion of the existing house as not significant. It was a hodge podge of materials and additions. He suggested that a gravel driveway might be more aesthetically pleasing.

Mr. von Wentzel pointed out that no change to the driveway was proposed.

Ms. Hamacher said the wording of the Commission's criteria for review of demolition requests was narrow. Ms. Burks reviewed the criteria.

Mr. Bardige moved to approve a certificate of appropriateness for demolition of the house on the basis that it did not retain architectural integrity or historical significance to the district and partly because of the minimal impact it would have due to the minimal visibility of the building from a public way.

Mr. Rafferty repeated that the landscape plan submitted was a concept plan only and showed that there were no grading changes proposed.

Ms. Burks asked if the site would be seeded for a lawn and Mr. Rafferty replied in the affirmative.

Mr. Crocker seconded the motion, which passed 5-0. (von Wentzel, Crocker, Henn, Bardige, Hamacher)

Ms. Burks asked if the photographs submitted by the owners in hard copy could be sent to her in their original digital format so that she could keep them as a record of the house. Mr. Rafferty agreed.

Minutes

Ms. Meltsner returned to the commissioner table.

Ms. Hamacher moved to approve the August minutes, as submitted. Ms. Henn seconded the motion, which passed 4-0 with the Commissioners who had been present in August voting. (von Wentzel, Bardige, Henn, Hamacher)

Staff Report

Ms. Burks reported on cases handled administratively and on the need to send a Five Year Status Report on the district to the City Council by the end of the year. She said she would organize a plan for a public hearing and a poll of district residents.

Ms. Henn moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Meltsner seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 6:50 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
that Signed Attendance Sheet
September 23, 2013**

Philip Hresko, AIA	110 Broad St, Boston 02110
Brendan Sullivan	118 Garden St
Edward Hoff	17 Hillside Ave
Kathleen O'Connell	17 Hillside Ave
Blue Magruder	82 Avon Hill St
John Hurwitch	82 Avon Hill St
Julia Bagalay	15 Raymond St

Addresses are in Cambridge, unless otherwise specified.