

Approved 11/25/13

Minutes of the Avon Hill Neighborhood Conservation District

Monday, October 28, 2013 - 5:35 PM - 831 Massachusetts Ave., Basement Conference Rm.

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

Commissioners Absent: Maryann Thompson

Staff Present: Charles Sullivan

Members of the Public: see attached sign-in sheet

With a quorum present, Chair von Wentzel called the meeting to order at 5:35 P.M. He made introductions and reviewed the hearing procedures.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

AH-462: 7 Humboldt St., by 7 Humboldt LLC. Demolish the existing house and construct a new two-story house.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the 1953 Ranch style house put up by a local builder according to plans sold by the National Homes Corp. of Indiana. He read the criteria for decisions concerning demolition and new construction.

Sean Hope, attorney for the proponent, Peter Quinn, observed that the house was visibly deteriorating. After meeting with the neighbors, the team had revised the design and adjusted the setbacks. They had just realized that the project could be made as-of-right by shifting the house 2' to the right, a change that was not reflected in the drawings previously distributed.

Peter Quinn, the architect, said that at the neighbors' request he had tried to acknowledge the historical styles present on the street with a Mansard design that accommodated the entire allowable floor area on two stories. Because of averaging, zoning allowed a 15' front setback instead of 20', with 25' in the rear. The house would be only 27' high, rather than the 35' allowed; he had hoped for more height. The foundation would be concrete, and the exterior would have wood or fiber-cement cladding, a bracketed cornice, a metal apron around the base of the roof, artificial slate, and a brick chimney in one corner. There would be bay windows on all facades. Color would be coordinated with CHC staff. He reviewed the shadow study.

Ms. Hamacher asked why the team had settled on a Mansard design and not something contemporary. Mr. Quinn replied that a Modern design would be harder to win approval, and that many potential buyers were more comfortable with traditional designs.

Katya Podsiadlo, the landscape architect, said the brick driveway would be 8½' wide. The front yard would be fully planted, with an American elm tree in lieu of a street tree and a blue-stone walk. The back yard would be enclosed with a 6' fence. Many volunteer trees would be removed.

Ms. Hamacher asked why they were seeking to raze the house rather than rehab it. Mr. Quinn said there was no merit in it, and Mr. Hope said that it was non-conforming, and would require a variance if it were to be enlarged. The new house would be more compatible with the district.

Ms. Henn observed that the low height of the building made it seem out of scale. Mr. Quinn replied that the first floor was the minimum 8" above grade, while other houses were 3'-4" above it. Ceiling heights were 9' on the first floor and 8'6" on the second. The upper roof had a minimal slope.

Ms. Meltsner said that one of the goals of the district was to maintain architectural variety, and that the guidelines were intended to reflect the evolution of styles. Buildings should reflect their period; it was not appropriate to build yesterday's buildings today. She would have the house redesigned in a contemporary style. A replica would perpetrate a fraud on the public. Ms. Hamacher observed that this was not prohibited by the guidelines.

Mr. von Wentzel asked if modern materials could be considered appropriate if the house was a reproduction. Ms. Meltsner said that materials should match the style.

Mr. Crocker asked about the compressors. Mr. Quinn said they would probably be by the deck.

Mr. Bardige asked if the building couldn't be taller. Mr. Quinn responded that his preference would be to raise it 4' to 31' by adding 1' per floor.

Ms. Meltsner said the architect could play with the Mansard style by taking some of its features but making the design such that it could not be mistaken for the real thing.

Mr. von Wentzel opened the meeting to questions from the public.

Holbrook Robinson of 11 Humboldt Street questioned the setback on the plan and stated that there was a 13'3" setback at his house and an 18'6" setback at 11 Linnaean Street. Mr. Quinn said a surveyor would confirm the dimensions.

Jie Li of 11 Linnaean Street praised the design and the landscaping but objected to the bay facing her kitchen window. Mr. Quinn observed that there would be 13' from the bay to the property line, and that a screen could be planted.

Katherine Moon of 10 Humboldt Street said that the design resulted from several neighborhood meetings that resolved different interests. A modern house would ruin the harmony of the street.

Tom Berentes of 9 Humboldt Street asked for clarification of the lot coverage. Mr. Quinn replied that 2,614 square feet would be allowed under zoning, and this scheme was below that. Mr. Hope stated that because the lot was set off from 11 Linnaean Street in 1950 it was grandfathered as a pre-existing non-conforming lot. Mr. Berentes said the city recorded the lot as 5,190 square feet, and the house should be no larger than 50% of that. Mr. von Wentzel said this was a zoning issue and closed the discussion.

Mr. von Wentzel opened the hearing to public comments.

Mr. Robinson observed that the scale of the house seemed small because it was too close to the street

Ms. Moon said the neighbors were definitely opposed to a tall building that would affect their light and air. A 4' higher building would be problematic.

Mr. Berentes said he favored a traditional design done correctly. The setback should be in close alignment with the neighbors. The mean was 13'.

Karin Weller of 12 Humboldt Street approved of the Mansard but pointed out several improper details, including the paneling under the bay, the length of the bay windows, the placement of the chimney, the cantilevered rear deck, and the brackets by the entrance. She wanted more information on the materials.

Ms. Moon supported the 27' height, and observed that the current building was 16' high.

Dorothy Robinson of 11 Humboldt Street said that the house could be three stories, but if two stories should be pushed back.

Ms. Meltsner said it was a nice design, but the fine details should be delegated to the staff. She left the meeting.

Mr. von Wentzel closed the public comment period and began deliberation.

Mr. Golberg said that the design might be improved if the roof were raised.

Mr. Crocker said the house was very low, and should be set further back. Mr. von Wentzel asked if that were possible; Mr. Hope said invading the 25' rear setback would require a variance.

Ms. Henn said she agreed with the previous comments. The design was acceptable, but the details should be addressed.

Ms. Hamacher was concerned about losing a Modern house, which would reduce the diversity of style in the neighborhood. ~~Ms. Hamacher did not think the Mansard style worked well; a different style might have a better presence. She objected to demolishing the Modern house.~~

Mr. Bardige said he had no objections to the Mansard style and that he hoped to promote consensus in the neighborhood.

Mr. Sullivan said he was reconciled to the Mansard style by Ms. Moon's comments about the visual disruption that a Modern design might bring to Humboldt's cohesive collection of Mansards and Queen Annes. He said it would be a mistake to artificially diminish the height of the building, because all its neighbors were very tall; its foundation should be at least a foot taller.

Mr. Bardige moved to a) approve the demolition of the existing house, once the replacement project received a Certificate of Appropriateness, b) to approve the new design in principle as being not inappropriate to the district, pending further review of the building's height, materials, construction details, and chimney, and c) to continue the hearing until November 25. Mr. Golberg seconded, and the motion passed unanimously with Ms. Hamacher not voting.

Minutes

Mr. Bardige moved to approve the September minutes as submitted. Ms. Henn seconded the motion, which passed 4-0

Ms. Henn moved to adjourn, Mr. Bardige seconded, and the motion unanimously at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles Sullivan
Executive Director

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

Katya Podsiadlo	318 Harvard St., Brookline
John Sanzone	540 Memorial Drive
Dorothy Robinson	11 Humboldt St./
Holbrook Robinson	11 Humboldt St.
Jie Li	11 Linnaean St.
Karin Weller	12 Humboldt St.
Elizabeth Brainerd	9 Humboldt St.
Tom Berentes	9 Humboldt St.
Jeffrey Frankel	10 Humboldt St
Katherine Moon	10 Humboldt St.
Sally Cook	4 Humboldt St.

Addresses are in Cambridge, unless otherwise specified.