

Minutes of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Mon., Nov. 9, 2009 at 6:00P.M., Friends Meeting House, 5 Longfellow Pk., Cambridge

Members present: James Van Sickle, Chair; Dennis Wolkoff, Vice-Chair, Bill King, Judith Dortz, members
Grenelle Scott, alternate member

Staff present: Susan Maycock

Members of the Public: See attached list

The Chair, James Van Sickle, called the meeting to order at 5:55PM. He made introductions and reviewed the hearing procedures. He designated alternate Scott to vote on all matters.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

HCM-62: 15 Gibson St., by Nancy Hemenway & Ellen Langer. To demolish attached garage and restore left wall of house.

Ms. Maycock showed photos, described the house and its history, and summarized the application. She pointed out that the attached garage was part of the original 1929 design of the house.

James Weir, architect of the project, stated his reasons for thinking that the garage could be removed without detriment to the neighborhood. He presented photographs of all the houses on the street showing the variety of architecture and stated that there is no consistent house style on the street.

He stated that the garage at 15 Gibson has been unused for at least two years because the current width is only 7'8" or 7'10" depending on where you measure it, and if you can get a car inside the garage, there is not enough room to open the car doors. He submitted copies of two accepted standards for single car garages which stated that the minimum width is about 10'. He said that there would be no change to the house except removal of the garage and shingling of the exposed side wall.

Mr. Van Sickle asked if the two windows on the side of the house behind the garage are original, as they will now be visible for the first time from the street.

Mr. Weir replied that those two windows are not original, but earlier replacements.

Mr. Wolkoff expressed his concern about keeping the parking behind the front plane of the house in accordance with the HCMNCD guidelines and asked if they were proposing only one parking space as shown on the plans.

Mr. Weir stated that two parking spaces had been discussed but that there was not enough room.

Mr. Wolkoff asked if there was anything Mr. Weir could design, such as a narrower front part of the driveway, to make sure that parking would not take place in front of the front plane of the house.

Ellen Langer, an owner, responded that the space is so tight now that it would be hard to open the doors when the car is parked next to the house. She added that she has worked to restore the house and does not want a car sticking out in front of it.

In response to a question about the appearance of the exposed side, Mr. Weir said that the foundation there is parged and that the new shingles would start about 30" above grade.

Mr. Van Sickle asked for a description of the rebuilding of the retaining wall which looks like it is right on the property line.

Mr. Weir said that the retaining wall would have to be built with 1" thick steel plates, 6' or 7' long and set within an inch of the property line. There would be only a 3" space to work in, and the wall would be braced under the driveway. The retaining wall is necessary because the grade of 21 Gibson Street is 3' above the grade of 15 Gibson Street at the sidewalk and slopes down to the back of the lots where the grades of the two properties are similar.

Mr. Van Sickle asked if he had spoken to the Seklers, owners of 21 Gibson Street, about this project.

Mr. Weir said that they had told the Seklers that they were evaluating different possibilities, including building a bigger garage which would require a variance. The Seklers are in Europe and he has not been able to talk to them about the current scheme of removing the garage which would not require a variance and could be done, he thought, without excavating in the neighbor's property. He agreed that he needed to do more design work.

Mr. Van Sickle asked about the driveway material, and Mr. Weir said that it would probably be brick or masonry pavers that drain, not asphalt.

Mr. King said that he needed to leave the meeting soon, but that in his opinion removing the garage was not inconsistent with the neighborhood. He suggested, however,

that any approval be conditional on getting the prior written consent of the neighbors for any construction work that would disturb or affect their property. He wanted to make sure that the HCMNCD did not permit anything that would even temporarily trespass on the neighbors' property without their written consent.

Mr. Weir submitted a letter from Scott Haas, 27 Gibson Street, in support of the project.

There were no other questions or comments from the public, and Mr. Van Sickle closed the public comment period and asked for deliberation by the commission.

Mr. Wolkoff said the project meets some of the goals of the district, such as opening up views between houses, but he was concerned that parking would take place in front of the front plane of the house or over the sidewalk and wished that the commission could do something to guarantee that did not happen.

Mr. Van Sickle suggested narrowing the throat of the driveway to get it a foot away from the neighboring property.

Mr. Weir said that he had wanted to save the garage roof and use it as a carport, but the structural posts necessary to support it would have to be even closer to the lot line. This would have made the garage even more non-conforming and so this idea was dropped.

Mr. Van Sickle suggested moving the retaining wall one foot from the property line, but Mr. Weir said that the code requires a 10' driveway.

Mr. King moved to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work as submitted on the condition that any construction or permanent activity that occurs on the neighbors' property be approved by the neighbors in writing. Ms. Dortz seconded the motion.

Mr. Wolkoff suggested amending the motion to include a second condition that the applicants convey to ISD that it is the Commission's wish to ensure that parking will not take place in front of the front plane of the house. Mr. King so amended his motion, and Mr. Wolkoff seconded. The motion passed 5-0 with all voting.

Informational presentation by Aaron Kemp, 245 Mount Auburn Street

Before Mr. King left the meeting at 6:35 pm, he stated that he could support the idea of the small dormers proposed for 245 Mount Auburn Street.

Mr. Kemp described the house and his meeting with Charles Sullivan who had suggested removing some shingles to reveal the original size of the second floor

windows. He found that the windows had been longer than the current windows, and that they originally extended to within 5" of the floor. He wants to replace the second floor windows for sound reduction and would like to replace them with windows of the original size but move them off the floor by putting the extra height into two dormers. If the dormers are too expensive to build, he would just put in long windows to match the originals.

Mr. Van Sickle asked about the steepness of the roof, as he was concerned that the dormers as drawn were too shallow to shingle. He said that a 2 ½ /12 pitch was needed to be able to use real shingles, but he wouldn't want to see the dormers extend way up on the roof to achieve this pitch. He noted that the sense of the Commission was positive with regard to the addition of dormers.

Mr. Kemp then described his chimney problems and asked the Commission's position on chimneys. He was asked to come back with a specific proposal for both the dormers and the chimney.

Minutes:

Mr. Wolkoff moved to approve the minutes of September 14, 2009, as submitted. Ms. Scott seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.

Mr. Van Sickle proposed to go into Executive Session for the purpose of reviewing the minutes of the Executive Session on September 14, 2009. Ms. Dortz moved to approve the minutes, as submitted. Mr. Wolkoff seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.

After a motion was made, seconded and passed to close the Executive Session, Mr. Van Sickle moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Scott seconded, and the motion passed 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 7:06 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Maycock
Survey Director

Members of the Public attending November 9, 2009

Ellen Langer, 15 Gibson St., Cambridge 02138
James R. Weir AIA, P.O. Box 98, Adamsville, RI 02801
Barbara Kurze, 40 Waldo Road, Arlington, MA 02471
Robin Osten, 805 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472
Aaron Kemp, 245 Mount Auburn St., Cambridge, MA 02138