

Minutes of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Mon., Nov. 14, 2011 at 6:00 PM, Friends Meeting House, 5 Longfellow Pk., Cambridge

Commission Members present: James Van Sickle, *Chair*; Robert Banker, Judith Dortz, William King, *members*; Deborah Masterson, Michael Robertson, Charles Smith, *alternates*

Commission Members absent: Grenelle Scott, *member*

Staff present: Eiliesh Tuffy

Members of the Public: See attached list

Chair Van Sickle called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. Mr. Van Sickle introduced the Commissioners and staff present.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties **HCM-105: 154 Mt. Auburn St., by Adrian Catalano.**

The current hearing is to address inconsistencies in the as-built conditions at the 1853 property under rehabilitation. Differing sets of plans (dated one day apart) were submitted for Historical review versus those submitted to Inspectional Services to obtain the building permit. As a result, windows and porch columns were installed in violation of the Certificate of Appropriateness (C.O.A.) issued for this project by the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission. The front elevation was discussed first, followed by a discussion about the East elevation window and mechanical changes (adjacent to the commercial property).

On the front porch, the original height of the first floor window sills was raised approximately 5-8" based on adjacent clapboards in "Before" and "After" photos, and the decorative wood porch columns were milled at a larger proportion than the originals.

The owner said that, in order to avoid waiting longer for custom windows to match the originals he installed stock window sizes. Also, this would allow enough room to install a standard size baseboard on the interior of those rooms. The owner said the replacement units were thought to be approximately 5" shorter than the original windows.

With regard to the front porch, in order to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy the owner needed to have his engineer sign off on the building plans. The engineer was reluctant to do so using the grouped 3"-square wood columns historically installed at this location. Based on this information, the columns were built at a larger scale using stock 4x square wood posts with column capitals scaled up to the larger lumber dimensions. Inspectional Services staff confirmed that this was an unnecessary increase in dimensions, and that the 3" posts still meet current code requirements.

When Commission members questioned the importance of correcting this design change, Chairman Van Sickle had several points to make, including:

- This building is a contributing structure within the Ash Street National Register district
- It is a very significant house, both architecturally and for its prominent corner location
- The first two points lead him to believe this project should fall under a high standard of review for details of the rehabilitation, particularly
- Preserving original features or recreating the best approximation of those features

Ms. Masterson asked why the property owner did not return to the Commission for the required approvals prior to undertaking these changes at the property. The owner said that, while he did get the column detail drawing required in the C.O.A., he did not provide staff with that drawing until the day of the site visit when the violations were identified.

Mr. Van Sickle asked about the reduced height of the front porch windows, and staff said they are anywhere from 5-8” shorter in overall height from the original windows. Mr. Van Sickle reiterated that new custom windows would be required to replicate the correct length of the front windows. Mr. King said that in viewing the current condition he still gets a sense of the elongated windows meant for that location and was not appalled by the fact that they are shorter.

When Ms. Masterson asked why the originals could not have remained in place, the owner said he applied for and received approval for their replacement. She expressed her concern that, rather than wait 6 months for the proper windows to arrive, the owner proceeded without Commission approval and under the assumption that it was acceptable to do so. Mr. Banker stated that it is the Commission’s charge to be sure developers follow the rules.

The discussion shifted to address the East elevation and the reduced-size, 1st floor casement window that had been installed where a full-size, 6-over-6 operable sash window was initially called for. When Ms. Masterson inquired about the reason for the smaller window in that location, the owner said he thought it had been approved and that had he known it was not he would have arranged the kitchen differently. A kitchen sink was planned to go underneath that window on the interior. Mr. Van Sickle explained that a properly designed interior window well or the insertion of a black-out panel behind the lower sash of a full-height double hung window could still allow for a sink in that location without disrupting the symmetry of the original exterior design. Ms. Dortz said that this window change bothered her because it is so glaringly different. The other Commission members agreed.

The last item discussed was the placement of three exterior air conditioning condensers, which are proposed to be located along the east wall of the building at grade level, one of which is towards the front corner of the house. When asked why the condenser closest to the sidewalk could not be at the rear of the building, the owner said it would be closer to an abutting neighbor there and he wanted to minimize the disruption to surrounding residences. Mr. King asked what the proposed landscaping would be around the condensers, to which the owner said he would plant evergreen bushes to screen them from view.

Mr. Catalano agreed to correct the porch columns and kitchen window violations, and withdrew approval of those items from the scope of his application.

Mr. King made a motion to approve the revised locations of the exterior mechanicals and the new first floor windows overlooking the front porch as installed, which convey the elongated proportions of the original design. Ms. Dortz seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Informational Meeting

The project architect for the new owners of **43 Gibson Street** (1908 American Foursquare) asked for preliminary feedback on altering this highly visible corner-lot residence. He mentioned that in the history of the property, additions had been designed by T.A.C. and Jim Freeman during different timeframes and wondered whether those additions also fell under the purview of the Commission.

The Commission noted that, while all exterior changes were subject to review, the architect should not feel confined in his design approach. Rather, he should use the stated goals and guidelines of the district as a framework to work within. The style of the design does not play as important a role as the overall scale and massing in many cases.

The Commission encouraged the architect and owners to reach out to the neighbors in advance of submitting plans for review.

Minutes

Mr. King moved to approve the minutes from the October meeting. Mr. Smith seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Mr. King moved to adjourn. Mr. Smith seconded the motion which passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:40pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy
Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public who signed the attendance sheet, November 14, 2011

Kyle Sheffield
Catherine Hayden

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