

Minutes of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Mon., Apr. 9, 2012 at 6:00 PM, Friends Meeting House, 5 Longfellow Pk., Cambridge

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

Commission Members absent: William King, Grenelle Scott, *members*

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-142: 983-986 Memorial Dr., by Longview Corporation. Proposal for a building-wide window policy.

The property under review is one in a series of early 20th century brick apartment buildings along Memorial Drive that overlook the Charles River. All were constructed between the years 1900—1924, and were converted over the years from apartments to either condominiums or co-op ownership models. The building at 983-986 Memorial Drive was initially known as the Radner Hall Apartment (#983-984) and the Hampstead Hall Apartments (#985-986). In plan, the structure has a rear section across the back of the lot that runs parallel to Memorial Drive. Three wings were built perpendicular to the rear section, in the direction of the river. The spaces between those wings create two large courtyards that allow views out to the Charles River.

The architect for this complex was Charles Greco, who was born in Cambridge and worked with the architecture firm of Peabody & Stearns before starting his own practice at the age of 20. Greco was 42 years old when the Memorial Drive project was constructed in 1916.

The application before the Commission was submitted by members of the Longview Co-op Board and requests a building-wide Certificate of Appropriateness for window repair methods and suitable replacement window models that could be approved at the staff level to expedite the Historical Commission review process. This would also ensure uniformity in the treatment and appearance of the numerous windows throughout the building. The goal of the Longview Co-op Board was to preserve the historic fabric and character of the building at a standard that could be upheld by the Half Crown-Marsh Commission's official ruling.

The Board hired Davis Square Architects to conduct a window survey and catalog the various window sizes, styles and existing conditions in preparation for the whole-building window maintenance and repair plan. The project architect, Laura Wolthuis, described the variety of sizes among the 1,000-plus windows catalogues at the property as well as the firm's recommendations

as outlined in their report. Those recommendations call for a 4-tiered approach to window maintenance:

1. Install high quality storm windows over the original wood windows
2. Repair the existing wood windows
3. Where existing wood windows are beyond repair, proceed with sash-only replacement using a wood window to match the original
4. When sash-only replacement is not sufficient, pursue full window replacement using new wood windows to match the originals

While the current application does not call out a specific window model, the architects' report lays out window specifications to be used in selecting a suitable replacement unit, if needed.

Ms. Masterson asked the Board representative, Lindsay Miller, about the current oversight with regard to owners repairing versus replacing windows. Ms. Miller said the building's Renovation Committee calls for plans from owners in advance of such projects and that they were looking to draw up more detailed specifications to assist in that review process.

Mr. Van Sickle asked if the Board has encountered many instances of owners wanting to replace their historic wood windows, to which Ms. Miller said they had fielded several requests. Mr. Van Sickle asked if financial issues were raised in those requests. Ms. Miller said cost efficiency in both materials and energy savings were points of concern for those inquiring about replacement.

Mr. Robertson commented that if we are able to simplify the approval process for owners in large buildings it will make the co-op board's job easier as well.

There were no questions from the public.

Comments were accepted from the public.

Laura Gale of 36 Ash Street said that she lives in a 17-unit brick building that is currently dealing with similar issues and hoped that a process for uniform maintenance standards eligible for approval at the staff level of the Commission could be implemented for buildings such as hers.

During the Commission's deliberation Mr. Van Sickle commented that, rather than impart a system of guidelines that restrict acceptable replacement window models perhaps it would be better to emphasize maintenance, repair and restoration of existing windows as the acceptable practice. Then on the occasion an owner wishes to deviate from the approved methods they would still be subject to a binding review before the Half Crown-Marsh Commission.

Ms. Masterson asked how often people request to replace their windows, to which Ms. Miller said not often but the Board was trying to be proactive and plan ahead for future inquiries.

Mr. Robertson asked how many windows were in each unit. Ms. Miller said approximately 15-20 windows per unit.

Mr. Van Sickle again stressed that he was hesitant to include options for window replacement because once the original historic building fabric is gone, it's gone forever. The application

procedure for a Certificate of Hardship was mentioned as an option for extraordinary circumstances.

Mr. Robertson commented that, with the window repair document in place potential new buyers would have all the information they needed to assess the true cost of ownership prior to buying into the building. Staff suggested that window repair guidelines be included in all new-owner documents as part of the co-op board's building policies.

The Commission, staff and Longview Cooperative representative all agreed that the Window Guidelines adopted by the Cambridge Historical Commission (or some concise summary of those city guidelines) could serve as a document that the board officially adopts as part of the building's maintenance documents. Any deviation from those guidelines would still be subject to review by the Half Crown-Marsh Commission as part of the regular public hearing process.

Ms. Masterson made a motion to continue the meeting to allow the condo board and architects an opportunity to refine and revise the submission to better reflect the Cambridge Historical Commission's Window Guidelines. Mr. Smith seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Minutes

Mr. Van Sickle corrected the references to the rear "el" at 154 Mt. Auburn St. to read rear "ell".

Mr. Banker moved to approve the corrected minutes of the January 2012 meeting. Mr. Smith seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy
Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public who signed the attendance sheet, February 13, 2012

Laura Gill
Laura Wolthuis
Lindsay Miller

36 Ash St., #301, Cambridge, MA 02138
Davis Square Architects, 240A Elm St., Somerville, MA 02144
984 Memorial Drive, #604, Cambridge, MA 02138