

## **Minutes of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission**

Mon., May 13, 2013 at 6:00 PM, Friends Meeting House, 5 Longfellow Pk., Cambridge

Commission Members present: James Van Sickle, *Chair*; Judith Dortz, William King *members*; Deborah Masterson, *alternate*

Commission Members absent: Robert Banker, *member*; Michael Robertson, Charles Smith, *alternates*

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-191: 8-10 Brewer St., by 8-10 Brewer St. Condo Trust.** Alter rear porches; replace select windows; new exterior condensers.

The property under review is a 3-story frame building, built by the carpenter Robert Currie Grovestein in 1914. This is one of three buildings by Grovestein on Brewer Street; the others are located at #5 and #6 Brewer. This building is the same design as #5 Brewer Street, both of which were designed for 6 apartments. Over the years, #8 Brewer has been converted to condominiums.

In late January, 2012 a fire broke out at 8-10 Brewer Street that forced the building to be evacuated until repairs could be made. The current proposal is to repair the interior damage caused by the fire while also making certain alterations to the building's exterior – specifically the proposed enclosure of the existing rear porches on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors. In addition to the porch alterations, some windows damaged by the fire are being replaced.

As part of the project, new air conditioning units are being installed throughout the building for all 6 units. 2 of the condensers are to be located on the roof, while the other 4 units are sited for installation along the north elevation, which directly abuts #6 Brewer Street.

Craig Whitaker, architect, represented the condominium owners at the meeting. Mr. Whitaker said the purpose for enclosing the rear porches was to create bedrooms in those locations. The 3<sup>rd</sup> floor owners wish to retain the original open porch design. He also stated that he had discussed the location of the four grade-level air condensers with the abutters, who did not voice opposition. The units to be installed are quiet and are predicted to be under the maximum decibel limit set forth in the city's noise ordinance.

Mr. King asked if there was a plan to screen the condensers with plantings. The architect said they could either take that approach or install a low fence for screening.

Upon inspection after the fire, it was discovered that the front corner of the building was lowered substantially due to differential settlement of the structure. To stabilize the building, the front

corner was pulled back up to plumb, the foundation walls were rebuilt and helical piers were drilled into place to shore up the building.

The new basement windows are to be awning windows with a composite material on the exterior. The rooftop chimneys, which had minimal public visibility, were also removed.

Questions of fact were received from the Commission.

Ms. Masterson asked if the condensers would be used for heating as well, or only cooling. Mr. Whitaker said that yes, they would be capable of being used for heating as well as cooling. The prior heating ducts were all covered in asbestos, and all of that was removed as part of the post-fire demolition work.

Ms. Dortz reiterated that, if used for heating and cooling, the condensers would be operating on a year round basis.

Ms. Masterson asked what the existing windows had been before the fire. Mr. Whitaker said the existing windows had been PVC, so they are putting in replacement PVC windows.

With regard to the air condensers for this and surrounding properties, Chair Van Sickle asked if the neighbors' air condensers were actually on 8 Brewer's property. Mr. Whitaker said he believed that, while the fence might be on 8 Brewer's property, he understands that the existing condensers at the rear of the lot are on 6 Brewer's property.

It was recommended that the applicants verify with professionals – such as the city's License Commission -- that the grouping of 4 condensers would meet the city's noise limit requirements. Mr. King noted that there is a big difference in noise suppression between cheap and high end condensers. Mr. Van Sickle also pushed for diligence in the maintenance of the condenser units to keep them operating properly and quietly.

Chair Van Sickle asked if the foundation walls would be parged and painted to replicate the previous condition. Mr. Whitaker said it would be.

The Commission inquired whether the applicants had included the perimeter fence in their scope of work for this review. It was clarified that the fence, which exceeds the 4-foot height limitation set for the district, was installed without knowledge of that restriction. The Commission members asked about its necessity, and the applicants explained their want to block out the noise and sweeping headlight intrusions from the large adjacent parking lot along the south lot line. Mr. King suggested the Commission could consider this unusual juxtaposition for consideration under the hardship provisions in the district order.

Ms. Dortz asked how high the existing wood fence was, to which the applicants said it was 6' tall with a 1' lattice topper.

Questions and comments were received from the public.

Barbara Yeoman of 11 Brewer Street said she and her family have lived in the neighborhood for 75 years, and that the fence is the best thing that's ever gone up there.

The Commission began its deliberation. Mr. King said he did not feel that the enclosure of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor porches would be incongruous with the goals of the district. Chair Van Sickle

agreed, saying that the porches are at the far rear of the building and that by keeping the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor porches open, it does not alter the open views that the general public currently experience when looking at the building.

The recommendation of the Commission, should the proposed condenser location exceed the noise ordinance, would be to relocate some or all of those units to the south elevation. In addition, thick plantings such as holly could be planted to aid in screening the units, which was preferred over the option of installing a low fence for the same purpose.

The Commission said the owners and project team were to be congratulated for all the work done to save this neighborhood building following extensive fire damage.

Mr. King made a motion to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness for the application with the condition that plantings be added around the grade-level condensers to provide natural screening and help dampen sound. Ms. Masterson seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.

Mr. King made a second motion to grant a Certificate of Hardship for a fence greater than 4-feet in height along the south edge of the property. The reason for the hardship is the large parking lot that directly abuts the property on the south side and the resulting disruption from auto traffic and headlights shining into the property throughout the day and evening hours. It was felt that the taller, lattice-topped fence in this specific location did not cause a substantial detriment to the overall character of the district. Ms. Masterson seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.

#### Minutes

The minutes of the April meeting were approved unanimously by the Commission.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:11pm

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy  
Preservation Administrator

**Members of the Public who signed the attendance sheet, May 13, 2013**

Laura Hoffmann	P.O. Box 382150, Cambridge, MA 02138
Craig Whitaker	36 Ash St., Apt. 301, Cambridge, MA 02138
Seth Ri___in	Stinson Ct., Cambridge, MA 02139
Elizabeth Carroll-Horrocks	11A Brewer St., Cambridge, MA 02138
Barbara Yeoman	11 Brewer St., Cambridge, MA 02138
Jas. McDavitt	11 Brewer St., Cambridge, MA 02138