

**Minutes of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission**  
***Approved at the August 15, 2016 Meeting***

May 9, 2016 - 6:00 PM at Friends Meeting House, 5 Longfellow Park, Cambridge

Members present: James Van Sickle, *Chair*; Judith Dortz, *Vice Chair*; William King, Marie-Pierre Dillenseger, Deborah Masterson, and Peter Schur, *members*

Members absent: Charles Smith, *member*

Staff present: Samantha Paull

Members of the Public: see attached list

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Mr. James Van Sickle, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:00pm and gave an overview of the agenda. Mr. Van Sickle discussed meeting procedures. He noted that as four members were present, the alternates would alternate voting. He designated Ms. Judith Dortz, Vice Chair, to vote for HCM-328 and HCM-330. He noted that he would be voting on HCM-329.

***HCM-323 (continued): 138 Mt. Auburn Street, by Loreda, LLC. Alter exterior, demolish rear ell, and construct new ell.***

Ms. Samantha Paull, staff, noted that the applicant requested a deferral. The Commission accepted the request for a deferral.

Mr. Van Sickle recused himself as he was the applicant on the upcoming application. Ms. Dortz assumed the role of Chair.

**HCM-328: 15 Brown Street, by James & Mary Alice Van Sickle.** Alter garage and construct entry hoods.

Ms. Samantha Paull, staff, gave an introduction to the application and showed slides.

Mr. James Van Sickle introduced himself and his wife, Mary Alice Van Sickle, as the owners of 15 Brown Street. He noted that the proposal had been on their to-do list for 35 years as the entries did not have an overhang to protect from the weather.

Mr. Van Sickle reviewed the proposed plans to construct an overhang above the entrance to the house and to the second unit in the rear. He noted that the structure would have a copper roof to match the bay window on the front elevation. He continued, stating that the application included adding clapboards and trim to the garage to match the details of the house over the garage's existing concrete block.

Mr. Bill King, Commissioner, asked if a variance was needed for the increase in square footage. Mr. Van Sickle replied that yes, a variance was needed as the property was currently non-conforming.

Ms. Dortz asked what was being covered in clapboard. Mr. Van Sickle said that all elevations of the garage were proposed to be covered, except the existing doors, which would stay the same. He noted that they

were proposing to add trim where there wasn't any. Mr. King asked if the clapboards would increase the footprint of the garage. Mr. Van Sickle replied yes by a few inches. Mr. King asked if that would also require a variance. Mr. Van Sickle said he did not think it would but he would check prior to permitting.

Ms. Dortz asked if the project included square columns like the photo example included in the application. Mr. Van Sickle replied yes, with a low pitched hip roof.

Ms. Deb Masterson, Commissioner, asked if he had talked to abutters. Mr. Van Sickle replied yes. Ms. Dortz noted that she had letters of support from abutters: Thomas Roades of 10 Brown Street, Dwight Quayle & Deb Manegold at 16 Brown St, and Mrs. Pratt at 11 Brown St. Mr. Van Sickle noted those were immediate abutters.

Ms. Dortz asked if the roof was changing on the garage. Mr. Van Sickle replied that the pitch was not changing but he was proposing a new waterproofing membrane during the renovation.

Ms. Dortz asked if there were any questions from the public.

Ms. Lucy Titman, resident at 12 Gerry Street, asked if the owner did not like the look of the garage and expressed concern with having the garage match the house as they were from different time periods. Mr. Van Sickle responded that the garage also needed a number of repairs and that the lentil over the right opening was falling apart. He added that he had seen this treatment used on other garages in the area.

Ms. Dortz asked if there were any additional comments or questions. There were none; she closed the public hearing.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Dillenseger noted that she felt the proposal was well thought through and it was supported by abutters.

Mr. King made a motion to approve the project as submitted as the proposed changes were not incongruous to the neighborhood. Ms. Masterson seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0.

Mr. Van Sickle joined the Commission and reassumed his position as Chair. Ms. Masterson recused herself, from HCM-329, as she was an abutter and joined the audience.

**HCM-329: 52-54 Foster Street, by Ann & Charles Bonney.** Alter windows.

Ms. Paull gave an overview of the application and showed slides.

Mrs. Anne Bonney, an owner, outlined the proposal. She said that the proposal was due to the renovation of the basement but noted that the windows were taller than the basement ceiling. She said the proposal was to drop the windows by a row or two of bricks as needed to allow for the windows to be opening and a ceiling installed in addition to the basement floor being lowered.

Ms. Dortz asked how far the windows would be lowered. Ms. Bonney replied that they did not know an exact measurement yet as the windows varied in height. Ms. Dortz asked if they were proposing to reduce

all windows around the house. Ms. Bonney replied yes. Ms. Dortz asked how many windows were being affected. Ms. Bonney replied ten windows.

Mr. King asked if the digging of the basement required a soil study. Mr. Van Sickle said that the District Order seemed to state that analysis was required of new construction only. Ms. Paull offered to follow up with the applicant.

Ms. Masterson asked if there was a window being removed as part of the project. Ms. Bonney said yes on the front right elevation a window would be removed for a closet. Mr. Van Sickle asked if it was visible from the street. Ms. Paull directed the Commission's attention to a photograph included in their packet.

Mr. Van Sickle asked for comments from public. Seeing that there were none, he closed public hearing.

Mr. King made a motion to approve the application as submitted, stating that the proposed alteration would be minimally visible and not incongruous to the character of the structure or the district. He noted that the alterations were subject to any additional engineering reports that may be required as part of lowering the basement floor. Ms. Dillenseger seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0 with Mr. Van Sickle voting.

**HCM-330: 7-9 Gibson Street, by Robert Livingston.** Alter windows, remove existing roof, construct new mansard roof, remove chimney, alter porches, and replace windows.

Ms. Paull gave an overview of the application and showed slides. Mr. Van Sickle asked if the house was significant. Ms. Paull responded that she did not complete a full house history. She noted that from her research, the house had not had significant alterations over the years aside from the front porches being enclosed and windows replaced.

Mr. Robert Livingston, owner, said he moved here from Cambridge, England, as he was now faculty with Harvard. He found this home and had undertaken this project to increase livability for himself and make the home more similar to other homes in the area. He noted that he hoped to restore some of the historic character to the structure. He continued, stating that when the sellers put the house on the market, the same family had owned the house for its entire existence. He said he was chosen by the sellers because he wanted to keep the historic character while making it something he could live in. He said his architect and builder were present and were proposing a floorplan to optimize the structure's floor space.

Mr. King asked what prior alterations had been made to the original house. Mr. Livingston said the original linen plans reflected that the main alterations were to enclose the front porches and replace the windows with a one over one product.

Dr. Schur asked if the additional square footage on the third floor would require additional zoning approval. Mr. Livingston noted that the structure was non-conforming and would be more nonconforming with the addition. Ms. Masterson asked if the third floor was currently livable. Mr. Livingston replied that a portion of the third floor was livable space, approximately 256 square feet of the same with four (4) skylights. He noted that the addition would create 850 square feet of livable space.

Ms. Masterson asked if there were dormers currently. Ms. Paull directed her to the photos provided.

Ms. Dortz asked if the entire height was only being increase by two (2) feet. Mr. Livingston replied that he would prefer to increase by six or seven feet but he wanted to match the surrounding heights. The architect, Alexander Jacobson, added that the proposed massing was larger than the surrounding properties.

Mr. Smith asked if Mr. Livingston was proposing to reopen the porches. Mr. Livingston said yes and that he wanted to rebuild the railings.

Ms. Masterson asked how much taller the proposed structure would be. Mr. Livingston replied about a foot and a half taller.

Mr. King asked if the proposed changes needed a special permit or a variance. Mr. Livingston replied that it would need a variance but he was not sure of the process. Mr. King asked if Ms. Paull could elaborate on the process. Ms. Paull stated that it was a different department that handled applications made to the Board of Zoning Appeals and she would defer to that department for specifics on zoning questions or their application process.

Mr. Van Sickle reiterated that zoning was not within the Commission's jurisdiction. He continued that reopening the porches will impact the square footage but the additional square footage on the third floor from the proposed mansard application would require a zoning variance. Mr. Van Sickle stated that the Commission's position was to determine whether the proposal was appropriate to the neighborhood in terms of style, massing and so forth. He added that only elements that were visible from a public way were to be reviewed.

Ms. Dillenseger asked if Mr. Livingston was proposing to replicate the banister [porch railing] and why he was proposing to reduce the size of the windows. Mr. Livingston clarified that the banister [porch railing] proposed was more consistent with others in the area but added that he was open to something more simplistic. He noted that the proposed change to the windows would help increase livability inside, especially with counter space in the kitchen. Ms. Dillenseger asked if the owner had looked at keeping the windows as is. Mr. Livingston replied yes but it was not ideal.

Mr. Van Sickle reminded the Commission that it had reviewed similar window alterations for a kitchen in the past; some were approved and some were not. He added that the Commission had taken a stance to preserve the trim as much as possible when kitchen windows were altered.

Ms. Dortz asked if all other windows were to remain the same size and in the locations as they were currently, except for the kitchen windows. Mr. Livingston replied yes. Ms. Dortz asked if the window and door on the porches were where they were historically or if those were new openings. Mr. Livingston replied that they were existing on the interior and staying in the historic locations.

Ms. Masterson asked why the stairs were being proposed different than the original plans. Mr. Livingston noted that he was not moving the stairs, as they were currently configured how they were shown on his drawings, which differed from the original plans and predated his ownership of the property.

Mr. Smith asked if the windows on the south elevation, in the kitchen, were going to be two over two windows. Mr. Livingston replied yes.

Mr. King asked staff how many mansards there were in the immediate area. Ms. Paull replied just one on Gibson at 41, which was moved there in the late 1800s. She added that there were some on the neighboring streets. Ms. Masterson added that there was one on Lowell Street and two on Willard Street. Mr. Livingston said that he handed out photos of those properties.

Mr. King said he was concerned with the removal of the chimney and added that if the mansard addition was approved the removal might not be noticeable as the chimney was shorter. Mr. Livingston pointed out that the original linen plans from the 1890s reflected two chimneys, one of which had previously been removed and the remaining one had its ornamentation removed. Mr. King replied that the chimney also appeared to no longer be a prominent feature as the peak of the roof was taller than the chimney.

Ms. Masterson asked if he had reached out to his neighbors. Mr. Livingston said he attempted to contact all the neighbors by foot with a rendering and a letter explaining the proposed changes. He said that some neighbors had stopped by and had not heard any concern from any of them. He added that he realized the Commission was not about making a structure beautiful. He noted that the previous owner said that the proposed changes would bring the house close to its original state than what was existing.

Mr. Van Sickle said that he saw the shadow study but felt that it was hard to follow. He noted that it was rough and difficult to read as they did not have before and after renderings for the shadow study as well as summer, winter, spring and fall with the times of the day. He said the submitted shadow study was neither useful nor complete. Mr. Livingston said that the need for multiple seasons was not explicit from the application. He added that the overall height only increased by a foot and a half which did not dramatically impact the shadow.

Mr. Van Sickle asked how close the neighbors were. Mr. Livingston said that on the southside the neighbor was at least 20 feet away, the east side was about five (5) feet and the north elevation was about 10 feet. Mr. Van Sickle noted that the surrounding houses were all two or two-and-a-half story structures and said that the largest area of impact will be on the upper portions of the house.

Ms. Mary Canner, neighbor at 12 Gibson Street, said she lived across the street. She proffered support for the restoration of the porches but expressed concern over the impact of the mansard roof addition to the structure's character and her views. She showed photos from the inside of her house. Mr. Van Sickle noted that the views from the inside were not within their jurisdiction as they were restricted to views from a public way.

Ms. Pat Seckler, neighbor on Gibson Street, asked how far Mr. Livingston distributed the materials. Mr. Livingston responded that he went down to Kenway Street. Ms. Seckler responded that her house was missed and that there were two architectural historians in the house. Mr. Livingston apologized. Ms. Seckler showed a historic photograph of the street. She continued saying that this was the first time she had seen the plans and was concerned as the street was more modest than the proposed plans would reflect and felt that this would impact the street.

Mr. Jerry Michael, neighbor at 18 Gibson Street, offered his support of opening the front porches and said it was nice to see the house getting attention. He asked if Mr. Livingston was doing anything about the garage. Mr. Livingston said he had plans for the future but was focusing on the house first. Mr. Michael asked if he was replacing the shingles on the main house. Mr. Livingston replied no.

Mr. Van Sickle noted that the project was a complicated case, with a number of issues. He expressed concern with changing the entire style of the house, going back in time from a Queen Anne to a Second Empire Mansard. He expressed concern with the shadows, kitchen window alteration, blocked views and increase in massing. Mr. Van Sickle read the district order, noting the importance of visual layering and thru-views. Mr. Van Sickle asked if dormers had been considered. Mr. Alexander Jacobson, architect for the project, said that a dormer wouldn't give them the needed head room within the dormer guidelines. Mr. Van Sickle asked if the stairs could be moved. Mr. Jacobson said he was hoping to have the stairs stack. Mr. Livingston added that originally he did not want to alter the roof because he was cheap but that it was born out of necessity. He added that the dormer was not the path they chose because it felt like he was adding wings to the house. Mr. Livingston noted that he was not aware that the house was in a district. Mr. King noted that many of the dormers on Kenway Street exceeded the current dormer guideline restrictions.

Mr. Van Sickle asked if there were more comments from the public. As there were none, he closed the public hearing.

Ms. Masterson said that there were portions of the application she strongly supported and others that she had a strong reaction to. She supported the opening of the porches but expressed concern about the roof alteration, stating that she did not feel like it matched the original character of the house or the neighborhood. She stated that she was not focusing on the kitchen window alteration as the roof appeared to be a non-negotiable on the side of the applicant. Mr. Livingston said that a dormer would not achieve his needs. Ms. Dortz shared Ms. Masterson's concern over the roof alteration but supported reestablishing the front porches.

Mr. King expressed concern over the alteration to the kitchen windows as it was readily visible from the street. He said did not feel concerned with the alteration of the structure into a mansard roof as there were other mansards in the city.

Mr. Smith replied that he agreed with Ms. Masterson and Ms. Dortz; that he was concerned with the scale but felt other components were a positive change.

Ms. Dillenseger asked if it was possible to approve only a portion and not vote on something else. Ms. Paull replied that all items before the Commission needed to have a vote for approval or denial or the Commission would issue a defacto approval for not reviewed those components within their 45 day required timeframe.

Ms. Dillenseger stated that she did not support the alteration of the simple Queen Anne into a faux Second Empire with a mansard roof.

Ms. Paull stated that staff was concerned about the additional massing and the conjectural impact of changing the architectural style of a house within the district, as they were from different time periods. She added that the other mansard structure on Gibson Street was not original to the block but rather moved there in the late 1800s. Mr. King asked if Staff was opposed to the project or recommending denial. Ms. Paull stated that staff does not take a specific stance on applications but rather was expressing concern with the additional massing and the conjectural alterations.

Mr. Van Sickle expressed concern with the massing, noting that the proposed improvements had the potential of outweighing the additional massing. He concurred with Mr. King's observation that the larger impact was above street level and compatible with other structures in the area.

Mr. King said that it had been done in Cambridge before and that he felt the house had already been significantly altered.

Ms. Dortz stated she felt the proposal was out of scale with the structure and other mansards in the area. She also expressed concern with the precedent an approval would set for the district.

Mr. Van Sickle said he felt as if the application offered a tradeoff and while opening the porches was a huge positive he was still assessing the impact of the proposed addition.

Ms. Dillenseger said that she was concerned about the mansard alteration and the additional massing, making the house larger.

Mr. Van Sickle noted that it would not look like a true mansard as proposed.

Ms. Masterson said that part of the Commission's charge was to conserve things and she felt that the proposal exceeded conservation of the structure's character, as well as the entire neighborhood as projects set a precedent. She continued, stating the Commission's mission was to conserve the small modest character of the neighborhood and felt like the proposal was a substantial deviation from that. She noted that while she supporting the re-opening of the porches, she did not feel comfortable "trading off" the porches for changing the entire structure's character.

Ms. Van Sickle designated Ms. Dortz to be the voting alternate.

Ms. Masterson made a motion to deny the proposal as submitted on the grounds that the mansard roof was incongruous to the objective of the order to conserve the historic architectural and modest character of the neighborhood. Ms. Dortz seconded the motion. The motion was approved 3-2 with Mr. King and Mr. Smith opposed to the motion.

Mr. Livingston asked what the denial meant for the project as he was in the middle of the renovation. Ms. Paull offered to discuss the project with the applicant after the meeting.

### **Minutes**

Mr. King made a motion to approve the March 14, 2016 minutes as edited. Mr. Smith seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0.

Ms. Dortz made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Masterson seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0 at 7:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Samantha Paull  
Preservation Administrator





**Members of the Public  
(who signed the Attendance list)**

Mary Alice Van Sickle	Owner	15 Brown Street
Mary Canner	Neighbor	12 Gibson Street
Ann Oliver	Neighbor	985 Memorial Drive
Virginia Newes	Neighbor	986 Memorial Drive
Charles Murphy	Contractor/Rep	83 Virginia Rd, Concord
[illegible]	Neighbor	12 Gerry Street
Lisa Gamble	Neighbor	17 Gerry Street
Robert Livingston	Owner	7 Gibson Street
Annie Bonney	Owner	52-54 Foster Street
Richard Plumb	Abutter	14 Gerry Street
Craig Appel	Abutter	11 Gerry Street
Alexander Jacobson	Architect	36 Dana Street
Ian Gamble	Neighbor	17 Gerry Street
Gerard Michael	Neighbor	18 Gibson Street
Patricia Seckler	Neighbor	21 Gibson Street

Note: All addresses are located in Cambridge unless otherwise noted.