

Minutes of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission ***Approved at the December 11, 2017 Meeting***

November 13, 2017 - 6:00 PM at Lombardi Building, Basement Conference Room, 831 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge

Members present: James Van Sickle, *Chair*, Deborah Masterson, Peter Schur, and Charles Smith, *Members*.

Members absent: Judith Dortz, Marie-Pierre Dillenseger; Adrian Catalano, *Alternate*

Staff present: Susan Maycock

Members of the Public: see attached list

Mr. James Van Sickle, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:00pm. He introduced the commission members and outlined the meeting procedures.

HCM-394: 154 Mount Auburn Street, by Sharissa Jones and Daniel Medwed. Construct a four (4) foot screen wall on top of an 18 inch retaining wall.

Ms. Susan Maycock, staff, presented an overview of the property's history and the project. She pointed out that the 1853 house at 154 Mount Auburn Street was restored by Adrian Catalano about 5 years ago.

Ruth Webb of Ruth Webb Landscape Design presented the case for the owners and said that she was working with them to create a safe family garden at the side of the house. She said that people use the yard as though it were public space. During the 5 years that the family has been living there people regularly come from Darwins, go through the current fence, and sit in the yard or on the steps of the house to drink their coffee. She remarked on the incredibly cramped space and narrow dimensions of the site and presented the landscape features of the plan to carve out a second seating area.

The plan proposed to lower the grade to the level of the walkway between the buildings, build a bluestone wall, and top it with screening to shield the condenser units and create some privacy. Ms. Webb explained that they could achieve a similar effect by moving the retaining wall forward and putting the screen behind it instead of on top, but that would take up more space and space is very tight. She also said that any lower fence would make the condensers visible to anyone 5'5" tall walking by on Mount Auburn Street.

Mr. Van Sickle called for questions of fact from the Commissioners.

Deborah Masterson, Commissioner, said that she did not realize that there was a gate on Mount Auburn Street currently and asked what would happen to that. Ms. Webb said that the gate would be removed and that hornbeams would be planted where the gate is now. The hornbeams would be maintained at 6 feet tall. The idea is to improve circulation around the house while also blocking views from the street. The circulation is confusing now, and the gate is how people have been letting themselves into the property. Mr. Van Sickle remarked that hornbeams are deciduous. Ms. Webb responded that they wanted

to use evergreens to block the long views into the property, but did not want to block all views from the street.

Mr. Van Sickle asked about the material of the screen and what “stained solid cellular” on the plans meant. Ms. Webb said that it is a manmade material, not wood, and that it was the same material used in the fence at 121 Brattle Street. She said that there would be two fences: a traditional 3’ 6” picket fence around the perimeter of the property and the historic house and then a more modern manmade screen around the condensers. Peter Schur, Commissioner, said that the current fence was something of an eyesore so this would be an improvement.

Mr. Van Sickle called for public comment.

Andrea Landman, who lives at 993 Memorial Drive, said she has been walking by this house for 20 years. She said that she came as a neighbor to make three points in support of the proposal:

1. The corner needs privacy as a lot of young people treat it as a property you can just walk into.
2. Mr. Catalano intentionally left the perimeter open so that future owners could design the landscape themselves.
3. There has been increased attention recently to well-designed fences along Ash Street. The proposed fence at 154 will correspond aesthetically to the fence at 153-155 Mount Auburn Street.

Ms. Landman added that the previous owner of 154 at one time found that a homeless person had taken up residence behind the hedge on the property. She said that she walks past the property all the time and never really sees the area that is being talked about.

Mr. Van Sickle closed the public comment and the Commission began deliberations.

Ms. Masterson said that it made sense to cover up the condensers and that she supported the proposal. Charles Smith added his support. Mr. Van Sickle read from the order establishing the HCM NCD that calls for encouraging “low fences to define the street edge...while permitting flexibility to minimize the adverse visual effect of ... air compressors”. It also encourages “the planting of trees and greenery to enhance the landscape amenities of the Neighborhood. He added that he doesn’t have a problem with the modern design of the screening and likes that it reflects its own period.

Dr. Schur made a motion that Case HCM-394 be approved as presented on the plans dated October 24, 2017. Ms. Masterson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.

Minutes

The minutes from the meeting on July 17, 2017 were reviewed and there was one correction. Ms. Masterson then asked whether Commissioners who were not at that meeting can vote to approve the minutes. Because it was unclear Mr. Van Sickle said that he would add these minutes to the next agenda.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Maycock, Survey Director

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

Ruth Webb	Landscape designer	90 Marion Rd, Watertown, MA 02472
Andrea Landman	Neighbor	993 Memorial Dr, Cambridge, MA 02138