

Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

April 4, 2011 - 6:00 P.M. – 344 Broadway, City Hall Annex/McCusker Center, 2nd Floor

Commission Members Present: Nancy Goodwin, *Chair (recused)*; Lestra Litchfield, Carole Perrault, Charles Redmon (*acting Chair*), *Members*; Sue-Ellen Myers, Monika Pauli, *Alternates*

Commission Members Absent: Tony Hsiao, *Vice Chair*; Siobhan McMahon, *Alternate*

Staff: Eiliesh Tuffy

Members of the Public: See attached sign-in sheet

With a quorum present, Ms. Goodwin called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

Ms. Goodwin recused herself from deliberation of the case, as she is currently working on another city-owned property with the same project manager. Mr. Redmon assumed the role of Chair for the remainder of the hearing.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

MC-3829: 459 Broadway, by Cambridge Public Schools. Exterior signage proposal.

The architects went through the sign proposal, outlining which sign types would be located at each entrance, the loading dock area and sites on the campus grounds.

Mr. Redmon asked what the sign material and finish would be. The architects said they would all be metal with a painted gray, black and white finish to go along with the school colors. The metal is between 1/8”-1/4” thick with smooth finish edges.

Signs projecting from the buildings’ facades would have an average clearance of 6’-6” from the lower edge. Banner sign heights are consistent along each elevation despite the various doorway heights. The largest signage would be the freestanding installations at both Cambridge St. and Broadway, which are three-sided at the top and mounted to a pole that is graffiti and vandal-proof and should not be subject to deformation. These signs will not have any integrated lighting components.

As called out in the plans, sign type #2 will be a blade sign, sign types #3, 4, and 5 will be flat-mounted to the stone façade, and sign type #6 will be freestanding, mounted on a post.

Mr. Redmon noted that some of the wall-mounted signs were horizontal and some vertical, suggesting they all be designed to hang in the same direction.

Ms. Tuffy asked whether masonry anchors had been considered for the wall mounted signs rather than adhesive, commenting that anchor holes could be easily patched should the sign be removed at a later date. Ms. Perrault also expressed concern over the method of attachment, asking if the adhesive for the wall-mounted signs would be reversible, since it could be damaging to the stone’s surface. Mr. Valaes said they could look at ways the adhesive could be removed, probably using some sort of chemical.

Ms. Pauli asked if the existing carved sign over the Broadway entrance would be altered. The architects said it would remain in place.

The two freestanding campus directory maps will have a matte finish. The design does not include additional ADA elements such as Braille or audio directions.

Some of the proposed signs require zoning variances, including one that would be located adjacent to the access ramp for the underground parking lot. Library staff had expressed concerns prior to the public hearing about minimizing the confusion over dedicated parking locations for the library versus the school. Ms. Tuffy suggested shifting the sign to the west, so the curve of the sign could mimic the curve of the architectural bay on the building, and perhaps also serve as a bench seat in that location. Mr. Rossi suggested that approval of the sign package could include a condition regarding that sign, suggesting the various parties could come back to staff with refined details for review.

Facing Broadway, an illuminated sign is proposed to be installed at the edge of the entrance canopy leading to the Fitzgerald Theater. The sign would consist of plastic lettering illuminated from behind, which are mounted on top of an LED cabinet sign capable of displaying messages about school shows and athletic events. The entire sign measures 3'-1" in height.

The Commission asked if the existing sign above the main, east-facing entrance would remain. The architects said it was not being altered.

Another campus map directory at the corner of Broadway and Ellery Street was suggested by the Commission, but it was determined that the land there is not school property.

Mr. Redmon asked if the current signage design differed from those previously installed on the War Memorial building. The architects said the buildings' signage does not relate to one another.

The Commissioners pointed out that the existing lettering on the school's signs is done in all upper case letters, and that the new signs would be introducing a third font style at the site creating different languages aesthetically speaking.

Staff asked what type of movement, if any, was envisioned for the LED message board. The architects said it was unclear at this time, but that they could work out a policy at the school to turn the sign off at certain hours. Ms. Litchfield said the theater could be difficult to find and that it would be nice to have better signage at that entrance. Ms. Perrault said the illuminated sign looked very complicated. The architects said the LED sign cabinet would have two steel channels on the back side and the plastic letters would be mounted to the top of the ticker sign cabinet. Mr. Rossi said there was a way to program the sign remotely, which would simplify entering and changing messages and information.

Mr. Redmon asked if there might be a better location for sign #6B that eased pedestrian way finding, suggesting either a spot closer to sign #8 or a "6C" sign incorporated into the landscape. At the same time, he also warned against adding too much signage, saying it was not necessary to lead people by the nose. He complimented the project team on the design and presentation.

There were no questions or comments from the public.

Ms. Litchfield moved to accept the application as submitted with the following conditions:

- Evaluate the adhesive in order to find one that is reversible

- Consider making sign #2B larger
 - Working with Historical Commission and Library staff, come up with a better solution for sign #10 to eliminate parking confusion
 - Work out a schedule of operation and cessation for the illuminated LED message sign
- Ms. Myers seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Minutes

The minutes of the March meeting were approved.
The meeting was adjourned at 7:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy
Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 4/4/11

Michael Black	Project Manager, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, Cambridge, MA
Warren Pearson	Facilities Manager, Cambridge Public Library, Cambridge, MA
Vassilios Valaes	HMFH Architects, 130 Bishop Allen Dr, #130, Cambridge, MA 02139
Stephanie MacNeil	HMFH Architects, 130 Bishop Allen Dr, #130, Cambridge, MA 02139
Richard Rossi	Deputy City Manager, City of Cambridge, Cambridge, MA