

Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Mon., Aug. 5, 2013 at 6:00 PM, McCusker Center, 2nd Fl., 344 Broadway, Cambridge

Commission Members present: Nancy Goodwin, *Chair*; Tony Hsiao, *Vice Chair*; Lestra Litchfield, Carole Perrault, *members*; Sue-Ellen Myers, Monika Pauli, *alternates*

Commission Members absent: Charles Redmon, *member*

Staff present: Eiliesh Tuffy

Members of the Public: See attached list.

Nancy Goodwin, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM.

Carole Perrault disclosed that while she does not have any financial interest in the abutting apartment that she rents, she would participate in the discussions related to this case but recuse herself from any final vote on the case.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

MC-4315: 10 Ellery St., by Adam Siegel o/b/o Richard Freeman. Redevelopment proposal to include restoration of front house, demolition of existing rear ell, construction of a new rear ell, and construction of a new building to the rear of the lot.

The property under review is an 1840 side hall Greek Revival style house. It was originally one of four adjacent cottages developed between 1839-1840 by Isaac Livermore and constructed by the builder Henry Learned and housewright Oliver Woods. Of the row of four, only the two center structures survive (#8 & #10). The end houses (#6 & #12) were both demolished in 1974. The two remaining houses that stand side-by-side are also the oldest surviving structures on Ellery Street.

The house at #10 Ellery is currently sided with cedar shingles added in the 1930s. The rear ell steps down from two stories to one behind the 2-1/2 story main block. The rear yard is covered in asphalt paving.

The current proposal calls for relocating the existing building closer to the street to the minimum required front setback under Zoning. The existing foundation would be removed and replaced with a new basement to accommodate lower level living space plus a 4-car below-grade garage under a newly constructed, 2-1/2 story rear addition. The historic details of the original house would be retained, with the exception of several alterations to window locations and replacement of window sashes. A new structure is proposed for the rear portion of the lot which would be 3 stories in height. The total number of proposed dwelling units is two in the front building and two in the rear building for a total of four on the lot. Because the proposal involves new construction, staff mentioned that the district guidelines for review of new construction were included with the applicant's materials for the Commissioners' reference while evaluating the appropriateness of the proposal.

Ms. Perrault asked staff if any of the abutting properties were individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Staff responded that 7 Dana Street is individually listed, but the property under review is not. Ms. Perrault said that she thought it was important to be aware that 7 Dana Street is listed, as this project is part of that house's context and one of the district's evaluation criteria-criterion is to protect National Register structures.

The project architect, Campbell Ellsworth, presented the redevelopment plans for the site. He stated that he and the applicant, Mr. Siegel, had previously renovated another Greek Revival style residence in the district at 31-33 Fayette Street which was the recipient of a City of Cambridge Preservation Award. Mr. Ellsworth outlined that the current project is located on an 8,179 square foot lot and is located in a C-1

Zoning district which allows for an F.A.R. of .75 or 6,134 square feet of livable space. There is an 8-foot change in grade from the front of the lot to the rear of the lot, which is the high side of the property. This lot also allows for up to 5 total dwelling units under Zoning, but this project was designed for only 4. The foundation of the existing structure shows signs of attempted reinforcement in the form of concrete patching around the base of the building. The plan would be to replace the foundation and, in doing so, the house would be relocated 6 feet closer to Ellery Street. The rear yard setback behind the secondary rear structure would meet the 30-foot minimum requirement under Zoning. The new basement under the front building would house 4 regular parking spaces with the necessary turnaround space. The driveway to access the underground parking would begin to slope down 14 feet back from the front property line and a deck would be constructed over the parking entrance. Mr. Ellsworth stated that changes are proposed for the window openings of the North Elevation of the existing building.

The style of the 3-story rear building was modeled after a carriage house, and would have a stripped-down Mansard roof on the top floor. As viewed from Ellery Street, Mr. Ellsworth said the back structure would be mostly hidden from view by the new rear ell, which extends off the rear of the front building and turns 90 degrees at its furthest extent to create a wing towards the South.

The streetscape rendering was illustrated to scale with an overlay of the proposed project. The white space around the edges of the Greek Revival building indicated where the edges of the proposed rear structure would be in relation to the front building.

The project team discussed their approach to the study of the varied abutting properties from a Zoning comparison, stating that it was not an architectural comparison. The Zoning analysis was intended to show the greater height and larger scale of the surrounding apartment buildings, and pointed out that the 10 Ellery proposal would result in an average of 36-37% more open space than the surrounding properties.

Staff inquired about the preservation elements of the proposal. The applicants said the existing building would be returned to cedar clapboard siding, which removal of the existing shingles should prove was the original siding type. The trim would be retained or replaced in kind, as was done at the 31-33 Fayette Street project. The windows would be replaced with new wood windows that have simulated divided lights to replicate the original glazing pattern.

Questions of fact were asked by the Commission.

Ms. Goodwin asked if there was a problem with the existing foundation. Mr. Siegel said there were signs of buckling at the bottom of the building. Ms. Litchfield asked if that was the condition just under the side porch on the South Elevation where settling may have occurred or around the entire foundation. Mr. Siegel said they did not own the property yet, so access to the property left that answer unclear. Ms. Goodwin noted that, while they were not sure of that condition yet, this was being stated as the primary reason to move the house off its foundation. Mr. Ellsworth said there were areas where a concrete buttress had been poured over the foundation walls. He stated it would be cost prohibitive to repair the existing foundation and that, if they moved the building forward, is-it would allow more to happen on the rest of the lot.

Ms. Perrault asked about the building heights, to which the applicants responded that the existing building measures 32'-2" to the ridge and the new rear building would measure +/- 30' to the ridge.

Information about the water table was unclear, since obtaining that information required access they are not permitted to have by not yet owning the building.

When asked why the team did not present a 3-D massing model, the applicants said time constraints did not allow that additional step. Ms. Perrault noted that the 2-D sun and shadow study did not provide the heights of all the buildings, just the taller surrounding structures, and that the abutter study by the applicants was relating this redevelopment to the larger structures around it rather than the more

comparable, smaller residential houses that are of the same era as the house under discussion. Mr. Siegel said that, while those notes may not be provided, the massing models were all drawn to scale and relative to the height of the lot.

Ms. Perrault held up the site plans for the existing site and the proposed site. She read from the architect's narrative that he submitted with the project proposal, in which it stated: "Excessive infill will be avoided by maintaining a 30-foot rear setback, increasing open space and permeable open space of the property, and removing excess paving area on grade that currently serves as a parking lot..." She asked how he could make the statement that the project is increasing open space, considering the magnitude of the development. Excluding massing from the discussions of open space, she said would void the importance of view sheds/air space/open space and their importance to the quality of life in the neighborhood.

The project team felt the proposal supports the district objectives because it is in keeping with the evolved density of the area, which ranges from single family houses to large-scale apartment buildings. By removing the existing paving on site, they would also be increasing the amount of permeable open space.

The Commission, when viewing the existing and proposed site plans, asked how the extensive deck space and walkways would increase the open space, to which the applicant said they used the Zoning definitions for what qualifies for open space and that the current paved areas were not considered open space. Ms. Litchfield disagreed, stating that even if paved the current site configuration and existing foliage lends the feeling of open green space and provides for unobstructed views.

Ms. Perrault asked if any outreach had been undertaken with the abutters. The applicant said he had sent a letter to all of the abutters plus held a Monday night meeting but the direct rear abutters were not available to attend. In addition, they had met with the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Association in advance of the hearing and, in response to their comments, had modified the height and massing of the proposed reconstructed ell on the front building.

Mr. Ellsworth addressed the abutter study and its focus on the larger versus the smaller surrounding building context. He said their Zoning analysis was meant to look at the community and the level of surrounding density. He stated that the project as proposed is within the allowable limits for a C-1 zone and F.A.R. He said while the site could bear 5 dwelling units under Zoning, they did not feel that was responsible so they landed at 4.

Ms. Perrault asked the applicants if they were familiar with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Properties, specifically regarding additions to historic structures. While this building historically had two successive, small rear ell additions over time, this new proposal was more massive in its treatment of the new rear ell plus it adds a new building. She wondered how this was maintaining the history of the original structure. Mr. Siegel said he planned this proposal while trying to conform to the Mid Cambridge guidelines. Ms. Perrault said the historic principal structure will look like it was all one continuous building afterwards.

Mr. Ellsworth said accommodating the required parking for this redevelopment was complicated and that they were trying to move that element out of public sight. He also felt it would be more difficult to resolve if the parking were scattered across the site. With the new rear ell, they were trying to make that portion of the project a comfortably-sized home.

Ms. Litchfield held up the sheet in the plans that showed the Ellery Street elevation, on which she had shaded in the dotted outline of the rear structure which extended beyond front building on both side and above the roofline. She noted that, by shading this mass in, it illustrated that the view from the street would be different especially since the lot rises up higher towards the back where the new structure would be located. Mr. Ellsworth said the front wall of the proposed rear building would be 95' from the front property line, which he felt was a considerable distance that would minimize the rear building's visibility.

Ms. Goodwin asked about the proposed decks and whether those areas serve as the roof of the underlying parking structure, to which the architect said that was the case.

Ms. Perrault asked how the proposal followed the development patterns of other properties in the district that have carriage houses or rear garages to justify this secondary structure, and what else is there in the community like this. Mr. Siegel said he had looked at historic maps which showed carriage houses in the larger surrounding area over the years and that staff had mentioned the rear carriage house at 9 Centre Street as an existing rear structure that could be studied in their design development. Ms. Perrault said that the Centre Street example reads as a carriage house and is subservient to the historic house at the front of that property.

Staff asked what the square footage calculations were for the units in the proposal. The applicant responded that each of the four dwelling units were approximately 1500-1650 sq. ft. for a total of 6,100 sq. ft. of F.A.R. on the lot. Each unit was designed to have 3 bedrooms. The project would increase the existing square footage by 222%.

Questions were received from the public.

John Bohannon of 10 Ellery Street asked for clarification on the Commission's role, stating that it seemed the applicants were trying to convince the Commission that the project was appropriate under Zoning, but he thought that Zoning issues were reviewed by a separate board. If they violate Zoning wouldn't that be addressed by that board and wasn't it the Neighborhood Conservation District's role to determine whether this diminishes the historic character of the building? The Commission responded that his assessment was correct.

Francis Donovan of 42 Irving Street, and a representative of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Association, had several questions about the proposal. He referred to Panel 6 of the plans and asked how far from Ellery Street the driveway would begin to slope down under the deck and into the recessed parking area. Mr. Ellsworth said the transition below grade would begin 14 feet back from the property line. Mr. Donovan raised the issue of access by emergency vehicles such as fire trucks and how close those vehicles could get to the rear of the property if needed. Mr. Siegel said the adjacent apartment building to the north has a wide driveway that could bring fire trucks closer to the rear of 10 Ellery street and in his conversation with the Fire Department they said they have ladders that can extend up to 110 feet and could reach the rear structure.

Mr. Donovan asked if they had done a financial study of 3 units vs. 4 units for this site, suggesting that perhaps he could bargain down his asking price in order to create fewer units that would ultimately command a higher sale price. Ms. Litchfield added that, for this neighborhood, this density is less appealing to buyers.

Mr. Bohannon mentioned the study of the average density on Ellery Street and wondered how that justified a honeycomb of "hive" of units. Mr. Ellsworth said he does not think of the proposal as a hive, but rather 4 beautiful homes. They did the analysis to offer as contextual information and that showed there are not many single family residences with carriage houses in the back. He mentioned the parking lot where the #6 Ellery St. cottage once stood could be built with a structure up to 5-6 stories in height. This point was countered because that lot falls outside the edge of the conservation district boundary.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street discussed the side porch on the existing house which, once the house was pulled forward 6 feet and set on the new foundation, would overlook a driveway pit and asked what the material in that driveway grade transition would be. Mr. Siegel said they have forms available for the concrete pour to imprint the concrete with the look of granite. Ms. Meyer said it seemed there were a lot of materials being used in the plan including wood, brick, concrete and faux granite. She also noted there would not be any greenery along the right property line, where a walkway leads to the rear structure.

Elizabeth Aubergine of 42 Irving Street asked about the height of the current rear ell versus the proposed new rear ell. The current building was said to be +/-23'-5" high at the 2-story section and stepping down to 15'-7" high at the 1-story section of the ell. The new rear ell would be +/-29' at the ridge. She also asked what the space between the two structures would be and what was required. Mr. Siegel said there would be a 10-foot space between the two structures.

Tim O'Donnell of 3 Dana Street said that, given the grade of the lot from front to back rises 8 feet, wouldn't that raise the height of the rear building up by 4 feet of additional height? Mr. Siegel said it would be relative to the lower grade elevation at Ellery Street. Mr. Ellsworth said the plan was to excavate out the rear portion of the lot and install a retaining wall to make that transition and keep the rear structure as low as they could.

Comments were accepted from the public.

Ms. Meyer of 10 Dana St. asked what the interior ceiling heights were in the proposed rear ell. Mr. Ellsworth said they would be 9 feet on the first floor and 8 feet on the second floor. Ms. Meyer noted that if they dropped the ridge height of the 2nd unit (rear ell) to make it subordinate to the historic house, it appeared they would lose the cathedral ceiling and space for mechanicals. Mr. Ellsworth said they could play with those ceiling heights or possibly lower the basement further.

Amy Domini Thornton of 7 Dana Street asked for clarification on the role of the abutters in the Commission's deliberations. She said her yard is looking towards the open space on this property and the new construction would create a wall where she currently has a view through to late day sun. She said that she acknowledged this proposal would not be as dreadful as 14-16 Ellery Street, but that it would still create a wall in front of her sunset views.

Tuny McMahon of 14 Highland Ave. said there had been a lot of emphasis on Zoning and F.A.R. She said this is an historic house with open space and that the proposal would be overwhelming the old house. It would also be destroying large open space as a result. She felt this was a prime example of excessive infill.

Francis Donovan of 42 Irving St. said that if he was working on a project he would choose these two applicants to work with but unfortunately he did not think this was the right project. He has concerns about the back part of the lot having minimal access after the structure is in. He said he was delighted to know that the applicant does not own the property yet and he felt sure that if the owners knew the building would be redeveloped into 4 new dwellings that they would charge more for the sale. He said a smaller scale building in the back might open the way for a surface driveway to rear parking above ground instead of underground.

Ms. Meyer said that the South Elevation of the existing building is very charming and that, in the proposed plans, a dotted line in the rendering obscures the fact that the rear ell on that elevation reads like a straight wall mass with no detailing. The triangular roof on the rear ell was bothersome. Regarding the cornice, she said typically the Greek Revival cornice was intentionally built up, and that the cornice on the rear structure appeared too thin throwing the proportions off. On the rear building, she felt the Mansard roof was too big, trying too hard, and had no continuity with the front building.

Ben Williams of 6-8 Dana Street raised several points.

- He felt the sloping driveway would be awkward to walk past, but acknowledged that 4 underground parking spaces would be better than having so much paving at grade.
- He disagreed that this property had much public visibility from Dana Street, which he walks down 2 times a day and did not feel the photos presented were an accurate representation of the average pedestrian's view.
- He felt the rear building as proposed was too large and could be nicer by making it more subordinate and perhaps a simpler Greek Revival style structure.

Amy Domini Thornton of 7 Dana Street said that, unless you are an abutter in her position, you don't feel the impact of this proposal, and felt the previous commenter's assessment of the visibility from Dana Street was not accurate.

Tonya Orme of 5 Dana Street said she had a general remark about the shadow study. There are only 4 small houses in these abutting lots on Ellery and Dana streets and everything else is large apartment buildings. The existing houses have the most green space. The rear building would be much higher than its surrounding single family homes and would be shaped differently. She would call the proposal excessive. Her house at 5 Dana is not shaped like the proposed Mansard building. In fact, when she added on to her house she added a glass box on the rear of their 2nd floor, which is overlooking 10 Ellery St.

Ms. Meyer said the applicants' presentation was an overview of size and density of buildings such as 12-16 Ellery Street, which she highly doubted would be allowed to be built under current Zoning. Her own building at 10 Dana would not be allowable new construction today. She felt it was dangerous to use these examples when, by today's standards, such density was not allowable and that scale was very important.

Shandra Morris of 10 Ellery St. said their building is currently 2 rental units that are relatively affordable occupied by 2 groups of working-class tenants who are being forced out as part of this proposal.

Ms. Goodwin closed comments from the public in order for the Commission to comment and deliberate on the application.

Ms. Goodwin said she felt this proposal was incongruous with the district, which stresses that redevelopments focus on what's there now. With regard to moving the building, she did not believe they had ever allowed that before in the district. She felt the applicant could repair the existing foundation and that not enough evidence was provided to justify otherwise. She took issue with the overwhelming mass of the rear building. Right now there is a sense of so much open space on the lot, even if it is paved.

Ms. Perrault made several points.

- She said the National Register program has criteria for evaluating the integrity of historic structures. Although this site is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places, this criteria is useful for evaluating the integrity of historic structures in general. The first of those criteria is related to a structure's location which, if relocated, this integrity would be lost. ~~The second relates to the contextual setting. Right now you have four precious residential structures that have survived and remain unmarred.~~
- The second criterion relates to the contextual setting. Right now you have four historic houses from the 1840s that have survived in a cluster and have remained essentially unmarred by the contextual 20th century large apartment building development around them. This fact makes this cluster all the more precious and worth protecting.
 - Living on Dana Street and walking past 7 & 5 Dana every day she said the rear portion of 10 Ellery Street is more obvious at different times of year and that she disagrees with the comment made by a member of the public that the site was not visible from Dana Street. The garden and yard at 7 Dana Street in the Spring is one of the most photographed in Cambridge, with its stately Copper Beech tree. The ells of 10 Ellery Street are visible from this vantage point. She disagreed with the project premise in that excessive infill refers only to whether the land is permeable or not.
 - The third National Register criterion is design and massing. She felt the proposed new rear ell was incongruous with the existing historic structure, that given its size it becomes a difference different beast and that it reminded her of a McMansion. In essence, the development does not complement the existing building and its context of other small structures, but rather consumes it.
 - The next criteria are materials and workmanship. Ms. Perrault expressed that these elements of the project would probably be respected and are not of major concern here.

- The last of the criteria, ~~though, are~~ association and feeling, both of which are of paramount concern. When you view this cluster of four smaller abutting homes dating to the mid-19th century, you get a distinct feeling of another time and place and with this proposal you would no longer have that. This feeling of harking back to another time is a character-defining feature of the district. She said in her opinion back yards were meant to be back yards, allowing not only for the owners, but the public, to benefit from the resulting open space and view sheds. The current proposal would depreciate the integrity of place that this site holds and can be characterized as excessive infill.
- Ms. Perrault said she disagreed with the project's premise of using the large-scale early-to-mid-20th century apartment buildings as a barometer for the development project, rather than the homes at #8 Ellery and #5 and #7 Dana Street.

Ms. Perrault said she ~~loved~~ appreciated the project the applicant did on Fayette Street for its preservation of the Greek Revival structure and hoped for as good or better here. She reiterated that, although she is not an abutting property owner which would present a conflict, she would still refrain from voting if the Commission voted tonight.

Ms. Litchfield said she wished to reiterate what her fellow Commissioners said and agreed with Ms. Perrault. Having reviewed enough of these types of proposals in the past, she said once it's built it's so much bigger than you think it would have been. She referred again to the Ellery Street elevation which she had shaded in the outline of the rear structure as an especially large change. She said the historic structure reads like a cottage now, is evocative of another time and place, and that the cluster of 4 building on Ellery and Dana streets is a real gem in the city. These projects are so different in reality from models and drawings. For the amount of money people are spending on condos in the city, they will not want to be this close to one another. This is not what people are looking for. And 10-12' between homes is not enough space and nothing will grow there.

Ms. Pauli said she agreed. She did not believe they needed to move the building, except to get more room in the back for a second building and that was not a good enough reason for relocation. She said there might be a way to build a different structure and make it work, but was not in support of the current proposal.

Mr. Hsiao said that the intent of the shadow study to indicate the higher surrounding density actually shows the reverse by highlighting the surviving smaller scale homes. He mentioned that it was not in the Commission's purview to evaluate the development value of an applicant's lot to its highest and best use, and that preservation adds a different kind of value. He suggested the project team re-imagine the site and ask themselves if they were doing this project at the turn of the 20th century how would that frame the conversation. Think about what makes this site special and don't kill the very thing that makes it special. He felt if the 3-D rendering had been shown from eye level rather than bird's eye the proposal would look different as well. While the Commission is not anti-development, this project was felt to be excessive.

Ms. Myers said it seemed the Commission was pretty unanimous, and asked if her colleagues wished to request revisions to the plan, but the general consensus of the board was that it should be denied outright.

Ms. Litchfield made a motion to deny the application as incongruous with the district for going against the objectives and goals of the district order, which state that projects should avoid excessive infill, encourage new construction that complements existing buildings, and preserve neighborhood buildings which the design of this proposal did not appear to do. Mr. Hsiao seconded the motion, which was passed by 5 voting members. Ms. Perrault recused herself from voting.

Minutes

Mr. Hsiao made a motion to approve the revised minutes of the July 2013 meeting. Ms. Pauli seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:07p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eiliesh Tuffy
Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public who signed the attendance sheet, August 5, 2013

Deirdre Duckett	12 Ellery St., Cambridge, MA 02138
Sian Gramates	10 Ellery St., Cambridge, MA 02138
Margaret McMahon	14 Highland Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139
Benjamin Williams	67a Dana St., #3, Cambridge, MA 02138
Tonya Orme	5 Dana St., Cambridge, MA 02138
Tim O'Donnell	3 Dana St., Cambridge, MA 02138
Campbell Ellsworth	267 Norfolk St., Cambridge, MA 02139
Adam Siegel	130 Centre St., Brookline, MA 02446
John Bohannon	10 Ellery St., Cambridge, MA 02138
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St., Cambridge, MA 02138