

## **FINAL MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION**

Monday, March 4, 2019, 6:00 PM, 2nd Fl. Meeting Room, City Hall Annex, 344 Broadway, Cambridge

Commission Members present: Toney Hsiao, *Vice Chair*; Lestra Litchfield, Monika Pauli, *Members*; Margaret McMahon, *Alternate*

Commission Members absent: Charles Redmon

Staff present: Sarah Burks, Allison A. Crosbie

Members of the Public: See attached list.

---

With a quorum present, Vice Chair Hsiao called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M. He announced the sad news of Nancy Goodwin's passing, introduced the Commission, and described the hearing procedures.

### Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

**Case MC-5601: 285 Harvard Street, #311, by Mark Meachen.** Replace three original windows with vinyl windows – non binding review.

Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator, presented slides of the property, constructed in 1929, showed the windows face West Street and the building has a mix of old and new windows.

Mark Meachen, the owner, described the proposed windows, explaining that they tilt in for easier cleaning, and there are grids between the glass.

Vice Chair, Tony Hsia, asked if most of the windows in the building have already been replaced. Mr. Meachen replied that many of these kinds of windows are already in the building.

Commissioner Lestra Litchfield asked if the windows were snap on grid. Mr. Meachen replied no. Ms. Litchfield asked Mr. Meachen if he looked into restoring the existing windows. Mr. Meachen said yes.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked if there were storm windows. Mr. Meachen replied no. Ms. Meyer said it's a shame that financial issues cause a change to the character of the building, and faux mullions look like a tacky shortcut.

Ms. Litchfield stated that this is not the type of window the Commission typically approves. She understands the need to replace windows when the original windows can't be restored, but the proposed windows are not historically accurate or appropriate.

Mr. Hsiao explained he favors restoration, but if they can't be restored, then a close facsimile with simulated divided lights is preferred, whereas between-the-glass grid is farther down the scale.

Mr. Meachen replied that he can understand the desire for historic or very similar windows on the first floor where they are most visible, but his unit is on the third floor. Mr. Hsiao replied that a building like this had windows throughout the building so it's appropriate to maintain this character.

Commissioner Monika Pauli made a motion to not approve the application as submitted, but recognizes that it is non-binding. Mr. Hsiao seconds the motion, which passes 4-0.

**Case MC-5602: 9 Dana Street, by 9 Dana Ventures, LLC.** Replace windows, construct accessible entrance – non binding review

Ms. Crosbie presented slides of the property. The building was constructed in 1927 with 25 apartments (Mr. Thomas, one of the applicants, mentioned it still has 25). The main entrance is on the side with a curved colonnade with steps leading to the front door. The owner is required to build an accessible unit and the building currently does not have an accessible entrance. The building also has a mix of original and new windows.

Amir Kripper, architect for the applicant, explained the ADA requirement for an accessible entrance. He stated that they had considered a chair lift elsewhere in the building, but felt it was better that the main entrance is used by everyone. He also explained the change in level between the lobby and the vestibule. The ramp design includes removing two columns and keeping the other two. There would also be landscaping on both sides of the ramp. They are also proposing to replace windows, 60% of the visible windows are already vinyl. Mr. Jack Grant, one of the applicants, mentioned that most of the remaining wood windows are on the third and fourth floors.

Mr. Lee Thomas, the applicant, stated that they received pricing for restoring the windows, which is \$1,050 per window. The vinyl replacements would be \$550, Harvey with grid-between-the-glass, but are now looking at simulated divided lights. Mr. Thomas also explained that they changed their plans after meeting with Ms. Crosbie and Ms. Burks regarding the accessible ramp. They will move one of the pillars to the right to achieve the required 48-inch clearance.

Mr. Hsiao asked how far off are they with the distance between the columns. Mr. Kripper replied that they need 60 inches.

Ms. Pauli asked if the slope is at the maximum. Mr. Kripper replied they are using the maximum length to meet the slope requirement. Ms. Pauli asked if they spoke with the Access Board because the Board will sometimes allow a variance to historic buildings. Mr. Kripper replied that they did and decided this was the best option. The design includes a metal railing with steel cables and concrete ramp.

Mr. Hsiao asked what the pillars are made of. Mr. Kripper replied they are possibly limestone but the wall blocks are pre-cast.

Ms. Pauli asked if the columns are structural. Mr. Grant replied yes, they will have to put in a concealed beam in the ceiling, not visible from the street.

Mr. Hsiao asked if they rebuild the pillar with the lamp. Mr. Thomas replied yes, they are trying to maintain the original look as much as possible.

Mr. Kripper stated that they would improve the existing landscape planting.

Mr. Grant stated that there will be a below-grade transformer vault with metal grill at grade similar to a manhole cover. Mr. Kripper mentioned that they can install plantings around it.

Ms. Litchfield asked if the trees will be removed. Mr. Grant replied that one will be removed and one will remain. Mr. Kripper stated that they can plant another tree, it's a beautiful building and they want to preserve its character.

Ms. Chantal Eide asked how the new tree cutting moratorium affects the proposal. Ms. Burks replied that the moratorium goes into effect March 11.

Ms. Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street stated that she lives across the street and knows 9 Dana very well. Ms. Meyer asked if they considered putting the transformer vault at the other end of the building. Mr. Thomas replied yes they are checking with the utility company about other options. Mr. Grant explained

that the stairs to the basement limit the space available. The current location is the only place with enough room.

Ms. Meyer asked if there will be a curve in the landing at the door. Mr. Grant replied no that it will be squared off. Ms. Meyer asked how much width existing between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> column. Mr. Kripper replied not enough. Ms. Meyer asked what happens at the base of the columns. Mr. Kripper responded that the columns are shorter because the base will move up, they will match the existing base at new level of the landing. Ms. Meyer asked if they consulted with a structural engineer.

Ms. Andrea Southworth of 10 Dana Street asked that if the pillar materials can't be re-used, will they match it. Mr. Kripper responded yes, but he hopes to re-use.

Ms. Debbie Havery, of 19 Ellsworth Avenue, thanked the applicant for making the building accessible. She could not find a place for her father to live in Cambridge because so many buildings are not accessible.

Ms. Meyer stated that there are so many moving parts to this project. It's not an elevator building. At 10 Dana, they have been trying to match the pebblestone concrete and it's very hard to match. The entryway at 9 Dana is the primary architectural element of this building. Ms. Meyer stated that she is not convinced that the applicant has thought this through, that there has to be a better answer. And modern metal railing looks industrial and not compatible with the building. It's a very long distance. Can you redesign the railing? Have you spoken with the owners at 7 Dana Street as a courtesy? Mr. Thomas responded that the railing design is not set in stone yet.

Mr. Hsiao closed the public comment.

Ms. Litchfield asked how will they cut the concrete columns. Mr. Kripper replied they will replicate the bases at the new level.

Mr. Hsiao stated that this is a complicated effort. The platform at the entry has a significant impact on the columns. The applicant's rendering is not showing the entry close up. The columns will be 12-14 inches shorter. Ms. Hsiao asked if they considered moving the door back so the 5-foot turning radius moves back. He suggested looking at curving the ramp. The transformer is also a difficult thing to design. Mr. Hsiao suggested replacing the lost tree with one or more new trees.

Mr. Hsiao also stated that they do not approve the type of new windows proposed. He recommends that they use simulated divided light, not between-the-glass, it might cost more but it's very important to maintain the look of the building.

Mr. Hsiao also recommended creating a landscape buffer so you don't see the wall. Ms. Litchfield recommended that the applicant reach out to the owners of 7 Dana because they care a lot for their landscaping. Mr. Kripper replied that they love the building and can study the door option further.

Mr. Hsiao said they would like more detail and to continue the hearing. He explained that they could continue to the next meeting in April or have an architects committee meeting sooner. Mr. Grant responded that they will try their best to make it all work, and that meeting sooner would be better.

Ms. Litchfield made a motion to continue the hearing to March 19 at 8 am. Mr. Hsiao seconded the motion, and passes 4-0.

**Case MC-5338: 1500 Cambridge Street, by Renie Realty, LLC.** Amend plans for the construction of two new residential units.

Ms. Crosbie introduced the project and showed slides of the previously approved project.

Mr. Peter Quinn, architect, explained that the proposed amendment to the previously issued Certificate of Appropriateness, which addresses changes required by the City of Cambridge Inspectional Services. The new design also responds to feedback from the neighborhood. Mr. Quinn presented previous and new proposed renderings, showing similar architectural vocabulary, double roof decks, with a top floor family room that could be a bedroom. There are two separate buildings, 12 feet apart, each has a full basement. One building is pulled back, creating open space in the front. The corner building is closest to the street. There is a distinct entrance on Highland Avenue and one on Cambridge Street. The buildings are 3 feet, 2 inches lower than the previous proposal. There is a variety of massing at the third floors – one parapet and one open railing. The materials are clapboards of different widths, most likely fiber cement, some cedar siding, and wood pergolas.

Mr. Hsiao asked if the spacing from the neighbors is the same. Mr. Quinn responded that they are farther away in some directions.

Ms. Pauli asked why there's no landscaping along the 5-foot setback. Mr. Quinn said they could install low plantings. The owner also mentioned that the snow plow had to be accommodated as well. Ms. Litchfield suggested vines could also work.

Ms. McMahon stated that this is an improvement from before. It fits better on the street and the entrances are larger.

Ms. Cheryl Ehrenkranz who lives next door to the left on Cambridge Street on the second floor stated she is very pleased because she will now have light due to the reduced shadows. Ms. Ehrenkranz asked how big the units are. Mr. Quinn answered 2,000 square feet.

Mr. Richard Schouler of Ellsworth Avenue asked why not a single building with 2 units. Mr. Quinn answered that they considered it but single family homes are very desirable in the market and this design provides more open space.

Ms. Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street raised a concern over the patterning created by the shadows of the pergolas, casting a checkerboard pattern. Mr. Quinn explained the it will change during the course of the day and creates interest. Ms. Meyer wished they would re-think the square lattice, but thinks the proposal overall is better than the last one.

Mr. Kyle Sheffield of 13 Ellsworth suggested re-working the alignment of windows to create a little more control to the design.

Mr. Hsiao closed the public comment.

Ms. Litchfield stated that this is a better project, less is more, and better for the community given its prominent location on the corner. Regarding the top of the buildings, parapet vs. open railing, Ms. Litchfield suggests the parapet on both buildings to provide more privacy for the residents and to hide the furniture and other items from view. Ms. Litchfield also suggested reconsidering the size of the pergola on the corner building, perhaps narrower. She also suggested changing the pergolas over the doors to more substantial cover from rain and snow.

Ms. Pauli agreed that this design is better. She also concurred that solid covers over the entrances would be better. She also asked about the downspouts and gutters. Mr. Quinn answered that there are interior drains on the roof decks.

Mr. Hsiao stated that this design is a vast improvement in terms of siting, light, air, views, and the design has a strong urban approach. He also likes the solid parapet. He has no issue with the revised design and encourages the applicant to explore window alignments, parapets, pergolas, entry roofs, and plantings on the side of driveway, with CHC staff.

The owner asked for clarification on the open porch railing or closed parapet.

Ms. Litchfield move to approve the new design. Ms. Pauli seconded the motion, which passes 4-0.

**MC-5606: 17 Ellsworth Avenue, by Maureen O’Connell.** Remove portion of existing structure, restore remaining structure, and construct new single-family residence in rear of house. – binding review

Ms. Crosbie showed slides of the house, constructed in 1866. An addition was constructed in 1898, and alterations to the house were mainly done in the 1960s including window changes, new siding, a skylight, and a fire escape.

Mr. Kyle Sheffield, architect from LDA Architects, explained that #17 is one of 7 lots owned by Frederick Rindge who developed them all in the Italianate style in the 1860s. Each of the houses had ells. Mr. Sheffield stated that the bay encroaches on the side property line and the ell goes all the way back to the rear setback line. He is proposing to demolish the ell and side bay and keep the 2-story front bay. He is also proposing a full restoration of the front block of the existing house, including paired brackets, cornerboards, new bay on the south side to match size of front bay, punched windows, and 2 gables dormers on south side (similar to ones at #7).

Mr. Sheffield described the new building as a carriage house. It is intended to be quiet, simple, with wood clapboard predominantly, elongated windows, and wall areas with horizontal tongue-in-groove cedar, a recessed porch on the second level with the same cedar detailing, white clapboards and windows, clear cedar. There are shed dormers on either side and a standing seam metal roof, medium gray. The house is organized into thirds. Mr. Sheffield showed a streetview rendering. He stated that the view corridors at back are nice so they have kept back building pulled forward, the rear house is lower in height than the front house. There are older hemlocks, about 4 inches in caliper, on the left side. Mr. Sheffield also showed the shadow studies.

Ms. Katya Podsiadlo, landscape architect, described the landscape plan. The front walk will have ceramic brick with a gate. Both houses have front yards. There is a shared parking area with lawn area around for snow storage. Each house has a rear yard for privacy. A chain link fence will be replaced with 6-foot wood board fence. The hemlocks will be replaced with 3 hornbeams, hydrangeas, and inkberry for a layered effect. The hemlocks in the rear are not in good condition and will be removed.

Mr. Sheffield said Mr. Hayes, the developer, approached him because he was concerned that the design fit the neighborhood. As a resident of Ellsworth Avenue, Mr. Sheffield plans to live here a long time. Mr. Sheffield wants to preserve the historic character and view sheds.

Neighbors spoke out about how this project happened very quickly and they are just finding out that their neighbor is the architect.

Mr. Hsiao reminded that the Commission is looking for questions of fact.

Ms. Litchfield asked if they considered an attached addition similar to the one at #11, it was very successful. Mr. Hayes responded yes, but this can also be successful. Mr. Hayes stated that he didn’t study it thoroughly because he doesn’t like to do the same thing. Mr. Sheffield responded that he did consider it early on in the concept phase, but chose this idea for 2 reasons: it’s a very narrow plan, therefore more difficult, and he wanted more relief between 19A and the back unit.

Mr. Hsiao stated that they are not seeing the full context. And he noted that the carriage house is larger in footprint than the existing house. Mr. Hsiao asked about the parking. Mr. Sheffield replied that there

is parking up to the hemlocks. The code requires them to pull it back beyond the front yard setback. Mr. Sheffield is trying to narrow the curb cut.

Ms. Litchfield asked if they are adding parking. Mr. Sheffield replied they are not adding parking.

Ms. Pauli asked if they are meeting setback requirements. Mr. Sheffield answered yes, he wants as much space as possible between the buildings and away from the north property line.

Ms. Debbie Haverty, of 19A Ellsworth Avenue, designed her home and the chainlink fence belongs to her and her husband. She said her husband enjoys viewing the birds in the trees in the backyard of #17. She asked if the fence can be shorter or more transparent, and she has issues with cutting down trees. The landscape architect said the fence be lower or a different style, and the plantings can be changed.

Ms. Chantal Eide of 20 Ellsworth Avenue asked how the tree cutting moratorium affects the project.

Ms. Meyer asked about materials. Ms. Podsiadlo said the pavers are brick not concrete. Ms. Meyer also asked why a modern style, why a metal roof. Ms. Meyer said she has a problem with a modern style in this area and that the blank area on the front wall needs planting. Mr. Sheffield said there will be landscaping per the plan. Ms. Meyer asked if the house is being raised. Mr. Sheffield replied no, the building is already 35 feet.

Ms. Eide expressed an interest in less paving, narrower curb cut, less lawn, more trees and shrubs, and groundwater, stormwater basin, work with mother nature, and decrease footprint.

Ms. Margo Haverty, of 19 Ellsworth Avenue asked about patios.

Mr. Hsiao read letters received into the permanent record:

-Rani Nelken (15 A Ellsworth Ave) – support. (Mr. Hayes mentioned stormwater management).

-Chantal Eide (also present) – in favor of smaller footprint, more landscaping, less paving,

-Frankie Liberman (Ellsworth Ave) – discourage freestanding structures.

Mr. Hsiao offered applicant opportunity to respond. Mr. Hayes said the idea was to create a single family residence where there is a not a lot of them. He said that he lives at the rear of 11 Ellsworth which has no connection to the street, he likes that 17R has some connection, scaling the rear building down lower to 32 feet. Mr. Sheffield stated that the massing of 11 Ellsworth was already defined by very bulky ells and additions and that here the goal is create a sense of identity, to find the private/public balance with new housing.

Mr. Hsiao closed comment.

Ms. Litchfield stated that this Commission was formed in the mid 1980s to prevent excessive infill. Now with real estate prices so high, you don't have to build as many units to get the same profit. The Commission was created to prevent what the applicant is proposing. Having distinct yard spaces is not traditional for Cambridge multifamilies. At the corner of Cambridge and Maple are 3 townhouses crammed into the corner. This design doesn't seem like a carriage house to me. Clinton Street is an example where they started as a house behind a house, but they changed it to an attached house.

Mr. Hsiao agreed with Ms. Litchfield. He commended the application and thorough presentation. It's not an issue of design but an issue of scale. The footprint of the carriage house is larger than the front house. This is at odds with the premise of the carriage house as a secondary building. It's closer to 15 A Ellsworth, the scale of the carriage house is more dominant than the front house. This warrants a re-examination. Mr. Hsiao recommends a 3-d model, an important tool to help people to understand the scale.

Other aspects of the design are well thought out. The front house has good moves, improved fenestration and detail, there's no issue with that.

Ms. McMahon remarked that the back house's bulk is too big, it absorbs the front house, the massing is displeasing.

Ms. Litchfield stated she likes to know where the entrance is.

Ms. Pauli agreed that the back house is too large, and asked if the main house be bigger and the carriage house smaller. She appreciates the trees in front of the carriage house, and likes the dormers but too close together.

Mr. Sheffield responded that he can study changes to the scale if they can work within the zoning. He would like to keep the green corridor open.

Ms. Litchfield encouraged to give the attached concept a real go. Mr. Sheffield replied that they did during the concept phase, and that he wouldn't want to pull the rear building forward.

Mr. Hsiao requested that they show additional studies and design decisions. He also stated that he is encouraged that they are willing to engage in further study.

Ms. Litchfield moved to continue the hearing to April for review of massing, footprint, variations, 3-d model, and more understanding of streetscape. Ms. Hsiao seconded, which passes 4-0.

Mr. Hsiao adjourned the meeting at 9:11 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Allison A. Crosbie  
Preservation Administrator

**Members of the Public Present on March 4, 2019  
(who signed the attendance list)**

Lee Thomas	262 Washington St., Suite 301 Boston, MA
Jack Grant	262 Washington St., Suite 301 Boston, MA
Mark Meachen	285 Harvard Street
Margo Haverty	19 Ellsworth Avenue
Deb Haverty	19A Ellsworth Avenue
A Southworth	285 Harvard Street
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana Street
Robert Randall	78 Highland Avenue
Peter Quinn	259 Elm Street, Somerville MA
William Senne	33 Church St
Kyle Sheffield	13 Ellsworth Avenue
Katya Podsiadlo	318 Harvard Street, Suite 25, Brookline

Note: All addresses are located in Cambridge and/or Massachusetts unless otherwise noted.