

MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION ARCHITECTS COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, May 26, 2022, 8:00 AM, online Zoom meeting

Commission Members present: Tony, Hsiao, *Chair*, Lestra Litchfield, *Vice Chair* Charles Redmon, Monika Pauli, *Member*, Margaret McMahon, *Alternate*

Staff present: Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator, Sara Burks, Preservation Planner

Members of the Public: See attached list

Meeting held via online zoom webinar, <https://tinyurl.com/MCarchcomm>

Due to statewide emergency actions limiting the size of public gatherings in response to COVID-19, this meeting was held online with remote participation and was closed to in-person attendance. The public was able to participate online via the Zoom webinar platform. The meeting ID was **836 4123 9891**.

Commission Chair Tony Hsiao started the meeting at 8:05 am.

Case MC-6447: 123 Hancock Street, by MSW Hancock LLC. Remove rear and side additions and extend existing dormer. Construct 1 new detached dwelling unit.

Heather Souza, architect, presented revisions that responded to the Commission's comments at the May 9 hearing. These included removing the front bay facing the street, adjusting the scale of the windows, adding 2/2 divided lites, and bringing down the head heights. The window trim remained larger than the existing house windows. Ms. Souza showed the front of the proposed house located 30 feet back from the front of the existing house. She presented the third-floor revisions including new transom windows.

Commissioner Charles Redmon asked to see an aerial view of the 3-d model. Ms. Souza presented that view.

Mr. Hsiao commented that the design moves are very helpful, that the window scale and pattern are more compositionally tied to the existing house. And removing the front bay is also helpful. Regarding the third floor, Mr. Hsiao noted that it could be further simplified, that the two-story structure is the dominant mass, and the third floor wants to be simpler.

Mr. Redmon agreed with Mr. Hsiao, pointing out that the roof edge could be simplified.

Vice Chair Lestra Litchfield stated that she preferred not to see a third floor at all, that it looks out of place. Although it's pulled back from the edge facing the front, it still goes to the edge on other sides. She questioned the need for it, it's really just a roof deck, does it have to have a bathroom? She also asked if it always had a bathroom. Ms. Souza said yes it did have a bathroom.

Mr. Wolff, the owner, responded that the third floor did get smaller and moved further back, and explained that they are constrained in every direction. He stated that he feels they have been cooperative and that they do need the third floor.

Mr. Redmon suggested removing the cornice from the second floor, making the third floor flush with the wall below and then painted the same secondary color, thus breaking the mass and simplifying it as viewed from the street. Ms. Litchfield remarked that it would then look like a 3-decker. Ms. Souza liked the idea of tying back to the previous project where she simplified the cornice line.

Mr. Hsiao noted that it's an interesting approach and that without the bathroom, the massing could be smaller and look more like a widow's walk, a form that pulls in from all sides, and perhaps add more windows, maybe the space is used as a study. He recommended more transparency and lightness, right now it's neither here nor there. Looking at the overall massing, Mr. Hsiao commented that with the removal of the bay, it's stepping back. He likes that there is some play with the windows, but the furthest façade seemed a little blank and suggested possibly additional windows to help lighten the form. He noted that Mr. Redmon's suggestion is something to explore as well. He also said that the bathroom on the third floor is contributing to the complexity of the massing, adding that if it weren't there you could look at just having a study on top. Mr. Hsiao said both approaches should be explored.

Mr. Wolff asked if they went with more glass, should more glass should be added on the back? Mr. Hsiao asked about the staircase on the wall with limited windows. Ms. Souza explained it's for separation and some privacy. Ms. Souza noted that one more step back would help the visual hierarchy and the view from the street. Ms. Souza showed the interior plans and the staircase on the furthest façade. Mr. Hsiao remarked that the stairs can offer more opportunities for windows, that windows can "acknowledge" the stairs, and reiterated that this façade warrants more consideration. Ms. Souza asked if lightening up the third floor would be acceptable to everyone.

Ms. Litchfield agreed with Mr. Hsiao and mentioned that Mr. Hsiao raised the idea of the widow's walk at the previous meeting, and that it's worth looking at these two approaches. She understands it's problematic but explained that the Commission has to think about excessive infill and the concerns of the neighbors. She stated that she feels the proposal is still excessive.

Mr. Hsiao asked about the floor height on the third floor, that it looks about 10 feet. Ms. Souza answered that the finished floor height is 7'-10," so it can't go lower.

Commissioner Monika Pauli stated that she is happy to see this new version, that she watched the recording of the previous meeting. She agreed that it's really just the third floor that needs fine tuning, that more windows would help as well as the lightening of the cornice. She also asked Ms. Souza if she could render the elevations in color for the next meeting in order to more clearly see how the color scheme is working.

Mr. Hsiao suggested reinterpreting the existing Greek Revival house, specifically the front porch or portico, for the third floor – not emulate it, but do a modern reinterpretation with the same scale and delicacy, because right now it's still a little clunky, heavy, and drawing too much attention to itself.

Ms. Pauli suggested looking at white pilasters to break up the third floor.

Ms. Souza remarked that she liked the idea of a modern light box with perhaps different glazing, she saw a lot of potential in this concept. Mr. Hsiao replied that by eliminating the bathroom from that floor, there would be a lot more freedom in making it work.

Ms. Litchfield agreed with Commission's comments and cautioned that they are careful with the trim, that it doesn't look hokey, it should be a modern reinterpretation, not literal.

Public Questions and Comments

Mr. Evan Remington of 324B Harvard Street stated that he appreciated the discussion and liked the idea of simplifying the third floor and is glad to see the terracing of the facades.

Ms. Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked about the front windows facing the street, are they French doors? Ms. Souza elaborated on the windows, that they are like French doors, the bottom units are fixed, and the upper ones are operable. Ms. Meyer asked about the smaller windows and was not sure that the furthest façade needed more windows, that she likes a more solid looking wall, it looks more cozy. She also agreed with the comments regarding the third floor, she is concerned about no cornice, that it could look like a "jar without a lid." She also remarked that she likes the direction the design is going in.

Mr. Alex Gourevitch of 324A Harvard Street expressed appreciation for the discussion and the effort with the third floor and that he supports the changes. He also thanked the applicant for his efforts.

Additional Commission Comments

Mr. Wolff responded that they will look at the portico but was concerned about it looking hokey. Mr. Hsiao replied that he was confident that Ms. Souza can come up with something that reads as modern. Ms. Pauli advised to look at this like a truss, more garden like.

Mr. Redmon asked Ms. Souza to show both schemes at the next meeting, both today's and the revised schemes. Mr. Redmon summarized the revisions,

- Reduce the cornice on the third floor,
- Remove the cornice between the second and third floor,
- Look at adding pilasters or something to lighten up the third floor, to be treated more like a widow's walk,
- Reconsider the fenestration.

Ms. Souza asked for clarification on what to present at the next meeting. Ms. Litchfield answered that they will show today's scheme and a revised scheme as an overlay to be able to compare both, especially the third floor. Mr. Hsiao added that seeing it in a 3-d model is really helpful, especially the third floor. Ms. Litchfield added Ms. Pauli's suggestion of using color on the elevations. Ms. Souza asked about the colors, Ms. Litchfield said it doesn't matter what colors are used, it's just to understand how they work to break up the massing.

Mr. Hsiao also advised that the applicant can present what they think is the best design.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 am.

Respectfully submitted,
Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public Present on May 26, 2022Panelists:

Sam Wolff
Heather Souza

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Attendees:

Marilee Meyer
Evan Remington
Alex Gourevitch

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