Approved ~~12/15/13~~ 1/27/14

Minutes of the Avon Hill Neighborhood Conservation District

Monday, November 25, 2013 - 5:30 PM - 831 Massachusetts Ave., Basement Conference Rm.

Commissioners Present: Constantin von Wentzel, *Chair*; Mark Golberg, *Vice Chair*; Catherine Henn, Heli Meltsner, *Members;* Art Bardige, Theresa Hamacher, John Sanzone, *Alternates*

Commissioners Absent: Robert Crocker

Staff Present: Charles Sullivan

Members of the Public: see attached sign-in sheet

With a quorum present, Chair von Wentzel called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M. He made introductions and reviewed the hearing procedures.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

AH-464: 36 Arlington Street, by Seth Friedman. Change single window to double window on rear elevation.

Mr. Sullivan showed images of the site, which was visible from Lancaster Street between the house and stable at #37. He noted that it would be a binding review because it involved a window opening.

Blake Allison, an architect representing the applicant, said the project involved replacing a tripartite window installed in the 1930s with a new double-hung window custom made to match the traditional windows in the house. The new hood would match original details, the color would remain the same, and there would be no change to original building fabric.

Mr. Bardige asked about the adjacent bulkhead. Mr. Allison noted that it was not part of the project.

There were no comments from the public

Mr. Golberg moved to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as proposed, based on its minimal visibility and consistency with other windows. Ms. Henn seconded. Mr. von Wentzel designated Ms. Hamacher to vote in the absence of Mr. Crocker, and the motion passed unanimously.

AH-462: 7 Humboldt St., by 7 Humboldt LLC (continuance). Demolish the existing house and construct a new two-story house.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and reviewed the case. At the preceding meeting the Commission had voted to a) approve the demolition of the existing house, once the replacement project received a Certificate of Appropriateness, b) approve the new design in principle as being not inappropriate to the district, pending further review of the building's height, materials, construction details, and chimney, and c) to continue the hearing until November 25.

Peter Quinn, the architect, said that in response to the Commission's comments at the last meeting he had raised the foundation so that the house was now 3'6' above average grade. The floor-to-floor distance had been increased by 1', so that the overall height had gone from 27' to 29'9", an increase of 2'9". Other changes and features included:

- The bay window had been elongated
- There were now three equal dormers
- The chimney had been moved to the center of the south elevation.
- Brackets had been added to support the bay above the entrance

- Windows would be JeldWen clad windows with flat casings and historic sills
- Roofing would be fibre-cement 'slates,' with a Galvalume (zinc) apron
- Siding would be red cedar shingles with 8" exposure
- Trim would be thermally-treated preprimed pine and Azek (PVC) cornice brackets
- Gutter would be half-round copper
- Front door would be wood or fiberglass, paneled

Ms. Hamacher noted that the guidelines did not permit vinyl windows. Mr. Quinn noted that these would be aluminum-clad.

Mr. Sanzone asked about the detailing of the cornice and gutter, and Mr. Golberg asked about the location of downspouts. Mr. Quinn described these elements, and told Mr. Sanzone that the bay would be trimmed with pine and Azek. The direct-vent furnace exhaust would face the driveway.

Ms. Hamacher asked about the air conditioning condenser; Mr. Quinn said it would be in a return at the northwest corner of the house. Ms. Meltsner asked about the railings, which would be wood.

Mr. Bardige noted that the front door would face uphill and be at the driveway grade. Mr. Quinn said there would be a non-rotting sill and a French drain.

In response to a question from Mr. von Wentzel, Mr. Quinn noted that sheet A-1.1 showed the incorrect location for the chimney, and that A-2.2 omitted the basement windows. He told Ms. Henn that the gas fireplace would exhaust to the rear.

Mr. Quinn told Mr. Golberg that the raised foundation would not necessitate a handrail. The lower patio would have a 36" railing. Ms. Hamacher noted that the plans called for a 42" lattice. Mr. Quinn said it could be 36", and that it would not be visible in any case.

Mr. von Wentzel opened the meeting to public comments.

Holbrook Robinson of 11 Humboldt Street said that the two bay windows should be supported by foundations, as was the case with all Second Empire houses in his experience. Mr. Quinn responded that foundations would trigger setback requirements in the zoning code. In any event, the bay would be screened by landscaping.

Dorothy Robinson of 11 Humboldt Street observed that a bay window without a foundation would look cheap; it would be a poor compromise. She had looked at hundreds of houses, and all had foundations under their bay windows.

Karen Weller of 12 Humboldt Street said the design had improved, but:

- The siding should be clapboards with 4" exposure
- The slats under the porch should be fibre cement with gaps between them
- The transom was improperly detailed; the casing should surround both transom and door
- The panels on the bay should not be vertical; the middle two should be combined

Betsy Brainerd of 9 Humboldt Street said the shade study was incorrect because it showed conditions on November 21 rather than December 21, the solstice. Mr. Quinn replied that shadows covered the entire street at 3:00 PM. He said the height of the apartment building southwest of the project might not be correct.

Ms. Brainerd said that the 5,190 s.f. site shown in city records would allow a house with 2,595 s.f.; the house as designed was 20 s.f. too large, regardless of the surveyed dimension. Sean Hope, attorney for the applicant, said that ISD would accept the surveyed dimensions, but if not they could shed 20 s.f. without altering the approval process.

Holbrook Robinson advocated again for putting a foundation under the bay; the convenience of zoning should not be allowed to affect the quality of the design. A variance would surely be approved. Mr. Hope replied that legal standards for hardship do not include aesthetics; the BZA would be hard put to approve the project in place of a fully demolished building. Mr. Robinson observed that the NCDC could make an aesthetic decision.

Tom Berentes of 9 Humboldt Street said the average height of a foundation on the street was 2'-3'. Mr. Quinn observed that Mr. Berentes' foundation was about 5', which he took exception to. Mr. Berentes said that the height issue was key to three neighbors; 29'9" was too high. He showed photos of three 1½ -story Mansards nearby; all were under 29'. The height could be reduced to 28'6" by taking 6" off each level.

Mr. von Wentzel closed the public comment period and asked the commissioners for their observations.

Ms. Hamacher thanked the applicant for listening to the Commission's concerns. She allowed that the project created changes for the neighbors, but observed that the zoning constraints were real. The context of the project was comprised of large houses; the three examples cited by Mr. Berentes had different contexts. Not all details were consistent with the Second Empire style, but this was a reasonable compromise.

Mr. Bardige said the contested setback of 1½'-2' seemed insignificant. He agreed with Ms. Hamacher that there was no need for the Commission to seek a shift in location. The added height improved the proportions of the building. The shadows on the street were already enormous. The street would be happy to have this house as a neighbor.

Ms. Henn agreed with the preceding comments.

Ms. Meltsner said she was troubled by the artificial materials, except in ground-contact situations. The house seemed less-detailed than it should be, and she still questioned the use of a Mansard on a contemporary house. Mr. Quinn said his design intent was to keep the detail simple and flat.

Mr. Golberg agreed with preceding comments, and asked about the transom and door details. Mr. Quinn said the owner had told him that the door would be mahogany, with beveled glass.

Mr. Sanzone said the design was a substantial improvement. There was a balance between replication versus interpretation of a style.

Mr. Berentes asked to be heard, but Mr. von Wentzel observed that the public comment period had ended.

Mr. von Wentzel asked about the siding. Mr. Sullivan advised that clapboards would be more appropriate. Mr. von Wentzel said that the floating bays did not strike him as inappropriate. The square footage issue should be left to ISD. He thanked the applicants for their responsiveness.

Mr. Bardige moved to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as presented, while delegating certain details for staff review and approval, including the exposure of clapboard siding; roof material and exposure; brackets, windows, and bay panel details; front door and transom details; masonry; basement window placement; air conditioning condenser placement;

and PVC and fibre cement elements. Ms. Henn seconded, and the motion passed with Mr. Bardige voting.

Minutes

Ms. Hamacher submitted the following correction to the October 28 minutes:

Page 3, ninth paragraph, should read as follows: "Ms. Hamacher was concerned about losing a Modern house, which would reduce the diversity of style in the neighborhood."

Ms. Henn moved to adjourn, Mr. Golberg seconded, and the motion unanimously at 7:24 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles Sullivan
Executive Director

Members of the Public
Who Signed the Attendance Sheet
November 25, 2013

Dorothy Robinson	11 Humboldt St/
Holbrook Robinson	11 Humboldt St.
Karin Weller	12 Humboldt St.
Elizabeth Brainerd	9 Humboldt St.
Tom Berentes	9 Humboldt St.
Charles Mahoney	153 Naples Road, Brookline
Blake Allison	159 Mt. Auburn Street
Lilian Handlin	18 Agassiz Street
Matt Hynes	298 Highland Street, Somerville
Betsy Caney	7 Linnaean Street

Addresses are in Cambridge, unless otherwise specified.