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Historic Districts Commission Minutes 01/06/2005

Minutes of Proposed Academy and Maple Streets Expansion of the Pleasant Street Historic District

AHDC Commissioners Present: S. Makowka, J. Worden, M. Hope Berkowitz, M. Potter, B. Cohen

AHDC Commissioners Not Present: L. Kuhn, Y. Logan, A. Alberg, M. Penzenik,
Y. Logan

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Guests Present: Judi & Larry Bohn, Sharon Stafford, Kimberly Allen-Blair, Alan Jones, Elizabeth Carr Jones, Doris Schwaab, Hilary & David Baldwin, Alex Frisch, Catherine Bartlett Heraire, John Lane, Miriam Levine, Ilene Rosin, Liz Buchanan, Rick Norcross, Sheila & Brian Rehrig, Gail Revist, Jean Keller, Dave Ledwig, Kevin O'Brien, Max Mahoney, Jane Becker, Richard Duffy

Hearing called to order at 8:13 pm by Chairman Stephen Makowka.

S. Makowka said main reason for the hearing which is required by Chapter 40C is to get public comment. Hearing was advertised in Arlington Advocate and written notice was sent to all property owners at least two weeks prior to tonight. Hard work by Dr. Jane Becker and Richard Duffy as well as area residents of the proposed expanded District. Talking about timeline, what it means to be in a Historic District, what happens next. Dr. Jane Becker gave history of expansion idea. She talked about expanding District initially in summer of 2003. Richard Duffy came to the Bohn house and gave slide show about Pleasant Street District. Later that same summer neighbors met at the Revist house and R. Duffy gave more info on historic district status, exclusions, etc. with a question and answer period. The neighborhood consensus was very favorable to go ahead with expansion idea. They came late that summer before the Historic District Commission with their idea, which was met with great enthusiasm. Architectural descriptions and photography reproduction of area properties was then started. In October they met at the Knobloch-Buchanan's with Historic District Commission Chairman S. Makowka and Commissioner M. Hope Berkowitz about formally becoming part of an expanded district. In November the draft report was submitted to the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the Arlington Redevelopment Board for their review. S. Makowka spoke about being in a district. Purpose is to preserve and protect buildings and spaces in town. Additions, sometimes even new houses can be approved if in the context of the District. Commission must approve all exterior changes to properties in a District. Interiors of properties are excluded. Portions of property subject to public view only are included, not those beyond public view. Everything in the beginning is grandfathered, nobody needs to make changes to get "up to standards" when becoming part of a District. It will be future changes that will require compliance. Excluded are repair with like materials, then no formal hearing required. The Commission has no jurisdiction over paint color, no jurisdiction over storm window or storm doors, window a/c units or landscaping on property. The Commission works very hard to talk about projects with homeowners prior to changes. Can't get a building permit from the Town to do any work without first having certificate from the Commission.

Comments were then received from the audience. David Baldwin asked about consultation or guidance, is it appropriate for someone to come to the Commission? S. Makowka said yes they certainly will give advice, they are however not able to endorse products, specific contractors, etc. B. Cohen added that she is the representative of District, registered architect and degree from BU on historic preservation. She has consulted with homeowners in the past. Larry Bohn said he was thrilled about Jane Becker starting this project. He is very proud of neighborhood and happy to see neighborhood join ranks of historic association in town. John Lane said he supports endeavor. He grew up in the neighborhood, attended Parmenter School, had several relatives who lived in the area. The 40s and 50s had many changes, buildings taken down, etc. He felt that

was too bad. He returned to the neighborhood because of what it is -- he treasures the homes of neighbors, wants to see legacy of this beautiful neighborhood continue. Alan Jones representing Masonic Temple, 19 Academy Street, said they are in full support. Brian Rehrig, 28 Academy, said he and wife Sheila are very much in favor. He wasn't aware of effort years ago, glad it's being done now. Always thought it was an oddity with Academy & Maple Streets being an island in the middle of the two districts. Now he's proud to be included. He commented that the President of the Arlington Friends of the Drama spoke with him the night prior and told him that they are in support of the effort also.

Richard Duffy arrived at 8:27pm. Late due to a minor vehicle accident. He asked was anyone interested in anything about history of the proposed district. He gave short overview of why the effort in the 1970s was unsuccessful. At that time the concept of a Historic District was very new and the Town was struggling with the larger issues of how to regulate and plan for development throughout the Town. In short, it was an idea ahead of its time.

Kevin O'Brien, Planning Director for the Town of Arlington and Secretary Ex Officio of the Arlington Redevelopment Board, said the Redevelopment Board does strongly endorse inclusion of their buildings in the District expansion. Their intention is to maintain buildings in as historically appropriate a manner as possible. Their property at 23 Maple has a roof replacement coming soon, with their hope that in the not too distant future they will remove the aluminum siding and make the building more historically accurate and visually attractive.

Miriam Levine, 26a Academy Street, said she is very supportive of expanded district. She says it's a wonderful feeling to walk through the streets. The tremendous variety of detail is exhilarating, new structures can be so boring, here streetscape is not boring, the variety is tremendous. She would love to see the expansion be approved to preserve this gem. Dr. Becker added that there is much variation of what you see, but also a place where you get a sense of past history. In a town center, its easy for historic areas to get encroached upon and not easy to bring back. Sharon Stafford from Mt. Gilboa/Crescent Hill District spoke next. She said she is very happy she's in a district. Neighborhood she is in has beautiful house recently bought by a developer who wants to tear it down or move it and build many more houses on this lot. It hasn't happened yet, because the permits required have yet to be approved by the Commission.

Brian Rehrig asked about when someone should come before the Commission on a project. If building permit not required, is still certificate required from Commission. S. Makowka answered that you need to come to us for any work to be done on the outside of a property that is subject to public view. B. Cohen added that some things like replacing windows, gutter repair, etc. still need to come to Commission, even though you might not need a building permit to do the work. Sometimes we would give a certificate of non-applicability. Dr. Becker added that all houses will go from being covered by the Historical Commission to being covered by the Historic District Commission. Rules are contained in state statute Chapter 40C. All 4 sides of property were under Historical Commission jurisdiction. You don't need to get two sets of permits, now you wouldn't deal with the Historical Commission and you'd deal with the Historic District Commission. S. Makowka reminded that www.arlingtonhistoricdistrict.com has all our guidelines, applications, and additional information.

L. Bohn asked about comments on subdivision property, conversion of single occupancy homes to condominiums. J. Worden commented that the Commission has no control over what goes on inside a house. If a new door for second entrance is needed, though, the property owner would need to get approval. As far as subdivision, Lowell Street is an example of what is going on currently: HDC has legal authority to require criteria be met that it is compatible with neighborhood, street, environment, and so on. In some cases where new construction is sought, the Commission has encouraged building something set back on property designed to mimic accessory structures, like a carriage house, etc. that would look like it actually was there long ago. Also, at corner of Pelham Terrace and Pleasant Street, Dr. Nau's house, with a spacious front lawn, a developer bought property and tried to subdivide and build in the front yard. The Historic District Commission denied the application and the developer sold the property to another buyer who renovated the house and preserved the existing streetscape. Currently a property owner on the corner of Pleasant and Brunswick is also looking to add a large house next to the current house. However, as described in the Commission guidelines, anything proposed must fit in size and context with the character of the neighborhood. On the corner of Broadway and Webster Street is a Greek Revival house. Multiple meetings took place with the owner and the final plan of an L-shaped addition on the back of the house enables him to get more units on the lot, maintains the lawn and is a reasonable solution for all parties involved. A number of years ago a house from East Arlington (Greek Revival) was moved to Pleasant Street with approved demolition of the contemporary house previously on the site. S. Makowka remarked that he feels there is an implied promise to homeowners that the Commission will defend and work very hard against inappropriate changes in a District.

Question from audience whether every building on the two streets is included in the addition. Answer was yes. In this case the geographical boundaries include the entirety of Maple and Academy Streets, but with the one exception: the Town Hall. The Senior Center, the yellow house next to it and the Parmenter School building will all be subject to the same guidelines as fellow district homeowners. B. Rehrig heard from Kevin O'Brien earlier that Redevelopment Board supporting project, asked whether the school department endorses and has any say over Parmenter School building? Redevelopment Board is in control of Parmenter School at this time. Page 25 of the draft study has a map showing the addresses included. Town Hall is under the jurisdiction of the Historical Commission.

S. Makowka explained the next steps: after this meeting the Commission must vote on whether to go forward, and if affirmative, must submit a warrant article to the Selectmen to be included in the recently opened warrant. Then there will be a hearing before the Board of Selectmen when they review all the warrant articles. There will be effort needed at that meeting so the Selectmen know of the neighborhood's support. Then it goes to Town Meeting where a 2/3 vote is needed to approve this change to the District. After that approval, the last step would be approval by the Attorney General's office. Once that has occurred, and the approved vote has been legally advertised by the Town Clerk, a copy of the vote and the map will be filed with the Register of Deeds and we will have successfully expanded the Pleasant Street Historic District.

The Commission then asked for a straw poll. All in favor by unanimous showing of hands. None opposed.

John Worden moved that Arlington Historic District Commissions, acting jointly as a study committee, insert an article in the Warrant for the 2005 Annual Town Meeting asking for the addition of Academy and Maple Streets, as outlined in the proposal, to the Pleasant Street District. Seconded by B. Cohen. Voted unanimously by S. Makowka, M. Potter, M. Hope Berkowitz, J. Worden, and B. Cohen.

Moved to adjourn at 8:50pm by S. Makowka.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carol Greeley
Executive Secretary

Cc: AHDC Commissioners
Arlington Historical Commission, Ms. JoAnn Robinson, Mr. Richard Duffy, co-chairs
Building Inspector, Mr. Michael Byrne
Building Department, Mr. Rick Vallarelli
Planning Dept. and Redevelopment Board, Mr. Kevin O'Brien
Massachusetts Historical Commission
Town Clerk
Robbins Library
Town Webmaster, J. Miskis