

Arlington Historic District Commissions

January 25, 2018
Whittemore Robbins House

Final & Approved Minutes

Commissioners Present: N. Aikenhead, M. Audin (arrived at 8:15pm), D. Baldwin, C. Barry, M. Bush, C. Hamilton, S. Lipp, C. Tee, J. Worden

Commissioners Not Present: M. Capodanno, B. Cohen, S. Makowka

Guests: J. Nyberg, S. Shaloo, R. Smurzynski, T. Smurzynski, H. Colquhoun, D. Perlo, R. Perlo, J. Leone, K. Lubar, J. Davis, R. Pacheco, T. Taketomo, J. Becker, D. Tee, K. Miller, J. Miller, K. Barrett, J. Gibson, L. Kaplan

1. **AHDC Meeting Opens** 8:00pm
J. Worden acted as Chair in the absence of S. Makowka and B. Cohen
2. **Appointment of alternate Commissioners; Jason/Gray – C. Hamilton, but removed when M. Audin arrived.**
3. **Approval of draft minutes from December 21, 2017. M. Bush moved approval with J. Worden's modifications, seconded by C. Barry. Unanimous approval**
4. **Communication**
 - a. **CONA Application for 28-32 Central Street (Kellerman) for window replacement**
 - b. **Documentation for 0 Ravine Street hearing from J. Leone and request from C. Barry for additional info for hearing**
 - c. **Request for gutter replacement at 3 Montague Street (Lancelotta) and ensuing COA Application**
 - d. **Email to Commissioners of Draft Minutes for approval at upcoming meeting**
 - e. **Application for window replacement at 734-736 Mass. Ave.**
 - f. **Email to postpone until February formal hearing for 734-736 Mass. Ave.**
 - g. **D. Baldwin spoke with Pieottas on Central Street and they are not interested in serving as a Commissioner. D. Baldwin wants them taken off the list.**
 - h. **M. Bush spoke with Donegans at 39 Russell and they wanted to replace bulkhead which he authorized as monitor. Wanted to change door facing Russell Street with a different style and there was discussion and ultimately an approval by M. Bush as monitor.**
5. **New Business**

Hearings (typically last around 20 minutes per application) 8:20pm

 - a. **Formal Hearing re: 0 Ravine Street (next to 40 Irving Street-Perlo) for new construction of a home on the vacant lot next to 40 Irving Street. M. Bush made a motion that the application be denied on administration grounds due to the gross**

inadequacy of the application submitted. No info about geographic character of the lot, large number of uncaptioned photos that could have been taken at random in the district. We have a 3 paragraph statement of purpose that proposes to build at the same scale as neighbors. Application in his opinion is grossly inadequate. D. Baldwin seconded for purposes of discussion. C. Barry said, in his opinion, for purpose of simply deciding whether lot should or should not be developed – spacing of houses in neighborhood and other info would be sufficient for Step 1 in the stage of the process. C. Hamilton said she was concerned about the photos not having labels. J. Leone and applicants, the Perlos were present and said they were only doing Step 1 requirements because they have chosen financially not to engage an architect, etc. until they know the answers. Topographically it is a flat lot. The Applicant gave photos to Commissioners which were all in the immediate neighborhood, either in District or immediately adjacent. They feel the materials are totally appropriate in 3 part process. M. Bush said topographical maps are available on town website. Floor area ratios are available and don't require experts either. As for the photos, given the casual relationship with applicants before the commission he would like application materials presented in time to be adequately approved. J. Leone said this is why if they get to those stages they want to have experts present the info but that is Step 2 in the process. C. Barry said he feels like the submission was made with plenty of time with the Commission. D. Perlo said he can identify the photos. Based on the guidelines that the HDC publishes and Step 1 says you would consider whether the lot is buildable and that is all that they are asking – not asking to build a house yet – just whether it is developable. S. Lipp felt it was sufficient, D. Baldwin agrees. Vote on M. Bush motion to reject the application yes – M. Bush solely. Motion is to deny not passed so carried forward with the consideration of application to step 1.

The Applicant described that one map goes back to 1891 when area was first subdivided (Estate of George Gray). In 1919 another map on record divided up properties to create lots a, b, c, and d. Lot a is still as it exists today, lot is Perlo property, lot c is 24 Ravine Street (Stevens home). Lot including shared driveway has existed for 99 years. They found old assessor's map (undated) which shows a house on that lot at some point of time. Another large map from 1987 shows current configuration of properties including new configuration of this house and little lots carved off this property. This is not a new lot, the deeds have a progression of that lot as a separate parcel through the past century. Argument is separate lot and a buildable lot and paid as a taxable buildable lot all those years it is a separate standalone lot and always has been and but for the fact that it is in a HD it would by right be built upon. First photo is of actual lot itself, Perlos' home and home in back. 2nd one shooting down driveway. Pg 3 – homes down bottom of Jason on small lots and relatively close; pg 4 – picture on Academy Street showing no closer than any home that would be built here; page 5 infill house is very close in photo; D. Baldwin said point is closeness and an infill house; next photo around corner; next photo showing closeness of Jason and Irving from back; C. Barry said infills were carved out of existing lots. The Applicant clarified that they were not arguing for infills but for the closeness of homes throughout the district. There is adequate space on the lot to mirror adequate space as throughout the district. 24 Irving is very close to 40 Irving – keeping houses distant was not always a factor back then. Not an extraordinary lot in any manner.

Audience members invited to comment:

R. Smurzynski, lives across the street and said on Ravine Street if you notice there is lots of land and open space there and she objects to Mr. Leone's characterization of the neighborhood as being dense.

Josh Davis, 54 Academy Street, neighbor, said they were delighted when it turned purple. The original house and landscape was built in 1864 and his point is that someone decided to create a lot doesn't matter – the land was very much a part of that property. C. Barry asked about a house that burned down in 1932 – it was not on this particular lot.

S. Shaloo, 8 Ravine Street, said at some point the lot became part of her house and it was sold to R. Publicover by the prior owner. The structure that was on that lot was a barn that is now behind her garage and is attached to another house. Her assumption is they moved the barn on purpose for some reason. When listed for sale the land was at some point separate. She found that the lot is 6,029sf – smallest lot on street. She was really surprised the lot was classified as buildable and that they're being taxed for \$350k land value. It will completely cut off the brown house behind. The only thing in the neighborhood that seemed to be a good example is at the corner of Pleasant and Gray – the barn was turned in to a house. Maybe she could see something like that going on that location, but not something large. J. Worden cautioned that the issue we are dealing with tonight is whether anything can be built on the lot.

K. Lubar lives at house on corner of Gray and Ravine. Concern is characterizing neighborhood as dense housing is so misleading and not true – respect the Historic District.

J. Nyberg, 30 Lakeshore Drive – lot is 8,058SF for clarification.

Commissioner M. Audin used GIS system and felt that the lot seemed smaller than others. 13 Ravine is the closest in size to it. C. Barry said this isn't what we're talking about here – M. Audin disagreed. He's having difficulty how an appropriate house for this neighborhood would fit on the lot. C. Barry still disagreed. J. Leone said you are talking about sizing and massing. M. Audin said yes but he needs to put things hand in hand and he doesn't feel that what would need to fit. R. Smurzynski said the house on 13 Ravine St. sold off the land and the infill house at Gray Street demonstrates the crowdedness. D. Baldwin said he takes a different approach – historic preservation is his expertise. He read his remarks on the history of the Historic District:

***“For the past 150 years, Arlington’s location, landscape, and built environment have made it a desirable suburb. The boom of the 1920s brought the demolition of many historic buildings and spaces. In the 1960s, further sub-division brought additional in-fill construction. This development sparked the town to investigate the creation of a Commonwealth of Massachusetts authorized 40C Historic District. The 1972, Final Report of the Arlington Historic District Study Committee to the Town of Arlington, in part stated, “The setting is as important as the buildings; the relation to each other creates a whole that is greater than its individual parts.” This historic preservation principle has been enacted into Town By-Law in seven local historic districts and their enlargements, by a required two-thirds majority of the Arlington Town Meeting on thirteen separate occasions in the last forty plus years.*”**

Noted preservation architect D.S. Rotenstein has best stated the importance of treating an entire district as a single historic property and not a loosely connected collection of historic properties occupied by old buildings. He suggests a musical analogy that compares a historic district to a song. “In music, the notes are held together by the breaks, silence. Without these breaks, a song would fall apart. The same is true for historic residential suburbs: if you remove the open spaces, the whole is diminished and will disintegrate.”

The National Park Service preservation office has also provided guidance, “In locations with multiple historic buildings, the relationship between buildings must also be protected. Contributing buildings must not be isolated from one another by the insertion of new construction. Historic landscapes and viewsheds must be preserved.”

We are the stewards of the past. Property owners in locations designated as historic districts are partners with town and state historic preservation commissions; together we have the ultimate responsibility for preserving the historic resources and landscapes of Arlington. “

D. Baldwin said that the setting is as important as the buildings – this historic district preservation principle has been enacted by Town Meeting. He feels passionately that he is a steward of the past. J. Nyberg said he thinks it is imperative that there is some cohesiveness. All different types of houses, different sizes, characters, etc. and that is wonderful to have that diversity in the neighborhoods. C. Barry said important to respect what the actual question is for tonight – is it appropriate to build anything on this lot. The applicant should be mindful that there are concerns about maintaining the fabric of appropriateness for anything that could be built there. C. Tee shares concerns about the size of the lot and what could be built there that would be acceptable. C. Hamilton asked for clarification about even if we approve this, it can be denied in the next step on the massing. Confirmed by Commissioners. S. Lipp said he has concerns about the size of the lot – asked about the driveway – it is shared by the 3 lots with easements. There is currently a fence. M. Bush – nothing to discuss. N. Aikenhead said on surface it looks like a buildable lot but concerned about the open spaces. J. Worden said he can see that he might see something being built on this lot – small barn, dog house, etc.; he’s very much in favor of open space and some comments made show this Ravine Street as a little subset of the entire district. This is almost a sliver compared to the other lots. J. Leone said all the lots except this one are built upon already. He disagrees that it was a barn on that property as a neighbor suggested. He hopes the Commissioners will consider that there may be something that could be achieved to be built here. Does not preclude a new home being built in this district. Mr. Perlo says he doesn’t see anything in Chapter 40C that nothing can be built in a Historic District lot. Mrs. Smurzynski objects to his characterization of the neighborhood and she’s been surrounded by mansard or Victorian houses and the area has historic preservation to keep it together – large houses on large lots. T. Taketomo, 48 Irving Street resident said guidelines came since many people bought the properties – current guidelines gives commission purview above zoning guidelines – this is a very subjective decision and he finds it very difficult to believe that this group has such power to make a subjective decision to allow people to do what they want with their properties. Complicated condition because the commission wields a lot of power which is subjective unless better articulated. In their opinion the view of other houses will be obstructed by a new house. J. Worden said since a lot like this is quite rare, a house that is in district would command a good premium. 40C says Commission does have power to

impose greater restrictions than zoning. M. Audin said he agrees with architect neighbor (Taketomo) on many points he brought up. He feels particulars of the site has to be very carefully developed as a design for the site. J. Leone said whatever is brought forth will require tweaking and change but when it gets to that stage. J. Worden said that when he owned a vacant lot near his house in another neighborhood he put a conservation restriction on it so that it would always be open space.

D. Baldwin moved that the proposed home development on 0 ravine street is incongruous to the historic aspects to its surrounding and the historic district. C. Tee seconded. No further discussion. Vote to deny – In favor: D. Baldwin, C. Tee. Oppose – C. Barry, S. Lipp, N. Aikenhead, M. Audin. Motion that nothing can be built on the lot defeated. C. Barry moved that it is hard for him to imagine that nothing could be built on the lot and that they should move to phase two. S. Lipp seconded move to phase 2 for discussion. M. Audin pointed out that we're not saying that something can be built but we are saying that it still may turn out that there isn't a massing that makes sense but it is appropriate to proceed to find out. M. Bush said the Town of Arlington requires a building permit for anything larger than 8 x 10. J. Worden said he could only see something really small – a full scale house put between other large buildings would not be wanted. Motion that something may possibly be built on the lot, seconded by S. Lipp. In Favor: N. Aikenhead, S. Lipp, C. Barry, M. Audin; Opposed – D. Baldwin and C. Tee; J. Worden abstained. Vote 4 to 2 with 1 abstention. J. Leone said they would be back in 2 months for step 2. J. Worden added for clarification: such vote shall allow discussion to move to phase 2 but does not reflect any actual approval.

- b. Formal Hearing re: 734-736 Mass. Ave. (Jason Street LLC) re: window replacements – **POSTPONED to 2/22 MEETING AT APPLICANT'S REQUEST**
- c. Informal Hearing re: 3 Montague Street (Lancelotta) re: replacement of wood gutters with Fiberglass Gutter Co. gutters on the barn at 3 Montague Street. M. Bush moved that based on past precedent this application is so insubstantial it qualifies for a 10 day certificate. Seconded by C. Barry. Unanimous approval. M. Bush moved approval for a 10 day certificate for the replacement of wood gutters with fiberglass gutters from the Fiberglass Gutter Company. Seconded by C. Barry. Unanimous approval.

7. Other Business

- a. Discussion regarding sidewalks in Historic District to be incorporated into Master Plan – *D. Baldwin and J. Worden said they have not heard from M. Rudemacher*
- b. Discussion regarding large project hearing procedures – *no discussion*
- c. Central Street Historic District vacant commissioner seat – *if nobody will serve from Central Street after next month we will need to find someone from another part of town to serve*
- d. M. Audin update on Zoning Recodification Working Group-ZRWG – *This project is going forward and the ARB seems ready to push this forward at upcoming Town Meeting*
- e. Discussion on Guidelines update. *C. Hamilton said she is concerned about the level of expertise needed to confirm or deny applications. She feels we need to make it clear and helpful on or job. M. Bush said he has made the point before: the way zoning is written anything bigger than 8 x 10 needs a permit and requires a vote by us first. Problem is that as a committee we don't have a consistent feeling on massing.*

8. **OPEN FORUM**
Ordinarily, any matter presented to the Commission under Open Forum will neither be acted upon nor a formal decision made, absent a previously noticed agenda item, but the Commission may make a decision if it deems it appropriate and necessary for the public good.
9. **REVIEW OF PROJECTS** - C. Greeley will circulate updated list for review.
10. **EXECUTIVE SESSION – To discuss current litigation**

Roll Call at 10:02pm to enter into Executive Session – D. Baldwin, C. Barry, C. Hamilton, C. Tee, S. Lipp, M. Bush, N. Aikenhead, M. Audin, J. Worden

See Executive Session Minutes of 1-25-18

Return from executive session to open session at 10:26pm. D. Baldwin, C. Barry, C. Hamilton, C. Tee, S. Lipp, M. Bush, N. Aikenhead, M. Audin, J. Worden.
11. **MEETING ADJOURNED** - M. Bush moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by C. Barry
Unanimous approval to adjourn at 10:36pm.