

Arlington Historic District Commissions

February 28, 2019
Whittemore Robbins House

Final and Approved Minutes

Commissioners Present: M. Audin, C. Barry, M. Bush, B. Cohen, C. Hamilton, S. Makowka, C. Tee, J. Worden

Commissioners Not Present: N. Aikenhead, D. Baldwin, S. Lipp

Guests: R. Smurzynski, T. Smurzynski, J. Leone, K. Lubar, S. Wikman, M. Malchano, T. Taketomo, D. Tee, C. Harrington, P. Hatem, G. Axelrod, D. Green, M. Dublin

1. AHDC Meeting Opens 8:00pm
2. Appointment of alternate Commissioners – Jason/Gray District – M. Bush, B. Cohen, S. Makowka
3. Approval of draft minutes from January 24, 2019. Draft Minutes with J. Worden’s revisions. M. Audin moved approval, B. Cohen seconded. Unanimous approval
4. Communications
 - a. Request from Select Board’s secretary for 2018 AHDC Annual Report submission
 - b. Email from D. Green with data for house spacing in Jason/Gray District with regards to 0 Ravine Street hearing
 - c. CONA Application from 105 Pleasant St. for repair to retaining wall damaged by plow
 - d. Applicant Email Submission for 0 Ravine Street with supporting documentation
 - e. Emails for AHDC 2020 Budget Review
 - f. Applicant email submission for 17 Jason Street with supporting documentation
 - g. Request for Pleasant Street District Report from R. Smurzynski
 - h. Emails from K. Lubar regarding 0 Ravine Street – corrected from D. Perlo to K. Lubar
 - i. Email from MA Historical Commission (C Skelly) – Preservation Newsletter
 - j. Email with application for window replacements at 20 Russell Street

(Martin) front porch

5. 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.

6. Other Business

- a. Central Street and Avon Place Historic District vacant commissioner seat – No report
- b. Discussion on Guidelines
- c. Report from Streetscape sub-committee – No Report

7. New Business

8:20pm

- a. **Continuation of Formal Hearing re: 17 Jason St (Hatem) for addition and exterior renovations:** S. Makowka clarified that the voting Commissioners would be Marshall Audin, Carol Tee, John Worden, Michael Bush, Beth Cohen, and Steve Makowka. P. Hatem said they heard feedback from last month and tried to look at the suggestions made. In particular, they tried to make the proposed addition more integrated with the main structure. The additions now overlaps with the existing house more. They slid the addition over so that the ridge of the roof intersects with existing house roof in a different way. They also lowered the addition by a foot (trying to keep existing façade as visible as possible), lowered the windows, and simplified the shape. They also got rid of the shed dormer. While they considered eyebrow dormers, they were not happy with that look and are proposing a hip roof on new dormer which has lots of historical preference. He noted that the third floor dormer of existing house is what they want as focal point. There is also an antique weathervane they would like to mount on wall – [the Commission noted that that is not under our jurisdiction because it can be removed]. He continued that adding the proposed rear decks to house reinforces the connection to the back yard which is in keeping with the shingle styled feeling. In response to a question, he noted that the foundation on existing house is fieldstone and that their intention is to match the fieldstone portion as close as possible as they did on the prior addition. He further noted that the shingles go all the way down to the ground (based on existing details) and they will do their best to make it look right. The Commission discussed the lack of visibility because it's the back of the house and that they might not want to do it all the way down to the ground.

P. Hatem confirmed that they were proposed all wood windows, as well as siding and roof shingles to match existing conditions. They want to replace the floor of the deck in the rear and want to use composite decking but noted that the railing systems will be wood. So, the desire for the flooring on the rear deck and the steps on the front of the house (not included in application) is to use a composite material – such as 'Fortress Deck' but they don't distribute it in New England. S. Makowka confirmed the second location is the front entry of the house. He has two issues, 1) it is not part of application so can't approve and 2) this is the main entrance of the house so a composite might not be appropriate. He suggested an ipe or mahogany wood as an alternative since the area is relatively small and those products would be more appropriate. and needs application. He did suggest that composite on back deck floor is ok, but did not think it would be approved on the front of the house. M. Bush suggested they look at STK Cedar – not commonly available but Friend Lumber in Burlington does sell. Half the price of Trex. It's cedar so it weathers nicely. It feels

nice under foot where the Trex feels kind of plastic. M. Audin said his concern is that as a deck the space between the boards needs some way to vent down below – maybe under the stair. But you need good through ventilation – maybe that’s why the fir didn’t last on the old porch. Change siding out to lattice work or screen to get circulation going. M. Audin complimented architect on his presentation. M. Audin asked about spacing on balusters – about 1 ¼ and will match existing conditions. Hoping to reuse some of the existing railing.

S. Makowka open the floor for other interested parties. No audience member wanted to speak to this project.

J. Worden moved that application as amended by tonight’s presentation be approved with final specifications be shared and approved by the monitor prior to installation with the clarifications that the shingles do not need to come down to ground and rear deck may be made with a wood like composite or suitable material with a similar dimension to wood. B. Cohen seconded for discussion. M. Bush clarified for the applicant that the concrete footings on the deck should not be visible upon project completion. The Commission voted unanimous approval. Monitor appointed: B. Cohen.

- b. **Continuation of Formal Hearing re: 0 Ravine Street for new construction** – S. Makowka clarified that the voting Commissioners would be Marshall Audin, Carol Tee, John Worden, Michael Bush, Beth Cohen, and Steve Makowka. M. Audin distributed a handout with photos of surrounding houses to help the Commissioners visualize the layout of the area. He clarified that the photos are informational only and are not meant to make any particular point.

S. Makowka noted that the Commission has moved on to Stage 2 which means that we are not talking finishes, but have moved to include the issues of the appropriateness of the proposed structure’s size and massing on the site. He noted that the Commission had requested information on spacing of the houses in the area which needed to be clarified. J. Leone said they are moving towards spacing. Gary has provided additional drawings showing the house as it would sit and the distance between neighboring houses. M. Bush said he is happy with D. Green’s numbers (submitted per the Commission’s request at the last hearing and incorporated in the record) and as long as the Applicant agrees that the numbers are factual and accepts them that way he is satisfied with the info. In response to a question by S. Makowka, the Applicant’s architect confirmed that the distance between proposed house and surrounding structures was 22 feet on one side and 35 feet on the other side with the offset used to save a tree significant tree on the site.

J. Leone clarified that the Applicant didn’t do any more architectural drawings until they know they are moving forward. They presented a montage of what you will see of the house located to the rear of the proposed house as you are walking down the street. They clarified that the gray mass shown behind the proposed house is # 24 Irving and white mass is a shed in front of it. These drawings are based on photographs. M. Audin would like to hear why this is not incongruous to the character of the neighborhood. The architect for the applicant replied that their argument is if you look at the Historic District based on the report establishing the District and you read through that you find about 15 different styles of buildings in the District. As you look through exact descriptions of buildings in report you find references of very eclectic combination of buildings. You will see shingle style buildings with colonial revival elements, Victorian farmhouse and building next door has gothic revival elements – this is a district characterized by a great variety of

architectural styles with many buildings that you don't even give labels to in the district. In short, there is an eclectic 20th century design buildings throughout the district. M. Audin expressed that how building fits into streetscape is the issue. How does massing respond? The Applicant's architect said that they chose to do a gable that is parallel to the street like the Jason Russell House. They are keeping building as close to ground as possible. What's more compatible – match historic style or mix them all together or do massing which is less visually opposing on the street. They are proposing a building mass less imposing as a 3d object than another one.

M. Audin said style is a moving target. Jason Gray is a very large district for this town and encompasses several neighborhoods so when reviewing this house he's looking at Ravine Street. Several patterns are consistent such as the pitch of the roof. He asked about the pitch of the proposed roof—answer is 8[12]. M. Audin noted that in the neighborhood, there is nothing is less than a 10 pitch, so he feels that an appropriate roof pitch should be 10 or more to be consistent. Another feature that M. Audin notes of all houses in the area is that they address the street – that is the elevation is facing street and the entry is celebrated with some kind of in between space (portico or porch) but that element is missing completely from the proposed structure. M. Audin said for every house in immediate neighborhood, the garages (with exception of 1 house with no garage) are disconnected from the house. Now you're the only house with internal garage and house is having to work around that issue. You can't put a detached garage because of silly angle on back of lot but now that's it's attached it creates the larger footprint that needs to be counterbalanced with increased massing. His issue is the volumetric massing of the house. He referred to page D3 which has reference photos of garages. The Applicant's architect responded that they worked from the premise that a parallel gable that falls away from you is less imposing as you see it from the street. Consideration of roof line being parallel so there's more roof and less wall will help – key is that house does not stand out. Part of the background of the whole district. It was suggested that a hip roof might be a better solution.

S. Makowka invited public comment. S. Shaloo commented that “vicinity” is being discussed and used in various ways. She would like a consistent definition by both parties. R. Smurzynski disagrees with a lot of what applicant's architect said – you've never looked out her window and seen the view of Ravine Street that she sees. She does not believe the houses are eclectic at all. She look at a report – titled Guidebook for Historic Districts Commissions in MA (published by MHC) and on page 59 she keeps reading over and over “house has to be similar in scale, materials and siting”. She feels that the proposed house's scale and siting are incompatible on that lot. The report establishing the District says that this is one of the most beautiful streets and is a provocative area. A neighbor asked about barn at 24 Irving – does the visibility of that structure matter with the Commission? The Commission noted that it was not represented on the street view visualization chart provided by the Applicant but it is a factor that the Commission will take into consideration. The Applicant's architect said that the barn is totally blocked by #8 Ravine street, but the Commission noted that when standing in front of the site of the proposed house you can see it today. S. Makowka thanked D. Green for info he sent to Commission on house spacing. D. Green said he would like to see better clarity on what is a side yard. The Commission explained that they consider space between existing houses – the reference in the guidelines is not meant to be a zoning concept or to be driven by definitions in the zoning code. T. Taketomo said he is confused about the stages and the criteria the HDC applies whereby you will judge appropriateness. He hears “fittingness” but it is very confusing where you're going – there is lots of testimony but better criteria from Commission might help to know how decisions are made. At last meeting discussed

appropriateness of architectural elements addressing the street – surprised that this was discussed.

S. Makowka summarized we started with what's allowed on site, and have now expanded into size, massing and how it addresses the street. He explained that the procedure they established is to move forward with consideration until the Commission gets to a point that it feels the proposed structure is not appropriate or that it is approved sometimes with modifications. He reminded the audience that during the prior hearing D. Baldwin had moved to deny the application based on a finding that nothing could be appropriately built on that lot but that no one had seconded that motion thus allowing the consideration of the project to expand and proceed. That motion to deny died at that meeting and we are at discussion on size and massing – but not yet not style or finishes. J. Leone stated that you are saying that at any point in time you can rule that it is not buildable. This does not seem fair.

S. Makowka invited more public comment. K. Lubar made a presentation of materials that had been previously provided to the Commission. He said it is not fair that information was presented by the Applicant for the first time tonight. This is not an addition but a large infill project. The proposed project is on small lot that has been historically empty for long period of time. This is a heavy pedestrian street. The Applicant's references to the Jason Russell House are inappropriate because that is a very different lot. He feels that approving this house would set a dangerous precedent in every historic district. S. Makowka thanked him for his presentation and noted that has been added to the record (dated 2/13/19). K. Lubar also asserted that the materials submitted by applicant are incomplete in his opinion. Not an unreasonable plot of land to build an appropriately sized house – maybe a barn or a 2 car garage and maybe both would fit there. For example, the barn at 161 Pleasant Street might be appropriate. He turned to a new presentation which had also been provided to the Commission. J. Leone took exception that the info presented, asserting that it does not pertain to the Applicant's proposal. K. Lubar stated that what he is trying to show is that the size and massing is really inconsistent with this District. J. Leone again took offense that he feels K. Lubar is inventing situations that don't exist to denigrate the Applicant's proposal. K. Lubar moved to his conclusion that feels a 900 sf structure might be appropriate.

J. Worden said it seems the size and massing, whether or not you like the style of the house, size and massing ought to be much smaller like K. Lubar suggested. Visually in an area that's mostly fence free the viewer doesn't see this invisible line – he sees the distance between houses. You see that throughout the district you have a fair amount of space between buildings and this really characterizes the District as a whole. These spacings are much more generous than any other part of Arlington with the exception of Pleasant Street. This creates the ambiance of the Jason Gray District. That setting, built over a period from 1880s to the early part of 20th century, in a fairly short period of time, reflects tastes that governed in that time period. In terms of massing you've got to have a mass facing the street that allows that kind of generosity of spacing between buildings that you see otherwise. You need to maintain that kind of same feeling of space between buildings.

S. Makowka asked if anyone wanted to make a motion. B. Cohen moved that the Commission deny the application based on lack of buildability because the size and massing, in context with Ravine Street, of this proposed application is incongruous with the neighborhood. M. Bush would like to strike the word buildability from the motion. B. Cohen accepted that modification to the pending motion. S. Makowka asked if he could make an alternative motion which he thought might capture the

concerns of the Commission in more detail. B. Cohen agreed to withdraw her motion.

S Makowka made the following motion: Having reviewed the evidence presented, the Commission determines that the proposed structure would be incongruous with the purposes of the District for the following reasons:

- 1) The District Study establishing the District specifically emphasizes this portion of Ravine and Irving Streets as being perhaps the best preserved streetscape offering a compelling panorama of architectural style and history.
- 2) The proposed building would be an incongruous intrusion into this noted streetscape.
 - a) First it breaks up the historical spacing of the buildings in the immediate area, namely Ravine and Irving Streets which we determine to be the most relevant setting within which to judge this proposal.
 - i) Evidence in the record establishes combined side setbacks between structures in this area have a median value of 141 feet while the proposed house would have a combined side setback of less than 60 feet.
 - ii) The house's coverage of its lot is much higher than the surrounding houses in the relevant area.
 - iii) The visualization materials presented during the hearing support a finding that the proposed placement of this structure makes it appear shoehorned in and thus unsympathetic to its surroundings.
 - b) Second the proposed building would substantially block the currently existing Ravine Street view of a significant District resource (24 Irving Street) which has historically been experienced from this perspective.
 - c) Third, the evidence shows that the subject parcel was part of the "Hardy compound" which both constitutes a historical feature of the site and preserved the spacing of the area (for which it had a deed restriction). That spacing remained intact up to the point that the District was established and is an integral part of the historic context of the site.
 - d) *Fourth, there is no evidence that any house was ever sited on this lot. There is some uncertainty about the possible siting of a smaller barn, leading to the conclusion that the proposed house is too large for the site and that a possible an appropriate alternative might be a smaller accessory sized structure sited further back on the lot. [This paragraph subsequently removed – see amendment below]*
 - e) Fifth, the massing of the proposed house is elongated with its narrow façade facing the street. This orientation is inconsistent with any of the other structures that make up the relevant streetscape and is thus also incongruous.
 - e) Finally, we note that there may be significant issues with the style and finishes of the structure. This denial is based on the review of the siting and massing of the structure alone and a finding that it is inappropriate on those grounds. At this point, we have heard no evidence nor made any determination about the appropriateness of other factors such as the visible style and finishes of the proposed house.

Motion was seconded by J. Worden for discussion. M. Audin said he doesn't agree with everything that was proposed by S. Makowka – he feels this is an eclectic neighborhood but with distinct patterns that follow through and is also concerned about the paragraph discussing what

may have been on the site. M. Bush echoed this concern. S. Makowka said that he was willing amend his motion by removing the entire paragraph starting with "Fourth, there is no evidence" noting that possible alternatives had been discussed already and were contained in the record. B. Cohen seconded the amended motion (with removal of the 4th point). S. Makowka asked for a recorded vote. Voting in favor of the amended motion: S. Makowka, B. Cohen, C. Tee, M. Bush, and J. Worden. M. Audin abstained.

8. REVIEW OF PROJECTS

9. EXECUTIVE SESSION – To discuss ongoing litigation Not needed

10. MEETING ADJOURNED 10:21pm