



ARLINGTON HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSIONS

Carol Greeley, Executive Secretary
c/o Department of Planning and Community Development
Town Hall Annex - First Floor
730 Massachusetts Avenue
Arlington, MA 02476

September 23, 2024

Arlington Redevelopment Board
c/o Planning Department
Town Hall Annex
730 Mass Avenue
Arlington, MA 02476

Re: AHDC Information re 149 Pleasant Street

Dear Arlington Redevelopment Board,

As Chair of the Arlington Historic Districts Commission (AHDC or Commission), I am writing to communicate some information for your consideration regarding the Certificate of Appropriateness issued by the Commission for demolition and the construction of a new residential structure at 149 Pleasant Street in Arlington. I understand that there are at least two elements relevant to the Redevelopment Boards review of this project may be informed by a review of AHDC protocols and/or discussions. I provide the AHDC's solar panel guidelines and the Commissions' discussion of parking options for that project.

As you know, the 149 Pleasant Street property is located in the Pleasant Street Historic District and thus falls under AHDC jurisdiction for most exterior changes, including changes to grade and construction of walls, that are subject to public view. Note that this property is located on a very visible corner lot within the District making it important that any changes be as sympathetic to the District as possible. The Commission held several hearings on the proposed changes to this property resulting in a vote to issue a Certificate of Appropriateness on March 21, 2024.

Regarding this project, I provide the following information for your consideration:

- Solar Guidelines:** The Commission is a supporter of solar installations within the Districts and in fact has approved the large majority of applications that have come before it. In order to make sure that such installations are not incongruous with the purposes of the District, we have established guidelines concerning the location and type of installation allowed. While such proposed installations are considered on a case-by-case basis, the AHDC has consistently applied the following subset of its criteria to determine whether a proposed installation is appropriate and as well as where they are typically not allowed:
 - For most properties, locating solar panels on the primary facade is the least desirable option because it will have the greatest adverse effect on the property's character defining features.

- Solar panels should be installed on rear slopes or other locations not highly visible from the public right of way whenever possible.
- Solar panels should be positioned behind existing architectural features such as parapets, dormers, and chimneys to limit their visibility.
- Use solar panels and mounting systems that are compatible in color to established roof materials. (AHDC Design Guidelines, Revised January 2024)

In short, the Commission has consistently declined to approve solar panels on the primary street-facing façade of structures in the District and has required that any installations be compatible with the color of roofing to help the installation blend in to the surroundings.. While the Commission did not discuss solar specifically for this property, the discussions highlighted the visual prominence of this address and the fact that as a corner property, it has two primary facades.

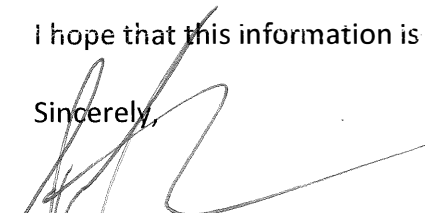
2. **Parking:** The Commission noted during its hearings that it does not have direct jurisdiction over the curb cuts or zoning related parking requirements of the Town of Arlington. Rather, the Commission has jurisdiction over proposed changes in grades and any walls that are constructed on site. In particular, the Commission noted that (due to the topography of the lot) the size and placement of the proposed parking area(s) would require backing into heavy traffic and could create overly large and prominent retaining walls and asked that Applicant to explore alternatives. Here are excerpts from the AHDC minutes:

- J. Worden said he thinks it would be an improvement to the site and the neighborhood for a building in scale and size. He wondered if Gray Street access for parking would be better but M. Penzenik said the topography is very tough up there on that side and just couldn't make it work. C. Barry said the light at Irving Street will help because traffic does get breaks. He's excited but a bit troubled by the parking. The Applicant stated that the Redevelopment Board has jurisdiction on waterflow off the property and the issue with parking is going to be further dealt with by them. B. LaBau said the idea of making the new structure in the style chosen fits in well and makes sense but he too is concerned with the parking. AHDC Minutes 12/14/23
- Applicant: The discussion last month about the parking necessitated a change, next slide showed it divided up for parking for lower unit on Pleasant St and parking for the other 2 units up off of Gray St. Little turn around shown to facilitate not backing into Pleasant St traffic. AHDC Minutes 1/25/24
- The Commission noted that it will want to know how things will look visually from the street including any retaining walls. Applicant replied that any retaining walls will be sympathetic to the neighborhood visually.... C Barry asked for more info about changes at grade – walls, etc are concerning and it does affect massing.... S. Makowka noted concern about what does the visual representation of the retaining walls look like – the one in the front, etc. Would like to see proposal for the height and how it affects contours of the front. B Labau said parking areas were a definite improvement. AHDC Minutes 1/25/24

- [Applicant submitted] changes shown on new plans submitted for 2/22/24 meeting. She noted that with change to parking, they need 2 curb cuts approved. The Commission noted that while we can note our concerns for parking in front as reason for parking in rear, the AHDC can't override zoning or other regulations. Also, the Commission can't interpret the [Town] zoning codes around setbacks, etc. J. Worden asked about the parking off Gray Street and the retaining walls shown in the drawings. The Applicant noted that they will be poured concrete with stone facing. J. Worden noted that they may have to go to the ZBA after us for additional approvals. The Commission noted that for any stepped stone walls in back – think about how that works – not cinder block – any would need to look like fieldstone walls etc. The Applicant stated there will also be a low retaining wall to hold back the slope in the front.... There was a discussion of how much wall would be visible since it appears highest portion would be at end of driveway facing away from Gray Street given the slope of the lot. S. Makowka said we want walls to blend in and be as compatible as possible.Grade TBD and steps need to be added still to drawings. AHDC Minutes 2/22/24
- The Commission noted that any walls to manage grades will need to be engineered but all will be concrete with stone facing to match the rest of the district and that will need to be approved prior to installation. In addition, if approved the walls should blend in as they do as in other places in the district and if the change is so significant that the monitor feels it is beyond his/her discretion, the Applicant may need to come back for further direction by the Commission. AHDC Minutes 3/21/24
- S Makowka said there's a little bit of concern about the ... uncertainty around the grade changes and what needs to be done for parking in the back, M Penzenik said she's happy to come back after the ARB to submit that info. AHDC Minutes 3/21/24
- Certificate Condition: 2) CHANGES OF GRADE AND ALL IMPLICATIONS OF SUCH CHANGES (INCLUDING LANDSCAPE WALLS AND PARKING AREA) TO BE APPROVED BY MONITOR WITH THE POTENTIAL THAT APPLICANT MAY HAVE TO COME BACK TO COMMISSION FOR APPROVAL IF MONITOR FEELS SCOPE OF WORK EXCEEDS THEIR DISCRETION.

I hope that this information is helpful. I would be happy to answer any remaining questions

Sincerely,



Stephen Makowka
Chair, AHDC

Cc (via email): Martha Penzenick, Architect for 149 Pleasant
Carol Greeley AHDC Executive Secretary
Charles Barry and Brian Lebau, AHDC Project Monitors