



Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

05/25/2021

7:00 PM

Online, Town Hall, 472 Main St, Acton, MA 01720

Present: David Honn (DH), Anita Rogers (AR), Fran Arsenault (FA), Ron Regan (RR), Art Leavens (AL), Zach Taillefer (ZT).

Absent: David Shoemaker (DS), Dean Charter (DC) BOS liaison.

1. Opening;

Chair David Honn opened the meeting at 7:03 pm and read the “remote meeting notice” due to COVID-19.

2. Regular Business

A. Citizen's Concerns – DH goes over upcoming events: Volunteer appreciation day is June 3rd at Nara Park. Saturday June 5th 11 AM – 53 River St site visit. 615 Mass Ave visit on an upcoming Wednesday, please send availability. Waiting for formal response from town counsel on how to proceed with garage demo. AL asked if the public may attend the 53 River St site visit; DH thinks it will be okay.

ZT – COA for 2102 is all set. I also responded to email questions about signs from another sign maker.

B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – AL makes a motion to approve the minutes from May 5th, AR second, DH takes a roll call vote: RR – Y, AL – Y, FA – Y, AR – Y, ZT – Y, DH – ?, the motion passes 5-0. [note: DH said okay but didn't roll call himself and say aye.]

C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet – spreadsheet up to date.

3. New/Special Business [or other applicable agenda items]

A. Public Hearing for Application 2109 New Multi-Family Building at 9 School St by John Perkins

Applicant present. DH reads the public hearing notice.

DH noted that we met with the applicant many times and asked Patrick Guthrie, applicant's architect, to give an introduction and go over the full presentation for the benefit of the public.

Patrick Guthrie of Design Associates gives an overview: this is a proposed, new construction, 6-unit, residential building inspired by nearby Second Empire buildings in Acton such as the American House Hotel on Railroad St. The building is 2 ½ stories. The



School Street façade will be articulated into three blocks by recessing the center block 18 inches. Each unit will have a hooded entry supported by decorative brackets. The four end units will have bay windows; the central units will not have bay windows. There will be a deck across the whole building in the rear with parking under the units in the basement. Patrick goes over the materials: concrete basement with parging where exposed; Hardi-plank siding; Harvey Majesty aluminum clad windows; wood trim; Fypon decorative brackets in Frieze and as supports for hooded entries; wood doors on the School St side; aluminum bay roofs with weathered zinc finish; three-tab asphalt shingles on mansard roof lower section; EPDM on low pitch hip roof; galvanized aluminum half round gutters with round downspouts; rear deck and railings stained P.T.; revised lighting: Herrington Two light outdoor flush mounted Sea Gull Lighting collection in black.

The Site Plans: massing taken from near-by historic commercial buildings with a long linear form. Quickly goes over the basement, first floor, second floor and roof plan, noting the setback of the middle section and articulation of the bays.

School St (north) elevation: second empire styled, the projecting bays at the first level break up the massing and are common in Acton; the second floor is more restrained and punctuated with the fenestration and a frieze band with paired brackets. The attic has a mansard roof with dormer windows with a more elaborate hood.

The east elevation: The original elevation shows a tall foundation at the back; we are proposing stepping down the siding to limit the exposure of the foundation wall. We would introduce a water table and then edge boards so that the siding is more cleanly terminated.

The rear elevation (south): parking underneath, a deck runs across from end to end, sliding doors at the deck level. At the roof level there is a balustrade blocking the view of the mechanical equipment.

Architectural details: bay elevation, balustrade for rear deck and roof, entry elevation, entry roof brackets, eave detail with frieze brackets and ½ round gutters; there is an updated window trim detail. The trim is padded out with 1” blocking so that the rabbet in the trim to enclose the window frame is 1” thick. Window elevation, dormer side elevation and roof detail.

DH – The HDC met with this applicant multiple times and strongly encouraged them to do a single building rather than smaller duplexes side-by-side because the scale of structures around it is larger, with Exchange Hall and the bridge over the railroad tracks, and historically there was a larger building on this site. DH asks for comments:

RR – referencing the alternate foundation in the supplemental drawings – the stepping of the siding isn’t typical for the period and brings more attention to the foundation height. I like the new light better than recessed. At the last meeting there was a discussion of going with a pine clapboard instead of the Hardi-plank; is that a possibility? John asked if RR had a chance to look at a building with Hardi-plank, RR – No; in the past AR has commented that long runs of Hardi-plank can get a wavy look.



ZT – On the mansard roof, in previous meetings there was discussion of cedar or faux cedar for shingles; are you going to change the material from three-tab and EPDM?

John/Patrick – no.

FA – I don't like the stepped down siding; it's not period appropriate; I'd prefer seeing half-brick; a lot of second empire have granite or stone foundations. I do like the light fixture.

AR – Is the deck railing material still PT and are the posts capped or wrapped? Patrick – The material is still PT. The posts are capped. AR – the posts are large, 6x6, which will tend to get more checks. I know this is on the back and minimally visible from the street, but it is a rough detail. If we don't approve stepping the siding, we can require landscaping material to soften the impact of the parged concrete foundation. The sills on the windows seem like a small scale; are they historic sills? Patrick – we can look at thicker base material. AR - It would be better if you could bring down the tall vertical wall on the back of the mansard. Patrick – because the pitch of the upper part of the mansard is so shallow, to drop the roof line even a foot would lose six or seven feet of mechanical space. AR – and you need that much space for mechanical equipment? Patrick – I'm not sure yet, and I don't want to give up the space before I know how much I need.

DH – at the last meeting I expressed a hesitation in the amount of unnatural materials versus what we've allowed at Exchange Hall or 25-27 School St. We want to impose the same standards on owners in the district. I want to see wood clapboard; it weathers and looks different from Hardi-plank, which looks perfect after 10 years. I'm willing to live with three-tab on the mansard sidewalls but looking at other mansard roofs, they have the same type of shingles on the upper roof, and I'm not convinced that the upper roof won't be visible. Could you put three-tab on the upper roof? Do you have enough slope? Patrick – the slope is 2/12 which is the minimum for asphalt in a low-slope application where it is glued down. DH – could you raise the slope. Patrick – maybe, I'm not sure how close we are to the height limit.

DH – For the back deck have you looked at Intex systems? We've had good success with its use in the districts and it looks better than P.T. lumber. Patrick – The cost difference between Intex and P.T. lumber is significant. DH – You could mix and use a cedar top rail with P.T. balusters. I don't like the stepped down siding, it looks contemporary. Half-brick looks pretty good, and we've had success in the districts. Patrick – I'd prefer going with the parging and landscaping. DH – If you tint the parging grey to give it a stone-like color versus white like concrete that may be acceptable.

DH – Even if you don't have the stepped down siding, you should have a water table. AR – I think it should be two pieces: a sloped cap and banding. Patrick – in the original design without the stepping, we didn't have a water table; the siding goes all the way to the foundation; are you saying we need a new element? DH – the original elevation looked like it had a water table. Patrick – that is the first floor dimension.

DH – On the first floor plan, the way that the deck extends along the same plane as the east and west plane of the building, it would be better if that was set back so the corner board isn't interrupted with the deck; turn the corner, have the full corner board and then



start the deck. Maybe have a termination post at the siding. John – I’m not sure that we can move the posts in from the edge because of the parking requirements. Patrick – I need to think about how that will terminate at the siding. I don’t think moving the deck back from the corner board (about 8 inches) will diminish the read that there is a deck off the back of the building. There was a discussion on the connection details and visual impact, in the end it was decided to leave it as it is.

DH – I’m concerned that the mechanicals on the back will still be visible above the balustrade; maybe you could add lattice above the top rail to make sure the mechanicals and possibly the doors are hidden from view.

ZT – is there still a plan to do a mockup of the window to examine the trim detail? John – Yes. There was a discussion about window details: butt joints vs. miter joints to look like traditional construction, putty profile, comparison of Harvey windows with traditional joinery. The best way to see the mockup would be a site visit. The mockup should include casing and sill and it should be clear how the siding would butt against it.

AL – I am concerned about the precedents. Generally, we should apply the same standards with respect to materials. We are stepping away from what we very recently required at 25-27 School St., in particular the Hardi-plank, aluminum clad windows, the foundation without half brick. The foundation with parging may be okay if it is screened, and depending on how the windows look in the mockup, they may be acceptable, but I don’t find the Hardi-plank acceptable; I think the clapboard needs to be wood.

AR – We should have a discussion at some point with respect to materials on new buildings versus preservation of existing historic structures. Should we be compelled to have the same material choices in both cases?

DH asks for comments from the public:

Terra Fredericks of West Acton – How close is the building to the sidewalk? DH – It is right up to the sidewalk; there are entry ways. Patrick – it observes the property line setbacks. Terra – For the new houses built on River St. were Hardi-plank and aluminum windows allowed there? DH – No, they had wood clapboard and wood windows. Terra – How close were those to the street? DH – about 15 feet. Terra – This new building is right in South Acton center, across from Exchange Hall, listed in the National Register of Historic Places. I am very concerned about the use of non-traditional materials in the districts. I think the bay windows look too small; have they been compared to other bay windows in the districts?

The recessed section of the center units seems too small. The porches are too small and don’t seem appropriate for Victorian era buildings. The detail of the door seems to be lacking; what does the door look like, how is it framed? DH – the jamb depth, we can ask for a section detail of the door. There was a discussion about second-empire style versus other styles of the period. Patrick – The center units are setback 18”, which gives good shadow lines. The bay windows are modeled on the bay windows. Terra - Is there a 3D model of the building? Patrick – no.



Michaela Moran of School St –If the upper slope of the mansard roof is visible, I think it should have the same material as the lower slope. I don't like the deck on the back; it will be very visible from either direction travelling down School St. and it is not something I associate with second-empire buildings, especially when they are above ground level. Could the parging on the basement walls be pressed/stamped with a brick look? Someway to make it not look like a blank concrete surface as that doesn't fit the historic look of the neighborhood. The Frieze brackets seem too widely spaced? DH – you are okay with them but there needs to be more? Michaela – Yes, to be period correct they need to be spaced closer together and there should be more. AR – if you split the pairs and space out the brackets individually would that improve it? Patrick – I think that may make them look sparser. AR – we should compare the spacing to an existing second empire building to figure out the spacing.

Michaela - I think being one building is okay; I'm concerned about the back, even though it isn't in HDC jurisdiction, because it will be prominent coming over the bridge from the South on Main St. Anything you can do to make the building fit into the neighborhood would be greatly appreciated. The doors in the middle section seem too plain. AR – Maybe the roof could be a little taller. DH – maybe the porch could be wider. AR – maybe deeper as well.

Barbara Morse of Piper Rd – I find the front façade engaging and the back of the building is not. The back will be very visible coming over the bridge and will have a greater emotional impact than anticipated. The area where the HVAC will be located seems creatively unimaginative. It doesn't look up to the standard of the rest of the building. I don't like the Hardi-plank siding, I think wood is more appropriate. Using stone or old granite blocks in the landscaping against the foundation would make the building have a more organic look. The windows on the front façade seem small given the height of the building and being so close to the sidewalk. If the windows were taller, it would give more scale.

DH – we are over our time limit and will continue the public hearing at the next meeting. We will want to see a mockup of windows, detail of the water board area, shingles on the top of the mansard roof, use wood clapboard for the siding, center porch detail. AL – I just want to make it clear that the back of the building is not in our jurisdiction; with regard to the back, we are making suggestions that aren't binding.

No motion was made.

B. Application 2110 New roof at 44 Windsor Ave by Lawrence and Christa Roberts

Applicant not present. RR recuses. AL liaison.

DH goes over the application description. CertainTeed Landmark series architectural shingles. Aluminum drip edge to match trim color. The ridge vent should run gable to gable end. Lead flashing at chimney, no mill finish flashing, plumbing vent boots should be black rubber if needed.

AL makes a motion to approve the replacing of the roof as described, AR second, DH



takes a roll call vote: ZT – Y, AL – Y, FA – Y, AR – Y, DH – Y, the motion passes 5-0 pending abutters notices.

C. Application 2111 HVAC equipment at 16 Woodbury Lane by Brian Saar

Applicant present. ZT recuses. FA liaison.

DH goes over the application. Brian included a document with details on the unit and plantings. The unit will be masked from view by Inkberry Holly.

DH will this be on a concrete or rubber pad? Brian – rubber.

DH asks for comments:

RR – regarding the plantings, in the previous meeting we had said the plant locations should be organic rather than a tight L formation. Make sure all connections between the house and unit are masked by the plantings.

AL – no comments.

FA – no comments.

AR – no comments.

ZT – no comments.

DH – buy enough plants to do a natural clumping versus all lined up.

AL makes a motion to approve the installation of HVAC equipment as described, AR second, DH takes a roll call vote: RR – Y, AL – Y, FA – Y, AR – Y, DH – Y, the motion passes 5-0 pending abutters notices.

D. Pre-Application discussion new house at 16 Mead Terrace

Canceled by pre-applicant.

E. Miscellaneous HDC Business: Volunteer Day; 53 River St site visit; HDC Memo Regarding Drive-up Windows; Contractor for West Acton Baptist Church

DH – I got an email from West Acton Baptist Church; they need to do work on the Tower and foundation. We can't endorse anybody, but I said I would send a list of contractors from previous applications. AR – Tom Peterman may be a good person to ask. Maybe the South Acton and Congregation church may have contractors they've used. The building department may have some contacts. DH – I can ask Frank to look up the permit for Theater III and see who the contractor was.

DH goes over the draft memo for the Drive-Up Window warrant article to be sent to the Select Board.

AL – the third point about the HDC “assumes” the same review process, should be “requires.”



AR – the second point should be specific to Acton, “there are no drive-up windows in Acton historic districts.”

Terra Fredericks of West Acton – I think the first point should be removed.

DH will update and send to the Select Board.

No motion was made.

F. Missing Historic District Signage

The discussion did not take place.

No motion was made.

4. Adjournment

At 9:17 p.m., AL makes a motion to adjourn the meeting, AR seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: RR – Y, AL – Y, FA – Y, AR – Y, ZT – Y, DH – Y, the motion passes 6-0.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Minutes for April 13th
- Minutes for April 27th
- Application 2109
- DS’s Administrative/Research tasks for the HDC document
- Draft Warrant Article for Drive-up Window Facilities