



Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

2022-02-22

7:00 PM

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

Present: David Honn (DH), Art Leavens (AL), Ron Regan (RR), David Shoemaker (DS), Barbara Rhines (BR) Cultural Resource Planner. Fran Arsenault (FA) BOS liaison, Zach Taillefer (ZT)

Absent:

Opening:

Chair David Honn opened the meeting at 7:02 pm and read the “remote meeting notice” due to COVID-19.

1. Regular Business

- A. Citizen's Concerns – Ellen Spero, 25 Windsor. Needs some help with windows. Received information from RR on windows. 1926 Craftman. Approx. 13 windows in need of attention. Rope suspensions, not functional. One over one (or two over two). Storms, but in poor shape. DH: requests some photos; HDC will consider and offer help. Can offer an architect visit to assess the historical value.
- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – DS makes a motion to approve the minutes from 8 Feb 2022; AL second, DH takes a roll call vote: RR – Y, DS – Y, DH – Y, ZT – Y AL – Y; the motion passes.
- C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet – Up to date.
- D. Chair Update:
 1. 29 Windsor: COA waiting.
 2. 74 Nagog Hill: COA waiting.
 3. Annual HDC Report – BR had sent along the request. DH will update the last report, and will ask for input where needed. Deadline is 28 Feb.
 4. BR: Homeowner’s letter out and received by HDC members. Also to be forwarded to Committees and Departments.

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

- A. 7:15 Public Hearing: Acton Town Common Improvements. BR reads the public meeting announcement. QinRui Pang, Dan McCormack. DM: Discussion of the Horse Trough in the Town Common. Would like to move it to the West. Careful plans have been made to reconstruct in the new location with a new foundation. Foundation granite blocks to be retained; cobbles may not be identical, but appearance will be reconstructed. Water service to be moved to the new location. Sign will also be relocated, maintain the compass



orientation. DH: would like to see the full plan for the changes to the intersection – Project wide, for all items 6” out of the ground. AL: No problem with the proposal as presented. RR: No issues. ZT: Nothing to add. DS: Any cleaning planned? DM: No. DS: Water access is rather obvious and not very attractive. Better if the water hatch can be behind, and maybe something more conventional and smaller in scale and less visible. DH: A net improvement. Public Comment: Kathy Fochtman: The Garden Committee takes care of the plantings. Will continue care of the plantings. The location looks good. Garden Club Maura Sharp president. Anita Rogers, Citizen: Dangerous as it is now. This is a net improvement. DH: Please ask Cory to come to the next meeting, give an overview, and expect to vote at that time. QP: Is another meeting really necessary? DH: We do need to understand the context. AL: Moves to continue the Public Hearing to the next meeting, March 8 2022. DH takes a roll call vote: DS – Y, RR – Y, DH – Y, ZT – Y; AL - Y; the motion passes.

- B. 7:40: HDC Demolition Decision Draft Guidelines (Continuance). AL: Triggered by the discussion at the previous meeting, it became clear that the full purpose of the HDC needs to be explicitly acknowledged as a motivation for any further detailing of the Demolition Guidelines. The evolution of the Districts is a key concept – it is not a museum. Concord’s HDC has a very hardline approach. Acton’s language is more nuanced. DH: MHC says their direction to deny demolition is for ‘significant’ structures. Perhaps demolition is *strongly* discouraged. Also ‘practical’ should be strengthened – it should not simply be ‘unprofitable’. The HDC should want a proof of impracticability, e.g., via an independent engineer’s assessment. Citizen AR: Practical indeed should be judged from the perspective of the HDC. AL: Page 4. Discussion of what measures of significance. DH: Add National Register as a measure of significance. NB e.g., Asa Parlin there are unseen but important means and methods of construction – joinery. Or eave brackets on Exchange Hall. AL: can an expert infer from the exterior a unique structural value and have that be in the HDC purview? DH: Good question! It would indeed need to be an unambiguous exterior feature. Recommends to add a sentence. Need to move away from an idea that our scope is to preserve a ‘colonial style’ – should work to correct that image of the HDC scope and intent. Deck Houses. We may find a sentence to communicate this. ‘as recent as 50 years old’. AL: Discussion of setting. Agreed that this is a good description. Why is it necessary? DS: need to ensure that it is the HDC that determines what is ‘not practical’. DH: State that the burden is on the applicant to address these issues and overcome the general guidance that demolition is not allowed. DH: the evaluation system for contractors for State Contracts, with a point system. Perhaps we can create a similar point system for this sort of decision.
- C. 8:15 615 Mass Avenue Existing House Renovation: Discussion with Architect Lisa Adamiak. Daphne Schneider, owner. Discussion of current state of the house and comparison with historical photos. DaphneS: wants to restore the house to its central role in Acton. Perhaps a home for elderly residents. Also, note that the ‘historical’ picture is from 1921, not 1860. The Belvedere has disappeared, but one sees the remains of the structure and an internal staircase. That feature is thought to be recreated. Also a significant addition to the left, sitting on an existing, historical foundation. The vinyl siding would be removed, with wood clapboard to be installed. The windows will be a large element of the wall, and it will be a challenge to balance preservation of old



windows, vs. energy efficiency and recreating historical windows. DH: Like to visit the property to assess the condition and the historical value. DaphneS: might bring some existing windows from the back to the front. DH: Feels the Italianate feel of the house in the addition in the current sketch – 2nd floor does not feel right. Roof needs some more rhythm. DaphneS – wants to disassemble the sunroom and move it. DH: The granite is great, and sets up great expectations. A challenge to match the podium. DS: Love the building. AL: The lack of the Barn at the west end of the addition renders the long roof problematic – the hallway to nowhere. DaphneS: may be able to construct a structure in place of the Barn. RR: in favor of the return of the Belvedere. For the roof – small changes be suffice. ZT: Excited to see this house come back to life. Echo the concerns about massing. Chimneys – might they be reconstructed? Lisa: no plans at present. Ornate tops gone, and no functional chimneys at present. Public Comment: Leo Fochtman: Neighbors, have more photos from 1920's. Terra Friedrichs: Reuniting parcels is a great idea. Jessica Donahue: Complicated. DH: happy to continue to find time in the HDC meetings to discuss the project.

- D. 8:45 Public Hearing: Public Hearing: Proposed Amendment to the HDC Rules and Regulations Regarding Abutter Notices (Continuance) – AL: Recapitulation of the Amendment (see previous notes for details). Terra Friedrichs: Recall that if any abutter requested a public hearing, it would be held. AL: Under both the statute and Town Bylaw P, the HDC may decide that a public hearing is not needed, but ~~that~~ the HDC's decision on the application would occur in an OML meeting, with members of the public free to attend and comment. No change to the procedure. Public and Regular meetings are described. AL: Moves that the Commission adopts the amendment to the rules. AL: will typeset, file with the town Clerk, then to the IT department to have the online version changed.

DH takes a roll call vote: DS – Y, RR – Y, DH – Y, ZT: Y AL - Y; the motion passes.

3. Consent Items

None

1. Adjournment

At 9:15 pm, DH makes a motion to adjourn the meeting, RR seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: DS – Y, RR – Y, DH – Y, ZT – Y, AL - Y; the motion passes.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Photos and Plans for 615 Mass Ave
- Amendment of bylaws for HDC Rules on Abutter Notices
- Draft HDC Demolition Decision Draft Guidelines