



Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

2023-07-25

7:00 PM

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

Present: David Honn (DH), Art Leavens (AL), Zach Taillefer (ZT), Anita Rogers (AR), David Shoemaker (DS), Barbara Rhines (BR) (Acton Cultural Resources Coordinator), Fran Arsenault (FA) (Select Board Liaison)

Absent:

Opening:

David Honn opened the meeting at 7:05 pm. DH read the “remote meeting notice” due to COVID-19.

1. Regular Business

A. Citizen's Concerns – Rod Kunz joins. Acton Congregational church co-chair of Trustees. The Church is considering installing solar panels; just starting the conversation. Aware of the need of HDC approval; has seen the HDC Solar Guidelines. Wishes to know if any specific information beyond the Guidelines is needed. Specifically: must it not be visible from the road, and wanted to know what conditions would apply. DH: handful of approvals; a few on River Street, which are good examples. There are cases where some panels are visible from the street of reference. In general, the installers can produce drawings. A series of photos from Concord Road (the governing way) of the roofscape walking along the road will be needed. RK: if one stands on Nagog Hill Road things can be seen. DH: We need to pick one road as the governing way. Usually the front elevation is the one used. That would mean no jurisdiction on what is seen from Nagog Hill. We like to see a first try by the solar installers and iterate a couple of times.

B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – July 18, 2023: DS moved their adoption, seconded by AL. AL, AR, ZT, DS, DH, and voted to approve. Minutes approved.

C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet / Chair Updates:

Outstanding COAs/CNAs/Denials –

1. 461 Main Street asking about a list of window manufacturers; DH responded. No application, 481 Main Street wishes to replace back door and windows. DH/ZT visited. Talked to the applicant, some windows visible. but no application. 37 Windsor Avenue Window Review Visits. 526 Massachusetts



Avenue window application: AL working on the disapproval; waiting on a potential discussion on hardship.

2. 508 Main St has an asphalt roof; interest in replacing. Also historic sign. No application so far.
3. 53 River Street, Concord Road District for 8.8.23 Meeting.

2. New/Special Business or other applicable agenda items

- A. 7:19 Application # 2321: 525 Mass Ave Signage. Amy Wiechmann, Applicant, joins. See notes from 18 July HDC meeting. AW: spoke with the sign guy, looked through the bylaws. Proposing 1" thick sign, painted wood, PVC, or high-density urethane. Would be mounted ~1/2 inch from wall. 16" tall, 84-some inches long. Centered under 3 lights, would like to choose lights from those they sell. See application for details. White background, black text. AR: Missing something around the border, a few inches in. Looking for a shadow line or something else that can give more texture and depth to the sign. Tighten up the lettering to the right. Try to be a bit more decorative. A bit thicker – 1.5" – could be better in terms of balance. Imperative that it be centered over the door. AL: Lighting – we need to see the fixtures for approval. ZT: ditto, need to see lights. Expect the left and right edges of the sign to be beyond the left and right lights. Is this contingent on the other sign moving? AW: lights should be shining on the sign. Would still work if the other sign does not move. DS: good to get the sign guy to do the mockup. DH: Indeed the sign will be wider than the current image. Recommends a bit more pizzazz. Somewhat incised lettering has worked well on high-density urethane. AR: want light that works like others on the nearby facades. Might be better to have more separation between the two signs. ZT moves we approve the sign at 525 Mass Ave, per the application; 1.5" thick. Pending approval of the specific light fixtures. Share with planning ASAP. Motion seconded. AL, AR, ZT, DS, DH, all voted to approve. ZT to write this up.
- B. 7:42 Application # 2325: 37 Windsor Avenue Windows/Fence. John Haberle, Applicant, and Daniel Otero join. JH: Fence was falling down; did some repair, new posts, adjusted layout, with existing parts. A generator will be placed on the inside of the fence. A new heat pump is on the other side of the house, but not visible from the street of reference. All pipes on the back of the house. A new electric delivery conduit is going to be made. DS: important to assure that no refrigerant lines can be seen from the street. DH: if in a corner and painted to be a match, electrical delivery lines disappear. JH: Windows: 1920 Sears Kit house. 5 windows downstairs visible (plus one not visible). 4 upstairs. The other windows, not to be replaced, are different – ~1980's picture windows etc. DO: PVC windows are proposed. Samples are at 37 Windsor. DH: we have never approved a PVC window. Strong preference to refurbish windows of value; a visit is needed. AR: need to match the existing muntin. Like half-screens. JH: note that casing is 1x; proposes to make the casing wider and on top of the PVC window to cover more of the new window, and the sill would be re-worked as well. The objective is to hide everything but the sash. DH: we will treat the fence as a CNA. 'Part A of the application'.
- C. 8:07 Application #2326: 9 School Street 6 Family New Construction. No applicant



present. AR: Discussed last week; discussed windows; agreed on the Windsor Hybrid as something that the HDC all found good; clad sash in pvc framing that looks a lot like wood. Butt joints; no miters. Arrives ready to install. Refer to the notes from 18 July. DH: The design drawings were from Chris Dallmus, which were approved. Applicant moved to a new firm to do the construction drawings. DH requested the construction drawings from the firm; mostly good but with some problems. No site plan was provided; it is needed to proceed. Need to issue a new certificate. The revised windows do not have the same width as the Dallmus design, which interferes with the mansard mentality. 7 roof brackets became 9 in the revised drawing. The deck design was simplified in a way which is unattractive. The front façade is adjusted in a way that is not attractive and ruins the consistency of the design. Would like to see a superposition of the current and Dallmus designs to check on all variances. AR: it is a new application, and may be best to start with this. John Perkins joins at the close of the time allocated; had a power outage. Discussing with Windsor; the Dallmus dimensions would be custom size. JP thinks this current drawing has already had discussion. DH: Central door should have 4 brackets, not two, as an example. We will take it up at the next meeting, 8 August. We will ensure the earlier design is available on Docushare.

- D. 8:36 Application #2322: 526 Mass Ave. Hardship Discussion. Marjorie Norman, Applicant, joins. AR: Marvin window that was proposed is fiberglass like the Integrity. The discussion at the 18 August meeting carried the opinion that the present windows could be repaired, and match with the other windows would be lost with the Marvin replacement, removing a significant feature of the façade. MN: maybe just the side windows could be changed? This would preserve the front façade. The trees separating from the playground have been removed, and the noise from the playground would be problematic. Concerns are both acoustic and thermal. DH: A lot of experience with old and new windows, and the acoustic and thermal properties of the windows. Renovation of the current windows can be very effective to address both of these issues. The substantial air space is very effective. MN: more practical to close the window if a simple sash for quiet in the summer. DH: an additional interior pane can be very effective. AL: Appreciate the Applicant's argument, but precedent, e.g., 99 Main, held to the preference for preservation. Windows on the ell visible from Mass Ave. would be all right to replace due to their distance from the viewpoint on road and the oblique view, but not those on the front or gable end. AR: Agrees. DS: Agrees. ZT: Concurs. In years past the Arborist has asked the HDC for recommendations, and we can urge the Arborist to prioritize trees to help shield the house from the playground. DH agrees. AR: with some new and some old windows, it will be a chance to make a good side-by-side comparison. AL moves to disapprove the application for the 5 windows on the front and the 3 windows on the gable end façade, but approve the two windows on the back ell, which are visible from Massachusetts Avenue, due to their distance from the Mass. Ave. viewpoint and thus difficult to distinguish between traditional and non-traditional materials. Motion is seconded. AL, AR, ZT, DS, DH, voted to approve. AL notes that a hardship application could be made but does not believe it would be approved. It has not been requested, but under Section 7.6.1 of Bylaw P, it must be considered after a disapproval of a requested alteration. Under Section 7, hardship requires 4 separate showings. The first is that the hardship is not unique to this building, which does not seem here to be the case. Many



buildings in Acton's three Historic Districts have similar reparable historic windows, and there have been other requests to replace such windows for reasons ranging from expense to noise abatement, which have been denied in favor of preservation. Even if this showing of uniqueness could be made, Section 7.6.1's three other requirements are also problematic. There has been no showing of substantial hardship, nor any showing that a Hardship Certificate would not result in substantial detriment to the public interest or be in substantial derogation of the Bylaw's purposes, the principal one of which is preservation of historic structures and buildings. AL moves to decline a Hardship Certificate; motion seconded. AL, AR, ZT, DS, DH, voted to decline the hardship.

- E. 8:45 Discussion: Concord Road Historic District; MHA Memo. No one present, and the Committee chooses to delay discussion for later.
- F. 9:00 Application # 2135 Gardner Field Violations Discussion. David Martin (Select Board Member), Corey York (Director of Public Works) join. DH: wishes to summarize the HDC perspective and the violation we understand to exist. AL reads the letter from DH dated July 24, 2023 to Melissa Rier into the record. DH: need to have a vote that confirms the letter. AL moves that the HDC adopt the letter, including the facts it sets forth, finding that those facts constitute a violation of Chapter 40p and the Bylaw 6.1. The motion was seconded, and AL, AR, ZT, DS, DH, voted to adopt the letter and confirm the violation. CY shares screen. The design had problems with water management, conservation land, and a number of trades including a grade difference. The concrete retaining block wall was a consequence. A landscape architect was engaged to make the best of the resulting design. A refined design for the entryway is presented to manage concerns of fragility of the original concept. Site furniture is also an open question. Wonders if the bike racks can be moved to the parking area to make the front of the park more attractive. A water fountain has been given as a gift. It is proposed to install it close to the street, for water health arguments. The fence to the neighboring house and plantings are open for some discussion. There is a will to do an overall study in West Acton which will be undertaken with the HDC. Seating on the concrete retaining block wall might be pursued. The playground was supposed to be flat (level). This led to a 5 foot drop. DH: Stamski seemed to only show a couple of feet. CY: There was a disconnect between the conceptual design and the engineering drawing that missed the fact that the site had a slope. DH: Seems like a sloping bank, perhaps planted, would have been preferred. CY: the Friends wanted a terraced wall for seating, and pushed for this retaining wall. The Friends like this solution. Would be tough to fit the sloped area in the distance available. AL: was there anyone taking into account the complete disconnect with the HDC's approved design? DH: The concrete blocks seem inappropriate for any design for any town or city, and is inimical to the concept of the playground and the historic district. DS: agrees, and believes that it must be changed to be consistent with the HDC purview. Could an old-fashioned rock wall as we see in the fields take the place of the concrete blocks. DM: This area was intended to be a playground, not an amphitheater. The space has presented problems with respect to drainage issues. In the early conceptual drawings a wall is shown, but in the application to the HDC it did not appear. DH: The Friends made an early presentation to the HDC. At that presentation, they said they don't want a wall; and Melissa Rier also said no wall was planned. DM: The project became vastly more complicated from its first steps to the current realization.



It would be prohibitive in cost to remove it. The town will not sue itself; something needs to be worked out. DH: views from the public way expose the concrete block. This is frankly unacceptable as a deviation from the accepted design. AR: screening is not allowed, in the bylaw, to remove an inappropriate design or realization. DH: Design Review Board is a good tool to try to craft a solution that might be amenable to all concerned; DM agrees. HDC does not want any further work in the area immediately around the concrete retaining wall. Applications for benches etc. will be welcome. FA: Possible to paint? DH: might face parts with wood, e.g., Cedar. We will keep this on the agenda.

3. Consent Items

None

1. Adjournment

At 10:14 DH moves to adjourn the meeting, AR seconds. AR takes a roll call vote: AL, AR, DS, ZT DH all approve.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting.

- All relevant Applications and Documents, in Docushare