

Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

2023-12-12

7:00 PM

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

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

Absent:

Opening:

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

1. Regular Business

A. Citizen's Concerns – None.

B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – 28 November 2023: DS moved their adoption, seconded by DH. AL, AR, DH, ZT, DS approve. Minutes approved.

C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet / Chair Updates:

Outstanding and Completed COAs/CNAs/Denials

- 53 River St. Park Elements Amendment to #2327 (Approved. AR will write COA; Deadline before end of the year.) Sending in tonight
- 66 School Street gutters #2343 (Approved. ZT will write COA; Deadline is 12/25/23.) By end of week -
- 77 Nagog Hill Rd. Siding #2344 (Approved. AR will write; Deadline is 12/30/2023.)
- Amend 472 Main Street Fountain COA. Adding information from the site visit. DH and AL to send notes to AR for an Amendment.
- HDC Letter to HC (DH) Re: Concord Road HD

Future Agenda Items:

- Public Hearing for 450 Main Street #2341 continued to 1/9/2024.
- Public Hearing for 30 Windsor Avenue #2346 will be 1/9/2024.

2. New/Special Business or other applicable agenda items

A. 7:15 Application # 2135 Gardner Field: Status Update. Corey York(CY) joins. Ron

Headrick(RH) and Jamie Falise(JF) both of GPI join as well. CY summarizes the interactions and introduces the GPI consultants. GPI are Landscape Architects. Presentation is shared by RH with a series of options. AL: Option C has a single entrance? RH: yes. AL: Vegetation to follow? RH: yes. Refer to initial plan; will need modification to accommodate the remediation. AR: Condo driveway is substantially on the playground property. AL and AR like the removal of the West concrete block wall. A barrier to prevent a child running to the street is good, and the 'stone wall' variant serves this well along with providing a safety barrier. Benches and grasses are also good ideas. DS: Move the rock wall closer? RH: Safety concern. DH: Likes rock wall; likes the stair to break up the East-West remaining wall. ZT: Agrees. Second entrance is good. Rock wall helps to hide the block wall. Bringing up the grade could also work. DH: Agrees. The placement of the main stairs is good. The original discussion suggested a stone wall – 18-20” – would be a good place to sit, with a finished top surface. The Condo residents are concerned about noise and the lack of significant foliage. A sizable fence, solid board, 8' tall, with plantings would address both issues. Second entrance is good; a second stair does not seem necessary. Does make it truly secondary in appearance. Some concern about the railing for safety reasons – maybe pull it a bit away from the block wall. Maybe it is more of a rigid robust but light fence serving as a trellis with planting. Seems that either stone wall or grasses work; and the stone wall is preferable. All HDC members appreciate the progress in resolving this situation. AR: any way to soften the stone wall? RH: some ideas have been tossed around. Stains are possible. ZT: Safer than moss. DS: Wood sheathing? RH: Cost, and maintenance in particular, are prohibitive. DH: Encourage progress and another meeting on 23 January 2024.

- B. 8:00 Application #2347 111-113 School St. replacement of deck and stairs. DH recuses himself from the Committee. Ron Mullen (RM), Applicant, joins. Images shared. Existing deck on a 6-unit building. Deck was PT, and the Town's Health Department and Building Department wanted repair. The wood was in very poor condition, and all needed to be replaced. The deck remains the same surface as before, and railing was brought to code. The deck is to the side of the house and about 40' back from School St. DS: Replacement in kind for the deck; but the new railing is much more obvious than the previous wrought iron, which is unfortunate. AL: This is an application for deck repairs after the fact of those repairs. It appears that the Building Department issued a permit although there was no CoA. Agree with DS. Unfortunate that the Building Department issued the permit without a CoA. Maybe they thought this was a repair in kind that didn't need a CoA, but it should have come here first. That's the HDC's call. ZT: Agree. Could the railing be lightened to make the railing more elegant? 2x6 on edge? RM: yes, although the photo makes it look heavier than it is in fact. AR: could be made less heavy and still meet code. Really unfortunate; although the deck itself is a replacement in kind and OK, the railing would not have been approved. The railings are incompatible with the house in every sense. Leaving this in place lowers the bar for future repairs and modification. RM: Staining will help. AR: A replacement of the railing in kind would have been acceptable. David Honn joins as abutter/citizen. 1900 house. If it is left in place, Pressure treated lumber is not compatible with the HDC. AL: It lowers the bar throughout the districts. Notes that it requires 4 votes to approve or not to approve. AL: moves that we approve the application, DS seconds. DS, ZT, AL, AR all vote to not

approve the application. AR: it does not need to be completely changed; AR and DS find the deck surface an acceptable remediation in kind. AR thinks a black metal solution could be of moderate cost. FA: will check with the Building Department to understand how the permit was approved. AL: A building permit should not have been issued if the plans showed this deviation from a replacement in kind. Suggest to call this an interim vote, with a proposal to return with an alternative solution. Disapproved, but did not deny. RM will talk with the landowner. But it is painful because there will be no payment for the work until the Building Permit is completed. AR: happy to have you join another meeting. BR: the 60 day time limit is 29 January from the time of the application. AR: will do some research on solutions that are affordable and likely to be acceptable to the HDC. RM expresses concern for the cost and the delay in completion. AL moves we continue the discussion to the next HDC meeting on 9 January 2024. DS, ZT, AL, AR approve. ZT notes we need to approve the materials; hope to have a decision at the next meeting. Discussion of ensuring we understand how the situation arose and what process the Building Department uses to determine ‘replacement in kind’. DH returns to the meeting.

- C. 8:15 82 River Street ADU preliminary discussion. BR: The applicant did not join.
- D. 8:45 South Acton Vision & Action Plan (SAV) discussion. Kristen had hoped that HDC might have participated in the open house, but no one was available. FA went to the open house and talked with Kristen. The MBTA zone requirements are impacting planning. The HDC is invited to think about general guidelines for development in South Acton that would be approved by the HDC. DH: is there anything peculiar about the South Acton District to call out? The train station, and previous role as the industrial center, are unique; but the districts all have about the same historical density. DS: more geographical height changes may allow more tall buildings and more variety of design. FA: empty terrain may allow some new ideas and constraints could help. DH: HDC letter to Perkins Project on School St may be helpful. DS/DH: A reminder that we could approve a more modern design that has the right scale, maintains or creates a street scape that works. AL: Notes that this is completely compatible with our existing regulations. Writing more words induces a risk of contradiction, confusion, or redundancy that can lead to later contradictions with edits. DH: Repackaging or a narrative may help; Frequently Asked or not asked Questions. FA: it could boost the efficiency the review process to have a some advice. DS: Could we hold a seminar or a workshop to inform many at once? DH: Frustrating that we have approved a number of major housing projects in this area and in West Acton which then do not move forward by decision of the owner. ZT: Don’t want to be too prescriptive. Perhaps distinguish between existing buildings and new construction. AL: This distinction is really already in place in Bylaw P and the decisional Criteria. AR: some graphics – photos or drawings – could help illustrate things which we could approve whether traditional or not, like the modernist houses in Concord/West Concord. AL: Again, there is a risk of giving an explicit recipe.
- E. 9:00 Review of Draft 2024 Property Owners Letter and Insert. AL: should use consistent naming; once HDC is introduced can use that consistently. A number of small changes were made in discussion. The flyer images also had discussion.

3. Consent Items

None

1. Adjournment

At 21:29 DH moves to adjourn the meeting, AR seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: AL, AR, DS, DH, ZT all approve.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting.

- All relevant Applications and Documents, in Docushare