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Historic District Commission

Town Hall, Rm. 126, Meeting Minutes 5/8/13

TOWN CLERK, ACTON

Meeting called to order at 7:30pm. Anita Rogers, Pam Lynn, David Honn, Kathy Acerbo-Bachmann, and Michaela Moran in attendance. Mike Gowing, Board of selectman liaison also in attendance.

62 Windsor's proposed development discussion of the project. Neighbors who are in attendance were informed that this evening's meeting is for the HDC to discuss the project at the first public meeting since the application filed. Neighbors will be able to ask questions and make comments at the next HDC meeting.

Windsor Ave. is one of the few 'architecturally and contextually' intact streets in the districts and the town.

DH, liaison for the project, reported that house combined 64 and 66 with 62, what does this mean. In a meeting with Steve Andersen, town counsel, KAB and DH and Selectman Mike Gowing, are to investigate the zoning issues of combining the parcels. Does the HDC bound move with the change of metes and bounds or does borrowing frontage from outside the district then make all the land in the district? Lots 64 and 66 are under 15K sf. If land is not then included in the historic district, the developer can do the 'finger' extensions to create more legal lots, according to town counsel. Suspect there is no case law regarding the swapping of land in and outside the district.

The pattern of development on Windsor Avenue is clear. Street with sidewalk and homes gable end facing the street, with one outbuilding. Neighbors have provided photos with all dimensions included. Cory York, town engineer, will provide satellite plans of the street.

DH – concerns, procedurally, lots of background info, lots of primary source, suggests that all information is entered into the record. Any email through the shell is automatically entered into the public record.

Beyond HDC jurisdiction, town wide view-preserve Acton's character is major goal of Acton 2020 master plan. We have a responsibility to identify the characteristics of this part of the W Acton historic district. One can only monkey with these parameters so much before the identity becomes meaningless. Feels nothing belongs in the backyard of these homes, pattern of suburban development.

KAB ideally would be frozen, HDC cannot trump zoning. Conundrum we face –we can say what it can look like but we can't say that it can't be built.

DH disagrees with that interpretation. Question to be resolved find out legally if we find adverse affects is that enough to prevent development or do we have to balance. Letter received from Renee Robbins is incredibly thorough with regard to legalities and other points .

AR would be enthusiastic to learn that we could restrict development on the lots to the extent that DH thinks we can. Current plan scale, siting, is chaotic in contracts to rest of Windsor Ave. It is pointless to

assess the details until the broader issues have been resolved. What was presented was taken to minutia, but important to resist that discussion of tiny details until the determination of the broader questions.

PL read all letters and consulted her memory of the meeting on 4/10, no sense of overall project, no streetscape. She was personally troubled by the design, which did not seem to reflect the context of or compatibility with the surrounding structures. CPC funding has tried to resuscitate the area. HDC should try to protect a neighborhood as it was built. The proposed properties threaten to debase the existing property and the district. As the developer had stated "I'm interested in suggestions." It struck her that his plan is not cast in stone.

1. Question of status of adjacent parcels in purview or not.
2. Borrowing of lots back and forth, 'legal'
3. Are we bound by existing zoning or not? What stands today.

Something will be built. Can we shape that 'something' sufficiently to protect the district?

If clearly not appropriate may be able to shape the project buildings.

Parcels 64 and 66. What if the HDC added those parcels to the district? Can only be done at a town meeting. Next town meeting is June 3. This cannot be done for this town meeting because the Mass state law requires 60 day waiting period. Must write report and send to MHC, who then has 30 days to comment, then a 60 day review period.

Discussion of possibly adding the parcels to the districts. DH thinks we should pursue putting the parcels in the district. HDC without staff means many hours of work to write the report, all without staff. DH will write the report. KAB moves to have DHG work on the MHC report. AR seconded, motion carried unanimously.

Citizen's petition to establish a temporary moratorium on new construction in the village residential district. AR worth considering but unclear on any detrimental effects. DH feels would be prudent to take a step back and take some time to review the effect of the zoning bylaw. KAB every street so different, current zoning all wrong for Windsor Ave. Her primary concern is to take the logical step to look at district street by street. HDC must take the time to answer all the open questions.

KAB asked MG to comment on the proposed moratorium. MG felt he needed to study the question with regard to the whole village residential district.

KAB will add moratorium to the next agenda for further discussion.

DH pointed out that a legal argument must be fact based to be taken seriously. If something has to be built behind these houses, what would be most appropriate? Danger of putting something in the back yard begins to make a fake history of the neighborhood. KAB for the purpose of the discussion, moratorium, assume under current zoning, something could be built. Looking at Windsor Ave hard to imagine a back row of homes because destroys the pattern or feel of the neighborhood. Pattern of

barns or carriage houses might be able to be considered. AR -large barn building set at the back of the property might be less detrimental to the district. MM noted that it might be best to place building on a new street so that it might be considered not part of the district.

PL New construction should be compatible with the existing structures and expressed as individual parcels.

KAB-Solutions for one parcel may not work for another parcel. May be able to hide most of massing of building behind large trees and the existing home.

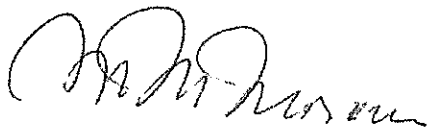
A proposed land clearing bylaw which might limit clearing to 2/3 of any parcel might be useful for the town.

KAB thanked commission for extra houses on this issue, DH and MG called out for special thanks for extra hours. DH has been acknowledged as the author of the report for the MHC to add parcels 64 and 66.

Agenda will come out tomorrow for the next meeting most appointments limited to 15 min for applications , but a full hour for resident comments on the Windsor Ave project. Motion to adjourn, seconded by PL.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary Michaela Moran', written in a cursive style.

Mary Michaela Moran

Michaela Moran, Secretary