



Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

04/27/2021

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 7:00 pm and read the “remote meeting notice” due to COVID-19.

2. Regular Business

- A. Citizen's Concerns – DH needs to contact applicant for 2103 – 82 River St about rejecting the application as it was out of date with what the applicant was proposing at the meeting. AR will supply DH with site plan sketches.

We missed the public-newspaper-notice deadline for May 11th public hearing for 9 School St. We should still have the applicant come in for May 11th and have the public hearing the meeting after.

Brian Saar is buying 16 Woodbury Lane and wants to know the HDC review process so that he can install central AC. DH gives an overview of the process. Brian shares some photos of where the unit will be placed. There is a discussion of plantings vs. fencing to hide the unit. Important that any piping, ducts, and electrical connections are hidden.

- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – questions about the final version, no vote taken.
- C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet – no new applications, spreadsheet up to date.

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

- A. Pre-Application New Multi-Family Building at 9 School St by John Perkins

There was a scheduling issue for this application, the applicant should be ready for the next meeting.

- B. Discussion: Missing Historic District Signage

DH got an email recently that there are missing HDC signs. DH discussed the issue with Corey York, in particular a missing sign on River St. FA noted that in a discussion with Corey York, the signs in West Acton along Mass Ave couldn't be placed because the Mass Department of Transportation wouldn't approve putting signs on sections of road



managed by them. DH – We have had this issue in the past for Main St. coming from Maynard. We may need to work with owners of property on streets managed by the state to put the sign on their property. There was a discussion on where signs may be missing: either end of the West District on Mass Ave and Central Street, and on Newtown Road approaching the Center District. We think there is a sign on Windsor, and, in the South District, on Main St. coming from Maynard and on River St. DH – We can invite Corey to an upcoming meeting to discuss how many signs and where to put them.

No motion was made.

C. Discussion: Conflict of Interest / Financial Interests

This was an impromptu discussion raised by AR regarding 615 Mass Ave as her business partner may be the architect on the project. DH said there is a form that you can file with the town declaring financial interests. AR will recuse and leave for tonight's meeting regarding 615 Mass Ave.

No motion was made.

D. Application 2106 Exchange Hall Condo Conversion at 2 School St by Glenn Berger

DH gives an intro: At the last meeting there was differing information about the term of the license for the town's use of Exchange Hall as part of the Preservation Restriction Agreement. DH and AL prepared a memo indicating the 15-year license commences when the renovation work completed on May 29th, 2013 as certified by the HDC. Glenn discussed the memo with the Planning department and has decided to withdraw the application and will renegotiate the preservation agreement with the town.

Glenn wants to discuss how to move forward. Four of the businesses leasing space in Exchange Hall went out of business. Glenn is looking for a way to keep the building viable as a business. Glenn is not looking to get out of the Preservation Restriction, but only wants to deal with the function hall space. He said the town has not used the function hall space since the agreement has been in place. The town has used smaller spaces for two meetings in the building so far.

Glenn makes two points: for the original preservation agreement, the HDC was involved and needed to sign off on it. What does the HDC need to move forward with changing the agreement? Second, should we continue with the review of the changes Glenn wants to make in converting the building space into condos? If the building can't be changed as needed to make condos viable it doesn't make sense spending time to update the agreement.

DH formally acknowledges that the application is being withdrawn and Glenn agrees. DH says the HDC is peripheral to the preservation agreement; the agreement is between Glenn and the Select Board. AL adds that changes to the preservation agreement, and specifically changes regarding the use of the function space, are outside of HDC jurisdiction. The town could have, but did not, delegate to the HDC the management or authority to speak on behalf of the town in the preservation agreement. Chapter 184 sections 31-33 defines the process for changing the agreement, including the public hearing and approval by the MHC.



Glenn makes the point that if he doesn't have HDC approval on changes that allow him to convert the proposed space into condos, the Select Board will want that before considering making changes to the agreement.

DH clarifies that the public hearing relating to changing the preservation agreement is a Select Board hearing and not an HDC hearing.

DH suggests Glenn contact the Select Board and MHC on guidance for proceeding with changing the preservation agreement. Glenn is having trouble connecting with the MHC. AL will send contact information he has to Glenn. DH will reach out to Dean Charter, our Select Board liaison and the town manager, for access to town counsel for guidance on how to proceed.

AL wants to clarify his position on the proposed changes on the original application: AL is not convinced the slate roof should be replaced nor convinced that skylights should be placed on the roof. AL does not want to leave the impression that we will approve the exterior changes if the preservation agreement is amended and the HDC application is brought back for HDC consideration.

DH - I agree with what AL said. Exchange hall is an important building in Acton. The first three floors are about 1900 sq. ft. The top level and attic space is about 2400 sq. ft. In the housing production plan done for the town last year, the overwhelming need was for smaller units. So, you could put two units per floor on the 1st and 2nd floor. DH has a problem converting the third floor to condos; I'd rather see a dance studio or something like that.

AR - What you've outlined for the procedure makes sense. I don't feel ready to agree with what's in the proposal now.

RR - I have a thought about the skylight issue; what if dog-house style dormers were used to add windows? That would be more appropriate style-wise.

FA - With the application withdrawn, what is the purpose of going through what was proposed? DH - I think it is fair to give Glenn a preliminary read on our thoughts on the scheme before he goes through the process of amending the preservation restriction. FA - I feel strongly that the slate roof should be maintained and repaired, and I don't like the idea of replacing the 2nd floor door on the south elevation with a window.

ZT - I generally agree with AL and FA; I think there is another way of making the 2nd floor porch safe without removing the door. I feel strongly about not having skylights. I would be more amenable to the dormer idea that RR proposed. Do we have clarification if the CPC funds were used to repair the roof? Glenn - Repairing windows, painting, exterior molding and decking repairs, repair the slate roof, and rebuilding the chimney.

DH asks the public for feedback:

Terra Friedrichs of Wright Terrace - I agree with the HDC members except I am against changing the restriction/lease if the ballroom is changed.

Alyssa Nichols of School St - brought to the Commission's attention that the latest applications and minutes are not available on the town website in DocuShare. I reviewed



the CPC award letter, in particular the section that refers to the town's use of the function space, and I am curious why the town only used it twice in the last eight years with the pressing need for space in town for meetings and boards. Glenn – the town has only asked me twice. AL – In the preservation agreement it states the town shall have access to the function space on the first Tuesday of every month from 6 PM until Midnight as well as the option to ask to use it two other evenings per year. DH added that public corridors, lobbies, restrooms and the parking lot are included in the agreement.

Discussion on DocuShare; Terra offered to help getting the documents uploaded.

No motion was made.

E. Pre-Application Preliminary Renovation Discussion for 615 Mass Ave by Daphne Schneider

AR recuses and departs the meeting.

DH introduces the board and adds his appreciation that Daphne bought the property after being empty for 10 years. Daphne only purchased the house; the lot behind that was split off is being sold to someone else. Jessica Donahue, the real estate agent for the property, joins the call. Jessica will be helping Daphne manage the renovation after the purchase.

Daphne's plan is to restore the property based on photos of the property from 1920s. The building is in poor condition and needs a lot of work.

DH gives an overview of the HDC's role and jurisdiction and clarifies that Mass Ave is governing way and any part of the house visible from Mass Ave is in the HDC jurisdiction, but not necessarily things visible from Wright Terrace if you go up that street off Mass Ave.

DH – Have you picked an architect yet? Daphne – I've been talking with Lisa Adamiak and am thinking of going with her. Lisa is partner with AR.

DH – We like people to come in as early in the process as possible before you get too far along in design. Before you have an application come in with ideas.

DH – 8 years ago there was an application to demolish the garage but was never exercised. A condition on the demolition was to maintain the foundation for potential reuse. It has a nice stone foundation.

DH – Do you have the MACRIS file for the property. Daphne – I have a detailed write up on the property and a photo. DH – I think I have some research done by previous interested parties in the properties that I can share with you.

DH recognizes Terra Friedrichs – Terra forwarded the links to the HDC DocuShare folder for 615 Mass Ave. Terra offered to assist Daphne. Terra is concerned about the subdivision plot plan with the boundary for the side lot going through the foundation of the garage. Jessica said there are easements regarding the garage, which belongs to Daphne as part of 615 Mass Ave. There was a discussion on the lot line and removing of the garage and setbacks. Terra suggested Daphne hire an engineer. The discussion was halted as this is not in the HDC's purview.



Daphne – my priority is to clean out and secure the house from future damage until I can get working on the restoration.

RR – before we close, Jessica had sent me photos of the front porch that we should look at. Daphne asked about closing in holes to keep the elements and animals out. Jessica said the contractor doesn't think the porch is structurally sound and it may need to come down. DH said to file the application as soon as possible that you need to take the porch down now and will replicate it in the future.

No motion was made.

4. Adjournment

At 9:07 p.m., AL makes a motion to adjourn the meeting, FA seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: ZT – Y, RR – Y, FA – Y, AL – Y, DH – Y, the motion passes 5-0.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Application 2106,
- Photos of front porch at 615 Mass Ave.