



Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

05/11/2021

7:00 PM

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

Present: David Honn (DH), David Shoemaker (DS), Fran Arsenault (FA), Ron Regan (RR), Art Leavens (AL), Zach Taillefer (ZT).

Absent: Anita Rogers (AR), 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 notes that Volunteer appreciation day is June 3rd at Nara Park. DH – There was an issue with the sign size specified on the COA for 2102, ZT to update. DH - put a revised label on the top with the updated size and send to the clerk, applicant, and DS. There was a discussion on using revision vs. amendment; revision is the correct term in this case.

DH – I rejected the applications for demolition for the porch and barn at 615 Mass Ave for lack of information. DH asked for an architectural drawing of the porch for how it will be rebuilt in the future. The barn is more complicated; I met with Kristen Guichard, the assistant town planner, to discuss what the procedure should be because there are two owners; DH will ask town counsel for direction on processing the application. AL – It’s tricky because as I understand it, they are not co-owners; each owner owns a particular half, and the other owner claims no ownership in that half.

FA – The previous demolition for the barn was approved with the constraint that the lower level (stone foundation) was to be retained; what is the implication going forward? DH – In the original application the building was dilapidated and unsafe, but the foundation could be reused. The intent is that a future owner could restore the barn on the foundation or use it for a new structure the same way the foundation was reused at 5 Chadwick St. Now that the property line goes through the barn it’s more complicated, as AL has pointed out, when rebuilding a structure, you need to honor the setbacks. The zoning bylaw does allow building vertically on an existing non-conforming structure, so if the lower level is considered an existing structure, building on top of it may be allowed.

DH – The owner of the empty lot behind 615 Mass Ave is under agreement with a developer, who was just informed that it is in the historic district. He asked about the procedure, and I will follow up.



DH – Saturday June 5th 11 AM – 53 River St site visit, we'll schedule this as an official meeting if four or more of us attend.

- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – AL makes a motion to approve the minutes from April 13th, FA second, DH takes a roll call vote: AL – Y, RR – Y, FA – Y, ZT – Y, DH – Y, the motion passes 5-0. DH has some comments – Check spelling for John Perkins, and 4th page Purview. AL makes a motion to approve the minutes from April 27th with the amendments suggested by DH; ZT seconds, DH takes a roll call vote: AL – Y, RR – Y, FA – Y, ZT – Y, DH – Y, the motion passes 5-0.

- C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet – spreadsheet up to date.

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

- A. Application 2109 New Multi-Family Building at 9 School St by John Perkins

Applicant present. DH prefaces the meeting by saying that this meeting is not the public hearing because the ad wasn't shown in the Beacon newspaper in time. The public hearing will be on May 25th. DH noted that he met with the applicant many times, arriving at this one building solution. The idea is to make it scale-wise and massing-wise suitable for this location, across from Exchange Hall and near the Main St. overpass and it's more urban-scaled than the rest of School St. Patrick Guthrie of Design Associates gives an overview: new construction 6-unit residential building inspired by nearby Second Empire buildings in Acton such as the American House Hotel on Railroad St. The building is 2 ½ stories. The School Street façade will be articulated into three blocks by recessing the center block 18-inches. Each unit will have a hooded entry supported by decorative brackets. The four end units will have bay windows; the central units will not have bay windows. There will be a deck across the whole building in the rear with parking under the units in the basement.

The drawings are reviewed:

Site Plans: DH noted that when you look at how the building relates to School St on the site plan, the street is curved and wider at the intersection with Main St. We should probably have a meeting with the town engineer to determine how the building should sit on the site in relation to the street. Patrick noted there isn't a lot of room on the site to shift the building around due to setback constraints and requirements for access to the parking in the rear.

There was a discussion about on street parking in front of the building and the need for urban planning outside the scope of this project.

The roof will be Mansard style, with a low-pitched section in the rear for mechanical equipment and vertical wall rising to the centerline of the building.

Quickly go over the floor plans and roof plan with pitches noted.

School St (north) elevation: Mansard roof form with Italianate details. Hooded entries supported by brackets. The two end units on each site have projecting bay windows on the



first level. The center block has a single hooded entry for both units. The window fenestration on the first and second floor match horizontally. Between the second floor and roof is a frieze band with doubled brackets. There is a flare at the base of the Mansard roof with a series of shallow dormers in the roof.

East Elevation: Concrete foundation with cement parging.

Materials: The siding is painted smooth side Hardi-plank. Window and door casings are wood. The windows are Harvey Majesty aluminum clad windows. The front doors are Simpson wood with lights over panels. The roof will have three-tab asphalt shingle on the steep and skirt portion of the Mansard and the low-slope part of the roof will be EPDM. The roof trim and soffit will be wood, the brackets will be Fypon. Half-round gutter with round downspouts, either galvanized or aluminum painted. The rear decks will be PT Wood with an opaque stain.

On the windows section view in the jamb detail the wood trim is rabbeted out to go over the frame of the window to hide the aluminum clad frame.

DH asks for comments:

AL – Is the low pitch top of the roof, which will be covered in EPDM, going to be visible from School St? Patrick – With the low pitch and trim detail it will be minimally visible. Did you consider fiberglass gutters? John – It would be cost prohibitive; we are using the ½ round metal that was suggested. AL -- I have concerns about the aluminum clad windows.

RR – I see you combined the entries for the center porch that Anita suggested. Do the doors have windows? Patrick/John – the top panels are windows. RR -- In the last meeting we asked for light fixtures over, but it looks like you still have recessed lights; is that something you are going to consider later? Patrick – we are planning to go with the recessed lights because we don't think there is enough room above the door to put a light. There isn't enough space for a sconce. RR -- I noticed you added parging on the wall and staining the back decks, which were concerns from the previous meetings. I don't have any other comments.

FA – One concern is the lighting on the front entries; having decorative lighting has a more authentic look than recessed lighting. The other is the exposed basement walls; have you considered using half-brick or half-stone to have it not be so much cement? John – I did not consider it; in one of the earlier meetings the parging was suggested to cover the lines in the foundation from the forms. FA -- I think the building looks great.

ZT – Most of my comments/questions have been addressed. I see you added a railing to screen the mechanical equipment on the roof in the back. Overall I think it looks good and you accommodated our concerns well.

DH – My concern is mostly with the material choices. We generally try to apply the same standards to everybody. Looking back at the application for 25-27 School St which we approved a couple of months ago, it included cedar siding, wood trim, wood windows, and half-brick on the foundation. I cautioned Chris earlier that I think there are too many synthetic materials on the building. I'm reluctant to approve Hardi-board when we've



imposed cedar siding on other projects. John – I’ve used Hardi-board with the smooth side out on the last few projects and it’s hard to discern from wood siding. Does the siding have to be cedar? DH – No, my house has quartersawn pine and it lasts well. AL – Is there an address where we could look at the Hardi-board siding? DH has a place in Acton.

DH - I’m somewhat convinced by the trim detail that the windows may be okay. Are the windows all-aluminum or clad? John – They are wood with exterior cladding. DH - Have you ever done this detail before to rabbet the casing to cover the window frame? Patrick – Yes, we have done this detail, with different windows. DH – I’m a little concerned in the detail; the rabbet is deep and there doesn’t look like a lot of material left, I’d like to see ½ an inch. Patrick – we could pack out the trim, but then the sill would need to be extended out. DH - Is there any place local we can see this window? Patrick – in an earlier meeting we offered to do a physical mockup of the window for approval. DH – on the entry ways the roofs are metal? Yes. DH – I’m still concerned with the three-tab on the Mansard roof; I’d like to see cedar; originally, they would have been slate. Patrick – Chris was basing that off the Mansard roofed building in the West Acton Villageworks. DH - For the lighting you only need about four inches to put a surface mount fixture, a simple square with black metal frame, which gives you a glow and shadow pattern. For the foundation using half-brick would look better than the parging. Patrick – is the concern about the expanse of concrete? Would you consider stepping the siding down over the foundation? DH – maybe. The building is a wood structure on a foundation and bringing the siding down muddies the water. If you look at 25-27 that has a brick foundation, which is more authentic. For the back deck are the posts clad or just raw PT? Patrick – the posts will be trimmed out. DH - I’m still concerned about the PT back deck – it’s hard to make it look right stained or painted. We’ve approved a cellular PVC rail system with hidden fasteners by Intex Millworks. When painted it looks more authentic. Not in our purview, but the vertical wall on the back of the roof seems tall, maybe you could return the roof down the back a bit and then have the vertical wall. It would lower down that middle portion and make the two hip parts on the ends look better. Maybe to the cornice part of the roof hips. John – maybe the railing becomes a parapet. DH - Are you thinking of having any fencing around the property? John – No.

DS – I want to echo the concerns for the foundation. The foundation is a key element in judging how comfortable the building is meeting with the ground and having a half-brick or stone veneer would look good.

No motion was made.

B. Proposed Town Hall Changes, Asa Parlin House Renovation and HDC Staff Assistance

The town manager John Mangiaratti is here to discuss the topics. Before getting on topic DH asked John if the suspension of processing deadlines during Covid was no longer in effect. John thought the town was already doing it, but will get back to DH with the official answer.

John – At town meeting we are proposing improvements to the town center streetscape to make it safer for pedestrians and vehicles and proposing to reuse the Asa Parlin house as a community amenity, inside and outside, with ADA compliance. Tonight I want to discuss



the area between Main St and the town hall parking lot along Woodbury lane. During Covid we had a blocked off an area of the parking lot for citizens to conduct town hall business. We were thinking of adding a walk-up window on the finance side to conduct business, but now we are looking to do something permanent in the area next to the building for meetings outside with tables. The town hall doesn't have a lobby and I was initially thinking of using the front entryway, but as an egress it can't have any furniture in it.

There will be no changes to the exterior of the town hall, just a patio and wall structure, which I think will be needed due to the grade of the land. There is a circular stone buried in the ground that was donated to the town by an insurance company. It is very large and probably too big to move. Anything that we are planning to do will incorporate it. We have some surplus granite blocks that look similar to what is used at the library that we can use for the wall.

What things will the HDC be concerned with relating to this area?

DS – Have you considered using the space behind the Red house next to town hall? It has a large back yard and may be less touchy in terms of HDC consideration since it's not as visible or as prominent as town hall. John noted that he doesn't want people to have to cross the street from town hall to use the space.

DH asks for comments:

AL – I like the idea; as John described the project it seems the wall is the only thing in our purview.

RR – I don't have any comments at this point.

FA - I like the idea; the space isn't used and the trees near the front of town hall provide a buffer from Main St.

DS – I like the idea. Is it quiet on that side of the building from traffic and mechanical equipment.

DH – I like the idea. It will promote more interaction outside.

I'd like to incorporate the wide section of the concrete sidewalk from Woodbury lane to the back of town hall into the area to break up the long stretch of concrete. Where would the wall be? John – the grade goes up towards Main St and the wall would be an L-shape starting near the smaller tree and working back.

John noted that we may be getting funding from the state for post-pandemic response that will partially pay for this project.

DH asked about the Asa Parlin renovation and if there is something to show us. John doesn't have the presentation to show but said there are two concepts. The first is to strip away the additions to leave the original house and add a space in the back for bathrooms. The second is to keep the 60's or 70's addition, taking away the second floor to bring the scale down with an addition for the bathroom. The select board liked both but are



favoring the first; ultimately it comes down to cost. John noted that they incorporated the comments sent by the HDC back in October.

DH – I would prefer to see the project while it is still in the early phase of design.

There was a discussion of the new HDC/HC support position. DS presented a list of administrative tasks that the HDC does where we could use assistance. John noted that this is meant to be a professional position more than administrative and the support the HDC gets from the clerk, building dept, and planning will still be handled by those departments. Someone to provide technical assistance and do research to help the board function more efficiently.

DH asked for comments:

AL – Having a dedicated staff member to help us with updating documents would be good.

DH – We have had various initiatives over the years, but don't have enough members to see them all through given our other duties. These are more substantive preservation initiatives than secretarial work and it would be good to have someone help us push those along.

John is hoping to have someone in the position before the end of this fiscal year.

No motion was made.

C. HDC Memo Regarding Drive-up Windows

DH gave an introduction – under the current town law only banks can have drive up windows. For years there has been an effort to expand it for pharmacies and since Covid that has expanded to include restaurants. DH noted that the DRB opposed the idea because it goes against the goal for a walkable town. You end up with a building isolated from its neighbors by a U-shaped driving scheme.

I think the HDC should take a position on what happens in a historic district for these cases. It takes up a lot of space and it will be difficult to add these to most buildings in the historic districts. In the Center and South Acton districts there don't appear to be buildings that could accommodate the driveways and windows. West Acton center seems to be the most vulnerable. The owner of Acton Pharmacy has come out against it already. Tables to Teapots has enough space around it. Other places in that block could support it as there is a large undeveloped area where the car wash used to be around the Silver Unicorn bookstore. DH asks for comments:

AL – Does the proposed bylaw change purport to override HDC authority with respect to installing a drive-up window? DH – no, changes to accommodate the window still have to fall within HDC rules and guidelines. We don't have authority over driveways. AL - In general, I don't like drive up windows, and they don't seem to be something that would blend into a historic structure.



RR – I don't know how I feel about it. In the villages the window has to be in the back, and using London Pizza as an example cars would go in the back and maybe come out next to Tables to Teapots. It would still be visible from parts of the district and I don't think I would like it, particularly with the added traffic, plus potential issues with the train tracks.

DH – The idea seems antithetical to a historic district; they didn't have horse and buggy drive up windows. In terms of a streetscape, where you want pedestrian activity and buildings close together in a commercial zone, to have curb cuts is the wrong thing to do.

FA – I don't think drive up windows belong in historic districts. In Concord center there are two drive up windows for banks that aren't very visible and I'm not against drive-up windows in general.

DS – I don't think it is appropriate to have them in the districts, and not having a precedent is most directly relevant to what we do here. It propagates the car culture, and the notion that people are more wedded to those machines than experiencing the town they are living in is problematic. Having walk-up windows could be compatible with the districts. DH – we could propose that as an alternative with windows accessible to the sidewalk for pedestrians.

ZT – Drive up windows are incongruent with historic districts given the average age of the buildings within the districts. I'm against any sort drive-up window in any of the districts.

DH – We can't tell someone they can't put in a drive-up window because we don't dictate use; we would need to come up with a different strategy.

DH will put together a memo stating that the HDC doesn't support drive-up windows in the district as there isn't a precedent for drive-up windows in the district, and we don't think there is a way to do it that fits with the districts' criteria.

No motion was made.

D. Missing Historic District Signage

The discussion did not take place.

No motion was made.

4. Adjournment

At 9:11 p.m., AL makes a motion to adjourn the meeting, FA seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: AL – Y, RR – Y, FA – Y, ZT – Y, DS – Y, DH – Y, the motion passes 6-0.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Minutes for April 13th
- Minutes for April 27th
- Application 2109
- DS's Administrative/Research tasks for the HDC document
- Draft Warrant Article for Drive-up Window Facilities