



Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

11/09/2021

7:00 PM

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

Present: David Honn (DH), Art Leavens (AL), Anita Rogers (AR), Ron Regan (RR), Zach Taillefer (ZT), David Shoemaker (DS), Barbara Rhines (BR) Cultural Resource Planner.

Absent: Fran Arsenault (FA) BOS liaison

Opening:

Chair David Honn opened the meeting at 7:01 pm and read the “remote meeting notice” due to COVID-19.

1. Regular Business

A. Citizen's Concerns –

1. Renee Robins: 53 Windsor. RR had a wood shed in poor condition near the garage, which collapsed last winter. A tree which was an accidental structural element contributed to the decay. The debris was removed. RR would like to build a proper garden shed on the current foundation, and smaller than the footprint requiring a Building Permit. It is close to the property line. It needs variance for the placement, and approval from the HDC for the Design. Mostly likely will buy one of the ready built sheds (e.g., Reed's Ferry). DH: Have you discussed with Kristen Guichard in Planning Department? If it does not have a below-grade foundation, or on concrete blocks, it may not fall under the set back zoning regulations. Fences, swingsets, etc. We have not heard much flexibility from the ZBA on this issue. AR: believes 5' may be required. Good to check in any event. DH: Recent approvals were for wood outside, simple monopitch gable, asphalt roofs, single or double doors, wood windows. No roof vents will be needed. RRobins: Considering a ‘salt-box’ roof. If the opening faces the garage, this might look a bit better. DH: The shed should be set back from the house. Want the house to dominate the visual impression. RRobins: 8x12 is a probable size. Timeline not clear. DH: Can visit HDC again before or after the application.

B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – DS makes a motion to approve the minutes from October 26; RR second, DH takes a roll call vote: RR – Y, DS – Y, AL – Y; DH – Y, AR – Y; ZT – Y; the motion passes.

C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet – Up to date.

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



A. 7:15 #2128 – 74 Nagog Hill Road Additions/Renovations. Bill Dickinson joins. DH: normally no meeting Thanksgiving week, but will hold a brief meeting on the 23rd; will open the meeting, open a public hearing on this application in order to comply with the 45-day rule and then continue the hearing ~~on~~ to the 14 December meeting. Also, would like agreement that we can extend the 60-day window for issuing a Certificate. BD agrees verbally. DH will send a document for his signature in order to satisfy the requirement that the agreement extending the 60 days be in writing. DH confirms that BD need not attend the November 23 hearing. BD: shows images of the house. ZT: will any trees be removed? BD: The need for the driveway may require removal of a tree; DS: the trees may be Town trees and need discussion. DH: this would be a second curb cut. A zoning regulation could ‘require’ that the two roads be joined. Should check. Ruth Bendig: The trees are town property. The tree which most likely is the one where the driveway could go may not be healthy. BD: shows elevations. 4-lite to 6-lite windows on the wall above the sunroom. Grade raised around sunroom, raised the sunroom roof. Made smaller sunroom windows and steeper roof. Now more wall and less window for the Sunroom, and panels under the windows. Eave of the sunroom is matching more the main house roof. The barn limits the ability to look face-on at the elevation with the sunroom. For the ‘back’ the back porch roof has been extended. DH: likes the changes. The roof does come across as complicated. RR: Like the updated design. The roofs are complicated. ZT: Likes the updates. AL: Looking straight on, one can see the sunroom; it still has a bit a 50’s flavor. Could it go in the back? BD: some problems – trees, water – but it would no longer be a sunroom there. DS: Likes it. AR: Likes updates...except you don’t need to match the pitch of the main roof for the sunroom. Size of windows matters the most. The scale of those windows are completely different than others. Could it be made with a transom over smaller panes, or otherwise adjusted the fenestration to match in some way the rest of the house. Could also help break the repetitive character; or cottage sash, 6 over 9. BD: Interesting ideas. Head height is 7’ though so not much room for a transom. DH: Likes the porch entrance to the garage. Agrees with AR. House is 1828. The trend of ‘3 season porches’ was probably around 1920 or so. May provide some examples. Triple-hung windows could play a role. Would like to see a few options for the fenestration of the sunroom. More roof overhang as a possibility, and/or a deeper sill line. BD: The Sketch-Up is lacking detail for the surface texture, and the as-built would be richer in texture. Eager to move forward. Offers to send something to the HDC in advance of the next meeting; DH accepts the offer. Requests also a section of the sunroom.

B. 7:45 #2124 – 53 River St Dam, Presentation/Discussion. Andrew Magee joins. DH: Andy Magee, Acton Resident, retained by the town to manage the project. DH, Bill Dickinson, Tom Tidman, and DH met at the site. At the last meeting, HDC approved the demolition of the buildings. Today: discussion of the dam. No application to date. AM: Wants to retain historical aspect while responding to hydrological needs. Gives presentation. Key point is to agree on the 7 elements that relate to water flow. The dam will need to be breached of all but the abutments on either end. Additional modeling was undertaken to try to preserve the second set of blockforms, but it was not workable. However, base of the dam can be left in place, and the blocks which are removed can be used to indicate where the dam had been. It is proposed to fill the tailrace with gravel, a foot below grade.



The stone piers will remain, as will the wheel house foundation. The chimney base is likely to need to be demolished for safety. RR: sounds good. ZT: no comment. AL: Looks appropriate. DS: are there funds for maintenance? AM: to be established. But it must be so. Maybe a 'Friends of...' which would go to CPA for funds. Supports the design. AR: Enthusiastic. DH: pg 19 sketch. Do the blocks continue under the stream and tailrace? Would be nice, and could vary the height a bit so to interfere and interact with the water. AM: not known. Nice to walk across, or sit on rocks, create a riffle region. We will need to demonstrate that we have created a viable natural environment. Next phase is to hire a landscape architect, and these suggestions would be very welcome. DH: Many more buildings than first thought. There are perhaps a number of foundations to preserve and expose, or mark the four corners of structures. AM: there is also some equipment; at present, no items are identified for preservation. The presence of an archeologist at all times will ensure nothing destroyed by negligence. Will return for demolition permission (discussion about the legalities of demolishing a structure which is deemed unsafe, but good to include the HDC in the process). Now need blessing that this is an acceptable approach. DH: asks each member if there are any objections. There are none. The HDC supports the proposed approach.

- C. 8:29 Discussion: Christian Science Site Visit. A number of HDC members toured, also with Marc Foster. AL: Vinyl clad, metal columns imitating wood, sitting on a granite-block foundation. Interior shows remnants of post and beam but reframed. In front room, one post at each end of a beam, and part of beam visible along the front wall. Structurally sound, but materials by and large not of historic vintage. Don't know if wall structure is post and beam. ZT: Roof rafters probably are from the original structure. The garage is on a slab, 1920s. DS: agrees with AL's impression. DH: wants to know if the exterior walls are original or modern structure. AR: might have added studs. ZT: original beams were seen in the basement, but additional modern beams added. Renee Robins: Are we looking at potentially demolishing the building? DH: That appears to be the owner's desire. AR: we don't vote to demolish before we know what would take the place of the demolished structure. RRobins: Asks that the HDC takes into account to what it adds to the streetscape. Returning the building to some previous glory has value. It is part of the neighborhood. ZT: Do we want to preserve the foundation as we have for earlier demolitions? We need a consistent decision. Our bylaws say we must preserve elements of historic importance. DH: Indeed.
- D. 8:45 Discussion: Historic Preservation Seminar for Town Various Boards. DH: Have experienced or heard of some recent meetings of the Planning Board, ZBA, and Finance Committee, where disparaging comments were made about the HDC role and actions. Could the HDC and HC put on some educational seminars? Part of the mission is to educate the public, and this has been done – paint, windows. Alissa Nicol, School St, member of HC, and Preservation, and Open Space Committee. Attended planning board meetings for 90 Willow St. The planning board approved the demolition of an old house and barn. These will be replaced by much larger structures. There is confusion about terminology for historic structures, the historic resource list, and what is listed. Urges that



we make a workshop to educate the committees who can make decisions about these structures, and to provide also for the public. RR: Sees a need. ZT: Comments are concerning even if not in our charge. AL: Agrees that there is no formal charge for education. But there is a charge to 'heighten a sense of architectural heritage'. DS: should be able to informally inform the committees. It will be some work. AR: Agree with the sentiments. The nature of the town is important for many Town residents, and the Planning and other departments should be sensitive to this. DH: Many preservation issues arise when people are uninformed about the domain. If it is simply an open seminar, we may not have the audience we want. Resources in MHC – DVD among other things. DS: good to get agenda items for this at the various committees to ensure that there is an attentive audience. AL: don't want to appear to be in competition or conflict with the other committees. BR: Will be writing for the Municipal Monthly, and these points can appear there. Case Studies can draw in a broad readership. Bring in the environmental element. Presentations need to be smart, informative, and upbeat. DH: In the past external speakers have helped. Some meetings of brainstorming would be good – outlines. BR: happy to gather points to include. DH: A 'FAQ' would be good. BR: Why were the HDC and HC formed? DH: will add this to the next few meetings. Alissa Nicol: will reach out to the MHC. Presentation of information should be non-threatening. Focusing on the Cultural Resource List may be the most positive thing. Stories are good. Powers Gallery; and the repurposed church at the South Acton train station.

E. 9:15 Discussion: Proposed Change to HDC Rules and Regulations Regarding Abutter Notices. AL: Want to formalize Abutter Notices. Drafted a set of regulations consistent with the practice to date, but now not certain that this is consistent with the Town Bylaw P or Ch. 40C. Recommendation, before proceeding, to take it to Town Counsel to check on the details. On a related point, under the statute and Town Bylaw, if we find that there is nothing substantial about a proposed project, the HDC can waive a public hearing on that application, sending notice of that waiver to abutters. The current notice of waiver informs abutters that they have a right to request a public hearing and provides the means for them to do so. AL doesn't think that is required. As AL reads the Bylaw and statute, once the HDC waives the public hearing, the abutters have no right to request a public hearing. The notice of waiver should simply inform abutters of the waiver, informing them when the application will be discussed and decided in an open meeting, which they may attend and speak for or against the project. Another point good to discuss with Town Counsel. DH: we guess that 300' was adopted just because the assessor had the habit for Zoning issues. AL: For applications requiring a public hearing, it makes sense to bring in more people, so 300' makes sense. Less significant issues handled without a public hearing could sensibly call for a smaller group (and maybe should be trimmed down to the legal minimum of adjoining properties). DH: don't want to have delicate determinations to make for each application, and 100' makes it clear who is in and who is not. AL: do note that notice to the adjoining properties is legally required and not ambiguous; that could be a fine approach. AR: only once have we heard back from our letters, and that probably was just due to a confusion. AL: best to send the notice of waiver at the time we receive an application which involves a project too insubstantial to justify a public hearing. DS: suggests to reduce to the legal minimum. AL: Removes the need to talk to Counsel as that



would seem clearly to be within what the Bylaw and statute permit. BR: Adjacent people get notices. AL: but we should not offer a public hearing with that notice, as it does not appear to be required (but this needs a discussion with Town Counsel). AL: this must be discussed at a Public Meeting, and we need to have a written text (Nov 23) and then bring to the next-scheduled HDC meeting of the 14 December. Happy to develop a text, circulate to HDC members, and then send to Town Counsel. Should ask at some point if we need to continuously run ads...Can ask Kristen on that. AL would like to meet with Town Counsel if that works.

3. Adjournment

At 21:38, AL makes a motion to adjourn the meeting, AR seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: DS – Y, RR – Y, ZT – Y, AR – Y, DH – Y, AL - Y; the motion passes.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Application 2124
- Application 2128; shows elevations and sketch-up drawings
- Presentation by Andy Magee