



Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

2022-01-11

7:00 PM

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

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

Absent:

Opening:

Chair David Honn opened the meeting at 7:02 pm and read the “remote meeting notice” due to COVID-19.

1. Regular Business

- A. Citizen's Concerns – Renee Robins. 1) Wood shed that collapsed under a heavy snow load; no building permit required. Closer to the property line than what is allowed. Are there exceptions to the zoning law? What's the best timing to try to proceed? AL: AL's understanding of the current bylaw is that one must observe today's Zoning Bylaws for reconstructions (no ‘grandfathering’ of the historic setbacks). ZBA has very specific limitations to issue a variance; likely unavailable here. The HDC proposed amendment to the Zoning Bylaw would allow HDC-approved rebuilds on the current site in an Historic District. DH: The HDC has never succeeded in seeking a set-back variance under the current law. AR: A significant hardship would need to be demonstrated, and meet the law on the books. The Planning Committee is expected to support the proposed Zoning Bylaw amendment. If so, it will be voted on in the Spring town meeting. If it passes, there will be a delay after the Acton Town vote before it is certified by the State. Although there is a natural disaster provision in the Zoning Bylaw, it seems unlikely that the ZBA would allow the setback variance based on that provision. 2) Front of house is square. Toward the back there is a kitchen. Working on a rework of the kitchen; it would be good to be able to move the window several feet to accommodate the interior design. DH: With a drawing the HDC could offer opinions. Send in email to Ron Regan; could discuss at the next meeting. Best to request an appointment. AR: Going back to the proposed Zoning Bylaw amendment, if someone asks for permission to build closer to the property line will require a CoA (no automatic approval under the proposed amendment). DH: Counsel has told us we may increase setbacks but not reduce them. AL: Starting point is whatever the zoning code says. DH: Need to tell the ZBA to update their graphical representation of the laws.
- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – DS makes a motion to approve the minutes from December 14 2021; RR second, DH takes a roll call vote: RR – Y, DS – Y, DH – Y, ZT – Y, AL – Y AR -- Y; the motion passes.



- C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet – Up to date.
- D. Chair Update:
 - 1. The RV at 102 Main Street has been removed.
 - 2. The seasonal decorations on Windsor Avenue have been removed.
 - 3. 282 Central Street: COA Status (ZT) – went out last weekend.
 - 4. 74 Nagog Hill: COA Status (AR) – not yet done but very soon.
 - 5. 77 Nagog Hill: COA Extension Request – BR and AL made a form, in circulation for signatures.
 - 6. 446 Main Street: Need additional information; potential CNA – waiting for additional information from owners.
 - 7. 85 School Street Revised Shed and House Renovations: Needs application – have not heard any update from the owners.
 - 8. Gardner Playground: Public Hearing on 2.8.22 – Being circulated by the Town for additional input. We anticipate a Public Hearing on the 8 February.

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

- A. 7:24 Public Hearing: Proposed Amendment to the HDC Rules and Regulations Regarding Abutter Notices. DH Reads the announcement of the meeting. AL: wishes to continue the meeting, to allow further discussion with Town Counsel, to January 25th.
DH: moves to continue the hearing. AL Seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: RR – Y, DS – Y, AL – Y; AR – Y, DH – Y, ZT – Y; the motion passes.
- B. 7:29 #2131 29 Windsor Avenue: Historic Plaque Placement. RR recuses himself as abutter. DH: Applicant Judith Kotanchik joins. She applied for an Historic Plaque to the HC; they approved and fabricated it. HDC determines where the plaque would be placed. Plaque is about 3 clapboards high. AR: would suggest to center on far right, between the corner pilaster and the window. ZT: Agrees. DS: An example on Wood Lane using this approach. DH: One clapboard down, centered between the window frame trim and the corner board. Screw mount with decorative or capped screws. JK: sounds like a fine spot. AR volunteers as liaison and to follow through with the paperwork. AL: Notice of Waiver (NOW) done? BR: Mailed Nov 24.
DH makes a motion to approve the plaque per the discussion. DH takes a roll call vote: RR – recused, DS – Y, AL – Y; AR – Y, DH – Y, ZT – Y; the motion passes. RR returns.
- C. 7:43 #2201 49 Windsor Avenue: EV Charger Post; Applicant Ben Glazer joins – DH: application to install a free-standing post and electrical charging fixture. Ben: ~35' from the street. Bollards are required. Could put a reflective surface on the bollard. A range of colors are possible. One or two may be required. The post is matte grey for the charging station and is sold by Tesla.
RR: The wooden post photo is interesting. Ben: most seem to be metal. RR: Possible to orient to hide the charger and cable? Ben: Not sure. RR: Are there requirements for color or reflectivity? Can a plant be put in front to hide it? Ben: Probably yes. AR: likes the contemporary post (metal). Would prefer to see it lower if possible. The bollards best



painted green, and some plantings are very appealing. May be better to push it back a bit for safety and appearance. DS: agree. ZT: agree. DH: Need to check on the electrical codes. Likes to see it turned 180 degrees. A concrete footing will be needed if the Tesla post is used (don't want it to get crooked). For bollards, best is to take a 4" diameter pipe, concrete fill. Or buy the Tesla model. Could pour a single foundation for the two bollards and the charging post. Could put reflective tape on simple posts. Decorative covers are available that may be historically appealing – pretend granite, for instance. HDC should take a look if a decorative cover is chosen. Concrete footing should be flush or better a bit below grade (and that could reduce the height a bit). AL: thinks we should require screening. AR: Maximum height can be lower to be fully functional; 30" is requested or lowest compatible with code, and more attractive to have lower bollards and a higher charging post. Code to be met for the electrical and safety installation. Screening to be minimum 28", unless otherwise required by code. Recommendation to paint it green or black or other dark color. AL will write it up. BR: NOWs now in preparation.

AR makes a motion to approve the installation per the discussion above. AL seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: RR – Y, DS – Y, AL – Y; AR – Y, DH – Y, ZT – Y; the motion passes.

D. 8:09 #2135 113 Main Street: Roof Renovations – DH: Buildings at Erikson's Grain. Applicant Mark Brown joins. The store and connected buildings are in discussion – all four roofs shown in the annotated photograph. Roofs are leaking. The owners just want to repair and replace in kind. Plan to remove the skylights on back. Same shingle on all roofs. Certainteed Landmark. DH: HDC prefers regular high def. MB: limitations on color suggestions due to supply problems, but HDC does not have jurisdiction. DH: Store is vented at the ridge; will continue gable-to-gable end. Drip edge to be painted to match trim, and leaving gutters as they are. Rakes and facia are brown, and drip edge should match. MB: Entry door canopy roof shingles also to be replaced. If repair is needed, may 'Boral' non-wood trim be used? DH: we have approved this in the past. AR: Boral is always painted. DH: would like copper or Neoprene for the vent flashing/boot or other dark material. Trim replaced with Boral as needed. ZT will be liaison. BR: NOW are out; important to check for feedback re: requests for hearing before missing COA.

DH makes a motion to approve the installation per the discussion above. AL seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: RR – Y, DS – Y, AL – Y; AR – Y, DH – Y, ZT – Y; the motion passes.

E. 8:23 #2133 16 Woodbury Road: Mailbox Post – BR: This discussion may have been planned for the next week. DH: We'll try to take care of it now. No mailboxes recently considered by the HDC. RR: likes the post and bracket, and likes the placement of the number. AL, AR, DS, ZT, DH like it. Attach the photo to the COA for clarity and simplicity. BR: NOWs have gone out. AL will be liaison. Applicant Brian Saar joins; DH explains that it is approved.

AR makes a motion to approve the installation per the discussion above. AL seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: RR – Y, DS – Y, AL – Y; AR – Y, DH – Y, ZT – Y; the motion passes.

F. 8:40 267 Central Street: Non-binding discussion regarding HDC Field Visit and Potential Demolition – Applicant Mark Foster and Architect Dan Barton join. DH: have already discussed this project; Architects want to discuss the demolition in greater detail.



Mark: Thanks for the site visit. RR, AL, ZT, BR visited; DS looked at the exterior and in the windows. DH, BR: looked for possible places to reuse the garage, but no good options. RR: Evident that the architectural detail is covered or removed. The foundation could be of historical interest. Some interest in the neighbors of restoring the present building. In any event it should not be left to demolition by neglect. AL: Agree with the description, but still stuck on demolition. It is on MACRIS. To justify demolition, it needs to be a 'structure of no historical significance'. Demolition is a last resort. AR: Considers the building effectively already demolished. The massing and familiarity are important. It is a relevant concern that a larger building sitting differently on the street may be less well accepted. DS: Agree. ZT: Agree; what would inform a 'restoration'? Massing is important; we have found foundations to be of historical significance, and could be a key to the path forward. DH: What are the Secretary of the Interior's thoughts on replication? What is the documented history to which we can point for best practice? Dan: replication is not welcome in general. This building is not of the significance of the Groton Inn which burned; that is the kind of building that is appropriate for replication. There is an unfortunate history for this building. Thinks something new and fresh can maintain the historic value of the neighborhood. Useful comments from the HDC. The foundation probably is larger granite stones at ground level, and then field stone further down. DH: would have been interesting if the inside were perfect and the exterior in the current condition? If it is dismantled, there may be some good materials – wide boards, significant post and beams. One would want a plan to preserve those parts and actively seek re-use. Dan: Appears that the flooring and internal structure was all replaced. DH: Make any sense to try to reuse some of the current structure, leaving the foundation in use and in place? Dan: The foundation would have to meet code and requirements. Terra Friedrichs: Thinks construction of a different building in this place would be a terrible shame. Whatever goes here needs to keep the historic character; the drawings shown at the last meeting did not meet these criteria. DH: The question at hand is if the actual wood is of intrinsic value. TF: can what goes back in place be more or less identical? Want to preserve the 'feel'. Is there no requirement for an accurate restoration? Anne Forbes may have photos which could help support this path. DH: We are currently considering the historic value of the materials. We do require that the replacement building after a demolition be well-defined and accepted/approved before a demolition. Dan: Peeled away some of the vinyl siding to find no siding under the surface. Garage: Dan: looked at some options to leave it where it is, others where it could be elsewhere on the site. Could be a snack shack, or a playhouse, somewhere – but see no 'customers' at this time. DH: it is an authentic largely original structure. AL: Found the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. They provide that in restoring an existing historic building, deteriorated historic features will be replaced if possible, but "where the deterioration requires replacement, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture and, where possible, materials," as substantiated by documentary and physical evidence. A false sense of history will not be created. This, with the Mass Historic Commission's guidelines, and our design guidelines, does not seem to make demolition justified. Not sure from what we could key. Pictures are one way to know what was there before. Dan: A 'reconstruction' would be needed; there is not enough there to 'restore'. Very little of even the frame remaining. DS: We should seek and study photographs of the building to see if there is some visual data to use to



understand what had been there. BR: spent some time looking with no significant success. DH: Should ask at Hosmer House Jenks Library. Should ask Anne Forbes. TF: Will try to track down some photos.

G. 9:21 3, 9 and Commuter Rail Parking Lot on School Street: Non-binding discussion regarding Development Proposal – John Perkins joins. DH: Project from John Perkins, 6 unit building was previously approved. JP: Now considering a larger project to include the civil defense building and parking lot. The overflow lot could help in creating a coherent design. This would allow a larger building covering 48 and some of the overflow lot. The Silva Fence building would have a commercial use in this vision. Affordable housing would be the use. DH: The overflow lot was for Exchange Hall with a restaurant, which did not succeed in a plan, and the Town moved to use it for commuters. Becomes an urban design project at this scale -- ~400-500 feet. AR: Difficult to imagine what this would be like – to hypothetically picture in Acton this sort of footprint. RR: The grey in the drawing represents a possible building footprint. Buildings removed in the drawing. Likes putting the parking out of site; would be large compared to Exchange Hall. Maybe multiple buildings could help with imagining. DS: could make it feel like a Mill or the Shaker buildings in Harvard – there are old buildings like this of the right scale and character which could be models. AL: The missing buildings at 25-27 School Street make this confusing. JP: In discussion with David Veo, and there may some flexibility there for the way the lots work together. AL: Demolition has a very high threshold. ZT: Not opposed to exploring such a project. Massing is important. A mill building could work. DH: Some urban design principles could be useful here. Best would be to have buildings fronting School St., and have the parking hidden; it encourages pedestrian presence. The site falls off and makes hidden parking natural. Could add a wing to the Civil Defense building, and use it to give access to parking behind the building. Try to avoid using parking to punctuate buildings. Exchange Hall needs to remain the most significant architectural feature of the area, and any new building needs to complement Exchange Hall. A good architect would be a good interface with the HDC. Parallel parking along School St would be ok; angled parking if there is commercial application, but it would be tough during times of high flux. Recommend two concepts, one say in two pieces – twins. A bridge between them. AR: this would be consistent with the 'Mill Building' concept. Need a realistic accommodation of cars associated with the building.

H. 9:50 HDC Discussions – Deferred to the next meeting.

1. Annual Historic Property Owner Letter;
2. Historic Preservation Seminar for Various Town Boards;
3. HDC Hardship Definition;
4. Open Space Recreation Plan Comments

3. Consent Items

None

1. Adjournment



At 21:53, 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

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