



Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

2022-08-23

7:00 PM

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

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

Absent: Fran Arsenault (FA)

Opening:

Chair David Honn opened the meeting at 7:04 pm and read the “remote meeting notice” due to COVID-19.

1. Regular Business

- A. Citizen's Concerns – Maria Palacio. Acton Library application for an historical library sign, on the Main St side (sent Aug 8). BR has received it. DH: did not receive it; apologies. Will place on the next meeting agenda, Sept 13. Should be able to resolve on that evening. Will want to assure it is ready to go.
- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – August 9 meeting minutes. First page the DB should have been DM. DS makes a Motion to accept after that correction; AL Seconds. AR AL DH, DS approve; ZT abstains.
- C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet – all ok. The Library sign will be added. 75 River is enquiring about solar panels. 450 Main St is on the market and may lead to discussion in the HDC.
- D. Chair Update:
 1. Window Field Visits: 12 Wright Terrace, 603 Massachusetts Avenue; not yet addressed.
 2. Any outstanding COAs: 75 School is pending.

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

- A. 7:15 CONTINUATION OF PUBLIC HEARING – 267 Central Street, Application #2218. Demolition of house and garage to build a new 4-unit residential structure. DH: It is critical that the public joins via Zoom when visual materials are being shared in that format. An extension has been agreed upon. Dan Barton (Project Architect) joins. Marc Foster (Applicant) may not be able to join. DB: Will pick up from the last meeting; the application is amended with some additional views and information on height. Trees except for one will be retained and the root structure should not be disturbed. One tree in



the parking lot will be removed. A rendering with the façade showing height comparisons for the present and proposed designs was made; the peak of the ‘barn’ is 6” taller than the peak of the present main building. There is precedent for this difference along Windsor. The porch is at 7’7”, consistent with the present porch. The farmer’s porch is simplified at the level of the steps to the front door. Garage: **Marc** Foster hopes that someone will offer to take the garage. A solution on the property can be found if needed, although wants a solution in that case that does not interfere with water management of the site. DH: Could have the garage in the lower right corner over some parking places. BR: Mark Foster (MF) joins at 19:32. DH: as the water management elements (septic and drywell) could be moved, it should be compatible. We understand that it is not easy to find takers for the garage building. There should be a narrative that explains how the new design would have grown organically to help motivate the new structures as well as the retention and placement of the garage. To follow through, some more stochastic elements could be introduced to give the variety of texture that would come from such an organic growth. AR: The typical result is additive and evolved. Windows, siding, roof pitches, corner boards would all be more relaxed. DB: agrees. Returns, doors are also opportunities. DH: Time to discuss the question of demolition. DH thinks that retaining the garage is the most critical in terms of retaining what is still of historical interest. MF steps away at 19:42. AL: Strong presumption against demolition with the applicant to provide the counter argument. A request for demolition does require a good design to replace it, and we have discussed that. If the building were in its original form and condition, the significance, architectural features, etc., its heritage would be significant (MACRIS supports this perspective). Thus, it was a building of historic value before its changes. DB: Also looked at MACRIS. The heritage was clear. The changes that followed have truly removed the historic value. Not only are exterior features stripped, but the interior framing and details have been removed. The building has effectively already been reconstructed. The garage is the most historically significant building that survives. DB considers reconstruction is not practical, due to the financial infeasibility. The design is intended to take what can be recovered – the foundation and the visual concept – and carry it forward. Does not consider the building one of the most important in the town, in addition. Believes 1) it is not a benefit to the district 2) unique position for a property with a financial reality and obligation to code 3) apparent impossibility of any gain or benefit of preserving any historic detail. It already has been demolished. DS: Could the building be reconstructed? DB: Enquired of MF, given the value of the land, the investment could not be rationalized. Considered building out the Mass Ave property could have been undertaken, but that seemed insensitive to the built environment. The area on Pearl St is residential, and that makes the proposed design well motivated. Financially the project is already difficult, and a reconstruction would not allow a recovery of the investment. If photos can be found they can inform the detailing of the proposed design. AL: A reconstruction is a vacant lot; A rehab is to take what is there and build it back. There is a framework, of the wrong materials, but still speaking to the original building character. A building in Concord went through such a transformation. DB: Even the internal framing has been removed. AL: on the topic of practicality, our Demolition Guidelines require that an applicant seeking to avoid the presumption against demolition on the grounds of practicality should demonstrate with specificity via an independent architectural and engineering assessment



that a rehabilitation is not practical. No intent to suggest that the current team is not excellent, but the HDC does request this. Note that additions to the current building could be compatible with rehabilitation of the main block, and if the element was a later addition, there may be a lower threshold for its demolition. DB: Numbers can be created, although do require discussion with engineers and vendors. ZT: The proposed building is more appropriate than previous design ideas. The notion of organic growth is to be pursued. On the topic of demolition, an estimate is needed to justify the impracticality of a reconstruction, with potentially an additional structure to get a footprint that would make the investment 'practical'. The HDC would certainly not want to see the current building suffer demolition by neglect. The garage should not be demolished without a very clear and coherent argument. AR: There is a level of investment required in any event, whether 'dressing' the current building or taking it down, that will be significant. Taking down the current building does not seem to be destroying something of historical value. It is a stand-in or fantasy for the building that had historical value. A new building, with real quality and with a narrative that feels coherent, can be better than just dressing this building. Add to this that a new building can be consistent with some new values like energy efficiency. Keeping familiar and key elements like the porch will be very important, and keeping the new structure to scale, can make for a better contribution to the town. DH: what's best for the district? Agree with AR and DB – it has lost its value. Reconstructing would not 'bring it back', and would not be beneficial for the district. DS: important to follow the bylaws quite strictly so that we do not set any precedents that we and the Town will regret. The HDC reasoning has to be crystal clear. AL: Sec. 2a of the Demolition Guidelines – exception to the presumption – asks for data. DH: We are asking for a financial analysis to demonstrate practicality or non-practicality. AL: Reads from Guidelines. Independent licensed professionals need to address the question of practicality. We are not pleased that this will use funds that could be used otherwise, but it is the HDC Guidelines. DH: this and a solution for the garage that is concrete will be needed at the next meeting. Past history shows it is important to keep the meeting open to ensure the HDC does not lose control of the end product. DB: Will follow through on the request for the financial story and the garage. The exact date for the next discussion to be determined. Public Comments: Terra Friedrichs. Our scorecard of losing buildings is crucial. Sounds like the applicants want to recover the maximum cost. The bylaws do require the analysis that has been requested. HDC: discussion of finding a quorum for the next meeting. 21 September is the best current date for HDC members.

B. 8:34 53 Windsor Avenue, Application #2220 Replacement of shed. The applicant has not been able to pursue the research so this will be deferred

3. Consent Items

None

1. Adjournment



At 20:35 AL makes a motion to adjourn the meeting, AR seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: AL, AR, DH, DS, ZT all approve.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- 267 Central Street, Application #2218, Amended to include some additional views.