



Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

2022-09-27

7:00 PM

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

Present: David Honn (DH), David Shoemaker (DS; joined at 19:24), Anita Rogers (AR; joined at 19:15), Art Leavens (AL), SB liaison, Barbara Rhines (BR) (Cultural Resource Planner), Zach Taillefer (ZT), Fran Arsenault (FA)

Absent:

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 – No citizen concerns.
- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – August 23 meeting minutes. AL makes a Motion to accept; DH Seconds. AR AL DH, ZT approve.
- C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet –
- D. Chair Update:
 - 1. Outstanding COA updates: Those COAs up against a deadline were timely filed.
 - 2. 9 School Street for Sale: The developer who was granted a COA for a residential building on that site apparently has decided not to go forward and has put the lot up for sale.
 - 3. Town RFP for 3 and 13 School Street: The two lots adjoining 9 School Street, 3 School Street on which the old Civil Defense building is located and 13 School Street on which there is a parking lot no longer in use, are Town properties, and the Town has issued a Request for Proposal for their development. The three adjacent lots may present an opportunity for some mixed use development.
 - 4. Move 11/8 Meeting Due to Election: Due to a conflict with the election, the HDC moved its first November meeting to Wednesday, November 9, at 7:00 p.m.



5. Zoom Coverage Person Starting in October: Because Barbara Rhines will not be available to provide Zoom coverage for HDC meetings, a new person will take on that assignment beginning in October.

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.

19:25 Discussion of possible alternative uses for the existing structure. The applicants could not join, but prior to the meeting DH spoke with the applicant, Mark Foster, and architect, Dan Barton, to get a sense of their thinking and to convey it to the HDC. They understand the HDC's desire to place the garage on the lot, working around the ground water systems. They do not see a way to make it work. HDC considers that the main building could be re-used as a commercial building, giving the framing that is consistent with that use. AL: Question remains if the main structure remains. We have not received an assessment of the cost of reworking the front building to re-instate some of the historical façade. HDC folks think there is a basement under the 'L'. Discussion of the garage; the doors are seen as desirable and the windows (or window glass). DS and AL and AR do not see the garage as intrinsically interesting. Due to changes in the main structure, the liaison with that building has been lost. ZT: Were the garage to be demolished, what control do we have over the project post-demolition? DH: We require a plan we can approve before any permission to demolition will be given. Past experience in the HDC makes it clear that this is necessary. HDC can revoke permission to demolish if the HDC is not satisfied with the developing plans. DH thinks there is more work to be done before the HDC would approve. AR: A mixed use approach with the 'main' building retained and any other modifications might be more acceptable to the neighborhood. The replacement building is effectively a duplication with adjustments of the current main building. The floor framing is up to code for commercial buildings – although over-structured for homes. ZT: structure and flooring is sound. AL: Roof structure appears to be original. DH: we could consider as a recommendation that: the main building is to remain, rehabbed to bring back some more of the historical patina, remove the garage, and add additional buildings to house some living units. From a sustainability perspective (not the scope of HDC) it seems undesirable to demolish and reconstruct a similar structure. AR: The foundation would be done differently, and may be a motivation for a complete reconstruction – but the HDC has not heard those arguments made. ZT/DH: We should see the cost estimates, and a renovation (re-decoration to bring out historical elements of the façade and potentially roofline) of the main building as one option. DH: We could consider that the garage may be appropriate for demolition but that a reuse of the main building structure could be appropriate with some other current elements replaced with a more performant building. AL: Reluctant to make this sort of trade at this point. The preservation of the main building is a high priority per HDC guidelines. DH: the demolition of the stone foundation is also of importance, per precedents. AR: would we approve a reconstruction in place? DS: there is no lumber remaining of particular historical interest. ZT: the foundation would be important to retain. DH: if the building is



demolished, code will require a functional foundation behind the granite. AR: is the granite better in the ground or as a decorative element? The streetscape is the critical element for the HDC. If the new design effectively replicates that, the historical value is not reduced. If the new construction is made with better materials, it could be better. DS: Effectively, the demolition took place before the HDC existed. DH: retaining significant trees are important to the presence in the environment, and retaining it should be a priority. AL: While a 'practical' approach may make a reconstruction attractive, we require in our Demolition Guidelines that the HDC becomes convinced that it is impractical to reconstruct. AR/AL: There is a question if the original framing remains, and this could be important. ZT: Roof does seem original. Structural elements are new. All original structural elements are below ground level. DH: We will renew our request that the applicants provide proof of impracticality of retaining the main structure. Other elements are worthy of discussion.

- B. 8:15 Application: # 2222 Main Library Signage. DH: Library wishes to have new signage. Maria Palacio (MP), Acton Memorial Library Director, joins. MP: From the street it is not clear that the building is, in fact, a Library. A double-sided sign would be functional. Drawings and photos are shared as examples. 6' long, 3' tall. Will probably use Library funds, but to be determined. DH: We would require wood posts. Recommend a mocked-up sign to get a sense of where it should be, parallel or perpendicular, how it will communicate, and what landscaping elements may be needed to make a success. We note that there is a general lack of signage on the campus of town buildings. AR: May be able to find something in Town Hall or the Library that could serve as a stand-in sign. This is a landscaping project – not just a sign project – and the sign should feel 'original' is needed. Worth looking to see if there are historical photos with a sign visible. DH: The old meeting house sign at Nagog Hill could help inform the approach. This is an 'American Romanesque' building and may also give hints. AL, DS: no comment. ZT: lighting? MP: no thought given to date. DH: Good to check with the Town – Corey – to see if there are changes afoot that would influence the sign or its potential illumination.
- C. 8:45 Application: #2223 75 River Street Solar Panels. Manish Kumar (MK), homeowner, joins. Jessica Fenton (JF), applicant and representative of installer, joins. JF describes the plan. The panels are placed to limit, but not eliminate, visibility from the street. The panels are effectively flush to the roof, all black. DH: Panels have been approved on the houses neighboring this house. AL: We must disregard the tree from the HDC perspective. Up to 3" off the roof is in the range of panels that can be approved; these are ~2.5" above the surface. Are any of the other elements visible? JF: there is a utility meter, and surface conduit. Can be painted in the house color. AL: The conduit needs to be out of sight. AR: would like to see a drawing of the house, with no vegetation, with the electrical wiring path. DS: might consider the meter in the basement. DH: The asymmetric panel arrangement is to optimize the output? The greater number of panels is on the more visible side. JF: yes. May be able to run the conduit internal to the house. MK, all: like this approach. DS, ZT, AL, AR: Comfortable with the visibility of the panels. AL will be the Liaison. AL makes a motion to approve the project as set forth in the application that the panels will be black, 3" or less from roof surface, setback as depicted, centered if possible on the visible roof. AR Seconds. AL, AR, ZT, DS, DH approve. BR: Abutters notices are out.



- D. 9:15 Application: # 2224 603 Massachusetts Avenue Windows: Applicants Lauren (LP) and Robbie Paro (RP) join. DH: Have had some previous interactions with this house/owners. HDC reviews drawings. Windows on Mass Ave – ‘A’ and ‘B’ – are two over two, matching ground floor. House is 1832; the windows look original. ‘C’ and ‘D’ are small, and likely original also. LP&RP: The sills are in rough shape and some of the sash are not operational. Wish to replace the windows, while improving the performance. DS: are the sash ok? LP&RP: mostly yes. No storm windows. AR: Sills on C and D are a dilemma, but replacing old sash is never welcome. Storms are clearly needed. The HDC will be resistant to replacement unless we have a notion of the possible replacement units. LP&RP: Anderson. AR: The appearance will be very different, and less desirable in appearance. DS: Really do not wish to see old windows removed. The motivation is very evident nonetheless. AL: Do not want to lose the old sash. A proper storm window would change the functionality quite significantly. ZT: The sash are in reasonable condition. Repair should be considered. We can’t recommend contractors, but should be responsive to requests – email is not reliable, unfortunately. LP&RP: No window repair person has indicated interest in carrying through with a repair. Only replacement windows have been offered. Really want operating windows; new additional member of the family. DH: Dilemma is that we need to apply our bylaws. For original windows, the default is to repair windows; replacement has a very high bar. Timing is very tough these days to get anything done – new or re-worked windows. May be good to find someone to replace the sills, and then to add exterior storms. For this winter, interior storms may be a good choice. AR: offers a list. ZT: We meet 2x month – come by any meeting without an appointment at the meeting start.
- E. 9:45 CPC Long Range Plan for Historic Preservation. DH: CPC is trying to make a 5 year plan. We are invited to contribute ideas for what will be important for the next 5 years for the historic districts. Roughly 1.75M is the yearly sum, and 10% (or more) is designed to preserve history. The CPC has spent less than the amount allocated for historic preservation. DH suggested that we set up a trust from the CPC which would be available to private home owners for targeted historic improvements (e.g., reconstructing windows, wood shingle roof). Historic New England could provide an example for the mechanics. CPC is checking for legality. Expanding the Districts could be another approach. Any action needs to be in the public interest – e.g., for a very visible building. Use of the funds imposes a preservation restriction, so not simple. AL: would it go to Town Meeting? DH: Not clear as it may be in the CPC’s purview. Decisions for how the money will be used are probably to be made in early 2023. DS: consider funding a restoration entity (e.g., window restorer). ZT: some research for schemes is worthwhile. Continuing education would be an option. AR: Low-interest loans could be set up. FA: expanding the districts is a strong value; the consulting to realize that would need funding.
- F. BR: Historic New England is offering an event – see email.

3. Consent Items

None



1. Adjournment

At 22:06 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; no new drawings, but previous drawings shared and discussed
- Main Library Signage
- 75 River Street
- 603 Massachusetts Avenue