

Historic District Commission  
Town Hall, Room 126  
Meeting Minutes, 22 Sept 2015

Meeting called to order at 7:31 PM. Attending: Ron Regan (RR), Anita Rogers (AR), David Honn (DH) and David Shoemaker (DS; note-taker); not present Chingsung Chang (CC, Selectmen Representative), and David Foley (DF),

Citizens: Fran Arsenault, applicants as noted below.

Move to approve Sept 6 Minutes; accepted unanimously

7:32pm Citizen's questions - RR brings in a package from 95 Main for Roof Repair. DF: Need number. This is will be appropriate for a CNA.

7:33 18 Wright Terrace (Kathy and Leo Fochtman). Want to build in-law apartment. What are the formalities, they ask? A plan drawing of the terrain, existing buildings, and proposed structure. Sight lines do not appear to allow seeing the proposed structure from Wright Terrace (and also not from Mass. Ave.). DH: we typically do what you have done, checking for the line of sight. Owners would be welcome to come in for discussion/advice even if a CNA is appropriate, and the design should not be constrained to be out of the field of view of the HDC – happy to work to a constructive solution if it were. Architect has worked through a plausible design. Owners advised to submit an application to the HDC for a final review of the addition prior to filing for the building permit since the Building Dept will need a certificate to confirm that the work has remained out of the HDC purview .

7:47 App# 1349 30 Windsor, for advice; RR recuses himself. Building Department requires a handrail. Various design options discussed to minimize the visual impact and the interaction with the present historical construction. House is circa 1883; a wrought iron railing, perhaps anchored to the porch floor and granite slab (instead of anchoring to the adjacent wood construction) was suggested. RR returns to the HDC.

7: 54 App 1523, 24, 592 Mass Ave. – West Acton Baptist Church. Nancy Emerson Lombardo representing the Trustees. Applicant brings along some photos. AR: Last winter's storms caused damage to the gutters, trim and some windows. Many non-visible windows (on

rear elevation parallel to Mass Ave) are vinyl windows (per 2012 HDC CNA). Request to replace the remaining wooden windows with vinyl similar to the previously approved units. In addition, the portico facing Mass Ave needs repair. It is clear that previous repairs used non-traditional materials/methods/details. This may be an opportunity to bring some of the details into better alignment with the building design and epoch. A flat, triangular pediment, which appears to be constructed of plywood, apparently to hide a light fixture and wiring was installed. AR recommends replacing with an attractive light fixture. We note that scraping and painting does not require HDC approval. AR will prepare a CNA for a simple repair in kind for everything but the front entrance. HDC recommends a separate process and application for the front entrance to include a new light fixture and a return to a more historically accurate pediment with appropriate detailing.

8:07 590 Mass Ave: RR says the owner will fix windows, and add triple track storms. For the chimney repair, they will reuse the maximum amount of the old bricks and use them on the visible sides of the chimney. Sign violation letters will be given by RR to the owner to subsequently deliver to tenants. AR notes that a number of the signs are improvised, and perhaps none are permitted. The HDC should confirm which of the signs facing Central Street can be seen from Mass Ave.

8:25 Wheeler House/Four Winds: DH reports. The existing property has a barn and house, both on the Acton cultural resources list and MACRIS system. The barn and parts of the house would be demolished. A developmental group home is proposed in place of the barn. The house would be partially demolished and modified for a multifamily building. Twelve (12) market rate houses are proposed for the remainder of the lot. The project began as a so-called DCHD "friendly" 40B. The developer has abandoned that process and is applying directly to the state through the MassHousing 40B program. Once MassHousing receives the application they are required to notify the BoS and a 30 day comment period would commence. They have 60 days to consider the comments, after which a site approval or rejection letter would be issued. The application would then proceed to the Acton Zoning Board of Appeals. In the past, the HDC has commented on preservation issues outside of the historic districts (Examples include the South Acton train station and Morrison Farm). The

Mass Historical Commission has jurisdiction concerning the fate of buildings on the MACRIS list, and the HDC will strongly recommend that they consider this situation very carefully. FA: The low fraction of low-cost housing in Acton leads to pressure to approve new 40B projects independent of the advisability from the perspective of the character and history of the Town.

8:45

543 Mass Ave Signage Victor Norman is the Applicant; Steve sign builder joins in at 9:07. Committee gets background from AR. A large interactive computer screen will be proposed for showing available houses; it would be internally lit.

- 1) Acton Real Estate will be leasing on the ground floor. Signage needed. Images of the building are shown and the placement of a sign indicated. A few mockups are shown. A sample layout using the HDC guidelines is shown, and a request for a slightly longer-and taller-than-allowed font is made. The proposal is for applied painted PVC letters rather than letters painted on wood. Lighting would be by already approved fixtures providing surface illumination.
  - a. Font: they have a preferred business font. Color: Red is a standard color.
  - b. Length/font size: in HDC, 1 foot length per 3 feet length; desired is 13 ft for the existing 26 ft length (ratio of 1 in 2). DH: want to be able to see when driving by; standard criteria must apply. Has a sense that it is not quite enough if normal HDC guidelines used. 15" with a back board of 18" height may be the best compromise.
  - c. Technique: Self-adhesive plastic lettering is proposed. HDC has never allowed an applied lettering; HDC requires normally a painted approach. AR: atypical for the district. DH: maybe better if an applied approach to stand off with a thicker substrate. Sign builder can cut thicker material. Consensus: flat and thin may be acceptable, given the significant distance (~45 feet) to the sign from the sidewalk.

Consider painting the background a slightly tinted color to reduce the contrast. A light grey, or a rose. If a different background piece ('sign board') is used, it could be painted in a shop and put in place. HDC notes that there will be other signs on this streetfront in similar situations – will want to have the same solution for all; separate boards would be a way to approach this.

2) Interactive Storefront Digital Display; a touchscreen. Notion is to draw people in to the courtyard. Would be well under 25% of the surface area. DH: one or two? VN: one. DH: plantings? VN yes. DS: unpleasant to see it glowing at night; VN: would only be lit at night while the office would be brightly lit. DH: can it be programmed to vary the light intensity according to the exterior light conditions? AR: documentation indicates variable intensity; the scaling to outside intensity is TBD. AR: hours planned? VN: 9-5. DS: post-installation review of intensity and adjusted post-approval? DH: yes, that is possible. The rules and regulations for the HDC are currently clear that there are no internally-illuminated signs, but it is also clear that this type of sign was not foreseen by the R&R. AR: will appear at the next meeting so no vote needed at this meeting. Zoning should be contacted. RR: does an interactive kiosk qualify as a sign or is it something else? A key feature for the HDC is that the appliance be interactive – serving a different and additional function to a traditional sign.

The HDC invites an application for the Interactive Display.

9:12            131 Main St sign deferred.

9:54            Move to adjourn; seconded and voted unanimously