



Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

2022-02-08

7:00 PM

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

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

Absent: Zach Taillefer (ZT), Anita Rogers (AR),

Opening:

Chair David Honn opened the meeting at 7:03 pm and read the “remote meeting notice” due to COVID-19.

1. Regular Business

- A. Citizen's Concerns – None
- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – DS makes a motion to approve the minutes from 25 January 2022; AL second, DH takes a roll call vote: RR – Y, DS – Y, DH – Y, AL – Y; the motion passes.
- C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet – Up to date.
- D. Chair Update:
 1. 29 Windsor: COA Status AR working on it.
 2. 74 Nagog Hill: COA Status AR working on it.
 3. HDC CPC Endorsement Letter – DH sent a letter from HDC. Asa Parlin, 53 River, Chapel Cemetery, Revolutionary War Markers, Storm windows for Iron Works and Faulkner were topics of interest to the HDC.
 4. DH: asks BR if an Annual Report will be required. BR will pursue the question.
 5. BR: 452 Main had asked for a permit, with the roof already done. The HDC has not seen a request. The roofer proceeded without either a building permit or HDC approval. DS: The owner should follow through with an orderly process of obtaining HDC approval (may be a CNA) and a building permit for the work, even if already done.
 6. BR: MHC Virtual Workshop on Historic Districts, and developing Historic Preservation Plan. BR is on a waiting list.

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



A. 7:15 Public Hearing: #2135 Gardner Playground Renovation. DH: Reads the Notice of public hearing. Melissa Rier, Recreation Director for Acton, joins. Needs work; built in '96. CPC gave funds, to add an archway, shrubs, trees, picnicking opportunities, and signage. Start in Spring planned, Fall completion hoped for. DH: no jurisdiction over trees and shrubs, but all elements which are of a certain height. AL: Earlier talk of a water park? MR: moved away from this; no sewage/septic. Other difficulties. No restroom. Water bubbler/refill will be there. AL: Structures look good. DS: Parking? MR: tried to be minimal. The Farmers Market will perhaps use this space, and parking is needed. Expect that the parking will be exploited. Mixed visits to the park and the Village Works. RR: Fence or wall on the front? Lighting? MR: no wall or fence. Archway and shrubs instead. No lighting. DH: Bikeshare? ML: not sure! Would like a bike rack. FA: out of business; hoping for another. DH: Archway design. Rough-cut granite and wrought iron. MR: No signage on the street; some in the park. Surface is a rubber surface; helps with falls. Accessible. No perimeter fence is being installed; present fences will remain. Asphalt parking. DH: nice to have a curving entrance. Can some benches be installed at the street face. We understand a wall would have been too expensive. MR: Children have given their approval. Lynn Parker, abutter Joins from Public: Can't find drawings that show how the entrance works and the entry over the sidewalk. Would be good to get online. MR: will send the drawings by email. LP: Abutters were not engaged at all in the process. 'Friends of Acton' are the businesses across the street, principally. No surveys, no neighborhood interaction. It is a West Acton park! And the parking may be principally for the businesses. MR: the parking fills the previous basketball area. It is small but can hold 14 cars. There was a public forum last spring, and a survey. LP: Appreciate the HDC message to abutters. Does not understand the drawings. MR: the master plan is not an engineering drawing, and will be detailed at a later phase. Used to select among some 9 plans. Presented to the Forum. Present benches are remaining, along with Boy Scout tables. LP: A rubber playground is not a green space. Thinks the design is insufficiently complete for a realistic understanding of the design. FA: Likes the design. MR: Many trees will be planted, consistent with both the health of the trees and the rules and regulations for trees in playgrounds. DH: The only thing over which we have jurisdiction is the Archway. Some sort of meeting with Neighbors may be in order. Later discussion will firm up our bylaws to clear when we call Public meetings, and the two classes of abutters notices. The HDC can vote on the playground structures and the archway. A motion for a certificate: AL moves that we approve the arch as depicted, and the playground structures as given in the presentation. RR Seconds. AL will write it up. DH takes a roll call vote: DS – Y, RR – Y, DH – Y, AL - Y; the motion passes.

B. 8:15 Public Hearing: Public Hearing: Proposed Amendment to the HDC Rules and Regulations Regarding Abutter Notices (Continuance) – AL: In Fall 2021, we took on the task of codifying our notice procedures. When there is a Public Hearing, we have been giving mail notice to owners of property within 300 ft of the project. We have been giving notice to owners within 100 ft of the project for applications as to which the HDC there is no need of a full-blown public hearing due to the insubstantial nature of the project. Town Counsel came back with a written approval of these differentiated groups. Our proposed text now reflects this. On advice of Counsel, we also move from "abutters" to "property owners" in describing those persons entitled to notice. DS: the notice goes to owners, not



residents. Not clear that there is any way to propagate that to renters. DH: there could be a substantial rental building nearby. LP: Was told at the last meeting that if the Town is doing work is not obligated to inform property owners. AL: Our committee, and the Zoning Statute, requires such notice. We consider the Town to be owners like any others for this purpose. LP: Had heard in a previous interaction with the town that it was obligatory to notify abutters.

The final written copy was presented this evening. It has been posted. We will then continue to next meeting for formal approval. AL: move that we continue the previously posted hearing on the matter to the next meeting, Feb 22. The motion was seconded. DH takes a roll call vote: DS – Y, RR – Y, DH – Y, AL - Y; the motion passes.

C. 8:32: #2202 273 Central Street Signage – Jill Wheeler joins. Interior design office and meeting space. Sign/logo is basic. Photo is of a different company but with the hardware, style, and layout. Sign will be 26x26. No lights. There is no current sign. Wishes also to place logos in the picture windows, say 20"x20", in form of a decal attached to the glass which is about 130". Mark Foster will repaint the façade, with the black sign. Sign is made of black metal. The lettering needs to be durable; a powder coated paint may be used. AL: Looks appropriate. DS: since it is a different firm, good communication on the details of the design/execution is important. Do not like vinyl stick-on letters. RR: How thick? All in one plane? JW: not chunky! Flat. AL: limitation on the number of signs. Bylaw P allows one sign. Under HDC Rules and Regs, the Window decals are considered signs requiring HDC approval. DH: Clear appliquéd, attached to glass, should work. JW: would like to have info on front door – Web site, hours, phone number, logo as another decal. AL: Moves that we approve the signs depicted in the application. Metal sign 26x26", powder-paint coated, hanging system as shown in the attached photograph, no lighting. Store front to have decal-like signs, Approximately 20x20", one per bay window; front door glass to carry a decal with key contact information.

ZT will be the liaison. DH takes a roll call vote: DS – Y, RR – Y, DH – Y, AL - Y; the motion passes. BR sent notices on Feb. 2, meaning COA cannot go out until Feb. 12.

D. 8:54: #2203 446 Main Street Renovations. DH: some work done without a certificate. RR: some work on some columns. DH: cedar siding, floor boards. RR: nothing was said about roofing. There are firms that can provide fiberglass gutters that can be appropriate. A CNA covers most everything but the gutter. AL will send DH contact info re: a vendor that provided molded fiberglass gutters for projects previously approved. No vote needed.

E. 21:03: HDC Demolition Decision Draft Guidelines. DH: Asked BR to seek more rigorous demolition guidelines. AL has undertaken, with BR and ZT, to develop draft guidelines. AL: MHC suggested treatment carried a list of questions. Believes our guidelines should carry this list of questions. Also: Demolition should be very rare, unless no reasonable alternative is presented. Sec of Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties state that the significance of the building is an important measure in deciding what treatment is appropriate. The Town of Concord has a very complete set of guidelines which have been an important resource for this draft, as have the MHC's Guidebook for HDCs and our Solar Panel guidelines. DH: It is a good start. DS: this leaves no room for an 'improvement' – we leave no room for changes which could improve the historical value of a site. Demolition by neglect could become attractive alternative given this very conservative definition. AL: indeed. Brookline has tried to bring demolition by neglect



into its definition of “demolition” in its Demolition Bylaw. Relationship of a building to its site is also an important factor in deciding whether demolition is appropriate. RR: There is discussion in the draft of demolition of the structure for safety or public-health reasons, which is outside of our purview. AL: The two grounds for demolition over which the HDC has jurisdiction are: Structure no longer sound; or if the building has no historic value. Engineering reports would be needed for an owner to support that first reason. DH: These categories can now generate lists of actions that are required. As a potential example: Choice of a structural engineer should be a mutually-agreed upon 3rd person, no relationship to the applicant, and paid by the applicant. RR: If a Town engineer determines a building must come down, that must be outside of the HDC’s purview. DH: We treat the Town like any other owner for this issue. The approval for condemnation does depend on the use – e.g., commercial use has stiffer requirements. Another example: “Historic Significance” is a more difficult point to render clear and unambiguous. If the building has been altered, does it remove its significance? “Architecture” as a factor is easier to judge. It can simply be representative of an historical epoch or one of a kind and thus of value. DH: there is constant evolution in the built environment. Should we freeze the communities? DS: the continuum of changes are of historical value, and e.g., reverting of changes of 50 years ago to recreate ‘the original building’ would not fulfill the goal of preserving history. DH: try to refine this document to develop decision trees as a means to clarify our intent. RR: how to use the questions? Responses in an application, or to be posed by the HDC at the review? AL: We should have questions that reflect or are designed to probe the decisional factors in the guidelines. DH: thought of this for our use in our discussion of an application. FA: have we ever had a structure demolished? DH: Chadwick. RR: Wave Project. DS: Barn at the corner of Main and Nagog. DS: Should ask Concord HDC if they would change things if writing a new Bylaw. DH: There is a timeline requirement. Could link to a limit on demolition by neglect. Within the purview of the HDC not to allow new construction on a site where demolition by neglect took place. More discussion to follow.

3. Consent Items

None

1. Adjournment

At 9:25, DH makes a motion to adjourn the meeting, RR seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: DS – Y, RR – Y, DH – Y, AL - Y; the motion passes.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Gardner Field presentation
- Bylaw amendment final version
- Demolition draft
- 273 Central St sign photos/drawings
- 446 Main photos of repairs