



Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

2023-04-11

7:00 PM

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

Present: David Honn (DH), Art Leavens (AL), Zach Taillefer (ZT), Anita Rogers (AR), David Shoemaker (DS), Barbara Rhines (BR) (Acton Cultural Resources Coordinator), Fran Arsenault (FA) (Select Board Liaison)

Absent:

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 – March 28, 2023: DS moved their adoption, seconded by AL. AL, AR, ZT, DS, and DH voted to approve. Minutes approved.
- C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet / Chair Updates:
 1. Outstanding COAs/CNAs/Denials – #2312 486 Main – Repointing and misc. repairs – CNA done; #2308 25 Windsor window restoration – DH will take on. 542 Mass Ave – Roofing started without a building permit. Process should be followed now; HDC will review. 70 School – Misc. repairs, will be a CNA, DH to handle.
 2. Asa Parlin Designer Update. Architect selection. Getting going.
 3. 3-13 School Street RFP Update. Proposal for the commuter rail lot and Civil Defense building. One response with 25 units, existing building as a coffee shop.
 4. DH sits on an Acton Study of re-zoning around train stations. All historic districts, conservation areas, and water quality-sensitive sites are excluded from the imperative re-zoning. Central St is the focus of attention. 3-13 School St is excluded as counting as dense housing because it is in a District.

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



A. 7:15. Public Hearing (Continued): 446 Main Street Application # 2306 Slate Roof Replacement. DS recuses himself. DH reads the announcement of the Public Hearing. Sarah McBride (SM), Owner/Applicant, joins. SM: wishing to replace slate roof with the asphalt roof. Purchased 16-18 years ago, and was informed that there is slate on top of a wood roof. The load is excessive and there are structural problems, and there are ice dams regularly. Replacing the slate piece by piece needs to be repeated regularly. Replacing the slate would be very expensive. A metal tie is used to stabilize the building structure, required due to the slate. Additional iron brackets were required to prevent further degradation of the structure. A range of quotes have been sought, all with excessive cost. A structural engineer, Rene Mugnier, made an inspection; some \$25k adjustments to the structure were recommended. This was not pursued professionally. The Cathedral ceiling is in one of the two elements of the house; it is not known when the ceiling was removed (and probably also the structure weakened). Maybe mid-60's. The one iron rod perpendicular to Main St probably does not have the structural integrity of the original joist structure. Engineer said that it was a combination of the two things: slate and missing ceiling. DH: wood roofs need air, and the slate is blocking the evaporation. SM: One can see the cedar where there are missing slates. AL: what is the nature of the deterioration? Any documentation of the deterioration? SM: Pieces are falling; pieces are cracked; pieces are missing; the hooks are such that adding one slate causes others to fall; the hooks are breaking; and the snow needs to be removed with a rake, and this exacerbates the loss. Trimmed trees to reduce moss. Marked on the home inspection report that the roof was in trouble. Expensive to get a written report. AL: Our bylaws do require documentation. AR: Would be very sad to lose the slate roof, and would regret to see it go to asphalt shingles. How about wood? SM: We can't afford a wood roof. Perhaps a certificate of hardship would work? DH: invites AL to describe the Bylaw. AL: Look at the HDC Hardship Review document. Under the Town Bylaw, based on the Historic District statute, GL ch. 40C, there is a two step process. 1) Merits of the project if a CoA should first be addressed, without reference to hardship. 2) If the Certificate is disapproved, then turn to hardship. Need unique circumstances, and not to be detrimental to the public interest. First, the condition causing the hardship must be unique to the building, and lead to substantial hardship for the applicant. Second, the approval of the application must be without substantial detriment to public welfare, and without substantial degradation to the intent/purposes of the Bylaw. Now turn to member opinions. AL: This is an important historic building, and is listed on MACRIS. 1840, Greek Revival; eligible for the National Historic Register. SM: The slate roof is not original. And, the HDC is not intended to create a museum. AL: Indeed, but the bylaw does ask to retain the character of the house now. Under the various relevant bylaws and guidelines, local, state and federal, when there is a distinct architectural feature that can be preserved, it is to be preserved. SM: A report that the roof is no longer repairable could fulfill these requirements, along with hardship. AL: The slate roof would be demolished, and our demolition guidelines request a structural engineering report, a licensed professional would be needed. AL judges that a certificate of appropriateness is not appropriate. DH: As noted in Somerville and our HDC Decision Criteria, changes and additions over time develop significance on their own right. Additions of slate roofs were coveted upgrades to houses in the late 1800's. SM: additions were made more recently.



No slate roofs are in the neighborhood so it stands out. DH: Exactly! ZT: Bought 2008. At that time, what documentation did you receive on the roof? Did you have a clear vision of the burden that came with this roof? SM: The previous owner claimed that it would last forever. The home inspection said maintenance was critical. The weather has been tough, including an early hail which damaged a lot of slates. DH: Town Hall would have records for repairs; a visit there would be best – they know the system well. AL: The Property card would be useful. DH: Sprague visited? They tend to be very expensive. SM: Yes, with a very high price. Another vendor also visited and had a high price. The hooks are made of the wrong material which is causing an early failure. Add to this the problem of rot in the underlying wood roof. Repair is not an option. DH: I see your point. Any more comments from members on the COA. AL: I think a COA is not appropriate. AR: can't vote yet. Want to understand the costs of the different projects. The slate on wood does not make sense. ZT: Would like to know more about the situation from a roofer. Cannot say that it is appropriate to replace a Slate roof with Asphalt. DH concurs. AR: Not a casual decision. Wants to see some competent roofers give quotes for a new slate roof, a wood roof, and an asphalt roof. DH: there may be some support available from the Community Preservation Funds. There are some examples in Acton of this as a successful approach. The incremental cost might be possible. There would be about a year delay. SM: Weight could make slate impossible. DH: that's where an engineering report would be valuable. ZT: if an engineer says the building is incompatible with slate, that would be valuable. AR: Helpful to read the report of the structural engineer. DH: points out that the back of the house is out of view of Main St, and so not in the jurisdiction of the HDC. SM: Not sensible to choose different finishes front and back. Unsure if getting multiple quotes will cause difficulty in closing with a vendor. AR: further information needed for hardship. DH: discussion of the CPC process and probability of success. SM: Assesses that the Committee is not inclined to approve a COA. There is no guarantee that the CPC route will work. Seems that hardship needs to be considered. AL: In terms of the documentation needed, can think of this as a partial demolition. BR reads an email from Terra expressing a desire not to replace the slate roof with asphalt. AL: Reviews Findings in the draft Basis for Review for 446 Main St. AL moves that we adopt the written findings. ZT Seconds. AL, AR, ZT, DH all approve. AL moves we disapprove the application for the replacement of the slate roof. ZT Seconds; AL, AR, ZT, DH all approve. DH: will take up the hardship question at the next meeting. SM: exactly what is needed for the meeting? AL: First, documentation of what renders the problems with this slate roof special, and the demonstration of exceptional hardship. Good cost estimates are certainly important for slate and asphalt. DH: can't recommend contractors, but a list of possible vendors will be shared. AR: The structural engineer report would be welcome. DH: this will be a continuation of the public meeting at the next meeting. SM: what is the degradation to the public well-being? Disheartened by the apparent process and likely outcome. AL: For a sense of how to judge the impact of the project on the Bylaw, look at the factors set forth in the Demolition Guidelines. Note that the hardship vote must be unanimous. AL volunteers to write up the denial. AL moves that the public hearing regarding App. 2306, seeking replacement of the slate roof at 446 Main St., be continued until April 25, 2023. DH seconds. AL, AR, ZT and DH approve. DS returns to the meeting.



- B. 8:15. Application #2310 94 Main Street Window Replacement. No applicant present. DH: After the HDC's initial denial, AR did some research. DH communicated a collection of three windows that would meet HDC approval. The Committee has not heard back. The initially proposed window was not acceptable. AR: found a historic window outfit with some samples of clad sash set up in a wood frame. It shows a good approach to installing a replacement window in a way that looks close to the original appearance, and would not be burdensome to maintain. The frame and sill are retained. May 21st will be the 60-day limit for this application. There will not be quorum for May 9 due to travel by HDC members. A special meeting may be needed on the week of the 15th.
- C. 8:45. Application # 2305 96 Main Street Solar Installation Notice of Waiver Public Comments. DH: Already approved. Notices were delayed, and we wanted to give the public a chance to speak to this; there are no citizens present, so this is closed and completed.
- D. 8:50. Application # 2218 267 Central Street Extend Public Hearing to 4.25.23. DH: we want to extend the Public Hearing. AL moves we continue this Public Hearing to April 25, 2023. DH Seconds. AL, AR, ZT, DS, DH all approve. DH notes that all materials should be sent in advance.
- E. 8:55. Application # 2313 615 Massachusetts Avenue Public Hearing to commence 4.25.23.
- F. 9:00. Violations Discussion. Deferred to another meeting.

3. Consent Items

None

1. Adjournment

At 9:06 DH moves to adjourn the meeting, AL seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: AL, AR, DH, DS, ZT all approve.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting.

- All relevant Applications, in Docushare