

Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

2023-10-24

7:00 PM

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

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

Absent:

Opening:

David Honn opened the meeting at 7:02 pm. DH read the “remote meeting notice” due to COVID-19.

1. Regular Business

A. Citizen's Concerns –

Terra Friedrichs. General comment on Masonry. Observed cracks in foundation; the entire surface of an old foundation was covered with cement by the contractor. Asks that, in considering the application to repair the masonry at 590 Mass. Avenue, we make it clear that there is value in preserving what is of historic value. Concerned about the Gardner Playground situation. Thanks the HDC for service.

David Gerratt, representing Acton Farmers Market. Wishes to move back to West Acton Village, using the revised Gardner Field. Mostly working well. Storage is a need; wants a permanent small storage facility. Asks for next steps with the HDC. DH: Application to the HDC, review, and approval would be normal. But Gardner Field has some significant violations, which must be addressed before entertaining any additional scope; may take months for that. Meeting on 13 Nov may show the pace with which progress could be made. If the right application for a Farmers Market storage unit at Garner Field comes in, it is likely the HDC would approve, but the timing is open. TF: Can the address be used now? DG: No. AL: Temporary buildings are not within our jurisdiction – “temporary” defined as not longer than 2 years. DG: That might work. DH: Important that it be truly temporary. DG: will check with the Town. LATER: AL rereads the regulations, and raises concern although “temporary buildings” are outside HDC jurisdiction, the HDC may attach conditions to the installations of such buildings, and HDC R&R provide that storage units may not be on a property for more than 60 days during any 12-month period. More discussion may be needed. AR: might ask what the permanent shed would be to see if it could be used as the temporary shed. DH: May be best to stick with a Pod. Debbie Andell with Farmers Market called, stating a Pod needed for the full season. Will carry AL’s revised understanding to DG.

Nora Masler from Planning (and Sustainability). Wishes to make the ‘Red House’ (468

Main St) more inviting to the community. Exploring accessible picnic benches, raised beds, landscaping. No changes to the external building. DH: Best to come back with a place in the Agenda at the next meeting. Will put it on the Agenda for 14 November meeting.

- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – 10 October 2023: DS moved their adoption, seconded by DH. AR, DH, DS, DH, ZT approve. AL abstains having missed the meeting. Minutes approved.

C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet / Chair Updates:

Outstanding and Completed COAs/CNAs/Denials

- HDC Letter to HC (DH) Re: Concord Road HD – DH not yet done.
- 85 School Street Roof CNA (DH) – issued.
- 525 Massachusetts Avenue Signage (ZT) Due 11.12.23 -- #2333. ZT to take care of it.
- 12 Concord Road Solar Panels PH on 11.14.23 – DH: public hearing on the 14 November; all HDC members to walk the public street to check all angles on the roofs in question.
- 504 Main St, Women's Club – Historic Marker query, needs placement. BR sent them the application.
- 450 Main St: BR says still no application, but expected to allow a discussion end of November.
- Town Hall fountain: -- AR notes they sent dates. If it is only in place for a short period of time, it may be best to arrange a short HDC meeting. BR: will post as a Site Walk. AR: Neighbors may be interested as well. BR to circulate dates to the HDC. Plan to meet 6 November 9am.

2. New/Special Business or other applicable agenda items

- A. 7:15 Application # 2135 Gardner Field: Status Update. Not Ready, so 'Continued'.
- B. 7:30 Application #2335 (Continued) 543 Massachusetts Avenue Signage. Katie Gorczyca and Cindy McCarthy joins. Bill Crosby joins. KG: Appreciates the input from HDC at the last meeting. Shares screen with a revised signage approach. Larger type on left and right of the Main St door. Same Materials as discussed at the previous meeting, internal illumination. DH, AR, AL, DS, ZT all like Front 3. Other sign received a lot of discussion. Wishes to use actual Copper sheet with the words cut out but without back lighting, placed on the East face of the building, close to the sidewalk. Removed material (e.g., 'D') is attached to the backing. AR: Likes it. Size ok, or smaller would be ok; 'of the context'. AL: Looks fine. DS: the downspout is helpful in putting it in place. ZT: Likes scale. Curious about mounting and distance from wall. Are plantings going to conflict? Bill Crosby: Copper might be a 1/4" off the backing to give a little shadowing. The mounting hardware will be hidden – likely a 'double French cleat'. No border. KG: plantings will be made such that the sign remains visible. DH: Likes it. AR: requests the smaller sign, and notes that it is closer to the scale of the window and 'respects' the window; would like the smaller sign and a bit lower. The Larger sign also better lower.

DH agrees. KG: only concern is that if too small can be lost on the wall. DH: Medium sign would work if installed a bit lower. AR: top of sign no higher than the opening for the window. BC: Medium sign is 4'7" wide, 2' 9" tall. Motion: approve 2 sign installations at 543 Mass Ave., one being on either side of the main entrance, existing backlighting, PVC. Other sign to be copper, with patina, and with white backing. No illumination. AL Seconds. AR, AL, ZT, DS, DH all approve.

- C. 7:45 Application #2332 and #2337 590 Massachusetts Avenue Warehouse Masonry Repair/Window Infill. Mark Foster (MF), Applicant, joins. MF: Block replacement and window coverings. Block, #2332: Difficult to find the original blocks, a Sears product from the 1930's. Woodfaced blocks an alternative; not an exact copy but textured. (Photos show some very ordinary blocks.) Has created a mold from a 3D scan of the surface to make replicas, but it is pretty labor intensive, especially for 50 or so blocks. A split-face block has some texture and depth and may be acceptable. Uniform texture on the entire corner of the repair when completed. No good long-term use for the structure as is and will be impacted by the ultimate re-use of the Church. Wishes to remove the windows and their rusted-out frames, and replacing them with panels. DH: Since the entire corner will be replaced, probably should admit it is an intervention, and use a material that does not jar with the old brick. Might consider a brick corner – could be concrete brick for structural reasons. The home-made textured blocks are quite successful. AL: Likes the home-made 3D block. Or a 'new corner'. AR: Not fond of something completely different; likes the home-made 3D block. DS: likes the 'completely different' approach, or the home-made 3D blocks. ZT: 3D blocks are good. Public Comment: TF (calling in): Does not see the photos; BR says they are in Docushare. TF: would like the blocks to be dark, and wishes that the mortar would be artistic and show variation. Proposes buttermilk and moss to create a more decorated surface. AR: not in favor of inconsistent mortar with the rest of the wall. AR: Move we approve of the corner of the building at 590 Mass Ave with CMUs that have been customized by the owner to resemble the old blocks, and to use mortar and techniques to resemble the original wall. Motion seconded. AR, AL, ZT, DS, DH approve. AR to write it up.
- Windows, #2337: MF: Plan to replace windows and rusted out frames with panels. What kind of panel. Recommends T111 panels which are appropriate and durable. Frames to be removed, and panels to be supported with 2x4 structure. A temporary solution until the final use of the building is determined. DH: something smoother than T111 may be better for painting. AR: concerned about rotting at the sill. A compressible filler may be best. Dark green would be nice. AL: The Governing Way is taken to be Central St, so the look is oblique and window-replacement is more acceptable. ZT: fine. DS: would love to see the windows rehabilitated, but the solution proposed is fine. Move we approve the removal of the existing steel frame windows at 590 Mass Ave, and replace them with an interim repair of infill of T111 panels coplanar with the existing windows. Existing windows are rusted beyond repair. Motion is seconded. AR, AL, ZT, DS, DH approve. AR to write COA.

- D. 8:15 COA #2313 (Amend) 615 Mass Ave. Window Renovations/Replacement. AR recuses herself. Lisa Adamiak (LA) Architect, joins. LA: Refers to previous meeting's

discussion. It is urgent to proceed to protect the building from further degradation. Quotes for removal of the four windows found to have asbestos in the glazing, with their asbestos, is expensive. To determine if the windows could be refurbished requires removal of asbestos, and the windows may not survive that process; then there would be additional cost to rebuild the windows *if* rebuilding is feasible. The cost would be \$18,000 for 4 windows if all the windows could be rebuilt. The four windows in question are on the upper story of the front of the house. The asbestos must be abated by law. AL: Are you seeking a Certificate of Hardship, or are you using the term “hardship” simply to describe the difficulties and expense involved? LA: Is not familiar with the hardship condition in the Bylaw. DH looked at the windows; can’t see asbestos. Experts consider this a surprising use of asbestos. Planned use as an elderly person’s home and that makes the laws re: asbestos rather demanding. DS: Thinks the windows would not survive the process of asbestos abatement, and the windows effectively do not exist any more. ZT: Finds this a unique situation and reasonable to pursue a hardship application. Public Comment TF: Recommends we have the asbestos report be included in the documentation. Is it necessary to call it a hardship? May set a precedent that is not desirable. Believes that the rest of the detail will provide a proper historic presence to the building without the original windows in the place. LA: Will provide the documentation. AL: If too expensive, it is not a good basis to allow the replacement. However, if the windows are not able to be refurbished, that is not a circumstance requiring a Hardship Certificate, and could just be a normal HDC decision. DH: Believes that this is a case of unusable windows. ZT: Agrees. The windows appear to be unrepairable, due to the unique conditions of this situation. DH: Moves that the COA be amended to permit the the south-facing windows original house levels 2 and 3, a total of 4 windows to be replaced. The finding is that Asbestos has been found in the exterior putty, and must be remediated if the existing windows are used. The likely outcome is that the windows would be damaged beyond repair, and the glass not salvageable. Therefore the HDC approves the substitute window, a Windsor Hybrid previously approved for other windows in the original application. AL Seconds. TF: Recommends ‘see attached Asbestos finding’. Findings should also include that the four windows in question are quite distant from the reference Street. AL, ZT, DS, DH approve. #2313 Amendment. DH to write the amended COA. AR returns.

- E. 9:00 Application #2327 53 River Street Park Elements. DH recuses himself; AR chairs. Mike Gendron (MG), Natural Resources, joins. AR: At last discussion there was a lack of a quorum, and a question on the location of the park benches. They are foreseen to be along the walking path, but exact locations cannot be specified at this point in the project; the number is not known, and in fact park benches may not be installed; could eliminate them from the application. MG: will remove them. A vote is needed for this ‘part 2’ of the application, approving parking lots, Bollards, historical signage, hydrant and noting parking-lot screening, bike rack. Leaving benches out. BR: this is an amendment of #2327. AR to liaise. Move we approve the selection of parking lots, Bollards, historical signage, hydrant and screening, per the plan. When benches are desired, a new application will be made. AL seconds. DS, AL, ZT, AR approve. DH returns.

- F. 9:30 Application # 2336 14 Newtown Road Emergency Generator. DS recused. DH:

Invokes the rule of necessity. ZT is an abutter but needed for a quorum. Town Counsel and the applicant are in agreement with the procedure. DS: Wish to install a generator ~150 ft from the street in a location that would be hard to see, per the application. AL: Thinks it might be visible but of a minor visible impact. Does not object. ZT: believes ok. Public Comment. TF: does not object; requires plantings as screening would be better than fence. DH: Motion to approve the generator at 14 Newtown Road, 120 ft from Newtown Road. If visible after installation, a fence or planting will be required and subject to approval by the HDC. Rule of Necessity applied due to the exceptional lack of a quorum otherwise. AR seconds. AR, AL, ZT, DH approves. DS returns.

- G. 9:00 Application # 2325 37 Windsor Avenue Window Replacement. No applicant and no visible progress. Will plan to discuss at next meeting, October 14th.

3. Consent Items

None

1. Adjournment

At 9:45 DH moves to adjourn the meeting, AR seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: DS seconds. AL, AR, DS, DH, ZT all approve.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting.

- All relevant Applications and Documents, in Docushare