

Historic District Commission
Town Hall, Room 126
Final Meeting Minutes, August 13, 2013

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TOWN CLERK, ACTON

Meeting called to order at 7:30 PM. Attending Kathy Acerbo-Bachmann (KAB), David Honn (DH), Pamela Lynn (PL), David Shoemaker (DS), and Anita Rogers (AR). Mike Gowing (MG) as BoS liaison.....Ron Regan attending as a potential member. Terra (TF) and Wayne Friedrichs and Renee Robbins attending as citizens.

Citizens' questions:

David Honn, a direct abutter, recused himself and spoke as a citizen on the following issue after which he rejoined the group.

David Honn reported that he met with town engineer Corey York, Stamski and McNary principal George Dimarkarakos, real estate representative Kevin Forsyth and property owner Pam Stevens concerning a newly created lot (Lot A-2) at 1 Lilac Court. Although the lot itself is not in the South Acton Historic District, the lot is bordered by its southern side by a 4 foot high granite stone wall. The wall abuts the sidewalk of School Street and is in the School Street town right-of-way which is in the district.

The owner is proposing a new driveway entrance and sewer connection which will alter/remove some of the wall. Due to the size of the stones, the wall appears to have been constructed at the time School Street was created in the mid-1700's. Mr. Honn notified the parties that HDC review/approval is required for altering walls in the districts. There was a question whether or not walls in the right-of-way are under HDC purview. It was agreed that KAB will check with town counsel for direction.

7:35 PM Minutes: July 30, 2013 minutes approved by consent.

7:36PM – Update on Commuter Rail Improvement/West Acton Train Crossing

Corey York shared that essentially the project in West Acton is done. He had met with DPU and the plan is essentially what is there now. It was presented to the Selectman in 2011 and they built what is out there now. They made some modification due to safety concerns.

KAB asked how to cure the amount of signage, whether the asphalt could be replaced with concrete, noted that a fence within the district was put up without a certificate, and suggested the interior of the brick divider could be filled with plantings. The MBTA put a chain link fence (which is inconsistent with the Historic District) along the tracks next to New London Style Pizza, to the HDC's best knowledge with at the request of the pizzeria, but the MBTA will be putting fencing at the South Acton station that looks more like picket style. The station in Hamilton has a nice looking fence as an example. KAB would propose that the MBTA replace the existing chain link fence at West Acton with one similar to the one in Hamilton.

The center islands and obstruction markers were required by the MBTA and DPU. The DPU came out and watched cars stop on the tracks and that was their concern. Corey assumes that they were required to put in at least one but probably put more due to what they were observing. TF indicated there are a total of thirteen signs. KAB suggests consideration of the placement of the signs is an issue. A remedy might be to put one further ahead. Corey shared that when the MBTA comes out, there is the possibility that they will express concern about something else. They did make some accommodations by removing one island. That may be the reason why more signs went in. In the past the MBTA had indicated that they would like to reduce or eliminate the on-street parking in the area.

KAB summarized that the issue is that the solution should be something that works. Could it be that the initial placement wasn't right? Could they step back and consider what would be most effective? Corey suggested that the Selectman take up the issue.

DH explained Hamilton's island solution to signage with plantings and one effective sign. KAB suggested using DH's photos and Mike indicated the first step is to send the issue to the Town Manager.

TF would like to consider asking for wooden signs. DH believes it would take a landscape architect to redesign the area. For instance, the curbing does not effectively guide pedestrians through the area. KAB asked Corey whether the concrete could be made consistent. Renee asked for clarification about asphalt near the pharmacy. It had been asphalt before. Corey indicates concrete can be put in that area but has not previously seen concrete at the tracks inside the gates.

KAB and DH asked if the curbs could be made consistent? Could granite curbs be budgeted for next year? DS wondered how significant an investment has the town made in this area. Corey believed not much as the work has been done by the MBTA.

TF suggested the possibility to have a sign that says Welcome to.....KAB asked about plantings. DH clarified that a box planter was used in Hamilton. AR suggests making contact with the Garden Club to care for the planters.

Wayne Friedrichs believes the fence is the most unattractive element.

Renee Robbins wondered why the fence is necessary at all. She believes it makes the area more dangerous. It did not involve Corey's office as it was a negotiation between New London Style Pizza and the MBTA. Wayne suggested shrubs rather than a fence. KAB suggested arbor vitae instead. TF suggests hedges are thicker and so a better deterrent.

Renee wondered about the pharmacy's decision to take the trees down and replace them with asphalt. The trees were in the town's right of way. KAB indicated that the trees were removed without permission. The remedy would be to remove the asphalt and replace the trees.

Following on a comment by Mike questions arose about grandfathering of the pharmacy's sign.

Mike suggested considering whether Windsor Ave should be one way to avoid cars being trapped on the tracks by eliminating a left turn onto Windsor by cars traveling west. Cars traveling east making left turns onto Spruce St. may also be a cause of cars backing up. WF, Renee Robbins, and Ron Regan were adamant that Windsor Ave. should not become one-way. The recently installed bump out may have exacerbated this dilemma. Previously cars could pass a turning car on the right.

Recap – DH will send pictures to Corey. Fence issue is under purview of MBTA, rest belongs to the town. KAB suggested that Corey return in a month for an update.

8:15PM –Appl. 1330: 492 Main St. Signs

Erin Webb has requested to retain the existing signs but refurbished and with new lettering for the new business. AR expressed concern about the fact that the left side

sign has all upper case lettering while the sign on the right has both upper and lower case. If the tenant would like, a graphic could be included in the left side sign to have the amount of text/graphic be more similar to the right side.

AR clarified that the sign maker will need to prepare the sign graphics prior to making it to allow her to determine its suitability. If Erin can do this, AR will have final check. KAB would suggest the ampersand be reduced in size to be similar in height to the lower case letters.

A motion was made and accepted unanimously to accept the sign as described above with Anita as the final signoff.

AR moved to approve application 1330 to repaint the existing two signs at 492 Main St. The Open Door sign is to be a combination of upper and lower case letters and Tutoring & Test Prep sign is also a combination with the ampersand to be the same size as the small case letters. The signs are to be painted using the existing wood signs with the colors to stay the same as the existing signs. The final artwork will be submitted to Anita. Seconded by DS and accepted unanimously.

8:30PM – Appl. 1325: 12 Concord Rd. – Acton Congregational Church – Steps

KAB indicated that revised drawings had been sent recently. Greg Waters indicated that the two changes proposed last time have been accepted – new railings will be angular instead of curved and the paving stones at the landings will not be turned on the diagonal. The landing has been changed to the same granite as the steps and the steps will come out at 90 degrees.

DH wondered if Caledonia granite is grey. Greg indicated that they upgraded the granite. DH – pieces of granite? GW – slabs of cut granite.

KAB thinks changes are an improvement. DS asked if the surface of the granite is to be polished. No, to prevent slips.

TF wonders about shape of stairs, the loss of the jutting out aspect in existence now, about which GW indicated was both more expensive and a trip hazard. AR does think the stucco is the weak link. GW thinks plantings can minimize the appearance of the stucco wall.

DH suggests changing the railing returns as it is difficult to hit the wall precisely. He recommended use of a post on each side at the top of the stairs.

Motion: DH moved to approve application 1325, the Acton Congregational Church step and railing replacement using drawings dated 8/2/2013, with a Condition being that the railings adjacent to the wall have a return with posts attached to the terrace rather than directly attached to the walls as shown on hand sketch L1 and L2 with notations dated 8/13/2013.

Motion seconded by AR with the Recommendation that appropriate landscaping would obscure the stucco side of the porch. A further Recommendation was made that members of the church pursue locating historical photos of the church to better understand historical landscaping. Accepted unanimously.

8:54PM – Appl. 0906AA: 525-531 Mass. Ave. – Design Updates (formerly called WAVE)

Suggestions were made to add panes to the transoms and sidelites and reduce the scale of the entry grouping at the blue house. Both have been modified. It had also been suggested that the doors and shop windows offered three same sized shapes so changed to a mirror image of each other and moved to the sides. On the blue house porch enclosure, the many paned windows were changed to a pattern used elsewhere with smaller and larger double hung windows. Muntins were added to the transoms and sidelites at the barn door and the sidelites at the blue house.

Focusing on drawings p. 2, it was discussed previously that the stone was higher and stopped on either side of opening. An effort was made to create a design with bolted steel to create an attractive façade featuring a visible lintel. DH found a barn behind Hartwell Tavern which has no expressed lintels and they have used that as the model. By simplifying it has allowed consistent line for the bottom of the clapboards. DH reminds that they have asked OMR for a full mock-up of the stonework. Success with the stone veneer will require the skill of the mason.

Focusing on drawings p. 3...underneath the awnings there will be recessed lighting. OMR tends to lean toward understated modern lighting. Lighting will be white. However, no lighting has been approved

KAB liked the lintel solution and that the stonework will be critical. AR said that a stonework sample will be installed onsite for consideration.

TF suggested having the stones be as big as possible. The pedestrian opening could be reduced to enhance the potential of the stonework. TF added the railings should be equivalent to those on the Acton Congregational Church – linear and wrought iron. KAB indicated more detail on front railings is needed. TR felt front double hung windows are very big.

DS wondered about the vertical siding between windows on upper level. AR says will be tongue and groove boards – either v- groove or square edge, probably square edge. DH said really a flat, painted wall. KAB suggested specification of this element to minimize the visibility of the siding joints.

MG suggested the west windows only seen from driveway be clad as they will be difficult to maintain. These are second and third floor 150 feet from the street. AR suggests if clad, sashes should, however, be wooden frames. AR shared that they are a tilt sash which are easy to remove, paint, and return.

KAB asked about why transom treatment on the left is not done as on the right (east). Doors and openings seem so much the same. She would like to see something more varied... more organic ...seems too cookie-cutter. AR and MG remind her of the three-dimensionality of the façade.

MG reminded to pursue a weathervane and lightning rods.

TF is concerned about repetitious quality of façade in general and large plate-glass windows in particular. Discussion led to the suggestion that the sill height of the windows should be higher, maybe 18 – 20 inches. DH believed that this would likely help with presentation of merchandise which should not be put on the floor. DH would make the siding under the windows a flush board. KAB pondered if there might be a creative way to introduce some variation?

AR suggested OMR needs to present a lighting plan. DH was uneasy with recessed lights, preferable to have some fixtures visible. No lighting fixtures have been approved to date.

9:45PM – Update on HDC Meeting with Town Staff

Pam reported on the notes of a very effective meeting held with representatives of the HDC, Assessors, Planning, Clerk and Building Departments at the request of MG.

MG shared that the departments came away with a better understanding of the work flow. Eva has begun attaching the field card to the application. Frank offered to take over the public hearing adds. KAB indicates that the public hearing and abutters notice mailings are the most challenging and time-consuming tasks. MG will follow up with Town Counsel issues of the proper distance for notification of abutters and the currently acceptable location of Public Hearing notifications. If parcel notation is standardized and abutters distance clarified, then these steps can be dealt with more efficiently.

TF wonders whether MUNIS would allow HDC to see Planning Department's workflow on issues that would be relevant. It might also allow individuals to express which violations were most important to address.

Review of logistical issues –

Next meeting will be the communications workshop previously discussed August 26 and starts early.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:57PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Pamela Lynn
Vice Chair acting as Secretary

