



Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

02/09/2021

7:00 PM

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

Present: David Honn (DH), Ron Regan (RR), Art Leavens (AL), Zach Taillefer (ZT).

Absent: Anita Rogers (AR), Fran Arsenault (FA), David Shoemaker (DS), Dean Charter (DC) BOS liaison.

1. Opening

Chair David Honn opened the meeting at 7:01 pm and read the “remote meeting notice” due to COVID-19.

2. Regular Business

- A. Citizen's Concerns – Renee Robbins called in to ask if we were discussing the Single to Multi-family dwelling conversion by right; DH said it was on the agenda as a reminder that we need to write a memo response.
- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – DH had some updates to the minutes. AL makes a motion to approve the minutes from February 9th. RR seconds, DH takes a roll call vote: RR – Y, AL – Y, ZT – Y, FA – Y, DH – Y, the motion passes 4-0.
- C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet – no new applications, spreadsheet up to date.

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

- A. Application 2101 Bee's Knees signs at 562 Mass Ave by Lucinda Sears

ZT Liaison. Updated drawings for signs are shown. A new smaller sign will be used in place of the original sign, 20" tall x 30" wide of 1" MDO painted white with digital printed design with blue molding trim (match the door), mounted with brass eyebolts to existing bracket near door. The directional wall sign will be ½" MDO 24" wide x 30" tall painted white with digital print and blue molding trim. Will be mounted to siding with L-brackets. DH asks for comments:

AL – They've done what was asked and is appropriate with sizing and framing. Will there be lighting? No.

ZT – Looks good, is exactly what we discussed in last meeting.

RR – Looks good, are you not reusing the existing side? Lucinda – It would have cost almost the same just to add the trim to the existing one and this allowed us to make it smaller to fit the bracket near the door better.



DH – Looks great, border, mounting is good. For the wall mounted sign, if you could have them align it with the horizontal edge of the clapboard, it would look better.

DH – I'll have ZT work with FA.

DH makes a motion to approve the proposed signs as depicted on the drawings S1 and S2 dated 1/26 and the wall mounted sign lines up with the clapboard joints. Governing way: Mass Ave. AL seconds. DH takes a roll call vote:

RR – Y, AL – Y, ZT -Y, DH – Y, vote approved 4-0 pending abutters notices.

B. Pre-Application meeting 9 School St by John Perkins and Chris Dallmus

Chris goes over the history of the project and introduces the proposed solution. A single second empire styled building with six units. The middle two units are set back about 1 1/2 feet from the face of the other four units. The building is mirrored across the center such that the left three units are a mirror of the right three. The two units on each side have bay windows. Each entry has double doors and bracketed covering. Single windows on the first and second floor will have traditional shutters. John would like some guidance on window options, materials, and roofing.

DH gives an overview/history of the site – the site is currently empty; it had a large building that burned down a while ago. The site is near Exchange Hall and Main St., it has the tracks behind it and parking lot next to it.

We encouraged the applicant to do a single apartment or condo block instead of smaller units so it would match the scale of Exchange Hall. The location is quite exposed, and we felt the scale needed to be large to hold the site. We asked for a roof form that would increase the volume and bulk of the building but doesn't increase the FAR, which is low for this site. Chris commented that the third-floor area is for mechanicals and storage only so it doesn't add to the FAR.

DH asks for comments:

RR – I like this design and I think it fits well for this site. I have a question about the roof, is there a change in pitch indicated by the lines at the corners where the building projects forward? Chris - No, I was looking at a roof plan after doing this elevation and the top ridge will probably come down and align with the ridge on the left and right side. RR – For the roofs over the bay windows and door entries, will those be flat or very low pitch? Chris – Yes, it's a relatively flat roof surface. Back in 1875 it would have been a flat soldered roof, maybe we'd use zinc, it's a decision for John. RR – What about gutters, will you have them integrated in the crown or mounted on the face? Chris -- I expect we will have mounted gutters on the facia that will appear as a crown.

Discussion on Fiberglass gutters – we do allow them in the district.

AL – I think the scale stands up to and compliments Exchange Hall. To clarify where the space for the mechanicals will be located, is that in the mansard section of the roof with the windows? Chris – yes. AL – I think when the back ridge shown in the elevation is dropped down to match the ends it will look more proportional.



ZT – I think you captured the architecture of the area; this plan is very attractive. Are all the windows 2 over 2? Will they have the same dimensions? Chris – All the windows will be 2 over 2 except for the sides in the bay, which are narrower, and will be 1 over 1. The first-floor windows will be taller than the second and third. The second floor is the sleeping area. ZT – for a building of this size I would expect to see multiple chimneys, will there be any chimneys? Chris – There won't be a need for them. In the era of these buildings with the addition of heating systems in the basement the chimneys were simpler and utilitarian. DH – The roof isn't going to be very visible and I think we want to downplay it; this is more about the façade. We can think about it in the future. ZT – have you considered parking? Chris – The site falls off in the back and in the original plan was to have access on the east side and having parking in the back underneath the building.

DH – For the two side elevations is the intent to turn the corner and have the same windows with shutters and the same cornice? Chris – The shutters make the front elevation more commanding and maybe not place the shutters on the side wall. Are you opposed to shutters that aren't wood? DH – We haven't approved any that are not, but AR is in favor. The key is the right style, width and height, and have the right kind of hardware.

Chris – We've been thinking about Marvin or Kolbe clad window in a wood frame, John wanted to know your thoughts on Anderson windows. DH – We haven't approved Anderson; they don't have the historic look. AR is the residential window expert; you should consult with her.

Chris – For roofing is split 3-tab okay? DH – We had discussed wood shingles. Chris – In West Acton Villageworks they used asphalt for the face of the mansard roof and I think the wood is going to be cost prohibitive. DH – Is there a synthetic shingle, does Hardy make a shingle? Chris – I've used them in the past, but the shingles don't look authentic. The top of the roof would be rubber membrane; it won't be very visible. AL – For 3 Wood Lane they used rubber and there was a condition that it couldn't be seen from the street.

No motion was made.

C. Discussions

1. Temporary Buildings and Structures

Regarding the plastic greenhouse building without a COA: DH will reach out to owner and ask if they can move it. DH – how do people feel about approving something like that? It has a home-made frame with plastic covering. AL – Using a plastic fence as an analog, the Design Guidelines provide that there be no plastic fences, particularly in front of the house. If we don't allow plastic fences, we shouldn't allow plastic buildings, particularly in the front.

2. Summary Memo for Proposed Warrant Article for Single to Multifamily Conversions

DH to write up a memo with the notes from our last meeting; the HC is also writing up a memo.



3. ZBA Setback Bylaw Warrant Article

DH – There were two recent projects to construct buildings in the original footprint of historic buildings that encroached into the zoning setback. The applicants applied for special permits to the ZBA for variances. In one case the permit was granted; in the other case the permit was denied.

AL – The governing statute MGL ch. 40A, sec. 10, which is incorporated in the Town Bylaw 10.5.5.1, limits the circumstances the ZBA can grant a variance from the setback requirement. They can only consider soil conditions, shape, or topography of the lot, such that the setback would cause a substantial hardship to the petitioner. In the case of 66 School St none of those conditions applied so the variance was denied. For 3 Wood Lane due to the shape of the lot they were granted a variance.

It doesn't seem the town can amend the bylaw covering variances because it is mandated by MGL ch. 40A, sec. 10, which limits the circumstances to what the bylaw already allows. The zoning bylaw does offer some promise. Section 5.3, Special Provisions and Exceptions to Dimensional Regulations, has exceptions such as walls, fences, uncovered steps, and similar structures. We could craft a narrow addition to the exceptions for the siting of buildings replacing, in like manner, buildings which were of historical significance and in the original boundaries. If we could add this type of exception, then a variance wouldn't be needed because the structure would be covered by the zoning bylaw.

DH – In the past I had asked Town Counsel about the HDC having authority to decrease the setback and they said no; we may be able to increase it, but not decrease it.

AL – We're not asking to reduce the setback, but to add to the already existing list of exceptions allowed by zoning.

ZT – Would the exception need to include language that this only applies in the historic districts or is that covered by some other aspect of the bylaw? I'm concerned with the appearance that we are overreaching our purview.

AL – We could limit it, but I'm not sure that we would want to as there are historic homes not in districts that might have the same kind of problem and could benefit by this exception. I don't think this will apply to very many cases, but if it applies, I don't see a reason why it should be limited to just the districts.

DH – We should focus on the historic districts as this is where it comes up the most; the planning department doesn't like expansive changes.

There was a discussion of the procedure for zoning by-law amendments.

AL will work on bylaw-change language.

4. Chapter P Coordination with MGL 40C

When Acton created the historic districts in 1990 some of the exclusions went beyond what is permissible by MGL Chapter 40C Sec. 8 in the Town's Bylaw P section 9.1. For example, the state's law exempts temporary structures or signs, but the Town's Bylaw



exempts temporary buildings, structures, decorations, or signs. AL doesn't think the Town was allowed to add buildings to that section. There are a few other things that the Town added that don't appear, like curb cuts, point of access served by handicapped access ramps and non-traditional materials. DH – I would expect that the Town Counsel went through chapter P, as well as the Secretary of State office, and wouldn't have allowed the town to exceed what was allowed by 40C.

Some of the things that are excluded have raised questions if we should remove the exclusion, for example roof and painting colors. For the most part, Commission members as well as residents have thought that would be too intrusive. Paving materials also come up a lot. In places like Somerville and Cambridge they have jurisdiction over materials.

The Town opted to have a single governing way for making determinations on what is in the purview of the commission, which is allowed under 40C, but not required. Acton has a lot of corner lots where the importance of the views are equal. For example, the intersection of School St. and Main St.

DH asks for comments:

RR – As far as paving materials, my walkway is asphalt and doesn't look nice, I've considered replacing it with pavers at some point. On the other hand my driveway is asphalt and fairly large, I'm not sure I'd want to do the whole thing in pavers. I wouldn't want to get into paint colors, that is a reasonably temporary aspect and doesn't change the architectural features. Regarding the multiple vantage points, what we would do in cases where people want to have an air conditioning unit or backup generators?

ZT – For painting color, you never want to have the power until you want to have that power. I'm open to adding color to our jurisdiction if we're liberal with enforcing it. I agree with adding multiple vantage points of jurisdiction. For paving, I have a pea-stone driveway that is a pain to shovel and snow blow, and I'd like something easier to maintain like stone pressed into asphalt.

AL – For driveway paving I think it would add a lot of expense for not a lot of payback. I do agree with expanding jurisdiction with a number of vantage points. I don't think paint color is that big an issue but would be open to it.

DH – I agree with driveways. Authentic driveways for Acton would be dirt or gravel and dirt, and that wouldn't be very convenient. In terms of paint, we could take a soft approach and have educational seminars and encourage historical colors. I think as many views as possible would be good; we could include distance for the secondary way.

We can continue the discussion at the next meeting; think about what the language for the warrant articles would look like.

No motion was made.

5. Adjournment



At 8:59p.m., AL makes a motion to adjourn the meeting, RR seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: RR – Y, AL – Y, ZT – Y, DH – Y, motion passes 6-0.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Minutes from February 9th;
- Application 2101– Bee’s Knees signs;
- 9 School Street Site Plan and Front Elevation;
- Summary Ch. 40A Sec 5 Zoning Bylaw Amendments;
- Zoning By-law Set-back provision.