



Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

2022-03-22

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), Anita Rodgers, (AR), Barbara Rhines (BR) Cultural Resource Planner, Fran Arsenault (FA) BOS liaison, Zach Taillefer (ZT).

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 – Michaela Moran: Application for repairs at 80 School, and 34 School. Should be mostly replacement in kind. One exterior French door is rotted, back of the house at 80 School. Visible but far from the street. Current door is glazed with a grille. DH: Fiberglass doors have been approved in the past. Have just received but not processed the applications. AR: Steel is not a good solution. If not wood, fiberglass probably ok. Direct Glaze should be chosen – the way the glass meets the wood is attractive. Wood is still possible; Simpson would be one possible vendor. But true divided lites in doors tend to have wide muntins.
Second question: A chimney was removed, but the certificate will expire before some action taken. DH: Send an email with a copy and the HDC can renew.
- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – DS makes a motion to approve the minutes from 8 March 2022; AL second, DH takes a roll call vote: RR – Y, DS – Y, DH – Y, ZT – Y AL – Y; AR – Y. The motion passes.
- C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet – Up to date. 8 Concord is there; waiting on the CoA for the Common, ZT to complete.
- D. Chair Update:
 1. 8 Concord Road Site Visit – a visit was made in sub-quorum groups of the HDC on the morning of 22 March. ZT will seek an opportunity to visit. DH: We will need a Public Meeting on the topic. It may need also to be taken to the Town Meeting.
 2. 9 School Street: DH – CoA earlier approved. Builder looking at some alternative designs. Higher densities would be considered.
 3. Proposed MBTA Zoning: DH: Kristen presented the proposed bylaw; a prerequisite to receive funds from the state. Would require ~1300 units within 0.5 miles of the South Acton train station.



4. FA: Select Board will not put the increase in Community Preservation on the Town Warrant. The additional tax burden seemed not timely. Currently at 1.5%; could come up to 3%.
5. AL: Is our proposed zoning bylaw on track to get on the Warrant? FA will look into it. Kristen would be the person to take action.

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

- A. 7:27 25-27 School Street Discussion. David and Laura Veo joins. Building on the RR tracks is the topic. DH: 1) could be repaired 2) could be re-created. Photos serve that purpose. HDC does not determine use. DV: would love to have another dwelling. Will not prepare drawings for a new dwelling that is identical unless there is an assurance that there will be approval. It could be made sound. 3 Units in the main building. DH: allowed 4 by right, so it could be a dwelling; could be a cute studio. AL: Previous suggestion is was to continue to talk about a solution; we would like to see a concrete proposal. RR: Won't last much longer as it stands. Maybe removing the back would be a first step. DS: a proposal would be welcome. AR: Is it feasible to have a building where it is? Maybe best to move (or replicate) to a different place on the property. Would be open to changes in the footprint or height. ZT: Not so familiar with the building. Would like to hear a proposal, with an eye on preservation and consistency of aesthetic. Even informal sketches welcome. LV: will make some drawings; just don't want to waste money on drawings that would not be used. DH: The back part without a foundation can't be saved. Best to do something with the rest of the building. The view from School St, possibly with an addition to the left, could work – if the building could survive a rebuild of the foundation. Suspect that a rebuild from the ground up is probably better. LV: units in the main building are around 1000 sq ft. DV: Front of building is facing the municipal lot. How about rotating the building? DH: don't see much advantage. DV: Will look if the structure is acceptable, removing the overhang, and look at building out to the left seen from School St. The Conservation Commission may provide complications for the path forward, but there are some compatible ideas to pursue. DV/LV: come back in April or May. DH: Some sketches would suffice for us to offer more substantive recommendations. A partial demolition could be considered for that back cantilevered section; it is incompatible with all codes. AR: Start with a structure expert, and with ConComm; those constraints will help pave the path forward. It may have some advantages to document the current roof area. DS: need to try to establish a rule on demolition by neglect.
- B. 7:52 HDC Demolition Decision Draft Guidelines Discussion (continued). AL: One suggestion from last meeting was to harden the distinction of building and structure. Propose that we use the terms interchangeably in this document unless a distinction is needed. RR: We were using without care 'structure' as defined here, and the general notion of 'mechanical structure'. DH: 'structural framing system' where that is what we mean for 'structure'. Group prefers demolition 'strongly' discouraged. Group prefers 'and/or', and 'no' historic value. RR: There was a plywood building on Main St., that had *no* historical value, as an example. Definition or expansion of MACRIS is needed. A link would be good. RR: The relation of the buildings in the districts to the built and natural



environment external to the Districts is of relevance. DH: The districts collectively form a whole, and then ‘one of a kind’ buildings are also important. BR: “Collective” sounds better than “cohesive” – general agreement. DS: After discussion, there is a consensus that we have no jurisdiction over the destination of the building if we give permission for it to be moved outside of the historic districts; can we say anything about the need to maintain it after moving it? BR: Maybe we would never allow an historic building to be moved outside of our districts. AL: The HDC can decide not to allow a building to be moved if it does not find the destination to be an ‘appropriate place’ – wherever that place might be. And: HDC has jurisdiction over proposed setting if that setting is *also* in a HD. In that case, stating availability, practicality, and *appropriateness* of the proposed site would be good. DS: Questions after ‘Why is demolition...’ are interesting as they provide the HDC an invitation to evaluate the proposal to demolish based on the history of maintenance of the building. DH: Cost should not be the basis of our decisions – our charge is preservation. DS: ‘practical’ is a key word used elsewhere – it proposes a trade between historical value and cost. DH: Cost only appears in the hardship clause. Need to reflect on this. Next: want to establish a decision tree for demolition decisions. Could try to establish a point system to help in making a quantitative evaluation, in emulation of the building industry. DS/AL: needs to be a way to focus thinking and an iterative approach to an actual score is the intent – not blind adoption of a numerical result to force a decision. We resolve to ask AL to take the questions and factors identified in the proposed Guideline intended to guide decision making and turn them into questions which ask for a rating from 1 to 5 or so for each factor, along with a free text input. AR: finds the three sub-buttons not useful for decisions, although the top-level question of ‘Why is demolition’ is indeed important.

3. Consent Items

None

1. Adjournment

At 20:58 pm, DH makes a motion to adjourn the meeting, AR seconds. DH takes a roll call vote: DS – Y, RR – Y, DH – Y, ZT – Y, AL – Y, AR - Y; the motion passes.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- School St building photographs
- Draft HDC Demolition Decision Draft Guidelines