



Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

2022-04-12

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 7:00 pm and read the “remote meeting notice” due to COVID-19.

1. Regular Business

- A. Citizen's Concerns – Paul Harrison, 12 Wright Terrace. 50 Windows. Interested in guidelines for updating windows. Very expensive for rebuilding the windows. 2 facades are visible from the street. Windows are original to the building. Concerned about energy efficiency. Has triple-track storm windows. 6/1 windows. DH: Typically the HDC makes a visit to assess their historical value and condition. In general, we recommend rehabilitation. The HDC has no jurisdiction over windows not visible from the street of reference. Likely David Honn, Anita Rogers, and David Shoemaker will visit.
- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – DS makes a motion to approve the minutes from 22 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.
- D. Chair Update:
 1. Public Hearing for 53 River Street Dam Removal – Set for May 10. BR is setting up abutters notice and the public notice.
 2. HDC New Owner Postcard Notice – BR: A draft went to DH, and will be sent to the HDC membership now. A Welcome and a few words on the privilege and responsibilities of owning in the historic districts.

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

- A. 7:15 8 Concord Road Demolition/Reuse Discussion: Continuation of discussion from March 22, 2022. Church representatives Mac Reid and Linda Vanemburgh present. DH:



want to reserve the content of discussion for the Public meeting on the 26 April, so only procedural measures may be discussed today. All HDC members visited the site. Mac Reid asked how voting works; AL: The rules state that we require 4 members in favor, and we must give a decision by May 6, unless there is permission to an extension. DH: we will likely ask the applicant for an extension. DH asks if there are other procedural questions from the church folks. Mac Reid: what is the procedure of a public meeting? DH: DH will introduce the topic. The Church representatives will present the situation. The HDC will have its discussion, and then the public will be invited to ask/contribute. Then the HDC will discuss pros and cons. Either then a vote, or a continuation will follow. Mac Reid: presentation and statements were provided. Can the HDC review those before the meeting? DH: Yes, certainly. RR: Circulated. Mac Reid: A structural engineer review of the building has been arranged; it may give results by the 26th. AR: Thinks that an engineering assessment will be unlikely to affect the outcome of the HDC considerations, based on the visit. DH: Let's defer the discussion for the public meeting, which is very likely to be extended beyond the 26th. Mac Reid: seems that additional input is needed. DH: HDC perceptions will be discussed at the Public Meeting.

B. 7:31 HDC Demolition Decision Draft Guidelines Discussion (continued). AL: Color coded document provided showing the evolution of the content. In the third paragraph, which provides that *if the applicant asserts that* the presumption against demolition does not apply because rehabilitation is not practical, the suggested addition provides that the applicant should specify the nature and amount of the costs of rehabilitation, backed up by estimates prepared by professional architects or engineers. RR: is this leading to a judgment of hardship? AL: If there is a unique circumstance for this building, hardship could play a role. This is a more narrow issue. Practicality necessarily is linked with cost. DH: Does 40C of the state regulations or the MHC contain everything on cost? AL: does not believe so. But the use of the word 'practical' entrains a discussion of cost. DH: Some structural reports have no notion of work in a 40C domain, and do not have a sense of appropriate mitigation. We should attempt to specify that skills for an engineering assessment require experience in the relevant domain of historical buildings and their peculiarities. A process of agreeing on a 3rd party engineer would be an approach; however, there are no funds for the HDC to enable the HDC to require this. But language indicating experience could be sufficient. Code reference may be usable. AL: Architects as well. AR: need to establish guidelines to ensure the investment by the applicant will be worthwhile. AR and DH to develop language. In the seventh paragraph, dealing with the possible relocation of a structure as an alternative to demolition, the proposed addition provides that *in determining what is an appropriate site* for the structure's relocation, the HDC may consider whether the proposed site would adequately protect the historic value of the structure being relocated. DH: once it is outside of the domain, it is outside of our jurisdiction. AL: But we could say we don't approve of the proposed relocation if it is to be moved to an inappropriate place. AR: thinks of our scope as contextual, but not a building on its own. Our top priority must be the District after any changes. AL: the Guidelines' current language speaks of relocation to an 'appropriate site' which is an implication that the proposed site of the building matters independent of the relocation's impact on its current location. DH: No experience in the Acton HDC in the last 15 years of anyone actually moving a building. Consensus that this is a good addition. DH: In the



list of factors regarding a building's historic significance, do we address buildings that make up a District on the Historic Register? The Acton Center is an example where there are buildings not individually in the listing. '...or an individually unlisted building contributing to the District.' We could nominate all the Districts for this, in fact. DH: Need to check with Anne Forbes on the language. In the final set of questions relating to the compatibility of the proposed replacement with its setting, the first question asks, *What is the proposed use?* DH: asks about 'use' – we don't evaluate residential, commercial, activity...none of these things are in the scope of the HDC. We are only concerned with the exterior features of a building, not how it is used. RR: The appearance can imply an appropriate, or inappropriate use. Is this in our scope? Probably. BR: proposed appearance? AR: Try: what is your proposal for the site currently occupied by the existing building? Then, last bullet: the three renovation/replacement/relocation are not at all equivalent in the HDC's view. AL: Simplify to 'Why is demolition of the building necessary?' DS: Condemnation may not require that all historic elements be removed, and the HDC should preserve its ability to address the value of what could remain if the minimal removal of the building and foundation is made for public safety. DH: Condemnation is very well defined in the Building Code. Add in the reference to the Code. AL: thinks the wording covers this. Concerned that adding the detail would reduce the power of the document for most readers. DH: Have experience that things happen quickly, and the foundation can disappear in a moment.

Draft Checklist: Made of excerpts, with some ideas of points to value the various points. DS: Important to have at the top of the document a very clear description of the limited use of the document, indicating that the values of points are just used to help focus and guide the discussion. RR: concerned how the public would see the point system. BR: think the public would want to know their 'score'. DH: No experience with a point-like system in an OML environment. Also concerned that convergence would take a Hubble time. AR: Could ask the HDC to circle the aspects which appear the most important for a specific case. This can help focus the discussion. Could break into two lists – considerations in favor and against demolition. ZT: Appears to reverse the roles of the HDC and the person proposing the demolition. The proposer should feel obligated to convince the HDC to agree to demolition. DS: We could see the HDC as partnering with the proposer to find the best fate for the building. AR, DH: Like ZT's comment. AL: The HDC does however need to do a reasonable amount of research to responsibly engage on the issue. AR: Checklists are useful. DH: could instead of a separate list, move it to the main document? AL: basically already done. DH: Agreed that we want a list, but without points assigned; next opportunity we check that the list represents well the main text.

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

- Draft HDC Demolition Decision Draft Guidelines
- Draft Checklist to help inform the HDC decision-making process