Brookline Preservation Commission

MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 14, 2020 MEETING

Denny Room, Brookline Public Health Building, 11 Pierce Street

Commissioners Present: 
David King, Chair
Elton Elperin, Vice Chair
Jim Batchelor
Wendy Ecker
David Jack
Peter Kleiner
Richard Panciera
Wendy Ecker, Alternate

Staff: Valerie Birmingham, Lara Kritzer

Mr. King called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

Approval of Minutes

Members reviewed and made edits to the draft minutes for the November 12 meeting at this time. Mr. Elperin moved to approve the minutes as corrected. Mr. Jack seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

Members reviewed the draft minutes for the December 10 meeting at this time. Mr. Elperin moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Ms. Ecker seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

Public Comment (for items not on the agenda)

No public comment.

PUBLIC HEARINGS – LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS

40 Dunster Road (Chestnut Hill North LHD - Continuation) – Application for a Certificate of Appropriateness to install exterior outdoor lighting in the rear, side, and front yards (Michael and Casey Buckley, applicants)

Ms. Birmingham presented the case report. Dan Gordon, Landscape Architect, was present on behalf of the owners and expressed their wishes to have the current lighting plan approved. He explained that the current proposal involved fewer lights which would be more controlled.

Mr. King opened the discussion to public comment and there was none at this time.
Mr. King asked about the height of the proposed light posts and was told that they would be 8’ to 10’ tall. Mr. King asked if one side could be mirrored. Mr. Gordon answered yes, that the fixtures could be configured to control the light in this way and that they would be open to doing it if the Commission required it. Mr. Elperin thought that the current proposal was much better than the previous one. He thought that it was a compromise to allow the post lights along the driveway but did not know of a better alternative. He pointed out that the site still included uplights for several trees at the top of the driveway. He thought that the uplights should be removed but that the plan was otherwise a good one.

Mr. King agreed that the up-lighting should be removed. Mr. Batchelor thought that the uplights were reasonable in their proposed location. Mr. King stated that he wanted to have the post lights screened to reduce or eliminate the spread of light to surrounding parcels and reduce the neighborhood impact. Mr. Gordon suggested that they could also back plant the lights with evergreens to reduce their neighborhood impact and that they could accommodate either option.

Mr. Elperin moved to accept the revised lighting plan with the uplights to be completely removed from the project and the carriage lights to be screened to eliminate light trespass. Mr. Batchelor stated that he was not concerned with the up-lighting of the trees and thought that the applicant had done a good job of removing elements that would impact the view from Dunster Road. Ms. Ecker agreed that the up-lit trees were set back on the site. Mr. Elperin felt that uplights were not an appropriate treatment within an historic district and was concerned that the lighting would compete with the historic house. Mr. Kleiner noted that there were great examples of well-lit historic structures and thought that lighting could be considered separately from historic character. He did not mind the proposed up-lighting on the site. Mr. King agreed that many historic buildings were well lit but noted that these were generally landmarks and not neighborhood residential structures. He expressed concern that this could lead to a significant change in the character of residential districts which are primarily darker in nature. Mr. Batchelor felt that the primary visibility to the site was from Dunster Road and did not think that the uplights would be visible from that location.

Mr. Batchelor moved to amend the motion to allow four uplights to be installed as shown on the submitted plans as long as they are not brightly lit and will not impact the public ways in the Chestnut Hill North Historic District. Mr. Kleiner seconded the motion. The amended motion was passed by a vote of 5-2 (King, Elperin).

16 Prescott Street (Cottage Farm LHD) – Application for a Certificate of Appropriateness to install new landscape features including new fencing, gates, stone wall, exterior lighting, built in grill, steel screen wall, 9’5” steel and wood pergola, spa, 16’x45’ swimming pool, steel swing set, granite paving and decking; rebuild brick wall (Miguel and Laura de Icaza, applicants)

Ms. Kritzer presented the case report. Ryan Wampler, Mathew Cunningham Landscape Design, was present for the discussion.

Mr. King opened the discussion to public comment and there was none at this time.

Ms. Ecker asked if the project included a pool house. Mr. Wampler stated that it did not. A question was raised about the metal fencing proposed around the existing wood door facing Euston Street. Mr. Wampler explained that the door only opens in and could not be modified to open out as required to meet the pool code requirements. Mr. Wampler explained that their proposed
solution was to install a secondary metal fence and gate around this door to meet the building requirement.

Continuing its discussion of fencing, Members reviewed the new fencing proposed for the NE and SE corners of the house to enclose the rear yard. It was noted that this fencing would be very contemporary in design and that the NE fencing would not be visible because the alley was a private way. Mr. Elperin wondered if the fence on the SE side of the property should be modified to have more vertical elements and asked about the posts. Mr. Wampler explained that they had tried to keep the fence simple to maintain the brickwork as the most prominent element. Mr. Elperin reiterated that the horizontal fence was a very modern element for the property. He thought that they would ideally want to have a simple gate surrounded by plantings so that only the gate was visible. The dimensions and design of the fence were discussed further.

Mr. King asked about the placement of the fence and how it would meet the building. Mr. Wampler explained that the fence would extend from the corner of the house to the jump in the height of the wall. This placement allowed them to use the fence to meet the pool enclosure requirements as well as to screen the generator from public view. Mr. King stated that he was less concerned with the modern nature of the fence than with its opaque appearance. Mr. Kleiner stated that he was fine with the fence design as proposed.

Discussion turned to the proposed stone walls. The design called for 4” to 5” wide stone veneer which Mr. Wampler stated was intended to pick up on the horizontal lines of the brick coursing. The walls would be consistent with the proposed renovations and new addition and would be sculptural elements in the landscape. The steps to the house would be solid monolithic granite while those leading to the wood deck would have granite risers with lawn treads.

The generator would be installed within a stone wall surround and sunk 1’ into the ground to minimize its impact on the terrace and street. Mr. Elperin expressed concern about the noise associated with generators and wondered if Tesla batteries or other energy solutions could be considered. Mr. Batchelor preferred the use of stone walls over wood fences to limit the amount of sound escaping the site. Mr. Wampler stated that the generator had been recommended by the energy consultant and was not something that they had chosen for the site.

Ms. Ecker asked if the stairs would have railings. Mr. Wampler answered no, that all of the stairs would have three steps or less. Mr. Kleiner stated that he would rather see the stone walls made of larger pieces which were more in the nature of the materials. He thought that the thinner layers were not characteristic of historic stone walls. Mr. Elperin agreed and thought that the walls looked too light for such a large house. Mr. Wampler explained that the walls would be very low and that they were trying to get more courses into them with the thinner layers. Ms. Armstrong agreed with the concerns raised about the scale of the smaller layers in the stone walls compared to the massing of the house. Mr. Jack thought that the walls as proposed worked well with the new contemporary addition to the rear façade. It was also noted that the stone walls shown in the renderings were taller than the ones that would be installed on the site.

Mr. Batchelor thought that the installation of the generator was an issue. Mr. Elperin asked if the generator could be lowered further into the ground. Mr. Wampler answered that it could but that this would expose more stone wall around the terrace. Mr. Batchelor agreed that it would be better to eliminate the generator from view and either sink it into the ground or remove it from the
project. The Applicants were asked to report back to the Commission on why they were not using a battery alternative and to address the auditory as well as the visual screening of the equipment. Members reviewed a rendering of the proposed new walls with the house. Members thought that the overall result would be elegant and modern. Mr. Panciera stated that he would prefer to see more variation in the color of the stone if possible. A question was also raised about how the walls would be ended. Mr. Wampler stated that the ends would be solid stone and that the drawing showed the construction more than the finished appearance. Mr. Jack felt that the Applicant had shown that they had the expertise to finalize the design of the wall. Other members agreed.

Wrapping up the fence and stone wall discussion, Mr. Elperin asked that the SE fence design be revised to include more verticality. Mr. Batchelor moved to approve the installation of the proposed stone walls, fencing and generator with the conditions that with respect to the generator, the applicant look into the alternative use of batteries and that if the generator is necessary, that it must be surrounded by a 4’ tall stone wall situated as close to the unit as the proposed fence for screening purposes and that the generator be either sunk into the ground or the height of the surrounding wall increased so that it is fully screened from view and that with respect to the SE fence, that the Applicants submit a revised design that adds vertical elements to the fence. Mr. Jack seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

Discussion turned to other proposed landscape elements beginning with the pergola, metal structure and swings. Mr. Wampler explained that that metal sculpture would stand 8’ above grade and that a hornbeam hedge would be planted between the structure and surrounding brick wall to help screen it from public view. Members were fine with the installation of both the sculptures and the swing set. In regards to the proposed pool, it was noted that the site had previously had two pools and that this addition to the site would not really be visible from the public way. Mr. Kleiner noted that the brick perimeter wall surrounding the rear yard provided a lot of leeway for proposed changes to the yard. It was noted that both the pool and its surrounding deck would be flush to the ground. It was noted that the spa surround would have the same character as the stone walls on the site. The steel and wood design of the pergola was also reviewed at this time.

Mr. Elperin moved to accept as drawn the pool, pergola, spa, swing set, and metal sculptural walls. Mr. Jack seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

The outdoor kitchen element was noted to be set into a surrounding stone wall and countertop. Mr. Elperin stated that he did not like to see appliances set into stone walls but was not sure that it would be visible from a public way. It was noted that the SE fence and brick wall would screen it from public view. Members discussed the appropriateness of these fixtures within the local historic districts. Mr. King moved to accept the grill and its surrounding stone wall as presented, even though the Commission prefers not to see permanent structures for grills or generators installed within the Districts, because in this case the grill is set well back from the public way with minimal visibility and will be screened from view by both the proposed new fencing and the existing brick wall. Mr. Elperin seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

Mr. Wampler stated that they would revise the proposed lighting plan and Commission Members agreed to continue this discussion to a later meeting. Mr. Elperin asked about the proposed down lights on the pergola. Mr. Wampler explained that they would be full cut off lights with minimal visibility to the street which would be located between and not on the columns. Ms. Armstrong
noted that this was a very urban setting in comparison to the previous project on Dunster Road. Mr. Wampler explained that the strip lights on the metal sculpture were intended to give it a lantern effect. Mr. Batchelor moved to continue review of the lighting design to a future meeting when revised plans were available. Mr. Jack seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

Mr. Wampler asked if the proposed path lights would be more acceptable if they were spaced out differently and whether up-lighting could be approved for any of the trees. Members did not think that it would be appropriate for the trees in front of the house. The Applicants were asked to consider what lighting was actually needed and revise the plans accordingly. Ms. Armstrong reiterated that this was a very different site from the property on Dunster Road which was set back from the street in a suburban setting. She asked the Applicants to consider the surrounding street lights and did not see a need for much new lighting on the site. Members did agree that some lighting would be needed below the pergola as it was essentially a path to the spa.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS – DEMOLITION**

**199 Clark Road** – Application for the partial demolition of the house (Nathan and Emily Spunt, applicants)

Ms. Ecker recused herself from this discussion and Ms. Armstrong voted in her place. Ms. Birmingham presented the case report.

Shayna Galinat from the Law Office of Robert Allen and Owner Nathan Spurn were present for the discussion. They explained that the project would involve the partial demolition of the house and asked the Commission to consider the amount of alterations that had been made to the building over time. Ms. Galinat also noted that some historic elements of the house would be restored in the process.

Mr. King opened the discussion to public comment and there was none at this time. Mr. Elperin moved to uphold staff’s initial determination of significance and impose a twelve month stay of demolition which would expire on January 14, 2021. Mr. King seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

**124 Dean Road** – Application for the partial demolition of the house (Fiona Fennessy and Michael Kutka, applicants)

Ms. Birmingham presented the case report. Architect David Buchanan and Owner Michael Kutka were present for the discussion as well. Mr. Buchanan stated that it was a beautiful, well-maintained house and that they were proposing some partial demolition for a small addition. He agreed that the house had retained its historic character.

Mr. King opened the discussion to public comment and there was none at this time. Mr. Jack moved to uphold staff’s initial determination of significance and impose an eighteen month stay of demolition which would expire on July 14, 2021. Mr. Kleiner seconded the motion and all voted in favor.
Ms. Kritzer presented the case report. Shayna Galinat from the Law Office of Robert Allen was present on behalf of the property owner. She explained that a future project was expected to require the partial demolition of the building and that they would be happy to work with the Commission in the future.

Mr. King opened the discussion to public comment and there was none at this time. Mr. King moved to uphold staff’s initial determination of significance and impose an eighteen month stay of demolition which would expire on July 14, 2021. Mr. Jack seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

**41 Mason Terrace** – Request to lift the stay of partial demolition of the house (Robert Desimone, applicant)

Ms. Kritzer presented the case report. Architect Paul Worthington was present with the plans to add a new garage and addition to the house. He explained that the property currently had no garage and that they would like to install an easier entrance as well as a family room on the rear façade that connected existing interior spaces. The garage was designed with a flat roof to have as little impact as possible on the house. He explained that they had tried to mitigate the impact on the apartment building at the rear of the property and were moving the rear deck to the top of the garage for more privacy.

Mr. King opened the discussion to public comment and there was none at this time. Members began by reviewing the location of the stairs to the rear deck and the windows on the side and rear facades. Mr. Elperin suggested that the Applicant consider using something other than the proposed cast stone urn on the roof of the wood ornamented garage. He thought that the heavy cast stone feature would seem odd resting on top of a wood structure, and that it would look more in place on a brick or stone pier. Mr. Worthington thought that it was an appropriate addition to the structure and noted that it was not attached to the building.

A question was raised about the rear setback of the property. Mr. Worthington stated that they would need zoning relief for the new addition, which would be approximately 10’ from the property line as proposed. It was noted that the project had not been evaluated for its proximity to the rear property line and the apartment building on that site. Mr. Batchelor thought that this was a big issue and did not think that the Commission should take a position on the project before it had been considered by the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals. Mr. Elperin agreed that it would be hard to approve the project without knowing what the ZBA and neighbors thought of the addition’s proximity to the apartments along the rear property line.

Members discussed how to proceed. Mr. King stated his concern that the new addition was too close to the apartment building and thought that the request for relief would be a reach. Mr. Batchelor noted that it was hard to make a determination as the site plan was not of the same quality as the elevations. He suggested that the Commission either continue the discussion until more information on the zoning relief process was available or send the project to a subcommittee. Ms. Armstrong stated that she would prefer to hear from the ZBA and Planning Board before
making a decision. It was agreed that the Commission would provide direction for a future review after the zoning relief issues had been addressed.

Mr. Elperin stated that he would like to see a section of the site which included the apartment building at the rear. He also had concerns with the proposed stone veneer on the foundation. Mr. Worthington stated that the veneer would have 3-6” corner pieces so that the thinness of the stone veneer would not be seen. Mr. Elperin noted that the original house had a full stone foundation and thought that the proposed thin stone veneer would not be convincing next to it. Mr. King preferred them to use concrete if the veneer was not at least 4” stone. It was also noted that the rear addition was proposed to be clapboard to match the house. Mr. King suggested that it be finished in shingle or another material to differentiate it from the house.

Mr. Kleiner questioned how the copper roof over the garage would terminate at the house without interfering with the existing windows. Mr. Worthington stated that it would not extend all the way to the side façade of the house. Mr. Kleiner noted that there was a conflict between the front and west facades views and suggested that the addition beheld back farther from the corner of the house. He suggested that the pedestrian door could be recessed into the garage so that the roof was not necessary. Mr. Kleiner also questioned how the balusters were recessed into the shingle walls surrounding the deck and thought that a simpler solution would be stronger. He suggested either bringing the shingles down or doing only the railing in its place. He also noted that the gutters needed to be resolved on this same façade and thought that there was a lot going on there.

A question was raised about the proposed garage door design and whether they were too Craftsman in style for the existing house. Mr. Panciera suggested that a simple paneled door would be more appropriate to the house. Mr. Worthington stated that he had picked up the garage door design from existing rectangular panels on the turret. Ms. Armstrong agreed that this house was very different in style from a Craftsman and that a different treatment might be more appropriate here. Mr. King stated that he would be fine with having a garage door that was different from the rest of the house. He thought that the building should have one style, though, and was not sure that the proposed door was the right one for the building.

Mr. Kleiner stated that he was not sure whether overlapping the roof on the west elevation was the right solution for the addition. Mr. Worthington explained how the addition would connect to the house and that it would have a minimal overhang. Mr. Elperin agreed that it would help the project to pull the addition away from the corner so that there was no overlapping. Mr. Batchelor also thought that the Commission needed to fully review the other side of the addition where it faced the public path.

Ms. Ecker left the meeting at this time and Ms. Armstrong voted in her place.

Mr. Elperin moved to continue the discussion until after hearing from the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals on the zoning relief needed for the project, noting that when it does come back the Commission would like to see the questions already raised about the alignment of the walls and detailing of the addition addressed as well as a section showing the relationship of the new addition to the apartment building at its rear. Mr. Batchelor seconded the motion and all voted in favor.
290 Tappan Street – Request to lift the stay of partial demolition of the house (290-292 Tappan Street LLC, applicant)

Ms. Birmingham presented the case report. Attorney Shayna Galinat, Law Office of Robert Allen and Architect Kecia Lifton, Finespace Architects, were present on behalf of the property owner. Ms. Galinat explained that the owners had applied for partial demolition review in July and had initially planned to come back in September before hitting a delay with the Planning Board. The project has been reviewed four times by the Planning Board and one Zoning Board of Appeals meeting and they had worked closely with the neighborhood to develop the currently proposed plans.

Mr. King opened the discussion to public comment and there was none at this time. Mr. King noted that the new roof would be 6’ taller than the existing one but did not think that the building would look all that different from the street. Mr. Elperin agreed that the new height would not stand out with the surrounding buildings. He asked why they were choosing to change the windows from four-over-one to six-over-one in design. Ms. Lifton stated that the owner had requested the change as they thought the windows would look less fussy. She noted that there were still some six-over-one windows on the building where the windows would be very wide. Members asked if the stucco and X style bracing on the front façade would be removed and Ms. Lifton answered yes. She also confirmed that the building already had two units in it. Members noted that the new rear façade was less busy than the existing one.

Ms. Armstrong left the meeting at this time.

Mr. Kleiner suggested pulling the left façade roof in so that it would be coplanar with the projecting gable end. Ms. Lifton explained that they had considered it but felt that it diminished the focal point of the gable-end to have them in the same plane. Members reviewed the plans and a 3D rendering of the corner. Mr. Batchelor stated that the plans were good and thought that the 3D image was very helpful. He added that a lot of work had already gone into the plans submitted and that this was not an LHD or National Register property. Mr. King agreed but thought that Mr. Kleiner had a good point about changing the left façade. Members agreed to leave the decision on whether to change it to the applicant. Mr. Batchelor thought that the old roofline was strange but charming. He was not sure that it could be retained with a taller roof, though, and agreed that it needed to morph into a new form. Mr. King moved to lift the stay on demolition based on the plans as submitted. Mr. Jack seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

46 Station Street - Request to lift the stay of partial demolition of the building (Mordejai Burnstein, applicant)

Ms. Kritzer presented the case report. Architect Mark Humphrey, CME Architecture, and Owner Mordejai Burnstein were present for the discussion. Mr. Humphrey explained that the front façade of the building was not structurally sound and that the roof was buckling. They were proposing to reconstruct the exterior facades and reconfigure the interior space. As part of this work, the entrances would be recessed. They proposed to salvage the brackets and some of the original detailing and would use the same size windows and window sill heights as the existing building. The new exterior would have wood siding and no new masonry was proposed.
Mr. King opened the discussion to public comment and there was none at this time. Mr. Panciera asked how the diamond pane windows would be constructed. Mr. Humphrey stated that they would be aluminum clad double pane windows with the diamond pane grill suspended between the panes of glass. Mr. Elperin asked if a grill would be affixed to the exterior façade as well. Mr. Humphrey stated that they were generally only between the panes of glass and that they were using aluminum because the wood windows would be too expensive. Mr. Elperin noted that a standard storefront window was proposed below the decorative transom and wondered if a Marvin or other window manufacturer might have a Simulated Divided Light product that could be installed over the storefronts. Mr. Humphrey stated that they were trying to make the renovations work financially for the owners. Mr. Elperin stated that he was having a hard time understanding how the decorative window would look. Mr. Panciera noted that installing the grill between the panes of glass would lose the texture and shadow lines of the existing window. Members discussed whether it was better to do nothing in the transom and use clear glass instead. Both Mr. King and Mr. Elperin agreed that they were not convinced by the proposed diamond pane solution.

Mr. Batchelor thought that it was good that the building was being restored and preferred to see them use no diamond pane windows as they would not look real. Mr. Humphrey explained his previous discussions about the diamond pane windows with the Planning Board. Mr. King suggested installing a laser cut grill on the exterior of the window and Members discussed whether this would truly mimic the appearance of a divided light window. Mr. Batchelor stated that he did not want to see the wrong things preserved here and Members agreed that no diamond pane windows were a cleaner approach. Mr. Humphrey stated that he would also remove the proposed diamond pane windows from the east façade of the building and simplify it. Mr. King moved to approve the request to lift the stay of demolition based on the plans as revised to remove the diamond pane transom windows and appointing Mr. Elperin to an empowered subcommittee of one to review the revised plans when available. Mr. Panciera seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

NEW BUSINESS AND UPDATES

Discussion and vote on providing letter of support for the full application for the Fiscal Year 2020 Survey and Planning Grant project: The Lindens and Vernon/Harris Street Neighborhoods Survey

Ms. Kritzer and Ms. Birmingham explained that the Town was submitting an application for Massachusetts Historical Commission funding through their 2020 Survey and Planning Grant Program to complete additional survey work in The Lindens and Vernon/Harris Street neighborhoods. A letter of support from the Commission was requested for the project. Mr. Batchelor moved to support staff’s application for Survey and Planning Grant funds and to write a letter of support for the project to the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Mr. Jack seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 10:12 P.M.