

Somerville Historic Preservation Commission

Minutes

Tuesday, July 18, 2006
City Hall
3rd Floor Conference Room
6:30 p.m.

6:40 p.m. Meeting Called to order

Members Present: Michael Payne, Cheryl Vanderbilt, DJ Chagnon*, Susan Fontano*, Abby Freedman*, Jeff Meese*, Susan Rabinowitz*, Derick Snare* Brad Stearns*. Derick Snare* arrived at 7:15 pm.

Members Absent: Dick Bauer, John Bunzick, Stephen Glines, Barbara Mangum, David Guss*.

Staff Present: Kristi Chase, Brandon Wilson (in and out), Katherine Montgomery (Intern)

6:40 p.m. Deliberation of HPC Cases

Please be advised that the following cases will be heard in the following order or as soon following as practical.

HPC #06.36 – 93 Highland Avenue – City Hall Bus Shelter - Continued

Applicant: Arn Franzen, Senior Project Manager for City of Somerville, Owner

The Applicant seeks Certificate of Appropriateness for the following:

1. Demolish 10' x 12' brick bus shelter;
2. Enlarge area by cutting approximately 3' of granite wall and earth bank;
3. Reshape detailing to match existing along cut edge;
4. Install new concrete retaining wall; and
5. Install new 5' x 15' Pal-Li style CEMUSA bus shelter.

The Commission had several outstanding questions that the Staff had not been able to answer, needing a more intimate knowledge of Cemusa's contract with the City. Michael Payne reviewed what had been said in the previous meeting. The current shelter is unattractive and a replacement was desirable. The proposed shelter would be a contrast to the architecture to City Hall and would not be confused with old. The Commission would like to see something more fitting would be nice. The proposed shelter is fairly minimalist and transparent, it is not imposing with the exception of the advertising. How critical is it for the shelter to have the advertising? The granite wall has been broken and interrupted. With the installation of the shelter, the granite should be replaced and tied back in. Can granite the concrete be placed behind the transparent wall? Do we have to have the advertising? Are their options on the finish?

Arn Franzen presented for the City and Cemusa. The design chosen was clean, simple and not in-your-face. The other available style was too big for the location. Cemusa provides the shelters at no cost to the City in return for the advertising revenue. The City gets 10% of that. It would have been higher had the City agreed to allow for alcohol and tobacco. Cemusa pays for the upkeep and maintenance of the shelters. All repairs must be done within 48 hours. If another shelter were to go into that location, the City would have to pay for the replacement shelter. There is a continuity of style throughout the City with the exception of a few MBTA shelters. Arn spoke with Cemusa regarding the Commissions questions. The advertising panel is a 4' x 6' plexiglass box with integral lighting. Removing the panels, removes the illumination for the shelter which has no alternative light source. The placement of free-standing panels elsewhere does not work as they are designed to plug into a shelter. Cemusa only provides the brushed metal finish, chosen for its ease of cleaning, especially grafitti removal. The shelters could be painted but that might void the repair and maintenance portion of the contract. The granite wall could possibly be done, although Cemusa would need exact specs regarding grading of the surrounding hill, height and finish.

Commission discussion revolved around whether we could push harder for this particular shelter to be without advertising and more landscaping due to its prominence, because there were already so many shelters placed in the City elsewhere that would be less expensive and would pay for this one. Everyone decided they could live with the advertising, but really wanted to be sure that the wall, which would become extremely visible would be constructed with granite to tie in with the rest of the granite wall. Brad Stearns said he knew contractors who could replicate the granite using concrete but used granite curbing was much cheaper. When Arn Franzen said that the granite would have to be carefully specified, DJ Chagnon volunteered to write the specs to ensure that Cemusa would install the material as the Commission decided.

Michael Payne made a motion, seconded by DJ Chagnon, that a Certificate of Appropriateness be granted for the new bus shelter except that the new retaining wall should be constructed of granite with a finish and style to visually and to physically tie the wall together. Vote was unanimous (6-0).

Demolition Reviews

HPC 06.16 D – 55-61 Clyde Street (MaxPac Site) - re: Update and discussion of possible mitigation measures on proposed demolition of one vacant industrial building: 1928 Agar Manufacturing Company

Applicants: Leslie Donovan, Preservation Consultant; Matt O’Neill, Director of Development, KSS Realty Trust

Received
03/14/06

Determined Significant
03/21/06

Preferably Preserved
04/18/06

Michael Payne recapped the process noting that a series of meetings had been held between the KSS development team and the HPC subcommittee over the last three months and that due diligence had been done, that the case had been made that all parties had tried to find ways of retaining the significant and preferably preserved building. The retention of the physical building had proved to be infeasible and imprudent. Community meetings had resulted in the feedback that retaining the buildings would have detrimental effects to the community and the City. The last meeting with KSS revolved around

mitigation efforts. The MOA between MHC, Mass Highway and KSS had been completed and had only asked for photographic documentation.

Matt O'Neill noted that they had focused on specific mitigation measures in a 3-tiered way. First tier was the standard mitigation measures of written and oral history, photography and site elements on the community path. Second tier was a macro approach related to the site plan relating to the historical site through use of street wall and street grid. Third tier was in the use of materials that related to the historic buildings and their uses.

Reuse of the Administrative portion of the building or its elements was the one area where there was no agreement reached, although the consensus was that it was not possible and the reuse would be token or schizophrenic. They did not find any added value in saving any of the brick portico although if there was interest from the Community Path, it might be considered there.

Leslie Donovan asked what the justification would be for the brick portion of the structure. The MHC had found the industrial portion of the building to be interesting and significant. The administrative building does not tell the industrial story of the site. Retaining any portion of it would not contribute to the long-term understanding of the architecture or history of the site.

Michael Payne noted that the measures to give memory and meaning were the following:

Traditional mitigation measures:

- 1. Photographic record*
- 2. On-site signage*
- 3. Oral History*

Macro level mitigation measures:

- 1. Certain level of Design Review given the nature of a work in progress*
- 2. Site layout to continue the street grid to fit into the larger context*
- 3. Response to edge conditions such as the*
 - a. alignment of buildings along the Community Path; and*
 - b. smaller scale buildings along Warwick Street.*

Micro level mitigation measures are possible

- 1. reuse of architectural elements themselves which give rich opportunities from the current look, feel, scale – such as glazing patterns, roof forms & materials such as brick and steel, manufacturing materials – making sure that there is follow through for the Design Review and comment.*

Joe Lynch, member of the public cautioned that not too much should be made at this stage regarding the design of buildings and materials. That the community had not signed off on any of this design for the site that is located in the heart of 4 existing neighborhoods. Some of the neighbors would not like to see any memory of the industrial past of the site. He said that materials and such should not be specified in the MOA. Town houses along Clyde and Murdock; Alpine and Lowell Street neighbors may not be into the industrial curtain wall design. Hinckley Magoun may also have other ideas. The neighbors are working on a covenant regarding the PUD. They would like to see an assignment clause added to the MOA so that if the site were to be sold, all the hard work that has gone into the planning process would not be lost. The MOA should be assignable.

Abby Freedman was concerned about scale and massing, especially of the larger buildings that went from 3-5 stories. DJ Chagnon noted that breaking the buildings into smaller volumes alleviated the potentially heavy massing. Abby also would like to see KSS give an art grant for the history of the site, possibly commissioning the Arts Council. DJ thought that Leslie had made some good points but that the predominant feature of the site was that the buildings were in three different styles and characters and that it was not possible to say that one style should have validity. Abby suggested a folly on the Community Path. Joe Lynch noted that on Winthrop Road in Ten Hills a similar structure memorialized the Grimmons School. Leslie said that one had to be very careful that such a use was successful and not stupid, pointing out a similar architectural retention that did not work in Boston.

Noting that the next step for the MOA would be for the Subcommittee to work up some language with the City Law Department, Michael Payne moved that the subcommittee continue to represent the Commission in the drafting to the MOA. It was seconded by Susan Fontano and passed unanimously (7-0)

HPC #06.27 D– 46 Pearl Street – re: Update on proposed demolition of 1871 Ezra Conant House

Applicant: John Mahoney, Developer

Received
04/20/06

Determined Significant
09/16/03

Preferably Preserved
05/16/06

Demolition Reviews by Staff Since Last Meeting

None

Certificates of Non-Applicability Issued by the Staff

HPC 06.39 – 145 Perkins Street

06/29/06

Applicant: Elaine Murphy

1. Repair front porch:
 - a. Replace joists, decking, stairway (risers, stringers and treads) in-kind;
 - b. Replace missing balusters and railing in-kind.

Section 106 and FCC NEPA Reviews by Staff

HPC 06.38 – 94 Beacon Street: Cell Phone Antennae

Received:
06/06/06

Decision
No adverse effect

HPC 06.39 – 119 College Avenue: Cell Phone Antennae

Received:
06/29/06

Decision
No adverse effect

Approval of HPC Minutes: *Susan Fontano made a motion, seconded by Brad Stearns to accept the minutes as written. Vote was unanimous (7-0)*

Other Business -Project Updates

- **Expansion of Local Historic Districts Grant Project Update – Brandon**
 - Consultants hired for Project: Ed Gordon & Preservation Intern Katherine Montgomery to assist Kristi and Brandon with project execution June through likely early 2007 (estimate)
 - Neighborhood and Overview Meetings scheduled & in progress (see handout)
 - Update on Prospect Hill & Union Square Meeting last night at Abby Freedman's House
 - Public Info. Materials for property owner distribution in progress; feedback welcome!
 - LHD Subcommittee meeting to be scheduled in early August once several neighborhood meetings completed
 - Review Meeting with MHC Grant Coordinator upcoming

- **Historic Plaque Program - Brandon**
 - Plaques for designated properties, past and upcoming, will be offered as one time program following completion of the LHD Expansion Project; newly designated owners will receive plaques free of charge (as further incentive to be designated), and current owners will receive discounted price of \$35 if order as part of this comprehensive round only.

- **Milk Row Cemetery Preservation Grant Project Update – Brandon**
 - MHC grant for cemetery repairs, conservation, and improvements completed by June 30th deadline!
 - MHC Final Project Report due on July 30st in progress
 - Next phase of project is completion of non-grant items, including hiring of archaeologist for flagpole relocation and fence repair work; fence and gate repairs and upgrading along parking lot and Somerville Ave. frontage, in concert with DeMoulas Market Basket & their contractor; and treatment of Heritage Tree in center of cemetery using DCR grant; and Somerville Ave. Improvements MHD Grant Project coordination.

- **Preservation Awards Teeshirt Project Update – Brandon**
 - Only 25 remaining of original 100! Hope to sell off last ones soon & plan to re-order another 100 with slight revisions & due to popular request possible ordering of tank top style and large shoulder length tote bags.
 - Hope to sell at weekly Saturday Farmer's Market in Union Square & other community events (as did at ArtBeat last Sat.) in order to raise \$5,000 to subsidize Historic Plaques for new property owners.
 - Sponsor(s) being sought for \$850 donation for re-ordering of shirts & tote bags as both fundraising and preservation-awareness tool; ideas welcome, especially of interested realty, architectural, banking and development firms with vested interest in preservation agenda!

- **LHD Repair & Maintenance Loan Program Proposal – Brad**

- **Recently Past & Upcoming Preservation Outreach Events – Brandon, Kristi & Barbara**
 - Historic participation in Memorial Day Parade via Kristi, Barbara & Evelyn
 - Davis Square ArtBeat last Sat. July 15th via table w. Som. Museum & Historic Somerville
 - Historic Somerville meeting, Thurs. August 3rd 7:30pm at Somerville Museum; all welcome!
 - Prospect Hill Walking Tour w. Ed Gordon, Sun. October 15th via ArtsUnion Grant

- George Dilboy Exhibit at Somerville Museum with Barbara Mangum as key participant beginning in September and continuing through 2007 with many related events planned -
- Second Annual “Ghosts of Somerville” at Milk Row Cemetery , end of October in concert with Historic Somerville

Schedule of remaining SHPC meetings for 2006: Held on the third Tuesday of every month: August 15, September 19, October 17, November 21, and December 19.