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Brookline Preservation Commission
MINUTES OF THE March 10, 2020 MEETING
Room 103, Brookline Town Hall, 333 Washington Street

6 **Commissioners Present:**

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8 Elton Elperin, Vice Chair
9 David Jack
10 Richard Panciera
11 Elizabeth Armstrong, Alternate
12 Peter Kleiner

Commissioners Absent:

7 Jim Batchelor
8 David King, Chair
9 Wendy Ecker

14 **Staff:** Valerie Birmingham, Tina McCarthy

16
17 Mr. Elperin called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

18
19 **Elections**

20
21 Mr. Elperin volunteered to serve in the position of Chair. Ms. Armstrong nominated him to
22 serve as Chair of the Commission. Mr. Jack seconded the nomination. All voted in favor. Mr.
23 Elperin accepted the nomination.

24
25 Mr. Panciera volunteered to serve in the position of Vice-Chair. Mr. Elperin nominated Mr.
26 Panciera to serve as Vice-Chair of the Commission. Ms. Armstrong seconded the nomination.
27 All voted in favor. Mr. Panciera accepted the nomination.

28
29 Ms. Birmingham volunteered to continue to serve as Secretary. Mr. Jack nominated Ms.
30 Birmingham to serve as Secretary for the Commission. Mr. Elperin seconded the nomination.
31 All voted in favor. Ms. Birmingham accepted the nomination.

32
33 **Public Comment** (for items not on the agenda)

34
35 No public comment.

36
37 **PUBLIC HEARINGS – LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS**

38
39
40 **20 Copley Street**– Application for a Certificate of Appropriateness to remove a door on the west
41 elevation of the garage. (Robert Hollister and Catherine Donaher, applicants)

42
43 Ms. McCarthy presented the case report.

44
45 Ms. Donaher stated that neighbors are supportive of the project.

47 Mr. Jack asked about the visibility of the door to be removed and how the space will be treated. He
48 asked about the exterior treatment and if the door will be left in place. Ms. Donaher responded that
49 the door will not remain. The exterior trim will remain; the opening will be filled with plywood
50 and painted to match the siding. Mr. Elperin asked if the garage still functions as a garage. Ms.
51 Donaher stated that it does not; it has been a living space for many years. Mr. Elperin expressed
52 support for the proposal. Mr. Jack asked if the plywood on the exterior is acceptable. Mr. Elperin
53 responded that he feels it is and also that this door is minimally visible from the public way; Mr.
54 Panciera agreed.

55
56 Mr. Panciera made a motion to accept the application as submitted. Mr. Elperin seconded the
57 motion. All voted in favor.

58
59 **103 Walnut Street**– Application for a Certificate of Appropriateness to install new landscape
60 features, rebuild the rear retaining wall facing Boylston Street and rebuild the 6’ privacy fence next
61 to the retaining wall (Generous Earth Gardens, applicant)

62
63 Ms. McCarthy presented the case report.

64
65 (Mr. Kleiner joined the meeting)

66
67 Douglas Plante, owner, stated that the property was featured as an example of the “worst of
68 Boylston Street which motivated the current application.

69
70 Mr. Elperin clarified details about the engineer’s report for the rear retaining wall and then stated
71 that he has no objection to the intent of the proposal. He raised questions about the aesthetics of
72 the design, and asked if it would be better to use blocks larger than the proposed Unilock blocks for
73 the top section of the wall. Mr. Plante explained the decisions regarding the wall on Boylston
74 Street: Permitting on Boylson Street is complex and care was taken to avoid shutting down a
75 portion of the street for construction. This restriction made the use of fieldstone or poured concrete
76 impossible. The blocks could be effectively staged from the sidewalk without causing traffic
77 disruptions.

78
79 Mr. Elperin made several suggestions to achieve a more uniform look including creating a new
80 CMU wall parged with stucco. The Commissioners discussed options for replacing all or the top
81 portion of the wall with different materials. Ms. Giso (landscape architect) stated her preference
82 for the proposed blocks, which she felt will stand out less than new concrete would. She passed
83 around a brochure with options for the Unilock blocks. Mr. Panciera suggested using a larger scale
84 CMU block, and stated that his biggest concern is that the pieces have a greater scale. Mr. Elperin
85 agreed with this point. Ms. Giso stated that there is a larger scale block available. The
86 Commissioners discussed further structural details and options for the wall construction. Mr.
87 Elperin suggested using the Brussel Block style blocks (same as mid-yard wall).

88
89 Mr. Kleiner noted that the proposed trees near the top of the wall are an additional structural load.
90 He asked if the wall on Boylston could be lower and the mid-yard wall higher to mitigate the
91 height of the wall on Boylston Street. He added that due to the step back required for the Unilock
92 block construction, the top of the wall is closer to the trees than shown in plan. Mr. Panciera
93 mentioned that the grade of the site is more severe as you go east, observing that changing the wall
94 heights in this way would make the grade worse. Mr. Elperin stated that the structural details are

95 not the concern of the Commission and asked if there is consensus regarding the suggestion to use
96 Brussel style block or cement block. Ms. Giso explained that she will need to consult with the
97 mason, noting that cement block is more affordable and is the existing material of the wall. Mr.
98 Kleiner stated that in-kind replacements are always allowed.
99

100 Mr. Panciera stated that the mid-yard wall is acceptable as proposed. Ms. Giso asked what the
101 options are for the Boylston Street wall. Mr. Elperin listed poured concrete, concrete block or
102 larger Unilock blocks as the options. Ms. Giso confirmed that a larger scale stone block is
103 acceptable. Mr. Panciera noted that it does not have to be exactly CMU dimensions but close.
104

105 Mr. Panciera moved to accept the Unilock Brussel Block mid-yard wall as proposed with the top of
106 the Boylston Street wall left to the applicant's choice of cinder block, poured concrete either
107 parged or unparged, or Unilock of similar dimensions. These final details will be reviewed and
108 approved by a subcommittee of one. Mr. Panciera volunteered for the subcommittee.
109 Mr. Jack seconded the motion, all voted in favor.
110

111 **151 & 153 Babcock Street (continuation)** - Application for a Certificate of Appropriateness to
112 construct two new residential structures, one on each vacant lot (151-153 Babcock LLC, applicant)
113

114 Ms. Birmingham presented the case report.
115

116 Mr. Allen introduced Colin Smith, the architect for the project and Trina Murphy, project manager.
117 Mr. Allen explained the zoning problems with some of the earlier proposals, and stated that the
118 current design was guided by the desire to lessen the street impact and have the back building read
119 like a carriage house. Mr. Smith added that the design has stayed similar to previous versions, the
120 back building still presented like a single story building, with 2 stories under the gambrel roof. He
121 passed around a historic map of the area and pointed out that the site was originally zoned for three
122 lots with a common drive in the location currently proposed. He stated the current proposal is
123 zoning compliant with the exception of a special permit for the shared drive.
124

125 Mr. Elperin opened the discussion to comments from the public.
126

127 Ms. Givelber, abutter to the rear at 81 Crowninshield Rd, stated that there is an ongoing problem
128 with the property boundary. She explained that her surveyor found a different boundary and that
129 the stakes installed by the applicant are an incursion on her property. Ms. Murphy stated that the
130 marker in question belongs to 157 Babcock Street, the neighbor. She offered to reconfirm the
131 boundary line between 151/153 Babcock and 81 Crowninshield and will share the contact
132 information for the owners of 157 Babcock with Ms. Givelber. Mr. Allen added that landscaping
133 plans include a buffer to be planted along the rear property line. Ms. Givelber stated that on the
134 boundary line a chain-link fence was removed and trees on her property were taken down. Ms.
135 Murphy restated that the incursions are from the neighbor, 157 Babcock. She stated that nothing
136 has been removed from the lots at 151/153 Babcock to date.
137

138 There are no further public comments.
139

140 Mr. Elperin opened the discussion to members of the Commission.
141

142 Mr. Kleiner stated that the new massing is more in keeping with the neighborhood. He expressed
143 doubt that the rear building would read as a carriage house, but felt it could read as a building on
144 another street. He pointed out that the grading and access to the second unit is not great. Mr.
145 Elperin agreed with these points, comparing the current proposal to the original and stated that he is
146 happy with the development of the design. He added that he would rather not have underground
147 parking at all, but that in this case it is not critical. He expressed appreciation for the architectural
148 detailing and states that he felt it was ready to move the application to a subcommittee to work
149 through final design details. Mr. Allen stated that the design still needs to go through Planning.
150 Mr. Elperin suggested that the design come back to the full Commission for review after approval
151 by Planning. Mr. Kleiner also expressed appreciation for the design, noting that the front building
152 used only two roof pitches.

153
154 Mr. Jack asked for the distance between the north wall of 153 and the south wall of 157 Babcock.
155 Mr. Smith stated that it is 22 ½'. Mr. Panciera stated that the design is as good as it could be under
156 the circumstances. He expressed concern about the existing trees on the lots and asked the
157 applicants to save as many as possible to satisfy the concern of the neighbors. Mr. Jack expressed
158 doubt about the feasibility of saving any of the trees. Mr. Allen identified two trees on the site plan
159 that it might be possible to save, and added that their protection is part of the contract for the
160 project.

161
162 Mr. Elperin motioned to approve the general design direction, to be continued to a subcommittee to
163 check the details after the design completes zoning review. The design will return to the full
164 Commission for final approval. Mr. Kleiner amended the motion to include a provision that the
165 applicant address issues with the entrances to the rear unit. Mr. Kleiner seconded the motion. All
166 voted in favor. The subcommittee members are Mr. King, Mr. Elperin and Mr. Kleiner.

167
168 **New Business and Updates**

169
170 Mr. Elperin opened discussion to nominate two members of the Preservation Commission to the
171 Welltower DAT if the Warrant Articles passed at Town Meeting as asked by staff of the Planning
172 Board. He began the discussion by mentioning his past experience of the Town's DAT process.
173 He asked if participation in the DAT is mandatory and if it is a good idea to participate. Ms.
174 Birmingham explained that the review process for the Preservation Commission remains the same,
175 through the Demolition By-Law. The applicant will request a lift of the stay of demolition, and
176 that the DAT is a separate advisory process with different Town representatives.

177
178 Mr. Kleiner asked if Robert Stern is the architect, and noted what he has heard about the design.
179 Mr. Elperin suggested that there may be an opportunity to play a role in the design of the affordable
180 housing proposed for the Holland House. Ms. Armstrong asked why Town Meeting is approving
181 the design. Ms. Birmingham stated that Town Meeting is required to approve the zoning
182 amendments and restated that the lift process remains in place.

183
184 Mr. Elperin stated that there is one volunteer for the DAT so far, Mr. Jack. Mr. Panciera noted that
185 Ms. Ecker has also expressed interest. The Commissioners discussed whether they have heard if
186 Ms. Ecker is still interested and decided to only recommend one member for now, saving the other
187 recommendation for a meeting that Ms. Ecker can attend.

188

189 Mr. Elperin motioned to recommend Mr. Jack to represent the Preservation Commission on any
190 future WellTower DATs pending approval at Town Meeting, and hold voting on a second
191 representative for the April hearing. Ms. Armstrong seconded the motion. All voted in favor.
192
193 Mr. Elperin adjourned the meeting.