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

Commissioners Present:  
Elton Elperin, Vice Chair
David Jack
Richard Panciera
Elizabeth Armstrong, Alternate
Peter Kleiner

Commissioners Absent:  
Jim Batchelor
David King, Chair
Wendy Ecker

Staff: Valerie Birmingham, Tina McCarthy

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

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

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

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

Public Comment  (for items not on the agenda)
No public comment.

PUBLIC HEARINGS – LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS

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

Ms. McCarthy presented the case report.

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

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

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

Ms. McCarthy presented the case report.

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

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

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

Mr. Kleiner noted that the proposed trees near the top of the wall are an additional structural load. He asked if the wall on Boylston could be lower and the mid-yard wall higher to mitigate the height of the wall on Boylston Street. He added that due to the step back required for the Unilock block construction, the top of the wall is closer to the trees than shown in plan. Mr. Panciera mentioned that the grade of the site is more severe as you go east, observing that changing the wall heights in this way would make the grade worse. Mr. Elperin stated that the structural details are
not the concern of the Commission and asked if there is consensus regarding the suggestion to use Brussel style block or cement block. Ms. Giso explained that she will need to consult with the mason, noting that cement block is more affordable and is the existing material of the wall. Mr. Kleiner stated that in-kind replacements are always allowed.

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

Mr. Panciera moved to accept the Unilock Brussel Block mid-yard wall as proposed with the top of the Boylston Street wall left to the applicant’s choice of cinder block, poured concrete either parged or unparged, or Unilock of similar dimensions. These final details will be reviewed and approved by a subcommittee of one. Mr. Panciera volunteered for the subcommittee.

Mr. Jack seconded the motion, all vote in favor.

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

Ms. Birmingham presented the case report.

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

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

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

There are no further public comments.

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

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

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

**New Business and Updates**

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

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

Mr. Elperin stated that there is one volunteer for the DAT so far, Mr. Jack. Mr. Panciera noted that Ms. Ecker has also expressed interest. The Commissioners discussed whether they have heard if Ms. Ecker is still interested and decided to only recommend one member for now, saving the other recommendation for a meeting that Ms. Ecker can attend.
Mr. Elperin motioned to recommend Mr. Jack to represent the Preservation Commission on any future WellTower DATs pending approval at Town Meeting, and hold voting on a second representative for the April hearing. Ms. Armstrong seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Elperin adjourned the meeting.