

BELMONT HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION**January 8, 2003 7:00 p.m.****Town Hall****Meeting Minutes**

Attending:

Commission Members: Richard Cheek and Lydia Ogilby, Co-chairs, Paul Bell, Linn Hobbs, Arleyn Levee, Nancy Richards, Michael Smith, Sharon Vanderslice. Absent: Jonathan Treat.

Pleasant Street Resident: Arthur Wolfson.

TOWN HALL COMPLEX UPDATE

Michael Smith reported that the Town Hall Complex Building Committee held a meeting last week with the Shade Tree Committee to further discuss landscaping materials for the complex and review the lighting plan. Arleyn Levee of the Historic District Commission attended. Lighting designer Bill Lamb prepared the lighting plan. It features three types of fixtures: in-ground fixtures shining upward; low, mushroom-shaped fixtures illuminating the walkways; and tree- or pole- mounted fixtures illuminating parking areas and roofs. The commission believes that the mushroom fixtures would add visual clutter to the site and suggested putting light fixtures into the bollards already planned for the pedestrian areas. The bollards will be tapered granite, not black iron as shown on an earlier plan. Other landscaping details, such as the design of the outdoor benches and the color of the lighting, are not yet finalized. The plans may go out to bid as soon as February 15.

483 PLEASANT STREET

Attending: Andy Salzman

Andy Salzman, owner of this 1868 Italianate house (which represents 13 ½ percent of the condominium association on this property), presented a plan for a proposed one-story addition to the original L-shaped kitchen at the back of his house. The plan, drawn by architect Jane Langmuir of Providence, would square off that corner of the house, reuse an existing window in a new wall, and add another custom window. The addition would be approximately 8 feet by 8 feet. After reviewing a drawing of the proposed new construction, the commission asked Salzman to inset the addition by one foot and reduce the overall size to 7 feet by 7 feet in order to preserve the vertical line of the original cornerboards and avoid having a new cornice jutting out beyond the original rear wall of the house. Paul Bell noted that the ornamental detailing of the addition should be less elaborate than the detailing of the original mansard roof and porch. He recommended that the detailing of the new cornice be simplified so that it is clearly secondary to the original—in the same family but not a copy. Linn Hobbs suggested that the Salzmanns consider lead-coated copper for the roof of the addition. Salzman said he would return with a revised plan.

UNITARIAN-UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

Attending: Joel Mooney and Ed Bing, Building Committee Co-chairs; Dave and Smoke Twitchell, church members; Rob Olson, architect; Dave Miller, landscape architect; Judy Selwyn, historical

preservation consultant.

The Unitarian-Universalist congregation plans to tear down the 1924 addition to its 1890 church and build a large new addition in its place. A capital campaign has been conducted and building permit applications will be submitted during the next six months. This building is not in an historic district, so the HDC has no jurisdiction over any changes to the structure. Nevertheless, the church's building committee, co-chaired by Joel Mooney and Ed Bing, wished to review its architectural plans with the commission. Mooney began the presentation by outlining the limitations of the existing structure. It has nine levels inside, it is difficult to heat and maintain, and it is surrounded by asphalt. Indeed, children have to cross a parking lot to get to the church playground.

The design goals of the project, Mooney said, are to preserve the 1890 Hartwell & Richardson church, add more religious education classrooms, consolidate administrative offices, put the parish hall on the same level as the sanctuary, visually connect the church with the Town Common, provide universal access, and make the whole structure more cost efficient to maintain.

The project's architect, Rob Olson, described the original church as a 19th century, boulder-based building. This design aesthetic grew out of the Transcendentalists' writings on nature, he said. The design of the church is "transparent" in that the interior uses of the building are reflected in its outward appearance. For example, the sanctuary, the parlor, and the ministerial office each have their own entrances. In restoring the exterior of this structure, the church plans to repoint the boulder base, re-anchor any stucco that can be saved, and replace any bad stucco with Portland cement. All of the stucco will be painted; only a few pieces of the original roughcast stucco survive. The original red slate roof, which has been improperly repaired over the years, will be replaced with a new red slate roof, using slate from Washington County, New York.

A new, two-story, L-shaped addition with a gabled roof will be constructed at the rear of the church. This structure will be wood shingle on the upper level and cast-in-place concrete on the lower level. The concrete will be patterned and sandblasted to give it a rough-hewn look. A large roof will be broken up by prominent dormers. The pitch of this roof will be the same as that of the 1890 church roof but, for reasons of cost, the architect is considering the use of red asphalt shingles instead of red slate. The side of the addition that faces the town common will be a "simple, double-height loggia" with lots of glass to give it a permeable appearance.

Plans call for eliminating the asphalt drive that now encircles the building and replacing it with green space on the right side and in the rear. (The turf will be built-up on these two sides to provide access for fire trucks.) There will be 27 parking spaces in the church lot to the left of the building and barrier-free access to the building from there. The children's playground will be relocated so that it is just outside the new classrooms.

Commission members praised the overall design of the addition. Richard Cheek lauded the idea of tying the church more closely to the town green. Before the railroad bridge over Concord Avenue was constructed, he said, it was possible to see the front door of the Town Hall from the front door of this church. Architecturally, they "spoke to each other."

The members agreed that the bell tower should continue to be the most important element of the complex. To help diminish the new addition in comparison, Paul Bell suggested that its roof be gray standing-seam rather than red asphalt, which may "fight" with the red slate on the 1890 church. Arley Levee said that more mature trees around the addition would help it to recede visually. Michael Smith said that he thought the dormers, as shown, were too hard-edged and should be more recessed. Linn Hobbs suggested that the addition might be related more closely to the original church if boulders were

added to the concrete on the lower level. But the Commission's architects, Bell and Smith, said that concrete, as proposed, would give a feeling of solidity without detracting from the boulder-based design of the original building. These two members had concerns, however, about the east-facing entrance and stair that will join the old and new buildings. That part of the structure seems awkward, uncomfortable, and out of scale with the rest of the design, they said; it could use further study.

The Commission thanked the church building committee for allowing them to view the plans.

HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES

Richard Cheek asked for a volunteer from the Commission to review examples of existing design guidelines for historic districts in other towns, copies of which he had collected from the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and highlight sections that would be useful for Belmont to include in a new set of guidelines for homeowners in the Pleasant Street Historic District. Linn Hobbs volunteered to do this before the next meeting on February 5.

PLEASANT STREET RECONSTRUCTION

Sharon Vanderslice, reporting for the HDC subcommittee on Pleasant Street, said that State Representative Anne Paulsen was making inquiries at the Massachusetts Highway Department to determine whether the Pleasant Street roadway could be narrowed under new guidelines set forth in the Community Roadway Improvement Program. These guidelines will allow exceptions to state roadway mandates in order to preserve trees and stone walls in conservation areas, through agricultural lands, and in areas of historical significance, including some urban downtowns. The current Pleasant Street plans call for the removal of 24 trees to make room for a wider roadway.

Vanderslice also reported that Municipal Light Department Director Tim McCarthy was interested in burying at least some of the utility wires along the street. The Light Department has money in a capital improvement fund, some of which could be used for this purpose if the Light Department Board (the Board of Selectmen) approved. Tom Gatzunis, Director of Belmont's Office of Community Development, has said he plans to call a meeting in January to discuss landscaping and other issues with the project's engineering firm, BSC Group.

CUSHING LIBRARY

Richard Cheek passed out a list of salvage companies that might be interested in restoring and selling this circular wooden library, which was saved from Belmont, the 1836-40 mansion on the Cushing Estate.

Minutes of the December meeting were reviewed and approved with no changes.

The Commission will next meet at 7 p.m. on February 5 in the Town Hall.

Minutes recorded by Sharon Vanderslice.