

BELMONT HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

November 2, 2005

Meeting Minutes

Town Hall

Commission Members attending: Co-chair Richard Cheek, Co-chair Lydia Ogilby, Paul Bell, Peter Gunness, Lisa Harrington, Linn Hobbs, Michael Smith, Arlyn Levee, Richard Pichette, Nancy Richards.

Also in attendance: Richard Schaffer, Eva Patelas for item 1; Joseph DiStefano, James DiStefano, Steven Savarese, Marshall Daniels for item 2.

1. PROPOSED RENOVATIONS AT 596 PLEASANT STREET

Owners Richard Schaffer and Eva Patelas, with their architect Steven Petitpas, presented their final plans for renovation and alterations at the rear of their house. Clapboards were deemed acceptable for the enclosed first-floor addition and were seen to tie into the existing top storey. The plans met with the Commission's approval, and a Certificate of Appropriateness was **approved**.

2. PRESERVATION OF 20 SOMERSET STREET

Mr. Joseph DiStefano, of Somerset Street, accompanied by his brother James DiStefano, broker Steven Savarese, and Marshall Daniels outlined his intention, pending the Commission signaling its putative approval, to purchase the house at 20 Somerset Street, raze it and construct in its place a larger house set back further from Somerset Street. He had spoken to the Massachusetts Historical Commission, who had directed him to Concord to seek out similar situations, and reported that he had found two such replacements: the first at 490 Lexington Road, next to the Alcott House, where a 565 square-foot house was torn down two years ago and replaced with a 4,200 square-foot one; and the second at 150 Barretts Mill, where a 1940's Cape had been replaced. He opined that the most attractive feature of the 20 Somerset property was its land, and that the larger house would not overpower the 22,000 square feet encompassed by the property. He proposed a 1-1/2 storey house, of more uniformly classical style, pushed back 35 to 40 feet.

Commission members then offered their reactions to his proposal. While the house—a split-level which had been somewhat altered from its original outward appearance—might be problematic with respect to room configurations, it was nevertheless one of the few houses of its type, and rehabilitation or additions should first be considered before proposing demolition. The garage could be removed and replaced with more house, for example, or the house could be built out in back. The house in its present state had a charming “cottage” feel and nestled nicely into the surrounding landscape. While the lot was of comparable area to many on Somerset Street, it was quite deep

and therefore quite narrow at the street and could well be overpowered by the large house being proposed, unless it were also comparably narrow and deep and therefore destructive of the attractive backyard that was one of the property's main features. One member held that, since the house was a mixture of many styles, any addition would only confuse the style issue further, and might offer less control over overall appearance than would careful oversight of new construction. All other members, however, felt strongly that the Commission should not be in the business of presiding over the destruction of existing properties in the Historic District. Moreover, the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines warn against not creating a "false" historicity and point out that what is important to preserve is scale, landscape and features—like the stone walls that creep around this property and provide some of its present charm. Whether a property would sell more readily or more remuneratively with another house built on it should not constitute a basis for the decisions of an Historic District Commission. It was pointed out that the Commission adjudicates specifics and cannot rule in the abstract or deal in intentions. The Commission members' comments nevertheless indicated to Mr. DiStefano and his colleagues that it was therefore unlikely the Commission would assent to razing of the house should he purchase it.

3. PRESERVATION ALTERNATIVES FOR OUR LADY OF MERCY CHURCH

Richard Cheek reported that the Belmont Housing Trust (BHT) has proposed a 25-unit condominium-style housing development, designed by their architects Brooks Mostue Associates, for the Our Lady of Mercy church properties on Trapelo and Oakley Roads. A neighborhood group, headed by Joanna Hilgenberg, has expressed concerns about a large Chapter-40B development; BHT has indicated they favor a particularly sensitive treatment for the proposed development to allay these concerns. Mr. Cheek opined that the church itself is a lovely Arts & Crafts building, originally built with natural cedar shingles, and that the rectory on Lawndale Avenue, half Tudor/half Arts & Crafts style, was likewise a beautiful building. The question of pressing for preservation was discussed. The Massachusetts Historical Commission has begun a study of remaindered Catholic churches, like Our Lady of Mercy, and will be approached for information about period and architect for the church building. Michael Smith indicated that he had explained to Roger Colton of the BHT that housing could be designed within the church building, while still preserving its façade. While the church has a set-back, concern was voiced that there could be a traffic impact, with as many as 50 new cars added to the neighborhood by such a development.

4. SALE AND PRESERVATION OF THE CENTRAL FIRE STATION

The fourth version of a document entitled "Provisions for the Sale of the Belmont Center Fire Station RFP," incorporating changes after discussions with representatives of the Commission and sent to all Commission members by Jeffrey Wheeler on October 21, 2005, was discussed.

5. DESIGN REVIEW AGREEMENT WITH ENGINE 1 TRAPELO LLC for REHABILITATION OF THE WAVERLEY FIRE STATION

Richard Cheek distributed copies of the Design Review Agreement, dated October 18, 2005, and signed by him as the representative of the Commission.

6. SPECIAL MEETING TO COMPLETE DESIGN GUIDELINES

A venue was set for an extraordinary meeting of the Commission on Saturday, November 5, 9.00 am to noon, at Equus Design, Cushing Square, for the purpose of finalizing the design guidelines of the Commission.

7. NEW BUSINESS

a) *Pleasant Street Reconstruction.* Linn Hobbs raised his concern about the style of a new stone wall that was being constructed along Pleasant Street, west of Snake Hill Road, as part of the Pleasant Street reconstruction. The wall did not conform to the stipulations of the agreement between the Commission and the Town that formed the basis of the assent of the Commission to the Pleasant Street reconstruction plan. In particular, the wall was flat-faced, of quite different stone from the existing old stone walls, and amounted to a stone veneer on a concrete retaining wall. He also noted that some of the older walls were scheduled for removal and reconstruction further from the street, and that the removal of trees in the Historic District portion of Pleasant Street could further damage existing walls, even if not scheduled for moving; given the style of wall that seem to be favored by the contractors, he was concerned that the older walls might not be reconstructed with the same stones and in the same style as they had been originally built. He undertook to draft a letter of concern to the Selectmen, with a copy to the Massachusetts Historical Commission. .

Minutes recorded by Linn Hobbs

