

BELMONT HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Town Hall

May 7, 2003 7:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

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

PLEASANT STREET RECONSTRUCTION

Attending: Arthur Wolfson, Pleasant Street resident.

Sharon Vanderslice reported that the Commission's letter to the Board of Selectmen approving the reconstruction of this street subject to certain conditions may need to be amended in light of additional information received from Tim McCarthy of the Municipal Light Department. Mr. McCarthy said that his department could not lay conduit under the street for the telephone and cable companies. Those wires would have to go in a separate trench. He also said that the Light Department's conduit would extend from Trapelo Road to Brighton Street, rather than to Route 2. The department is committed to putting the primary circuit underground between Concord and Clifton during reconstruction as well as two of the three primary circuits between Concord and Trapelo. Secondary lines, the ones that hook up each individual house or business, will go underground when residents are prepared to pay for it. Hand holes at each property line will allow this work to proceed in the future without digging up the street.

TOWN HALL COMPLEX

Michael Smith reported that plans for the renovation of the Town Hall Annex and the School Administration Building are out to bid. General bids are due on May 14. Estimates are lower than expected. Renovations to the third floor of the Town Hall, which will house town offices, are almost completed. The heating pipes in the second floor side hall next to the door of the auditorium have been boxed in.

DRAFT PRESERVATION EASEMENT FOR 5 SOMERSET STREET

Attending: Frank and Gillian Aguilar, owners, Catherine Shortsleeve, attorney, John Freeman, architect. Belmont residents: Charles Hamann, Dix Campbell, Ralph and Sherry Jones, Kit and Ted Dreier, John Sos, Justina Nassise, and others.

Frank and Gillian Aguilar, owners, came before the Commission with their attorney, Catherine Shortsleeve, and their architect, John Freeman, to review a draft Preservation Easement for the house, barn, and landscape at 5 Somerset Street. The Aguilars wish to

convert the barn to a dwelling, which would then become part of a two-residence cluster development on the property, if a variance is granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals. The family presented a letter from Michael Steinitz of the Massachusetts Historical Commission stating that the MHC was prepared to approve the easement pending any comments or changes requested by the Town of Belmont.

Mr. Cheek began the discussion by saying that everyone present was eager to save the barn, but there were differences of opinion on how to best preserve the barn and farmstead. If 5 Somerset Street becomes a two-owner property, a preservation restriction that includes baseline documentation will be required in order to protect the landscape. However, Mr. Cheek explained that individual members would still be free to vote for or against the cluster development, even if the wording of a preservation restriction was approved.

Commission members reviewed the easement draft in detail, asking for clarification and various changes to the document.

Others at the hearing were then invited to comment. Ralph Jones of 26 Prentiss Lane said he would like to see the historic barn on this property protected, but didn't believe that the financial burden of doing so should fall on one person. Instead, he suggested that the community create a non-profit entity to restore the barn as working rather than living space. He and his wife, Sherry, pledged \$25,000 in seed money for this project. He suggested that the barn could then be opened on an occasional basis for community use. Perhaps documents belonging to the Belmont Historical Society could be stored there.

Dix Campbell argued in favor of converting the barn to a residence, saying that old buildings cannot be "frozen in time." He recommended that the Commission preserve the flexibility to make changes to both the house and the barn.

Charles Hamann, a former member of the Historic District Commission, said that he believed it was the charge of the Zoning Board of Appeals to deal with issues of use and the charge of the Historic District Commission to deal with issues of preservation. Mr. Cheek concurred with that distinction but stated that the HDC had become involved with the zoning issue at the direct request of both the ZBA and the Aguilar's. The ZBA had asked the HDC to review the proposal for converting the barn to a residence and then present its recommendations to the ZBA before that board acted upon the Aguilar's application for a variance. The Aguilar's had also specifically requested the HDC to support their application at the ZBA hearing.

Kit Dreier of 11 Howells Road, speaking in favor of the barn conversion, pointed out that since this would be a cluster development, the Aguilar's were asking for a division of ownership, not a division of property.

John Sos of 8 Clifton Street, an abutter to the Aguilar property, spoke on behalf of himself and his neighbors, the Porters, in opposition to the proposal. He said that converting the barn to a dwelling would make a qualitative difference in the

neighborhood. To cast a “yes” vote on this proposal would be supporting new development in an area that, according to zoning regulations, is already built out.

Ted Dreier spoke in favor of the barn conversion, saying that most historic barns have disappeared because they did not have a contemporary use. This barn is at a turning point, he said.

Justina Nassise of 561 Pleasant Street, another abutter to the Aguilar property, said she agreed with Mr. Dreier. “It would not offend me to see this barn as a house. I would rather see the barn be used in this way than neglected.”

The Aguilars agreed to review the Commission’s suggested revisions to the preservation easement and return with a final draft at the Commission’s next meeting on June 11.

701 PLEASANT STREET

Attending: Sarah Bush, owner, and Tom Hecht, architect.

Jonathan and Sarah Bush wish to convert their early 20th century garage, which is concrete with brick sides, into a playroom. They also want to connect the garage to their 1858 house with an enclosed walkway. As part of the renovation, a 1989 addition that was originally built as an office would be converted into a mud room. The renovation would also involve replacing some modern windows in the kitchen with six-over-six windows that are more in keeping with those in the rest of the house and replacing a side door (circa 1989) with a window.

While sympathetic to the new use, Commission members said that Mr. Hecht’s garage redesign looked too much like a pavilion and “called too much attention to itself.” They suggested that the design be simplified to eliminate a proposed cupola and replace it with a skylight. They also recommended that the proposed French doors on the garage be replaced with doors that mimic the look of garage doors of the period. (Mr. Cheek referred Mr. Hecht to a book published by the Brookline Historical Commission on early 20th century garages.) They also suggested that a transparent material be used on the breezeway, so that it did not compete for attention with the house and garage. The design hierarchy should be (1) house, (2) garage, and (3) breezeway.

Mr. Hecht and Ms. Bush agreed to return with a revised plan.

480 PLEASANT STREET

Attending: Amy Heistand, owner.

Ms. Heistand asked the Commission to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the replacement of her front porch roof. While the main house is roofed in black munson

slate, the porch currently has roll roofing, which she would like to replace with a like material for reasons of cost. The Commission approved the certificate, saying that in-kind replacement was permitted.

WAVERLEY FIRE STATION

A warrant article that would permit the sale of this historic building is coming up for a vote at Town Meeting in June. Lydia Ogilby said that she would like to see the future use of this building contingent on a Trapelo Road Master Plan, which the town is just beginning to develop. Mr. Cheek said that he would explore the possibility of having Belmont's fire stations declared eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Such a designation would make future owners eligible for federal tax credits if they chose to rehabilitate the building according to the Secretary of the Interior's preservation standards. This building will be discussed at a special session of the Capital Budget Committee on May 19.

Minutes of the Commission's meeting on April 28 were approved. The next meeting of the Historic District Commission will be on Wednesday, June 11, at Town Hall.

Minutes recorded by Sharon Vanderslice