

Historic District Commission

Town of Natick, Massachusetts

Meeting Minutes for 4/26/2023

Remote meeting (Zoom)

Commission Members in Attendance:

Jeannine Furrer (acting Chair)
Chris Milford (Clerk)
Melissa Sullivan
Matt Labrie
Susana Fernandes

The meeting was called to order at 7:09 PM.

Old Business

Mr. Milford made a motion to approve the meeting minutes for 4/12/2023, and Ms. Fernandes seconded. Approved by the following voice vote:

Ms. Furrer – Yes
Mr. Milford – Yes
Mr. Labrie – Yes
Ms. Fernandes – Yes
Ms. Sullivan – Abstained

New Business

Continuing discussion of the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for renovations at 68 Eliot Street in the John Eliot Historic District. Updated plans were presented by owner Bill Churchill and architect Leslie Saul, as well as Monique Jankowski and Stephanie May of Ms. Saul's office.

Mr. Churchill explained changes to application: Siding changed from Hardiplank to red cedar clapboard with 4" exposure; moved skylight from street side to river side; changed railing on deck to wire mesh; extended stone veneer to park; changed top floor park-facing window so that the trim does not overlap the rake board; replaced proposed basement slider with windows; added color spec for metal roof; added permeable pavers under deck in back (not enough sun to grow anything); moved electrical connection from entrance to around the corner; added small roof to existing basement door; changed stone veneer from Boston round to ledge veneer.

Mr. Milford read the two attached emails into the record.

Ms. Furrer read commissioner Collins' attached comments into the record as well.

Mr. Milford commented that the roof is a dark gray called "iron ore." He is still struggling with the solar panels. It is a non-historic element, but we tend to approve because of the town.

Mr. Churchill clarified that the panels he would like to eventually install are not yet available in the U.S. They are glue-on solar arrays that connect to each other over the roof panel seams with no additional penetration to the roof. They are lower profile than existing panels in the neighborhood.

Mr. Milford commented that it seems to be a bad idea to have the solar panels integrated into a roof that will last 30+years. Mr. Churchill stated that the panels have a 25-year warranty and will not require major work to replace.

Ms. Furrer thought these panels would be a vast improvement over what we are accustomed to seeing.

Mr. Milford thought the house would stand out in the neighborhood with a full metal roof. He thought the addition was appropriate and balanced with the existing design of the house. He is worried about setting a precedent for the district in metal roof requests, but he is inclined to accept if a compelling argument could be made. The house doesn't have great historic characteristics to begin with. For windows and sliding doors, Mr. Milford recommended white because it is easy and historic. Some other houses have colors that match the house. He is not inclined toward black windows.

Mr. Churchill indicated that no color had been selected for back deck. Ms. Saul stated it might be the same gray. Ms. Jankowski indicated that the front door and upper shed door would be stained, and the other doors painted.

Mr. Milford noticed there were fences in various locations and would like to see details and an elevation for what exactly is proposed.

Mr. Churchill explained that all zoning regulations are violated as the house currently stands. He has approval from the Conservation Commission for the site plan; next is the HDC, and then the Zoning Board of Appeals after rejection by the Building Department. Mr. Milford stated that any approval by the HDC would be on the condition that any changes required by the ZBA be brought back before the HDC. If there are major changes, the HDC will decide if a new application will be required.

Mr. Milford stated that the house has a unique prominence to the park next door. He thinks the proposed addition is understated enough. Mr. Churchill said that he saw an old postcard that showed the house originally had windows facing the park, and he thought re-adding those windows would make the house a better neighbor to the park.

Mr. Milford said it's unclear from the site plan what vegetation was proposed where. Mr. Churchill indicated that there's weeping willow, a cherry tree and some shrubs. The Conservation Commission approved taking down one tree. He is hoping to get some window boxes; there's no room for plantings in the front. On the water side, invasive species need to be managed. When the spillway is removed, there will be an extra 30 feet of land, and it's unknown what will grow and affect planting options.

Ms. Fernandes was pleased to see that most issues had been addressed, and she had no additional comments.

Ms. Sullivan didn't feel the application was consistent with the district. She disliked that the chimney was removed, and she thought the roof stands out. She also did not like the deck railing. She thought that approving the metal roof would be a disservice to the district. She indicated she was not present at the previous meeting.

Mr. Churchill summarized the previous meeting: It was discussed that asphalt shingles are not historic either. The chimney was not discussed; this is the first time it has been brought up. It's collapsing from below and needs to be removed. The house next door also had a similar small, not architectural chimney that was removed. The deck railing proposal is a result of discussions at the previous meeting.

Ms. Sullivan said she struggled to find a theme in the house; there are a lot of different things going on. She was not sure what the owner wants to do, and suggested something simple and clean.

Mr. Churchill said the goal was to reduce the number of things going on. The house had three major renovations in the past 150 years. Ms. Sullivan said she appreciated the other improvements proposed.

Mr. Labrie thought the skylight was in a better location. He asked if the roof was trusses or stick frame. The skylight seemed to be too close to the ridge and he wondered if it would need to move down. Ms. Saul said they would like the skylight to be as close to the ridge as possible.

Mr. Labrie thought the deck railing Mr. Collins had suggested at the previous meeting was different from what is in the new proposal; the proposed railing is more modern. He felt it needed tweaking to fit in with the neighborhood. He asked about the stairs going to grade from the driveway – is Mr. Churchill planning to keep the pipe rail that's painted red? Mr. Churchill was not sure – it may not work with the pointing and siding. Mr. Labrie pointed out that there was no railing in the plans for the stairs that go along the shed. Ms. Jankowski suggested it could be a wood handrail. Mr. Labrie requested specs.

Mr. Labrie asked if the pavers between the deck and driveway would be the same as the ones in the back; he would hate to have competing looks. He also thought Azek Quick corner boards were incompatible with clapboard siding because the J-channel has a groove that makes painting messy. He suggested using regular Azek board. He thought the shed was too tall. The house is 28' wide, and the addition and the shed together add another 22'6" of frontage, which is another 80%. It also blocks public view of the river. He thought a one-story shed would be sufficient to store the trash bins and lawn mower. Mr. Labrie also thought that a decision on the roof should not be made based on solar panel needs. He said asphalt shingles are a sustainable option because they can be recycled. He recalled that in the late 1990s, the HDC required the Scared Heart Church to replace their roof with slate shingles, and maintained that there are other alternatives based on previous decisions.

Mr. Churchill stated that a slate roof would be too heavy for the structure. Ms. Jankowski indicated that without the two-story shed, the trash bins would be out in the open, and there would be a 6' fence anyway.

Ms. Furrer said that the color of the skylight frame needs to be carefully selected to match the roof. She felt that the roof overhang on the rear door at the bottom of the stairs would be a place for someone to hit their head. She thought the proposal tied together in an appropriate way. She thought the cedar clapboard and stone details are appropriate historically. She indicated that Mr. Churchill persuaded her that the roof is the best of the choices available, and thought it would be better than standard solar panels. She thought the shed needed gutters and downspouts.

Mr. Milford asked where the HVAC unit is. Mr. Churchill answered that there is one next to the shed, one next to the park.

For the windows, Mr. Churchill stated that there are some lead-time problems with Marvin, so they are considering Anderson, probably Storm Watch or Series A.

Ms. Furrer was curious about the actual color of the roof since there can be variations in photos. Ms. Saul said that she ordered samples of various colors.

Ms. Furrer suggested continuing the meeting, but Mr. Churchill wanted to put the application to a vote and have the resource person handle the details. Mr. Labrie thought there were too many missing details to vote on the application. Mr. Milford thought that the applicant has been willing to respond to comments, and he has higher confidence than if it was a developer.

Mr. Labrie was worried about setting a precedent with the metal roof, and eventually seeing applications for a metal roof on something like a Victorian. Mr. Milford pointed out that there are two separate districts, and what we agree to in one won't necessarily be what we agree to in the other. This house doesn't have any distinct style and has limited historic contribution to the district. We are not obligated to approve things in all locations because we did in one; we make decisions based on individual applications.

Mr. Milford made a motion to approve the application with the following qualifications:

1. Any revisions to the submitted and revised application by the ZBA, Conservation Commission, or any other regulating body must be submitted to the HDC to determine if it requires public review by the HDC or a new application.

2. Provide details and materials for the proposed fence and gate including typical elevation.

3. Provide details and material for the proposed deck railing.

4. Provide details and material for the proposed roof over the basement entry.

5. Provide a revised detail for the corner boards.

6. Provide specification and color selection for permeable and non-permeable pavers.

7. Provide color specification for the windows and confirm final specification for the windows.

8. Provide a color sample of the standing seam roof.

9. Provide a PDF of the full building applications for permit.

The motion was seconded by Ms. Fernandes, and approved by the following voice vote:

Mr. Milford – Yes

Ms. Furrer – Yes

Mr. Labrie – No
Ms. Sullivan – No
Ms. Fernandes – Yes

Other Business

1. Bacon Free Library at 58 Eliot Street would like to demolish one pathway and regrade part of another. Mr. Milford made a motion to issue a Certificate of Non-applicability, seconded by Ms. Sullivan, and unanimously approved by voice vote:

Mr. Milford – Yes
Ms. Furrer – Yes
Ms. Sullivan – Yes
Ms. Fernandes – Yes
Mr. Labrie – Yes

Waiving \$100 filing fee.

2. For 5 Auburn Street (former Eliot School), the Select Board chose the application for 12 units in the existing building and 21 units in new building, citing the need for affordable housing. As 40B housing, HDC does not have jurisdiction, but we should provide opinion and guidance.

3. Mr. Milford made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:28PM, seconded by Ms. Furrer, and unanimously approved by voice vote:

Mr. Milford – Yes
Ms. Furrer – Yes
Ms. Sullivan – Yes
Mr. Labrie – Yes
Ms. Fernandes – Yes

These minutes were prepared and submitted by Susana Fernandes.