

MELROSE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
Meeting and Public Hearing
Wednesday, February 6, 2019
6:15 PM
Basement Conference Room, City Hall, 562 Main Street

PRESENT: Brad Hutchinson, Charlene Marinelli, Justine Sterling, Kevin Erb, and Robin Peevey

ABSENT: Michael Coleman and Judith Sullivan

Denise Gaffey, Director & City Planner, and Emma Schnur, Senior Planner, were present.

The meeting was called to order at 6:16 PM by Mr. Hutchinson.

In accordance with the Open Meeting Law, Mr. Hutchinson inquired whether anyone would be making a video or audio recording of the meeting. No one in attendance indicated that they would be making such a recording.

I. MINUTES

Ms. Marinelli MADE a MOTION to approve the minutes from November 27, 2018. Mr. Erb SECONDED the MOTION. All members voted in favor. None were opposed.

II. APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATES OF APPROPRIATENESS

Application for Certificate of Appropriateness: Melrose Family YMCA, 497 Main Street (public hearing)

Katelyn Papadopoulos, Executive Director for the Melrose Family YMCA, and Steve Cefalo, the YMCA's landscape architect, were present to describe the application to modify the mini-park/courtyard at 497 Main Street. This public hearing was continued from November 27, 2018.

The YMCA representatives described the plantings that will go in each of the beds in the courtyard. An American sycamore will be planted in Bed 1 at the corner of Main Street and East Foster Street to add shade to that area of the courtyard. There was discussion about the caliber of the tree when it is planted. Members feel that a slightly larger caliber of three to 3.5 inches, rather than 2.5 inches, is preferable so that the tree is somewhat taller when it is planted. Any caliber larger than that is likely to be stressed in the bed, which could negatively impact its ability to develop into a large, mature tree. The tree should really develop in three to five years and can get up to 35 or 40 feet tall.

To add color to the area, a common lilac will be planted in Bed 2, which abuts the YMCA building on the East Foster Street entrance of the courtyard. In adjoining Bed 3, a weeping Alaskan cypress will replace the existing crabapple that was planted this past fall. The weeping Alaskan cypress is an easy-to-manage evergreen tree that should grow to about 25 feet. The crabapple will be relocated to behind the YMCA where the fruits that fall from it will pose less of an issue.

Bed 4, located at the Main Street entrance to the courtyard, will contain a limelight hydrangea since there is not enough room for a tree. This large shrub has an extended flowering period that lasts from July to the fall. Five flowering hibiscus shrubs will be planted in Beds 5 and 6, which are connected and wrap around the front of the courtyard. The hibiscus plants should grow up to ten feet tall at maturity.

Lastly, Bed 7, which is a new planter between the brick wall and the AstroTurf, will contain three emerald green arborvitae trees. It was originally proposed that the arborvitae would be three feet tall when planted, but the members requested that somewhat larger arborvitae be planted from the beginning to help screen the brick wall behind them. According to the landscape architect, it should be possible to plant five foot tall arborvitae. In order to create balance along that wall, Ms. Sterling requested that one of the arborvitae trees be centered in front of the tile pattern, with the other two placed equidistant on each side. Bed 7 has a thick rim which allows it to also serve as a bench.

Members inquired if the AstroTurf would be permanent, and Ms. Papadopoulos said it would be. When they modified the courtyard in summer 2018, the YMCA did not have the budget to extend the pavers to that area. Cement was an option, but they thought it would not look good. Ms. Peevey mentioned that cement actually could have looked a lot better than the AstroTurf because you can stamp it and mimic the appearance of pavers. According to Mr. Erb, the AstroTurf would look better if they had extended the elevated bed along Main Street in front of it.

In order to help shield the AstroTurf from view, the YMCA has agreed to plant an American sycamore tree centered in front of the turf. Members discussed additional means of shielding, and are supportive of setting back the AstroTurf about two to three feet and placing a bench on each side of the tree. The two benches should face Main Street, and are in addition to the four benches that will go in the passive sitting area of the courtyard. A member requested that the YMCA use the same material under the benches that is used in another area of the courtyard, since there are already quite a few different materials used. The YMCA's Facilities Department will see if they are able to remove some of the AstroTurf so that it does not extend all the way to the sidewalk.

The YMCA was required by their insurance to remove the trees in the courtyard because the roots were breaking through the cement and causing structural issues and tripping incidents. As such, they want new trees to be planted farther from the building so they do not contribute to flooding. Since removing the trees and installing the AstroTurf, they have not experienced any flooding in the building. Mr. Hutchinson encouraged the representatives from the YMCA to come back to the Historic District Commission in the future if they change their feelings toward the AstroTurf. Due to members' displeasure with the AstroTurf along Main Street, they request that the Certificate of Appropriateness stipulates that AstroTurf cannot be utilized in the courtyard if the existing turf needs to be removed or replaced.

The group discussed the possibility of the YMCA adding a mural to the building's south-facing exterior wall, and members are very supportive of the idea. Rather than painting directly on the brick, large panels can instead be painted and fastened to the brick. Ms. Papadopoulos mentioned how she would also love to create a rooftop garden adjacent to the courtyard. If either of these initiatives is pursued, the YMCA will return to the Historic District Commission for approval.

In the event that the YMCA's Facilities Department is unable to remove the AstroTurf under where the new benches will go, alternative arrangements will need to be made to allow for adequate screening. Members agreed to assign Justine Sterling as a point-person for the project should the Applicant need to make a minor change. This way, the Applicant can get approval without having to come back to the Commission.

Ms. Sterling MADE a MOTION to issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the courtyard modifications at 497 Main Street as described in the application. Mr. Erb SECONDED the MOTION. All members voted in favor. None were opposed.

III. OTHER

Members spoke briefly about efforts to extend the Downtown Historic District. Mr. Hutchinson suggested that it may make sense to start small at extending the district for now, and just add the one block on Main Street between East Foster Street and Grove Street.

The meeting adjourned at 7:19 PM.