

MELROSE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
Meeting and Public Hearing
Tuesday, February 9, 2021
7:00 PM
Remote

PRESENT: Brad Hutchinson, Kevin Erb, Justine Sterling, Liz Ryan, Michael Coleman, Richard Curl

ABSENT: None

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

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM by Mr. Hutchinson.

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the Melrose Historic District Commission was conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible. Specific information and the general guidelines for remote participation by members of the public and/or parties with a right and/or requirement to attend this meeting was found on the City of Melrose's website. No in-person attendance of members of the public was permitted, but every effort was made to ensure that the public could adequately access the proceedings in real time. An audio or video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive record of proceedings was posted on the mmtv3.org website as soon as possible after the meeting. Meeting access information was found at the following link and the plans could be requested by emailing the Senior Planner: www.cityofmelrose.org/remote-meetings.

I. MINUTES

Mr. Coleman MADE a MOTION to approve the minutes from February 9, 2021. Mr. Curl SECONDED the MOTION. All members voted in favor. None were opposed.

II. OTHER

12-16 Essex Street Comprehensive Permit Application

Mr. Coleman introduced the letter he drafted to the Zoning Board of Appeals regarding the 12-16 Essex Street Comprehensive Permit Application. He explained how he chose to not put in too much about background since the ZBA knows that the Commission denied the Certificate of Appropriateness. He tried to tame the passion because he does not think it would be helpful at this point. This should be a document that the Commission can collectively agree to.

Mr. Coleman read through the letter. The Commission still wants to be able to say that they have an interest in this project. While Commission members have mixed opinions, there was agreement that there should at least be documentation of the historic value of the structure to be demolished. He discussed the first two bullets in his letter and reflected that those points are the issues that doomed this project from the beginning. By stepping the top floor back, the developer will not lose any height and it is a nod towards being more respectful of City Hall.

Mr. Erb stated that he wished the developer put the same care and detail into this building as their first proposal. They were very proud of their last building and now it seems like they are doing the opposite.

He would like this building design to get closer to the other building. The Senior Planner explained that, along with requiring additional affordable housing units, Chapter 40B also caps the returns that a developer can receive. As such, 40B projects are often pared down from a design perspective so they are less expensive to build.

Mr. Coleman said that the developer lives here and he has to live with this building. He should want to do the right thing because he owns the building right next to this one. It is important that the ZBA looks at how this building could fit better in the district. There are vast areas of no fenestration but it is highly visible; it will look like a tenement building. In the letter, Mr. Coleman wanted to talk about the cooperative relationship the Commission has had with this developer and others in the district and show that we are sincere.

Mr. Hutchinson expressed his appreciate for the work Mr. Coleman has done and there is very little he would change. The group agreed that the letter would go on Historic District Commission letterhead.

Ms. Ryan mentioned that it is important that the developer understands that we particularly want the retail component to have a unique, authentic experience on the street level for there to be success. Mr. Curl added that buildings such as this have a big frame that allows glass to be more dynamic. There is an opportunity here to create something that is new and exciting. Ms. Ryan and Mr. Curl agreed to wordsmith their points and send to Planning Staff for inclusion in the letter. The Director & City Planner reiterated that all approval will be consolidated under the ZBA's authority and the Commission is strictly acting in an advisory role.

18 Winthrop Street Case

Ms. Gaffey explained that every now and again the City receives a request and it is unclear if it is something that needs Historic District Commission approval. The owners of 18 Winthrop Street have reached out because they would like to relocate a window from the side of their house to the rear. Mr. Coleman said that we do not want to obstructionist. We are looking at a house that is well kept and there is a pride in ownership. This is a tiny window on an addition. He questioned if we could have an administrative approval where City Staff can approval a small-scale project like this. Ms. Gaffey responded that we do not have that process in place now so that is something we would have to create. The group agreed that it would be best for the applicant to appear before the Commission but the materials they have already submitted to the City will be sufficient.

The meeting adjourned at 8:05 PM.