

MELROSE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
Meeting and Public Hearing
Tuesday, May 11, 2021
7:00 PM
Remote

PRESENT: Brad Hutchinson, Justine Sterling, Richard Curl, Kevin Erb

ABSENT: Liz Ryan, Michael Coleman

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

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 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. APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

First Baptist Church, 561 Main Street (Public Hearing)

Terron Tuckett, Pastor at the First Baptist Church, appeared to discuss the proposed Little Free Food Pantry at 561 Main Street. He explained that the concept is similar to a Little Free Library where people donate and take books but, in this case, it is a free food pantry. They will be modifying an existing podium to add shelves and a shingled roof. There will be white lettering that says "Little Free Food Pantry" and "Give what you can, take what you need" on the side. It will be stained in a reddish-wine color that is meant for outdoor use.

A member inquired if the podium will be permanently affixed to the ground or removable. Mr. Tuckett responded that it will be removable and that he does not want anything out there that they cannot easily get rid of if necessary.

Mr. Erb MADE a MOTION to approve Little Free Pantry proposed for 561 Main Street as described in the application. Ms. Sterling SECONDED the MOTION. All members voted in favor. None were opposed.

II. OTHER

City Hall Door

Ms. Schnur explained that she connected with Jay McNeil, Facilities Manager, to relay the Commission's desire for an Oak door that is stained to match the existing hardwood doors at City Hall. He was unable to attend the meeting but she read the following email from him:

"I reached out to the door supplier who specializes in doors and he responded 'It's [Oak] more of an interior door application as it's not as dense a wood as Mahogany. Mahogany is the preferred choice for exterior doors because it's a hard dense wood and naturally resistant to rot. With the doors being stained to match the existing (with the exception of the grain), I really don't think anyone will be able to tell the difference between the two species.' When I worked at Harvard with historical buildings going back over 100 years, this was a very common practice there as well when replacing exterior doors, they would be converted to Mahogany but stained to match the existing due to the natural resistance to weather and rot. The door has already been ordered. We may be able to change the order but that's really not preferred due to the information above, and that may delay the replacement even longer"

Members were very frustrated that the door was ordered before it was approved by the HDC. While the Mahogany door is hardwood like the others, it is not an in-kind replacement given that it is a different type of wood from Oak. Ms. Schnur mentioned that the Facilities Manager may have gotten confused because the group discussed utilizing a Mahogany door at the first hearing and he may have considered that an in-kind replacement. Either way, he should have received final approval from the Commission before ordering the door to avoid an issue like this. Members wanted to be sure this does not happen again with another City project. Despite their disapproval with the process, the group agreed that the Mahogany door would be acceptable if it were stained to match the existing doors and the same hardware was used.

Ms. Sterling MADE a MOTION to approve the ADA-accessible door at 562 Main Street as described in the application, with the condition that the stain of the wood and the hardware match the other doors at City Hall. Mr. Curl SECONDED the MOTION. All members voted in favor. None were opposed.

Incentive Zoning Amendment

Ms. Gaffey summarized the incentive zoning amendment that was before the City Council. She wanted to give the Commission a chance to weigh in since the area it encompasses includes the Historic District. The zoning is meant to incentivize development in the City's transit-oriented and smart growth locations, specifically the areas around the three commuter rail stations and the downtown, in exchange for community benefits such as sustainable building design and amenities for bicyclists and pedestrians. It will allow the Planning Board to approve, at their discretion, increased building height, increased FAR, and flexibility around open space in the BA-1 and BA-2 Districts. As a part of the process, the Planning Board is also proposing to rezone the area within the BD Medical District to the BA-1 District, which will allow projects such as the Caruso property to take advantage of the new incentive zoning tool. The height incentive will not be allowed in the BA-1 District as that area includes much of the Historic District and there is agreement that the extra story is not appropriate for this area.

Members had some concerns about the idea of rezoning part of the BD District to the BA-1 District and if that would send the message that the City wants to see the historic structures in that area redeveloped. Ms. Gaffey clarified that the new zoning would not change anything related to the HDC's authority over the properties in the Historic District. The intention is not to encourage these properties to be torn down, but rather to align the zoning with the kind of structures that people want to see in this area. Right now, the BD District allows eight stories and requires generous setbacks that would not allow a mixed-use project with commercial on the first floor and residential above. Members said their issue is more the optics and they would not want another situation where a 40B is proposed in the District. They generally support the

idea of mixed-use buildings in this area. Ms. Gaffey described the next stages of the City Council's process and encouraged members to submit any comments they have about the zoning.

The meeting adjourned at 7:57 PM.