HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION MEETING  
COLE AUDITORIUM, GREENWICH LIBRARY  
GREENWICH, CT  
MARCH 9, 2016  

MINUTES

ATTENDEES PRESENT  
COMMISSIONERS: STEPHEN BISHOP – CHAIRMAN, LLOYD HULL, NOBLE WELCH, FI FI SHERIDAN, KATHRIN BROWN, DARIUS TORABY  

ALTERNATES: MARIE WILLIAMS, JENNIFER KOSSLER  

ABSENT: ARIS CRIS  

Mr. Bishop called meeting to order at 7:32pm.  

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1. 220 EAST PUTNAM AVENUE  
GREENWICH, CT  

PRESENTED BY: R.S. GRANOFF, ARCHITECT, P.C.  
OWNER: PARISH OF CHRIST CHURCH, GREENWICH, CT  

ADVISORY OPINION TO PLANNING & ZONING  

Review proposed exterior of new, institution building located on property in Putnam Hill Historic District [National Register of Historic Places]  

Mr. Bishop gave welcome, introductions and guidance description of the meeting and the responsibilities of the HDC membership on the application.  

Mr. Granoff introduced himself as the lead presenter for the application and explained that there would be a few presenters who would offer remarks before his explanatory comments on the application.  

Reverend Dr. James Lemler, Rector Christ Church, opened the presentation by stating his support for the Neighbor-to-Neighbor application as a necessary and important project to the community and consonant with the values of historic stewardship and, more particularly, with this historic district. Neighbor-to-Neighbor is embarking on construction on a building that will be appropriate, attractive and suitable. Dr. Lemler continued with the importance of the services that Neighbor-to-
Neighbor will offer and how those services would be enclosed in a building that will be congruent with its siting.

Dr. Lemler further described the historicity of Christ Church declaring that it has had continuous stewardship of the site for over 300 years. Christ Church has constructed numerous buildings (by his own account 5 churches, 2 parish halls, several residences, and additional communal services). It has also renovated and restored its historic facilities – spending several millions of dollars for that purpose alone. The historic stewardship has been recognized far and wide for its quality-- it is a faithful steward of historic properties. He further added that we are committed to historic compassion and care. We are committed to historic properties and have demonstrated that numerous times. We don't believe that historic property and historic mission are opposed to each other but rather reinforce and strengthen each other. These values will be encompassed in the Neighbor-to-Neighbor project. A history of care and service will become united with historic properties.

Dr. Lemler then gave a brief time line history of Christ Church and added that Christ Church has worked with all other members within the [National Register] historic district as well as its residential neighbors by offering space for community gatherings. Christ Church has been stewards of the Tomes Higgins House for over 50 years which doing significant, historic and sensitive improvements so it could serve programmatic goals of Christ Church including opening its space for outreach and other support groups. Its restoration in the 1990s also won several preservation and architectural awards. So, the Neighbor-to-Neighbor project is important to our history, use, preservation and compassion that is at the true heart of this historic district and town. Therefore it does not harm our historic values, rather it deepens and expands them. Dr. Lemler urged the commission to offer their helpful and constructive advice to Neighbor-to-Neighbor and affirm this historic and sensitive addition to our community.

Dr. Lemler then introduced Neil Bouknight, a member of Christ Church’s Architectural Review Committee to speak.

Mr. Bouknight gave a reading of his letter (found in each HDC member’s packet) in support of the proposed Neighbor-to-Neighbor building. He then introduced Christine (last name to speak), a member of Christ Church’s Architectural Review Committee, a resident of Greenwich 23 years and a member of Christ Church to speak.

Christine Nichols spoke in favor of the new building. She gave a summary of her past history as an architect that included working with the National Trust of Historic Preservation at Phillip Johnson’s Glass House. She then stated that Christ Church’s Architectural Review Committee had met many times over the past two years as well as conducted numerous meetings with R.S. Granoff Architect to determine which direction to follow. We had understood that the size of the N2N building would be sizable in order to meet problematic needs, we all agreed that the design
of the building should be a supplementary structure in relation to the Tomes Higgins House designed by Calvert Vaux and illustrated in his *Cottages and Villas* book (1854). She described Vaux’s plans for the house and noted that the accessory buildings were also a part of the composition. This combined with other meetings with the Review Committee and the architect resulted in a design of a two story above grade structure that incorporated many of the Vaux’s design elements found in the Tomes Higgins House and brings a barn-like feel with an opportunity of bringing in natural light into the central core of the building. Among the many design elements taken from the Tomes Higgins House was the complimentary color scheme and clapboard and trim dimensions. There has been a clear focus on historical integrity, building typology, hierarchy and residential scale and materials.

Mr. Granoff then spoke as the representative for Neighbor-to-Neighbor. He has been a resident of Greenwich for 27 years and has been a practicing architect for the same amount of time. He gave a brief summary of his completed projects that included work on many historic buildings in Greenwich including the central Greenwich Post Office, Cos Cob’s River House, the former CL&P Building on Railroad Avenue. He began working on the Neighbor-to-Neighbor project about four years ago performing a variety of research tasks, conducting interviews, analyzing and evaluating needs in order to determine the best way to build in a most sensitive way especially as this site is a recognized NRHP district. Mr. Granoff also stated that the project has already received the approval from the Connecticut State of Historic Preservation Office. Mr. Granoff then gave a brief description of the Putnam Hill Historic District – a listing that was attained in 1979 and is comprised of 16 buildings along East Putnam Avenue that incorporate many different architectural styles. He then spoke to the design objectives. His meetings occurred with two groups - - Neighbor-to-Neighbor and Christ Church – and both were instrumental in the vetting process. It was concluded that the building was to be subordinate to the Tomes-Higgins house and that is the main reason the proposed building is located where it is. That was the number one objective. The location, massing and architectural features should not compete with the Tomes-Higgins House nor the other structures on the property. Further decisions included that the building should be discreet to support historic integrity. When it comes to building design, the goal for Neighbor-to-Neighbor was to be a welcome and dignified entrance for the Neighbor-to-Neighbor clients. We decided we wanted to use some of elements from the Tomes-Higgins carriage house but refer to them in a classic way. We also wanted to be honest. We are not trying to build a Calvert Vaux. We are trying to create a building that is sympathetic to the Tomes-Higgins House without copying it. We also wanted the building to be energy and functionally efficient as well as be compliant with all zoning issues.

Mr. Granoff then discussed the location of the building and said that it is subordinate and to the back of the property. You do not see the building from East Putnam Avenue and that is due to the existing mature trees. We are proposing to add more trees so that the proposed structure will not be seen from the Tomes-Higgins House
nor will the proposed structure see the Tomes-Higgins House. We feel that that is a very important aspect.

Mr. Granoff further described the architectural vernacular calling it a barn-inspired design. The design came from multiple discussions and studies and a ‘barn-like’ erection was agreed upon and it was decided to go with a two-story building.

Mr. Granoff stated that his research began by carefully studying the Tomes-Higgins House that included studying and measuring details, honing in on colors, on trim, on brackets, on dormers, and very carefully deciding which of those elements from the Tomes-Higgins House would be used on the new proposed building. The selection would only refer to the building as due to proposed landscaping, you will not see the either building at the same time. Mr. Granoff also looked at history of accessory structures in town and what resulted was that the Bush-Holley site was a good example of introducing new buildings into a historic site and seeing a barn structure being reused as a program space still being subordinate to a main structure.

Mr. Granoff finished his presentation by saying he had letters of support from members of the Greenwich community that he would distribute to the HDC membership.

Mr. Bishop then opened the application to questioning by the HDC members.

Ms. Sheridan announced that she is recusing herself from voting on the project as she is a parishioner of Christ Church and was involved in the fundraising and restoration efforts on the Tomes-Higgins House and gave support to Christ Church’s Architectural Review Committee.

Ms. Williams announced that she, too, is a parishioner of Christ Church but will not recuse herself from voting on the application as she was not involved in any committees and considers herself to be objective and able to vote on the merit of the application.

Mr. Bishop accepted Ms. Sheridan’s and Ms. Williams’ statements.

Mr. Bishop then addressed the proposal and targeted the bracketing in the upper right hand corner from Tomes-Higgins House. Mr. Granoff replied that that element is picked up in all the buildings and is considered a prominent feature.

Mr. Bishop then inquired about the roof over the porches. Mr. Granoff replied that it was a copper roof and will be on all the lower porches. Mr. Bishop then asked about its look over time. Mr. Granoff replied that it goes from shiny, to brown to green. It dulls very quickly. The rest of the roof will be asphalt shingle and is representing the carriage house.
Mr. Granoff further continued by saying that he had chosen not to represent the carriage house as it was an ‘ok’ building as the architect of the carriage house did not do a great job representing the Tomes-Higgins House.

Mr. Bishop then inquired the date of the carriage house.

Mr. Granoff could not supply the date.

Ms. Williams asked for a point of clarification and stated that since the applicant wanted the building to be subordinate to the Tomes-Higgins House can you give us the height of the proposed building with the cupola versus the height of the Tomes-Higgins’ roofline. Mr. Granoff responded by saying that he did not have the exact numbers but said that the roof will be below the Tomes-Higgins House as well as be below the 40ft zoning permitted height.

Ms. Williams commented that from the drawings, it appears that the proposed building will be 40 feet high. So as a subordinate building, how does the proposed building compare to the Tomes-Higgins House.

Mr. Granoff responded that The Tomes-Higgins House roofline is quite different from the proposed building. And even with the cupola, the roof of the proposed building is about 7 feet below the Tomes-Higgins House roof. He further added that P&Z zoning does not take into account a cupola into its height regulations. So the overall height of the proposed building is about 33-35 feet.

Mr. Toraby asked if the applicant would be good enough to describe how the massing of the building and its character was arrived at.

Mr. Granoff responded that the big idea is a cross in shape and with porches at each of the four corners. The cross shape came out of the layout as a result of function. To reduce the mass, we had porches at every corner. Three have a function and the fourth is superfluous. We tried to accentuate the main gable. The barn reference is made through decorative sliding doors. The cupola came out of vernacular architecture and was a good use to intersect two pieces. The roofline and gables are assembled and act a historic reference. It is a simple building.

Mr. Toraby then asked if it would have been less costly to have a rectangular barn then.

Mr. Granoff responded, possibly.

Mr. Toraby stated his reasoning for pointing this out was that the only barn-like aspect I saw was the use of the vertical siding. What other elements can you show that are barn-like.
Mr. Granoff responded that he has said barn in quotes. Many barns have gabled roofs and the detailing is clean and simple.

Mr. Toraby stated that the cupola is a very distinctive element and will be visible all around and does not really belong to the rest of the design. The design does have the barn-like aspect that you had described and is a good effort but looks more residential. The window arrangements on one side are institutional and that there are quite a bit of mix of design elements. A simpler floor plan and a simpler design would achieve your goal and premise and would be more appropriate.

Mr. Granoff said that there are double hung windows everywhere but duly noted.

Mr. Bishop asked what kind are they [the windows]

Mr. Granoff responded that they are Marvin residential windows.

Mr. Bishop then inquired about the siding.

Mr. Granoff stated that there are two types of siding -- we have vertical and horizontal clapboard siding and textured white pine will be used.

Mr. Toraby asked about the heating system.

Mr. Granoff replied that there is no chimney.

Mr. Toraby asked about the copper roofing and how is it congruent to the rest of the design.

Mr. Granoff said that copper is a traditional design element. It is a warm material. There will be asphalt shingles and the main roof will be asphalt.

Mr. Toraby said that slate would be preferred but understood that copper is being used to save money. He further stated that he failed to see despite the fact of the borrowing of architectural details and adjacent elements of the nearby buildings, the relationship between the proposed building and its context and that the design did not excite him.

Mr. Granoff said he understood but felt that the building should not be exciting and deliberately chose not to introduce a modern-style building that he believed would have been chosen by other architects as that would not be appropriate.

Mr. Toraby stated he had great respect for the Granoff office and that his comments should simply be accepted as observations. He further went on to say that the overall view that he saw in the rendering does not have an architectural style and seems to be a conglomerate of elements.
Mr. Granoff accepted that comment as a compliment as he stated he purposely did not design a building with a style.

Mr. Bishop asked for Mr. Toraby’s suggestions to make it more stylistic.

Mr. Toraby said that there are far too many different elements on one structure – a copper roof over the main porch, then an eyebrow part of the roof that does not have a relationship to anything else, then the location of the windows are off -- they are separated from one another. There are a lot of aspects that do not excite. It should be a structure of distinct character and to me it does not relate that.

Mr. Bishop asked Mr. Toraby if he had any concrete ideas as to what should be changed.

Mr. Toraby said to start it should be from the floor plan and should have a specific orientation and rationale. It should relate the footprint to the building to the massing around it and the roofline. It’s all a nondescript descriptive structure and maybe that is what the applicant wanted.

Mr. Granoff said that’s what we want – it’s a background building. And the floor plan is specific to Neighbor-to-Neighbor’s needs and its program. The building comes out of the floor plan.

Mr. Toraby said he felt that the context that this building is in and it as an addition is far too distinctive and valuable for the Town of Greenwich and does not belong. If you look at each one of the buildings in its vicinity, each have distinctive plans and styles.

Mr. Granoff interrupted and said even the carriage house.

Mr. Toraby responded with including the carriage house. The carriage house is a carriage house. The proposed building will have a specific function and use as opposed to the carriage house that is a secondary structure. When compared to other buildings nearby, why this? This building that will have a public use is a major structure – why not have something much nicer? It’s a matter of floor plan and design.

Ms. Williams noticed a tension between the goals and objectives as the want of the proposed building to be a subordinate building and the taking of design elements of the Tomes-Higgins House as there had been a conscious decision about which design elements the applicant drew from. Ms. Williams continued by saying that she had visited the site and felt perplexed that a new building within the 5.2 acres of the Vaux design should be incorporated within the landscape, not sitting on it. Ms. Williams further stated that research had demonstrated that one of the most significant design elements of the Tomes-Higgins House is its roof. That the objectives within this site should be: instead of the proposed roof structure, the
applicant could make it more compatible with the Tomes-Higgins House by using the same type of roof. Ms. Williams asked for further clarification of the decisions that were made regarding the design of the proposed structure.

Mr. Granoff replied that we did study it and came to the conclusion that the mansard roof should be on the primary structure.

Ms. Williams also asked, for a historical perspective, if the 1997 architectural drawings – when Christ Church was granted reuse of this property -- was the architect or that design committee consulted?

Mr. Granoff stated that an architectural historian was not contacted nor he was unaware of anyone being contacted on the design committee.

Mr. Hull stated that there are many areas in town have seen demolitions and that he was aware that this is an application that is the first evidence where the community is aware of its history and is attempting to resuscitate its history.

Mr. Bishop asked if anyone else had any questions. He then opened it to public comment.

James Dougherty, attorney representing Putnam Hill Apartments, asked that the HDC look at the use of the property as it will impact the site. The Board of Putnam Hill and the residents of Putnam Hill Apartments are opposed to the current proposal.

Lee Grant, a descendant of A. Foster Higgins gave a familiar relationship history as well as a summary of Calvert Vaux. She discussed the packet that was sent to the HDC membership stating that a barn never existed on the property – only a carriage house. A barn would have been irrelevant and out-of-scale. The outbuildings were low did not compete with the house and asked that the commission find the proposed structure is not appropriate for two reasons:

The footprint is too large and upsets the scale of the park and buildings and does compete with the house. She further referenced the Department of the Secretary of the Interior's view on historic preservation -- “The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved” and summarized Christopher Wigren of the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation who said in 1991 that the house was “artistically and historically very valuable and has survived with little alteration and the grounds are there to add to that piece of the picture ....It is architecture and landscape that are designed to compliment each other.”

Secondly, despite of all good intentions, the imposition of this building begins the process of taking the property apart. The proposed building is not related to the house and brings in the very urbanization that Vaux had fought. It
reduces the natural setting. It alters the historic landscape. It impacts the serenity of the park.

The Tomes-Higgins House and carriage house are published buildings. She further stated that it is the only Calvert Vaux house in Connecticut that still exists.

Ms. Grant ended by asking that the HDC do what they could to protect this rare and lasting example of Vaux architecture and landscaping.

Davidde Strackbein spoke (representing herself) and stated that she is the chairman of the board of the Greenwich Historical Society and had a few questions. In speaking of the height of the new building, what you see from the street and what you actually see is the carriage house and looking over the carriage house is the new proposed structure and that would have visual impact. She went on to state that the reason why this building/site is listed is because “most of the nearby structures constructed subsequently, followed its lead and built with mansard roofs and spacious, informally landscaped grounds”. This site is of first-rate importance as its integrity has never been compromised either by attrition or drastic changes in the environment. Putnam Hill, with representations of the works of two major mid-19th century architects, Vaux and Eidlitz, is an important remainder of American architectural and landscape design in the Victorian era which has substantially resisted uncomplimentary intrusion to the present day. The reason why the Tomes-Higgins House was preserved is that before that time, twice it came up for demolition and twice it was preserved. It was only preserved due to Paul Van Der Stricht who made a voice for the land and the house by strongly advocating for preserving it saying the centerpiece of the town of Greenwich with its two most important pieces of architecture should not be destroyed.

Charlotte Walker, President of Putnam Park Association, stated that we have had over 800 people overlooking this property for over 60 years. There will be a dramatic impact to some residents whose view will be obstructed/diminished as the proposed structure will be extremely close to the property line. The one thing that I do know about Calvert Vaux is that everything he did design was to incorporate the landscape around it. We feel that our sight line should be considered just as well as the streetscape view. The structure is too large and does compete with the property and the Tomes-Higgins House as well as changes the landscape dramatically. Also of concern is the industrial/commercial nature of the property. While the nature of Neighbor-to Neighbor is commendable the opposition is not to the mission but rather its proposed structure is out of character for this site.

Karin Crooks, a resident of Greenwich since 1977 and a member of Christ Church for almost as long, spoke and began with a history of the modern foundations of Greenwich and the churches within this district (and historic borough) referring to it as the basis of the town’s modern history. The concept of the Neighbor-to-Neighbor building based on the barn structure is curious to me as any would know
you would need more than five acres to support the animals and equipment and that constructing a barn on five acres does not make sense. She continued to describe the history of the buildings located on the Tomes-Higgins property and stated that there was no historic sign of a barn at any time. Accessory buildings within the same style of the main building can blend into the landscape as evidenced with the Carriage House. Ms. Crooks further described that the Tomes-Higgins House is viewable from all sides – Putnam Avenue, residents to the south and west and churchgoers to the east. Ms. Crooks ended by saying that the residents of Greenwich depended upon the HDC for understanding the value and importance of the diverse history of architectural presence which is clearly jeopardize by this proposed building in its present form and location.

Mr. Bishop asked if the applicant would like to respond.

Mr. Granoff replied that he wanted to clarify the distance of the proposed building that is approximately 400 feet back from Putnam Avenue and distance of 110 feet from the Tomes-Higgins House.

Mr. Bishop inquired if the proposed structure would be visible above the Carriage House.

Mr. Granoff responded by saying I doubt it, but only the cupola may be. It depends on where you are on Putnam Avenue, but it is mostly blocked by the Tomes-Higgins House or the Carriage House or by the Church buildings. Mr. Granoff further added that the back of the building is 100 feet back from the rear property line [of Putnam Park] and the closest building is 120 feet away.

Mr. Granoff then stated he had been asked to rear another letter and this was submitted by Susan Nova that focused upon the history of the site and Neighbor-to-Neighbor and stated that the proposed structure strives to remain in the character of the area.

Ms. Brown stated that the HDC is here to comment only upon architecture.

Mr. Bishop then closed the hearing on the application.

Mr. Bishop advised the applicant and HDC members that HDC would be voting on the application at their next meeting, April 13, 2016 to be held in the Town Hall Meeting Room, 101 Field Point road, at 7:00pm.

2. 245 EAST PUTNAM AVENUE
GREENWICH, CT

PRESENTED BY: JOSHUA BRANDFONBRENER, ARCHITECT
OWNER: PARISH OF CHRIST CHURCH, GREENWICH, CT

REQUEST FOR A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

Review plans for placement of flat family roof and flashing and installation of new HVAC dunnage on property located in Putnam Hill Historic District [National Register of Historic Places]

Mr. Brandfonbrener began his presentation by stating that the condition of the materials needs attention and reconstruction and proposed the following: remove tall crenulations that go around the perimeter as the roof was built much too high; install new steel dunnage; and the air conditioning units will be moving east and further screened from street by church itself and will be about several feet back further from the edge of the roof with the height being about 9 inches higher. The start date is hopefully Spring 2016.

Mr. Toraby inquired the weight of each unit. Mr. Brandfonbrener responded that he couldn’t remember but it would be the same unit.

Mr. Toraby asked if the crenulation would be removed as opposed to reinstalling to which Mr. Brandfonbrener responded yes. Mr. Brandfonbrener added that there have been several generations of flashing there and prior, there was lead coat copper flashing which had never been done well.

A motion to accept and approve the plans submitted to the Historic District Commission for March 9, 2016.

Moved by Ms. Sheridan and seconded by Mr. Welch

Unanimous vote

Voting in favor: Mr. Bishop, Mr. Hull, Mr. Welch, Ms. Sheridan, Ms. Williams, Ms. Kossler, Ms. Brown, Mr. Toraby

DEMOLITIONS

184 Shore Road
Old Greenwich, CT

20 Shoreham Club Road
Old Greenwich, CT

548 North Street
Greenwich, CT
Mr. Bishop moved to have the meeting adjourned at 9:24 p.m.