

FINAL MINUTES
Regular Meeting of the
Historic District Commission of the Town of Greenwich
Wednesday, May 8, 2019, 7:00pm
Mazza Room, Town Hall

ATTENDEES PRESENT

COMMISSIONERS: STEPHEN BISHOP – CHAIRMAN, FI FI SHERIDAN,
KATHRIN BROWN, DARIUS TORABY, ARIS CRIST

ALTERNATES: ANNIE MCGINNIS, MARTIN KAGAN, CYNTHIA SMITH
MARIE WILLIAMS, SERENA BECHTEL,

Mr. Bishop called meeting to order at 7:02pm

1. CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS
77 Sherwood Avenue, #3
Greenwich, CT 06833
Represented by Eric V.P. Brower, AICP

Reviews plan for addition

Mr. Eric Brower gave a brief history of the property, the Chieftain estate and the cluster conservation zone history.

Lot #3, built in the 80s, has its entrance from Sherwood Avenue. The proposed addition is to be in line with the south wall of the garage and will have improvements on the steps down to the patio. Even though it's a Historic Overlay Zone, no benefit is being sought by the applicant. The review on HDC's part is for the appropriateness of the proposed additions.

Mr. Tim Peck (architect) – described the house design and informed the Commission that the squaring off of the back of the garage to the back corner of the house is to create a new breakfast area on the lower level and mud room with a back stair. This façade looks to the east (the Conservation Zone) and would like to take advantage of those views. The bedrooms upstairs (master is on the first floor) – the owner wants to combine two of the bedrooms and add one more (bedroom) on 'top' of the garage that is not limited to the pitch of the roof.

The facade facing the street will have two small dormers on the front face of the garage added and another one on at the end and a shed that abuts the backside (near #2).

Mr. Kagan asked how many square feet will be added.

Mr. Peck replied that 800 square feet in total will be added.

Mr. Bishop inquired about the materials.

Mr. Peck responded that all new materials will match what is present. The existing fieldstone will be matched as well as the shingle for the rest of the house and the proposed windows will match the present ones as well.

Mr. Crist asked what the roof was made of.

Mr. Peck answered that it is a “fake” slate roof (possibly ceramic). But that is to remain. The flat pitch will go to another material. Probably metal.

Mr. Bishop asked about the Chieftain house’s style.

Mr. Peck replied that they are all eclectic.

Mr. Toraby was asked to comment on the design. Mr. Toraby stated that the roofline and the fenestration are quite consistent. And every roofline that you have added is sticking out like a sore thumb. They are not in keeping with the design of the original house.

Mr. Peck stated that the lower pitch was pulled off the back of the lower roof and the pitches can be changed. The idea was to move away from the steeply articulated rooflines inside the home (the inside of the second floor has a low plate height). So there is flexibility.

Mr. Toraby continued saying that the applicant has incorporated some square windows which weren’t there before. You can take some design liberties but must be in close response to what you are dealing with. You are messing up the flowing lines of the existing roof and the stonework and the windows. It needs more design attention so it can start to work together. The rigid forms that are being creating are not in keeping and are in conflict.

Mr. Bishop stated that the most important part is what you see from the street. Is the proposed dormer facing the street very important?

Mr. Peck answered that it could be eliminated.

Ms. Smith agreed saying that it wasn’t appropriate as well. She continued by offering that the applicant could match the pitch on the crawlspace, no one would see the shed in between.

Mr. Peck then said we would have the two pieces on the end go to the same roof pitch as the main roof will without protruding over the line of the garage roof.

Mr. Toraby stated that it was a very attractive house and its design quality needs to be maintained.

Ms. Smith added that maybe at the bay you don't do a gable but a shed with a flare.

Mr. Peck agreed.

Mr. Bishop asked if the applicant would return.

Mr. Peck asked if the dormer facing the street could remain.

Mr. Bishop responded that it would need to be matching what you see now.

Members responded that it does.

Mr. Bishop asked the members if the front dormer on the garage was appropriate.

Mr. Toraby responded that it needs a different look.

Mr. Peck then asked about landscaping.

Mr. Brower said that the existing patio is being modified (which is in rear). The present existing stairs are very steep. The new stairs will be slightly circular. The greenery will remain.

Mr. Crist asked about existing balcony.

Mr. Peck said that the center is to be pulled out. The pull out is to be only 2 feet and will not look awkward.

Mr. Bishop said that the Commission was OK on the landscaping.

Applicant to return.

2. FOR DISCUSSION ONLY*
35 Strickland Road (C-Local Historic District)
Cos Cob, CT 06807
Represented by George Flouty

Continuation of discussion from April 2019 of possible addition of garage for front house, window replacements, addition to barn on second lot, addition of garage for barn on second lot, rear-right corner of house to be squared

* No certificate of appropriateness will be issued at this meeting

Mr. Flouty introduced Mark Pruner (realtor) to add some comments. Mr. Flouty said he would begin discussing 35 Strickland road (“the bungalow”). Mr. Flouty has been told that he should start “fresh” as there are great difficulties with the house that include, electrical wiring, heating, plumbing (not to code), cooling – most all done without permits and therefore not to code. Further, the boiler is hazardous.

Mr. Flouty considered adding a dormer but the hip roof does not support a dormer.

Mr. Flouty also described that the backyard is small and sloping towards the house. The exterior is popcorn stucco (difficult to maintain). And there is no garage nor shed.

Mr. Flouty stated that his conclusion last time was to demolish the house and start fresh and realized that this is a dramatic approach.

Mr. Bishop invited Mr. Pruner to speak.

Mr. Pruner spoke and spoke of the weakness and uncertainty of the Greenwich real estate market. Mr. Pruner said that he visited the house and noticed it was badly positioned on the lot and built very cheaply. Mr. Pruner stated that he hoped the application would focus upon how the new property would be enhanced and as such, enhance the district. Mr. Pruner described 31 Strickland – calling it beautiful and having great historic character and also described 37 Strickland as beautiful. He felt that the natural line of the streetscape was the one drawn from 31 to 37 Strickland road. #35 does not fit into that line (being lower). Mr. Pruner felt that if the house were to be moved forward it prevents two houses being jammed and allows for a better value for both properties. Mr. Pruner felt that certain historic elements of the house should be kept, making it proportional to the lot and enhance the district. A nice two-story house with a raised porch similar to #37 would work well compared to #31. It’s a beautiful area that deserves a beautiful house.

Mr. Bishop said that he would like to narrow the questions and give the applicant some general direction. Mr. Bishop further queried the Commission as to how they felt if the house (#35) were to be moved forward.

Mr. Crist responded that we don’t know the massing, elevation, footprint – these are factors in making that decision.

Ms. McGinnis said that moving the house is a good idea as the two structures are very crowded now. We should try and preserve at least one of the two and the best one to preserve is the bungalow. This then gives you more creative freedom to work with the back.

Mr. Pruner stated that the rear structure (referred to as the “barn”) should have its style adapted to #31 Strickland (which it was once associated with).

Mr. Crist added that the front lawn is such a statement and if you move it (the bungalow) forward you lose the historic feeling of the property.

Mr. Flouty said that to build a compact house would be ideal. So you can preserve as much of the front yard. But this would mean a two-floor home. A one and a half story home could look like a bungalow but you need depth to get the living space of the second floor. The desired size would be about 3,000 – 3,500 square feet and right now the house is 1,200 square feet.

Ms. Smith suggested that if you preserve the house, you could move it forward and still have a great lawn that also allows for a rebuilding of a foundation. Ms. Smith stated her curiosity regarding if a new house were to be built, then is it a free-for-all?

Mr. Bishop responded no. If the design being proposed is for a new house, that design is still subject to HDC.

[Ms. Sheridan departed – 8:00pm]

Mr. Bishop commented that he could see a “new” house being built but it must have the characteristics of the old house. Mr. Bishop commented that while he had not seen the interior of the house, he believed that it would be very difficult to bring the house up-to-date. Perhaps an engineer’s report should be submitted. Mr. Bishop continued saying that the official submission of the house which would include the design, size and location must well thought out. It must pick up as many of the features of the old house as much as it can and would probably be a 1 ½ story with dormers (not a full 2-story) and see the scale somewhat similar with more going out the back than width-wise.

Mr. Kagan said that the official submission must include #35 Strickland road alongside the barn/garage in the rear for review as both structures impact each other.

Mr. Bishop agreed.

Mr. Bishop stated that houses must be livable in order for them to survive.

Ms. Toraby stated that #35 is functionally obsolete and is being held together with spit and rubber bands.

Ms. Toraby stated that she is torn about the project. She stated her fondness for the new owners and hoped they would do something reasonable with the property. Ms. Toraby felt that #35 is a ‘demolition-by-neglect’ in action. Ms. Toraby further added that the property’s front lawn (esp as dealt with the Smith’s lawsuit) is integral and that the HDC should be careful about how much it could/should be moved forward and she does support that within reason.

Mr. Bishop stated that whatever the design is that will be submitted, it is the HDC’s role to decide the application’s appropriateness.

Mr. Pruner stated that the house is brick underneath the stucco and brick houses don't move well. They tend to fall apart. As there is common ownership on the two properties, seeing an application for both properties simultaneously is correct.

Mr. Kagan stated that one of the things we are not seeing is an approach that looks at alternatives. Is there a way to add an addition to the front of the house that still preserves the structure? Presently we are getting either leave it as is or a new structure. Mr. Kagan would like to see a variety of choices.

Mr. Toraby said he agreed seeing how the HDC is wrestling with the two concepts. These being some preservation and some appropriateness. Study and attention must be done. The first meeting had minimal changes that enhanced the character.

Mr. Bishop replied that tearing down a historic structure is not what we are about but this project might encompass that and he agreed with Mr. Toraby that a great deal of study must be done and that several designs should be presented.

Mr. Kagan stated that this is a design problem.

Mr. Bishop agreed.

Ms. Toraby asked how difficult would it be to move this house forward.

Mr. Toraby responded very difficult as the main feature being the fireplace must be considered. He added that there may also be the possibility of raising the house a few feet and regrade the front lawn.

Mr. Flouty said that economics is also a consideration. He stated that he is willing to fix things but is hoping to have a final product that is larger. Mr. Flouty did say that he would try and obtain estimates for lifting the house.

Mr. Pruner said the purchase price for both lots was just over a million dollars. But in this case, there are limited amounts of improvements. Mr. Pruner asked that the HDC to realize there is very limited value for a 1,200 square foot house.

Mr. Bishop said these are important properties that are highly visual.

Mr. Toraby said you want to preserve the landscape and the relationship of the structures. Mr. Toraby is worried about invading the landscape. And, of course, economics come into the picture.

Mr. Bishop said expansion can be considered as long as it's appropriate and includes the main architectural elements.

Mr. Toraby asked what would the cost be to bring new services to the barn.

Mr. Flouty said a lot.

Mr. Toraby then asked could both properties be combined to be one entity with their own functionalities?

Mr. Pruner said that having common ownership is not popular. People are reluctant to share property. And it would diminish the value of the total by several hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Mr. Pruner then asked about thoughts regarding the back property.

Ms. Toraby stated that the building is an important component of the landscape of the historic district.

Mr. Bishop agreed that the structure was an important one. He further understood that there wasn't any foundation.

Mr. Flouty further stated that the floorboards were on soil.

Mr. Kagan said at this point, we would like to see as much of each structure preserved as possible.

Mr. Bishop stated that he wanted to see as much of the front façade preserved as possible.

Mr. Flouty commented that it would be easier to disassemble the barn, rebuild it and maintain the front and side looks and do any additional living spaces either behind or possibly on a side.

Mr. Flouty further added that he would try and take into account all comments for his application.

Ms. Smith said that generally speaking, an architect comes up with a great many schematics and in this instance, those concept drawings should not be too costly, it can allow HDC to give hard comments and critiques for the application to have an appropriate design.

Mr. Bishop thought that Ms. Smith's idea was prudent.

Discussion was then had regarding the timing and scheduling of application deadlines, formal notices and mailings.

Applicant is to return.

MINUTES

Motion to approve April 10, 2019 minutes

Moved by Mr. Kagan

Seconded by Ms. Smith

Voting in favor: Mr. Bishop, Ms. Brown, Mr. Toraby, Ms. Smith, Ms. McGinnis, Mr. Kagan, Mr. Crist, Ms. Bechtel, Ms. Williams

[Ms. Sheridan departed at 8:00]

DEMOLITIONS:

[note: any Greenwich resident may place a stay on a noticed demolition].

176 North Maple Avenue

Greenwich, CT 06830

HDC, by unanimous vote, will place a stay on the above

Motion to end meeting

Moved by Mr. Kagan

Seconded by Mr. Crist

Meeting adjourned at 9:20pm