HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION MEETING
MAZZA ROOM
TOWN HALL
GREENWICH, CT
SEPTEMBER 9, 2015

MINUTES

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

ALTERNATES: MARIE WILLIAMS,

ABSENT: JENNIFER KOSSLER, ARIS CRIST

Mr. Bishop called meeting to order at 7:13pm.

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1. 599 WEST PUTNAM AVENUE
GREENWICH, CT

REPRESENTED BY: EDWARD V. O’HANLAN, ESQ., ROBINSON & COLE LLP
ARCHITECT: R.S. GRANOFF
OWNER: 599 LANDLORD, L.L.C.

ADVISORY OPINION TO PLANNING & ZONING [REQUESTED]

Review plans to remove existing vacant cottage and masonry streetwall and replace with a landscaped seating terrace

Edward (Ted) O’Hanlan presented. He described the project as a renovation and reuse of site for the building’s current occupant Catterton (which is also the site of the company’s headquarters and has been for the past 20 years). He described the 2.2 acre site as “curious” as it is carved out of the office park and continue the use of the current office/structure.

The plan of the building reflects the investment philosophy -- “conservative”. Catterton wants to put a new face on the building as it moves into becoming the sole user of the property and into the 21st century.
Mr. O'Hanlan said that the Zoning Board of Appeals had already approved the plans and their required variances. He further pointed to the members that the plans projected a “friendlier” front yard. And that the designs are similar to what is currently along that portion of West Putnam Avenue – those designs having received approval from Planning & Zoning.

Mr. O'Hanlan stated that it was strange for this application to appear before the Historic District Commission as the site is NOT in any type of recognized historic district. But the plans that Catterton has involves the removal of the structure and the wall and that the owners of 599 West Putnam Avenue are being diligent in following all recommendations by Planning & Zoning, one of which required them to appear before the Historic District Commission. Mr. O'Hanlan emphasized that after extensive research, the owners of 599 West Putnam Avenue determined that the wall and cottage did not possess historic or cultural value. He further stated that the site has not been placed on any historic register. In essence, “No one has ever thought about it”. The conclusion was arrived that after various design attempts in conjunction with the Catterton corporate philosophy, that a design was unable to be rendered to incorporate the cottage into the philosophy of organization’s vision.

Mr. O’Hanlan further described the extensive research that was performed. Examinations of Catterton’s records (as the building’s 20-year resident), the town Land Use records, the Assessor’s records, the Building Department’s records, and the title history. Visits were made to the Greenwich Historical Society as well as the Greenwich Library.

What was discovered was that the cottage was a garage. Prior to 1914, this site was part of a much larger tract. In 1914, 5 acres was sold and one house with one accessory structure (the garage) was built. From that point forward, the site can be seen on the 1920 Sanborn map as well as the 1938 Franklin Atlas.

From 1941 to 1960, the house was empty and then turned into a nursing home. Then in 1970, the house was turned into a daycare center. The garage still remained a garage but the second floor was converted into living quarters in 1940. The wall does not appear in any of the town records until 1928 (on a road survey map). Mr. O’Hanlan believes that the wall was most likely built in 1914/15 when the house was but there is no record stating that.

In 1970s, alterations did occur to the garage and in 1979 conversions occurred to turn it into a ‘residence’.

When the office was constructed in the 1970s, part of the wall was demolished. Where the wall ends does present a site line problem for the employees of Catterton because the Putnam Avenue traffic is heavy in both directions.

The actual lot is scooped out in the middle. The rear portion cannot be used for anything due to its topography (stream and sewer easement) and therefore parking
is mostly underground. The proposed project plan is to create a user-friendly open space.

Ms. Brown pointed out the “wall” portion of the proposal and Mr. O’Hanlan replied the applicant has thoroughly examined this all possibilities and the ‘best’ outcome is keeping the portion of the wall that is built into the ledge on the western portion of the site. Mr. O’Hanlan re-emphasized that the diligence that the applicant has used has been extensive.

Ed passed around contemporary/current images of the interior and described it as confining and nothing to recommend it as historic.

Ms. Sheridan asked when the structure was built. Mr. O’Hanlan replied that the garage was built in 1914. There was a significant renovation in the late 1970s (floor was raised, a concrete foundation was placed in the building). But there is nothing to officially determine what (if anything) remains from the 1914 structure.

Ms. Sheridan said that it sounds as if you cannot then determine the date. Mr. O’Hanlan said that based on the title history, the records show that there is a house under construction with an accessory structure. The house with a separate garage is carried out through the assessors’ records. Then in the 1970s you see greater details in the building’s description.

Ms. Sheridan inquired whether there really could be a structure on the property even prior to town records. Mr. O’Hanlan answered that while maps do show a structure on the property, no records prove that. In 1914, records show that a house is under construction with an accessory garage and it is that information that is carried consistently forward. There is no evidence of anything being on that particular portion of the site prior to then.

Mr. O’Hanlan finished his historical reference and introduced Rich Granoff.

Richard Granoff began his presentation. He began his statement by mentioning that as a resident of 25 years, whenever he passed by the site he wondered, “what is that thing” and wondered if it ever had any significance. Mr. Granoff stated that he has worked approx. 20 years on the office building at 599 West Putnam Avenue and was retained a year ago when Catterton purchased the entire site. There were plenty of discussions concerning the keeping of the house and wall or not. A lot of soul searching occurred. Possible uses included either having Catterton employees or guests reside there, but the cost proved too high. Further, when Mr. Granoff considered the view of the office building to the house and even from the street, he came to the conclusion that the cottage should not be there. When taking into account of keeping the wall, there were many proposals that were examined, but the same end was reached with the wall. The conclusion was reached that there was no logical conclusion in keeping either the cottage or wall.
Mr. Granoff further stated that the Architectural Review Committee and Planning & Zoning have reviewed the current plans and the keeping of the low wall (or using a low wall) is in keeping with other parts /neighbors.

David Heidecorn spoke by saying we have worked very hard throughout this process and want to pursue all the proper avenues. WE want to make the area nice, presentable to the employees and the town. And this last piece of the puzzle (the research of the cottage and wall) was examined with great detail(s) and hard work that demonstrate the seriousness that the client is taking towards the property.

Mr. Hull inquired about the land titles. Mr. O’Hanlan stated that the applicant took it back to the 1880s and firmly believes that the structure (based on tax records etc) was built in 1914-15.

Mr. Hull then asked for further details regarding the cottage’s use. Mr. O’Hanlan responded that during the 1930s, two rooms on the second story were converted into residential use. And, during the 1970s, the floors were raised and replacing the heating system.

Chairman Bishop asked if the members had any comments.

Mr. Toraby stated that the rendering that was presented showed a landscape asked about the use of the area. The applicant responded that it is an outdoor terrace that is connected to three conference rooms but only available to Catterton employees, not the public. Mr. Granoff is proposing a step-wall with plantings that will be connected to the rock ledge (that already exists). A.R.C. did discuss whether the wall should be stone or not and that item was not finalized.

Mr. Toraby stated that architecturally the house/cottage and the stone -wall have a beautiful character that show the age and period of when it was conceived. In looking at the overall factor of the area, although it is now be contended somewhat of an anomaly, that this is what makes Greenwich special and it acts as a buffer of the modern road way and the modern buildings adjacent and across it. Mr. Toraby stated that he would hate to see it go.

Mr. Bishop echoed Mr. Toraby’s statement. He further said, that everybody loves this building. It’s a landmark and iconic. Mr. Bishop added that since the application had been moved to be heard by HDC, he has driven past the building many times and feels a very big mistake would be made in tearing it down. He stressed to the applicant asking if further work could be done to accommodate keeping both cottage and wall and integrate the Catterton corporate philosophy. Additionally, Mr. Bishop believed that the applicant would be applauded if the building were preserved. Mr. Bishop finished by saying that he personally would hate to see this go.
Ms. Sheridan stated her agreement in respect Mr. Toraby and Mr. Bishop’s comments. She listened to the description of the Catterton organization and felt this project would be a great example of continuing their tradition of being environmentally friendly and consumer oriented. The cottage speaks to the history of the town. She continued by saying that when she heard that the building would be demolished and in its place would be a private terrace serving a small group of people, is ‘not the right thing’. Doing the right thing would be keeping the structure and wall in the town.

Ms. Williams wished for an accommodation that had both sides happy. She referenced the British Trust’s ability of reuse and offered a local example of Hamilton Avenue School that preserved the shell but modernized the interior. She felt that from the road, the building is unique. Continuing, she thought to repurpose the building, using the most valuable points, could enhance the park environment and further the company’s mission. Taking the perimeter of the structure and opening it up and from the company’s point of view making it unusual – a shell. The concern is the keeping of the streetscape and enhancing the utility part of the building in a park-like setting.

Ms. Brown though the part you all find charming is the streetscape and that should be explored.

Mr. Welch inquired if the application were to be denied would the applicant suffer any hardship? Why do you want to demolish it? The wall is very nice.

Mr. O’Hanlan responded that if you examine the shape of the lot, you can see the significant constraints that we are working with. The ledge is completely unusable. The only green space is the portion in the front. The variance that was received was to use the green space as a terrace. The other option would be to go and find another corporate headquarters. The structure is legally non-conforming. Security wise you cannot use the windows. The structure is not safe as a car could hit it. The structure does not fit with any other use of the building.

Mr. Hull said that taking it down would increase the industrialization of the whole area.

Mr. Bishop stated that a vote should be taken. He asked if the applicant would like to return after having heard the various comments and suggestions by the commission’s members and that he would be happy to review any new proposals that keep the cottage and wall.

Mr. Bishop then instructed the commission members that the vote is solely focused on the wall and the cottage.

Motion to deny the application to remove existing vacant cottage and masonry streetwall due to the commission’s belief that both the cottage and streetwall have
demonstrated special architectural character and age and that their current contribution to the streetscape is significant and its loss would be noticeable.

Moved by Mr. Toraby, seconded by Ms. Sheridan

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

Opposed: Ms. Williams

HISTORIC CEMETERY
Ms. Young alerted the members of HDC that a Cemetery Committee was formed by the Conservation Committee and they are moving forward in surveying ALL burial grounds in the town. She further added that a list will be produced that identities town-owned cemeteries, town-maintained cemeteries, privately owned cemeteries, and abandoned cemeteries.

117 DINGLETOWN ROAD
Chairman Bishop will be attending a meeting of the Land Use Committee to be held on September 14th in preparation for the item to be voted on at the RTM meeting occurring Monday, September 21st.

STRICKLAND ROAD
Mr. Toraby will be drafting a summary letter for HDC Chairman’s review to then be sent to the Office of the First Selectman for his comments.

MINUTES
Chairman Bishop asked for comments regarding the June minutes. Ms. Sheridan asked that her vote not be considered as she believes that her tardiness for the meeting does not allow for a full understanding of the application and therefore she should be listed as abstaining.

Motion to accept June 10th minutes

Moved by Ms. Brown, seconded by Mr. Toraby

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

July minutes will be considered at October meeting

DEMOLITIONS
205 Glenville Road
Greenwich, CT
(2/3 demolished. They started a renovation and the structure was taken down so much that a demolition was required)
Mr. Welch motioned to adjourn meeting.

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

Chairman Bishop adjourned the meeting at 8:59pm