

MINUTES
EAST GREENWICH HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
January 10, 2018 Meeting
Town Council Chambers – 6:00 p.m.

Present: Kim Balkcom, Chair, Matthew McGeorge, Vice-Chair, Gregory Maxwell, Andrew Barkley, Erinn Calise, and Kristen Carron

Absent: Lauren Drury

Staff: Lis Bourbonnais, Town Planner and Andrew Teitz, Legal Counsel.

The Chair convened the meeting at 7:05 PM. She read the meeting procedures into the record and introduced the membership. She then noted she is recused on the first two matters and has filed the appropriate forms. She left the room and Mr. McGeorge took over as Chair.

Historic District Commission Hearings

1. Julie Rocheleau
37 Rector Street; Map 85 AP 1 Lot 279
Fencing – FINAL (Submission based upon Zoning Violation)
(Continued from the December 13, 2017 meeting)

The applicant was on hand along with her attorney but before they could go into detail about the project, Mr. Teitz provided some legal and procedural background for the Board, noting there is an adverse possession suit associated with the property but that issue is irrelevant to the Board's review. He stated the applicant has submitted a survey and indicates the fence is installed fully on her property. The character and design of the fence are the only features under the board's purview and the look of the work is clearly textbook-complaint with the design guideline published by the Commission. Mrs. Bourbonnais explained that had the application been filed consistent with the procedures outlined in the Ordinance and guidelines, it would have been administratively approved by staff and the Commission would not have seen it. However, since the fence was built and the application came in later - in response to a citation - it is ineligible for staff review.

The abutting owners, the Berlyn's were represented by counsel, Sanford Resnick, who asked to be heard. He stated the fence is clearly a perimeter fence that requires an authorization signature from the adjacent owner. Mrs. Bourbonnais disagreed, noting the fence does not sit on the line but is inset to sit fully on the applicant's property and thus is not a common fence and requires no sign-off by any neighbor. Mr. Teitz chimed into agree, stating that this is a very well settled area of property law in Rhode Island and that requiring an abutter signature for a fence not sited on a shared lot line is ceding control of one's property to a non-owner and is equivalent to giving veto power to an outside party.

Mr. Resnick noted there is a dispute over the line and recommended the HDC defer making a decision until that claim is settled. Mr. Teitz stated this is not necessary. The lot line claim can play out privately between the two owners without regard to the HDC's approval. If the size and design of the fence are appropriate, the application should be approved and if the Courts say it is not properly sited, then it can/should be moved. Mr. Teitz cited the "Cardi case" wherein it was made clear that local boards have no authority to determine ownership. If the application were for a demolition or

some other irreversible/irreparable action, it might be appropriate to delay action to see if any estoppel action was taken by a court but since the proposed improvement is easily moved/remedied, there is no compelling reason not to act.

Motion by Ms. Carron, second by Ms. Calise to approve the application as submitted. VOTE: 5 – 0 – 0 in favor of the motion. In support of the motion, Ms. Carron cited the relevant standards (#5 pertaining to new construction) and described the appropriateness of the work and significance of the property while referencing the staff report. The application was approved.

2. Camille and Dan Specca
35 Liberty Street; Map 75 AP 1 Lot 311
Minor Modification – FINAL
(Continued from the December 13, 2017 meeting)

Member Greg Maxwell recused himself to represent the project as Architect. He filed his recusal form and Ethics determination with staff. Mr. McGeorge continued as acting Chair.

Mr. Maxwell explained that the applicants desire a couple of modifications to the south (left side) and rear (west side) of the home. The proposal includes adding two new windows to the south side of the back ell; these will match and flank the existing window. Additionally on the west side, the Applicant would like to replace a window with a new glazed door. There is an existing rear slider that will be replaced with a new pair of 15-lite in-swing French doors.

The two new windows, relocated door and French doors will be Pella Architect Series products with simulated divided lite grilles. Like products have been approved previously for use at this property and in other locations around the District. There was a substantial discussion, with the acting Chair taking the lead. Mr. McGeorge stated he thinks the alterations are appropriate in that the rhythm of the building openings is respected and maintained, the changes will appear natural, the quality of the materials is high, and there would be no loss of original features since the windows here have already been replaced. It was his conclusion, and the Commission agreed, that there would thus be no impact on the character of the property as a result of the proposed modifications.

Motion by Ms. Calise, second by Mr. Barkley to approve the application as presented. Vote: 4 – 0 – 0 in favor – the motion was approved. In support of the motion, it was noted that the work will be consistent with Commission Standard #4 pertaining to modifications and architectural changes and the subject structure was noted to be a significant one, with its age, style and character defining features being as described in the staff report.

3. Craftland Inc.
264 Main Street; Map 85 AP 1 Lot 168
Signage – FINAL

Ms. Balkcom and Mr. Maxwell re-joined the group as voting members.

Margaret Carleton representing the business was on hand to present the application. She explained that her application includes two signs but the intent is to start with the projecting sign and add the wall sign at some future date. Providence Painted Sign Company fabricated the sign and it served a prior location. Her desire is simply to install it from the existing bracket as shown. The Commission praised the sign for its effectiveness. The same company will be used to fabricate and install the wall sign when the time comes. The Commission felt the overall design, location and size were appropriate but they needed additional information regarding materials, illumination, etc. It was suggested that the Chair serve as referee when a final design becomes available and so a separate

Certificate of Appropriateness could then be issued. Motion by Mr. Barkley, second by Ms. Carron to approve the application as discussed. When the applicant is ready to proceed with the second sign, the Chair will be contacted through staff to referee the plan/shop drawings. VOTE: 6 – 0 – 0 in favor of the motion. The projecting sign was approved. In support of the motion, it was noted that the building is a significant c. 1850 structure with character defining features as described in the staff report. The work proposed will be consistent with Standard of Review #5 regarding new work that will replace a previously existing feature. The installation will not impact the character of the property.

Historic District Commission Business

1. FOR ACTION: Discussion and recommendation - Second Advisory Opinion to the Planning Board regarding the Historic Rehabilitation of the existing structure located at 62 South Pierce Road, the Coggeshall Preserve development.

Developer Tom Primeau, his Architect David Okerlund, and his attorney Bill Landry were on hand to discuss the referenced project. Staff gave some brief background on the history of the project review, noting that a prior version of the development plan called for demolition of the historic structure but the current plan intends to save as much of the original part of the house as possible.

Mr. Landry described the agenda item as a “fish out of water” since it is not a regular application under the HDC’s direct jurisdiction and they are not asked to review the rehabilitation/addition project through the lens of the regular standards of review. He noted the plans have evolved significantly since the HDC’s last look at the project. The “skin” of the historic original will be retained to the degree possible and important architectural features like the chimney and front porch will appear intact. Mr. Landry introduced Mr. Okerlund who described the project thusly:

Time and change have not been friends to the dwelling in question. It now sits derelict and unoccupied and is being subjected to severe weather which can be damaging. Low quality, architecturally inappropriate, and value-degrading additions and alterations to the original farmhouse have resulted in a diminution of historic integrity here and are also negatively affecting the ability to properly maintain original components. Non-original features like the crossing gable protrusions and other rambling “add-ons” will be demolished but as much of the original farmhouse as possible will be retained. This will include its essential form, foundation and siting, as well as structural members and exterior features that are salvageable. Most importantly, the stone chimney, which has been determined to be the most significant original character-defining feature of the house, will be re-built in place and its appearance above the roofline will be retained. The re-appearance of a deep front porch, which was determined from old photographs to be a prominent architectural feature, is also an important positive component of the current plan.

The proposed additions to the original historic structure are architecturally sympathetic and subservient in mass – and if reviewed under the ordinary standards - would likely gain approval on those grounds. Several Commissioners agreed, noting the reduction of the attached garage from 3 to 2 bays with a correlating smaller mass and lower profile. There was substantial discussion regarding material details and ultimately, the developer agreed to use natural wood siding and trim materials rather than the originally specified composite materials along with authentic operating shutters, divided light windows, and other appropriate features. The Commission universally liked the form of the proposed new appearance. The new construction being stepped back and down from the existing façade and the rhythms - in terms of lines and fenestration - are compatible with the simplicity of the centuries-old farmhouse and the design language respects the historic original.

After a thorough presentation and discussion of the proposed plan, the HDC voted to recommend the current plan favorably to the Planning Board and the specific findings were as follows:

“The project’s design intent is to repair and/or replace in-kind the original structure’s exterior features which is consistent with the locally adopted HDC’s standards of review.

The proposal will result in the disappearance of the visual “clutter” now associated with the original farmhouse which has been subjected to inappropriate and low-quality alterations and additions in the past.

The historic house will retain its prominence on the site in relation to existing and proposed surrounding development.

A true “brick by brick and board by board” restoration is probably not feasible here given the extent of neglect and deterioration but the proposal to rehabilitate and retain as many original features as possible seems to be made in good faith.

The design approach to the historic house rehabilitation is sympathetic to and compatible with the original proportion, mass, rhythms, texture and form of the farmhouse and the addition proposed will respect the original dwelling through the use of appropriate materials and by invoking a size, profile and siting that demarcates and emphasizes the original structure.

The HDC recognizes that the project is in the early stages of approval (Master Plan) and would respectfully assert that the “devil is in the details” with regard to historic preservation projects like this one. Assuming the project proceeds through final engineering, with construction drawings, cost estimates, etc. the HDC would like to stay involved to offer input on the use of natural materials and the design of historically appropriate details (divided light windows, eave depths, porch balustrades, and the like, as examples. The use of inauthentic materials and details – like composite sidings and faux stone - would severely detract from the integrity of the historic resource and should not be allowed). While we find the overall design concept compatible and acceptable, we would suggest that our involvement throughout the project review stages could help ensure the kind of quality and attention to detail that will guarantee the end product accomplishes the goals of the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance. We therefore request that the Planning Board require – as a condition of any approval – that the project return for further advisory opinion from our Board as the design and plans evolve during the Preliminary Plan stage of approval.”

Motion by Mr. McGeorge, second by Mr. Maxwell to transmit the foregoing to the Planning Board.
VOTE 6 - 0 - 0 in favor of the motion.

2. FOR ACTION: Discussion/Advisory opinion to the RI DOT regarding potential effects of “diversion route” travel on historic or cultural resources in the Post Road/Main Street corridor. The DOT is planning for toll systems on RI’s major highways which could result in truck traffic seeking alternate routes to avoid payment. Post Road has been identified as a potential “diversion route” and possible impacts must be assessed.

Staff made a very brief presentation, the crux of which was: with pending truck toll gantries being installed on RI’s highways, downtown/Main Street could see an increase in truck traffic as drivers seek alternate routes to avoid the tolls. The State, as part of an environmental assessment, must address any potential impacts on historic districts and structures resulting from an increase in truck traffic. Planning staff, the State DOT and the HDC ultimately concluded that since “time is money” for the average commercial driver, the downtown alternative would likely not be pursued in any significant volume. Drivers may try it once, find it unwieldy, congested, and time-consuming, and opt to avoid it in the future.

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The HDC voted to send such opinion to the DOT and the toll consultants but felt it important to reserve the right to take up the issue anew with the State if these predictions do not hold true. Staff was directed to send correspondence reflecting the discussion to the relevant parties.

Motion by Mr. McGeorge, second by Ms. Calise to transmit the foregoing as discussed. VOTE 6 - 0 - 0 in favor of the motion.

3. MINUTES: Action on the minutes of the December 13, 2017 meeting. Motion by Mr. McGeorge, second by Ms. Calise to approve the minutes as written. VOTE 6 - 0 - 0 in favor.
4. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS/OTHER - NOT FOR ACTION: Commission members are invited to comment on any observations they have made within the District, ask questions about past approvals and/or request updates on violations.

Members noted recent demolition of a well house and greenhouse (possibly contributing accessory structures) at an outlying property and asked that they be addressed by the enforcement officer.

Motion by Ms. Calise, second by Ms. Carron to adjourn at 7:45 PM.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Planning Staff - for further information, please contact the Department.