

**RIDGEFIELD HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION**  
**Town Hall, 400 Main Street**  
**Ridgefield, CT 06877**  
**January 19, 2023**

Policy: Historic District Commission meetings will be conducted under Roberts Rules of Order and all participants are expected to conduct themselves with dignity and treat all those present with respect, empathy and civility.

**APPROVED MINUTES**

A meeting of the Ridgefield Historic District Commission (“HDC”) was held in the lower level small conference room of the Town Hall, 400 Main Street, Ridgefield, CT 06877, on Thursday, January 19, 2023, and beginning at 6:30 p.m.

The following members were present:

Dan O’Brien (Chair), Sean O’Kane (via Zoom), Kam Daughters, Mark Blandford (alternate for Rhys Moore) and Sara Kaplan (alternate for Harriet Hanlon)

**AGENDA**

- 1) **Election of Officers**
- 2) **27 West Lane – Replacement of existing porch columns and railings with new material and design**
- 3) **Approval of Meeting Minutes**
  - **December 15, 2022 – Regular Meeting**
  - **January 8, 2023 Special Meeting**

**MEETING**

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Dan O’Brien at 6:32 p.m.

1) **Election of Officers for 2023**

Ms. Daughters moved and Mr. Blandford seconded a motion to elect Mr. O’Kane as Commission Vice Chair and Mr. O’Brien as Commission Chair. Both are for one-year terms ending on December 31, 2023. Motion passed 5-0

2) **27 West Lane – Replacement of existing porch columns and railings with new material and design**

Mr. David Trombetta, Senior Managing Partner & Co-Founder of New England Property Management, representing the Applicant was present.

Mr. Trombetta said the owners decided they wanted to replace the entire deck surface, all columns and railings with new material. The owner wanted to mirror the building across the street at 22 West Lane also known as the West Lane Inn, which was also a Queen Anne style. Mr. O'Brien asked why. Mr. Trombetta said that he was captivated by the look, the aesthetic, the historical aspect and how different it looked. Mr. Trombetta passed along pictures of both 22 West Lane and 27 West Lane. He said they had looked at pvc columns and some other railing material but still had to do more research.

Ms. Kaplan said that both homes were built around the 1900's and in the Queen Anne style. Additionally, there were certain subcategories of Queen Anne styles in terms of ornamentation that differed. Consequently, the details for both Queen Anne homes differed such that they were not interchangeable. Ms. Daughters agreed. She said 27 West Lane was more classic Queen Anne. Across the street was more intricate. Ms. Kaplan said she didn't understand why they would want to destroy the design for something more prosaic. Mr. Trombetta said he didn't know the reasoning but wanted to put the proposed changes before the Commission. Mr. Blandford agreed with Ms. Kaplan. These were two completely different houses. He didn't believe the proposed changes made good sense. He said they could do a repair on the existing columns and railings and be more cost effective. Mr. Trombetta said he believes that the cost of repair may be higher.

Mr. O'Brien said the Commission is guided by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standard #6 which said in part "Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence."

Mr. O'Kane said West Lane is one of the primary entrances to Ridgefield. Historic resources referenced 27 West Lane for its Queen Anne style and how it had remained in good condition for over 120 years. This house marked it as a late style, turn of the century home and part of the existing historic street scape of Ridgefield. Mr. O'Brien agreed this house was a very important contributing element to the existing historic streetscape. Mr. O'Kane further reiterated that Federal historic preservation standards read "Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced."

Copies of the Historic Resources Inventory pertaining to 27 West Lane authored by the Connecticut Historical Commission in Hartford in 1979 were distributed (and are attached as part of these minutes) by Mr. O'Brien who then read the following quotations from it:

Notable Features: "A peristyle porch with curved gazebo – like area at the corner retains **all its original ornament in excellent condition.**"

Historical or Architectural Importance: "The restrained and crisp form of this Queen Anne house marks it as a late version of the style which shows the influence of the then growing interest in classic and Colonial forms at the turn of the century. **It is a critical contributory element in the West Lane Streetscape of large old houses which date from this period.**" (Emphasis Added)

Mr. O'Kane said the porch at 27 West Lane had original historic materials and details which needed to be preserved. Adding elements that didn't exist originally is to be avoided.

Mr. O'Brien said the Commission's consideration regarding the appropriateness of a proposed change considers that:

1. Properties which contribute to the character of the historic district shall be retained, with their historic features altered as little as possible.
2. Any alteration, repair or reconstruction of existing property shall be compatible with its historic character, as well as with the surrounding district."

Mr. O'Brien further said each individual historic structure had its own distinctive charm. Replacing historic elements of an historic structure to better match a structure across the street was counterproductive to historic preservation.

Mr. Trombetta asked if there was any kind of historic funding available. Mr. O'Brien said there was, however, the process may prove difficult to obtain. Mr. Blandford said they should research the process. Mr. O'Kane said he went through the process and it took a very long time. Mr. Blandford mentioned that this was our individual opinions only, not the Commission's. Mr. Trombetta said he was just asking for opinions and would be doing his due diligence.

Mr. O'Kane said the work to be done was technically a repair project of historical material, not a restoration. Restoration meant the material didn't exist originally which is clearly not the case here. At 27 West Lane, the historic material was intact, and only needed to be repaired under the guidelines for historic preservation.

**Mr. Blandford moved and Ms. Kaplan seconded a motion to deny the replacement of the railings and columns on the front porch at 27 West Lane in lieu of their repair, as such proposed changes are not compatible with its historic nature as well as the structure being a contributing historical element to the West Lane streetscape within the Historic District. Motion passed 5-0.**

Mr. O'Brien said that although they were denied for this work, the owners were still previously approved to replace the front porch deck, as approved in the HDC Special meeting of January 8, 2023. January 8 2023's unapproved meeting minutes were given to Mr. Trombetta.

**3) Approval of the December 15, 2022 HDC minutes and January 8, 2023 Special meeting minutes**

**Mr. Blandford moved and Ms. Daughters seconded a motion to approve the December 15, 2022 HDC minutes and January 8 2023 HDC Special meeting minutes. Motion passed 5-0.**

**Ms. Kaplan moved and Mr. Blandford seconded a motion to adjourn the Historic District Commission Meeting at 7:03 p.m. Motion passed by unanimous vote.**

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy L. Fields  
Recording Secretary