

RIDGEFIELD HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
Upper Level Conference Room
Town Hall, 400 Main Street
Ridgefield, CT 06877
November 29, 2016

APPROVED MINUTES

A special 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 Tuesday, November 29, 2016, and beginning at 7:30 pm.

The following members were present:

Daniel J. O’Brien, Chair
Harriet Hanlon (Alternate – voting for Joe Gasperino this evening)
Rhys Moore
Sean O’Kane – recused himself – doing the presentation
Eric Pashley, Vice Chair
Briggs Tobin

Absent:

Joe Gasperino
Jim Hancock

The special meeting was called to order by Mr. O’Brien at 7:35 p.m. The minutes of the November 17, 2016 regular meeting of the Historic District Commission were approved as amended.

Briggs Tobin moved and Harriet Hanlon seconded a motion to approve the minutes of the November 17, 2016 meeting of the Historic District Commission as amended. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

AGENDA

1. 19 High Ridge Avenue – Stone entrance piers with carriage lamps and wrought iron driveway gate at both High Ridge and Shadow Lane entrances.

Sean O’Kane, the architect, came forward with the owner of the property at 19 High Ridge Avenue, Anita Donofrio. S. O’Kane was not present on November 17, 2016, for the previous meeting on this topic as he was out of the country. Rich Adamski, of Mr. O’Kane’s firm did the presentation instead. S. O’Kane reported that since the November 17 meeting, the Donofrio’s have been very disappointed and concerned with the outcome of that meeting regarding their application. Accordingly, the application has been refiled with Ms. Donofrio in attendance at this evening’s meeting. Chairman D. O’Brien stated that the Commission generally does not like to see applications result in a denial. The

Commission generally works with applicants to reach a position, if possible, which is acceptable to both the Commission and the applicant.

S. O'Kane reviewed the history of the Donofrio's in Ridgefield. They moved to town in 1987. They were intimately involved with construction of their present High Ridge Avenue residence built on the site of a structure which burned down in 1994. The Donofrio's with S. O'Kane's guidance designed a proposed new structure which would be historically appropriate with the area. They worked closely with the HDC in 1995 and 1996 and focused closely on quality and design including the restoration of part of the original house on the site. On the property at 19 High Ridge Avenue, they recently built a carriage house guest house which consists of an apartment above a four-car garage and worked closely again with the HDC on this project. The Donofrio's are strong proponents of quality of design and historic preservation.

S. O'Kane presented an overview of what they are trying to do at the carriage house location. They understand the need to preserve the openness and thus are not suggesting a solid gate, but one on a small scale with visibility through the gate. There is a stone wall almost 400 ft. in length fronting the property on High Ridge Avenue. They wish to clean up the driveway access which is currently 40 ft. in width and narrow the driveway down to 26 ft. with proper curbing. Someone entering the proposed driveway will be able to pull off the road onto a level stretch of property. The gate will be 15 ft. back from the wall and street. Greenery will be planted and thus one will not be able to drive around the gate.

The Donofrio's wish to make the driveway off High Ridge be private in appearance and secure. The gate will establish that this is an entrance to private property. They do not wish to have people mistakenly driving in and then having to back out 200 ft. to High Ridge Avenue. This will not be an opulent entrance and they do not propose any fencing. They will plant greenery which will tie the gate with the stone wall and the small gate will open back from the road. There will be a keypad code in place to open the gate.

S. O'Kane stated how there are no historic or other regulations prohibiting gates. The proposed gate is only 5 ft. high and appropriate to the historic district. The light fixtures on top of the stone piers will be similar to what is on the carriage house from Brass Light Gallery. They are very traditional high quality carriage lamps. The stone piers for the gate will match the fieldstone wall with veneer like that used on the carriage house wall.

D. O'Brien commented on how the gate will be only 5 ft. in height and that the driveway will be narrow and thus it will be difficult for cars to turn around. S. O'Kane observed that this is a one-acre zoning area and the current zoning would allow a two-story house built only 25 ft. back from High Ridge Avenue.

R. Moore asked if there is a security problem on this part of High Ridge Avenue. Do people actually drive thru private property? Ms. Donofrio stated how since the carriage house would generally not be occupied that it may very well attract curiosity seekers or worse. By locating a gate farther off of High Ridge Avenue and not visible from the street entrance as discussed by Commission members at the last meeting, such an approach would not accomplish what is needed from a security point of view.

S. O’Kane stated how there have been security issues on this property in the recent past. Kids have been found to be partying on this property. The Donofrio’s always intended to design a driveway with a gate. They just had been busy with the carriage house and had not moved ahead on the driveway part of their plans.

B. Tobin stated that the Commission's role is not only to look at applications in their particular context, but also in the context of the historic district as a whole. He further stated that while there are gates within the historic district, the openness of the district is a critically important aspect and we do not want the district to become a "gated" community. So while he understands why the Donofrio's are proposing this gate, and he has no aesthetic problem with the gate being proposed as a general matter, he does not favor this gate in this location given that there is no gate there today and other alternatives appear to be available. He also asked if this application is approved, what would be the rationale for denying any future application for a new gate.

D. O’Brien stated how the HDC is not bound by precedent. Each case is onto itself. The merits of each application is what we are looking at. S. O’Kane stated that there are 9 gates throughout the district and more along Main Street

S. O’Kane stated how for some Commission members to say one just doesn’t like gates is not a salient point in opposing this application. This was the belief he got from Rich Adamski from his attendance at the last meeting about this application.

E Pashley commented that we were not trying to rewrite statues with this particular situation. The Commission reviews matters on the merits of the application before us and does not rely on past decisions nor potential future ones. As for this application, the gate in question is a concern for E. Pashley as it relates to the open look of the property.

D. O’Brien stated how the real question is the location of the gate and whether the other options for the gate’s location proposed are not appropriate or practical.

H. Hanlon stated that she feels the proposed gate is appropriate. The stone wall is already there. She recently drove by the property and believes that one can hardly see where the proposed gate is to go.

D. O'Brien stated how the location of the gate is 15 feet back from the street and it is to be a small gate that ties in with the landscaping. The wall is already there. He is less concerned about the gate now that he better understands the nature of the piers, what the gate will look like and how the gate will be tied in with the greenery and the existing wall.

R. Moore stated how he likes this application better than the previous one since this presentation has been able to present it in a different context. As re-presented, this proposal is aesthetically more pleasing. However, he still questions the claimed security issue need.

H. Hanlon moved and D. O'Brien seconded a motion to accept the application as presented at tonight's Special Meeting of the Historic District Commission on November 29, 2016. Motion passed 3-2. R. Moore, H. Hanlon and D. O'Brien voted in favor and E. Pashley and B. Tobin opposed.

E. Pashley moved to adjourn the Historic District Commission meeting at 8:15 p.m. D. O'Brien seconded the motion. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson