

RIDGEFIELD HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Upper Level Conference Room

Town Hall, 400 Main Street

Ridgefield, CT 06877

November 17, 2016

APPROVED MINUTES

A regular 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, November 17, 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

Eric Pashley, Vice Chair

Briggs Tobin

Absent:

Joe Gasperino

Jim Hancock

Sean O’Kane

AGENDA

1. 87 High Ridge Avenue – New gate and light on previously approved front wall and pillars.
2. 19 High Ridge Avenue – Stone entrance piers with carriage lamps and wrought iron driveway gate at both High Ridge and Shadow Lane entrances.

The meeting was called to order by Mr. O’Brien at 7:35 p.m.

1. **87 High Ridge Avenue** – D. O’Brien indicated that he had received a phone message from Jane Didona to the effect that neither she nor Mr. Jabara were able to attend the meeting and that they would reschedule at a later unspecified date. Since the application is approaching the 65-day statutory limit imposed on considering applications, the Commission would need to consider a motion to “deny without prejudice”. Such a denial does not preclude the applicant to refile the plans with the Town Clerk on a new application so the 65-day window may begin anew.

B. Tobin moved and R. Moore seconded a motion to deny without prejudice this application for 87 High Ridge Avenue. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

2. **19 High Ridge Avenue** – Rich Adamski was present for this application. Mr. Adamski indicated how he has worked with Sean O’Kane’s firm for the past twenty years. He presented pictures of the property with a four-car garage and an apartment upstairs. They wish to create a stone entrance with piers on each side complete with carriage lamps and a wrought iron driveway gate at both the High Ridge and Shadow Lane entrances. The stone pillars will match the stone walls on the property.

Mr. Adamski commented on the history of High Ridge Avenue and showed nine pictures of the gates on various properties both on High Ridge Avenue and in close proximity. Three of the gates are within walking distance of 19 High Ridge Avenue, one is on Shadow Lane, and the others are at the other end of High Ridge Avenue. There is nothing in the historical records of the High Ridge Avenue area that prohibits gates or that gates were not uncommon. Mr. Adamski also presented a photo of an old gate found lying on the property as an indication that there were likely gates in place at some time in the past. However, the location of such gate was unknown.

The property owner wishes to have gates as a security measure so that the uninvited members of the public will not mistakenly or intentionally enter the property.

E. Pashley stated that he is not supportive of a gate on the High Ridge Avenue side of the property which would be visible from such avenue when there appears to be other options for the placement of such a gate before reaching the premises and yet be out of sight from High Ridge Avenue.

D. O’Brien stated to Mr. Adamski that he wanted to be clear that the Commission’s comments on the High Ridge Avenue gate voiced this evening and at our October meeting were based solely on the location of such gate and that the Commission is not opposed to gates as being not appropriate to the Historical District. The only question of concern with this particular application is the placement of the proposed High Ridge Avenue gate and whether it is appropriate that it be visible from High Ridge Avenue given the facts and circumstances of this particular application. There appears to be no objection to the proposed matching gate to the property off Shadow Lane which is the main entrance to these premises. The premises’ front on Shadow Lane is clearly visible from that street. The premises are not visible from High Ridge Avenue as they are located at some distance from High Ridge Avenue and behind a hill on the property. Accordingly, the proposed gate on High Ridge Avenue would bear no visual architectural relationship to the property’s premises. Other property gates in the Historic District bear a visual relationship to their property’s premises. Importantly, in this case, there appears to be other options for the placement of a gate for those vehicles entering from High Ridge Avenue and where such gate would not be visible from High Ridge Avenue and would serve the same purpose.

B. Tobin inquired of Mr. Adamski if gates were part of the plan when the garage was first built? Mr. Adamski said that perhaps they should have been addressed at that time but they were not. Mr. Tobin stated that the applicant is requesting a gate where one does not exist today, and that while we understand the applicant's desires, we are concerned generally about the trend towards "walling off" the open views in the district – particularly where other alternatives exist to address the applicant's concerns.

E. Pashley suggested to Mr. Adamski placing the High Ridge Avenue gate in line with the entrance to the parking area of the existing building structure. An individual could not get around it and it would not interfere with the “open” look of the property from High Ridge Avenue. This would seem to be consistent with the approach taken by the Applicant with the Shadow Lane gate. Both sets of gates would still provide privacy and security without diminishing the view of the property from High Ridge Avenue.

Mr. Adamski stated how the gates are to be a visual barrier that will deter people from driving down the driveway. The gate is to be a “light” gate with openness as part of the gate’s design. It is to be an elegant light gate that can be looked through. Mr. Adamski stated that by moving the gate from the proposed entrance on High Ridge Avenue to either over the hill beyond the site line from the avenue or close to the entrance of the parking area would create problems from a security perspective and with possible errant vehicles entering from High Ridge Avenue which would then need to back out or turnaround. Turning around in the driveway would be difficult given the driveway’s width. Mr. Adamski stated further that by so moving the gate would result in a loss of use by owners of a sizeable area. A few Commission members, notably Messrs. Moore, Tobin and O’Brien, commented that they fail to understand how the placement of a standalone gate would lessen the owners’ property use and they did not understand why an ungated driveway at the entrance of High Ridge Avenue would necessarily invite errant entry.

Mr. Adamski read a letter to the Commission from the homeowner – a copy of which is attached to these minutes and is a part thereof.

D. O’Brien inquired of the Commission members if anyone would like to make a motion to approve the application.

H. Hanlon made a motion to approve the application as submitted.

D. O’Brien called for a second to the motion of which there was none.

D. O’Brien then stated that without a second to the motion, there could be no vote to approve and asked if there was a motion to deny the application.

E. Pashley moved and B. Tobin seconded a motion to deny without prejudice this application as presented. The motion was approved by unanimous vote.

D. O'Brien asked each member of the Commission to state why they voted to deny this application:

B. Tobin voted to deny the motion because (1) there is no gate there today and (2) alternatives appear to be available to address the applicant's concerns.

R. Moore stated how he does not find the gate appropriate in that proposed spot.

H. Hanlon stated how she does not see the purpose of the gate out by the road. There is already a fence and a wall. However, adding a gate would not change the look of the property because there is already a stone wall cutting off the open field look.

E. Pashley stated that his prior comments at this meeting reflect his position.

D. O'Brien stated how his vote was based on the location of the gate. There are other options for placing the gate which need to be explored by the Applicant. Mr. O'Brien stated to Mr. Adamski that the Commission's process is not intended to be contentious and that he encourages the Applicant to consider other possibilities for placement and to refile an application so that an approach acceptable to both the Applicant and the Commission can be achieved.

Approval of Meeting Minutes - October 26, 2016 Meeting

E. Pashley moved and D. O'Brien seconded a motion to approve as written the minutes of the October 26, 2016 Historic District Commission meeting. Motion approved 3 in favor with 2 abstentions. (R. Moore and H. Hanlon abstained as they were not present at the October 26, 2016 meeting.)

The next meeting of the HDC is December 15.

E. Pashley inquired as to when election of officers for next year will occur. He has a demanding work schedule and will be traveling considerably. He requests that he not be considered for Vice Chair when elections are held in January.

The HDC meetings are usually the third Thursday of each month. The first meeting in 2017 will be Thursday, January 19. D. O'Brien stated that he will be sending out a meeting calendar shortly for 2017.

Chairman D. O'Brien adjourned the Historic District Commission meeting at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson

Ridgefield Historic District Commission

Ridgefield, CT

To whom it may concern:

On High Ridge Avenue between Route 35 and King Lane there are at least 7 houses that have gates in one form or another. While a few of them have been there 'historically' and may warrant exemption, most of the gates are new and their approval by the HDC is questionable. The HDC should render explicit the approvals they have given or not given to these new gates and why. The lack of consistency is clearly disconcerting. New members thinking differently is not really a reason to change the rules and or application of standards.

Specifically, 'Not liking gates' is clearly not an acceptable and thoughtful interpretation of the Historic District Commission Charter given the piece of the HDC charter I clipped in below.

The Commission was created in 1968 for the purpose of preserving the historic character of the homes and properties within Ridgefield's Historic Districts.

In the original build on High Ridge Avenue clearly gates were allowed. After all isn't this what determines the historical reference for the area. Gates then are not to be simply treated as exempt now. Rather they are the standard against which new gates should be considered.

Also, there were a pair of gates on the 19 High Ridge property. Doesn't this also suggest an exemption?

For a myriad of reasons, putting gates on 19 High Ridge can and should be argued and supported.

Sincerely,

AM & NM Donofrio

55 High Ridge Avenue, Ridgefield, CT 06877

The houses I counted are noted below for your consideration:

Jabara

Bratt/Katz

Corner Brick House King Lane and High Ridge

Corner House Parley Lane and High Ridge

Peter Parley House

Corner House High Ridge and Shadow Lane

Corner House High Ridge and Route 35.