

RIDGEFIELD HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
Upper Level Conference Room
Town Hall, 400 Main Street
Ridgefield, CT 06877
December 15, 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, December 15, 2016, and beginning at 7:30 pm.

The following members were present:

Daniel J. O’Brien, Chair
Harriet Hanlon
Sean O’Kane – (Taking the place of Eric Pashley this evening)
Briggs Tobin

Absent:

Joe Gasperino
Jim Hancock
Eric Pashley (Vice Chairman)

The meeting was called to order by Mr. O’Brien at 7:30 p.m. The minutes of the November 29, 2016 Special Meeting of the Historic District Commission were approved as written.

AGENDA

1. **51 West Lane** – Restoration of steps and exterior damage and to add a porch and replace a walkway.
2. **87 High Ridge Avenue** – New gate and light on previously approved front wall and pillars.
3. **207 Main Street – Jesse Lee Memorial Church** - Plan changes to second story addition above existing porte-cochere to include ADA compliance changes.
1. **51 West Lane** – Max Axler came forward to discuss the proposed restorations and addition to his own home including replacing and restoring siding to the extent it is damaged. There was originally a porch on the front of the home. That has been taken down as well as the guard rail and pillars. Mr. Axler explained how he wants to change the walkway. It is cracked. He wishes to change the front porch and put pillars back on.

S. O’Kane inquired as to the composition of the siding – it is wood. Mr. Axler has already redone the kitchen and finished the basement. Restoration of the house is a big project that he is gradually working on and repairing.

B. Tobin inquired as to the covered porch. Mr. Axler said that he is not “married” to it. S. O’Kane stated how the peak in the roof with the proposed cut-out would work very well.

S. O’Kane indicated favor with the peaked roof, and replacement of the pillars being brought down to the porch itself. If the porch is narrower, they can still do a vaulted ceiling with a peak on the top.

S. O’Kane stated how by restoring the porch and installation of the peak, the house becomes less of a Craftsman style and more of a colonial revival. He suggests the Applicant’s googling of Greene & Greene and Mr. Axler will see craftsman details that he might like. Pillars are available in standard sizes. Mr. Axler prefers the use of stone and wood together on the pillars. Mr. O’Kane suggested that Mr. Axler return on January 19, 2017 with some “colonial revival” ideas for the porch. Once Mr. Axler gets approval, he can then apply for a building permit. If any construction is proposed for beyond the footprint of the house, then Planning & Zoning will also need to look at it.

2. **87 High Ridge Avenue** – New gate and light on previously approved front wall and pillars.

The owner of the property Richard Jabara and Jane Didona, the architect, came forward for this discussion. D. O’Brien welcomed them back. Ms. Didona walked through the various changes that have been proposed including the shortening of the wall adjoining the driveway entrance. The lower portion of the wall will be 3’6” in height. Ms. Didona discussed her recent visit to the Hershey Hotel in Hershey, PA which was built at a similar time in history to the Jabara residence. She shared pictures of a gate at the hotel which is also similar in size and design to that being proposed by the Applicant with similar light fixtures. Richard commented on how most of the property uses bluestone. He did not want to introduce a different product. The parking area had been approved.

S. O’Kane stated how he would like to see the gate toned down a little and less decorative. Mr. Jabara said he is perhaps open to a gate simpler in design. S O’Kane inquired as to the width of the curb cut. Mr. Jabara and Ms. Didona will return on January 19, 2017 to discuss the final design of the gate.

B. Tobin moved and S. O’Kane seconded a motion to approve as presented the proposed changes to the previously approved driveway entrance brick wall and pillars and the proposed slight repositioning of the previously approved courtyard in front of the house. Also approved as presented the proposed gate and globe lighting fixtures atop the pillars on the condition

**that the final design of the gate is subject to approval by the Commission.
The motion passed by unanimous vote.**

- 3. 207 Main Street – Jesse Lee Memorial Church** – Plan changes to second story addition above existing porte-cochere to include ADA compliance changes.

The Applicant has cancelled today's appearance due to a conflict and has indicated that he will attend the Commission's meeting on January 19, 2017.

- 4. 188 Main Street.**

Mr. Keith Gerety, the builder representing the owner of the property at 188 Main Street, appeared before the Commission as a member of the public in order to advise the Commission of building issues which have arisen on the work being done on the property's carriage house. Such work had been recently approved by the Commission pursuant to an issued Certificate of Appropriateness.

D. O'Brien recused himself given his prior ownership of the property and his sale of such property to the current owner. D. O'Brien asked that B. Tobin take over as Chair of the meeting.

Mr. Gerety stated that the construction plans called for the excavation of a cellar below the existing first floor. However, during the excavation, it has been determined that the existing foundation lacks a sure footing and that the support beams underpinning the structure have suffered severe water and rot damage over a long period of time and are crumbling. Approximately 40% of the rafters are seriously compromised. Mr. Gerety stated that the structure is now in a serious state of imminent collapse. Mr. Gerety indicated that his firm has attempted to stabilize the structure with extra support which he checks daily but that the structure remains at serious risk of shifting and collapsing. Ground water coming into the structure is currently being pumped out twice daily. Mr. Gerety indicated that Peter Coffin, the property's architect, agrees with the assessment that the structure is severely damaged and unstable. In addition to the foundation and rotted beam issues, Mr. Gerety reported that cupolas have to be rebuilt and that the entire roof needs to be taken off and replaced.

Given the dangerous and structurally unsound condition of the building, Mr. Gerety is suggesting that the rear of this garage/carriage house be demolished and rebuilt to the exact same specification and exterior features as is currently in place using the same types of historical appropriate materials. The front of the carriage house which houses the garage portion only would not need to be demolished and would continue to be a part of the rebuilt rear structure.

Mr. Gerety stated that such an approach would result in a rebuilt structure exactly in the same dimensions, style and exterior features and like historical materials and would also result in having a structure which can be sustained for many years

to come versus attempting to rescue the current structure in its seriously compromised state at a great cost and financial hardship to the owner. The owner is committed to finishing such reconstructed secondary building on this property in an historical appropriate way.

Mr. Gerety presented several photos of the excavation, the rotted beams and the compromised foundation.

Mr. Gerety indicated that Peter Coffin is prepared to document what needs to be done and put together a plan for moving forward with the restoration. Anything proposed has to be approved by the Ridgefield Building Department. Planning & Zoning will need to check with the Building Department also. Bob Jewell is the attorney. Ken Jones is the structural engineer.

S. O’Kane suggested a site visit and it would be best for the Commission to visit the site together. The building has been shored up but it is not safe. Plans need to be done and brought to the meeting on the 19th. The site visit was then scheduled for Saturday, January 7, 2017, at 10:30 a.m. The proposed plans are to be presented on January 19, 2017 with the need by the owner to make sure that there are no issues with Planning & Zoning. Keith agreed to uncover more of the existing structure for those on the Commission to be able to view the dry rot and lack of structural support during the site visit.

B. Tobin moved and H. Hanlon seconded a motion to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of the Historic District Commission held on November 29, 2016, relative to the Donofrio application for 19 High Ridge Avenue. Motion passed 3-0 with S. O’Kane abstained because he was the architect responsible for the application.

D. O’Brien indicated that he will email out the 2017 meeting schedule.

D. O’Brien made a motion and B. Tobin seconded a motion to adjourn the Historic District Commission meeting at 8:50 p.m. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson