

RIDGEFIELD HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
Lower Level Small Conference Room
Town Hall, 400 Main Street
Ridgefield, CT 06877
June 24, 2019

APPROVED MINUTES – SPECIAL MEETING

A site visit and special meeting of the Ridgefield Historic District Commission (“HDC”) was held at 63 High Ridge Avenue on Monday, June 24, 2019, and beginning at 10:00 a.m.

The following members were present:

Dan O’Brien, Chair
Joseph Gasperino
Sean O’Kane
Kam Daughters (Alternate for Briggs Tobin)
Harriet Hanlon (Alternate for Rhys Moore)
Mark Blandford (Alternate - Recused)

AGENDA

1) 63 High Ridge Avenue – Erection of a new fence.

MEETING

The meeting was called to order by Mr. O’Brien at 10:00 a.m.

In attendance at the meeting was Mr. Bill Diamond, the property owner and Applicant, and Mark Blandford, a business associate of Mr. Diamond and also an Alternate member of the Commission who had recused himself and was designated by Mr. Diamond to speak on his behalf for the initial presentation of this application on Thursday, June 20, 2019.

The meeting started with a site visit of the property to view the proposed fence which had been partially installed.

The Commission members together with Messrs. Diamond and Blandford viewed the fence from High Ridge Avenue and from various points on the property, including on the west side of the fence.

Mr. Diamond explained that he needed to install a fence to keep his two dogs securely on the property since they have had a history of escaping despite the installation of an electronic fence. He, therefore, installed a four-feet high black metal fence.

Mr. O’Brien said that being on one of the most prominent ridge lines in the Town, this property, along with the four adjoining properties to the south, provides for a very scenic public way for the public. The newly

installed fence is clearly visible from the road. Therefore, anything that can be done to minimize the visibility of the fence from the road would be something to take into consideration in considering the current placement of the fence which is on the ridgeline and runs from the house north to the property line.

Mr. Diamond said that the fence is not a solid fence and that he believed that the fence was the least intrusive. You can barely see it from the road and it fits with the other architectural features of the house.

Mr. O'Brien inquired whether Mr. Diamond had considered other alternative sitings of the fence such as running the fence from a position further back from the ridge line. Mr. Diamond said that that would cut his property up. Mr. O'Brien indicated that the recently installed fence likewise cut the property up.

Sean O'Kane said that the fence is clearly visible from the street. He suggested running the fence from a point a little further west off the ridge from the corner post of the raised stone patio and running between the existing playground equipment and the large birch trees. Kam Daughters believed that while it still may be visible from the street, its profile would be a little lower. Mr. O'Kane suggested that a few sections of uninstalled fence be held up in the location he proposed and then have the group view the proposed relocation of the fence from the street.

Viewing the relocated position of the fence as proposed by Mr. O'Kane from the street, K. Daughters said that it was amazing how much the visibility of the fence from the road appeared to drop by moving it back a few feet to Mr. O'Kane's suggested siting of the fence. The other Commission members agreed with that view. Mr. Diamond said that he couldn't disagree that you see it less when it is moved back.

The Commission members and Mr. Diamond then returned to the westside of the fence in the rear of the house and explored several possible ways to run the fence a few feet back of the recently installed fence.

However, agreement could not be reached between the Commission members and Mr. Diamond as to an acceptable way to run the fence in a position west of the installed fence. Mr. Diamond said that he was not in favor of relocating the fence because it didn't look right; the proposed change had minimal impact; and the current fence is an attractive fence which is not greatly visible from the road. It is not a meaningful improvement to move the fence back; to move it back just doesn't work with the whole house.

Mr. O'Kane said by moving the fence back 20 feet or so and looking out from where we were looking at it from the road, it appeared considerably less noticeable. It definitely had less impact from the street in his view. While he appreciates that there are some issues as to how it can be moved back, if there is some way to move it back and we can resolve as to how it comes off the house, that's the key. Given the large size of the property, moving it back 20 feet doesn't appear to make a significant difference.

Harriet Hanlon said that she sympathizes with Mr. Diamond even though she would prefer that the fence be moved back. She stated that when you viewed a relocation of the fence back behind the birch tree from across the road, visibility of the fence goes down 50%. She said that we were not trying to be arbitrary about this but by moving the fence back as discussed would minimize the blow and minimize its visibility tremendously.

Mr. Diamond said that he preferred a vote on the existing fence if the Commission was agreeable. Mr. O'Brien inquired of the Commission members as to whether anyone was in a position to make a motion on the appropriateness of the currently installed fence. Mr. O'Kane said that having considered the factors,

he believed that trying to angle a relocation of the fence was somewhat awkward. Mr. O'Brien asked if he was making a motion or if he believed that the Commission should take some further time to consider the matter. Mr. O'Brien said that we do not have to make a decision today.

Ms. Hanlon said that she didn't need to sleep on the matter and that she would make a motion to approve the existing fence. In response, Mr. O'Kane made a motion to approve as presented. The motion was seconded by Ms. Hanlon. There being no further discussion raised, a vote was taken with Mr. O'Kane and Ms. Hanlon voting to approve the motion and Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Gasperino and Ms. Daughters voting against the motion based upon their expressed concerns of the visibility of the currently installed fence from the public way. Accordingly, the motion was denied by a vote of 3 to 2.

D. O'Brien suggested to Mr. Diamond that it would be helpful if he gave some further consideration to an alternative solution and meet with the Commission at its next regular meeting on July 18, 2019 to see if we can reach an alternative solution that is acceptable to the Commission and him.

Mr. Diamond said that he didn't think that he would be amenable to moving it and that his path forward on this was to do some legal work as he believes that the Commission is being unreasonable. Mr. O'Brien told Mr. Diamond that without an approval of the currently installed fence that it is in violation, and indicated to Mr. Diamond that the Commission tried to accommodate his request for a time-sensitive consideration of the application which was submitted to the Town Clerk's office on Tuesday, June 18, 2019, by scheduling a special meeting to initially hear the application on Thursday, June 20, 2019, at which time the Commission agreed to hold a site visit and an additional special meeting at the property on today's date, Monday, June 24, 2019. The fence was installed on Friday, June 21, 2019.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:55 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel O'Brien
Historic District Commission, Chair