

RIDGEFIELD HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
Lower Level Small Conference Room
Town Hall, 400 Main Street
Ridgefield, CT 06877
June 21, 2018

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 Thursday, June 21, 2018, and beginning at 7:30 p.m.

The following members were present:

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

AGENDA

- 1) 236 Main Street – Hawley House – Proposed replacement of house siding and replacement of rear door

MEETING

The Meeting was called to order by Mr. O’Brien at 7:30 p.m.

- 1) 216 Main Street – Hawley House – Proposed replacement of house siding and replacement of rear door

Don Ciota, the applicant, was present along with his contractor, Neal Hicks of Hicks Construction LLC.

D. Ciota gave an update on the windows he worked on. He said he applied special wax to all windows sides. Said the wax was working out really nicely. He was working on the last inconspicuous window and the front windows were next. Distributed a piece of hardware taken off the trim, layered with paint. D. Ciota said he wanted to show the HDC the paint accumulation. D. Ciota showed the window frame interior and said he may take the old paint off as it was impossible to match. Said he didn’t have to remove the glass. Said it was not modern glass. K. Daughters said it looked beautiful.

D. Ciota distributed several photos of the house taken today. The West side showed a bulge in the back of the building. D. Ciota said the clapboard was separating from the building. Didn’t know what it was. Above the bulge, there were cracks in the clapboard, forcing the clapboard up. At the bottom, the drip rail was completely rotted out. Also, there were separations between the clapboard, of approximately one inch. D. Ciota said he couldn’t see how they could be caulked. On the North side, looking up from the driveway, behind the window was a void. There was a big hole in the building. The picture showed mesh netting to keep the birds out – quite extensive. There was board shrinkage from the top of the shutter to the top of the window. D. Ciota said although wood could last for centuries, it had already been centuries.

At the front, the clapboard was deteriorated on the northerly corner. Looking at the four windows in front, the clapboard was very much deteriorated. Looking upward, between the windows, you could see the deterioration. Below the shutters, there was water damage which had caused the deterioration. The siding on the southerly side also had deterioration. He didn't take a picture of the South side because N. Hicks said it had to be replaced. Originally, he only wanted to do this one side.

N. Hicks said the shakes on the South side were shot. There was no way to resurrect them. If you tried, they'd break and fall off. There was extensive damage as well as being worn paper thin at the top of the crown. D. O'Brien asked if any shakes had come off. N. Hicks said yes, some had.

N. Hicks said you wanted to keep as much history as you could, but major structural problems existed. N. Hicks said he didn't know what was causing the bulge and that it would be nice to insulate at the same time. S. O'Kane said it was possible the clapboards were put straight on the studs.

S. O'Kane asked if the paint was scrapped off one of the clapboards to determine the type of wood, if white pine was underneath. N. Hicks said yes, it could be white pine.

D. Ciota said the main house was laid on dry stone foundation while the addition was not. The settling ground was active. There were no modern concrete footings. The house has been treated decently, but now it needed work done. He took pictures to show the HDC how the siding looked. And, he suspects there may be some mold. J. Gasperino asked if D. Ciota had seen any mold. N. Hicks said he had seen evidence of mold on the lower walls and behind cabinets. J. Gasperino asked if it was black mold. N. Hicks said yes. S. O'Kane asked if there were no drip caps or flashing. N. Hicks said none.

N. Hicks said the crowns were starting to go. At what point would the siding get replaced. If could save some siding, of course that was preferable. D. O'Brien asked why most couldn't be saved. Especially if not rotted. N. Hicks said it was really difficult to get off. They were nailed and attempting to pull them off will have the nails pop thru the clapboard splitting them. N. Hicks estimated 20-30% were going to be lost. D. O'Brien asked if large spikes were used. S. O'Kane said probably wrought nails were used. N. Hicks said he spoke with Peter Coffin. They think the addition was added in the 1760's. Where the bulge resided, there was a significant slant in the floor inside. M. Blandford said the bulge was very noticeable. The pictures didn't do it justice. M. Blandford happened to be walking by the house earlier in the day, when D. Ciota was taking pictures. S. O'Kane said there probably were no collar ties holding back. It was evident the overhead of the window was deteriorated. The crown molding had to be fixed and flashing used. These could be original clapboards. D. Ciota said he wouldn't offer an opinion that these were original. S. O'Kane said there were areas that need to be addressed. His general feeling was that repair was much more favored by HDC. D. Ciota agreed, N. Hicks favors this. D. O'Brien said it had to be significant. He didn't want to get rid of the clapboard because there were spaces between them. Rotted was one thing. D. Ciota said if boards could be salvaged, they'd be happy to use them. D. O'Brien said this couldn't be based on a contingency. There needed to be a determination of what could or couldn't be salvaged. S. O'Kane suggested some hand sanding/scraping of some areas. He would be happy to go out and take a look at the result. Repair the crown and use flashing, yes he agreed with that. However, an exploration was prudent – one step at a time, on selected areas. For example, starting with the southeast corner, then the northeast corner. He'd want to see if it was oak or pine underneath. This home was the oldest and most historic home in Ridgefield. D. Ciota asked if his home was being treated differently or the same as other homes. D. O'Brien said the standards were the same for everyone. D. Ciota said there were other historic homes in the District who have had replacement siding. D. O'Brien said there may have been, but none had been approved in the last ten years to his knowledge. M. Blandford said he could feel D. Ciota's frustration, but his home was a unique example. D. O'Brien said D. Ciota's home was not being singled out. He reiterated that D. Ciota was doing great work and clearly showed dedication and

great stewardship. D. Ciota said he was looking for the house to look exactly as it was built. D. O'Brien said the house might lose its character if it had new siding. D. Ciota said when he thought of architectural detail, he was not talking about shingles or siding. He did have D. O'Brien's handout titled "Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings-Wood". D. O'Brien quoted from the Secretary's Standards that actions specifically **not** recommended by the Secretary of the Interior Standards were: "Removing a major portion of the historic wood from a façade instead of repairing or replacing only the deteriorated wood, then reconstructing the façade with new material in order to achieve a uniform or improved appearance". D. Ciota said there was the necessity of doing the repair/replacement to maintain the integrity, but the bone structure of the home was suffering. D. O'Brien said if N. Hicks could get at the bones, he could fix it. D. Ciota said the boards might have to come off for N. Hicks to get at the bones to fix. S. O'Kane said nobody wanted to see the house stripped and resided. Repairs were always preferable. If the home was falling down, something drastic would have to be done consistent with historical materials. S. O'Kane said D. Ciota was doing an amazing job as was evidenced with the windows. Those windows would last another 100 years. D. Ciota's approach was consistent with being a custodian of the most important house in Ridgefield. And it was true that if they tried to pry off the boards, they could splinter. This was why S. O'Kane suggested hand sanding. And, they may be able to do some caulking without taking the boards out. D. Ciota said in 15 to 20 years, they might have to replace what wasn't done – he wanted to protect all now, put in moisture barriers. D. Ciota said he was not thinking short term, but long term. He was willing to see the job done correctly. Why not address all issues now, including the moisture. How do other jurisdictions handle the deterioration of the homes? What were their practical basis? D. Ciota didn't see how all the inspecting could be done. N. Hicks had a good reputation in the community. He believed the HDC should trust N. Hicks was going to take good care of this project. D. O'Brien said he was happy N. Hicks was doing this project. However, the question was had enough been done to understand the scope of the work.

N. Hicks said he thought on insulating, moisture control and care. S. O'Kane said he was not in favor of vapor barriers in insulating. Yes, windows could be air sealed with weather stripping. Basements were ok to foam. But personally, he was not in favor of insulating walls. D. Ciota said beyond caulking here and there, replacement had to be done somewhere. N. Hicks would salvage what could be salvaged. D. Ciota was interested in seeing if there was evidence of any fire damage on the South side siding, as there was a story the house was set on fire at some time. But the real issue was the West side, where the bulge resided. Probably they wouldn't be able to solve that. But if they could determine the extent, they could stop it. S. O'Kane suggested putting telltales on the siding to see if the walls were creeping out.

K. Daughter asked N. Hicks if he had a percentage estimate of saving the boards. N. Hicks said he didn't know. Maybe 70%. S. O'Kane said that's why he advocated doing some exploration. D. Ciota said if N. Hick were to bring a crew and take off some boards, would there have to be another meeting? He believed this would hamstring the operation. D. Ciota said there should be some trust in doing the right job. S. O'Kane said they were not trying to hamstring the work. Rather, what the HDC was saying was that taking off all the boards were more than what the HDC was comfortable in approving. That was why he advocated exploratory hand sanding an area first, not taking the boards off. D. O'Brien said a wait for a monthly meeting was not necessary. The HDC were flexible and could do a Special meeting, such as had been done currently.

D. Ciota said the earth moved and the house settled. That was why there were separations. And to fix, that required more than any sanding or caulking. When the house was built, the builders did a good job. How were modest adjustments going to help? If a mild approach was taken, the house could crumble in 50 years. He wanted to do the siding, fix the structure, and remove the gaps. If things were not level, that had to be addressed too. N. Hicks said the house was built well. The addition, not so well. The roof on the addition was sagging badly. The forces on the back wall were tremendous. There were major structural

problems in the addition portion. N. Hicks had been involved with this house for approximately 15-20 years. S. O’Kane said perhaps they should have Di Salvo Engineering take a look at the house.

J. Gasperino said to be clear, some clapboard had to be replaced – but with what? Each original clapboard varied in thickness and was irregular. Could this be replicated or would it look like a paint job – what was the plan? N. Hicks said this would be determined by what he found when he took them off. When the original carpenters put them on, they settled with age and changed with movement over the years. Could they be replaced with milled? That would be the question at that point. N. Hicks said D. Ciota was willing to go the extra mile. J. Gasperino said if possible to replicate, could one tell the difference? N. Hicks said the amount of lead paint over time changed the dynamics of the siding. So it was hard to tell. S. O’Kane said he was not saying to strip the wood. Rather, to take off by hand scraping, using no heat, no sand blasting. To do as little as possible. S. O’Kane said it appeared some paint was falling off in some areas. The siding may be white pine which was preferable to oak, which split, and was more forgiving. How much could be salvaged? This was why a step by step approach needed to be taken, like what had been done with the windows. N. Hicks said for the South side, it appeared the consensus was to replace with similar material – clapboard. S. O’Kane said to take off and see. It appeared weather beaten and was worth investigating. He said on the South side, he wouldn’t be adverse to clapboard being replaced. D. Ciota said they needed to take a look at the clapboard. This would be painted to match what was on now. It was hard to see but they were irregular. S. O’Kane said there hadn’t been enough exploration. They needed to find out what they were dealing with. D. Ciota said when he painted previously, they stripped the paint and repainted. But the work needed to be redone within a year. The work needed to be done correctly. He wanted to rescue whatever could be salvaged.

J. Gasperino asked if there was access inside the house to the bulge. N. Hicks said behind the fireplace masonry, he was able to look but was unable to maneuver to do any work. D. O’Brien asked the size of the bulge. N. Hicks said approximately 12-14’ by 6-8’. He said they needed to find out what was going on. N. Hicks said pressure went down and out. There was degradation in the foundation, rot in the sill plate, and the bulge exacerbated that. They needed to stop it. D. O’Brien asked how to fix that. N. Hicks said he wasn’t sure. He felt it was similar to another property he worked on. He was not going to be able to fix it, but was looking to stop it. He could possibly tie it to the chimney. S. O’Kane suggested starting at the drip plate. N. Hicks said he wanted to get a visual. S. O’Kane said to do the minimal to find out the problem, not strip the house. D. Ciota said to determine what was causing this, by taking the siding off, may be able to stop this. He was looking for approval for the South side. S. O’Kane said the first thing was exploration.

D. Ciota said he was looking for approval to get started. S. O’Kane said he couldn’t approve without knowing the rest of the house - the North and West side of the house. Before saying let’s use xx siding, what was the clapboard? Pine? Oak? D. O’Brien asked if the siding was hand split or machine made? Could N. Hicks tell? N. Hicks said yes, he could – it was hand split. D. Ciota said if N. Hicks removed the clapboard from the bulge, would that give an answer. S. O’Kane said not if the addition was done 100 years later. It could be different. So would have to take some from the original house. M. Blandford said it made sense to work on the rotted pieces first. S. O’Kane said the exploration was like key hole surgery. D. Ciota said so they were going to explore the nature of the clapboard siding on the South side. S. O’Kane suggested D. Ciota check with the Historic Society (Kay Ables) for the Hartman Archives. There might be an old photograph that would show the siding in detail. J. Gasperino said, the South side could be tested, and might see wrought iron nails.

D. Ciota said he wanted to protect the house. Felt there was a plan. Asked the HDC if N. Hicks could see what was contributing to the bulge. D. O’Brien said that there appeared to be a consensus among the HDC members agreeing to D. Ciota and N. Hicks doing exploratory work on the shingles and the bulge area.

M. Blandford said S. O’Kane could also meet to look at that. S. O’Kane said they didn’t have to wait until the monthly meeting. Everyone lived in Ridgefield. Could easily meet or have a Special meeting.

D. Ciota said he saw himself as the current proprietor. Wanted to do the work correctly. He knew he had the right contractor. The windows he worked on were now working. He hadn’t touched the front ones yet but has learned by doing the inconspicuous ones first. D. O’Brien said he was very impressed on the approach D. Ciota had taken. S. O’Kane said D. Ciota was preserving the historic fabric. D. Ciota could say he had saved 150 year old siding.

D. O’Brien said to D. Ciota to let the HDC know when he would like to see the HDC again. D. Ciota said he appreciated the meeting and was now able to get on N. Hick’s schedule. When he had begun the exploratory, he would let the HDC know, to come visit the house.

D. Ciota showed a picture of the proposed back door. It was wider than the front, as it had to be handicapped accessible. The door had two raised panels. He was trying to mimic the front door, even though one would not be able to see the back door. This would be a Dutch door. He was not looking for approval at this point. K. Daughters, S. O’Kane and J. Gasperino said the door looked good. S. O’Kane mentioned that the Dutch doors typically were not the best for weather stripping.

S. O’Kane moved and K. Daughters seconded a motion to adjourn the Historic District Commission Meeting at 9:13 p.m. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy L. Fields