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MEMORANDUM

To: Rocky Hill Planning Board

From: Tamara L. Lee, PP, AICP, LLA, ASLA



Re: Block 5, Lot 7.02
Historic Preservation Permit
Application

Date: July 31, 2018

1.0 Background

The applicant is applying for a Historic Preservation Permit for the construction of a new house on Lot 7.02, Block 5 in the R-1 zoning district. The subject lot is part of a recent subdivision application which was approved for a property locally known as the Scassera property. The new one acre lot on the south side of Washington Street is next to and east of the historic farmhouse house at 25 Washington Street.

The proposed dwelling will include 2,869 sf plus a basement and two-car garage. It will be oriented at an angle to the street, just behind the 50 foot front yard setback, with the garage at the front of the house and closest to the street. The driveway will begin at the northeast corner of the lot and cross most of the width of the lot to reach the proposed garage. The original subdivision showed the proposed house parallel to the street with the driveway entering the lot at the same location, but running parallel to the side lot line and connecting to a garage on the east side of the house.

Two (2) 36” trees, noted to remain on the approved subdivision plans have been removed, presumably due to storm damage. A 30” pine and a 15” Japanese maple which were identified on the approved subdivision plans to be removed are now proposed to remain. The ‘parking area’ for the new dwelling will be in front of the house, cut into the slope and edged with a retaining wall of indiscernible height. The application notes that this area will not be visible from Washington Street.

The subject property is located within the Historic District, therefore the proposed construction must be consistent with the provisions of Section 80-95 of the Rocky Hill Land Use Code.

2.0 Historic Preservation District – General Criteria

Any new development within the Historic District must be compatible with existing structures in the District. It cannot adversely affect the ‘ambiance, character and appearance’ of the District or the relationships among and between the structures in it. Moreover, it must be in keeping with the scale of other structures in the area. *(Section 80-95B(1))*

The neighboring farmhouse, the Scassera House, is on the National Historic Register and classified as ‘contributing’ to the historic character of the Borough’s Historic District. The two existing homes east of the site are also listed on the National Historic Register and they are classified as ‘harmonizing.’ The proposed house, and its angled orientation, seem inconsistent with these existing structures. There are no other angled houses in the area and the architectural design lacks any historical context.

Existing homes in the area all have elements of symmetry to their front facades; this reflects a measure of the historic character indicative of the District. The proposed house has no symmetry and virtually no other historic elements to its design.

The applicant should identify for the Board the relative sizes of the Scassera house and the two existing homes east of the site so the relative sizes of the existing homes can be compared to the proposed house.

The applicant must demonstrate how the proposed design meets the general criteria of the Historic Preservation ordinance.

3.0 Historic Preservation District – Additional Criteria

In addition to general criteria, all new construction in the Historic District must be consistent with criteria outlined in Section 80-95B(2)(a). This includes the following:

[1] Is not incongruous with the existing structures and streetscapes of the Historic Preservation District; and

[2] Is visually compatible with the structures and places to which it is visually related, as judged by the following standards:

[a] The height of the proposed structure shall be visually compatible with structures within the Historic Preservation District.

[b] The relationship of the width of the structure to the height of the front elevation shall be visually compatible with structures and places to which it is visually related within the Historic Preservation District.

[c] The relationship of the width of windows to the height of windows in a structure shall be visually compatible with the structures and places to which it is visually related within the Historic Preservation District.

[d] The relationship of solids to voids in the front facade of a structure shall be visually compatible with the structures and places to which it is visually related within the Historic Preservation District.

[e] The relationship of the structure to the open space between it and adjoining structures shall be visually compatible with the structures and places to which it is visually related within the Historic Preservation District.

[f] The relationship of entrance and porch projections to the street shall be visually compatible with the structures and places to which it is visually related within the Historic Preservation District.

[g] The relationship of materials and texture of the facade and roof of a structure shall be visually compatible with the predominant materials used in the structures to which it is visually related within the Historic Preservation District.

[h] The roof shape of a structure shall be visually compatible with structures to which it is visually related within the Historic Preservation District.

[i] If proposed, appurtenances such as walls and open-type fencing shall form cohesive walls of enclosure along a street, to the extent necessary to maintain visual compatibility of the main structure with the structures and places to which it is visually related within the Historic Preservation District.

[j] The size of the structure, the mass of the structure in relation to open spaces, and the windows, door openings, porches and balconies shall be visually compatible with the structures and places to which it is visually related within the Historic Preservation District.

[k] A structure shall be visually compatible with structures and places to which it is visually related in its directional character, whether this be vertical character, horizontal character, or nondirectional character within the Historic Preservation District.

The proposed construction does not seem to satisfy many of these criteria.

As already noted, the angled orientation is incongruous with the existing structures in the area and the streetscape.

The width of the proposed house seems substantially wider than the existing homes.

The proposed windows appear significantly more modern than those of nearby existing homes, which tend to be double hung; many with divided lights. The proposed windows appear to be large undivided panes.

The front façade of the proposed house is very different from other homes in the area, which tend to include a noticeable element of symmetry, indicative of historic homes. The proposed house is exceptionally asymmetric.

The proposed roof seems to have more visible surface area, either because the roof surfaces are more continuous, or monolithic, and/or because the roof pitch is steeper than existing houses in the area. Consequently, the roof is architecturally more prominent on the proposed house than it is on the other homes in the District.

Unlike the existing homes, there is virtually no architectural detailing. Notably the front porch is not articulated, but rather the roof of the main house extends over the front porch so there is no distinction between the architecture of the main house and the front entry. This is contrary to all of the houses in the area.

In short, neither the design of the house, nor its proposed orientation on the lot seem compatible with the character of the Historic District. The applicant should explain how the proposed construction meets the criteria of the Historic Preservation ordinance.

3.0 General Comments

- 3.1 Streetscape – Washington Street is the main road through the Borough and the subject site is close to the Town’s western entrance. This historic neighborhood is one that is most familiar to people passing through the town. The character of this important streetscape should be preserved. The objective of the Historic Preservation ordinance is to insure that all new development contributes, or at least harmonizes, with the historic character of the District. There appears to be no discernible relationship between the proposed design of the house and the historic character of the area. The applicant should explain how the proposed design meets the objective of the Historic Preservation ordinance.
- 3.2 Grading – The proposed construction requires a significant amount of cut in the front of the lot and fill at the rear. None of the adjoining lots include such severe grading and the approved subdivision plans did not include it either. These significant changes in landform design seem unnecessary and incongruous with the historic character and visual aesthetics of the District.
- 3.3 Other issues – though not specifically related to the Historic Preservation application, the applicant should confirm that the requisite seepage pits will be installed, the existing sewer lateral on site will be located and development fees will be paid, per the subdivision approval.

Cc: Christine Witt, Board Secretary
Jolanta Maziarz, Esq., Board Attorney
Steve DeRochi, Applicant