



Martha's Vineyard Commission

DRI #708 19 Mill Square Road Demolition MVC Staff Report – 2021-8-25

1. DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 **Applicant:** Christopher and Abby Sage; George Sourati, Engineer
- 1.2 **Owner:** Christopher and Abby Sage, Trustees
- 1.3 **Project Location:** 19 Mill Square Road (Map 3, Lot 19), Oak Bluffs
- 1.4 **Proposal:** Demolition of a historic structure and construction of a new residence.
- 1.5 **Zoning:** Residential 2 (R2)
- 1.6 **Local Permits:** Building Permit, Special Permit
- 1.7 **Surrounding Land Uses:** Other residences in the R2 district.
- 1.8 **Project History:** The existing six-bedroom, 3.5-story house was built around 1898 by Otis C.

Johnson as a seasonal dwelling. According to the MACRIS file:

“This house is significant as part of the Vineyard Highlands, an area laid out originally in 1869 as an alternative to the Wesleyan Grove Campground by a group of Camp Meeting Association directors fearful of encroachments by the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company on Wesleyan Grove. The area includes the highest land in the resort, overlooking Lake Anthony [Oak Bluffs Harbor] and Vineyard Sound [Nantucket Sound], and is closely identified with the Baptist Camp Meeting which began there in 1875. This house has a prestigious location on the bluff called East Chop overlooking Vineyard Sound.”

The Vineyard Highlands (also listed in MACRIS) includes the approximate area between Vineyard Sound, Oak Bluffs Harbor, Oak Bluffs Cemetery and Munroe Ave., at the northeastern tip of East Chop.

The neighborhood on East Chop is also known as Institute Hill, since it was associated with the Martha’s Vineyard Summer Institute that once stood at the bend in East Chop Drive. The institute had begun in the 1870s, with classes held elsewhere in Oak Bluffs, and was later able to construct the building known as Agassiz Hall, named after Harvard professor Louis Agassiz. According to *The History of Martha’s Vineyard*, enrollment peaked at around 1,000 in the late 1890s, and a second building was constructed next to Agassiz Hall. Enrollment declined as state normal schools began offering free classes in the summer, and the institute closed in 1906.

The Oak Bluffs Historic Commission reviewed the proposal in 2020 and voted 5-1 to deem the building not preferably preserved.

It should be noted that the house stands in its original footprint and is essentially unaltered from its original form.

- 1.9 **Project Summary:** The proposal is to demolish the existing building and build a larger single-family, four-bedroom, 3.5-story residence in a similar style, with a porch and patio. An existing driveway and garage would remain.

2. ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 **DRI Referral:** Oak Bluffs Zoning Board of Appeals

- 2.2 **DRI Trigger:** 8.1a (Demolition of structure listed in MACRIS), 8.1b (Demolition of structure more than 100 years old)
- 2.3 **LUPC:** July 19, 2021
- 2.4 **Site Visit:** July 29, 2021
- 2.5 **Public Hearing:** August 5, 2021

3. PLANNING CONCERNS

- 3.1 **Historic Character:** As with the existing house, the proposed house would have 3.5 stories, cedar shingles (roof and siding), symmetrical gables (on the portion facing East Chop Drive), and would stand about 32' above median grade (accounting for the grade change from west to east). The new house would have a larger footprint extending to the west, and include a covered porch on the east and north sides, and a large patio on the east side. The lower floor would also be more exposed on the east side as a result of regrading. Other proposed features include wooden balusters and non-tapered columns on the porch, a deck with wooden balusters and decorative wood brackets on the second floor, a small balcony with balusters on the third floor, wood-framed windows, and sliding doors opening onto the patio. The proposed non-tapered columns, and the row of sliding doors and windows on the bottom level, would be somewhat incongruous with the immediate neighborhood, where other similar columns are tapered, and doors and windows are more traditional.
- 3.2 **Wastewater:** The property drains into Nantucket Sound and would have a new septic tank and leaching field to the west of the house (the property slopes away from the house in either direction). An existing cesspool would be pumped dry, crushed, and backfilled with sand.
- 3.3 **Stormwater and Drainage:** The project will lead to an increase in impervious surface on the site, including the building and patio. The applicant has not yet submitted a drainage plan, although the elevations show a gutter and downspout system, and the applicant has stated that there will also be a drywell. The building is located at the crest of the property, so all drainage would be away from the building.
- 3.4 **Energy:** The applicant has proposed all-electric design with heat pumps, and propane for cooking.
- 3.5 **Climate Change Resilience:** The building is not within the Coastal District, but is surrounded on three sides by the Floodplain District, which is likely to expand in the coming years.
- 3.6 **Landscape and Lighting:** The applicant has not yet submitted landscape or lighting plans, but a revised site plan submitted on Aug 4, 2021, includes concept photographs of organic tiered planting levels, along with stone steps and cobblestone pavers, and additional parking along East Chop Drive. Exterior lighting would consist of wall sconces at four locations under the porch, and two locations for the patio. All lighting would be Dark Sky compliant and not exceed 3,000 Kelvin.
- 3.7 **Zoning:** The project requires a Special Permit from the Oak Bluffs Zoning Board of Appeals, since it involves a preexisting nonconforming structure that would be replaced with a new nonconforming structure, and the current setbacks would leave only a narrow strip for development. The Zoning Board had opened a hearing on the project but has not yet discussed it.