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Martha's Vineyard Commission

DRI 736 43 Look Street Demolition

(previously CR 4-2022)

MVC Staff Report – 2022-10-20

1. DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 **Owner/Applicant:** BWP Properties LLC (Brian Purdy); Michael Morrison, agent
- 1.2 **Project Location:** 43 Look St. (Map 8, Block B, Lot 14), Tisbury
- 1.3 **Proposal:** Demolition of a house built around 1900.
- 1.4 **Zoning:** Residential 10 (R10)
- 1.5 **Local Permits:** Demolition permit
- 1.6 **Surrounding Land Uses:** Other residential and commercial (lodging) uses in the R10 district; William Street Historic District to the east.

- 1.7 **Project History:** The existing 1,920 ft², three-bedroom, two-story house was built around 1900. It is just outside the William Street Historic District to the east. The house was occupied until recently.
- 1.8 **Project Summary:** The proposal is to demolish the house and build a larger house in its place. An existing one-bedroom detached structure built in 1970 would remain in place.

2. ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 **DRI Referral:** Tisbury Building Commissioner, April 19, 2022
- 2.2 **DRI Trigger:** 8.1b (Demolition of a house at least 100 years old)
- 2.3 **LUPC:** June 11, 2022
- 2.4 **MVC:** Aug. 11, 2022
- 2.5 **Public Hearing:** Sept. 8, Oct. 6, 2022

3. PLANNING CONCERNS

3.1 Character and Identity

The MVC engaged Preservation Consultant Eric Dray to conduct a third-party evaluation of the existing structure in terms of its architectural significance and relationship to the streetscape; and the proposed structure in terms of its style, appearance, and relationship to the streetscape. Those findings and conclusions are included here.

Age: The town assessor lists the house as built in 1900.

History/Culture: The house is not known to be associated with any significant people or events, although it is part of a general development pattern that includes the William Street Historic District to the east and more specifically the stretch of homes on Look Street between State Road and Spring Street.

Design/Construction: The structure is modest in size and is an example of the American Four Square style. Distinguishing features include nearly symmetrical massing with hipped pyramid roof, mostly symmetrical fenestration on each side, and a front porch spanning the width of the house. The MA Historical Commission documents 1,796 Four Square houses in Massachusetts, but only three on the Vineyard (two in the Edgartown Historic District and one in Oak Bluffs). Of the houses in the Look St. corridor that were built between 1880 and 1920 (see *Contribution to Streetscape/Community*), 43 Look St. is the only one that can be assigned a recognizable style. However, the original wood exterior has been replaced with aluminum siding.

Historic Portion of Existing Structure: The entire house is considered historic.

Integrity / Previous Alterations: According to the peer review, “The overall form, window openings, possibly the windows themselves, the front door, and some of the exposed wood trim all appear to be original. A review of floor plans and interior photographs ... show that the floor plan is typical of Four Square houses - four rooms per floor - and it remains largely intact.” The front porch has a hipped roof that matches the main structure, and a beadboard ceiling and interior siding, which would suggest that it was original to the building and later enclosed. The foundation of the porch also appears to match the rest of the building.

Contribution to Streetscape/Community: The property is located on the corner of Look and William Streets, just west of the William Street Historic District, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. The peer review identified the house as part of a development pattern along Look Street between State Road and Spring Street, where the houses face the street and are visually distinct from houses along William Street. It is similar to other properties along the corridor in terms of its lot size and orientation of the house (set back and facing the street). It is also from the same period (1880-1920) as most other houses in the corridor. It is among the largest of that age group in terms of its visible volume, but the among the smallest in terms of its footprint. It is also the only house in that age group with a recognizable style, and the only one with a hipped main roof. The size and spacing of windows are generally similar to the other houses, where all those facing the street have a single front door. Four other houses also have enclosed front porches. All are of wood frame construction, and three have synthetic siding, including 43 Look St. It is unknown whether the original siding on 43 Look St. was shingles or clapboards.

Historic Designation: The house is not listed in MACRIS or any other historic register.

Visibility: The house is located at the intersection of Look and William Streets, just a few feet from the road in a densely developed area.

Condition: The town assessor lists the property as “Average +10” condition, which is slightly below average for the town. A structural inspection report by John Lolley (dated June 23, 2022) notes the following:

ROOF/ATTIC: From ground level, the roof shingles appear to be in serviceable condition, however, during my inspection of the attic, there was evidence of water intrusion and rot in the attic roof and floor joists. The chimney shows significant mortar cracking and water stains from rain leaks. I would recommend that a mason inspect the chimney to check the interior of the flue for cracking as well as the overall serviceability and safety of the chimney. The insulation between the attic floor joists appears to be old, water damaged, and in need of replacement.

INTERIOR: Areas of the interior walls appear to have disconnected from the studs and shifted vertically. Without a more extensive inspection, I could not speculate on a cause for the framing movement. Several areas throughout the building's interior show signs of rainwater leaking into the house. Wall and ceiling surfaces throughout the house have cracks with water staining. To more thoroughly understand the apparent water leaks in the structure, the house should be inspected during a rainstorm. There also appears to be some structural cracking at various places. The wall board should be removed, and structural framing inspected. There are interior floor areas where the floorboards are of different heights creating a tripping hazard. Floors overall do not exhibit significant "bounce".

BASEMENT: There is a steel beam supporting the first floor and appears to be structurally stable. The basement walls have deteriorating lime mortar – a result of the freeze/thaw cycle reducing the integrity of the mortar and allowing groundwater and rain to seep through the walls into the basement. This coupled with the pipes lack of waterproofing is allowing for water into the wall and basement. These issues are something that will need to be addressed.

Other review: The project is not subject to review by any other agencies that could condition or deny the demolition. No other agencies have provided comment on the proposal.

Replacement structure / alternative solutions

- Plans show a larger, two-story, single-family home, slightly farther back on the lot.
- The footprint would increase from about 776 ft² to 1,580 ft², and the overall volume (excluding basements and open decks) from 1,920 ft² to 3,479 ft².
- A proposed basement would be used for utilities and storage.
- The new house would have a front-facing deck on the first floor, and stand about 32'7" at the ridge, compared to the existing height of 29'7".
- Elevations and a conceptual rendering have been provided.
- The new house would be solar-ready and has a projected HERS rating of 55, meaning its energy use would be about 55% of the "reference home," according to HERS. The proposed house is also certified to meet the 2018 International Energy Conservation Code.
- Bedrooms on the lot would increase from four to five, including the detached structure.
- The applicant has stated that demolition is preferred from a cost perspective.
- The applicant has inquired about the possibility of offering the house for reuse offsite, but notes that Habitat for Humanity no longer accepts entire house donations. Other salvaging opportunities may still be possible but have not been proposed.

Findings and conclusions from peer review (edited):

Siting

The proposed house, while larger than the existing, is consistent with the existing house in terms of front and right (south) side yard setbacks.

Scale

Footprint: The footprint would be increased to the left (north) and to the rear (east). However, the footprint for the existing house is one of the smaller footprints along Look Street, so the increased footprint from the new house still remains in keeping with the overall setting.

Overall Volume: Based on calculations provided by the applicant, the new house will be 3,479 ft². This would make it the largest house along the Look Street corridor by a significant amount.

Height: The new house measures 32' 7 3/16" in height. Tisbury property cards do not include building heights, but this would likely make it one of the tallest houses along the Look Street corridor.

Design

Style and Form: The proposed house has a design that could be characterized as a modern interpretation of the Queen Anne style which was popular from ca. 1880-1910. The Queen Anne style employed different roof shapes, including corner turrets like that found here, to animate the building's form. There is no precedent for this more elaborate Victorian-era house style and form on Look Street.

Windows and Doors: In comparison to other houses along Look Street, this house has far more fenestration on the front elevation. The front elevation is particularly problematic because it not only has extensive, large-scaled windows, but also has three other doors that are fully fenestrated – the second story has a multi-lite single door and multi-lite paired (French or sliding) doors. This is also the only house on Look Street with more than one door on the front elevation – in this case a total of four.

The fenestration pattern on the side elevations of the new house is minimal. There is no precedent along Look Street for both side elevations to be so minimally fenestrated with windows of varying sizes and irregular placement.

Porches: There is no precedent for double-height porch/decks along Look Street. A number of houses do have covered one-story front porches, but they all employ roof slope to cover those spaces, thereby incorporating them into the main body of the house. With the flat roof required for a second story deck, this (metal?) structure would appear tacked onto the body of the house in a way not found along Look Street.

Materials

Wood shingles are the predominant siding material along Look Street. This was likely due in part, at least for the houses built from ca. 1880-1920, to the fact that wood shingles would have been cheaper to use for these modest houses than clapboard. If wood clapboard is found under the synthetic siding of 43 Look Street, perhaps an argument can be made that clapboard is appropriate in this instance.

CONCLUSION

The siting and footprint of the proposed new house at 43 Look Street are consistent with the overall setting along the Look Street corridor. However, the new house may be contextually inappropriate in terms of scale and design (including turret, windows, doors, and second story deck). Clapboard siding may be appropriate if the original cladding for 43 Look Street was clapboard, otherwise wood shingles would be more appropriate contextually.

UPDATES:

The project was revised on 10/17/22 to eliminate the proposed second-story deck. In response, the peer review consultant has stated that this partially addresses the design concerns, but does not address the larger issue of the Queen Anne-inspired form with corner turret, for which there is no precedent along the Look Street corridor, or the scale of the proposed house, which would still be the largest and among the tallest along the corridor.

In addition to the peer review, the Tisbury Historical Commission conducted its own review, making the following points in a letter dated 10/19/20:

Foursquare designs were popular in the 1890s-1930s, especially for their affordability. They were seen as one way to achieve the 'American dream' of homeownership, and they were often kit homes made even more popular by Sears Roebuck.

Most homes in the Look Street neighborhood are historically and architecturally coherent products of the period between 1880-1920, which were significant in the development of Vineyard Haven. Look Street is, in its way, as emblematic of the climax-and-twilight era of the village as William Street (architecturally very different but similarly coherent) is of the golden years of the 2nd quarter of the 19th century.

Along with William Street, the fringes of colonial Vineyard Haven that survived the Great Fire, and the rambling summer 'cottages' at the of West Chop, Look Street is an important link in the history of the village and town, one that deserves special consideration and (if necessary) thoughtful and nuanced new construction.

The property at 43 Look Street borders the William Street Historic District and, in its original Foursquare design, lends to the story of its neighborhood. For these reasons, we recommend renovation over demolition.

