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Martha's Vineyard Commission

DRI #718 7 Arlington Ave. Demolition

MVC Staff Report – 2022-7-1

1. DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 **Owner/Applicant:** Eunu Chun and Lisa H. Kim; Chuck Sullivan (architect)
- 1.2 **Project Location:** 7 Arlington Ave. (Map 3, Lot 15), Oak Bluffs
- 1.3 **Proposal:** Demolition of a house built in 1875 and listed in MACRIS
- 1.4 **Zoning:** Residential 2 (R2)
- 1.5 **Local Permits:** Demolition permit, building permit, special permit
- 1.6 **Surrounding Land Uses:** Other residential uses in the R2 district, conservation land owned by East Chop Association
- 1.7 **Project History:** The three-story four-bedroom house is listed in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) as the Palmer Villa House, built in 1875, which was divided and moved from Plymouth Park in 1917. It is significant as part of the Vineyard Highlands (laid out in 1869 as an alternative to the Wesleyan Grove Campground) and because the original house was built in the Campground cottage style. The town assessor’s office lists the building’s condition as “minus good” (considered above average for Oak Bluffs), with an assessed value of \$371,300. Various work has been done on the building since 2016, including unspecified renovations in 2012.
- 1.8 **Project Summary:** The proposal is to demolish about 70-80% of the existing historic house, while retaining and relocating two stories of the main three-story section (minus the second-floor ceiling), and expand the structure as shown in the tables below. An existing detached bedroom would be renovated and expanded in the same footprint (425 ft²). And a new 484 ft² garage would be added. The proposed height of the main building is 32 feet from grade which is the maximum allowable in the R2 district.

Existing area (ft ²)		Proposed area (ft ²)	
First floor	1,152	First floor	2,108
Second floor	941	Second floor	1,695
Third floor	140	Third floor	228
	2,233	Basement	1,027
			5,058 (127% increase)

2. ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 **DRI Referral:** Oak Bluffs ZBA, Nov. 15, 2011
- 2.2 **DRI Trigger:** 8.1a (Demolition of a house listed in MACRIS)
- 2.3 **LUPC:** April 11, 2022
- 2.4 **Public Hearing:** (May 12, 2022)

3. PLANNING CONCERNS

3.1 Historic Significance:

Age: The structure was originally built in 1875, and divided and moved to two other locations in the Vineyard Highlands in 1917.

History/Culture: The building is significant as part of the Vineyard Highlands, and is an example of Campground cottage construction. The original structure on Beecher Park was an elaborate seasonal home built in the Campground style and later divided and moved, with half going to 7 Arlington, and half to 11 Arlington next door. (The house at 11 Arlington is associated with the former Rice Playhouse, which is considered the second summer theater in the nation. It is unknown to what degree 7 Arlington was also associated with the Rice family.) The property is in the vicinity of an area known as Institute Hill, which was associated with the Martha's Vineyard Summer Institute that once stood at the bend in East Chop Drive.¹ (See *Contribution to Streetscape/Community* below.)

Design/Construction: MHC classifies the style as Victorian Eclectic, meaning that it was built in the Victorian era but does not display sufficient characteristics to clearly identify with one style. Palmer Villa included features associated with the Queen Anne style and Second Empire style. The existing structure retains some of the proportions, massing, and roof shapes of the original, but few of the original decorative features remain, as indicated by a photograph of the original Palmer Villa. The building was apparently constructed with high quality methods and materials, as indicated by its age and condition.

According to a peer review by preservation consultant Eric Dray, the house “retains some of the Queen Anne-style irregular massing of the original 1875 villa, most notably the roof forms with clipped-gable dormers on both sides of the corner tower. However, the house has lost all ornamental trim that animated the elevations and roof; and the primary reference to the Second Empire style – the Mansard-roofed turret – was replaced by a larger, astylistic corner tower with shallow hip roof.”

Historic Portion of Existing Structure: The historic portion is not defined, but the entire structure as it stands is considered historic.

Previous Alterations: Apart from the division and relocation in 1917, various work has been done on the building, although the footprint of the house remains the same as in 1917. The following changes were identified in the peer review:

¹ The Martha's Vineyard Summer Institute begun in the 1870s, with classes held elsewhere in Oak Bluffs, and later constructed 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.

- *Removal of all ornamental trim. The house in its original form was highly ornamented, including vergeboards, roof-top finials and cresting, patterned roofing (presumably slate), and turned porch posts with ornamental brackets.*
- *Replacement of corner turret with larger tower.*
- *Replacement of wrap-around porch. This was likely done when the house was moved in 1917. The replacement porch has no ornamental details, and the corner steps with clipped gable roof were not replicated.*
- *Infilling of dormer decks.*
- *It is unclear if the rear ell is original to the house. The ell appears to have a similar roof height, but in the original location, the second story appears to have been stepped back, which is no longer the case.*
- *Window replacement and resizing. None of the windows appear to be original or historically significant. The majority of the windows appear to originally have been wood, 2/2 double-hung sash. These windows have all been replaced with modern, thermal 2/2 windows and large fixed sash.*

Contribution to Streetscape/Community: The house is part of a wooded and gently developed area in the Highlands. It stands on a hill overlooking Oak Bluffs Harbor and is among the first and more visible houses on Arlington Ave., as approached from East Chop Drive. The other half of the original house that was divided (see *History/Culture*) is located next door. The house is aligned with other large houses along the part of East Chop Drive known as Institute Hill (named for the Martha's Vineyard Summer Institute), but is more heavily screened by trees and other vegetation. 7 Arlington was the most recent addition; the other five had been built or relocated in the late-19th century. It is somewhat larger than other houses in the neighborhood, and stands farther back from the road. The construction dates of houses in the immediate area range from 1890 to 1930.

According to the peer review, "It was likely intended that 7 Arlington Avenue be located in a manner that continued the row of summer cottages on the ridge overlooking Vineyard Sound. Although somewhat altered, 7 Arlington Avenue does provide the north terminus to a distinct row of late-19th century cottages."

Historic Designation: The house is listed in MACRIS, but no other historic registers. The Oak Bluffs Historic Commission voted in 2022 to designate the house as both "Significant" and "Preferably Preserved."

Visibility: The house is visible from East Chop Drive, Arlington Ave., and Oak Bluffs Harbor, but is partly obscured by trees and other vegetation.

Condition: A structural report has not been provided, although Squash Meadow Construction, which has done work on the house, provided an email noting that they had observed areas of rot and stating that the deck and roof need to be rebuilt. The applicant has stated that the kitchen, as well as most of the ceiling framing on the second floor, appears to be insulated, but that the

insulated spaces might not be up to code. The town assessor's office lists the building's condition as "minus good" (considered above average for Oak Bluffs), with an assessed value of \$371,300.

Alternative Solutions: The proposed work is generally too extensive to be considered a rehabilitation of the existing structure. A portion of the existing structure would be retained but not visible from the outside.

Windows, soffit and porch details, and some trim details will be similar to the existing house, but no exterior materials will be salvaged for the new house. Portions of the main stairway, including railing, balusters, and newel posts, will be salvaged, along with some interior paneling, doors, and hardware. The chimney of the new house would be brick with a chimney cap to match the existing chimney. The height of the new building would be 31 feet, compared to the existing height of 29 feet.

Oak Bluffs Historical Commission comments included the following (the project was revised again following the OBHC meeting):

- Large scale compared to existing house, including tower
- Would involve demolishing 70-80% of existing house
- The proposed addition would not be subordinate to the original
- The retained portion would not be apparent
- The architecture would be attractive in another location

MVC staff has assigned a score of 15/27 for the existing house, indicating "Meaningful Significance" under the Historic Preservation Policy. Using the previous Historic Demolition Policy, staff assigns a score of 23/38.

- 3.2 Water and Wastewater:** The property is within the coastal watershed. There are currently five bedrooms, including the detached bedroom, and plans show a total six bedrooms, including the renovated detached bedroom. An existing six-bedroom septic tank will remain, with the septic tank relocated slightly to the east. An existing leaching field on land once owned by the Highland Trust (now East Chop Association) will remain. The East Chop Association has stated that there are no current restrictions on that portion of the property.
- 3.3 Stormwater and Drainage:** The property is partly within the FEMA VE flood zone, but the proposed house is located on higher ground and is just outside that area. A drainage plan shows a gutter and drywell system for the main house and detached bedroom.
- 3.4 Energy:** The proposed building would be all-electric, with a heat pump HVAC system and hybrid hot water tanks. (The existing house has electric water heating, and plug-in AC units and radiant hot water heaters.)
- 3.5 Landscape:** The new driveway will require the removal of trees, but the applicant has stated that the demolition and new construction will not. A landscape plan has not been provided.

3.6 Impact on abutters:

Several abutters have written in support of the proposal, noting the following:

- General approval of the proposed house, including size and design.
- Owners' involvement in the community.
- Houses on East Chop range in style and 7 Arlington is arguably less historic than some.
- Various structural deficiencies with the existing house.

Other abutters have raised the following concerns:

- The back portion of the proposed house is too large and dissociated from the rest of the house. (The historical features would focus on the street-facing side.)
- The proposed house would not comply with current zoning setbacks.
- Little of the existing house would remain.
- Proposed house is out of scale with the neighborhood.
- Potential impact on views of abutters, including 11 Arlington. (Moving rear portion more towards Arlington Ave. to the north and east could help address that.)
- Potential noise from the proposed detached bedroom, which could be used for short-term rentals and would not comply with current zoning setbacks.
- Potential impacts from construction, if not limited to between Columbus Day and Memorial Day.