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Martha's Vineyard Commission

DRI 733 1133 Main St. Demolition

MVC Staff Report – 2022-7-20 UPDATED

1. DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 **Owner:** Brian and Susannah Bristol, trustees
- 1.2 **Applicant:** Brian and Susannah Bristol; Gary Maynard (contractor); George Sourati (engineer)
- 1.3 **Project Location:** 1133 Main St. (Map 29, Block B, Lot 12), Tisbury
- 1.4 **Proposal:** Demolition of a house on West Chop built in 1890.
- 1.5 **Zoning:** R50
- 1.6 **Local Permits:** Demolition and building permits, Conservation Commission
- 1.7 **Surrounding Land Uses:** Other residential uses in the R50 district; West Chop Club Historic District

- 1.8 **Project History:** The four-story, 8,537 ft² house (9,219 ft² per town assessor data) was likely built in 1890 by a member of the Hinckley family. It is just outside the West Chop Club Historic District (listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2007), and characteristic of other homes on West Chop built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It has three stories facing the street and four facing a private beach. The house has undergone various alterations, as described below.

- 1.9 **Project Summary:** The proposal is to demolish the house and build a new house in a similar style with a smaller footprint and floor area, and lower height. The new house would comply with current zoning setbacks.

2. ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 **DRI Referral:** Tisbury Building Commissioner, March 7, 2022
- 2.2 **DRI Trigger:** 8.1B (Demolition of a structure more than 100 years old)
- 2.3 **LUPC (concurrence review):** June 6, 2022
- 2.4 **MVC (concurrence review):** June 23, 2022
- 2.5 **Public Hearing:** July 21, 2022

3. PLANNING CONCERNS

3.1 Considerations from 2017 Demolition Policy

Age: Tisbury assessor data lists the house as built in 1904, although the applicant has stated that it was likely built around 1890.

History/Culture: The house was built during a period of development that began in the 1880s and lasted into the early 1900s and included most of the buildings on West Chop, including the West Chop Club and many summer homes built by its founders. The house is just outside the West Chop Club Historic District, although the district includes a private beach abutting the property.

Design/Construction: The house was likely design-built in 1890 by a member of the Hinckley family and shares characteristics of other Shingle Style homes in the area. The Shingle Style, with elaborate massing, gable/hip roofs, and wood shingles, was common in resort houses built between the late 1880s and turn of the century. The house sits on original cedar piers which sit on stone footings at or near grade.

The Tisbury Historical Commission has provided a letter stating that the existing house is “a marvelous example of shingle style architecture,” which was at its height during the development of West Chop and East Chop around 1900: “It represents a form of summer-home architecture distinct from the high-Victorian houses along Ocean Park in Oak Bluffs, and the captains’ houses of Water Street in Edgartown and William Street in Vineyard Haven.” The letter also states: “The challenges of rehabilitating such a dwelling are considerable, but many houses on Martha’s Vineyard, some more than a century older than 1133 Main Street, have been successfully updated and thus preserved. Were 1133 Main Street to be demolished, it would tear a page from the history of West Chop.”

Contribution to Context: The house shares characteristics of other Shingle Style homes in the area, including within the West Chop Club Historic District. It is visible from Main Street and Vineyard Sound, and from the historic Big Pier. Other houses in the immediate area are from the same period. (See *History/Culture*.)

Historic Portion of Existing Structure: The original massing and footprint of the house has been retained, with various exterior changes over the years.

Integrity / Previous Alterations: Exterior changes include new doors, replacement and reconfiguration of windows, addition of porches, railings and staircases, addition of walls on a previously open basement level, and foundation work. The changes are generally in keeping with the style of the original house, and others on West Chop.

Location/Visibility: The house is visible from Main St. and from the water, including from the historic Big Pier.

Condition: Tisbury assessor data lists the quality of the house as Good+20, with an assessed value of about \$2.77 million, not including the land.

According to the applicant, the house’s wood structural members are undersized and compromised by various work over the years, including the elimination of weight-bearing walls, and the owners have reported that the building sways and shudders in the wind. The building is heated and used year-round, but only partially insulated and the applicant has stated that the framing is not adequate to meet modern insulation standards. The applicant has stated that addressing the foundation and other issues would require lifting and gutting the house, which would undermine the historic integrity of the interior. A structural evaluation by Martha’s Vineyard Engineering and Design has been provided.

Other Review: The project is subject to Conservation Commission review due to its proximity to the coastal bank, but no other agencies besides the MVC that could condition or deny the demolition.

Comments from Other Entities: The Tisbury Historical Commission has provided a letter commenting on the house's architectural significance, and urging that it be rehabilitated rather than demolished. (See *Design/Construction*.)

Safety considerations: A structural evaluation by Martha's Vineyard Engineering and Design points out possible safety concerns, such as wiring and plumbing that is less concealed than in modern houses, and the absence of modern lateral support systems in regard to storm resilience.

The Tisbury Building Official had not conducted a safety inspection before or during the public hearing, in part because there was no request to do so and there were no obvious safety issues visible from the exterior of the building. Following comments by MVC staff at the public hearing that town agencies had not made any indication that the house is a safety hazard, the Building Official inspected the property to determine if there were in fact any safety issues. During the inspection, he noted the following:

- Recent failure of a cast iron pipe in the basement that was being repaired.
- Various spliced piping throughout the basement involving a mix of PVC and copper or cast iron piping. The piping is operable but not necessarily safe.
- Badly rotten support timbers inside one of the basement walls, where dirt had caved into the basement and settled around the timbers.
- Various wiring in the basement from different time periods with many junction boxes.
- The remainder of the house seemed well kept, although the stairs and handrails would not comply with current building codes. This is common in old homes, but with the presence of small children, this could be considered a safety hazard.

Replacement Program / Alternative Solutions: The proposed structure would be similar in appearance to the existing structure, including similar massing and fenestration, and would generally align with the Shingle Style architecture of the area. The proposed structure would occupy a similar footprint but without the angled wing on the east side of the building, and have a roof height of 26' from grade, compared to the current height of about 31'. The proposed chimneys would be larger and taller than the existing chimneys. The proposed house would be slightly closer to Main St. than the original, and slightly less visible from the Big Pier. Existing and proposed elevations and floorplans have been provided.

The applicant has stated that renovating rather than demolishing the house would require gutting and stripping the building and the existing frame would make insulation difficult. Demolition was preferred from a cost and design standpoint.

A structural evaluation by Martha's Vineyard Engineering and Design on behalf of the applicant states the following:

Demolition is deemed necessary for several reasons; they include economic, logistical, safety and material costs.

- *The existing building would need to be lifted off its existing foundation at a monumental financial cost to the owners*
- *The building would need to be lifted far above its current elevation to allow for equipment/excavators to dig/install a new foundation and would be exposed to the*

elements which is a huge liability and safety concern due to high winds from the Vineyard Sound.

- *The necessary re-framing to bring the entire building up to energy and structural code requirements would be extensive and costly:*
- *New frost protected foundation and interior footings as well as new support posts*
- *1st, 2nd, and 3rd level deck framing would need to be completely removed and reframed with i-joists or deep 2x joists to properly span between supports*
- *All existing exterior walls are sheathed with diagonal boards with insufficient nailing patterns, new sheathing and code-compliant nailing would need to be added to increase the shear strength and lateral support capabilities*
- *New roof framing and structural ridges would be necessary to both transfer the loading away from the insufficiently supported interior walls and undersized joists, and to increase the R-value whether with spray foam or SIPs.*
- *The number/ degree of renovations that have occurred to the building over its 125+ year lifetime has rendered it structurally insufficient to withstand current storm events and snow loads.*
- *To preserve and enhance the historic appearance of the home, demolition and a complete rebuild is the most viable option; the project will take less time and less money to rebuild rather than to heavily renovate.*

3.2 Character and identity / scenic values

The proposed structure would be similar in appearance to the existing structure, including similar massing and fenestration, and would generally align with the Shingle Style architecture of the area. The proposed structure would occupy a similar footprint, and have a roof height of 26' from grade, compared to the current height of about 31'. However, the proposed chimneys would be larger and taller than the existing chimneys. The proposed house would be slightly closer to Main St. than the original, and slightly less visible from the Big Pier. Existing and proposed elevations and floorplans have been provided.

3.3 Material use

According to town assessor data, the existing house has a floor area of about 9,200 ft² and is in above average condition for the town. The applicant had indicated the possibility of salvaging some interior features such as flooring, doors, hardware, and a staircase, but the existing house and foundation would be replaced with new material.

3.4 Energy

The existing building is heated with oil, and the applicant has stated that the current insulation is insufficient. The applicant has committed to all-electric power with the exception of a propane cooktop, and has stated that all-electric power would not be possible with a renovation.

3.5 Wastewater

The property is within the coastal watershed, and the number of bedrooms in the main house would be reduced from six to seven, including four guest rooms and a bunk room. There would be a total of eight bedrooms onsite, including the existing guest house. A new Title 5 septic system would be installed on the property.

3.6 Drainage

A drainage plan for the property is still pending, although the applicant has stated that a drainage system for the roof gutters will be designed to handle a 25-year storm.

3.7 Climate change resilience

The new house would be slightly farther inland than the existing house, making it farther away from the 100 year floodplain.

3.8 Landscape

Two mature black oak trees with large canopies would be removed as a result of the new building and foundation. A proposed landscape plan has not been provided.

3.9 Impact on Abutters

All immediate abutters have written in support of the proposal.