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Martha's Vineyard Commission

DRI #707 9 Beecher Park Demolition

MVC Staff Report – 2021-8-13

1. DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 **Owner and Applicant:** William and Melissa Callahan; Chuck Sullivan, architect
- 1.2 **Project Location:** 9 Beecher Park, Map 8, Lot 120, Oak Bluffs
- 1.3 **Proposal:** Demolition of a historic house and construction of a new house in the Vineyard Highlands.
- 1.4 **Zoning:** Residential 2 (R2)
- 1.5 **Local Permits:** Building Permit, Special Permit
- 1.6 **Surrounding Land Uses:** Other residential uses in the R2 District
- 1.7 **Project History:** The existing two-story residence was built in 1877 in the expansive Campground style, with several additions over the years. According to the MACRIS file, “This building is significant as part of the Vineyard Highlands, an area laid out in 1869 as an alternative to the Wesleyan Grove Campground by a group of Camp Meeting Association directors fearful of the 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 the Vineyard Sound [Nantucket Sound], and is closely identified with the Baptist Camp Meeting which met there beginning in 1875.” The Vineyard Highlands includes the approximate area between Vineyard Sound, Oak Bluffs Harbor, Oak Bluffs Cemetery and Munroe Ave., at the northeastern tip of East Chop.
- 1.8 **Project Summary:** The proposal is to demolish the existing 2,029 ft², six-bedroom house, and an existing garage (likely from the 1930s), and replace them with a new 3,593 ft² four-bedroom house, and a new 672 ft² garage with an office/bedroom on the second floor. (The second floor of the garage is intended as an office, but the Board of Health considers it a bedroom.) The house and garage would be connected by a covered porch. The new buildings are intended as a year-round residence.

2. ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 **DRI Referral:** Oak Bluffs ZBA
- 2.2 **DRI Trigger:** 8.1a (Demolition of a structure listed in MACRIS), 8.1b (Demolition of a structure more than 100 years old)
- 2.3 **LUPC:** July 26, 2021
- 2.4 **Public Hearing:** August 12, 2021

3. PLANNING CONCERNS

- 3.1 **Character and Identity:** The property is not within any historic district, although the Oak Bluffs Historic Commission (OBHC) has some purview over structures that are more than 100 years old. The OBHC has not reviewed the project, although Historic Commissioner Barbara Baskin (currently between appointments) has urged the commission to consider whether some portion of the front

of the house can be preserved, since that is likely the most historic part. The property abuts an approximately 1.5-acre property that is owned by the East Chop Association and protected as open space.

Vineyard Land Surveying and Engineering visited the property in July 2021 and provided a structural report on the building, including foundation support, first and second floor framing, and exterior weather proofing condition. The report states that the house “does not exhibit any major structural stability problems,” but that it would need “significant structural upgrade in each of the load bearing components with any major renovation project.” The complete findings are below:

1. Foundation system: *The foundation consists of timber and brick pilings. It appears that the brick piles are original and the timber piles were added in later years to add support. The brick piles are in sound condition with no signs of cracking or deterioration. The wood piles, though not failing are not supported on stable bases and do not have adequate connections to the floor frame of the dwelling. Cross-brace members have been added to indicate potential lateral strength issues as well. The dwelling is relatively stable on the existing foundation, however the foundation should not be relied upon for any reconstruction or major remodeling.*

2. First and second floor framing: *The primary support beams consist of approximately 2 x 6 (dimensional) fir with 2 x 6 fir floor joists. The joists and beam have all deflected significantly contributing to unlevel floors and ceilings. Though a catastrophic failure has not occurred yet, the beams are undersized for the current loading and would need replacement and reinforcing with any significant remodeling.*

3. Exterior wall and roof framing: *The exterior walls are constructed under traditional “balloon frame” style. Walls are not insulated and framing member are utilized around door and window openings only. Balloon frame techniques have largely been eliminated in recent years in favor of a more structurally sound stud wall system. Beyond the lack of added structural support, the existing walls do not allow for standard insulating techniques with a standard wall cavity. Code-upgrade of the structure would likely result in the addition of wall framing on the interior or the exterior of the building for both strength and insulation standards. Such an upgrade would effectively require the reconstruction of all exterior walls. The roof framing consists of 2 x 6 (dimensional) roof rafters spaced approximately 30 inches on center. The framing is well below current loading and strength requirements. As with the wall system, the lack of depth of the rafters and roof cavity would make insulating difficult. The rafters would need to be reinforced with any code-upgrade.*

Summary: *The existing house is not in disrepair and does not exhibit any major structural stability problems, however the structure needs significant structural upgrade in each of the load bearing components with any major renovation project. Most of the existing supports would be either removed or support members added with an upgrade, in which case most of the original balloon frame style will be lost within new wall and roof cavities.*

The new building will be similar in style to the existing building, but will be larger, with additional dormers, gables, and windows. The proposed windows are 2-over-2, as opposed to the mix of 2-over-2, 1-over-1, and picture windows on the existing house. Several of the proposed features on the new building and garage are intended to match the existing, including the following:

- Similar porch and balcony facing east (similar appearance facing east, with central portion and gabled roofs to the sides)

- Trim painted white
- Wood molding on the dormers and gables with a similar design
- Cedar shingle siding
- Posts and railings painted white
- Vertical board below the porch and around outdoor shower

The applicant has stated that some material from the existing structure, including floor joists and sheathing, may be reused for finish elements in the new house, but not for the structure itself.

- 3.2 Water and Wastewater:** The property drains into Oak Bluffs Harbor, and the number of bedrooms will decrease from six to five. The new house will have a septic system, and an easement would be granted for a leaching field on the abutting property to the east that is owned by the East Chop Association. The applicant has stated that an IA system is not required since the groundwater separation is adequate. However, even with an IA system, the nitrogen load for the property would exceed the limit for the Oak Bluffs Harbor watershed.

Staff review:

For a 0.22-acre property, the nitrogen load limit is 2.60 kilograms per year.

- Currently with 6 bedrooms, the nitrogen for the **wastewater alone** is over that limit, at 7.19 kg/yr.
- Decreasing to 5 bedrooms for wastewater alone will result in 6.0 kg/yr, which is still over the nitrogen limit.
- An I/A system at 12 mg/l on the 5 bedrooms would result in 2.77 kg/yr, which is still over the limit for the watershed, if only 0.22 acres.

- 3.3 Energy:** The applicant has proposed heat pumps, with a high-efficiency propane boiler for backup, and has stated that the building, fixtures, and appliances will meet the MA Stretch Code as required by the town. The applicant has also stated that have installed a 24-panel solar array at their property in West Tisbury, which is not part of the current project.

- 3.4 Landscape and lighting:** The applicant has not yet provided a landscape plan, but has stated that a large oak tree behind the current garage would be removed. The applicant does not intend to remove any of the other trees on the property, including a mature cedar on the south side of the house. A lighting plan shows a mix of parking, path, and wall-mounted lighting around the proposed buildings.