

January 3, 2017

Martha's Vineyard Commission
33 New York Ave.
Oak Bluffs, MA 02557

RE: Masonic Ave. Demolition

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing regarding the request for demolition of the historic building on Masonic Avenue in Oak Bluffs. Your consideration of this request will be the final hope for this structure. Either a new beginning or the end of a rich, historic journey will be decided by you.

People generally choose to think most derelict, 100-year-old buildings are unsalvageable and a financial burden in order to make way for something new. This is the primary reason historic commissions see requests for demolition. Friends, please let me remind you that this is not about people. People come and go. This is about a building that has outlasted people, had good bones because it still stands, a sentinel bravely holding onto the history that occurred within it. Can it be fixed and made healthy again – the Affordable Housing folks thought so and not so very long ago. Anything can be fixed if you try hard enough. Is it more expensive to do so? Of course it is. But should that be criteria for consideration here of demolition? It should not. I have watched cottage after cottage in the Campground painstakingly repaired and made strong. Many in far worse condition than this building. Is it a financial burden for those cottage owners? You bet it is, but it happens because that community values those cottages as a representation of their history. I don't see anything different here.

We know the historic significance of this building on Masonic Avenue. The ancestors of a good percentage of the year-round population in Oak Bluffs were mentored in that building when they left their native country. They learned how to speak English in that building, how to find a job, how to integrate into their community and become a part of America. Does it have architectural significance? As a matter of fact, I believe it does. The mass, scale and form relate to the neighborhood where it sits and all the rural buildings in a community that developed around it, especially the community it served.

So, what do you do here? Other towns have taken the bold step to insist that an historic building remain in the hopes that someone will come along who has the funds and desire to restore. West Tisbury, for example put their foot down to preserve the Old Parsonage which was in very poor condition and a financial burden for the owners. Instead of being demolished, it was sold. Look at it today. Work is slow, but it is happening.

The history of Oak Bluffs is rich, runs deep and is important to preserve for generations that will follow. Please give the building on Masonic Avenue one more chance. It deserves it.

Respectfully,

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