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Martha's Vineyard Commission

DRI 657 2015 Polly Hill Education Center

MVC Staff Report – 2015-09-03

NOTE: New information is printed in bold type.

1. DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 Applicant:** Polly Hill Arboretum (PHA); Tim Boland (Executive Director); Thomas Clark (Curator); Peter Rodegast (designer); Tucker Hubbell (contractor).
- 1.2 Project Location:** 809 State Road, West Tisbury Map 25 Lot 2 (40.7 acres); Lot 3 (9.7 acres); Lot 3.11 (2 acres); and Map 22 Lot 3 (19.5 acres). Total 71.9 acres.
- 1.3 Proposal:** To demolish a barn built in the 1870's and replace it with a two-story 2,625 education center, botany lab, herbarium, offices and storage.
- 1.4 Zoning:** Residential
- 1.5 Local Permits:** Planning Board; Building Permit; Board of Health.
- 1.6 Surrounding Land Uses:**
- 1.7 Project History:** The property was first settled as a colonial farmstead around 1670 by Henry Luce. Around 1750 part became the Barnard's Inn Farm and part became the Samuel Washington Adams House about 1850. Polly's parents, the Butchers, bought part of the property in 1926. The Polly Hill gardens began when she inherited the property in 1957 and began a private experimental garden that grew to over 20-acres of mostly non-native plants with an additional 40-acres of native woodland. In 1997 the arboretum was officially established with the creation of the non-profit Polly Hill Arboretum (PHA) dedicated to the study of plants and the preservation of the landscape created by Polly. In 1997 the Polly Hill Arboretum visitor center was referred to the MVC for DRI Review. The plans for the visitor center were withdrawn and then changed to bring the size of the building below the 2,000 sf DRI review threshold. The Arboretum campus includes the following structures: The Visitor Center & Bathrooms built in 1998 (1,436 sf); the Far Barn built around 1750 and enlarged in 1860 and renovated in 2011 (1,102 sf); the Slaughterhouse built in 1860 and renovated 2011; the original Homestead now Administrative Offices built around 1750 and enlarged in 1860 and converted to offices in 1998 (2,071 sf); and the Cow barn built circa 1850 and converted to residences in 1933 then renovated in 2008 (1,809 sf). In 2002 PHA purchased an adjoining 10-acre lot (833 State Road) which includes the Littlefield House built around 1844 and renovated in 2013 which the land caretaker and plant curator (1,346 sf); the Garage built in the early 20th century and converted in 2007 to greenhouse storage and support (627 sf); The Greenhouse and Shade house, a Quonset hut, built in 2007 (2,595 sf); and the Littlefield Maintenance Building built in 2009 (2,400 sf). In 2010 the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) listed PHA as a historic area in the state's Inventory of the Historic and Archaeological Assets of Massachusetts. On June 15, 2015 The Polly Hill Arboretum was accepted by the National Park Service (NPS) in the National Register of Historic Places as a District.
- 1.8 Project Summary:** To demolish a barn and shed built in the 1870's and replace them with a two-story 2,625 education center and botany lab. The building will include a 30-seat classroom, a digital projection microscope, an herbarium, a botany lab, a label production area, archival storage, and offices. The applicants estimate that the arboretum currently has 14,000-15,000 visitors a year. The project narrative states that they educate over 700 students per semester. The new center would allow year round educational activities and add storage and office space.

2. ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 DRI Referral:** The project was originally referred on July 1, 2015 by the Planning Board under DRI Checklist 6.1 (Educational facility over 2,000 sf), a mandatory DRI Review. The Planning Board re-referred the project on August 3, 2015 as a Discretionary Referral Section 1.1. However, the project clearly triggers several Concurrence Review triggers and possible 1 or 2 Mandatory Review triggers. See below.
- 2.2 DRI Trigger:** The proposal certainly triggers the following Concurrence Review triggers: 3.1b (New construction between 2,000 and 3,000 sf); 3.1d (New Construction of auxiliary building over 1,000 sf resulting in a total sf over 2,000 sf); and 8.2ii (demolition of a building that is over 100 years old). The proposal may also trigger the following Mandatory Reviews: 6.1 (Educational facility with total floor area of 2,000 sf or more...); and 8.2i (demolition of historic structure identified as having historical significance by the MHC or listed with National Registers of Historic Places).
- 2.3 Pre-Application meeting with staff:** August 6, 2015.
- 2.4 LUPC:** August 17, 2014.
- 2.5 Site visits: August 31, 2015.**
- 2.6 Public Hearing: September 10, 2015 at 7:15 pm.**

3. PLANNING CONCERNS

3.1 Some Key Issues

- Is the proposed development at the proposed location essential or especially appropriate in view of the available alternatives? Is the open field right next to the barn an appropriate alternative?
- Should the MVC allow the demolition of the historic barn?
- Is the demolition of the historic barn required for the establishment of the educational center and laboratory?
- If the barn and potting shed are demolished how will the PHA recover or re-use historic elements.
- The Applicant has submitted a draft list of exceptions that include future actions on the property that would not require referral to the MVC for Modification Review. Are there any items on the list that should be reviewed in the future?

3.2 Environment

- **Vegetation:** The new building is being pushed back several feet to allow for the retention of a mature Japanese stewartia. **A mature magnolia planted by Polly Hill in 1959, soon after starting her garden, will be cut down. A large Photinia bush and Japanese Holly planted by Polly Hill would also be removed to make room for the proposal.**
- **Habitat:** The construction, partly upon an existing footprint, will not affect NHESP habitat.
- **Landscaping: No additional plantings have been indicated other than the removal of three mature specimens planted by Polly Hill.**
- **Open Space:** Most of the site is gardens and open space.
- **Lighting:**
- **Archeological:**
 - According to the PHA application to NPS "seven ancient Native sites are recorded in the general area (within one mile)...There is also a high potential for locating historic archaeological resources on the Polly Hill Arboretum property".

- **The applicant has offered to use the services of two islanders, Jill Bouck and Dick Burt, to conduct an initial archaeological evaluation. If the initial evaluation is determined by the MVC to require further evaluation then PHA will contract the services of Public Archaeology Laboratory (PAL).**
- **Ordinarily in the case of a site that has high potential for revealing archaeological resources the MVC would require an intensive archaeological survey to be conducted by a licensed archaeologist with results and recommendations submitted to the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) for determination on further action.**
- **Historic Demolition:**
 - In 2010 the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) listed PHA as a historic area in the state's Inventory of the Historic and Archaeological Assets of Massachusetts.
 - The two structures slated for demolition were included as contributing to the district.
 - On June 15, 2015 The Polly Hill Arboretum was accepted by the National Park Service (NPS) in the National Register of Historic Places as a District. As part of the application the "Gym" and "Potting Shed" were identified as buildings contributing to the historic district but, a few pages later, the application notes that the two "altered" buildings were planned to be removed and that would "not compromise the district's overall integrity".
 - The MHC and NPS signed off on the removal of the barn and potting shed.
- **Noise:**
 - The visitor center is open daily 9:30 am to 4:00 pm. The grounds are open sunrise to sunset.
- **Energy/Sustainability:** The new building would have solar panels on the south side not facing the road. Currently solar panels on the nursery provide 35% of PHA power needs.
- **Water Source:** Well
- **Wastewater / Stormwater:**
 - **Soils:**
 - The site is located in the glacial outwash plain at elevations of 55 feet.
 - The soil type is Riverhead Sandy Loam on a 0-3% slopes.
 - This type of soil is prone to be very deep, nearly level and well drained.
 - **Nitrogen Loading:**
 - The site is in the Tisbury Great Pond Watershed. The status of the watershed is compromised.
 - The Tisbury Great Pond Watershed Budget is 0.8 kg/acre/yr
 - For this size lot the maximum allowable load is 57.52 kg/yr (0.8 kg/acre/yr *71.9 acres)
 - For this proposal, based on the estimate of 366 students that will visit the Education Center and Botany Lab (provided by the Applicant) the estimated wastewater flow is 3,660 gallons per year.
 - The estimated total nitrogen load for that would be 0.5 kilograms per year.

3.3 Transportation:

- **Traffic Study:** The LUPC voted that an independent traffic study by an engineer is not required.
- **Access:** The site is accessed from State Road via an existing driveway. The Polly Hill campus has three driveways on State Road. Students will access the facility from the existing Visitor Center parking area and then walk across the campus to the proposed new building.

- **Parking:** A small lot that serves the Homestead Administrative offices and the Cowbarn library and offices will be the closest lot to this building. The proposal is for groups using the building to use the Visitor Center parking lot.
- **Sight Lines:**
 - The sight lines are
- **Trip Generation:**
 - **Existing Traffic –**
 - **Future Traffic –**
- **Crash Data:**
- **Mass Transit, Bicycle and Pedestrian:**
- **Traffic Summary:**

3.4 **Affordable Housing**

- According to the MVC Affordable Housing Policy, the recommended monetary mitigation for a project of 2,625 sf is \$1,312.50.

3.5 **Economic Impact**

- There are currently 3-4 employees.
- The potential impact on schools is likely to be beneficial as the proposal is intended as a special facility to educate the islands youth about botany.
- The potential impact on police and fire is likely to be minimal.

3.6 **Scenic Values**

- **Streetscape/Building Massing:** The building approximates the massing and location of the building it is replacing.
- **Architectural Detailing:** The proposed new building is designed to fit the vernacular of the existing buildings and the recently designated historic landscape district.
- **A.D.A. Accessibility:** There will be an elevator in the proposed building which will be fully A.D. A. accessible.

3.7 **Local Impact/Abutters**

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4. **CORRESPONDENCE**

4.1 **Town Officials: The West Tisbury Local Historical has written in support.**

4.2 **Island Organizations:**

4.3 **Public: Selena and Bill Roman have written in support; Ann Littlefield Nelson has written in support;**