

Edgartown Historical District Commission
P.O. 5158
Edgartown MA 02539

~~June 16, 2020~~ June 18, 2020 (corrected version in yellow)

Re: June 25, 2020 hearing on Hob Knob Annex

Dear Commissioners:

I am writing to oppose the radical changes proposed to the 124 Main Street historic building, its site and its neighborhood environment. Although presented today as two separate properties, in reality it is clear it is one major project. Therefore, the Commission should review the project as a whole and should not review any individual element without consideration of the overall plan. To further emphasize this necessity, I learned it has already been sent to the MVC as a DRI.

Whether or not the MVC approves it, the Edgartown Historical Commission has a greater duty to the town's long-term preservation goals and our own community's interests. To meet Standard 1 of the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* (under which all Historic Districts operate), it states that "a property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment." The new use of 124 Upper Main is a hotel annex, the site is completely changed, and the residential neighborhood environment will be irreparably damaged.

In sum, for all the reasons listed below, I am vigorously opposing the radical changes being proposed to the property, because this plan is contrary to the Secretary of the Interior's/HDC guidelines:

- *A new addition should be simple and unobtrusive in design.*
- *A new addition should not be highly visible from the public right of way; a rear or other secondary elevation is usually the best location for a new addition.*
- *The new addition should be smaller than the historic building—it should be subordinate in both size and design to the historic building.*
- *Generally, a rooftop addition should not be more than one story in height. There is no rhyme nor reason to the design, EXCEPT to cram more hotel rooms onto this historic property.*
- *The rooflines of the existing building and the new additions are all of different heights, shapes and is totally incongruous. From Main Street, we see a 1) two-story side-gabled main house that is attached to 2) two smaller lateral one-story extensions that in turn are attached to 3) a two-story front-gabled addition and then to what looks like a 4) protruding box-like structure at the rear. It is dizzying.*
- *If any dormer gives the impression of adding an additional story to the building, it is inappropriate within the Historic District.*
- *The cornice is cut through without regard for its Greek Revival symmetry and classically simple but proportionate features in order to have three (3) large "Through-the-Cornice" dormers that have nothing at all to do with the historic elegance of this small home, and even if they were appropriate to the architecture, which they are not, the three (3) are set above the*

four (4) windows below... dormers should always be placed above the existing windows. The sole reason for this bizarre add-on is to create more three more hotel rooms, without regard to the historic property and our neighborhood.

First, the architect miscounted the number of bedroom proposed for 124 Upper Main Street and these numbers need to be corrected. There are two #8 hotel bedrooms, when there should be one #8 hotel room. Thus, the total hotel bedrooms at this property to increases to 16 bedrooms, not 15 bedrooms.

~~If Hob Knob/VIC LLC wants to create 18 new parking spaces and 19 new bedrooms (15 hotel and 4 employee rooms) to 124 Upper Main Street, I suggest they look for another site outside of Edgartown's Historic District.~~

If Hob Knob/VIC LLC wants to have 18 parking spaces and 16 bedrooms (12 hotel- and 4-employee rooms) at 124 Upper Main Street, I suggest they look for another site outside of Edgartown's Historic District.

I am attaching a guidelines published by the Secretary of the Interior (under which Historic Districts fall) as well as excerpts from one other Massachusetts Historic District Commissions (Concord MA) and related online sources of architecture and preservation. I want this to be an integral part of my letter, so please read this letter and the attachment as one.

We cannot continue to allow the chipping away of our downtown historic district. The number of construction projects underway now tell this story. We have one town and it was settled in 1641 and has stayed remarkably true to its origins. Even the National Trust for Historic Preservation selected Edgartown as one of their 30 "Main Street Center" programs (*The National Main Street Center was established as a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1980 as a way to address the myriad issues facing older and historic downtowns during that time*). At that time, the selectmen appointed Peter Bettencourt, Town Manager, and me as Co-Managers of this national pilot program, now in its 40th year.

Finally, we the voters overwhelmingly approved the Historic District Commission in 1987. Now you are the ones who are representing all of us who live here and you should vote as our guidelines so direct. Therefore, I am requesting that you do not approve the request for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the reasons stated above.

Sincerely,

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Duty of the Edgartown Historic District Commission

- The prime objective of the Edgartown Historic District Commission (HDC) is to preserve and protect its significant historic and architectural resources. The Commission seeks to maintain and enhance the Historic Districts by considering the **long-term preservation goals and the context of the community's interests.** To meet Standard 1 of the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, which states that “a property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use **that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.**” (NPS/gov)
- The first place to consider placing a new addition is in a location where **the least amount of historic material and character-defining features will be lost.** In most cases, this will be on a secondary side or rear elevation. (NPS/gov)
- In the case of the **potential development of multiple adjacent sites,** the Commission **should review the project as a whole** and should not review any individual element without consideration of the overall plan (CM-HDC). [Hence the Hob Knob existing inn and the 124 Main Street residence should be considered as one project].
- “Additions must be designed so that their size, placement, and design complement the existing building. **At no time should the existing building be radically changed, obscured, damaged, destroyed, or rendered subordinate by the new addition.** (CM-HDC)
- **The existing streetscape and the scale and massing of the existing building should always be considered in the design of a new addition.** The combined massing of the original building with the addition should be appropriate for the property size and spacing to other adjoining structures. (CM-HDC)
- **In short, additions** should: be subservient to the original structure; be **in harmony with the original building in size, scale and style;** be located where **least visible to the public view;** and be sited so as to **not obstruct the visual integrity of the original structure.** (CM-HDC)

The 1977 *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, which may be applied to **all** historic buildings listed in, or eligible for listing in the National Register, also state that “the new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with **the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment (neighborhood).**”

Character of a Neighborhood

The setting is the larger area or environment in which a historic building is located. The relationship of buildings to each other, setbacks, fence patterns, views, driveways and walkways, and street trees and other landscaping together establish the *character of a neighborhood*. (NPS)

New Exterior Additions and Related New Construction

A new addition must preserve the building's historic character, form, significant materials, and features. It must be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and design of the historic building. (NPS)

- A new addition should always **be subordinate to the historic building; it should not compete in size, scale or design with the historic building.**
- An addition that bears no relationship to the proportions and massing of the historic building—in other words, **one that overpowers the historic form and changes the scale**—will usually compromise the historic character as well.
- **New construction should be appropriately scaled and located far enough away from the historic building to maintain its character and that of the site and setting.** Placing an addition on the rear or on another secondary elevation helps to ensure that it will be subordinate to the historic building. (NPS)

Generally speaking, preservation of historic buildings inherently implies minimal change to primary or “public” elevations and, of course, interior features as well. Exterior features **can be seen from a public right of way, such as a street or sidewalk, are most likely to be the most significant.** These can include many different elements, such as: **window patterns [3 dormers above 4 windows]**, window hoods or shutters; **porticoes, entrances and doorways; roof shapes (124 is side-gabled, while addition is front-gabled), cornices** and decorative moldings.

Generally, **constructing the new addition on a secondary side or rear elevation**—in addition to material preservation—will also preserve the historic character. Not only will the addition be less visible, but because a secondary elevation is usually simpler and less distinctive, the addition will have **less of a physical and visual impact on the historic building.** Such placement will help to preserve the building's historic form and relationship **to its site and setting.**

“Such additions should be **as inconspicuous as possible from the public view**

The difference may be subtle, but it must be clear. A new addition to a historic building should protect those visual qualities that make the building eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The Revivals: 1820-1860 Greek Revival

Colonial homes were similar to those in the first period. Glass became more common during this time, refining the windows to individual panes. Focus on ordainment was around the entrance surround. This style has multiple variations found across New England. **The residence at 124**

Figure 16. The proposal to add to the rear ell of this early-19th century residential property doubles its size **and does not meet the Standards** (NPS/gov)

Dormers

A dormer is a window that is typically set vertically on a sloping roof. Dormers should always be set well back from the wall plane below, **and any dormer which gives the impression of adding an additional story to the building is inappropriate** within the Historic Districts.

Dormer windows should match the style of the house. (CM-HDC)

An addition attached to a highly-visible elevation of a historic building can **radically alter the historic form or obscure features such as a decorative cornice** or window ornamentation. Under these circumstances, an addition would have too much of a negative impact on the historic building and it would not meet the Standards.

They can end up making the house look out of character with its original architecture, as it does at 124 Upper Main Street. **Also called "wall dormers," these "through-the-cornice" dormers are more appropriate in grand mansions,** (thespruce.com), not on small 19th century New England Greek Revival residences such as 124 Upper Main Street.

Through-The-Cornice Dormers: Grand Mansions/Homes



- Dormers should always be proportional to the mass of the roof and the mass of the facade. The **dormers should never obfuscate the roof, nor overpower the lower stories.** Your eye shouldn't immediately go straight to the dormers. It should (arguably) go to the **front entrance.** (McMansionHell.com). **The front entrance of the house is the appropriate focal point – not the dormers.**
- The three dormers for 124 Main **completely dominate this small house. They are the tallest windows on the entire elevation.** This house, with its low-pitched side-gabled roof shouldn't have dormers at all.

- Further, the three dormers **are not vertically aligned to the** four windows on the front elevation, **which they should be.**
- Finally, the dormers **are not recessed into the roof: they cut through the cornice which spoils the original architectural features.**