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MEMORANDUM

TO: Martha's Vineyard Commission
FROM: Eric Dray, Preservation Consultant
DATE: August 2, 2023
RE: DRI #718, 7 Arlington Avenue, Oak Bluffs – Replacement House

As a preservation consultant to the Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC), I have been asked to provide analysis regarding the appropriateness of the revised replacement house design at 7 Arlington Avenue. The elevation drawings dated 06.14.2022 and the revised drawings dated 03.06.2023, prepared by sullivan + associates architects, provide the basis for this analysis (see Figures 1-8). I have not had access to plans, perspective drawings, or specifications for the revised 2023 replacement house so some aspects of the design may be overlooked or misread.

I have been asked by the MVC to assess the 2023 replacement house (as shown in Figures 2, 4, 6, and 8) as follows:

1. Does the 2023 replacement house reflect the historical integrity of the original structure?
2. Does the 2023 replacement house harmonize with the defining characteristics of the neighborhood in terms of massing and architectural style?

Question 1. Does the 2023 replacement house reflect the historical integrity of the original structure?

The appearance of the current house has been impacted by alterations after it was moved to this location in 1917. In its current form, 7 Arlington Avenue retains some of the Queen Anne-style irregular massing of the original 1875 Palmer Villa, most notably the varying roof forms, including the use of clipped gables. The house has lost the ornamental trim that animated the elevations and roof. The primary reference to the Second Empire style – the Mansard-roofed turret – was replaced by a larger, astylistic corner tower with shallow hip roof.

For purposes of this analysis, the current form and design of 7 Arlington Avenue will be the basis of historical integrity against which the replacement house will be evaluated.

As part of its written decision to deny this application, the MVC noted the following regarding the first version of the replacement house (see Figures 1, 3, 5, and 7):

“The Commission further notes that the proposed replacement structure did not faithfully preserve the historic character of the existing structure, particularly in regard to its size and massing, and in light of its visibility from East Chop Drive and impact on the character of the neighborhood.”

The 2023 elevation drawings represent an improvement over the 2022 elevation drawings; they better reflect the historical integrity of the existing house in form and design. The 2023 drawings also represent an improvement in terms of size and massing, as will be discussed in Question 2.

The following is an analysis of each elevation.

South Elevation (Figures 1, 2): The south elevation, while longer than the existing house, retains the same essential composition, including the cross-gable bay. A shed dormer spans most of the main roof slope. The 2023 version of the tower has retained the broader width on the south and north elevations shown in the 2022 drawing, and it is now rectangular in shape as a result. It is difficult with only the elevation drawings to determine whether this rectangular tower is at variance with the historical integrity of the original house.

The open porch, which spans much of the south, east and north elevations retains the shingled half-wall enclosure employed for the existing house. The use of turned posts shown on the 2022 and 2023 drawings, however, introduces an ornamental feature that does not, in my opinion, reflect the historical integrity of the existing porch which is supported by simple square posts.

The balcony on the cross-gable bay has been simplified in design with a shed roof that is more in keeping with the original house.

East Elevation (Figures 3, 4): The 2023 version of the east elevation has been improved with the narrowing of the tower to a width similar to the original, and the re-introduction of the open porch within the dormer (in this one respect, the design reintroduces a feature that had been removed from the existing house).

North Elevation (Figures 5, 6): The eastern half of this elevation is similar in design and massing to the existing house. The western half has been expanded. Shed dormers span much of the main roof slope. The feature which, in my opinion, could be made more reflective of the architectural integrity of the existing house is the new two-story bay that contains the main entrance. The 2023 design pulls that bay back so that it no longer projects beyond the porch. However, the gable roof appears more complicated in design including the introduction of cross-bracing. An improvement might be introducing another clipped gable roof and removing the cross-bracing, making it compatible with the existing dormer with clipped gable on that elevation.

West Elevation (Figure 7, 8): The west elevation appears to represent the greatest expansion of the house. However, this elevation is the least visible from a public way. Despite the expansion, this elevation retains the simplicity in detail that characterizes the existing house. The west elevation also retains the gable-roofed form, although on the 2023 design, that gable roof now has a clipped gable.

Question 2. Does the replacement house harmonize with the defining characteristics of the neighborhood in terms of massing and architectural style?

As part of MVC’s written decision, the Commission noted that, “The existing house is significant in part due to its location in the Vineyard Highlands, and is considered integral to the row of houses along East Chop Drive known as Institute Hill...”

For purposes of this analysis, the “neighborhood” against which the 2023 replacement house’s massing and architectural style will be evaluated will be limited to the four houses of similar character that extend south

on Institute Hill: 94 East Chop Drive, and 17, 19 and 21 Mill Square Road. These were the same houses that were referenced in my June 3, 2022 Memorandum in which I was asked to assess the relationship of the existing house to its context or “neighborhood.”

Massing - Analysis

The original application called for demolition of the existing house and construction of a new house that would have been, according to the MVC decision, twice the size of the existing house, 60% larger excluding the proposed basement, and about three feet taller. The Commission determined that the proposed massing would also have been significantly different in appearance, including a large uninterrupted section of roof visible from East Chop Drive.

The following is a comparative analysis of the Net Area Square Footage for the five existing houses along the ridge of Institute Hill as calculated by the Oak Bluffs Assessor and included on Property Cards:

<u>ADDRESS</u>	<u>Net Area Sq. Ft.</u>
17 Mill Square Road	2,234
19 Mill Square Road	4,381
21 Mill Square Road	2,905
94 East Chop Drive	1,398
7 Arlington Avenue – Existing	2,102
7 Arlington Avenue – 2022 Replacement	3,363*

* For purposes of this analysis, the square footage for the 2022 replacement house is calculated as 60% larger than the original house, not including the basement, as noted in MVC’s decision. In a phone call with staff at the Oak Bluffs Board of Assessors’ office on Wednesday, July 26, I was informed that basements only count as part of Net Area if there is at least one fully exposed wall, which does not appear to be the case with the 2023 replacement house.

7 Arlington Avenue – 2023 Replacement	3,198*
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*According to the applicant’s representative, the 2023 replacement house reduces what they describe as above grade square footage, which likely is similar to Net Area, by an amount of 165 sq. ft.

In addition to that calculated reduction in square footage, the following are observations about the degree to which the overall massing does appear to have been reduced based on a comparative review of the 2022 and 2023 elevation drawings (Figures 1-8).

South Elevation (Figures 1, 2): The most significant reduction in massing appears to be the reduction in the length of the south (and north) elevation, pulling the overall footprint of the house back on the east side so that the footprint on the east side of the 2023 house approximately aligns with the existing house.

East Elevation (Figures 3, 4): The width of the tower has been reduced on the east and west elevations, and it is now the same width as the existing tower. The end gable has been reduced in size and massing by recreating the recessed balcony.

North Elevation (Figures 5, 6): The new two-story bay represents one of the largest increases in massing to the house. On the 2023 drawing, this bay has been pulled back behind the wall plane of the porch, but it is unclear if that reduces the overall massing of that bay. One increase in massing on this elevation from the 2022 to the 2023 replacement design appears to be the extension of the shed dormer farther west.

West Elevation (Figure 7, 8):

The one-story component is substantially broader than the existing house and appears to be largely unchanged between the 2022 and 2023 versions.

Massing – Findings

The Net Area for the 2023 replacement house will be considerably smaller than the new house at 19 Mill Square Road, and it will be only 10%± bigger than 21 Mill Square Road.

The degree to which the massing of the 2023 replacement house is larger than the existing house appears to be largely concentrated on the north and west elevations – elevations that have less visibility from public ways. I do not have information about whether the 2023 replacement house is taller than the existing house. Assuming that it is 3' taller, as the 2022 replacement house is stated to be, and assuming the house would be sited essentially where it is now, then I would consider 3' to be a minimal increase in height, especially given the separation this house has from those to the south.

The Commission raised a concern about the “long uninterrupted section of roof visible from East Chop Drive.” This appears to refer to the south elevation which, as noted above, has been pulled back on the east side, and shortened. These actions, together with the reduction on the east gable by creating a recessed balcony, may be sufficient to mitigate the Commission’s concern.

Design – Analysis and Findings

As noted in response to Question 1, the design of 2023 replacement house includes alterations that result in the proposed house being more reflective of the historical integrity of the existing house. As such, it is reasonable to conclude that the 2023 replacement house design would also better harmonize with the historical integrity of the neighborhood.

7 ARLINGTON AVENUE, OAK BLUFFS, COMPARATIVE DIAGRAMS – EXISTING, 2022, AND 2023



Figure 1. 06.14.2022, South Elevation, Existing and Proposed (sullivan + associates architects).



Figure 2. 03.06.2023, South Elevation, Existing and Proposed (sullivan + associates architects).

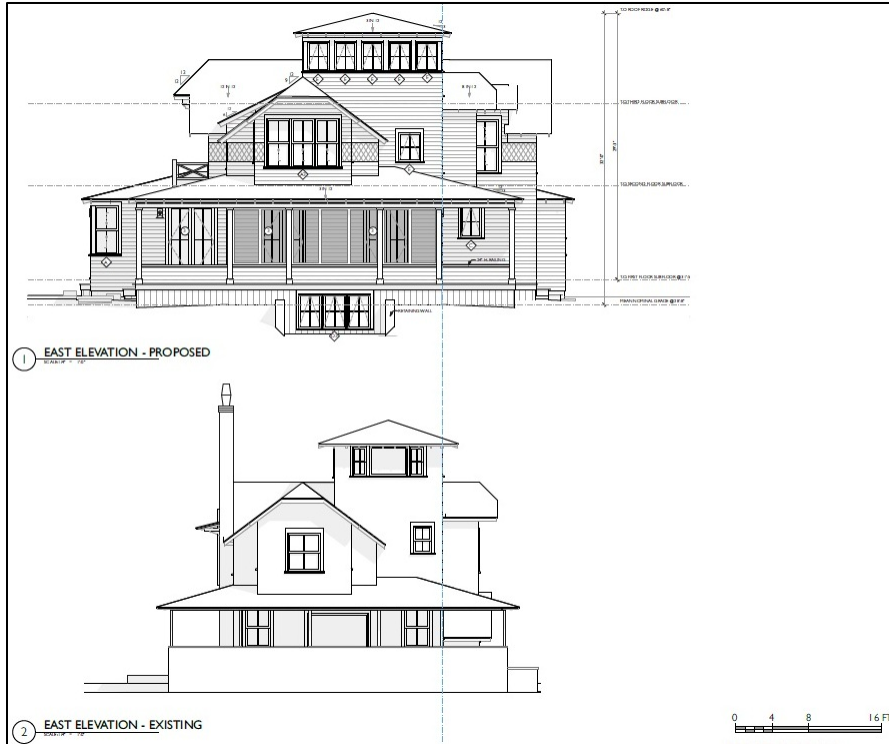


Figure 3. 06.14.2022, East Elevation, Existing and Proposed (sullivan + associates architects).

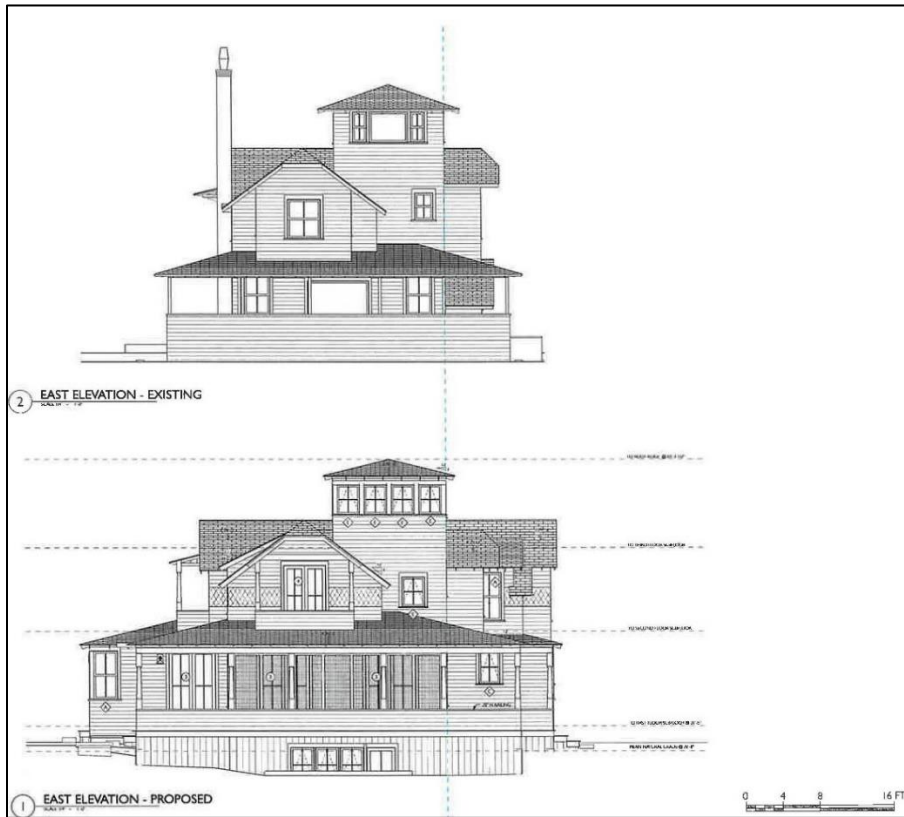


Figure 4. 03.06.2023, East Elevation, Existing and Proposed (sullivan + associates architects).



Figure 5. 06.14.2022, North Elevation, Existing and Proposed (sullivan + associates architects).



Figure 6. 03.06.2023, North Elevation, Existing and Proposed (sullivan + associates architects).

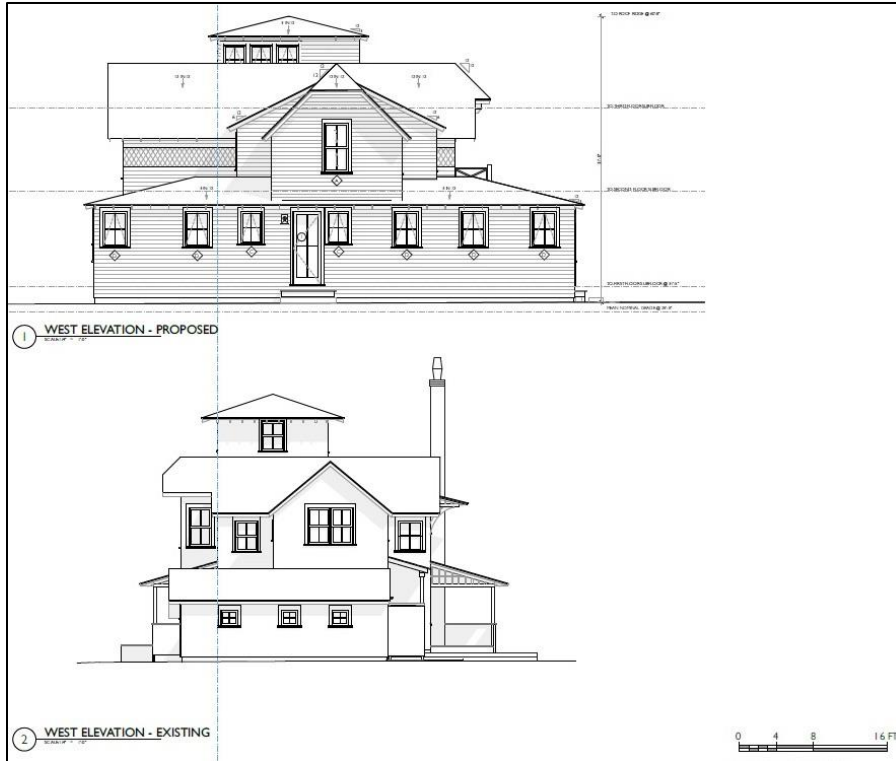


Figure 7. 06.14.2022, West Elevation, Existing and Proposed (sullivan + associates architects).

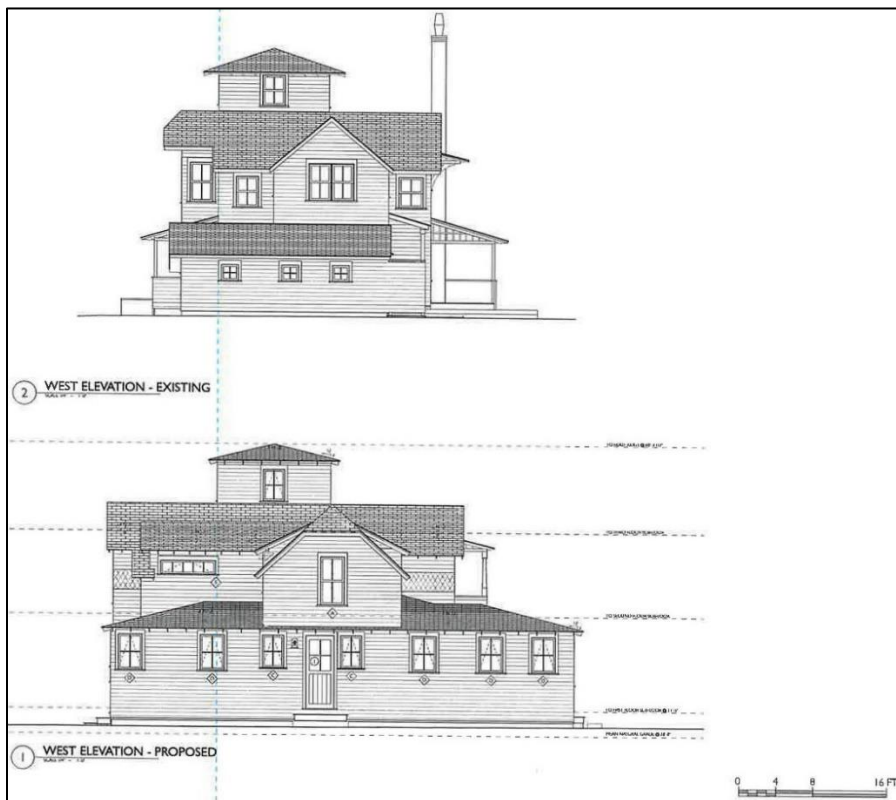


Figure 8. 03.06.2023, West Elevation, Existing and Proposed (sullivan + associates architects).