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Martha's Vineyard Commission

DRI 722 – 17 School Street Demolition

MVC Staff Report 2022-6-23 UPDATED

1. DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 **Owner:** Lucy Thomson
- 1.2 **Applicant:** Lucy Thomson, Darran Reubens (Breese Architects)
- 1.3 **Project Location:** 17 School Street, Oak Bluffs
- 1.4 **Proposal:** Demolition of a house listed in MACRIS and construction of a new single-family dwelling.
- 1.5 **Zoning:** Residential (R1)
- 1.6 **Local Permits:** Demolition permit, building permit, special permit, conservation commission order of conditions
- 1.7 **Surrounding Land Uses:** Other residential and municipal uses in the R1 district, nearby B1 district along Dukes County Ave., Copeland Plan District to north and east.
- 1.8 **Project History:** According to the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) report, the existing house (known as the Henry Chadwick House), was built in the late 1800s in the Gothic Revival / Campground style and originally used as seasonal dwelling. It is part of a development area known as Central Place, which was planned in 1871 and contained about 100 lots on 12 acres. Noted features include a front-facing gable and cross-gable, gingerbread vergeboard, pointed Gothic windows with trim, Gothic shutters, and covered front and side porch. The house was likely moved to its current location from the Campground, since the style is indicative of the 1860s, and added onto. The house was last occupied in 2021.
- 1.9 **Project Summary:** The proposal is to demolish the existing 1,300 ft² (footprint) house and construct a larger single-family dwelling in its place. The applicant has stated that demolition is necessary due to various structural and mechanical deficiencies, “including foundation, walls, ceiling, framing, chimneys, roof, trim, windows, electrical, plumbing, HVAC,” and various interior elements. The house is within the 100-year floodplain and FEMA AE flood hazard zone, and the applicant notes that work amounting to more than 50% of the house’s assessed value would require the house to be raised an additional four feet. (See sections 3.2 and 3.3 below.)

2. ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 **DRI Referral:** Oak Bluffs Building Department, March 22, 2022
- 2.2 **DRI Trigger:** 8.1A (Demolition of house listed in MACRIS)
- 2.3 **LUPC:** June 27, 2022
- 2.4 **Public Hearing:** July 14, 2022

3. PLANNING CONCERNS

3.1 Historic Significance

Age: Likely late 1800s. The MACRIS report lists the date as 1896, while the town assessor lists the date as 1900, and a step in the basement is inscribed with “1910”. According to the Oak Bluffs Historical Commission, the house was moved to its currently location from the Campground in the late 1800s and is clearly indicative of the Campground construction style of the 1860s.

History/culture: The house was moved to its currently location from the Campground by Henry Keyes Chadwick and used as a chicken farm. The house is part of a development area known as Central Place, which was planned in 1871 and contained about 100 lots on 12 acres. The house is an example of the continued expansion of Oak Bluffs as a summer resort community.

Design/construction: Gothic Revival / Campground. Noted features include a front-facing gable and cross-gable, gingerbread vergeboard, pointed Gothic windows with trim, Gothic shutters, and covered front and side porch. The Oak Bluffs assessor lists the property as in “Minus Good” condition, which is above average for the town, with an assessed value of \$264,900.

Historic portion: The OBHC has stated that the front portion of the house is original, although it is possible that the remaining portion is also more than 100 years old. Plans delineating the historical portion were not provided.

Previous alterations: The applicant has stated that there appear to be several additions to the house, including the middle and rear portions, but documentation was not provided.

Contribution to streetscape/community: The house is part of a development area known as Central Place, which was planned in 1871 and contained about 100 lots on 12 acres. Other houses in the immediate area range in age from 1860 to 2011, according to town assessor data, with most (8/13) being more than 100 years old, and four being from the 1800s.

Historical designation: Listed in MACRIS. The OBHC has also voted to designate the house as “Significant.” The OBHC voted to not designate the house as “Preferably Preserved,” with the understanding that any original materials would be incorporated into the new house where possible. (The applicant has not presented any plan to salvage materials.)

Visibility: The house stands about eight feet from School Street.

Condition: The Oak Bluffs assessor lists the building as in “Minus Good” condition, which is above average for the town, with an assessed value of \$264,900.

A structural report by real estate consultant Todd Cleland in April 2022 states that the house is in poor condition, with issues including insufficient structural support throughout the house, sagging floors, mouse droppings, groundwater in the basement, water damage throughout the house, microbial growth, noncompliant doorway heights, deteriorating chimneys and wood, some missing shingles, shallow insulation depth, and outdated or nonfunctional plumbing and utilities. The applicant has stated that the house has been winterized but that it has suffered from decades of deferred maintenance. The applicant has also provided photos showing various deficiencies.

3.2 Replacement Program

The proposed house would have a footprint of 1,932 ft² and floor area of 2,500 ft², compared to the existing footprint of 1,300 ft² and floor area of 1,493 ft². The OBHC voted to not designate the existing house as “Preferably Preserved,” with the understanding that any original materials would be incorporated into the new house where possible. The applicant has proposed replicating various features of the front façade, including vergeboards, posts, and porch and window framing; and reusing an interior doorway.

FEMA floodplain regulations state that if house repairs amount to more than 50% of the assessed building value (about \$130,000 in this case), the bottom of the first floor must be elevated to 11 feet above sea level. To comply with the FEMA regulation, the new house would be built on stilts, with a portion in back open for parking and storage. The open area under the rest of the house would be covered with vertical breakaway paneling. (See section 3.3 below.)

The applicant has stated that the house could likely not be relocated, due to its structural condition, but has offered to make it available for reuse offsite if an interested party were to fully fund the relocation and accept liability.

3.3 Stormwater and Climate Change Resilience

The property is entirely within the 100-year floodplain and FEMA AE flood hazard zone, and will experience increased flood risk in the coming years. The proposed house will be raised on stilts with the bottom of the first floor 11 feet above sea level to comply with FEMA floodplain requirements, and the bottom of the west wing 14.75 feet above sea level. (The current first floor is at seven feet.) The applicant has stated that the current grade of 5-6 feet above sea level would not change. A drainage plan shows trench drains around the building and a pea stone driveway.

The new building would be closer to the edge of the wetlands just to the east

3.4 Wastewater

The property is in the Oak Bluffs Harbor Watershed, and has a nitrogen load limit of 7.098 kilograms per year. The existing house has four bedrooms, and the proposed also has four bedrooms. As proposed, the new house would be connected to the town sewer. The town wastewater department indicated in a letter dated February 2007 that the property could connect to an existing sewer line on School Street, but it is unclear whether approval for the proposed four bedrooms has been granted.

3.5 Energy

The applicant has stated that all appliances will be Energy Star rated, with heat pumps for heating and air conditions, and a fuel range for cooking.