

Moujabber House at 10 Sea View Avenue Extension

Staff Note: Design Criteria for Evaluating Possible Addition

This note was prepared by the staff of the Martha's Vineyard Commission and discusses possible criteria for evaluating a possible addition to the existing building. It in no way commits the Commission to any course of action with respect to its treatment of this application.

Background

The Oak Bluffs Board of Selectmen have referred an application for the above project to the Martha's Vineyard Commission as a Discretionary Referral for review by the Commission as a Development of Regional Impact, and have also asked the Commission to assist town boards in their review of the proposal. Any proposal on this property would have to be approved by the Cottage City Historic District Commission, by the Copeland District Review Committee, by the Zoning Board of Appeals, and if the MVC accepts the Discretionary Referral, by the Martha's Vineyard Commission.

After the owner appealed the Town's issuance of a demolition permit for a structure partially built on this property, the Superior Court ruled that the Town must give the owner clearer guidance as to what could be built on this property, and what the concerns were about the latest proposal. It would then become the owner's decision as to whether it is preferable to modify the new, partially built structure, or it makes more sense to move or demolish that structure, and start over from scratch.

Criteria for Architectural Integration

According to the Martha's Vineyard Commission Act (Chapter 831 of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts 1977 Acts and Resolves as Amended):

In evaluating the probable benefits and detriments of a proposed development of regional impact the commission shall consider, together with other relevant factors, whether:

- (a) development at the proposed location is or is not essential or especially appropriate in view of the available alternatives on the island of Martha's Vineyard;*
 - (b) development in the manner proposed will have a more favorable or adverse impact on the environment in comparison to alternative manners of development;*
 - (c) the proposed development will favorably or adversely affect other persons and property, and if so, whether, because of circumstances peculiar to the location, the effect is likely to be greater than is ordinarily associated with the development of the types proposed;*
- etc.*

In light of these factors, determining what might be an appropriate building addition would involve four related issues:

1. Its relation to the Defining Characteristics¹ of the existing building,
2. Its relation to the Defining Characteristics of the existing historic North Bluffs neighborhood,
3. Its relation to views from major public vistas,

¹ See definitions on page 5.

4. Its impact on abutters.

This note deals with the first three issues. It is assumed that the Zoning Board of Appeals will deal with the fourth issue in determining whether to issue a Special Permit, though the MVC could also deal with this issue.

Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40C state that in historic districts, both the first and second issues should be considered. *"In the case of new constructions of additions to existing buildings or structures, the [Historic District] Commission shall consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the building or structure both in relation to the land area upon which the building or structure is situated and to buildings or structures within the vicinity . . . "*

1) Relation to the Defining Characteristics of the Existing Building

From an historic preservation point of view, the first priority is to ensure that any addition harmonize with the existing building. The existing Moujabber house was built in 1914, and is clearly has historic architectural significance on its own, as well as contributing to the overall historic character of the district.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for new additions call for them to be "compatible in terms of mass, materials, relationship of solids to voids, and color" and calls for "limiting its size and scale in relationship to the historic building".

The Cottage City Historic District Architectural Guidelines² state: "Additions shall be secondary in scale [*perceived size and shape in relative terms*] and mass [*three-dimensional composition*] to the original building, while incorporating compatible proportions [*design ratios between building elements*], materiality [*textural detailing of the building's façade*], and intent [*purposeful design*] with its design. These guidelines then outline specific elements to be reviewed including siding and trim, doors and windows, roofs, porches, and appurtenances.

The main Defining Characteristics of the existing house are given in table 1.

Referring to these Defining Characteristics in order to apply the Cottage City guidelines would suggest, for example, that:

- The roof be a gable with a slope of 8 in 12 and ridge height lower than that of the main house (in this instance, less than 26') and dormers occupying up to about a quarter of the roof area,
- All windows be double-hung approximately 1.5 times higher than wide, and that window and door openings not make up more than about 23% of the façade,
- There not be any projecting decks or balconies.

Note that the Commission and each board will have to make its own judgment as to whether any proposal meets its criteria (Chapter 831 for the MVC).

2) Relation to the Defining Characteristics of the existing North Bluffs neighborhood

In addition to harmonizing with the main building, the addition should harmonize with the area in which it is located (see aerial photo on page 4). When a historic building has different characteristics from the area in which it is located, these two criteria could be in conflict; however, since this house

² See appendix.

is very much in the same style as the rest of the district, an addition that harmonizes with the house should also harmonize with the area.

This house is one of an Architectural Ensemble³ of five buildings that have very similar design features -- though there is some variation among them -- namely 8, 10, 14 and 10 Sea View Avenue and 6 Saco Avenue. This Ensemble is part of a Character Area⁴ made up of buildings built during the same period and sharing defining characteristics. This larger Character Area includes most of the North Bluffs, excluding the larger buildings facing Oak Bluffs Avenue and the Harbor and other larger, recent, peripheral buildings which are of a different scale and character to the main part of the Bluffs.

Table 1 shows the Defining Characteristics shared by 80% or more of the main buildings in the Character Area. The few newer modifications that are not architecturally compatible were not considered in the calculations.

This analysis does not deal with accessory buildings, which are generally one story high and have similar roof shapes and exterior wall treatments to the main buildings.

³ See definitions on page 5.

⁴ See definitions on page 5.

Table 1: Defining Characteristics of Moujabber House and of North Bluffs Character Area		
Feature	Moujabber House	North Bluffs Character Area
<i>Height – stories</i>	<i>1½ stories*</i>	<i>1½ stories*</i>
<i>Height – roof ridge (above existing grade)</i>	<i>26'</i>	<i>21-28'</i>
<i>Height – side walls (from the bottom of the roof overhang to the ground)</i>	<i>10'</i>	<i>10' to 13'</i>
<i>Maximum length of exterior wall</i>	<i>48'</i>	<i>57'</i>
<i>Roof shape</i>	<i>Gable</i>	<i>Gable</i>
<i>Roof slope</i>	<i>8 in 12</i>	<i>6 to 8 in 12</i>
<i>Percent of roof area used for dormers</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>4 to 21%</i>
<i>Window and door openings as proportion of overall wall</i>	<i>23%</i>	<i>21 to 26%</i>
<i>Window proportions – ratio of height to width</i>	<i>1.5</i>	<i>1.5 to 2.5</i>
<i>Window types</i>	<i>Double-hung</i>	<i>Double-hung except fixed (square) with transoms in some living rooms</i>
<i>Exterior wall materials</i>	<i>Naturally weathered cedar shingles.</i>	<i>Naturally weathered cedar shingles.</i>
<i>Projecting balconies or projecting decks</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>Porches</i>	<i>Ground-level verandahs enclosed below the second floor or roof structure.</i>	<i>Ground-level verandahs enclosed below the second floor or roof structure.</i>
<i>Architectural Style</i>	<i>American Craftsman</i>	<i>All five buildings in the ensemble are American Craftsman</i>
<i>* i.e. they have second floors with limited floor space within sloping roofs</i>		

Although it is hard to completely reduce questions of appropriate architectural design to objective criteria, conformity with these basic parameters would be a good first step.

The architectural detailing could closely match the existing house. Alternatively, if the addition is treated as a distinct volume, it might be acceptable to use the detailing to subtly differentiate it from the original building.



3. Viewscapes from Major Public Vistas

The subject property is highly visible from two major public spaces that both also serve as major gateways to the Island:

- The Oak Bluffs ferry dock,
- The Oak Bluffs harbor.

If buildings were designed to respect the first and second criteria, they would likely be appropriate with respect to their impact on these viewscapes. However, a photomontage (or perspective drawing) from each of these two viewpoints should be used to analyze any proposal.

Definitions

Defining Characteristics

For a Character Area, a Streetscape, an Architectural Ensemble or for an individual building or property, the defining characteristics are those distinctive features that give it its particular character. Characteristics include, but are not limited to the following.

- *Building Siting and Relation to the Landscape: Setback from street. Site coverage. Space between buildings. Topography. Natural and man-made landscaping features (trees and other vegetation, retaining walls, fences, hedges, driveways, etc.). Car access (from street or lane) and parking (garage in main or accessory building; parking apron).*
- *Building Form: Building typology (detached, row house, apartment etc.). Height. Width. Shape of building. Recesses and projections. Ground floor level in relation to sidewalk or natural elevation. Entrance design (level, front or side location, presence of stairs). Roof shape (sloped, flat with parapet or decorative sloped roofs, etc.). Other volumetric features (porches, bay windows, balconies etc.).*
- *Facade treatment and building elements: Composition, scale, rhythm, balance and proportion of various elements. Size, proportion and location of window and door openings as well as the specific design of windows and doors. Architectural details and decorative features (cornices, roof ornaments etc.).*
- *Materials: Primary and secondary wall and roof materials. Colors, textures, scale of elements, etc.*

Architectural Ensemble

A group of buildings that were designed and built as a single venture (e.g. a row of identical houses, a group of buildings forming one overall composition).

Character Area

An area in which the buildings and properties share similar physical characteristics based on topography, street layout, history and age, building typology, building siting, and/or architectural style.

Cottage City Historic District

Architectural Guidelines

The Cottage City Historic District guidelines have been established in accordance with Section 7, Chapter 40C of the Massachusetts General Law, in order to help preserve the architectural as well as visual character of one of the most historically significant and eclectic residential compositions in the United States.

The Victorian Architecture of the Historic District is characterized by examples of the Queen Anne, Italianate, Stick, Shingle, Gothic Revival and Carpenter Gothic styles. Most of these "cottages" were constructed based on the principles laid out in Robert Morris Copeland's Community Master Plan designed in 1866. Copeland's plan was developed as an extension to the adjacent Campgrounds and promoted simple wood cottages with open porches fronted on meandering paths, which in turn defined common park areas. This concept was intended to promote friendly social interaction. The architectural intent included intentional charm that was to be personalized through the choice of architectural style, building coloration and level of detailed woodwork on the cottage facades.

Each of the architectural styles have imposed a certain precedent for very different detailing on, sometimes, adjacent buildings. However, the underlying architectural theme remains consistent throughout the Historic District in terms of scale (perceived size and shape in relative terms), mass (three dimensional composition), proportions (design ratios between building elements), materiality (textural detailing of the building's façade), and intent (purposeful design).

It is the responsibility of the Historic District commission, as a representative body of the Community as a whole, to promote sympathetic and appropriate design in terms of exterior alterations, additions, new construction, rehabilitation and/ or renovations within the limits of the Historic District. It is also the intent of the Historic District Commission to promote the repair and restoration of original building elements, when possible, rather than the replacement of such elements. Purposefully, the District and its history shall be respected rather than ignored. It is this purpose along with a sense of stewardship that will help assure future generations the benefit of community history.

Chapter 40C states the following:

In passing upon matters before it, the Commission shall consider among other things the historic and architectural value and significance of the site, building or structure, the general design arrangement, texture, material and color of the features involved and the relationship of such features to similar features of buildings and structures in the surrounding area. In the case of new construction or additions to existing buildings or structures the Commission shall consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the building or structure both in relation to the land area upon which the building or structure is situated and to buildings or

structures within the vicinity and the Commission may in appropriate cases recommend or support dimensional and set back requirements.

The Commission shall not impose requirements except for the purpose of preventing development incongruous to the historic aspects of the architectural characteristics of the Historic District.

I. The Commissions purview shall include but not be limited to the following Construction Types:

- A. Alterations shall include the repair and/or replacement of fatigued or inappropriate building elements. It is also important to recognize the potential significance of certain building details or elements which, may not be original to the structure or its time of origin, however have since become historically prevalent.
- B. Additions shall be secondary in scale and mass to the original building while incorporating compatible proportions, materiality, and intent with its design.
- C. New Construction shall be architecturally compatible with the character of the Historic District through the means of scale, mass, proportions, materiality and intent while avoiding artificial imitation.
- D. Renovation / Rehabilitation shall include an attempt to return the building or structure to its original detailing and/or use by authentically recreating or uncovering building elements, which may have been removed or obscured over time. This may also include the restoration or replacement of deteriorated building elements through historically correct means. It is imperative to retain and restore original components and detailing when possible.
- E. Demolition of entire buildings within the Historic District shall be prohibited unless the Commission deems the building architecturally insignificant to the District or has fallen into gross disrepair through extended negligence or catastrophic mishap. Financial hardship shall be considered and if demolition is permitted, it may be required, by the commission, that certain salvageable building elements be retained and incorporated as part of the new construction.
- F. Ordinary Maintenance inclusive of exterior paint maintenance and minor carpentry repairs shall be expected of all property owners within the Historic District. General upkeep shall not require commission review.

II. The Commissions purview shall include but not be limited to the following Building Elements:

- A. Siding and Trim shall be painted wood with contrasting textures and decorative detailing including but not limited to shingles, lap siding, butt siding, board and batten siding, shouldered casework, tracery, three dimensional friezes, cornices

and brackets that are consistent with the original buildings architectural style. Aluminum, synthetic and vinyl siding and trim material along with artificial veneers shall be discouraged.

- B. Doors and Windows shall be painted wood with authentic type glass panels and true or simulated divisions. Adjacent details shall include but not be limited to double doors, pointed arch doors and windows, screen panels, bay and oriel windows, stained or decorative glass, double hung and casement windows, operational hardware, working shutters, lintels, architraves and ornamented encasings consistent with the original buildings architectural style. vinyl or aluminum sash or doors, removable muntin grills, false shutters or tinted glass shall be discouraged.
- C. Roofs shall be limited to certain color and texture patterns achieved with either asphalt shingles, wood shingles, slate tiles or copper installations. Roofs shall maintain historic shapes, pitches and details including but not limited to cupolas, towers, turrets, chimneys, projecting eaves, decorative barge boards and soffits, dormers, gutters and downspouts consistent with the original buildings architectural style. Historically incorrect roof pitches and types, certain asphalt and synthetic roofing, aluminum gutters, aluminum or plastic awnings and visible skylights shall be discouraged.
- D. Porches inclusive of frontal porches, wrap around porches and covered balconies shall be of painted wood while maintaining historic shapes and details including but not limited to decking, ornate railings, balustrades and columns, scrollwork, decorative skirts exposed ceilings and steps consistent with the original buildings architectural style. Pressure treated or synthetic decking, lattice or scrollwork shall be discouraged.
- E. Appurtenances such as mechanical equipment and exhaust devices, antennae, and electrical power sources shall be concealed or located out of public view so as not to detract from the buildings historic character. Exterior lighting fixtures, house identification numbers and name plates shall be harmonious and complimentary to the historic nature of the building and its materials. Imitation brass hardware, artificial stone and brick veneers and metal flue pipes shall be discouraged.

NOTE: If a buildings original style is unknown, the homeowner shall seek a determination by the Historic District Commission prior to proposing new work on the existing building.