

Katherine L. Scott ♦ P.O. Box 639 ♦ Vineyard Haven, Mass. 02568
(508) 687-9986 ♦ kscott@meganet.net

January 16, 2022

To the Members of the Martha's Vineyard Commission:

I am writing to express support for a decision disallowing the razing of the Edwin Luce House at Indian Hill.

The photos of the house at the MVC website seem to be selected to focus attention on portions of the house that show rot of a corner post or peeling paint or overgrown vines and portray the house as a disaster area, to reinforce the “extremely poor condition” assessment by the architect hired to design the replacement house. These look to me like cosmetic features that can be easily fixed by a competent builder. The four photos of a vine growing over the pink door elicit in me a “So what?” response. Get your secateurs and cut back the vine. That is maybe one year’s growth. It looks as though the reeds were arranged in front of the camera’s lens to amplify the “overgrown wreck” look.

Inside, the brick fireplace, the window and other trim, the paneling, and the wide floorboards look to me like valuable features.

The fallen plaster is a cosmetic issue. Ceilings can be replastered or otherwise fixed without tearing down the whole house. The six-over-six windows can be restored and storms added, as advised by This Old House. Or replicas ordered from Anderson Windows with energy-efficient panes.

Some photos show shingles in obvious need of replacement, but most of the shingling seems to be in pretty good shape.

To me, looking at the photos, this does not look like a teardown.

Who intentionally lets a property that they own disintegrate, when they have the money to maintain it? This looks like a case where the owners want a big modern house instead of the historic house they purchased, and they let things go to seed for a few years to create “pearl-clutching” visuals. That story is getting old.

The owners contend that they need a larger house, of 4,600 square feet, so that they can have their four daughters and their grandchildren to visit. All at the same time, under one roof? Far be it from me to question the Meyers’ preferred living arrangements, but this razing rationale doesn’t sound convincing. The

existing house plus the wing plus the existing guest house already seem to total over 4,000 square feet.

Yesterday I was stunned to find that Quawk Cottage, a lovely home loaded with character on Hines Point, had disappeared! I always looked forward to seeing this house when I walked out to Hines Point. The photos in a real estate listing from 2020 show a lovely hundred-year-old house in apparently excellent condition, and reveal zero justification for tearing it down.

https://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-detail/139-Hines-Point-Rd_Vineyard-Haven_MA_02568_M34893-60343.

In fact, it looks as though Quawk Cottage had undergone a historical renovation by the architectural firm of Judge, Skelton, Smith fairly recently.

<http://jssarch.com/blog-3/>.

Where the picturesque, tradition-rich “cottage” used to be rises an ugly, massive barnlike object that overpowers the site, cuts off views of the Lagoon, and seriously reduces the charm and interest of the whole neighborhood. How can this be? Did this teardown project go through MVC review? And what happened to the debris that the cottage was reduced to?

The MVC’s mission is, in part, “to protect and enhance the island’s environment, economy, character, and social fabric.” I challenge each MVC member to think of concrete examples of the Vineyard’s “character” that they are charged to preserve. The Edwin Luce house in its Indian Hill setting surely qualifies. If the site has views of Vineyard Sound, that implies that it can also be seen from the Sound.

The Vineyard simply cannot sustain continued losses to its built environment and retain its character. Much of the Vineyard’s charm inheres in the diversity of building styles to be found on one little island, and their relationship to the terrain. This diversity creates multiple atmospheres. Modest older homes and even shacks contribute to atmosphere. Certainly, historic homes do. Artists do not come to the Island purely to paint the terrain. Many of them come to paint shacks in Menemsha. No artist will be tempted to lift his or her brush to paint the brutish structure that replaces the Quawk Cottage.

If all houses look basically the same (and a lot of them do look the same)--- large, slick homes designed by the same high-end architects---there is no more unique atmosphere. These houses could be helicoptered in from the suburbs of Anywhere, USA. The surrounding land then also loses a lot of its character. Sure, we have beautiful hills and shorelines, but it doesn’t take much to ruin even their aspect.

Furthermore, such razings and replacement building are incredibly wasteful, of both energy and materials.

We have to draw the line and send a clear message that such destruction of historical landscapes and wastage is not encouraged on this island, most certainly not by the official guardians of the Vineyard's character at the MVC.

Respectfully,

Katherine Scott
Tisbury