

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm by Chair Leas.

ROLL CALL

Mike Giller	Mark Leas	Allen Frechter	Susan Propper
Ethan Guerra	Steve Gerard	Elaine Gort	

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

With no changes, January 16, 2024 Planning Commission Minutes were approved.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

With no changes, the February 6, 2024 Planning Commission Agenda was approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION ISSUES:

- None.

CONSENT CALENDAR:

1. Messerich Residence Residing (SVC), 205 E. Washington Avenue, PL-2024-0008

Mr. Gerard made a motion to call up Messerich Residence Residing, seconded by Mr. Frechter. The motion passed unanimously and the project was called up.

Ms. Crump presented an overview of a proposal to restore and replace historic exterior clapboard siding, remove deteriorating asphalt shingle siding, and paint.

Commissioner Questions / Comments:

Mr. Frechter: What's the specification for matching? Is that in terms of texture or dimensions? (Ms. Crump: The handbook states that texture should be that which was used historically but it's not specified, we would prefer new material match in both texture, dimensions, and color. It is possible for them to buy four-inch lap fiber cement siding and it would have a texture similar to natural wood.) How much are we allowed to put a more durable material close to the ground to better follow building codes? (Ms. Crump: I don't know the building code but because the structure is historic, I believe the historic guidelines would override and can dictate the natural wood siding be maintained to the ground.) (Mr. Truckey: I don't believe there's anything in the building code that requires that) (Mr. Kulick: We do allow more durable materials such as rock around the base but if there's historic materials we would want them maintained.)

Ms. Gort: What's the benefit of using the Hardie board over regular wood besides the water issue? (Ms. Crump: It's a more durable product. It's a wood fiber product made with cement and fly ash from coal that creates a durable compound material. It's hard to chip and is weather and fire resistant which is more durable than natural wood. Some Commissioners may have another opinion.) Is the cost similar to wood? (Ms. Crump: Less in cost but the installation costs can be more due to the weight of the product.)

Mr. Gerard: Has Staff formed any opinions as to if any of the facades are unrestorable? (Ms. Crump: The sides that have had shingles removed seem to be very salvageable, especially the front façade; more investigation is needed for the rear because it's south facing with more sun and weather exposure. From initial investigation the natural wood siding seemed spongy and rotted from moisture in the rear.) Is it Staff's feeling that rather than treat this like a preliminary hearing you have added conditions of what to do based on the historic siding discovered and the condition of the siding? (Ms. Crump: That is how the proposed conditions currently read, that if material is discovered to not

be salvageable then it could be replaced with new material, so yes because it is a lower-level classification of permit this would be a combined hearing.) (Mr. Truckey: We feel if we get the overall direction from the Commission during this meeting, Staff can make that final determination in the field with the building department's input.) Could they landmark the property for tax credits to help with this cost? (Ms. Crump: That's up to the applicant. They could choose to pursue landmarking or they may consider it later on with a potential addition.)

- Mr. Guerra: Could they install gutters to prevent further water damage? (Ms. Crump: Yes.)
- Mr. Giller: Was there any consideration to fixing the drainage around the house that may drain into the house? (Ms. Crump: That was not considered as part of this application, the applicant can speak more to that if they've contemplated that.) Do we know how old the existing clapboard siding is? (Ms. Crump: We don't, it could be original dating to between 1909 and 1914, but it could have also been redone in years prior to adding the shingles.) I could tell its cedar siding which is more rot resistant than other woods. If you cut into Hardie board at all does have problems with moisture and expansion? (Ms. Crump: I think that was a problem early on with the earliest versions of the product but they have made improvements to prevent that over the past 15 years; it is the only synthetic wood siding we do allow it in the historic district because of its durability.)
- Ms. Propper: If Staff determines that the south side with the barn wood is not salvageable would Staff want it to be the vertical or horizontal board? (Ms. Crump: We would want the new material applied to be horizontal to match the rest.) Would they be able to put Hardie board on the lowest portion of the walls to prevent degradation? (Ms. Crump: That is a question for the Commission.)
- Mr. Leas: Could it be landmarked, is it eligible? (Ms. Crump: Yes, according to the historic survey done it is contributing to the district and eligible for local landmarking.)
- Mr. Gerard: Isn't it true that if a side wall is not totally unrepairable you have to match the existing wood with material to match? (Ms. Crump: Yes, our handbook recommends to splice with natural wood if it's not salvageable and Staff is only recommending a change in siding if the side is a total loss. Considerations for splicing and patching with Hardie is something for the Commission to discuss.) (Mr. Truckey: An example of that is the house on French Street across from the catholic church that collapsed. We required them to maintain all the historic material that they could and then splice in natural wood material to match, some of which was historic from other sites.)

Ms. Maureen Messerich, Property Owner: This project started with a new roof and we thought it would be nice to get the siding fixed because the workers were already there. We were familiar with the Hardie board siding because it lasts forever and doesn't have many issues. We priced it out and decided it was worth it. When we found out we potentially had to maintain the original siding we spoke with others and they recommended the Hardie board. We would be willing to do the historic siding on the front and the Hardie board on the sides where it's not visible from the street. We're not prepared for the cost and maintenance of restoring the original historic siding.

- Mr. Frechter: Have you priced out the cost for patching the existing siding on the facades where you would have to keep the historic siding?
- Ms. Messerich: I have not, I think you have to patch the side boards with matching boards but on the bottom I don't see why you can't use Hardie board.
- Mr. Frechter: Are you asking us to approve Hardie board everywhere or just use Hardie board at the base.
- Ms. Messerich: I would prefer Hardie board for the whole house but I understand that is not allowed. I would hate to spend money to end up with the same problem I currently have. I want to

- understand is painted damaged boards, like on the business right next to us is that preferred?
- Mr. Frechter: The Town Council set these guidelines and it's our responsibility to see those through, we have some leeway so I want to understand what your preference is.
- Ms. Messerich: I would at least like to have Hardie board on the bottom boards because I wouldn't have ever submitted the application if I knew it had to be all wood. Amy (the daughter) inquired about installing gutters in the past and was told no but I suppose that has changed. I was also told when the neighbor uphill of us did some work more water started ending up in our yard creating moisture issues at the bottom.
- Mr. Frechter: What's the condition of the bottom of the vertical boards?
- Ms. Messerich: Spongy, would you require us to replace the whole board or splice? I drove around Town and saw a lot of buildings with the gaps between the wood covered with strips of wood but most of those were garages and sheds, not living structures. I don't like the look of that and would prefer the painted siding look.
- Mrs. Gort: I encourage you to maintain the vertical board because it showcases the unique history as a possible conversion from a barn to a house, have you seen it that way?
- Ms. Messerich: We discussed it as we drove around Town.

Amy Messerich, Property Owner's Daughter: You would have to have a caulk line between the boards after you add the batten strip which can eventually degrade and allow rodents into and under the house and would be a continuing maintenance issue. Some of the areas have wider than 1-inch openings, large enough for a fist, and would be harder to cover with battens.

- Mr. Gerard: Do you have plans for an addition?
- Ms. Messerich: Ms. Crump gave us information that we could do a small addition in keeping with historic standards of either 200 square feet or 400 square feet as part of a bonus and you could make it 1,600 square feet if you put a basement under it. (Ms. Crump: We discussed the landmarking process and the density bonus underground as part of that.) I thought the extra space would be nice but now that it's become more complicated we should have contemplated the addition with this, but that's for another time.
- Mr. Giller: Do you know if the framing is stable for the uphill side and the back side?
- Ms. Messerich: My understanding is that the back is older than the front and the front was actually built to be a house while the rear was not. We are not sure of the condition of the framing.
- Mr. Giller: It's likely if the sheathing is rotted the framing is too and it may not be productive to put new siding on rotting framing. Can you speak to the drainage issues you noticed?
- Ms. Messerich: I haven't noticed it, but I was told about it by a contractor years ago.
- Mr. Giller: It's not unusual in construction to change onsite and have it affect an adjacent site. Have you considered fixing the drainage?
- Ms. Messerich: No, this project is more of an extension of fixing the roof.
- Mr. Giller: You said you'd like to understand why, the short answer is authenticity and integrity of the historic building. We're bound by the State to protect the buildings in the historic district and we're trying to work with you for a suitable solution.
- Ms. Messerich: Yes, my thought is the Hardie board would look like the original but you must see a difference.
- Mr. Giller: The experts see it differently.
- Ms. Messerich: We were okay with doing the front, but the cost is a large issue to us. My impression is the Hardie board is much cheaper than the original siding and milled wood. The maintenance issue is the big problem for me, especially for the lower boards. It's not just drainage but also the snow sitting against the house.
- Mr. Giller: That goes back to the discussion of would you fix the drainage and the siding that has dried is very old and still sound. With older buildings issues are a puzzle to figure out

what's causing the issue and even with the Hardie board you may have the same issue. Typically, we would be brought a set of drawings to have a better understanding which we understand this project has evolved from something much simpler but the lack of drawings makes it harder for us to give answers.

Ms. Propper: No questions.

Mr. Leas: If I understand correctly, you're looking for the Commission to approve the use of Hardie board to address the problems you know of at this time though there may be further problems with the structure as Mr. Giller has brought up?

Ms. Messerich: Correct.

Mr. Eduardo Vazquez, Contractor: With the initial project we proposed to tear off the existing siding down to the plywood but we were unsure what was underneath. We were also going to fix any rotting studs underneath the siding and we were going to put two feet of sheet metal all the way around to prevent rodents and five feet of ice and water shield and then the Hardie Board which is a very durable product in snow. Now I see we can salvage the front and left side of the house only about three quarters of the way down and in the rear I'm not sure we can save the vertical siding because it is rotted on the bottom and the top and the insulation is falling out between the pieces of siding. To get a straight surface to do the siding we need to remove that and then check the studs, put in plywood, sheet metal, ice and water, Hardie board, and paint. The other option is we can try to salvage the middle of the vertical siding and then do 3-4 feet of the Hardie board siding and then reuse the vertical siding on the top.

Mr. Giller: We understand you have ideas for a more complete rehab of the exterior, it makes us nervous because when you have moisture issues with a building they tend to be more complicated. Have you taken off any of the siding to see the condition of the walls?

Mr. Vazquez: No, we just discovered some of this yesterday and today.

Mr. Giller: Typically a one foot hole is cut in a wall in a few places to try and understand the conditions but what you were describing is not what's allowed as part of the historic standards and it may not solve your problems. Have you looked at going at it from the inside?

Ms. Messerich: We haven't.

Mr. Vazquez: But we can.

Mr. Giller: Would you want to look at that first before removing the full exterior siding and finding rotting wood underneath.

Ms. Messerich: I don't think that would be a big deal and we would find out pretty early on whether it's fully rotted or not. The inside of the structure is quite nice and stable so I don't believe there's any major problems. I feel like we could deal with whatever problem may exist on the exterior when it comes to light.

Mr. Giller: I think it would be a good idea to investigate to better understand what the issues are and the condition of the framing.

Ms. Messerich: This is the first time I've come up here to look at it. I don't anticipate it to be a big problem because the boards in the middle are fine, it's only the boards near the roof and at the base. In my experience, I haven't run into have a major problem like that.

Mr. Truckey: Just to clarify, Mr. Giller is providing a suggestion. You could replace your siding and not do what he is suggesting, we do not regulate that aspect.

Ms. Messerich: I have a lot of confidence in the contractor to do the right thing.

Mr. Giller: I disagree, due to the substandard work on the fascia boards.

Mr. Leas: Do you have any experience for doing the restoration of a project that's in this bad of a condition?

Mr. Vazquez: Yes historic, but this is very different. This house is something that must be treated like gold. Speaking to the fascia installation the building is not very square so it made it

harder to do a fine cut but we were not aware we would be doing the siding at the time, otherwise we could have worked to fix the structure some.

Mr. Leas: When you undertook this project you were not aware of the scrutiny the Town would have on what you're proposing to do, has this meeting given you a better understanding of the standards required by the Town?

Mr. Vazquez: Yes.

The hearing was opened to public comment. There were no comments and the public comment period was closed.

Commissioner Questions / Comments:

Mr. Frechter: We have municipal and state mandated standards we have to maintain with limited leeway for how you will have to proceed with siding restoration. To provide approval we'd need to look at something very specific in terms of what's being restored and what materials are being added into each façade.

Mr. Gerard: I think there are more questions than answers for this project and there were surprises. I ask to treat this as a preliminary hearing rather than a final because there are many things that need to be looked at as there may be foundation and drainage problems that should be addressed. As I read the design guidelines you would not be allowed to put Hardie board close to the ground and must have milled siding to match. Would you be interested in landmarking this project and getting tax credits to help with the restoration? This could be a much larger project and I'm sorry it has gone from a small project to make the building look better to a much larger discussion.

Mr. Guerra: I have sympathy for the applicant's discovery of the siding and how much it's governed by the guidelines. Staff has outlined quite accurately what needs to be done, I don't think there's more questions that need to be answered. The structure and the drainage are other questions, and questions for the building department. This is focused on the siding and the design standards around that are very specific about what you can do. There is no leeway to allow the Planning Commission to approve something different than is stated in the outlined Conditions of Approval.

Mr. Giller: I think you need a preservation architect to guide your work, it's much cheaper to find the problems early on rather than during construction and restoration projects tend to snowball. I agree with Mr. Guerra in that the design standards are very clear, and we can't approve the use of Hardie board in the way you're proposing.

Ms. Propper: My heart goes out to you with the struggles of this project, but the rules are very clear. Mr. Giller has offered some suggestions if you wish to follow that, but the standards are clear that absent an entire façade that's unusable you need to replace it with natural material to match existing. I understand the concerns raised but we don't have the leeway to do that.

Mr. Guerra: This started out as a repair project, but it is now a restoration project and I recommend finding a restoration expert to move forward with the project.

Mr. Leas: Echoing the comments of most of the Commissioners, I don't think we're in a position to allow you to put your siding on the bottom. I don't think you understand how big of a problem you are uncovering here. You have a valuable piece of property but it's limited by its value due to the structure that's there. I don't think it would be wise to throw more money into a situation you cannot recover, I urge you to look carefully with what you have here and I empathize with your situation.

Mr. Gerard made a motion to approve the Messerich Residence Residing with the attached Staff recommendations, seconded by Mr. Guerra. The motion passed 4 to 3.

OTHER MATTERS:

1. Town Council Summary

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 7:03 pm.

Mark Leas, Chair