

Preliminary Review

HPC2006-091901

for 315 Grove Avenue

On September 19, 2006, property owner Chris Kirtz requested a preliminary review, at the HPC meeting scheduled that same evening, of his plan to construct a second floor addition to 315 Grove Avenue.

Because of an ongoing family emergency, the applicant was not present. Present at the preliminary review was neighbor Candi Byrne, who resides at 202 Second Avenue.

General Description: The plan as submitted contemplates a second floor addition over the existing shallow-roofed, one-story wing which includes the kitchen. A sunroom/sleeping porch is also shown above the existing “boiler room” at the back of the house. From previous conversations with the applicant (during early consultations), the HPC is aware that the two smaller dormers depicted on the roof plan of the original cottage (flanking an existing doghouse dormer) are intended to cover existing skylights.

Adequacy of the Documents Submitted: Submitted for HPC review were:

- A copy of the **site plan** (most current survey), marked up to show the roof plan of the proposed addition (bird’s-eye view). The marked-up site plan also indicates that new construction will be entirely within the existing footprint.
- An **artist’s rendition** by Ralph Hurst, architect, of **one elevation only**, the NW perspective view (i.e., the view of the house from Grove Avenue). (It was noted that on the artist’s rendition the house address is incorrectly identified as 315 *Second Avenue* rather than 315 Grove Avenue.)
- An **e-mail** from Chris Kirtz dated September 19 addressed to the HPC members which contains information about proposed ridge heights and the applicant’s intention for the east elevation (side adjacent to 202 Second Avenue). The e-mail is included as part of the review record.

No floor plans or to-scale drawings were submitted. No drawings were included that clearly differentiate proposed new construction from the existing structure. No building materials were specified. It would have been helpful to have this additional information during the preliminary review.

Visibility from public ways: 315 Grove Avenue enjoys a prominent location in the historic center of Town. The new construction will be visible from numerous roads and walkways, including Grove Avenue, Second Avenue, Chestnut Road, Miller Drive, Acorn Lane, and The Circle. The structure stands on one side of the Second Avenue entrance to the most historic place in Washington Grove, called The Circle.

Contributing structure: The cottage is a contributing structure dating from no later than 1888 and maintains the form, feel, and exterior of the early cottages built up from a tent platform.

Nearby Contributing structures: Located only steps from The Circle, there are many contributing structures near the subject property. Those in closest proximity include 300 Grove Avenue (Town Hall),

and 316 Grove Avenue (The Woman's Club House), as well as private residences at 313 and 319 Grove Avenue, immediately adjacent 202 Second Avenue, and 2, 6 and 8 The Circle.

Compatibility with the existing structure: In his e-mail of September 19, Chris Kirtz states that "the new longitudinal ridge will match the ridge height of the existing one." The new cross gable depicted in the artist's rendition appears to be no more than one foot (1') higher than the longitudinal ridge.

Because the new cross gable has a ridge height which is greater than the height of the existing longitudinal gable, it will tend to dominate the original structure and become the most prominent feature of the NW (Grove Avenue) elevation, which is not considered desirable.

The lower ridgeline on the second-floor sleeping porch/sunroom has been noted. This helps break up the mass of the addition, and it is commended.

Specific HPC recommendations are provided below that would serve to optimize compatibility with both the existing structure and the historic district.

Compatibility with the historic district: The diminutive nature of houses on The Circle and vicinity is a strong contributor to sense of place. From the marked-up site plan provided, the new second-floor addition (*minus the sunroom/sleeping porch*) appears to be nearly as long as the original 1-1/2 story longitudinal ridge; and, if the sunroom/sleeping porch is included, the addition appears to be slightly longer than the original ridge. Relative to the existing structure, and in the context of houses that are located within close proximity of one another, this represents a considerable increase.

HPC considers additions that are smaller or deferential to the existing house to generally be more compatible with the historic district, and this is particularly the case with the original cottages. Specific steps to achieve this are outlined below in Recommendations.

Neighbor Candi Byrne (whose house is located only a few feet away from the subject property) expressed her concern that the height and mass of the addition as depicted would eliminate her current view of the sky, trees, etc., and would block natural light from entering her home. She fears that she may feel "boxed in" by the new addition. Removal of the existing shed was discussed as a possible means to increase a sense of openness and compensate for views lost. From the site plan, the shed appears to span three properties – most of the structure is on Chris Kirtz's property, but small portions of the shed sit on Town property and on Candi Byrne's property.

Recommendations:

The HPC recognizes that the applicant has taken into consideration various comments that were offered to him during early consultations. However, we feel there remain refinements that will substantively improve the perceived mass and scale of this project without adversely affecting the livability of the proposed addition.

The HPC recommends that the applicant lower the new cross gable to a height somewhat less than the height of the existing longitudinal ridge (in other words, approximately 2' lower than depicted on the artist's rendition). (The roof pitch as shown is compatible and is recommended to be maintained). This would attenuate the perception that the cross gable is the most dominant feature on the NW façade. It is also suggested that the applicant consider slightly lowering the *new* longitudinal ridge. This would help to keep the perceived mass and scale more in keeping with the original cottage and the adjacent cottage at 202 Second Avenue.

The second-floor porch is referred to both as a sleeping porch (e-mail) and a sunroom (site plan). HPC would like the opportunity to comment on the screen/window plan for this feature.

As the applicant refines his design, it is recommended that additional thought be given to the fenestration plan. The triple window depicted on the first floor below the new gable appears somewhat awkward. It may be that a triple window is shown in this location because there is a similar bank of windows (but shorter in height) in the existing structure (we believe above the kitchen counter). However, in relation to the new roof gable above, the triple window appears off-center, and its large width tends to emphasize the perceived dominance of this gable.

The applicant indicates in his September 19 e-mail that “the other side of the house facing the Circle will replicate the one depicted facing the Woman’s Club.” **To-scale drawings of all views should be provided before the Planning Commission considers granting a building permit.**

There appear to be inaccuracies in the roof representation, particularly the intersection of the existing front roofs with the new cross gable. This should be clarified in subsequent drawings.

It was noted that the new roof pitch of the addition may cause run-off to be more forceful in the narrow “alley” between the two houses (315 Grove Avenue and 202 Second Avenue). The applicant may wish to consider installing gutters on the east side of the house to control water flow.

Candi Byrne expressed a desire that Chris Kirtz speak directly to her concerning his plan for 315 Grove Avenue. HPC encourages open dialog between property owners who are contemplating construction projects and their immediate neighbors.

No building materials were specified. HPC encourages the use of natural building materials whenever possible.

Note: This is a preliminary review only. The reviewer should review the final plans and requested additional material (particularly to-scale drawings of all views) submitted with the building permit application to determine whether the design generally follows the material submitted and/or recommendations made in the preliminary review on September 19.

Emilia A. Styles
for the Historic Preservation Commission

Date

Please note that the Historic Preservation Commission acts only in an advisory capacity to both applicants and the Planning Commission. The reviews undertaken are designed to assist homeowners in their projects, to provide input to deliberations of the Planning Commission and, more generally, to contribute to historic preservation in Washington Grove.

Further information regarding the scope, powers, duties, and structure of the Historic Preservation Commission may be found in Article XV of the Code of Ordinances of the Town of Washington Grove. Section 5 (a) of Article XV describes the powers and duties of the Historic Preservation Commission in the building permit process. This section reads as follows

The Commission shall review all applications for building permits filed with the Town Planning Commission which would involve any change to a structure or site visible from any public way for historical accuracy, integrity, or compatibility with the neighborhood and improvements therein. The Commission may recommend to an applicant alternative historical designs, materials and sources for the same which may be more historically compatible. The Commission shall forward its recommendations regarding the same, if any, in an advisory capacity, to the Planning Commission for consideration by the Planning Commission within thirty (30) days from the Commission’s receipt of the application from the Planning Commission.

cc: Applicant
HPC members
HPC Binder
Web site, Bill Saar
Planning Commission, John McClelland
Mayor John Compton
Town Clerk, Kathy Lehman