

Preliminary Review for 125 Grove Avenue

An application for a building permit submitted to the Town of Washington Grove Planning Commission by Renee Chandler was first received for review by the HPC at its November 2005 meeting. The application was *not* reviewed at that time because there were open questions on several issues, and neither the homeowner nor her contractor were present for discussion and clarification. The November 24 letter from the HPC (signed by Ed Mroczka, HPC member) addressed to John McClelland, Chair, Town of Washington Grove Planning Commission, outlined the areas of concern.

The homeowner and contractor were subsequently contacted and encouraged to meet with the HPC. Renee Chandler and Michael Gargan of the builder Labor Resource, LLC were both present at the December 20 meeting.

General Description: The project is for construction of a “4-season room” addition at the rear of the house, replacing a greenhouse/sunroom that the homeowner had previously removed.

The homeowner and contractor explained that following their December meeting with the Planning Commission, the original concept would be changed by bringing the “north” wall in by 6 inches, in order to comply with setback requirements.

Adequacy of the Documents Submitted: The documents submitted were minimal; however, this was offset by the presence of the homeowner and contractor to answer questions. It was noted that only Page 1 of the building permit application is included. A site plan and sketch of the elevation as seen from Grove Road was received with the original submission. A new sketch presented at the December meeting clarified the scale of the addition and how the new roofline relates to the existing roof line.

Visibility from public ways: The addition will be visible from Grove Road.

Contributing structure: The house is a contributing structure listed as dating from 1890-1900.

Nearby Contributing structures: There are other nearby contributing structures – namely adjacent 123 and 127 Grove Avenue as well as facing structures 122 and 124 Grove Avenue.

Compatibility with the existing structure: The ridge line of the addition is shown to be only slightly higher than the existing ridge line and the eave line remains low – both are desirable. It was also noted that natural materials are being specified (painted cedar siding), as is preferred. See HPC Recommendations below.

Compatibility with the historic district: The scale of the project (as depicted on the revised sketches brought to the December meeting) is compatible with the historic character of Washington Grove. The homeowner was very open to HPC suggestions presented below, which will further ensure the project’s compatibility with the historic district.

HPC Recommendations: HPC members presented some suggestions they felt would not only enhance the addition’s compatibility with the existing structure, but also better meet the homeowner’s intended goal for the addition. The homeowner and contractor were open to suggestions, and discussions were productive.

HPC feels a wall of windows facing Grove Road (as shown on the original sketch and on the revised sketch brought to this meeting) would not be compatible with the existing structure or the historic district. And, from a practical point of view, the number of large, fixed windows at the back of the addition, both on the main level and in the gable, would cause a similar solar gain that the homeowner had found troubling in the previous greenhouse/sunroom. It was suggested that the number of windows be reduced and that the windows be operable. It was

pointed out that the connection with nature that the homeowner desires can still be achieved. Indeed, although it may seem counter-intuitive, smaller framed views will often provide a more dramatic appreciation of the outdoors than a wall of windows.

After looking at HPC archive photos of the house, the homeowner and contractor decided to use a small window in the new gable facing Grove Road, similar to the existing window in the gable on the front elevation of the original house. This small window would replace the large triangular windows shown on an original sketch of the proposed addition.

HPC proposed that the eave line could continue over the windows facing Grove Road, as a means to emphasize the roof line, separate the mass of the first floor from the gable, and visually keep the addition tied to the earth.

It was also suggested that the homeowner consider taking the opportunity to replace the existing sliding door, which will become the only entrance from Grove Road, with a more practical, traditional inward-swing door. The addition of a small roof structure (“hood”) over the entrance door could not only provide protection from the elements when entering the house, but also add interest to the left side of the rear elevation adjacent to the new addition.

It was recommended that the original house (or other Grove houses of the same era) be used as a guide and inspiration when details are specified – for example, exterior window trim.

This review is considered preliminary, as the homeowner and contractor concluded that changes would be made to the sketches submitted. They are considering having an architect draw up the final plans. HPC looks forward to the next meeting with the homeowner and contractor.

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 Binder
Web site, Bill Saar
Planning Commission, John McClelland
Mayor John Compton
Town Clerk, Kathy Lehman