

HPC Review
for 400 Chestnut Avenue

HPC2021-5-18-03

Homeowner Lawren Lankford submitted 2 Applications for Public Ways and Property Permit dated May 12. HPC reviewed the projects at its regularly scheduled monthly meeting on Tuesday, May 18, held via Zoom. The homeowner did not participate in the review.

General Description:

1. Repave the existing gravel driveway with asphalt
2. Install a stamped concrete front entrance walk

Adequacy of the Documents Submitted:

Documents submitted included two Applications for Public Ways and Property, location drawings for both the driveway and the front entrance walk, and an explanatory letter addressed to Georgette Cole.

The documents for the front entrance walk were minimally sufficient for HPC’s review of the project. Neither the existing paver walk nor the proposed concrete entrance walk is clearly shown on the location drawing.

General Scope of Project:

1. The homeowner proposes to replace the existing 2,008 sq.ft. gravel driveway with a properly regraded asphalt driveway.
2. The homeowner wishes to replace the existing narrow concrete paver path (approx. 24” wide) that leads from the residence across Chestnut Avenue to the shoulder walkway of the Town’s open storm drain with a more permanent concrete entrance walk. Neither the design proposed to be stamped in the concrete, nor the color, has been specified. More importantly, the extent to which the existing paver path has been built on Town land (Chestnut Avenue) is unclear. The width and trajectory of the proposed concrete entrance walk has not been identified, and thus the extent to which a new entrance walk would encroach on Town land is also unclear.

Visibility from public ways:

The proposed changes to the driveway will be visible from Hickory Road and from the informal, unnamed asphalt-shoulder walkway that abuts the open storm drain running from Chestnut Road to Hickory Road.

The proposed stamped concrete entrance walk would be visible from Chestnut Avenue, Chestnut Road and from the above-referenced unnamed asphalt-shoulder walkway.

Contributing resource:

The house is a contributing resource to the Washington Grove Historic District. The December 2019 Architectural Survey prepared by Robinson & Associates, Inc., describes the home as follows:

400 Chestnut

1963-66 (MD assessment, 1964)

400 Chestnut Avenue consists of a standard ranch house with a one-story wing, which has an unusual triangular footprint. The original section of the house has a low pitched, side-gable roof, central door, tripartite picture window (composed of a fixed, central panel flanked by double-hung sash), and attached carport, which extends from the south façade. Although the house has a Chestnut Avenue address, the primary entrance appears to be located under the carport, which is accessed by a driveway from Hickory Road. Other than the fixed central panel of the picture window, windows in the original section of the house are six-over-six or eight-over-eight, double-hung, vinyl sash. The wing, which extends from the west façade, has a compound roof pierced with skylights and is faced with brick veneer. The façade of the wing that is angled toward the driveway features a flush door, two pairs of sliding-glass doors, and a six-over-six, double-hung sash window.

Nearby contributing resources:

Contributing resources in closest proximity to 400 Chestnut include 303, 306, 405, 407, 411 and 415 Chestnut Avenue; 301, 303 and 305 Washington Grove Lane; 11, 13 and 101 Center Street.

Compatibility with the historic district and/or existing structure:

Driveway - Gravel driveways are generally considered to be the most compatible option for the historic district. They are preferred for their informality, and from the viewpoint of sustainability. They retain some permeability--an advantage for the forested canopy in the Town’s residential areas--and because gravel slows stormwater runoff as compared to concrete or asphalt.

However, 400 Chestnut dates to an era when impermeable driveway surfaces became more common, so an asphalt surface for the driveway would not be considered incompatible with the house or the historic district.

HPC notes that currently, north of Center Street, there are six residences with driveways connecting to Hickory Road, and they are split equally (3-3) between asphalt and gravel surfaces.

Front Walk – The existing walk is approximately 24” wide and consists of concrete pavers set directly in the ground. As grass has grown between the pavers, the overall impression of the current path is of stepping stones, and is not overly intrusive to the Chestnut Avenue viewshed.

The homeowner has not specified the width of the proposed concrete entrance walk. HPC is concerned that the homeowner’s contractor may suggest a walk of a more “standard width”, namely 3’-4’, or greater. A concrete walk of that width would interrupt the Chestnut Avenue viewshed.

HPC Recommendations:

HPC recommends that the homeowner consider installing a front entrance walk no more than 3’ wide, using pavers of a natural material (for example, slate or bluestone), maintaining a small gap between pavers to allow for grass.

In this scenario, the entrance walk would continue to read as “stepping stones” and the open feeling of the avenue would not be violated. This would be less intrusive on the public way than a concrete path.

A gravel walk, using an aggregate similar in size as that used on Town walkways, would also be a highly compatible option for the homeowner to consider.

Should the Town decide to allow the homeowner to install a new entrance walk across Town land, HPC considers it imperative that that portion of the walk NOT be concrete, in order to mitigate the impact on Chestnut Avenue’s bucolic viewshed. In this case, HPC also strongly recommends that the Town require the homeowner to obtain a boundary survey before concrete is poured adjacent to Chestnut Avenue.

The 2020 National Register of Historic Places Registration Form recognizes the Chestnut Avenue as an “historic associated feature” and the Town should protect it and its viewshed as critical attributes of the historic district.

Emilia A. Styles
for the Historic Preservation Commission

Date: May 26, 2021

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

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.