TOWN OF COUPEVILLE
Special Design Review Board Minutes
Monday, April 9, 2007
9:00 a.m.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:
Acting Chairperson Larry Cort, Boardmembers Millie Fonda, Chuck Poust, Jill Usher, and Randy Williams were present. Chairperson Carol Thrailkill was excused.

STAFF PRESENT:
Town Planner, Larry Kwarsick; and Recording Secretary, Karen Fuller.

CALL TO ORDER
The meeting was called to order by Acting Chairperson Cort at 9:06 a.m.

NEW BUSINESS

DRB 07-04, Class II Historic (Vaughan) House Demolition, 501 NE 6th Street
Mr. Kwarsick explained that the owner has submitted an application to demolish the Vaughan House at 501 NW 6th Street. This home is designated as a Class II historic structure. Demolition of historic structures is guided by CTC 15.16. Accompanying the request for demolition is a building permit for a new single family home. The applicant is seeking authorization to demolish the home under a procedural exemption authorized under the underlined provisions CTC 15.16.050.D as stated below:

'The provisions of this chapter shall in no case be used to impose upon any property owner any peculiar or undue financial hardship, nor be used to prevent the removal or demolition of any structure which cannot be economically maintained or restored, giving due consideration to all potential uses to which the structure may reasonably be put following restoration by a private property owner.'

Note: The process of demolition was initiated by the applicant inadvertently. A computer scan of the parcel number did not identify the property as protected. Subsequently, it was discovered that the parcel number had changed from the one included on the list of protected structures. In addition, staff reviewed a hard copy of the list and mistakenly did not identify the property. At no fault of the owner, they prematurely initiated demolition. The Town discovered the error and issued a stop work order.

The statute is geared toward protecting the historical significance of a specific property. There are Class I, Class II and Class III structures. Class I structures have the highest protection standards. Of the 1,024 total square feet, 240 (the addition) is not protected. The Town asked for documentation in the form of an appraisal and construction cost estimates, providing detail of the cost to rehabilitate this home. Said documentation was provided by the applicant and subsequently provided to the DRB. Staff made contact with Ebey's Landing Historical Reserve, our State Office of Archeology and the local historical museum.

This home does not have a concrete foundation, and the structure itself suffers from decline and decay. A portion of the home is actually embedded in the ground. Structural support is

substantially decayed. It would be difficult to relocate or restore this home. Documentation provided by the applicant indicates a significant cost from $250K to $300K to restore the home. It would take a substantial financial investment to bring it up to code, and the subsequent market value does not match the investment.

The Town, the State Office of Archaeology, and the Ebey's Landing Historic Preservation request recordation of the property including existing conditions, both photographically and in narrative form. This was a small farm house. The property was short platted into 3 parcels.

Boardmember Williams asked whether the real estate appraisal includes the land too. Mr. Kwarsick responded that it is the land and the structure. The land is dominating the appraisal, not the structure. The structure is at the end of its useful life.

Boardmember Usher asked how much of the foundation is embedded. Mr. Kwarsick answered that it is a significant portion of the foundation that is embedded.

Boardmember Poust asked about the parcel numbers and the electronic numbering thereof. Mr. Kwarsick stated that the first problem was that he didn't realize the property had been short platted and that the parcel number had changed. Bottom line is: I looked at the list and I didn't see it. But it is on the list.

Rod Homan, the applicant's stepfather and contractor, explained to the board 'We're trying to build a new residence there. We have looked at the old situation and it is very costly to do any renovation. We want to rebuild there. We have worked with the city to go through the process. The foundation was jacked up in the past to try to get a beam under it. The wood was rotten.' Jeanette Omar explained that she was there when they tried to repair foundation.

Marjorie Homan spoke about trying to jack up the house. She said the contractor(s) told her 'the plate of your house is rotten and gone'.

PUBLIC COMMENTS
Mark Preiss, manager at Ebey's Landing Historic Reserve, acknowledged the difficulty in restoring historical properties and stated "As we think about our historic properties, they are connected in a very meaningful way. The trust board is committed to working with the DRB, Town of Coupeville and Island County. I don't think the argument is about whether it is a significant structure. It reflects the era in which it was built. Once we lose these structures, we don't have that authenticity any longer."

Buell Neidlinger agreed with Mark Preiss and was sad to see the home go. He felt it was a classic Coupeville beach cabin.

Margaret Storer commented regarding the demolition ordinance. Find the address, get in your car and go look at the place.

Mr. Kwarsick said the applicant is applying for an exemption: financial hardship provision. This is a common exemption within demolition ordinances. It's to give consideration to not forcing people to take an undue hardship on rehabilitation of a historic site.

Boardmember Cort added that the town's ordinance does not promote ignoring property until they "fall down", and demolition by neglect does not apply.

Boardmember Usher commented that it is frustrating trying to be proactive and reactive. This is where a lesson can be learned to get into a proactive mode and work with the existing owners, so we don't get to the point that feasibility is beyond practicality.

Board Action: A motion was made by Boardmember Poust, seconded by Boardmember Williams, to approve DRB 07-04, subject to staff Findings and Conditions as follows:

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

Staff proposes the following findings and conclusions with respect to DRB 07-04:

1. The Town received an application to demolish the Vaughan House at 501 NW 6th Street in connection with the construction of a new house.
2. The property is a contributing property within Ebey's and a Class II structure in accordance with CTC 15.16.030. A portion of the house, i.e. 23% of the structure that was constructed in the 1950s is not subject to this chapter and is not protected.
3. CTC 15.16 provides protection to historic properties commensurate with the degree of significance.
4. The owner/applicant have applied for an exemption under CTC 15.16.050 A and D which are intended to recognize that certain historic properties may, through no fault of the owner, deteriorated to a physical condition whereby the cost of rehabilitation to Secretary of the Interior standards significantly exceeds the expected appraised value of the structure after rehabilitation.
5. The owner/applicant have submitted a report detailing the current condition of the property. The report indicates that the structure suffers from substantial dry rot and insect damage.
6. The owner/applicant have submitted two estimates of the real cost of rehabilitating the structure.
7. The accuracy of the cost estimates for rehabilitation have been verified by:
   a. Comparison to prior rehabilitation costs for a similarly sized local project; and
   b. The Building Official who independently inspected the structure.
8. This estimate has been reviewed by the Building Official, who independently inspected the structure, for accuracy by a person or persons with professional familiarity with current market rate construction costs and the estimated rehabilitation cost has been found to be an accurate assessment.
9. The owner/applicant have submitted an appraisal report by a person licensed to perform such work that indicates the appraised value of the historically significant square footage of the existing building to be $15,313 and the appraised value of the post rehabilitated square footage of $142,244.

CONDITIONS

1. Existing conditions must be documented both photographically and in narrative form;
2. The narrative must include a record of the character-defining features associated with the structure and site. Historical photos should be included. Documentation to be presented to the Town for preservation.

Discussion

In the construction of the subsequent building, you might address and/or incorporate some of the features that the old house had. Perhaps salvage anything (trim, window) from the old house that could be used in the new home.

Boardmember Fonda commented: I've just always loved that house. This is the only remaining evidence on 6th Street that there was a farm there that was build in the 1920s. It is part of the fabric of our community, and I sympathize with the owners. It is sad to see it go. The reasoning for the variance is the reason that half of Coupeville could use. Selling price and appraisal are two different things. There is tax relief for restoring historic properties. It was a rental with no maintenance for 20 years. This demonstrates a failure of a great concept. I would like to suggest that we at least hold to the condition of the 180-day waiting period.

Acting Chairperson Cort stated that in going over the construction estimate, he found a couple of things. New windows are not a requirement for an historic structure. However, the economic equation still supports the case here. If there is a choice between rehabilitation and demolition, rehabilitation should be our choice. It's a close call for me, but I will support the motion.

Motion passed 4-1 (Fonda).

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 9:53 a.m.