

OXFORD HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

MINUTES

JANUARY 13, 2011

A special meeting of the Oxford Historic District Commission was called to order by the chairman, William Dial, on Thursday, January 13, 2011, at 7 p.m., in the meeting room of the Oxford Community Services Building.

Other commission members in attendance were Jennifer Stanley, James Deerin, Thomas Costigan, and Dorothy Fenwick.

The purpose of the meeting was to consult with Raymond Porter, property owner of 219 S. Morris Street, regarding a proposed addition to the rear of his property. Prior to the onset of any discussion, a letter from Mr. and Mrs. C. Read Madary, next door neighbors of the Porters at 217 S. Morris Street, was read aloud by the chairman, Mr. Dial, which expressed their concerns as to what Mr. and Mrs. Porter were proposing to do on their property. A motion was made by Mrs. Fenwick to enter the Madary's letter into these minutes and seconded by Mrs. Stanley. The motion was carried and, as such, the Madary's letter has been entered with these minutes and labeled as Attachment "A".

Mr. Porter stated that since his last meeting with the commission he had put together a report in order to address the commission's concerns at their January 3, 2011 consultation with him. The commission, at that time, had discussed creating an "L" footprint, a roof revision, doing something about the long, unbroken exterior side wall, as well as addressing concerns about the linear nature of the house and the bookend style Mr. Porter had last presented which had shown a higher front, a lower middle, and a higher rear section of house. Since that past meeting, Mr. Porter explained that he had tried to show, through photographic exhibits around town, where there are instances of these bookend situations as well as long faces along the sides of houses and houses built on property lines. He noted that he just wanted to show that what he and his wife were proposing was consistent with other architecture in the Town of Oxford. Mr. Porter also noted that he had tried to put together some illustrations to represent the perspective from the public right of way that the commission had struggled with at their last meeting. He noted that his purpose for having this special meeting with the historic commission this night was for consultation to work things out so that he could submit approvable plans for the commission's February meeting.

Chairman William Dial referred to Section 9.00.5(a) which states, in part, that it is the intent of that section to grant the Historic District Commission the tools to "preserve the look and feel of the historic district of the Town of Oxford, and to maintain to the extent possible the traditional scale and bulk relationship among structures located therein.." With that in mind, Mr. Dial stated it was the responsibility of the historic commission to consider such things as bulk and scale in the historic district. Mr. Porter responded that the photos he presented to the commission were to show them that what he was proposing was consistent with what is in town. Mr. Dial responded that the neighbor's rights and interests are also the responsibility of the commission which goes along with bulk and scale. He added that the commission was very

concerned about the impact of houses on their neighbors and that would include setbacks, proximity to property lines, and appearance. Mr. Porter responded by citing Sections 31.10 to 31.12 of the Oxford Zoning Ordinance which refers to reviews by the historic commission and that they should be based on the best interests of the majority of the persons in the community. Mr. Dial replied that the commission was talking about streetscape and that streetscape involves the neighbors. The streetscape is the commission's concern and the neighbors have the right to legitimately express their concerns with regards to streetscape.

Mr. Deerin stated that some of the structures that Mr. Porter had listed and showed pictures of were probably additions that were done somewhat recently. However, the commission was not bound by precedence of prior actions by past historic commission members that were approved or disapproved. Mr. Porter replied that he understood that but he wanted to show the commission what existed today and that what he was proposing would still fit into the town. Mrs. Fenwick pointed out that there was an issue regarding the existing proximity of Mr. Porter's house to the sideyard setback and that what he was proposing would continue along that line. She asked if Mr. Porter had thought about keeping the main part of the existing house and adding on an "L" shape to it. Mr. Porter replied that he and his wife had thought about that and that his new concept plan reduced the length of the building by 4' and would come out into the yard more. He added that adding an "L" addition would be counter to the intent of historic houses that were built right up to the property line and that he wanted to maintain a continuous side yard. Mrs. Stanley responded that was not a good argument because houses weren't built as big in the past as what Mr. Porter was proposing. She added that most of the additions Mr. Porter referred to in his photos were additions that had been built in the past 30 years. She noted that one thing she had learned was that these big additions were not good practice as they takes away from the neighbor's property. Mrs. Stanley noted that traditionally additions were all stepped down and that the idea of drawing straight back wasn't historically true of architecture in Oxford. Mr. Porter responded that what he was saying is that houses were built along property lines in a linear fashion and to do anything other than that would not make sense with intent towards the original building. Furthermore, the reason for the big addition on the back was to try to save the middle portion of the house and that what he was proposing was modest and within the "50% growth spurt which is a requirements of planning and zoning." He added that what he was proposing was nothing more or less than what other houses in Oxford have and to say it wouldn't fit into the architecture of the town he thought was wrong. Mrs. Stanley added that when one looses the step down feature the neighbors are very much affected. Mr. Porter asked if that was a streetscape concern of the commission. Chairman Dial responded that it was a concern to the commission to the extent of the section that he had previously quoted to Mr. Porter. He added that the commission was concerned about the bulk of Mr. Porter's structure, among other things, and the solid wall addition he was proposing to build. Mrs. Fenwick added that her major concern was that what was being proposed would be right on the property line and the issues raised in the Madary's letter. Mr. Dial stated that Mr. Porter had indicated in his presentation that there were some compromises

he had made from what he had previously shown the commission. Mr. Porter responded that he had reduced the length by 4', done an "L", and opened up into the yard almost 5'.

Chairman Dial asked Mr. and Mrs. Madary, who were in the audience, if they were concerned about the property line and noted that was an issue they would have to bring up to Planning and Zoning. Mr. Madary responded that they had had two surveys done and that they believed the property line between them and the Porters goes back at an angle so that if the Porter's house was extended any great length it would actually cross the property line and that was their concern.

Mr. Porter noted that he had made some concessions and had tried to meet the historic commission in the middle. He added that he had reduced the size of his addition with respect to the long north face but that he didn't want to go right out into the yard with the addition and basically tear up the back yard.

Mr. Deerin stated that he still struggled with what looked like a huge caboose added on to the end of the Porter's house and that it did not fit Mr. Porter's house. He added that the commission was not addressing the question of whether or not there may be other houses in Oxford that have this similar sort of thing and that the commission was strictly dealing with his house. Mr. Deerin felt it was too big and too obvious and that the mass distorted the historic structure of this house. He added that the configuration, even with the change Mr. Porter had made, did not solve the problem. Chairman Dial again stated to Mr. Porter that the mass is what everyone was struggling with and that a solution needed to be found otherwise Mr. Porter would have to go before the Board of Appeals. He added that the commission would not be voting on anything tonight as this was a consultation.

Mr. Porter noted that he felt like he should have put in an application to tear off the back of his house and he now felt like that by keeping the middle section they were stuck. Chairman Dial responded that he thought there was still room for the commission and Mr. Porter to arrive at something that is attractive and complimentary to the community that would meet the streetscape.

Jayne Bourke, Mr. and Mrs. Porter's neighbor at 221 S. Morris Street, spoke stating there were other issues besides height and bulk. She stated that the presumption is that one sees these views from the various sides and it relies a lot on existing trees. As a landscape designer she noted trees are not permanent structures. She felt the addition would be "a thumb in the ground" and that it concerned her that none of what had come into discussion included how the addition would look from her side of the street. She ended by stating that from an aesthetic point of view the addition would be terrible. Richard Steeg, Ms. Bouke's husband, added that his concern was the scale and that there had to be some willingness by the Porters to compromise. He also understood that the Porters were thinking of putting a driveway in on the south side of their property and that too raised his concern. Mr. Madary spoke again stating

that he and his wife had provided their list of concerns. He added that they had had a spirit of cooperation with their new neighbors and welcomed them to Oxford but were given a lack of courtesy, in his opinion. He ended by stating he knew how he and his wife had received no answers to the questions their letter had posed.

Chairman Dial ended the meeting by stating he wished he could say there were solutions, but they don't have any yet. He added the commission would continue to work with Mr. Porter and that if he had for consideration some new ideas they would hold a special meeting for him.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Willoughby
Assistant Clerk