

**WETHERSFIELD HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION  
PUBLIC HEARING  
JANUARY 13, 2004**

The Wethersfield Historic District Commission held a public meeting on January 13, 2004 at 7:30 p.m. in the Council Conference Room of the Town Hall, 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, Connecticut.

Members present:

Billye Logan, Chairperson  
Douglas Ovian, Vice Chairperson  
Jennifer Wolf, Clerk  
Vacek Miglus  
Robert A. Garrey  
John Toomey  
Eric Hart  
Paul Courchaine

Also Present:

Robert Cook, Wethersfield Historic District Coordinator

Chairperson Logan called the hearing to order at 7:30 pm and Clerk Wolf, read the Legal Notice as it appeared in the Hartford Courant on January 2, 2004

**APPLICATION NO. 3161- 04.** Town of Wethersfield seeking to convert the Francis Stillman School into the Board of Education offices at 127 Hartford Avenue.

Mr. Jeff Bianco, historic architect, and Mr. David Drake, School Projects Building Committee appeared before the Commission and distributed the proposed plans to the Commissioners. Mr. Bianco then outlined the major changes that were being proposed to the exterior of the Stillman School as it was converted into the Board of Education offices. He said that essentially the facade of the three story brick building was to be restored but there would be a couple of changes. The primary entrance would no longer be the front or eastern side of the building but would now be the western or rear side of the building, facing the parking area. The former rear entrances would be further developed and made handicapped accessible. Access would still be possible through the front for pedestrian traffic. The parking area would be made more functional and hopefully more aesthetically pleasing. Currently there is blacktop right up to the building, but they would add a sidewalk system and the parking area would move approximately 20' toward the tennis courts. Mr. Bianco explained that after meeting with various Town agencies in particular the Parks and Recreation Department, they had agreed to include a fence at the edge of the parking area and a 10' area of stone dust prior to the fence on the playing field side in order to warn potential players that they were off the grass area and slow them down before hitting the parking/fence area. Although the dumpsters would be enclosed with an attractive a steel fence, this boundary fence would be a black chain link in order to keep down costs. Although it was noted that there was no fence in place now, it was agreed that with the proposed development there would be additional traffic and/or parked cars that might prove a danger to players on the playing fields. The Building Committee was hoping not to be financially responsible for the fence.

Mr. Bianco then continued with the architectural details. He said that there were partial brick treads on the front stairs which they proposed to replace with granite which would match the granite top step which would be extended out one additional step for safety.

Mr. Drake explained that the granite was actually an alternate material, because of its extreme expense. They were actually proposing that the stair tops be replaced with a pre-cast material.

Commissioner Courchaine asked what the original material had been. He was told by Mr. Drake that it might have been brownstone.

Commissioner Courchaine ventured that it had probably been brownstone because that would have been locally available. Mr. Bianco said that brownstone would not be an option now for the treads because of its lack of durability.

Mr. Bianco continued his presentation and said that the entire masonry facade would be repointed. He added that although they don't have to do structural repairs, they would need to make some repairs with mortar patch to some of the flat stone elements. The slate roof will remain and be restored as needed. The chimney will be rebuilt.

Commissioner Miglus asked about the windows. Mr. Bianco said that the existing windows would be removed and replaced with aluminum windows which will match the same profile as the existing with brick molding. The lower 4/4 windows would have simulated divided lights.

Commissioner Ovian mentioned that there had been some question as to the pattern of the original windows. Mr. Bianco said that they had been unable to find any older photographs which showed any window patterns but those that were currently in place. These windows were at least 50 years old and so they were going to match their light pattern of 1/1.

Commissioner Logan asked what color the windows would be. Mr. Bianco said that they were willing to accept the color as a condition. He said that they were available in all the traditional colors and he would suggest maybe green or red or black.

Mr. Bianco said that the current mortar color was very white which was popular in the 1920's, and he preferred to tone down the color of the brick mortar when they repointed and go with a redder color by using a redder aggregate in order to bring out the redness of the bricks more.

The west side of the building currently has a set of single doors those would be replaced in order to make them handicap accessible. There is currently concrete base exposed at the rear of the building because of the difference in grade. The plans showed a planter made of uniblocks which would introduce a new material, but Mr. Bianco was suggesting that a berm be created there at a slight curve which would work as well.

There would be 2 street lamps at the entrance and 2 recessed lamps.

Commissioner Ovian asked if the steel railings would be powder coated. Mr. Bianco said that they had proposed painting the railings but could suggest the powder coated railings as an option.

Commissioner Logan asked if any thought had been given to less breakable material for the windows that faced the playing fields because they were broken frequently. Mr. Bianco said that the building would be occupied now which might alleviate the problem, but they could certainly look into tempered glass.

Commissioner Logan said that the breakage came from the tennis balls and hockey balls that are used. Mr. Drake suggested using grates on the windows on that side.

It was noted that although the north and south elevations were identical, the south side was missing from the plans.

Mr. Bianco said that the transformer located beside the dumpsters was the only piece of exposed mechanical equipment. It would be contained by a low concrete wall and would be screened additionally by bushes. The dumpster would be enclosed within a fence with gates.

The discussion then returned to the boundary fence. Mr. Bianco felt that the fence was a reasonable compromise; if it meant that the building could be utilized and restored. It was suggested that if it were the same imitation wrought iron style as the fence at Mikey's Place, then it might be more attractive. The additional cost for this type of fence was not a welcome consideration.

Clerk Wolf read a letter from Susan Smith, 146 Hartford Avenue dated January 10, 2004 which said that she was proud of the Town for planning to use an existing piece of beautiful property instead of using up more of the quickly

vanishing free space for the construction of a new building, or the destruction of a handsome piece of architecture such as the Stillman School. She ended by saying that she is in favor of this project.

There being no one else who wished to speak in favor or against this application, this portion of the hearing was declared closed.

**APPLICATION NO. 3162-04.** RMA Home Services seeking to install 6 (six) vinyl replacement windows at 18 Kenwood Road.

Mr. John Stoppelworth, contractor representing the applicant and homeowner Timothy Howe, stepped forward and presented manufacture specification sheets of the type of vinyl window with simulated divided lights they hoped to replace the wooden true divided light windows currently in the house with. The grids would have a sculpted grid sandwiched between the glass. He also presented a photograph showing the front of the home as it currently exists.

Commissioner Ovian asked if the ultimate goal was to replace all of the windows. Because if it was, then perhaps the application could be amended to reflect this and then when they were ready to replace the other windows they would not have to submit another application. Mr. Howe answered that it was their intention to replace the other windows next year.

Mr. Cook mentioned that because there are only 6 windows visible the application may not need to be amended at all.

Commissioner Ovian said that the Commission typically tries to replicate the look of the existing and with this type of interior grid the shadow line is missing so that exteriorly applied grids are generally preferred.

Mr. Stoppelworth said that wooden removable grids need to be painted and are not very durable and that when they are removed for cleaning they often get broken and then one ends up with windows that don't match. He said that is why the grids are now placed on the interior of the glass. He suggested that the product he was promoting would stay pristine forever.

Commissioner Ovian said that plastic grids that are glued permanently to the exterior are typically looked on with favor by the Commission. Mr. Stoppelworth thought that that would defeat the purpose of ease of cleaning and maintenance.

Mr. Howe said that he and his wife had always lived in historic districts and they were not looking to change the look of the home, but that the existing windows were drafty and not energy efficient as their heating bills reflected. They were looking to address this problem as quickly as possible.

Mr. Cook mentioned that the Howes had been interested in looking through the Historic District Handbook and seemed keen to preserve their home.

There being no one else who wished to speak in favor or against this application, this portion of the hearing was declared closed.

**APPLICATION NO. 3163-04.** Great Meadows Conservation Trust seeking to install a sign on property at the SE corner of Middletown Avenue and Maple Street.

Mr. Jim Woodward, President of the Great Meadow Conservation Trust, and Mr. Larry Lyndon, Land Management Chairman for the Great Meadow Conservation Trust stepped forward and gave a brief history of the ownership of the Meadows area. He explained that since they had been awarded a grant from the DEP for the property they were required to put up a sign indicating the Trust ownership and that the land is open to the public. Mr. Woodward explained that this was a little like putting the cart before the horse. Although they had dreams and plans to build paths and perhaps additional bridges to unite the paths, they didn't have a lot to offer the public at this time.

Commissioner Ovian asked if there was a parking area for the public. Mr. Woodward said that right now there was not an official parking lot but that the Town would be doing a Beaver Brook streambed improvement project, which had evolved out of the Spring Street, Middletown Avenue realignment project. Apparently the culvert was not big enough

to handle the amount of water that sometimes comes through there.

Mr. Lyndon explained that the Town would be opening up the berm to enlarge the culvert and when they did they would also be removing some large pieces of trash like a refrigerator and an old Coke machine. A staging area would be constructed for the heavy equipment which would be left and the Trust would be able to use this as a parking area.

The discussion then turned to where the sign would be located although they were not sure of the exact location of the Town staging area. It was determined that there was no better access area except the Middletown Avenue entrance, and this would be the best place to locate the sign. Although the sign font shown would not be readable by vehicle traffic it would satisfy the legal requirements and was mainly designed as a sign for pedestrians.

Commissioner Miglus then suggested that the Commission could approve the location of the sign placement on the SW corner of the property along Middletown Avenue and that this would probably allow the applicant enough leeway for a proper placement.

There being no one else who wished to speak in favor or against this application, this portion of the hearing was declared closed.

There being no other business to come before the Commission, the public hearing was declared closed.

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Commissioner Ovian left at this time.

**APPLICATION NO. 3161- 04.** Town of Wethersfield seeking to convert the Francis Stillman School into the Board of Education offices at 127 Hartford Avenue.

Upon motion by Commissioner Miglus, seconded by Commissioner Garrey and a poll of the Commission it was voted to APPROVE the subject application with the following stipulations;

1. The front stairs shall be granite.
2. There shall be no chain link fence installed upon the border of the property.

**INFORMAL DISCUSSION**

The Commissioners continued their discussion of the proposed chain link fence. They agreed that the fence was not suggested to protect cars from errant balls and it was felt that the 10' stone dust boundary should be an adequate reminder to children running across the field that the grass area has ended and stop them or at least slow them down before entering into the parking lot. It was noted that schools do not traditionally shield the playground from the school as would be the case here by putting up a fence as well as planting trees to separate the playing fields from the school. It was suggested that perhaps the Parks and Recreation Department could come forward with an application for a fence if they felt it was necessary.

Aye: Miglus, Logan, Wolf, Garrey, Toomey

Abst: Courchaine, Hart

**APPLICATION NO. 3162-04.** RMA Home Services seeking to install 6 (six) vinyl replacement windows at 18 Kenwood Road.

Upon motion by Commissioner Miglus, seconded by Commissioner Wolf and a poll of the Commission it was voted to TABLE the subject application.

The Commissioners felt that the proposed window grids did not adequately replicate the existing windows grids and time should be allowed for the homeowner to explore other more appropriate options.

Aye: Logan, Miglus, Wolf, Garrey, Hart,

Abst: Courchaine, Toomey

**APPLICATION NO. 3163-04.** Great Meadows Conservation Trust seeking to install a sign on property at the SE corner of Middletown Avenue and Maple Street.

Upon motion by Commissioner Miglus, seconded by Commissioner Garrey and a poll of the Commission it was voted to APPROVE the subject application with the following stipulation:

1. The sign to be installed at the SW corner of the property along Middletown Avenue.

Aye: Logan, Miglus, Wolf, Garrey, Courchaine

Abst: Hart, Toomey

**APPLICATION NO. 3158-03.** RMA Home Services seeking to install vinyl siding at 323 Garden Street.

Clerk Wolf read a letter from the homeowner requesting that the application be withdrawn.

Mr. Cook explained that the homeowner had called him and decided to withdraw the withdrawal, and also said that the contractor would be appearing to present another product for Commission consideration. Mr. Cook told the applicant that they would have to submit another application for the windows that had been installed without permit or approval. The current application remained Tabled.

#### **APPROVAL OF [MINUTES OF: December 9, 2003](#)**

Upon Motion by Commissioner Garrey, seconded by Commissioner Hart, and a poll of the Commission, it was voted that the above minutes BE APPROVED as submitted.

Aye: Logan, Wolf, Garrey, Miglus, Hart

Abst: Toomey, Courchaine

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Commissioner Courchaine related that he thought that the voting procedure of having the alternative members alternate their voting was ridiculous. Chairperson Logan explained that she had been told by Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk that this was the proper method. Mr. Cook agreed that this was also the way it was explained in *Roberts Rules*.

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted

TOWN OF WETHERSFIELD  
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Jennifer Wolf  
Clerk