



SOUTH KINGSTOWN PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Shepherd's Run – Major Land Development

Historic District Commission Review Memo

September 10, 2020

Project:	Shepherd's Run - Major Land Development		
Address:	4780A Tower Hill Road		
Plat:	50-4	Lot:	12
Parcel Size:	35.69 acres	Zoning District:	R-80

Property Characteristics & Purpose of Review

The subject property is located east of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry Highway (Route 1) northeast of the Oliver Stedman Government Center and in between The Prout School and the John H. Chafee Wildlife Refuge. The parcel was originally part of a 200+ acre residential estate that included The Prout School campus, the Government Center, and a portion of the John H. Chafee Wildlife Refuge. However, since the early 1960's the property has been exclusively used for religious institutional uses.

The property is presently before the South Kingstown Planning Board for proposed redevelopment as a small (33 room) boutique hotel, vineyard and outdoor event venue. The project has received Conceptual Master Plan approval from the Planning Board as well as an advisory recommendation to the Town Council to approve amendments to the Town's Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance to facilitate the proposed change in use. At the time of Conceptual Master Plan approval, the Planning Board forwarded the application to the Historic District Commission (HDC) for advisory review and comment regarding the historic nature of the property and input on the project's adaptive reuse plan.

Historic Overview

The subject property has a rich history. The original 200-plus acre estate was first developed in or about 1933 when Rush Sturges and his wife, Elizabeth Hazard Sturges, hire noted Philadelphia architect Thomas Pym Cope to design a home. Mr. Cope was likely recruited to design the home based on his own personal ties to the Hazard family after his sister Anne married Thomas Pierrepont Hazard. Mr. Cope's design of the Sturges house and his family ties to the area later led to his selection to design the reconstruction of the Dunes Club after the 1938 Hurricane as well as various renovations and additions to Hazard-family residences throughout town.

The formal gardens for the Sturges residence were designed by famed Landscape Architect, Beatrix Farrand. Ms. Farrand was a founding member (and only woman) of the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1899, and is credited with designing gardens at the White House, the New York Botanical Gardens, college campuses including Princeton and Yale, as well as numerous private estates like the Sturges Residence.

In 1959, a portion of the Shepherd's Run estate was sold to a Catholic religious order, the Sisters of the Cross and Passion, which built two dormitory buildings and a chapel and opened The Prout School in 1966. The Sisters used the Sturges residence as administrative offices for the school. The Sisters later transferred The Prout School to the Catholic Archdiocese of Providence. The parcel containing

the Sturges residence is presently owned by the Legion of Christ, Inc., which ran a boarding school at the location. The property has been vacant since the boarding school closed in 2012.

HDC Review

The HDC reviewed the project plans at its virtual meeting on Thursday, September 10, 2020. In attendance were the project's principle representative, Ryan Schoen, and its attorney, James Callahan. In addition to the project plans and adaptive reuse proposal submitted to the Planning Board, the HDC also reviewed historic background information provided by Vice-Chair Youngken, including archival photographs from the Library of Congress, background information on the architect, Thomas Pym Cope, from a National Historic Register Application for the nearby Dunes Club in Narragansett, and a documentary video on Beatrix Farrand, the Landscape Architect responsible for designing the gardens.

Overall, the members of the HDC agreed that the proposal for adaptive reuse presented an exciting project for a property that is a rare resource with both architectural and historic significance. One member noted that the historic Sturges residence was only used as a private residence for about 25 years after it was built in 1933, and that the applicant's proposal to adaptively reuse the property as a commercial hotel is actually a reasonable extension of the property's 60-year history of institutional uses. The members of the HDC offered a variety of comments and suggestions for preserving the historic character of the property as the project proceeds:

- Exterior repairs should be made "in-kind" with a focus on maintaining details. The loss of small details adds up when accurate replacement items or materials cannot be sourced. Accordingly, the developer is advised to maintain and preserve original details wherever possible and investigate the availability of replacement materials before discarding seemingly insignificant items.
- During site work the developer should be vigilant about identifying and preserving mature trees and plantings outside the formal gardens. When the property was originally developed in the 1930's much of the land that is now overgrown field was treed, it is not clear whether this was natural growth or landscaped. In addition, Beatrix Farrand's landscape design work may not be restricted to the formal gardens; she was known to include less formal landscaping elements throughout estates that she designed. The developer should be vigilant for such features and seek to preserve them as well as the formal gardens. In general, the conceptual site plans appear to be sensitive to the landscape architecture on site; however, efforts should be made to preserve mature plantings where possible and, where landscaping or trees are removed, efforts should be made to replace them in-kind where practicable.
- The developer is advised to consider retaining a historic preservation consultant to work with the project architect if the architect did not have one on-staff.
- The property includes a number of fieldstone farm walls, particularly along the entrance-way between Prout and the Government Center. Efforts should be made to preserve and restore these walls. Where walls must be moved, the stones should be reused for repairs or the walls should be relocated.
- Where possible the developer should consider improvements to the exterior fascia of the institutional buildings added in the late 1950's; e.g. mimicking the exterior elements of the residence or using other complimentary, period-correct exterior elements. Inspiration might be sought in other Thomas Pym Cope designs. The developer indicated that the idea of using climbing ivy or other "green wall" elements was under consideration; the HDC supported this concept.

- The “bungalows” proposed for Phase III of the development were viewed with some skepticism as being out-of-sync with a historic re-development project. Care should be taken in terms of the architecture of the bungalows and landscaping so as not to create visual elements that distract from the historic setting around the Sturges residence and gardens.
- The developer was advised to look into the property’s potential eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and the pros & cons of register listing, including but not limited to state and federal tax incentives. Given its pedigree, the Sturges residence is clearly a worthy candidate for listing in the Register; however, some of the other structures, particularly the chapel, may have separate architectural merit for consideration. It was noted that applying for listing on the Register would require the developer to retain a historic consultant.
- The property has many historically important South County connections; e.g. the Dunes Club and the Hazard Family that should be leveraged in promoting the property.
- The HDC supports the developer’s proposal to remove the bridge/walkway on the east side of the structure to restore the original viewscape over the Narrow River from the south wing of the Sturges residence.
- The HDC notes that the intensity of the various proposed uses has been appropriately distributed among the various structures. Locating the more intense uses in the newer, institutional buildings allows the architecture of the Sturges residence to be appreciated without stressing it with heavy use.
- When working with the engineering consultants on the mechanical side of the redevelopment, the developer should take care to avoid overly sealing the historic buildings, which can damage original materials. The original structure needs to be allowed to “breathe.”