

Lawrence Township Historic Preservation Committee
Regular Meeting
Monday, November 9, 2015

Present: Edward McDonald, Chairperson
Wolfgang Hu
Alfredo Trevino
Douglas Sargent
Joseph Como

Absent: Mark DiGiacomo
Michael Lavanga
Leona Maffei
John Deibel
Billy O'Neal

Also Present: Brenda Kraemer, Assistant Municipal Engineer
David Rosko, Township Attorney
Susan Snook, Recording Secretary

Applications:

3641 Lawrenceville Road (Care One, LLC); Lawrenceville and Province Line Road; Tax Map Page 66.02, Block 6601, Lot 2

Lori Grifa of Archer and Greiner represented the property owner of Care One, LLC., handed out colored photocopies of photographs that are part of the architectural record.

Ms. Grifa raised with the Chair an issue of recusal of a member of this commission, not sure if present or not present, and confirmed by Chairperson McDonald she was not present and the Council Liaison also has a conflict and it was confirmed that he was not present at the meeting.

Matthew B. Jarmel of Jarmel Kizel Architects and Engineers, Inc. prepared the expert report. Mr. Jarmel gave his background, credentials and projects he worked on or is currently working on and does not offer that he is an expert in historic preservation in this testimony, not tonight or any other places he has testified. Mr. Jarmel testified he is qualified as an expert with the practice of architecture, land use and zoning and all aspects of building design and restoration (structures and mechanical). Mr. Jarmel was retained by the owner which is known as Care One, LLC in order to require a demolition permit for this facility. Mr. Jarmel visited the site on July 25, 2014 and was accompanied by Paul Signet, VP of Environmental Services and Facility Management for Care One; Angelo Giacchi, President of Geng Sing Construction. Mr. Jarmel took photographs that were handed out to the Board members at the beginning of the presentation, as well as a written report and distributed to the Board members.

The site is identified as Block 6601, Lot 2 and according to the tax map it is 7.38 acres in area. There were two structures present on the property, defined as a single family home which was toured by himself and the team and a side building or garage which was not toured. The site is overgrown and has not been taken care of in which appears to be years and no evidence of any pavements or walkways, presumably there were there but they deteriorated and have been overcome by growth over the years. There is no safe access on or off of the property from the roadway because there are no real curb cuts or driveways. The utilities appeared to be shut off and no evidence there was any gas, electric or water service in the building. The exterior finish of the building was toured and photographs were taken of the facade. The building's main entrance is on the south side. The exterior finishes of the building consist of wood siding; ornamental trim and all of the wood is in need of re-finishing, repair or replacement which has visible signs of rotting. The roof plank up and down of the façade of the building, shingles and trim, refer to photographs 65, 66, 67, 69, 70 show the general condition of the exterior of the building, very poor. There are many broken windows, siding is rotting away, the chimney is masonry and made of brick and is in poor condition and one, see photograph 65, there is a large

crack or fissure through the chimney, see photographs 67 & 68, which show a metal strap strapped around the chimney basically holding it together. The chimney is in danger of collapsing or breaking away. The front of the stairs are rotted and in very poor condition and in state of collapse.

The tour continued into the inside and started in the basement to each level to each room within the building. The main floors in the building are prominently wood and are in fair condition and could be cleaned up, except in areas where there are strong structural concerns. These areas have a large piece of plywood covering a hole in the floor, see photograph 6 – 9. The walls and ceilings are all made out of plaster and painted. The paint is peeling all throughout the facility and all of the paint was not tested. Mr. Jarmel stated he is not an environmental expert, but the way it is peeling he believes it is lead paint and because of the age of the building. The paint would have to be abated from the house before it was demolished or anything else done to the house. There is mold throughout the house, significant amount is seen on the upper floors, which was assumed as a result of the fact that the roof does not hold water, it leaks into the building and flows into the building. There is black mold and fungus that Mr. Jarmel does not understand what they are, see photographs 12, 21, 22. There is evidence that birds are nesting in the building, feathers throughout, a dead turkey vulture in one of the bedrooms.

There is fire damage to the building at the main entry which faces Lawrenceville Road and is blocked off. There was an electrical fire in the basement, based on news articles he read, photographs 5 & 41. The flooring in that area and the structural system is in danger of collapsing; the only thing that the girders and beams hold up is themselves, which means they can only carry their own weight. Many of the plumbing fixtures and associated piping has been removed from the home. The dumb waiter shaft is exposed so there are no doors on it; there are rat/rodents throughout the building, see photographs 17 & 18; the most concerning area is the basement. The basement foundation walls are constructed out of stone, which is not unusual for the time, the walls seemed to be fairly secure, but there was a lot of evidence of water infiltration, see photographs 27 – 29. Portions of the basement had concrete or broken concrete floors, but most of the basement had dirt floor, there is fungus growing on the floor and pieces of the wood structure that had fallen on the floor, see photographs 35 and 36. Mr. Jarmel stated he is an architect and not an environmental consultant and had never seen any fungus like this before. The wood framing in the basement is exposed and visible and he has significant concerns about the wood framing structure integrity, especially as it supports the first floor.

In the central portion of the home, there was fungus growing and eating away at the wood, many of the wood members are significantly damaged and is in danger of collapse as a result of either fire or insect infestation, with evidence of severe termite damage on one side of the house in the joists and girders and woods posts supporting the same area, see photographs 30 – 32.

Although the building has somewhat of a quaint architectural style but unfortunately in his opinion, in a state of disrepair and that it would take a significant amount of money that far exceeds the value of the home or the land to restore it to anything that was functional.

Mr. Jarmel stated it is definitely not stable for occupancy and concerned and advised the client that they should do anything they could to secure the facility and sort of envisioned kids getting in to have a party or something and anyone running through could be seriously hurt or maybe severely injured. He noticed on the web that people had actually trespassed into the home and taken photographs of it and some of the photographs shows some of the nice features that aren't terrible, but if you look at Jarmel photographs, they depict the poor state of the house and if you are not skilled at walking through a structure like this in this state of disrepair could be seriously injured. Mr. Jarmel state the house is in a structural failure but it is failing and is slowly coming down and he stated the building should be demolished.

Mr. Trevino asked Mr. Jarmel if he was certified as a structural engineer to actually determine that the house is structurally not sound, professionally as an engineer. Mr. Trevino wanted to know if any one did an independent analysis, a structural engineer, that the house is sound. Mr. Jarmel stated a structural engineer from his team was not in it and Mr. Trevino wanted to know why not. Mr. Jarmel stated he is qualified and designs structures to buildings every day and licensed by the State of New Jersey. Mr. Trevino stated you are

just trained to do one thing, to look at the structure, not at the architectural elements, not at the mold, just to look to see if the structure is structurally sound. Mr. Jarmel stated the architectural engineer in his firm looked at the pictures and at the fire. Mr. Trevino stated he was not physically there and looked at the photographs. Mr. Trevino stated that he was hired to just look at the aspects on reasons to tear down the house and if he was hired to restore the house, he would not be qualified to do that. Mr. Jarmel stated he would be qualified and he could definitely design and repair the house, if it was repairable. The repairs would far exceed the house and would probably have to take down 95% of it to fix it and rebuild it.

Mr. Trevino stated the pictures were just taken to show all of the bad areas. Chairperson McDonald asked if there were ways to repairs, beams that are charred and need repair. Mr. Jarmel stated anything could be done with money. The money that it would take to repair this house and the labor it would take would far exceeds the value. Chairperson McDonald asked if he did estimates; Mr. Jarmel stated just visually looking at it that it is in bad shape.

Mr. Trevino stated the house is overgrown and that is actually by neglect of the owner basically they did not maintain it, did not up keep it, did not secure it, did not weather proof it. Ms. Grifa stated that is not a question that is a statement. Care One has owned this property for at least 15 years to her knowledge and never received a citation from any one from in the Town from any department; never received a concerned phone call; never received any angry phone call, never received a mailing indicating to the owner that the Town was dissatisfied with the manner in which it was maintained. The fact is on the advice of her law firm it was fenced a year ago and they relied on the ordinance that enabled them to fence that property without coming before this Commission because we believed it was in such disrepair and it was a significant emergency and threat to public safety. They did not receive an objection that they didn't use a weed wacker. Mr. Trevino stated he was making a statement that it hasn't been maintained. Ms. Grifa stated the pictures speak for themselves. Mr. Trevino stated again it has not been maintained.

Chairperson McDonald asked if the foundation is in good shape. Mr. Jarmel stated it is stone foundation and is stone and mortar and there are partial slabs and water does flow through it in some areas. Mr. Trevino asked if any pictures were taken of the attic and the structure on the roof rafters. Mr. Jarmel stated no.

Mr. Sargent asked if anyone received access to the attic space and the reply was no. Mr. Sargent stated that Care One or the previous owner did some work on the roof quite a while ago to maintain it. Ms. Grifa stated she could not speak to whether it was Care One or the previous owner and Mr. Sargent stated he did not know the ownership of it, and Ms. Grifa could not say who her client purchased the property from and could not say if it was. She did not know if it was more than 15 years ago or 20 years because she does not know who her client purchased the property from so it preserved the integrity of the roof for a period of time and that roof may be reasonable intact and wonder how all the water is getting in and the birds are getting in. Mr. Sargent asked if there were any efforts to maintain the place within the last 15 years. Mr. Grifa stated it is boarded up and her understanding there was a trespass there and the fire was set, inadvertently by someone who was trying to keep warm. Mr. Sargent stated no maintenance was being done by the current owner and the reply was no additional maintenance was done there.

Mr. Grifa stated she cannot say what it looked like when they purchased it. She does not have a relationship with the property owner and she can only have an observation she has no knowledge as to the course of degradation if there has been such a course or whether it had been like this at the time of purchase.

Chairperson McDonald questioned the width of the fire damage, looking at the pictures 42 – 44. Mr. Jarmel stated it in the center hall of the building that faces the main road and has been secured so you can't get through, it is in the area in the hallway that goes back. Mr. Trevino wanted to know what the percentage of the house that actually got burnt. Mr. Jarmel commented that the damage is limited or contained to the first floor

framing and some of the first floor walls. The first floor framing would be estimated at 20% and adjacent to that there is a few structures here, at least two separate structures and built at different times, the front section is the original that is on the stone foundation, the side, looking at the house from the main road, is where a lot of the termite damage is. The termite damage is more expensive than the fire damage is.

Chairperson McDonald questioned to the right of the main entry. Mr. Jarmel stated at the center of the house is where the fire damage is and to the right side is where the termite infestation is. Mr. Jarmel stated on photograph #41 is the underside of the flooring and that is an example of charred floor boards and photograph 42 is a better example of how the damage of the fire is and look at the lower left hand corner there is a post that is all burnt up that sits on a larger girder and joists and timbers that come into it and what saved this house is the fact that it was built with timber before distress wood. Mr. Sargent asked if the photograph was taken in the basement or the first floor. Mr. Jarmel stated it is in the basement, notice the stone wall.

Mr. Roskos asked for a point of clarification and asked Ms. Grifa if she was familiar with the ordinance and Section 1109 which deals with demolitions. He stated "just so the record is clear, you are here tonight not to address the enumerated items A – H, but essentially the Committee understands your testimony, it is D you are focused on, it's the structural condition in the economic feasibility of alternatives to the proposal based on the report of the architect who is testifying". Ms. Grifa agreed. Mr. Roskos continued "so it is not your intention to go through any other criteria exists; you are essentially saying the house should be demolished due to severe structural impairments as testified through Mr. Jarmel". Ms. Grifa stated "that is my case and this is the process by which one would seek a demolition permit, you must come here. My client had unfortunately, before they had someone represent them, did not come here and went to the Building Department and were denied. The ordinance is clear that they have to come here first". Mr. Roskos stated "I just wanted to understand because there are other enumerated criteria, the case is simple, you are relying on D and you studied the house and here is your report and this is your testimony". Mr. Roskos just wanted to make sure the record was clear. Ms. Grifa stated that was helpful for all of us.

Chairperson McDonald asked if there was lead testing, mold testing, termite testing. Mr. Jarmel stated no, visual only and not sure what termite testing is. Chairperson McDonald stated you get a qualified termite inspector come out and look at it and determine if they are still there. Mr. Jarmel did not know if there was an active colony, but there is severe termite damage.

There were no other questions by the Board members. Mr. Trevino made a motion to deny and seconded by Mr. Hul. The application was denied by 4 to 1. Chairperson McDonald voted to demolish the home because unfortunately Care One has done demolition through neglect and it has created a hazardous condition for first aid responders and the neighborhood. Mr. Grifa gave the application to Chairperson McDonald to sign.

Adjournment:

There being no further to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 9:19 p.m.

Digital audio file of this meeting is available upon request.

Respectfully submitted,



Susan J. Snook
Recording Secretary