

To: Acton, HDC
Subject: WAVE

October 2012

Dear HDC Members,

Thank you for your hard work protecting the heritage and character of our villages. You are historic preservation's "first and last line of defense". You have the power and the mission to say no, when a project is unsuitable. You are in a position to balance the pro-development forces, with pro-preservation ideals.

My points are:

1. This should be a new application. It is not the same project.
2. The massing wasn't appropriate in the first application. It isn't appropriate on this one.
3. Every bit of material should be specified, because this area of town is so important

1. IT'S A DIFFERENT PROJECT

This project is NOT the same project as which was proposed for the "conditional approval" OR the Site Plan Special Permit.

You have the opportunity to require a new application, so that the town can have more input into the design of this new project. With a new application, you have the opportunity to dictate greater design control over the project. The HDC's "power" and authority stems from its refusal to accept this as a "modification".

I do not believe that "use" is connected to this decision, except that there is no longer a "need" for such a large building. There is only a "desire" for such a large building. If you think that this project is too different from the old project to be relevant and if you think this project is TOO BIG for this village, you can require a new application. You CAN require more appropriate massing.

And I believe that you have a duty to do so. You are preservation's last hope.

2. THE PROJECT IS TOO LARGE

The HDC's responsibility includes ensuring "appropriate massing". So even if the HDC supports the removal of the two historic assets, it should do so only if the project is reduced in size considerably.

INAPPROPRIATE MASSING

The massing of this project is still way too big for this area of the village. It's tempting to extend "goodwill" to the applicant because the new project is "better" than the old

project. But that is not a good enough reason to approve this project. Just because it's better than something that was horrifying, does not make it "good enough". It doesn't make it a project of appropriate massing.

Replacing fairly small houses and a barn with one warehouse sized building, is too sizeable a change for the character of this section of the village. The applicant has told us that a building of this size is fine because there are a couple of buildings in West Acton of this size, and therefore this project is "appropriate". But those buildings are in other areas of the village. NOT on the east edge of the town; not by natural wetlands. Further, the large buildings in West Acton are on flat areas of the village, not in an area requiring a massive change to the landscape, including raising the ground level many feet.

The entire project is totally out of character, because of its size and the change required to the land.

3. ALL MATERIALS SHOULD BE SPECIFIED

Any approval should include specifications for all materials. Developers can not be trusted to make decisions of taste on their own. This applicant has a history of making changes to materials and design without approval.

No assumptions from drawings should be made. This project is huge.

The garage is huge, and if built, will become "the face" of West Acton forever. If built, the walls of the garage should be made of large boulders, like that used behind Sorrento's pizza, and up at the Mead Hill historic home's terrace at the top of Wright Terrace.

There should not be a flat plain concrete face to our "gateway". There should not be manufactured "linked blocks".

The garage will take on monumental proportions, and it's important that the materials indicate the appreciation for fine historic character that we have for our village.

In closing, please let me state again that you are our village character's first and last line of defense.

By municipal law, town employees and elected officials are "agents of the state" and the state is "obligated" by its subjugation to the federal government to facilitate corporate chartered commerce before preserving heritage and/or caring about people. And so you are the only ones working for preservation as your main mission.

Despite the limitations of the HDC's authority, the HDC members still have an opportunity to vote no on this project.

It may seem that cascading failures of governance are not related to this particular project, and the HDC's authority and responsibilities. But I believe that strongly considering the failures of past decisions, as you make this decision, is in keeping with our need to "mitigate" the damage these past failures.

These failures include:

- misleading promises by the Town Planner that by handing out huge FAR and densities, the West Acton "Village Plan" preserve historic assets. In reality, this "plan" has made for nothing BUT problems, increasing traffic, the loss of historic assets, and now the introduction of a "mall".
- demolition by neglect. The failure of Town staff to bring forward the simplest legislation protecting historic assets from this "technique" by developers, and the subsequent use of the technique (in absence of this legislation) to gain support by neighbors is a dual stab, facilitated by the lack of action on the government's part. Neighbors are manipulated into supporting a project, because the developer allows/facilitates disrepair to the point of danger and blight, which impacts their property values. So the neighbors support "anything".

These failures, and many more, necessitate a strict approach to this application. IF we had zoning codes that actually supported what the townspeople want. IF we had strong town staff support for historic preservation over "new tax revenues". IF we had staff available to actually do audits to ensure compliance with promises made. IF we had these things in place, being flexible with this applicant could be justified.

But this is NOT a case where we can afford the developer such luxury. This is a new application. Not a modification of the original approval.

Please VOTE NO! Please REQUIRE A NEW APPLICATION. Please do what you can to reject inappropriate massing and design.

I respectfully request you to ask for legal support on HOW to require a new application, rather than asking IF you can. You will get very different answers, depending on how you ask for legal support.

Again, thank you for all you do to help preserve the character of our small village aesthetic.

Sincerely,



Terra Friedrichs, West Acton