



Department of Planning and Development
 Staff Report to the Historic Districts Commission

February 2, 2012

1855 & 1899 Washington Road – New House	
REQUEST	Certificate of Appropriateness for construction of a new single-family house
APPLICANT	CP Ventures LP/Christopher Cousino
FILE NO.	HDC # 12-001
PARCEL NO.	15-01-227-015 & 15-01-227-034 & 15-01-227-035
ZONING	RE - Residential Estates
HISTORIC DISTRICT	Winkler Mill Pond
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Request

This application was initially reviewed at the Commission’s January 12 meeting and postponed until the February meeting so the applicant could provide additional information.

The subject site is located on the west side of Washington Road near the north end of the Winkler Mill Pond Historic District., on the east bank of Winkler Mill Pond. The owner has combined three parcels that are presently vacant. The HDC approved demolition of a non-contributing house at 1899 Washington in 2005. The City issued a demolition permit without HDC review or approval for the house at 1855 in 2005. The 2002 survey sheet for 1855 lists the house as being constructed in 1945 with more information needed to determine if the property was contributing.

This portion of the district contains mostly non-contributing properties except for directly across the Winkler Mill pond. The applicant is proposing to construct a sprawling, 11,385 square foot house with an attached 2,900 square foot garage. The proposed two- to three-story stone house in a “rustic mountain style” is

located near the center of the site. Two driveways are proposed, one to access garages in front of the house and one to access lower garages in the rear. The house is proposed for the highpoint on the property. An in-ground pool, spa and cabana are proposed for the rear of the property. Extensive exposed aggregate terraces are proposed to run along the entire rear of the house leading over to the pool and spa area. Although many existing trees will remain, the landscaping will be extensively modified, including two planted outcroppings at the north and south ends of the house, and six sets of stone stairs leading down to the pond.

Historical Information

The subject property is located in the Winkler Mill Pond Historic District. The 2002 *Rochester Hills Historic Districts Survey* describes the district as generally surrounding Winkler Mill Pond from the north edge of the Stoney Creek Historic District along both Winkler Mill Road and Washington Road. The district is almost wholly residential in character, with houses dating from the 1830s to the 1990s. A few of the houses retain agricultural outbuildings. The foundation of Winkler Mill is visible and two of the mill dams are functioning. The district has sloping terrain and is heavily treed.

The district was developed around the Winkler Mill (a gristmill that burned in 1985) and a wool carding mill owned by Levi Cole who also owned the majority of the property in the nineteenth century. In the 1920s the first suburban and summer homes appeared in the area. Most of the residential development around the mill pond took place after World War II, particularly beginning in the 1970s. The district has sixteen contributing resources and forty-three non-contributing resources, and two that require more research to determine their status. Some of the most significant properties in the district include the Greek Revival Levi Cole house; the house at 1740 Washington Road; the Colonial Revival Von Isser House built c. 1918; the mill house on Winkler Mill Road; the mill dams and the mill pond.

As previously noted, the 2002 survey identified the house that previously existed at 1899 as non-contributing and the house at 1855 as needing more information to determine whether it contributed to the district. Both houses have since been demolished.

Review Considerations

The proposed house has a sprawling footprint that spans across the width of the property, from the edge of fifteen foot setback on the north to within sixty feet of the south property line. A driveway on the north edge of the property runs from the street to a motor and service courts in front of the house to access four sets of garage doors. A stone wall is proposed in front of the motor and service courts that turns into a fourteen foot high retaining wall that will be a large scale planted outcropping. A gravel driveway is proposed for the south edge of the property to access a gravel service court and four-car lower garage at the rear of the house. An in-ground pool and spa with a cabana are proposed for the rear of the property. The cabana has not been fully designed and approval for that building will need to come back to the Commission at a later date.

The front elevation ranges from one-and-a-half stories to two-and-a-half stories high with a complex roof line featuring gables, eyebrow dormers and round towers with conical roofs. The central entrance projects forward from the house and is marked by a gable front with heavy timber trim and a two-story (nineteen foot tall) window. A porch with a curved roof supported by massive stone piers projects from the entrance. The front doors are French doors. There is a round turret with conical roof proposed for the north half of the house, and the attached four car garage in the south half has a gable roof with heavy timber trim and two shed roof dormers. The roof overhangs a section of the garage, creating recessed garage doors. Copper shed roof “vent” dormers are proposed for the roof on the north half of the house.

The rear of the house is proposed to have a walk-out basement, creating a three-and-a-half story elevation. A multi-sided screened in porch above a terrace projects from the rear and has a conical roof. Two stone chimneys rise from the center of the house. Two porches with railings are located on the rear elevation. An exposed aggregate grand terrace is proposed to run the length of the house. On the south end it connects by steps to the pool terrace and spa. A second large planted outcropping is proposed for the north end of the house where there will be a steep slope.

The proposed house has a larger footprint than any other contributing or non-contributing property in the district. The footprint sizes of contributing properties in the district range from about 1,200 to 3,200 square feet. The size of non-contributing properties footprints range from about 1,000 to 8,560 square feet. The proposed house has a footprint of about 11,000 square feet.

The house is proposed for the highest point in the property and is taller than the surrounding houses. The surrounding non-contributing houses are one to two stories tall and do not sit at the highest point of the sites. These attributes allow the historic houses to remain the prominent features in the district when viewed from the street.

The proposed landscaping, including the two large outcroppings and extensive terraces in the rear create landscape features that are not typical for this historically rural district. The landscaping proposed is intended to create a mountainous, rustic feel to complement the rustic style of the house, but the nature of the historic district is rolling terrain, originally open for farming, with newer tree growth. Large rock outcroppings, boulders, and extensive terraces are not characteristic for the district.

The combination of the large footprint and height of the proposed house create a massing and scale that is not compatible with the surrounding historic district. The landscaping creates a setting that is not compatible with the historic rolling terrain of the district.

The applicant has indicated that the following materials will be used for the project:

1. The south driveway will be gravel, the north driveway material will be asphalt. A large grand terrace of exposed aggregate is proposed to run along the entire rear wall of the house and connect via a series of steps to the pool and spa terrace which will also be exposed aggregate.
2. A stone wall is proposed in front of the house along the motor and upper service courts. The fourteen foot drop on the southeast end of the motor court will be a large scale planted outcropping with boulders to create a rustic setting for the house. A second large scale planted outcropping is proposed at the north end of the house where there will be a steep slope toward the back of the house. Six sets of stone steps are proposed from the upper lawn (next to the grand terrace) down to the lower lawn near the pond.
3. The walls of the house are proposed to be "Astoria Blend" natural stone with wood timber elements, cedar siding and cedar trim. The windows will be bronzed aluminum Marvin windows. Porches with railings and a screened in porch will be located at the rear.
4. The house will have a natural cedar shake roof with decorative copper finials, a copper chimney cap, and copper dormers.

Summary

1. The property is in the Winkler Mill Pond Historic District. It is currently vacant and previously had two houses on the lots. The property backs on to the east side of the mill pond and fronts on Washington Road. The highpoint of the land is about halfway between the road and the pond.

2. The applicant is requesting a Certificate of Appropriateness to construct a two- to three-story single family house that is 11,385 square feet with an attached 2,900 square foot garage. The house is proposed in the “rustic mountain style” with stone walls, heavy timber trim, and a cedar shake roof with decorative copper dormers and finials. Extensive landscaping including trees, terraces, driveways and outcroppings are proposed. The applicant is also requesting approval of an in-ground pool and footprint of a cabana. The cabana design will need to come back for Commission approval at a later date.
3. The proposed house and landscaping are not compatible with the Winkler Mill Pond Historic District. The house is too large in massing and scale because of the size of the footprint and height, it is placed too prominently on the site, the planted outcroppings are not appropriate for the rolling terrain, and the large pool, size and number of terraces and steps in the rear are too extensive for the district. Although the applicant proposes screening the house with a number of trees, it does not hide the fact that the house is too large for the district.
4. The applicant has submitted the proposed plans to the City’s Building Department for a formal review, conditioned on the decisions made by the Historic Districts Commission. Any work performed in connection with this project will be required to meet all zoning and building codes, rules and regulations.

Potential Motions

(Subject to adjustment based on Commission discussion)

MOTION, in the matter of File No. HDC 12-001, that the Historic Districts Commission **APPROVES/DENIES** the request for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the construction of a new house at 1855 and 1899 Washington Road in the Winkler Mill Pond Historic District, Parcel Identification Numbers 15-01-227-015 & 15-01-227-034 & 15-01-227-035, with the following Findings and Conditions:

- 1) The proposed house is in the Winkler Mill Pond Historic District and **is/is not** compatible in massing, size, scale and materials with the district;
- 2) The proposed landscape alterations, in particular the large scale planted outcroppings, large terraces, pool, and steps **is/is not** compatible with the setting of the rolling terrain nature of the district;
- 3) The proposed house construction **is/is not** in keeping with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines, in particular standard numbers 9 and 10 as follows:
 9. *New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.*
 10. *New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in a such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.*
- 4) **IF DENYING** - The application can be corrected by proposing a house with a more modest massing that does not sit in a prominently visible location on the site and that has less extensive landscape alteration to the site, including elimination of the planted outcroppings, reduction of terrace and pool size, and elimination of the stone steps at the rear of the property. The footprint or floor area of the house may not need to be reduced, provided that the house is more sensitively located and concealed on the site.