



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

December 5, 2017

1841 Crooks Road – Demolish House	
REQUEST	Notice to Proceed for demolition of existing house
APPLICANT	Frederick and Kathryn Dunn
FILE NO.	HDC # 99-011
PARCEL NO.	15-20-428-003
ZONING	R-1 – One family residential
HISTORIC DISTRICT	1841 Crooks Road
STAFF	Kristine Kidorf, Kidorf Preservation Consulting

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Request

This is an application for a Notice to Proceed to demolish the house at 1841 Crooks Road. The Commission denied a request for a Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition at the May 2017 meeting when the owner stated she would rehabilitate the house. Since that time the owner has taken no action and the house has continued to deteriorate. Per the Commission’s request staff has attempted to pursue enforcement actions without success. The City Building Department has stated that the building is a hazard and is not repairable.

The property contains a house and barn that contribute to this individually designated historic district that is located on the east side of Crooks Road. The house sits southwest of the barn on the property with the house being closest to Crooks Road. The site has a circular drive with many trees and bushes around the buildings and edges of the property. There are subdivisions around the property. The applicant is proposing to demolish the existing house, re-grade the property, retain the existing trees, and repair the fence. No work is proposed for the barn.

Historical Information

1841 Crooks Road which is an individual historic district was designated by the City of Rochester Hills in 1978. The house was built sometime in the 1860s and 1870s, and is an example of the upright and wing house type popular in Avon Township and Oakland County in the nineteenth century. The house was originally part of the 230 acre A.C. Parker farm which also contained other buildings to the south near the stream. The 1908 Oakland County Atlas shows the house on 52 acres of property owned by E. Berry. The 1938 Rural Property Inventory shows the house belonging to E. J. Beattie, of Grosse Pointe Park. Per the inventory the house was remodeled in 1910, well within the period of significance for the district and during the time property was being used for agricultural purposes. Twenty-four acres of the property were "class A agricultural crop land." It is rare to find a surviving house and barn in Rochester Hills. From the 2002 *Rochester Hills Historic Districts* survey, "Relatively few farm buildings other than farmhouses survive to represent the agricultural landscape that once constituted nearly the whole of Avon Township. Therefore, most farm buildings that retain the greater part of their historic appearance are considered significant. Most common are barns: a total of twenty-five buildings historically used as barns are extant in the survey area. This is likely the total or very close to the total for Rochester Hills."

Review Considerations

The applicant is requesting approval to demolish the house at 1841 Crooks Road, an individually designated historic district with two contributing structures, the house and barn. The owner states they will repair the existing fence and retain the barn. The house site will be graded flat and the trees on the site will be retained.

With the City Building Department's statement that the house is unrepairable and is a hazard, the Commission needs to determine if enough evidence has been provided to meet the Notice to Proceed condition 1 - that the resource constitutes a hazard to the safety of the public or to the resource's occupants and allow demolition of the house. Per the ordinance the conditions for Notice to Proceed are:

- (1) The resource constitutes a hazard to the safety of the public or to the resource's occupants;
- (2) The resource is a deterrent to a major improvement program that will be of substantial benefit to the community, and the applicant proposing the work has obtained all necessary planning and zoning approvals, financing, and environmental clearances;
- (3) Retaining the resource will cause undue financial hardship to the owner when a governmental action, an act of God, or other event beyond the owner's control created the hardship, and all feasible alternatives to eliminate the financial hardship, which may include offering the resource for sale at its fair market value or moving the resource to a vacant site within the historic district, have been attempted and exhausted by the owner; or
- (4) Retaining of the resource is not in the interest of the majority of the community.

Note that the Commission only has to find that ONE of the above conditions has been met, the applicant is not required to meet all four conditions.

Summary

1. The property is an individually designated historic district and is one of the few remaining upright and wing houses with a barn remaining in the city. Removal of either the house or barn from the property would destroy one of the few remaining intact house/barn combinations left in the city.
2. The applicant is requesting a Notice to Proceed to demolish the existing house citing the house's poor condition and deteriorated state. The applicant states that they will grade the house site flat, retain the existing trees, and repair the existing fence.

3. Demolition of the house, a contributing structure and distinctive feature of the district does not meet The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines, in particular standard number 2, which states, "The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided."
4. The Commission may find that the first Notice to Proceed Condition has been met: "(1) The resource constitutes a hazard to the safety of the public or to the resource's occupants;" The City of Rochester Hills Building Department has stated that the building is deteriorated beyond repair and that the house is a public safety hazard and should not be entered by any person. The department has stated that in order to repair the house it would need to be completely dismantled. More specifically the city cites the following deficiencies:

"Basically, the balloon framing acts as the "skeleton" for the house structure. In this case, the skeleton has been weakened and the structural stability of the building has been compromised.

The primary purpose of the exterior surfaces, including roof coverings, windows and doors, siding and trim, and even the foundation, is to protect the skeleton from the elements. In this case, the exterior surfaces are failing their protection of the skeleton. For example:

- **Foundation** – The rubble stone foundation is crumbling in many areas and settling in others. This may not seem significant, but the unstable foundation is causing the building to shift, which in turn is opening gaps in siding, trimwork, etc., which then allows further damage to the structure by the elements. The shifting foundation further causes the skeleton to move to adjust, weakening connections and placing additional loads on members not originally intended to take the added loads.
- **Siding & Trim** – As mentioned above, loose siding and trim, along with missing siding (either that has been removed intentionally or has since fallen off), further aggravates the problem by allowing water, etc., to seep into recesses and freeze in colder weather, or deteriorate the wood structure through mold and decay in warmer weather. Case in point are several areas with rotted foundation sill members, which in turn cause further settling and shifting of the structure.
- **Roof & Roof Covering** – The roof on this building has ceased to serve its purpose. Multiple layers of shingles and missing shingles are allowing water to affect many of the roof areas, particularly along the edges. This is obvious at the front porch and the South side of the building where the chimney once stood. The roof is beginning to collapse in these areas and are allowing even more water into the structure to cause further damage.

All the above items, along with many structural members that have been further compromised by the cutting or complete removal add up rapidly to a building that is no longer safe."

5. The City has provided reports from the Oakland County Sheriff's Department documenting responses to the property and a list of building violations since 2002.
6. The City has received numerous complaints from surrounding property owners about the condition of the house and detriment to the area.
7. The Commission may find that the fourth Notice to Proceed condition has been met: "(4) Retaining of the resource is not in the interest of the majority of the community." The City has been under pressure from surrounding property owners to do something with the deteriorated house, neighbors consider it a blight on the neighborhood.
8. The applicant has re-submitted the following materials that were provided for the May 2017 HDC meeting:

- A) A report from the engineering firm, Johnston Design stating that the following repairs are needed, and that rehabilitation would cost at least \$400,000.

In summary;

- Much of the existing structure may not be useable and will require extensive repair, replacement and/or reinforcing to meet current building code requirements. There will also be required modifications needed to meet requirements for fire safety, egress and energy codes.
- A complete new roof is required which will probably require new roof sheathing.
- The existing roof framing members are not adequate for current building code requirements.
- Headers are missing and will require replacement along with adequate supporting studs and blocking. It appears that deflection has occurred in many areas which if it has existed for some time, may require replacement as the framing members may have taken a permanent bow.
- Floor framing needs repair, replacement or reinforcing including the main carrying beams that are not adequately supported at this time.
- The timber sill needs at a minimum, repair of the damaged areas and may require replacement if the damage is extensive.
- Stone foundation walls need stabilizing
- As with all structures of this age and type that are in need of extensive repair and maintenance, it is very common to find even more issues once demolition and construction is started and other areas are exposed to view.

- B) Estimates for a new roof: \$10,197 for asphalt shingles; \$30,217 – neither price included removal of the existing shingles, new sheathing, or carpentry work.

- C) An estimate for new windows: \$23,009 – it is unclear what window material would be used.

- D) An estimate of \$42,065 to reconstruct the stone basement and structure.

9. Staff comments – Although it is difficult to lose a historic resource, at this point it does appear that the house is truly deteriorated beyond repair and is a hazard to the safety of the public. Repairs to the house would require reconstruction to the point where the new materials would be greater than any historic fabric, essentially creating a new house. The surrounding property owners have been requesting that the city do something to correct the blight conditions on the property.
10. The applicant has not submitted the proposed plans to the City's Building Department for a formal review. Any work performed in connection with this project will be required to meet all zoning and building codes, rules and regulations.

Potential Motion

(Subject to adjustment based on Commission discussion)

MOTION, in the matter of File No. HDC 99-011, that the Historic Districts Commission **APPROVES/DENIES/POSTPONES** the request for a Notice to Proceed for the demolition of the house at 1841 Crooks Road in the 1841 Crooks Road Historic District, Parcel Identification Number 15-20-428-003, with the following Findings and Conditions:

- 1) The proposed demolition does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation but finds that the following condition prevails and the proposed demolition will correct the condition:

- (a) The resource constitutes a hazard to the safety of the public or to the resource's occupants;
AND/OR
 - (b) Retaining of the resource is not in the interest of the majority of the community.

- 2) The Notice to Proceed is issued on the condition that the owners of the property grant an easement to the City of Rochester Hills for the pathway on the property along Crooks Road. The easement should be granted before the demolition permit is issued.