

July 1, 2010

Rochester Hills City Council
1000 Rochester Hills Drive
Rochester Hills, Michigan 48307

***Re: Elimination of Historic District – G&V Investments
1585 S. Rochester Road, Rochester Hills***

Dear Members of Council:

In September, 2009, my client, G&V Investments (“G&V”) appeared before you to request the elimination of the noncontiguous historic district at 1585 S. Rochester Road. At that time, we presented you with materials documenting my client’s analysis of the house, and why it is neither feasible to restore the house for residential purposes, nor appropriate for an adaptive re-use. At your September 28, 2009 meeting, you referred the matter to the Historic Districts Study Committee (“HDSC”) to issue a report to City Council on the historic significance of the house.

With reference to my correspondence and supplemental materials submitted August 28, 2009, the applicant renews its request for elimination of the historic district for the following reasons:

- (1) Restoration is not feasible;
- (2) No market exists for any adaptive re-use;
- (3) The very similar designated Bordine house was approved for demolition; and
- (4) The house lacks historical significance.

Restoration Costs Are Not Feasible

According to the cost estimate prepared by Frank Rewold and Sons, Inc., submitted with my August 28, 2009 letter, which is based upon the thorough scope of work prepared by Finnicum Brownlie Architects, the cost to restore the house to its original residential condition is approximately \$1,000,000. Much of the restoration cost is due to remediation of the black mold present in the house, which creates such a dangerous condition that the City refuses to perform a safety inspection. There is no way G&V can reasonably restore the house at such cost. Even if the house could be restored, requiring a sales price of over \$1,000,000 would make the house unmarketable.

If the house is restored for a commercial use, the cost increases due to additional requirements imposed upon commercial construction by federal, state and local codes and

ordinances. Such a restoration would require an elevator, fire suppression, and ADA access and restroom compliance.

No Market for any Adaptive Re-use

G&V has investigated the possibility of an adaptive re-use of the house, and has found no market for any such use. The location, residential layout and type of construction make the house unmarketable for any office, retail or other commercial use. Please see my August 28, 2009 letter, and the letters from William Finnicum, a local historical architect dated August 6, 2009 and June 30, 2010 (copy attached) explaining in detail why the house is not subject to nonresidential use.

Bordine House

It must also be noted that the City allowed the historically designated house on the Bordine property (1805 S. Rochester Road), just south of the City Place Property, to be demolished in 1996. The findings of the HDC in approving the demolition of the Bordine house apply as well to the G&V house, which should lead to elimination of the historic district. Please see my August 2009 letter for a detailed comparison.

Insignificant Historic Value

Almost nine (9) months after City Council requested a report from the HDSC, the HDSC has issued its Final Report, which is somewhat lacking in both its data and conclusions. Under the City's Historic Districts Ordinance (§118-34), one of the grounds for elimination of the historic district is *insignificance*, meaning "the historic district was not significant in a way previously defined." **Kristine Kidorf, the City's historic preservation consultant, concluded in the Preliminary Report she prepared dated November 25, 2009, that the house "should no longer be designated as a local historic district" due to insignificance. William Finnicum, a local historical architect retained by G&V, also concluded that the historic district should be eliminated because it is insignificant (see attached letter dated June 30, 2010).**

Nothing of significance has changed between the issuance of the Preliminary Report and the Final Report. Ms. Kidorf revised the Final Report to support the conclusion desired by the HDSC: retain the historic district. A review of the applicable National Register Criteria A and C discussed in the Reports reveals that the house is not significant in the way previously defined, despite the changes made to the Final Report:

A. Associated with Events that Have Made a Significant Contribution to the Broad Patterns of our History

- After performing no investigation for more than six (6) months, HDSC Member John Dzuirman spoke with Sara Johnson, the granddaughter of Wayne Eddy who bought the house in the mid 1930s, about her recollection of events that occurred 75 years ago. Most of the information added to the Final Report came from this conversation.
- From this conversation only, the Final Report states that Mr. Eddy was “a chief/lead automotive engineer for Pontiac Motors.” However, Ms. Kidorf found in the 1930 Census that Mr. Eddy was a “Production Superintendent in the Motor Industry,” a substantial discrepancy.
- In the Final Report, Wayne Eddy is compared to wealthy Detroiters such as William Fisher and John Dodge who created large country estates and continued farming operations. In the Preliminary Report, Ms. Kidorf states that this farm “does not appear to have ever reached the prominence of the other farms in the township such as Van Hoosen Farm, Great Oaks Stock Farm, or Ferry-Morse.”
- According to the Final Report, after 75 years, Mr. Eddy’s granddaughter recalls that the architect for the remodeling project was John Burns who lived at 1812 Rochester Road. Without any evidence, the Final Report attempts to connect this person to Rochester architect Jack Burns, who designed other houses in the Rochester area. Regardless, the redesign of the house is not a good example of the neoclassical style and does not possess integrity of design. Please see Mr. Finnicum’s June 30, 2010 letter.
- Other than the above information, which is patched together with a long memory not corroborated by any other source (in fact one of the few records referenced, the 1930 census, appears to contradict such information), and references a possible connection to an architect who may have designed homes in the Rochester area during that time period, there is no information that would support changing the conclusion in the Preliminary Report that the house “should no longer be designated as a local historic district.”

B. Architectural Significance

- The Reports set forth the standard that “Buildings that are significant for their architecture must possess a high level of integrity of design.”
- In the Preliminary Report, Ms. Kidorf opines that “Closer inspection reveals that there is not a high level of integrity of design. The house appears to be cobbled together with many different elements.” While the design and workmanship of the house did not change, this conclusion was omitted from the Final Report.
- In his June 30, 2010 letter, Mr. Finnicum also analyzes the architectural character of the house and concludes that the workmanship is poor, materials are substandard, and the principle characteristics of neoclassical style are not present with this conversion. In short, the conversion of the house is a great compromise and would not make it worthy of historic designation.

Conclusion

For all of the foregoing reasons, G&V respectfully requests that the City Council amend the Historic District Ordinance by eliminating the historic district at 1585 South Rochester Road. City Council has the authority to eliminate an existing historic district pursuant to City Ordinance 118-126 and 118-133. These ordinances do not provide criteria or otherwise impose any limitations upon this authority, giving City Council the right to eliminate a historic district for any reasons deemed appropriate by City Council, in its sole discretion.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Very truly yours,

WILLIAMS, WILLIAMS, RATTNER & PLUNKETT, P.C.



John D. Gaber

JDG:djq
Enclosures
(522943)

cc: Mr. William Gilbert
Mr. Cornell Vennettilli