

# J.P. FRANZEN ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS, P.C.

TIDE MILL BUILDING  
95 HARBOR ROAD SOUTHPORT, CT 06890 • TEL: (203) 259-0529

Town of Westport Historic Commission  
Myrtle Avenue  
Westport, CT

April 13, 2022

Dear Commissioners,

I am the Architect for the property located at 33 Wright Street in Westport, and Principal and Owner of J.P. Franzen Associates, located in Southport, CT. I received my BArch ('72) and MArch ('75) from Cornell University. I am currently licensed in CT, NY, RI, MI, FL, CA, VT, NJ, and PA, and have practiced in Connecticut since 1981.

I served as a commissioner on the Fairfield Historic Commission from 1996-2000, and assisted with the writing and updating of the Fairfield Historic District Guidebook. I have appeared before the Fairfield Historic District over 100 times during the past 36 years, representing numerous clients in the Fairfield and Southport Historic Districts.

My firm has worked on several historic projects in the Town of Westport, including the following:

- Patagonia Building Rehabilitation: Conversion of a historic bank building into retail/restaurant space
- Bradley House: helped save the historic house at 131 Sturges Highway from demolition
- 3 Evergreen Road: numerous projects
- 72 Myrtle Ave : Rehabilitation in progress

In 2007 we received a Firm Award from the Westport Historical Society for Historic Preservation of both the Bradley House and 3 Evergreen Road.

Historic properties such as 33 Wright Street present unique issues and challenges. My design goal is to address these needs and conditions while maintaining the integrity of the surrounding building and landscape. I believe that the design presented is compatible and in keeping with the Westport Historic District guidelines.

Respectfully Submitted,

John P Franzen

*John P. Franzen*

John P. Franzen, FAIA

## OUTBUILDING – 35 WRIGHT STREET

The first part of the proposal calls for the removal of an existing outbuilding. Traditionally, there is an unwritten taboo against the wholesale removal of a building on property designated as historic, particularly in Westport.

Nevertheless, while not encouraging such action, demolition is not prohibited in the HDC Handbook or the Department of Interior/National Park Service Guidelines for Historic Preservation. This is particularly true when a structure isn't suitable for consideration under any of the four "Secretary of the Interior's Standard for the Treatment of Historic Properties" cited in Appendix F of the HDC's Handbook, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, October 2009.

The four different treatments for historic buildings are: Preservation, Rehabilitation, Restoration and Reconstruction.

Given the dire condition of the outbuilding after decades of neglect, the Standards for Reconstruction (which follows) is the only applicable standard on the list that can be ascribed to the outbuilding.

**"4. Reconstruction will be used to depict vanished or non-surviving portions of a property **when documentary and physical evidence is available to permit accurate reconstruction with minimum conjecture, and such reconstruction is essential to the public understanding of the property.**"** (Emphasis added.)

There is no documentary and/or physical evidence of the original use and construction of the outbuilding. Despite exhaustive research by current and former applicants, consultants and design professionals, the outbuilding fails to meet the standard for consideration as nothing in the records identifies the original use and purpose for the structure.

An earlier project architect, Robert Gault, theorized that the outbuilding may have been constructed as a seasonal accommodation for visiting artists, but his theory has never been confirmed with physical or recorded evidence.

It may be that lacking any recorded evidence of the outbuilding's historic use as a seasonal studio, Gault did not include his supposition in the 2007 & 2008 applications for this property.

Nor is the outbuilding essential to the public understanding of the property. The location, style, size, age, history, and early ownership of the Main House, all tell a story about the 1840's and the era of prosperous ship captains as confirmed by various historic records and the P.A.L. inventory. Captain Salman Sanford, who built the main dwelling at 35 Wright Street and another at 41 Wright Street is a classic example of a prominent and prosperous ship captain of the time

***FINDING: Lacking any form of authentication, according to Federal, State, and local standards the outbuilding does not qualify for historic reconstruction or preservation, nor is the outbuilding part of the historic property's "story".***

Next, we looked to other town records to determine the outbuilding's status from the view of other regulatory agencies.

- The outbuilding is not identified on the historic inventories by P.A.L. Inc. in 2011.
- The current Tax Assessor's records reveal that the outbuilding was removed from the tax records in 2015, as it no longer has any identifiable value as an outbuilding.
- According to the current Tax Assessor's records, the size of the outbuilding is 320 sq. feet. *This is worth noting as structures less than 500 square feet are exempt from the requirement of a Demolition Permit.*

***FINDING:***

***Town records do not support the assertion that the outbuilding is historic or physically worthy of preservation or renovation.***

***The outbuilding (per tax records) is less than 500 sq. ft. in area, which exempts the structure from Demolition Permit requirements in both State and local jurisdictions.***

The HDC has previously approved demolitions of outbuildings on other historically designated properties. To wit:

41 Whitney Street: As noted, per the HDC Inventory by P.A.L. in 2011 the Main House is a Greek Revival style, also constructed by Captain Zalman Sanford. In the years prior to the adoption of Section 32-18 of the Westport Zoning Regulations and the Town's Demolition Ordinance, the HDC allowed the demolition of a similar, derelict outbuilding also located to the rear of the main historic residence and within the side setback. (Formerly the Clarke residence.)

33 Meeker Road: In 2017, the HDC authorized the demolition of another larger historic outbuilding: Accessory Building #1 which was subject to a Special Permit under 32-18 of the zoning regulations and a recorded Preservation Easement. According to the HDC file, the decision to permit demolition of the structure was based on the Owner's testimony.

***FINDING: There is precedent for the HDC to authorize the demolition of an accessory structure that is too dilapidated to be renovated or preserved.***

Next, we looked to the National Park Service/Department of Interior and HDC standards for historic designation for guidance.

As provided in the Appendix of the current HDC Handbook:

“The National Park Service (NPS) has developed criteria to guide both state and local governments in evaluating potential entries in the National Register. These guidelines are equally useful for identifying potential Local Historic Districts and Properties. Quoting from the NPS, qualifying significance includes the following:

Eligible properties must possess integrity of:

- Location
- Design
- Setting
- Materials
- Workmanship
- Feeling ...”

***FINDING: The outbuilding is not representative of any of these standards.***

Also:

“Eligible properties are limited to those that:

- Are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- Are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- Have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important to prehistory or history...”

***FINDING: As the outbuilding does not comport with these standards, it does not qualify as a significant structure eligible for a historic designation.***

## **CONCLUSION:**

Although rarely desirable, there is no regulatory provision, regulation, ordinance, or statute that prohibits the demolition of an outbuilding that lacks a record of historic significance and does not comport with the designated historic residence's provenance, age, use or style. Nor is the subject outbuilding associated with a verifiable connection to a historic figure or event. It does not represent the work of a master craftsman, nor do its remains indicate that the original structure possessed any modicum of high artistic value.

For these and other reasons described herein we are seeking to remove a decayed, unusable, and unattractive outbuilding and replace it with a useful new structure, designed in keeping with the 1840's style of the principal building and design standards consistent with federal, state, and local guideline for historic structures

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