

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, 3rd 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 that might 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 of the structure.

An earlier project architect, Robert Gault, theorized that the outbuilding may have been constructed at the end of the 19th century as a seasonal accommodation for visiting artists. Part of the basis for Gault's conjecture was his understanding that similar accessory structures, since removed had been located on each of the properties on either side of #35.

According to Carl Muller, the Applicant and son of Theodore Muller:

"The Fullers bought the property in 1916...Mr. Fuller was a science teacher at the elite public school Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan. He used the outbuilding as a study, where he wrote several textbooks for his classes on Chemistry and Physics."

Fuller's daughter Helen inherited the property and in the 1940's married Theodore Muller. Muller established an office for his architectural practice in downtown Westport. The accessory building became a weekend design/art studio for both Muller's.

After Muller retired in the early 1990's, the building was used to store his expansive collection of architectural drawings, photographs, and papers. Once the documents were organized and donated or given away, the use of the outbuilding was largely abandoned.

Although these theories and recollections provide an overview of the 20th century use of the structure, the information does not rise to the level required for documenting the design and construction of the building.

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 home built for prosperous ship captains as confirmed by various historic records and the P.A.L. inventory. Captain Zalman Sanford built the main dwelling at 35 Wright Street and another at 41 Wright Street --- both classic examples of prominent ship captain's homes 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. *Although we disagree with the actual size of the structure, this is worth noting as structures less than 500 square feet per the Assessor’s records are exempt from the requirement of a Demolition Permit.*

FINDING:

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

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

41 Whitney Street: 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

out building 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 a 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 ...” [EMPHASIS ADDED.]

FINDING: Although the “property” comports with NPS criteria, the outbuilding is not representative of any of these qualifications.

Other standards provided by the NPS as cited in the current HDC Handbook:

“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: The property and the main residence are associated with events contributing to the broad patterns of the mid-1800’s, associated with the lives of significant persons of that period and embodies all the characteristics of the architecture of that time.

CONCLUSION:

Section 32-18 of the Westport Zoning Regulations recognizes demolition in the context of alteration of a historic structure:

“32-18.2.2 Alteration, Historic Structure

Any Regulated Activity in the Westport Historic Districts & Properties Handbook, or any relocation, **demolition**, restoration or reconstruction of the historic structure or historic accessory structure.” [EMPHASIS ADDED.]

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 property's provenance, age, use or style. Nor is the subject outbuilding associated with a verifiable connection to a historic figure or event.

Without appropriate documentation, there is no proof that the outbuilding represents the work of a master craftsman, nor do its remains indicate that the original structure possessed high artistic value.

Approval of the proposed cottage in accordance with Section 32-18 will benefit from preservation easements on both the main house and the cottage and prevent the potential loss of the invaluable historic legacy of the Zalman Sanford property.

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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March 10, 2022

Steve Smith, Building Official
Town of Westport - Building Department
515 Post Road East – 2nd floor
Westport, CT 06880

RE: 35 Wright Street – Accessory structure

Dear Steve,

Thank you for meeting with my associate David Weitowitz and me on March 8, 2022, to inspect the accessory structure at 35 Wright Street.

This will confirm our findings and related code deficiencies.

As we observed --

- Exterior elements of the accessory structure are deteriorated and based upon their age, we suspect are contaminated with lead i.e., shingles, trim, windows.
 - The roof is supported by temporary bracing put in place after the roof collapsed more than a decade ago, according to the property owner.
 - The frame of the accessory structure was constructed in post and beam style but with only intermittent posts and boards as sheathing. Hence there is no provision for wind shear as currently required in the Building Code.
 - As wood shingle siding is applied directly to the board sheathing there is no code required air barrier.
 - The structure has no insulation, and the roof rafters are too shallow for insulation to be added.
 - Portions of the interior walls are missing.
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- Approximately half of the interior floor is missing.
 - Remaining portions of the floor joists and plywood flooring are rotting and show evidence consistent with water damage.
 - The floor is not attached or connected in any way to the foundation i.e., there are no anchor bolts, tie downs, etc. in place as required in Building Code.
 - The crawl space shows evidence of infestation by vermin and racoons.

The exception to the above is the stone foundation. It appears that if the wood structure is removed, it may be possible to repair and preserve the foundation and incorporate it with proposed new construction.

The attached photos illustrate many of these issues.

Based on the forgoing, it appears that the accessory building is not a candidate for restoration or refurbishment under the current building code.

Do you agree?

Respectfully Submitted,

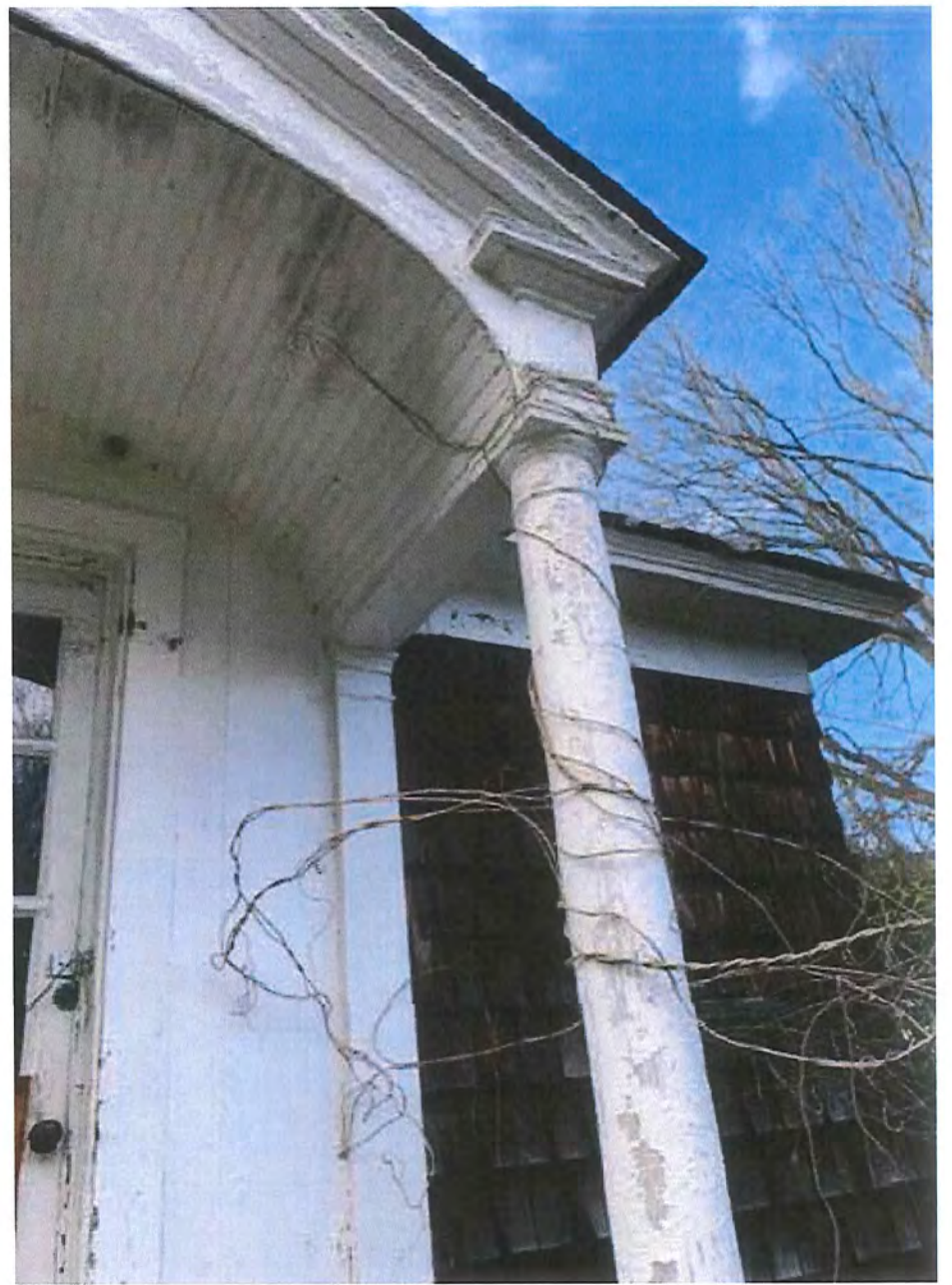


John P. Franzen FAIA

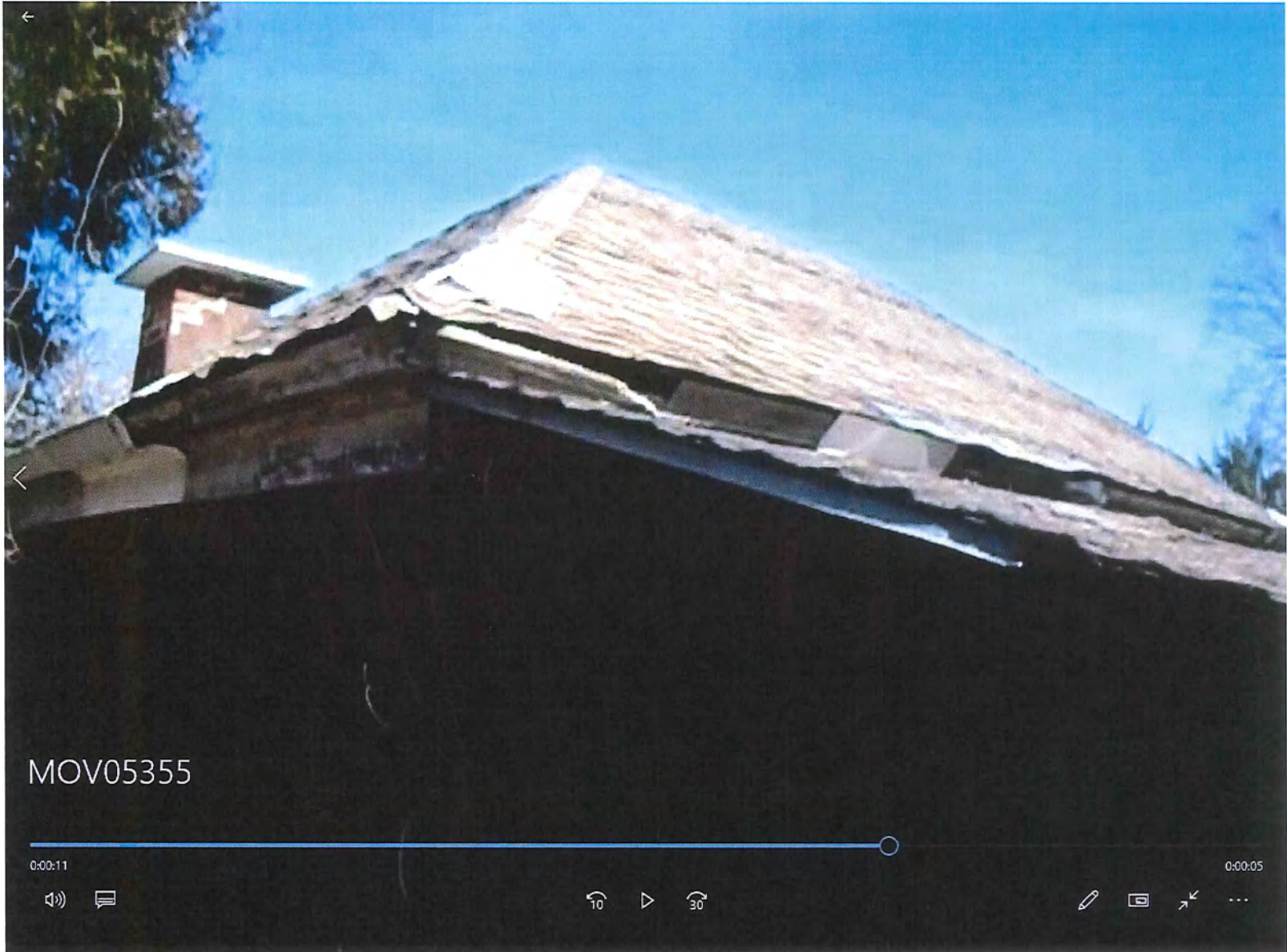
Attachments: Photos (3)



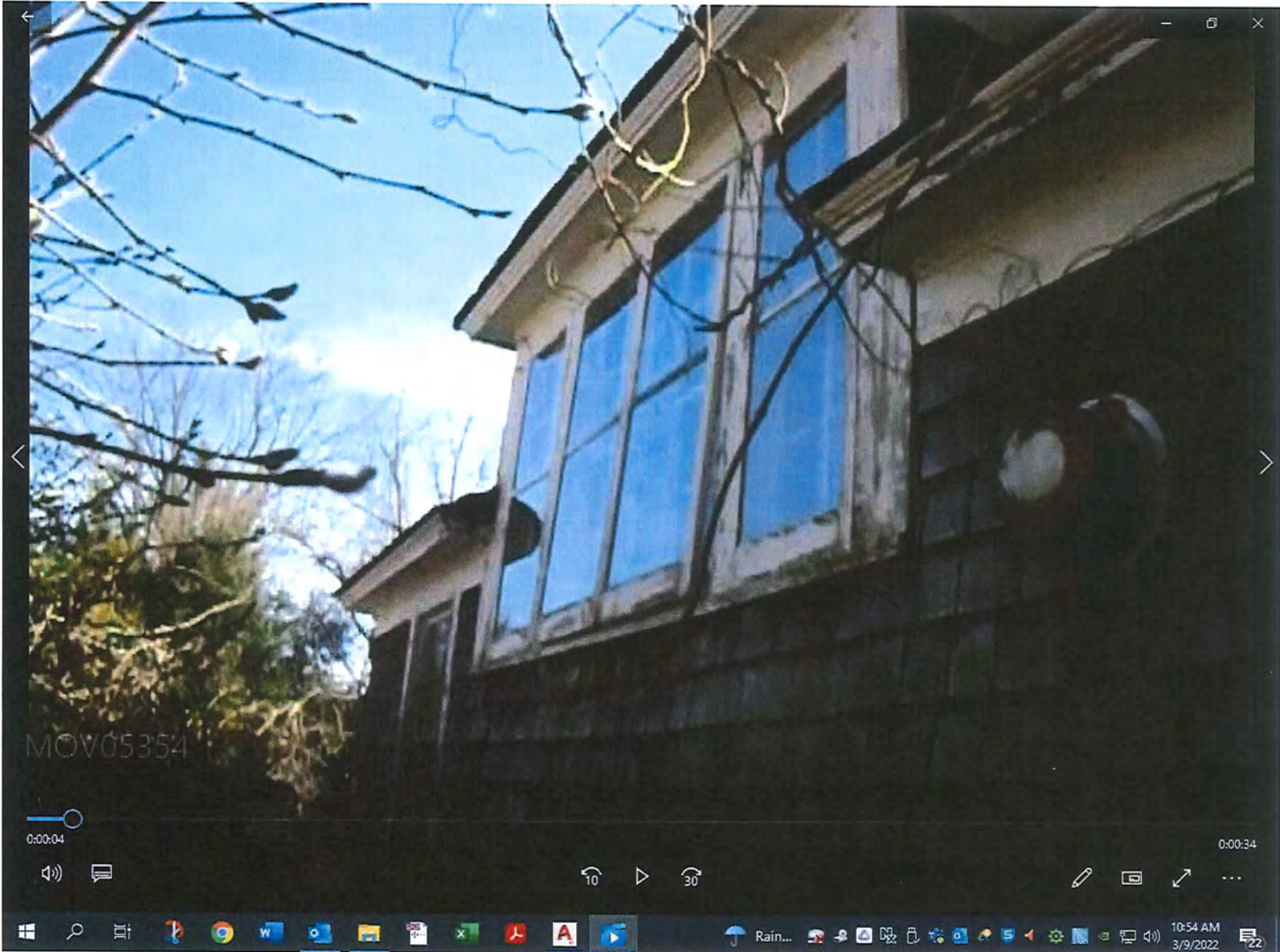












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April 13, 2022

Historic District Commission
Town of Westport – Town Hall
110 Myrtle Avenue
Westport, CT 06880

Dear Commissioners:

As the Architect for the property located at 35 Wright Street in Westport, I have been asked to provide my credentials for the benefit of the Commission.

I am Principal and Owner of J.P. Franzen Associates, located in Southport, CT. I received my BA and Masters Degree in Architecture from Cornell University. I have practiced in Connecticut since 1981. I am currently licensed in CT, NY, RI, MI, FL, CA, VT, NJ, and PA.

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

My firm has also worked on 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 Avenue: 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 35 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 of the proposed cottage, is compatible with the site and in keeping with the Westport Historic District and State and National guidelines.

Respectfully Submitted,

John P Franzen

John P. Franzen

John P. Franzen, FAIA

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