



TOWN OF WESTON

781-786-5066
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

July 6, 2019

Historical Commission Comments to the ZBA 751 – 761 Boston Post Road Comprehensive Permit Application

Introduction:

The Historical Commission seeks to optimize preservation of the historic complex of buildings impacted by the Modera Weston Project, while accommodating fair and reasonable development. These buildings contribute to the Boston Post Road National Register Historic District, and they can be found in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS), as well as the Town's Cultural Resources Inventory. We look forward to working with the developers toward the achievement of these goals.

On June 18th, the developers presented their most recent plans to the Commission. We are pleased that their new preservation plan incorporates earlier recommendations by the Commission to preserve most of the significant buildings on the property.

While the project now calls to retain three significant residences, we also want to express our desire to work towards a plan that also saves a fourth structure on the site, the Sibley Barn.

Historic Structures:

The **Mark Sibley/Mary Rice House**, 761 BPR, will be preserved in situ. This Greek Revival house dates from 1840 and is close to and highly visible from Boston Post Road. The proponents plan to restore the exterior of this building and to use it as a leasing office downstairs and as "work from home" offices upstairs. Ceiling heights in the building are well suited to modern use, and an elevator can reasonably be located either within or behind the structure. In addition to the exterior the Commission would like the opportunity to work with the applicant to identify significant interior features of the house. MACRIS information for this building can be found here: <http://mhc-macris.net/Details.aspx?MhclId=WSN.157>

The **Mirick/Farnsworth House** is now located toward the east side of the lot, surrounded on three sides by fields. This Colonial house dates from 1725 and 1735, and has been moved at least twice before. It originally stood near the Post Road, and now includes two substantial additions. The project proponents plan to once again relocate the original part of this house toward the southwest, close by the Mark Sibley/Mary Rice House. While much of the exterior of the house can be restored, areas in the back will need to be rebuilt where the additions are

now attached. The Commission requests review over this exterior work. The Farnsworth house contains elements from the George Lamson House, and the Commission would also like to develop a list of any significant features. We understand that ceiling heights in this building are not commodious and at this point the applicants are not sure how to use this building. We are grateful that they intend to preserve it and that they understand that they need to find a good use for it. MACRIS information for this building can be found here: <http://mhc-macris.net/Details.aspx?Mhclid=WSN.155>

The **Eleanor Raymond West Wing** is the name given to the westernmost addition at the back of the Mirick/Farnsworth House. Designed in 1935, this wing represents the distinctive style of this prominent Modernist architect. The wing is contextual on the exterior, but inside it is whimsical and unique. We understand that ceiling heights, especially on the 2nd floor of this building are low, and that the applicants do not yet know yet whether they will use it as a guest suite or if they might sell it as a single-family residence. While we are grateful that they have now agreed to preserve the structure of the Eleanor Raymond Wing, we ask that the applicant consider attaching it again to the main body of the Mirick/Farnsworth House, maintaining the existing relationship of the house and this addition. Most of the interiors of the Wing are worthy of preservation and we would again like to work with the applicants to develop a list of significant interior spaces and features. The MACRIS form listed above for the Mirick/Farnsworth House contains information about this wing.

The **Mark Sibley Barn**, located near the Sibley House on the site, is also a significant structure visible from Boston Post Road. An unusual form, it is a two-story bank barn, built with two basement levels. While the applicants originally assumed the barn would fulfill one of their functional requirements, they have subsequently decided to remove it from the site. The Commission asks that the applicant consider reuse of the barn. We believe the best alternative is to preserve the building in situ, where it contributes to the Historic District. If that cannot be accomplished, we recommend that it be preserved and used as a single-story structure somewhere on the property, or disassembled and donated to Land's Sake Farm where it can at least be kept in agricultural use. MACRIS information for the Mark Sibley Barn can be found here: <http://mhc-macris.net/Details.aspx?Mhclid=WSN.1229>

Miscellaneous recommendations:

Proposed plans for the new Modera Weston development create a new grouping of historic buildings around the site of the Sibley House. The applicants intend that these buildings will present appropriately to Boston Post Road and to the National Register District. The Commission would like the opportunity to comment upon and review the layout and massing of this complex. The Commission requests that the applicants provide site sections through this area to Boston Post Road and through to other parts of the development.

Among layout questions are the following: If the Farnsworth House and the Eleanor Raymond Wing are reattached, might there be space on the site to restore the Sibley Barn in the immediate area? Can the Waste Water Treatment Plant be moved out of the vicinity?

The applicant will conduct an archaeological study of the area prior to any development activity. A site analysis has been conducted and they are currently awaiting a draft report that will be filed with the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The Commission should be kept apprised of the results.

The rarity of the Sibley Barn as a two-story bank barn merits its documentation with measured drawings. We would welcome an initiative to document the other historic structures on site as well.

The Commission realizes that a portion of the Woodleigh Farm site will lose its current pastoral character as a result of this development. Before that happens, the proponents should provide professional documentation of the existing context in the form of photographs and a video which can also be used as the foundation for a Cultural Landscape Report and as part of the permanent record of the site. The proponents should consider using this documentation for educational purposes to inform prospective tenants about the history of the site.

Finally, the Commission asks that the proponents provide permanent protection for the preserved historic buildings, notably as preservation deed restrictions. These would be approved by the Mass Historical Commission and be held by the Town. The applicants foresee that the historic buildings, in their new context, will contribute to the Boston Post Road National Register District. They understand the advantage of creating a unique 600 plus foot streetscape that will benefit both the town and the development with permanent protections.

Again, we look forward to working cooperatively with these applicants on a successful outcome. Thank you for considering our comments.

Phyllis Halpern and Steven Wagner
Co-chairs, Weston Historical Commission