

William A. MacIntosh, RALEED AP
300 North Ridgewood Road
South Orange, NJ 07079

January 27, 2021

Village President Sheen J. Collum
South Orange Board of Trustees
South Orange Historic Preservation Commissioners
Town Planner, Greer Patras

Re. Squier House / 167 North Ridgewood Road
Preliminary Concept to Allow Development while Preserving the Historic Resource

Dear President Collum Trustees, HPC Commissioners, and Ms. Patras,

I live near the Squier House site and am an architect with experience in site / campus planning, residential architecture and at historic sites. I have a deep appreciation for the historic value of the Squier House. I also appreciate that Ampere Development purchased 167 N. Ridgewood with the understanding that subdivision and development for two houses was as-of-right. Moreover, I appreciate the Village's legal situation.

The purpose of this letter is to outline a **possible path forward to a "Win-Win" solution**, where Ampere can proceed with development to realize the value of their investment, while preserving the historic portion of the 1774 Squier House in an affordable, sustainable manner.

Following is a two-part strategy on potentially how to solve some of these issues, with preliminary ideas. Input from the Developer, Village officials and community members will be essential to test what is possible.

Strategy

1. Proceed and Protect

- Identify a way the developer can proceed with construction, using a modified version of their submitted plans, so the subdivision lot line and driveways avoid the historic 1774 core of the Squire House.
- Demolish non-historic parts of 167 N. Ridgewood, retaining the historic core and covering exposed sides from the weather.
- The additional costs for design revisions and more careful demolition will be identified as soon as possible to see how these funds can be raised privately in the very near term. Time is of the essence.

2. Develop, Explore, and Decide

- Ampere proceeds with constructing the two proposed houses
- Others – volunteers and potentially consultants paid by privately raised funds - explore all facets of feasibility on an expedited basis to preserve and renovate the old structure during construction of the new improvements.

- Specifically, explore the potential for the 1774 structure to be renovated to serve as a desirable, marketable, compliant accessory dwelling that can generate additional property sale value for offsetting renovation costs. (Alternatively, as a wing with desirable added space to the new house on Lot 37.)
- Explore the earlier precedent of the current Lot 37 being non-taxable given it has a stream, riparian buffer and steep slopes and is mostly non-developable. Assess taxes on the proposed new Lot 37 equitably and according to this precedent to reflect lower value in that part of the lot, and the lower value of a severely depreciated property requiring extensive renovation.
- Approvals needed apparently would include:
 - i. Front yard variance for historic structure closer than 25' to front lot line
 - ii. Pending consideration / approval in Village Master Plan of accessory dwellings (as one option for use of the historic structure)
- If the 1774 house can be saved in a manner that meets Ampere Development's financial objectives and complies with Village ordinances, the house could be saved, and used either as an accessory dwelling or potentially a wing connected to a house as extra space for home office, studio, or other uses.
- If after exploring options during the construction period, it becomes evident that there is not a viable financial / development path to save the house, then approval for a demolition permit for the Squier House would not be unreasonably withheld.

There are multiple issues to resolve – site planning / zoning, structural, timing, use, marketability and costs.

A primary issue to address is siting. Can two new houses and the historic house both occupy the two lots? The developer's design team suggests not. I have found otherwise, as outlined in the next section. A summary of other challenges and possible solutions follow – for timing, structural integrity, use and costs.

Site Plan / Zoning

The attached site plan study options demonstrates how Ampere could develop two new houses on the property, while retaining the original 1774 portion of the Squier House as a wing to the north house.

Attachments:

- Option A (Accessory Dwelling) Feasibility Study Site Plan, 1/27/21)
- Option B (Wing) Feasibility Study Site Plan, Rev. 1/25/21)*

*Shown to developer Isaac Lefkowitz of Ampere Jan 25 and provided to him.

Key aspects common to both options include:

- Demolish the non-historic additions to the Squier House to free up the site
- Subdivide the two lots to skirt the 1774 structure (not 50/50 but closer than today)
- Build a new house on Lot 38, same plan as proposed by Ampere, moved slightly south
- Build a new house on Lot 37, accessed by the existing curb cut.
- New construction would comply with zoning.
- The historic structure encroaches approx. 4 feet into the 25-foot front yard. I would hope a variance would be possible without undue delay given the Squier House was there long before there was a zoning ordinance.

- Lot 37 has significant area that cannot be developed given the stream, riparian buffer and steep slopes. Historically that smaller parcel was reportedly carved out as non-taxable for this reason, but later put on the tax rolls when development was proposed there that did not happen.
- The tax valuation for the newly configured larger Lot 37 valuation could reflect the significant non-buildable area. And hopefully the significant depreciation of the 1774 structure requiring some investment. The resulting equitable tax assessment for the reconfigured Lot 37 would be based on precedent and could increase the sale value for the developer, contingent on preservation.

Option A

- Uses same house plans as developer proposal submitted to Planning Board with modifications to driveway locations to avoid passing through the historic structure and resulting shift in house footprints
- Preserved / restored Squier House is a stand-alone dwelling, much smaller than current residence once additions are removed.

Option B

- Uses same house plan as developer for Lot 38.
- Lot 37 house shown connected by a wing to the 1774 renovated structure as additional space (or an accessory dwelling if permitted under updated Village Master Plan).

I have shared the site plan concept with Isaac Lefkowitz during the site visit and sent him a copy. I explained that the plan uses the architectural floor plans he already has to a great extent. I also offered to consult pro bono with his architect. He showed some interest, but understandably is concerned about timing, marketability and costs. Below are ideas how each of these might possibly be addressed.

Building Envelop and Structural Integrity, Preliminary Assessment

I have shared photos of the structural condition of the basement with a structural engineer who specializes in historic preservation for his opinion (pro bono). I have a call with him Friday to discuss.

As a licensed architect, I have the following observations from the walk through Monday January 25. This was not a comprehensive building inspection, more a scan. (Mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems were not assessed). **In my professional opinion based on this preliminary scan, the condition of the building envelop and structure of the original portion of the house appears satisfactory, with some remedial framing work needed.**

Roof – appears generally to be in satisfactory condition. Asphalt shingles.

Brownstone masonry wall:

- No visible cracks at north wall. Mortar looks good.
- Apparently at least one crack at east / front wall, though this may be from long ago settlement
- Overall, visible mortar looks good. Repointing does not appear required.

Basement stone walls

- No visible cracking. Mortar looks in good condition
- No evidence of water infiltration or efflorescence.

Floors

- Seem relatively level, no obvious settlement
- Floor levels vary considerably across the house – a functional challenge

Interior Walls

- Satisfactory condition generally. No cracking visible

Foundation Sills (Basement)

- Some sills are hidden, as the floor sheathing abuts stone wall with little to no sill visible
- Sill at NE corner is deteriorated but has had subsequent remedial column inserted. May need corrective work.
- Sill probed with a screw driver at east was dry and flaky. Potentially dry rot in that location.

Girders

- Some are in satisfactory condition. Constructed during subsequent restorations.
- One girder seen has beetle damage, likely decades old. Typical measures to reinforce can be explored (sistering new beam on either side of old beam) in lieu of full replacement

Floor sheathing

- Most visible flooring is in good condition
- One area near north wall, original 1774 floor sheathing was rotted away, new material above

Columns

- A mix of later supports in dimensional lumber and original timber (one a section of a small tree)

A comprehensive professional engineer survey should be undertaken if there is a path to saving the house, privately funded.

Feasibility of Selective Demolition

The cost to demolish all existing structures would be less on a per square foot basis than more careful demolition to preserve one part of the existing structure. I am willing on a volunteer basis to identify suitable contractors to bid on the selective demolition. I have preliminary interest from two qualified contractors already, Dudonis Construction and SL Construction who specialized in old houses, including 18th C. Selective demolition would also include covering the exposed exterior walls with temporary weather siding and any temporary showing pending determination of eventual use (demolition or renovation).

The proposed approach to identifying the added demolition cost would be:

- Cost of selective demolition to save 1774 portion (lowest qualifying bid)
- Minus cost of comprehensive demolition (from Ampere or other source)

The goal would be to find funding quickly from private and potential other sources to cover this added cost. This would allow development to proceed while "buying time" to determine if the Squier House can be saved.

Marketability

Mr. Lefkowitz has told me his concern about how keeping the old house may impact his ability to sell the property once he develops it. This understandably and a concern that needs to be addressed in concrete ways to allow a level of comfort that exploring how the house can be saved would not adversely impact Ampere Development financially.

The focus of our approach would be to see how the preserved / renovated core of the historic house could generate added value, increasing his eventual sale cost – either as additional desirable space or

as an accessory dwelling unity that can result in an income stream to the owner. Option A and B reflect both these approaches.

One next step as I understanding the potential to pass an accessory dwelling provision in the Village Master Plan. I am eager to learn more about this.

Another next step is to prepare a design concept for the preserved / renovated Squier House to assess it use and potential desirability on the market. I am willing to do this design pro bono to explore what might be possible and show the developer and Village officials in the near term, if current or anticipated amended land use law permits the proposed use.

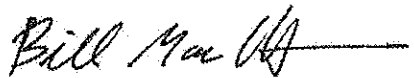
Suggested Next Steps

As a Village resident, I wanted to share this information first with Village officials. From Sheena's comments at the recent Board of Trustee meeting, however, I understand the developer, Ampere, is really "in the driver seat", having purchased the property in good faith with the assurance that development was as-of-right. The developer has carrying costs and needs a predictable and expeditious way forward. Accordingly, I think it would beneficial to continue the dialog the developer and share viable concepts with the developer in a very timely manner. First, however, it is critical to know if an accessory dwelling approach could be possible. I would respectfully ask that someone advise on this soon.

Then if Ampere has interest in this 2-part strategy, or learning more about potential costs, risks and benefits, we can address these quickly and in a coordinated manner to understand how private funds might be raised to cover near term expenses in "Preserve and Protect".

I look forward to hearing from you and learning how I can be of service.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill MacIntosh" followed by a horizontal line.

William A. MacIntosh, RA LEED AP
NJ Architectural License # 21A101991500

Addendum: CV Overview

William A MacIntosh

Registered Architect, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut
South Orange Resident since 2009, and in Maplewood since 1998

Employment:

G3 Architecture Interiors Planning, Elmwood Park, NJ
Director

Recent Projects:

- Bergen County Historical Society, New Museum / Event Building, on 18th C site (in fundraising)
- Feasibility Studies and Facility Master Plans for the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities. Lead planner. To support CSCU's capital budget process
- Residential Renovation Study, South Orange, NJ

Select Prior Projects

- Site and Facility Master Plan, George Washington's Mount Vernon
- Museum Master Plan, Shaker Museum, Historic Mount Lebanon Shaker Village
- New Museum and Visitor Center, Gettysburg National Battlefield
- Residences in Long Island, Connecticut, Wyoming, Montana

Prior Employment:

Perkins+Will, NY, NY; Associate Principal, Higher Education Practice Leader
Cooper, Robertson & Partners; NY, NY, Associate, Partner

Community Service:

Ad Hoc Committee on Historic Preservation, Maplewood NJ
St. George's Church, Maplewood, Building and Grounds Committee chair for 2007 renovation

Education:

Yale College, BA in Architecture
Columbia University, Graduate School of Architecture, Preservation and Planning, Master of Architecture
Teacher Assistant, Structures Course

Teaching:

Design juror at Pratt Institute, Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania
Associate in Architecture, Building Technology instructor, Columbia GSAPP, c 1996-1998.