Public Comment

Putnam Ave Historic Structure-25020-Barnstable

Submitted By: Susannah Wheelwright
Town/Village: Cotuit
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via online form

Comment

With regard to 49 Putnam Avenue as a Development of Regional Impact, please consider carefully the historical and environmental protections that forward-thinking residents of the Cotuit community established under the national and state mechanisms available by law.

Both Harriet Ropes Cabot and James Gould, whom I appreciated as notable community elders, were devoted to Cotuit Port and to the broader Cotuit and mid-Cape communities. Both worked tirelessly to share the stories of the Ropes--Lowell--Hooper--Crocker house and farm and to preserve its integrity within Cotuit's historical and cultural landscape. With the best of intentions, they and other local residents sought out and achieved National Historic Register designations for the buildings at 49 Putnam Ave. and conservation restrictions on the meadow. Harriet Ropes Cabot and James Gould considered both the historic farmscape and the viewscape from Cotuit Bay to be integral parts of the historical narrative, as it had included ship captains, postmasters, and the many historic uses of the landing, beach access, and Cotuit Bay. These two history-minded individuals preserved 49 Putnam Ave. and the narrative of its central role in the Cotuit community and broader mid-Cape region. I hope that their faith was well founded and that the administrators of the National Historic Register and the Cape Cod Commission can honor their intent.

Historical farmscapes are of clear value to preservation organizations on Cape Cod. Barnstable Land Trust has fought to preserve Ropes Field, Bell Farm, and Fuller Farm, and Yarmouth has preserved Taylor-Bray Farm. The Ropes--Lowell--Hooper--Crocker farm was intended to be on the National Historic Register as a complete farmscape of the ship captain's house with its view of the bay, the barn, the ice house, and the workshop/professor's office. If the house were moved so as to sever its view of the bay, it would cease to represent its original purpose as a ship captain's house. Its relationship with its rural outbuildings would no longer make historical sense, and it would lose its historic ells (post office, shop, sail loft). Moving the structure would result in its removal from the National Historic Register, as I understand it. The applicant or any future owners could then choose to demolish the house, as there would be no restrictions requiring them to preserve any part of that building. This seems like the worst possible outcome, the very antithesis of what Harriet Ropes Cabot and James Gould intended.

I appreciate that the Barnstable Historic Commission has required an 18-month demolition delay. Perhaps by then, the applicant's stated recreational goals will have been met in other ways. While it is possible that the applicant may eventually decide to withdraw this proposal, please use all preservation tools available to the Cape Cod Commission to encourage them to do so.

Sincerely,

Susannah Wheelwright
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PDF File submitted: No