



TOWN OF ACTON  
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD  
Review Memorandum: Asa Parlin House  
Design Concept Review  
October 21, 2021

DRB Members in attendance: Peter Darlow (Chair), David Honn, Holly Ben-Joseph, Thomas Doolittle, Jon Cappetta, (Planning Board Liaison), and Dean Charter, (BOS Liaison)

Town of Acton Proponents in attendance: Karle Packard – Red Hawk Studio\_ Building Architect, Martha Lyon – Martha Lyon Landscape Architecture\_Landscape Architect

Documents Reviewed: Powerpoint Document consisting of 15 images titled - Parlin House DRB Presentation – 10-21-2021 – 1B Final.

The town of Acton Select Board has prioritized the rehabilitation and redevelopment of the town owned Asa Parlin House located adjacent to Town Hall and the Public Library at 17 Woodbury Lane. The town has owned the property for close to 20 years and has on again/off again been debating how best to repurpose the property as an extension to the campus of municipal buildings in the town's Village Center.

The Asa Parlin House is an 1860 Greek Revival cottage located within the Village Center historic district. Over the years several additions have been made to the original 160 year old portion. Several building add on structures, that had been deemed in very poor shape, were recently removed by the town. The town has also completed the removal of the interior finishes within the remaining residential structures as a part of an abatement program.

Red Hawk Studio and Martha Lyon Landscape Architecture have been retained by the town to envisage program and design concepts for how the existing historic building and adjacent land can best be repurposed based upon an outline of programmatic requests established with the help of town staff and public input.

Two alternative reuse plans were presented to the DRB. Both concept plans endeavor to establish the reuse of the original Asa Parlin house and grounds as meeting and function focused spaces.

Alternative 1 removes all remaining additions to the original residential building, and removes most of the remaining interior partitions, stairway and second floor level, offering one large meeting/function space with a capacity for 38 within a restored shell of the original house. The meeting/function space would be augmented by a new one story addition on the east side of the house. The new addition will become the main entrance foyer to the meeting spaces with an accessible entrance porch on the north end serving the

adjacent parking areas and a second larger porch and entrance on the south end that will face towards town hall and the library. Within the new addition and accessible from the foyer are proposed toilet rooms, a modest kitchenette, a janitor closet, and a storage closet. A full basement, accessed via an exterior stairway on the east facing side of the addition, is proposed for below the addition to provide additional municipal storage space.

Alternative 2 proposes to provide all of what is described within alternative 1 and to maintain the 1970s era addition on the north side of the historic home which would be repurposed as a second meeting space with a capacity for 21 occupants.

For each of the alternative building-reuse schemes a significant rethink to take advantage of the very underused surrounding land is proposed. Though parking lots bound 3 sides of the Asa Parlin property, an enhancement is desired that will offer handicap accessible parking spaces immediately adjacent to the new north entrance to the Asa Parlin meeting space(s). The drive into the new accessible parking is proposed to be from within the existing parking lot, allowing for the removal of the existing driveway off of Woodbury Lane. Removal of the front drive will visually enhance the street facing landscape of the Asa Parlin property as well as to improve traffic flow on Woodbury.. The most significant portion of available land is to the south of the Asa Parlin house. The landscape design proposal is to redevelop this portion of the site to become a feature gathering space that can be used for outdoor functions. The proposed lawn area, though surrounded by parking on two sides and Woodbury lane on a third will be buffered and separated from much of the existing pavement through careful reuse of existing trees and stone walls enhanced by new plantings of trees, shrubbery and decorative plant material with the intent to establish the look and feel of the lawn as an outdoor room. The new outdoor gathering space and the Asa Parlin meeting room(s) would be accessed via a new walkway that will lead from the parking lot across from the library entrance to the new south side entrance to the Asa Parlin house. The existing front walk leading to the Asa Parlin house from Woodbury Lane would be maintained, primarily as a historic attribute and a new sidewalk along Woodbury Lane will be introduced.

Following are comments and recommendations made by the DRB:

- Definitively, DRB members recommend that the town proceed towards further development of building Alternative 1. Maintaining the 1970s addition is very much not desired.
- David Honn, who also reviewed the project presentation as chair of the HDC, offered reinforcement for preserving and restoring, (in an historically correct manner as possible-wood shingle roof, appropriate wood shutters, authentic paint colors, etc.), the original Asa Parlin Homestead as a visual jewelbox as seen from Woodbury Lane while allowing that the proposed lowrise addition to the east side of restored home can work well as long as the addition is proportionally developed so as to be discreet and to not visually compete with the original home's architecture.
- DRB members recommended that both entrances to the new meeting space be set indented behind the restored home to establish a visual separation between the massing of the Asa Parlin house and the new addition.
- The new low rise addition should be detailed simply, in a clean and relatively modern architectural language, (in mass, height, materials, detailing, color, etc.), that will sit comfortably and unobtrusively adjacent to the historic home.
- Within the addition, DRB members encourage that the kitchen space be made sufficiently large enough to allow for caterers to set up.
- Though the proposed basement storage below the new addition may be a desired, DRB members are very much against the exterior stairway access on the east face of the addition. This side of

the redeveloped property is as visually prominent as the other three sides. The open air basement stair would be a significant eyesore. DRB members noted that there are more cost effective solutions for storage than excavating full basements.

- The proposed solar array option for a flat roof version of the addition should not be pursued as this significantly intrudes visually on what can be a very well done redevelopment. To promote an energy responsive solution, a DRB member suggested a geothermal well in lieu of the solar array.
- DRB members are skeptical of the interior of the Asa Parlin home being successful as a single formal meeting space, unless an engineering solution can be identified to eliminate the columns presently suggested to be positioned within the middle of the plan. Should the column(s) need to stay, DRB members believe the house naturally lends itself to being developed with two separate meeting rooms that can be combined into a single function space through the use of some moveable partition system.
- The parking area redevelopment to offer accessible spaces adjacent to the Asa Parlin north entrance is a good idea. However, this looks like a fairly tight layout and will need more study to resolve the logistics.
- Maintaining the front walk to the original entrance door and developing a new sidewalk along Woodbury Lane are good ideas and supported by the DRB.
- DRB members are very pleased with the intention to redevelop the south side of the Asa Parlin site as a functional lawn space. This will be a very nice addition to the town government complex.
- It is recommended that more significant shade trees and plantings be focused along the east edge of the proposed lawn to screen out the large parking areas. At the same time, it is recommended to leave or create openings within the edge of the lawn facing towards Woodbury Lane to allow for views into and out of the lawn area.
- DRB members suggest development of a 'formal' entry feature, such as an arbor, gate or other small structure near the start of the sidewalk that leads from the library and parking area to the outdoor gathering space and Asa Parlin house to mark this as an important arrival point.
- There was debate as to whether the new walk, that borders the east side of the lawn should be separated by a rock wall, or low plantings, or even a line of trees. This should be further studied as the planning work is developed.

The DRB is pleased to have this opportunity, early in the development, to offer thoughts and suggestions to the town and design team. We look forward to continued involvement as the Asa Parlin house project continues.

Respectfully submitted,

The DRB