

Catherine M. Esselen
23 Summer Street
Bristol, RI 02809

August 15, 2023

Bristol Historic District
Commission
10 Court Street
Bristol, RI 02809

Sent also via email: ntoth@bristolri.gov

Re: Concept Review 23-111: 14 Union Street

Dear Members of the Bristol Historic District Commission,

My husband and I attended the HDC meeting on 8/3/23 to learn about the proposed plans for a 3 bay 2 story garage at 14 Union Street. We also attended the zoning meeting on 2/3/23 but missed the second hearing regarding this proposal. Our understanding is that zoning will grant Mr. Cabral the variances he needs, if HDC approves his concept for the 24' x 36' two story proposed garage. R-6 zoning permits 22' x 24" maximum for an auxillary structure for this lot size. (Reference attached Staff Report 2-3-23 for Zoning Board of Review: File No. 2023-08). The variance to construct a porch was granted at the 2-3-23 zoning meeting. Attached is a letter we sent to the zoning commission when we received notice as an abettor. Our neighbors at 19 Union Street (Amy and Keith Berg) sent a similar letter.

At the 2/3/23 zoning meeting it was explained to Mr. Cabral that he could not build the garage on the footprint of the 20' x 30' existing garage, because it sits right on the property line between 14 Union and 19 and 23 Summer Street. It was explained that a new structure must be at least 6' from a property line. Mr. Cabral was encouraged to scale down the garage size, but he was firm that he needed a garage that would accommodate larger vehicles and the 2nd story was needed for storage, due to a wet basement in the house. It was also clarified that although there is an existing 3-bay garage, there is no grandfathered right to 3-bays. The size, height and dormers were discussed at length. I spoke at that hearing because I felt the 24' x 36" size with a 2nd story, dormers on both sides are overwhelming for the lot, existing house, and neighborhood.


At the 8/3/23 HDC meeting, Mr. Cabral commented that he, his wife, and their architects/ engineers have been struggling to make this garage look smaller. The current plan is to turn it, so that the garage doors face the house (west), and the width of the garage is what will be seen from the street. Esthetically I don't know if that is an improvement or not. The proposed garage is to be tucked in the SE corner of the property, however the drawings submitted did not show this orientation or placement. Mr. Cabral also stated they were going to keep the driveway in its current location. I strongly believe that HDC members should have a site review, after Mr. Cabral has staked out the location along with the dimensions of the garage.

From my kitchen window I can see where this garage will sit. 14 Union Street has a large side yard between the house and the neighbors at #20 Union Street. There is an old perhaps 4' chain link fence with overgrowth and two large trees, towards the back of the property that divide the lots of #14 and #20 Union Street. It looks like the two large trees belong to #20, and I can't help but wonder what will happen to them with this proposed construction. There is a slight incline to the property, and the

proposed height should be considered. I'm not sure if the new owners at #20 Union Street have any idea of the Cabral's plans for this garage. The current house is 1954 sq ft and is rectangular in shape. The square footage will increase with the second-floor addition in the back, and along with the added front porch, eventually the home will look larger. The proposed garage is around 1728 sq ft, also rectangular in shape.

At the August 3rd HDC meeting, several HDC members lamented a decision where they approved an addition on State Street, that on paper didn't look as big as it turned out constructed. I fear that might be the case with this proposed garage. Susan Church expressed her concerns as to how the size of this proposed garage is in keeping with the character of Union Street or the rest of the historic district? We agree and feel some guidance should be given to scale down the size of this proposed garage.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Catherine M. Esselen".

Catherine M. Esselen

Email: cesselen@gmail.com

Attachments:

Esselen letter to Zoning Board of Review (1/28/23)

Zoning Staff Report 2/3/23



Town of Bristol, Rhode Island Zoning Board of Review

STAFF REPORT FOR:

FILE NO. 2023-08

APPLICANT: Louis and Joan Cabral
LOCATION: 14 Union Street
PLAT: 15 LOT: 52 ZONE: R-6

APPLICANT IS REQUESTING DIMENSIONAL VARIANCES TO:

Construct a covered front porch addition to an existing single-family dwelling with less than the required front yard; and to demolish an existing 20ft. x 30ft. single-story accessory garage structure and construct a new 24ft. x 36ft. two-story accessory garage structure with less than the required rear yard and at a size and height greater than permitted for accessory structures in the R-6 zoning district.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVIEW:

As this application is for a dimensional variance, it does not require review by the Planning Board per Section 28-409(b) of the Zoning Ordinance.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY STAFF:

The applicant is requesting dimensional variances to construct a front porch addition to the existing single-family dwelling, and to construct a new accessory garage structure at this property located on the southerly side of Union Street. The proposed front porch addition would measure approximately 6ft. 8in. wide and approximately 29 feet long across the front and a portion of the left side of the existing dwelling. This porch would have a roof covering and would replace an existing stone and masonry step that leads from the sidewalk to the front door of the dwelling. The proposed front porch would extend to within approximately 3ft. 3in. of the front property line located just behind the existing Union Street sidewalk. The zoning ordinance requires a minimum front yard setback of 20 feet or the average of the block (whichever is less) in the R-6 zoning district. In addition, the zoning ordinance permits front porches to extend up to 1/3 into a front yard setback (see Section 28-142(h)). I have calculated that the average setback of this block on the south side of Union Street is approximately 13 feet. Thus, the minimum front setback for a porch on this property is approximately 9 feet.

The applicant also proposes the demolition of an existing 20' x 30' accessory garage structure and the construction of a new 24' x 36' three car accessory garage in its place. The proposed garage would be located at the southern rear portion of the property in line with the existing driveway. The structure would be larger in size and height than what the zoning ordinance permits for accessory structures in the R-6 zoning district. The zoning ordinance permits accessory structures to a maximum size of 22' x 24' in the R-6 zone. The second floor of the structure would reportedly be utilized for an open "bonus room" with no specific use proposed. The height of the proposed structure would be 22 ft. 9 1/4 in. above grade. The zoning ordinance permits accessory structures to a maximum height of 20 feet in the R-6 zone. In addition, the proposed garage would be located approximately 1.3 feet from the rear property line. The zoning ordinance requires a minimum 6 foot rear yard setback for accessory structures in a residential zoning district.

This property is also located within the Bristol Historic District Overlay Zone. As such, any exterior alterations to the property are subject to review and approval of the Bristol Historic District Commission (HDC). The applicant has submitted copies of minutes from the August 4, 2022 HDC meeting in which the board "generally gave positive feedback" to the conceptual design of both the front porch and garage additions. However, the HDC has not given final approval of the proposed project. Any approvals should be conditional and subject to final approval of the HDC.

 2/3/2023
Edward M. Tanner, Zoning Officer

January 28, 2023

Zoning Board of Review
Attn: Mr. Edward M. Tanner
10 Court Street
Bristol, RI 02809

Re: Review of 14 Union Street, Lot 52 = File #2023-08

Dear Mr. Tanner and fellow committee members,

My husband and I are in receipt of the notice of the Public Hearing to review the request by Louis and Joan Cabral for dimensional variances on the above-mentioned property. We have no issue with the porch request. However, we do have concerns with their plans to demolish the existing garage and construct a larger two story, three car garage.

While the existing garage has three-bays, it sits very close or on the property line between our property at 23 Summer Street, and our neighbor's, the Berg's at 19 Summer Street. This existing garage was likely built long before there were historic and zoning requirements. There is approximately 12" from the back side of our fence to the stone building material of this garage.

We appreciate that many cars are larger today than they were a hundred years ago, and we don't object to some modifications being granted to allow for larger cars, but we feel that the additional second story on the proposed 3 bay 24ft x 36ft is not in keeping with the historic district's character, or the town's dimensional regulations for the lot size, placement vis a vie the boundaries of the property. We assume because the existing garage is a 3 bay, that they might have "grandfathered" rights to keep 3 bays. We can accept that, but adding another story, concerns us that the property begins to look overbuilt, more in keeping with a neighborhood of newer homes. Another concern is where rain run-offs would fall from a two-story roof when the structure sits so close to abetting properties.

Most homes in the "circled" 200' radius don't have garages, if they do, they are older, smaller scale one or two bay garages, or an old barn. There are a few exceptions. Part of the historic nature of the Bristol Historic District is that homeowners acknowledge the guidelines to protect the historic character.

We will attend the hearing to learn how this proposal will be determined.

Thank you,

Catherine and Gustavus (Jack) Esselen