

December 16, 2025

Bristol Historic District Commission
235 High Street, Bristol, RI

Re: 125 Hope Street – Application for Demolition

Dear Members of the Bristol Historic District Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit further information regarding our application to demolish the existing structure at 125 Hope Street. DiPrete Engineering worked in collaboration with the applicant and the other professionals engaged in this project in the preparation of this supplemental information. This document accompanies the architect's concept sketches (attached) and provides a clear summary of our position, supported by professional evaluations and relevant findings (already submitted to the HDC). Much of this document is a summary of the flood plain survey and research, structural evaluation and report, and architectural reports previously submitted and presented to the HDC.

1. Recent History and Travel of the Application

- The project began in December 2024 with the applicant's intent to renovate the existing house. A survey in January 2025 documented that the foundation was out of compliance with VE zone requirements and the first floor and foundation were below the VE zone elevation, making the house noncompliant with RI Building Code and FEMA regulations.
- Structural engineers and architects determined that elevating or raising the house up and replacing the foundation would be required, but not feasible due to the construction type, poor condition of the house, and the flood zone requirements. The house would have to be disassembled, and rebuilt as a significantly different house if we proceeded along that route.
- The project was presented to the HDC at the March 6, 2025 meeting, followed by a site walk on March 26, 2025 with HDC members, the town building inspector, state RIHPHC representatives, and town staff.
- Over several months, the applicant commissioned additional flood plain studies and deeper structural and architectural investigations to address issues raised by the HDC and town officials. These studies confirmed that the house is within the VE zone, subject to severe storm surge and wave damage, and that renovation on the existing foundation would require variances unlikely to be granted or appropriate. Flood insurance for a renovated house in the current configuration would be prohibitively expensive (\$103,747.68/year for only a one-year commitment).
- At the September 9, 2025 HDC meeting, findings were presented, including a letter from the RIHPHC stating: *'there are no prudent and feasible alternatives to the demolition.'*

2. Why the Existing House Cannot Be Restored and Would Only Be a Replica

The existing home at 125 Hope Street is situated entirely within the FEMA VE flood zone, with both its foundation and first floor below the required elevation for code compliance. Comprehensive engineering and architectural evaluations have determined that the foundation is structurally deficient and exposed to significant wave energy, making it unsuitable for renovation or restoration.

At the September 9th meeting of the Historic District Commission, both the project's structural engineer, David J. Odeh, PE, and the project architect, Madeline Melchert RA testified at length regarding these issues. They presented detailed professional opinions and reasoning, supported by written reports submitted to the Commission. Their findings confirmed that the original construction lacks adequate corner bracing, framing, roof tie-downs and much of the existing structure has been exposed to water and has wood rot in the framing. Elevating the house to meet code would most likely be done by removing the asbestos siding, roof, and windows; dismantling the remaining structure; reconstructing the house with significant new framing and on a new foundation; and adding new code compliant siding, windows, and roof. This completely dismantled and rebuilt replica house would result in a structure two to three feet higher and fundamentally different from the original. Key historic elements, including the foundation, asbestos siding, windows, roof shingles, and other elements are not salvageable and would be replaced with modern materials. Their conclusion was that the required scope of work was not feasible and would leave a replica house with no contributing historic value.

The option of renovating the house on the existing foundation without dismantling and moving it would also be prohibitively expensive, significantly out of conformance with building codes, and with annual insurance premiums exceeding \$100,000 and only a one-year commitment on insurance available. Achieving code compliance would require variances from both state building codes and FEMA regulations, compromising safety and long-term viability.

The Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) has reviewed all findings and issued a letter stating: *'Given these factors, it is the RIHPHC's opinion that there are no prudent and feasible alternatives to the demolition.'*

In summary, any attempt to restore or reconstruct the house even if feasible would result in a non-contributing replica, with no remaining historic materials or value. The adverse effect on the district would remain, and the historic character would be lost.

3. Why the Two Detached Homes Are a Superior Alternative and Better Meet the Goals of the Historic District

The proposed alternative—demolishing the existing structure and constructing two new detached homes—offers a solution that is both respectful of the Historic District and responsive to the unique challenges of the site.

The detached homes are designed to be in scale with surrounding properties, less structural frontage along the street, incorporating architectural details such as hip roofs, center chimneys, and appropriate finishes. Rather than replicating the original house, the design pays homage to its shape and scale, creating view corridors to the coast and reducing massing close to the street frontage to better match neighboring homes.

Importantly, the detached homes will be built on code-compliant foundations, elevated above the flood plain, and constructed with modern materials that meet all current safety and building standards. This approach ensures the long-term viability and safety of the structures, while also preserving the character of the district.

The Bristol Comprehensive Plan encourages good design, appropriate scale, and respect for existing neighborhoods. The two detached homes can meet these goals better than a reconstructed replica which would be out of scale and character for the area at the new elevated first floor grade.

Finally, the applicant is committed to working collaboratively with the HDC on the final design to ensure the new homes contribute positively to the Historic District and reflect community values. The architect's concept sketches of what 2 new homes could look like are attached. We recognize that considerable additional detail and collaboration would be necessary before the HDC could issue an approval of the design and materials. However, we believe the concepts and request are sufficiently detailed to show the superiority of this concept over a replica of the existing house. The project architect illustrates a 2-step design process for the homes where she took inspiration from the shapes of the existing building, separated the addition from the original house and proposed narrower homes. She also illustrates a concept where the design more closely matches other homes in the historic district and offered to generate further design concepts.

In summary, the unique challenges posed by the flood zone, structural deficiencies, and regulatory requirements make restoration of the existing house at 125 Hope Street neither feasible nor historically meaningful. The proposed alternative—constructing detached and new appropriately designed homes—offers a solution that both respects the character of the Bristol Historic District and ensures long-term safety and compliance. We remain committed to working closely with the Commission and the community to achieve a result that honors the district's heritage while addressing the realities of the site.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to discussing this proposal further and working together to achieve the best outcome for the Historic District.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dennis DiPrete". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Dennis DiPrete
Principal, DiPrete Engineering

ATTACHMENT SHEET I

THIS PLAN ILLUSTRATES:

1. THE EXISTING FOUNDATION IS DIRECTLY EXPOSED TO THE HORIZONTAL WAVE ENERGY & IS NOT A COLUMN TYPE DESIGN AS REQUIRED BY THE RI BUILDING CODE AND FEMA REGULATIONS AND IS NOT APPROPRIATE FOR THE VE ZONE.
2. THE HOUSE IS TOO LOW AND NEEDS TO BE RAISED OR RECONSTRUCTED TO A HIGHER ELEVATION WHEN THE FOUNDATION IS CHANGED.

125 HOPE STREET EXISTING HOUSE:

1. LOCATED WITHIN THE VE FLOOD ZONE
2. BASE FLOOD ELEVATION AT 14' ABOVE SEA LEVEL
- REAR PROPERTY GRADE AT 6' ABOVE SEA LEVEL
- STREET ELEVATION AT 12' ABOVE SEA LEVEL
3. A NEW FOUNDATION IS REQUIRED TO ELEVATE STRUCTURE.



RED LINE = LINE OF
ELEVATED FIRST
FLOOR

BLUE LINE = LINE OF
14' FLOOD ELEVATION



RED LINE = LINE OF
ELEVATED FIRST
FLOOR

BLUE LINE = LINE OF
14' FLOOD ELEVATION



RED LINE = LINE OF
ELEVATED FIRST
FLOOR

BLUE LINE = LINE OF
14' FLOOD ELEVATION

THIS PLAN ILLUSTRATES THAT BECAUSE THE HOUSE MUST BE DISMANTLED AND A REPLICA BUILT, AN OPPORTUNITY EXISTS TO UTILIZE THE MUSEUM STRUCTURE AS THE DESIGN INSPIRATION FOR A SEPARATE STRUCTURE TO COMPLIMENT A REPLICATED AND MODIFIED DESIGN OF THE ORIGINAL HOUSE, THIS MAKES OPPORTUNITIES AND OPTIONS AVAILABLE:

1. SEPARATE THE BUILDING TO CREATE TWO NARROWER BUILDINGS MORE APPROPRIATE TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD.
2. RE-SITE THE HOUSE TO WORK BETTER WITH THE NEW AND HIGHER ELEVATION ALONG HOPE STREET.
3. MOVE THE GARAGE AND CAR PARKING TO UNDERNEATH THE NEW STRUCTURE.
4. SELECT ARCHITECTURAL STYLE AND MATERIALS APPROPRIATE TO THE HISTORIC DISTRICT

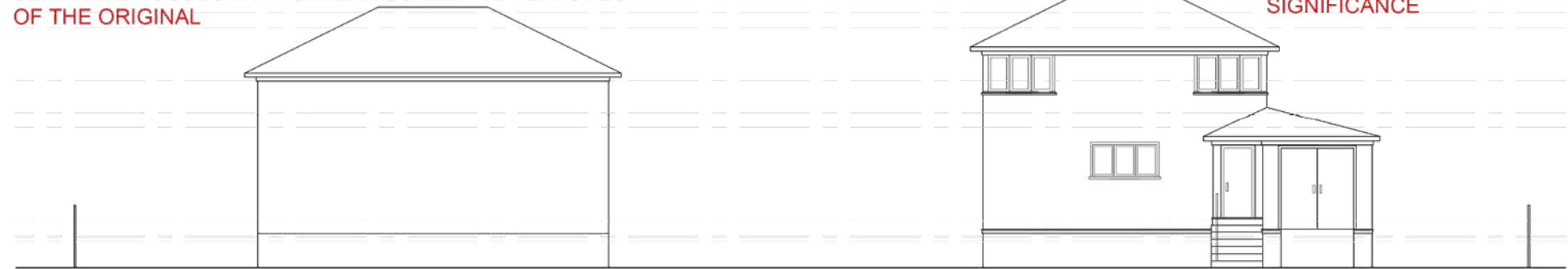
EXISTING ELEVATION

- STRUCTURES OCCUPY 92 LINEAR FEET OF THE STREET'S VIEW CORRIDOR TO THE WATER



PROPOSED ELEVATION - STEP 1

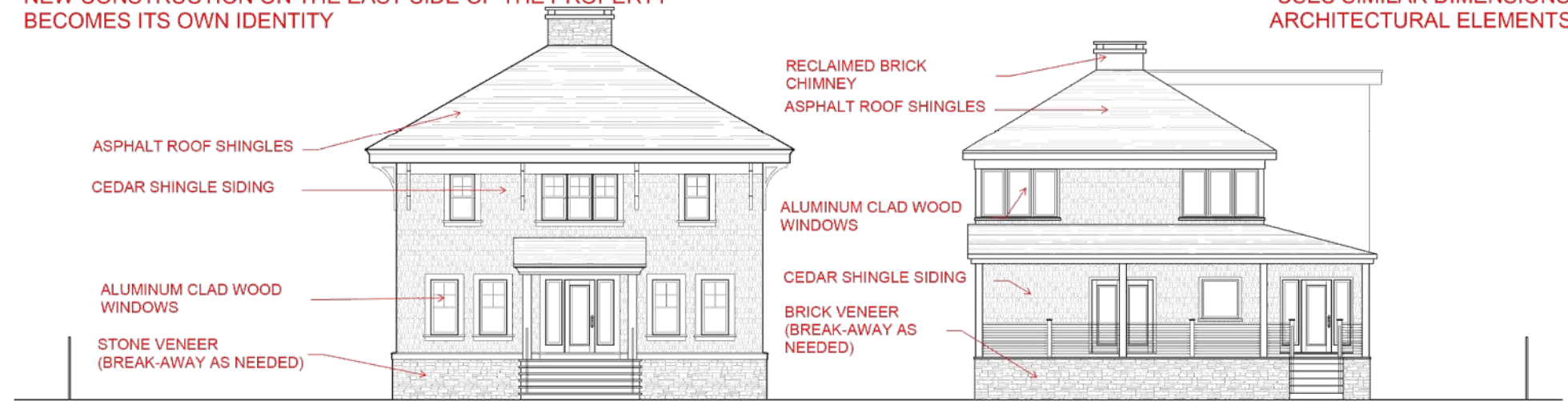
- NEW CONSTRUCTION ON CODE COMPLIANT RAISED FOUNDATIONS LENDS THE ABILITY TO HAVE TWO SEPARATE HOUSES WITH SIMILAR SCALE AND FEATURES OF THE ORIGINAL



- WITH REQUIRED MATERIAL & STRUCTURAL MODIFICATIONS COMPLETED, THE END RESULT IS A REPLICA OF THE ORIGINAL
- WOULD NOT RETAIN HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

PROPOSED ELEVATION - STEP 2

- SIMILAR IN SCALE TO THE OLD 'MUSEUM' STRUCTURE, THE NEW CONSTRUCTION ON THE EAST SIDE OF THE PROPERTY BECOMES ITS OWN IDENTITY



RECLAIMED BRICK CHIMNEY
ASPHALT ROOF SHINGLES

ALUMINUM CLAD WOOD WINDOWS

CEDAR SHINGLE SIDING

BRICK VENEER (BREAK-AWAY AS NEEDED)

- A MODIFIED OPTION PAYS HOMAGE TO THE ORIGINAL DESIGN WITHOUT DUPLICATING IT
- USES SIMILAR DIMENSIONS AND ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

ELEVATION CONCEPTS

- FURTHER VARIATIONS TO THE DESIGN IF THE IDEA OF A REPLICA IS NOT CONSIDERED THE IDEAL APPROACH
- CONCEPT 'A' IS SIMILAR IN SCALE AND DESIGN TO THE ORIGINAL HOUSE AND SHOWN IN RELATION TO THE SCALE OF THE STRUCTURES ACROSS THE STREET WITH DOTTED LINES
- CONCEPT 'B' IS ALSO SIMILAR IN SCALE WITH DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS THAT BLEND WITH THE HISTORIC DISTRICT AND ENHANCE THE NEIGHBORHOOD

CONCEPT 'A'



CONCEPT 'B'



THIS PLAN ILLUSTRATES THAT DIFFERENT OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE FOR SHAPES AND MATERIALS FOR THE REPLICATED HOUSE:

1. CONCEPT A TAKES DESIGN INSPIRATION FROM THE EXISTING HOUSE.
2. CONCEPT B TAKES DESIGN INSPIRATION FROM THE OTHER HOMES IN THE HISTORIC DISTRICT.
3. ADDITIONAL CONCEPTS CAN BE GENERATED FOR DISCUSSION AND COMPARISON.

THIS PLAN ILLUSTRATES
HOW THE NEW HOMES
COULD BE SET ON THE
PROPERTY AND HOW THE
NEW HOMES MATCH THE
SCALE AND STYLE OF THE
AREA

CONCEPTUAL ELEVATION/MASSING

- SIZE, SCALE AND MASSING WOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD



FIRST FLOOR NEEDS TO BE ELEVATED:
ADDING SINGLE STORY ELEMENTS (LIKE
PORCH) MINIMIZE A MASSIVE FEELING
FROM THE STREET



PARKING UNDERNEATH HELPS TO LIMIT
PARKING AREA VIEW FROM THE STREET



THIS PLAN ILLUSTRATES
HOW THE DESIGN AND
MATERIAL USED COME
FROM OTHER HOMES IN
THE AREA FOR THE
PURPOSES OF SELECTING
MATERIALS AND SHAPES
THAT ARE APPROPRIATE
FOR THE NEIGHBORHOOD.

Figure 1 shows an aerial view of the study area, which includes three residential lots. Lot 1 (left) is a small lot with a house. Lot 2 (middle) is a larger lot with a house and a driveway. Lot 3 (right) is a large lot with a house and a driveway. The lots are separated by a road. The dimensions of the lots are 44'-2", 64'-0", 45'-0"9", and 40'-0".



HOW THE SIZE OF A BUILDING COMPARES TO THE DISTANCE TO THE STREET AND THE SPACING BETWEEN BUILDINGS

COMMON MATERIALS INCLUDE WOOD SIDING WITH ASPHALT
ROOF SHINGLES (NOT ASBESTOS SHINGLES OR ROOFING)

COMMON FEATURES ARE FIRST FLOOR ROOF OVERHANGS
AND GABLE ROOFS AT TWO TO THREE STORIES TALL



NEIGHBORHOOD INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

- TWELVE STRUCTURES WITHIN THE HISTORIC DISTRICT WERE STUDIED FOR THEIR CHARACTER, MATERIALS, SIZE, SCALE AND MASSING
- THE HERRESHOFF HOUSE IS LABELED AS #11

