

## **TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION**

### ***Building & Planning Committee***

#### **Issue Briefing**

**Topic:** HARB 19-14, 322-324 Righters Mill Road, Gladwyne, Gladwyne Historic District

**Prepared By:** Greg Prichard, Historic Preservation Planner

**Date:** September 12, 2019

**I. Action To Be Considered By The Board:**

Approval of HARB's recommendation to create new openings to install two dryer vents on the front façade.

**II. Why This Issue Requires Board Consideration:**

The Board of Commissioners is required to approve recommendations by the HARB.

**III. Current Policy or Practices (If Applicable):** N/A

**IV. Other Relevant Background Information:**

HARB received an application from the owners of 324 Righters Mill Road, one half of the repurposed Odd Fellows Hall in Gladwyne, to install a dryer vent on the second story front façade of the building. Also proposed is an identical, symmetrically located vent to be installed at 322 Righters Mill Road, the other half of the converted structure.

The residential conversion of the Odd Fellows Hall was successfully completed after a long and detailed review process beginning around 2012, resulting in the preservation and re-use of a dilapidated landmark in the Gladwyne Historic District.

The conversion of any existing historic building in an area with strict design standards is inherently more complicated than a new construction project. Unforeseen circumstances are often encountered and modern needs inevitably lead to design compromises. The initial redesign of the building included locating the dryer vents under the upper eave above the front façade's third floor, the least visible location. When the design was initially reviewed, this treatment was not an issue because it had very little impact on the appearance of the building as viewed from the public way.

The residences in the building have now been occupied, and since moving in the new owners have encountered issues with the dryer venting as constructed. As they stated at the September 10, 2019 HARB meeting, applicants Prashant Yadav and Lila Moran have been encountering mechanical issues with their dryer, which is located at the front of the building on the second floor. They have been informed by contractors that the cause of the problem is the long distance between the dryer unit and the exhaust vent, and a new exterior vent located directly behind the dryer unit exiting to the second floor façade would be the best option mechanically. The residents

of the other half of the building are having identical issues, and the two vents are being proposed simultaneously to create a consistent appearance and symmetrical placement.

HARB discussed the issue at length, taking into account the needs of the residents as well as the impact on the appearance of the building's most prominent exterior façade. This is often the balance that HARB must weigh: the needs of modern livability in historic districts versus the obligation to maintain the historic appearance of the contributing resources in a district. This question becomes more complicated in adaptive re-use situations where the original use is abandoned in favor of a new use that requires potentially more invasive changes. In many cases, these conversions (coupled with the modifications that they require) provide the best hope for the long-term preservation of the resource.

Several options were mentioned during HARB's discussion, including the use of a fan to pull the hot air up the existing vent (not feasible) and locating the proposed vents lower on the façade to partially obscure their visibility from some angles (not recommended because the dryer is the top of a stacking washer/dryer unit and hot air cannot easily vent downward). Understanding the challenges the residents are facing, HARB recommended approval of the application, with the request that the vents be lowered as far as possible. The selection of a vent that is flush with the façade surface and colored to match the façade was also noted as an essential detail.

The HARB recommended approval subject to the following conditions:

- a) The vents shall be painted or colored to match the surrounding facade;
- b) The vents shall be lowered as far as reasonably possible, subject to Code and the manufacturer's specifications;
- c) The locations of the two vents shall align horizontally.



V. **Financial Impact:** N/A

VI. **Staff Recommendation:**

Staff recommends approval subject to the conditions recommended by the HARB.