

Mystic River Boathouse Park Implementation Committee
Regular Meeting Minutes
Stonington Police Department, Pawcatuck, CT
Monday, July 1, 2019
7:00 p.m.

The Stonington Mystic River Boathouse Park Implementation Committee held a regular meeting on this date, Monday, July 1, 2019 at the Stonington Police Department at 7:00 p.m.

Present were Rob Simmons, Chairman; Mike O'Neill, Vice Chairman; Farouk Rajab, Mike Crowley, Jim Kelley, Breck Perkins, Nick Kepple, Steve Planchon, Alan Strunk and Sandy Tissiere, Recording Secretary; as well as Chad Frost, Principal, Kent + Frost, Angela Daughtry, Westerly Sun and Herb Holmstedt

Members absent were Tim O'Brien, Tom Switz, Kathryn Burchenal and Steve White

1. **Call to order**

Chairman Rob Simmons called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

2. **Pledge of Allegiance**

Herb Holmstedt led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. **Comments from the Public**

There weren't any public comments.

4. **Approval of minutes**

A motion was made by Farouk Rajab and Mike O'Neill to approve the minutes of June 3, 2019 as presented. The vote was unanimous and the motion passed.

5. **Correspondence**

There wasn't any correspondence presented.

6. **Old Business**

Chairman Simmons said he was not in attendance at the last meeting and was unaware of the request of Chuck Stevens, Mystic River Park Commission, to keep the discussion item of renaming the Mystic River Boathouse Park on the agenda under Old Business until it was resolved. Chairman Simmons asked a motion be made to amend the agenda to include this item as a discussion item under #6. Old Business.

A motion was made by Nick Kepple and seconded by Breck Perkins to amend the agenda to include the item: Discussion – Renaming the Boathouse Park.

The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

- **Discussion – Structures of the Property**
- **Discussion – Memorandum of Agreement with SHPO**
- **Discussion – Historical Consulting**

Chad Frost distributed photographs and a report created by Bruce Clouette, Historical Consultant, Architectural and Historical Services, Inc. (attachment #1) hired to review the property. Mr. Frost said he met with Mr. Clouette on June 26, 2019 at the property for an evaluation. Mr. Frost discussed the first picture was taken between 1911-1920 showing the majority of the mill had been constructed and depicted the garage as an entirely different structure as is currently on the property. The other picture shows the mill constructed around 1898 and the house is not there.

Chad Frost discussed Mr. Clouette's suggestions under the Current Plan for the Site and CT SHPO (State Historical Preservation Office) review. Mr. Clouette's key points were to: 1. Classify this project as an adaptive reuse, which acknowledges the moving of a historical building following the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation allowing accommodation of the building to new use. 2. New additions follow Rehabilitation Standard #9 for new construction. 3. Written and photographic documentation of the buildings prior to relocation for preservation and 4. Signage providing the history of the property.

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Mr. Frost went on to explain the history of the house speaking about the occupants of the house. Mr. Frost discussed the garage saying the report states evidence shows this is not the original structure that was built. Mr. Frost discussed what constitutes adaptive reuse of the house.

Chad Frost discussed Mr. Collette's review and suggested changes to the current draft MOU (Memorandum of Understanding). Mr. Frost recommended incorporating these changes into the MOU with SHPO so it can be moved forward.

A motion was made by Mike Crowley and seconded by Breck Perkins to delegate to Chad Frost and Bruce Collette the task of forming a draft MOU to SHPO based on the document presented at the meeting with a circulatory copy sent to committee members for review prior to submission.

Discussion: The committee discussed if there was any committee concern once the informational copy was reviewed by the committee, a special meeting could be scheduled.

The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

Chairman Simmons recognized Herb Holmstedt for comment. Mr. Holmstedt asked for verification of the date, July 26, 2019, in the first paragraph. Chad Frost said this was not correct, the date was June 26, 2019.

- Discussion – Agreement with Friends of Stonington Crew and Town of Stonington
Nick Kepple reported the committee has a draft agreement and it will be circulated to the committee for review prior to the next meeting.
- Discussion – Architect for Boathouse
Mike O'Neill said the Boathouse Committee is waiting for the guidelines that will be set by SHPO before moving forward with the search for an architect.
- Discussion – Renaming of the Boathouse Park
Tabled until the next meeting.

7. New Business

There wasn't any new business presented for discussion.

8. Comments from the Public

There weren't any public comments.

9. Comments from the Committee

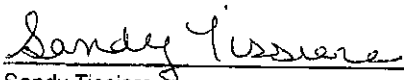
Steve Planchon asked how it is known that the current house is the original house on the property. Chad Frost answered there are enough attributes in the house that indicate it is the original house.

Jim Kelley asked if there was a hurricane and the house was destroyed, what would be the obligation of the town to replace it. Mr. Frost said he did not have an answer to that question.

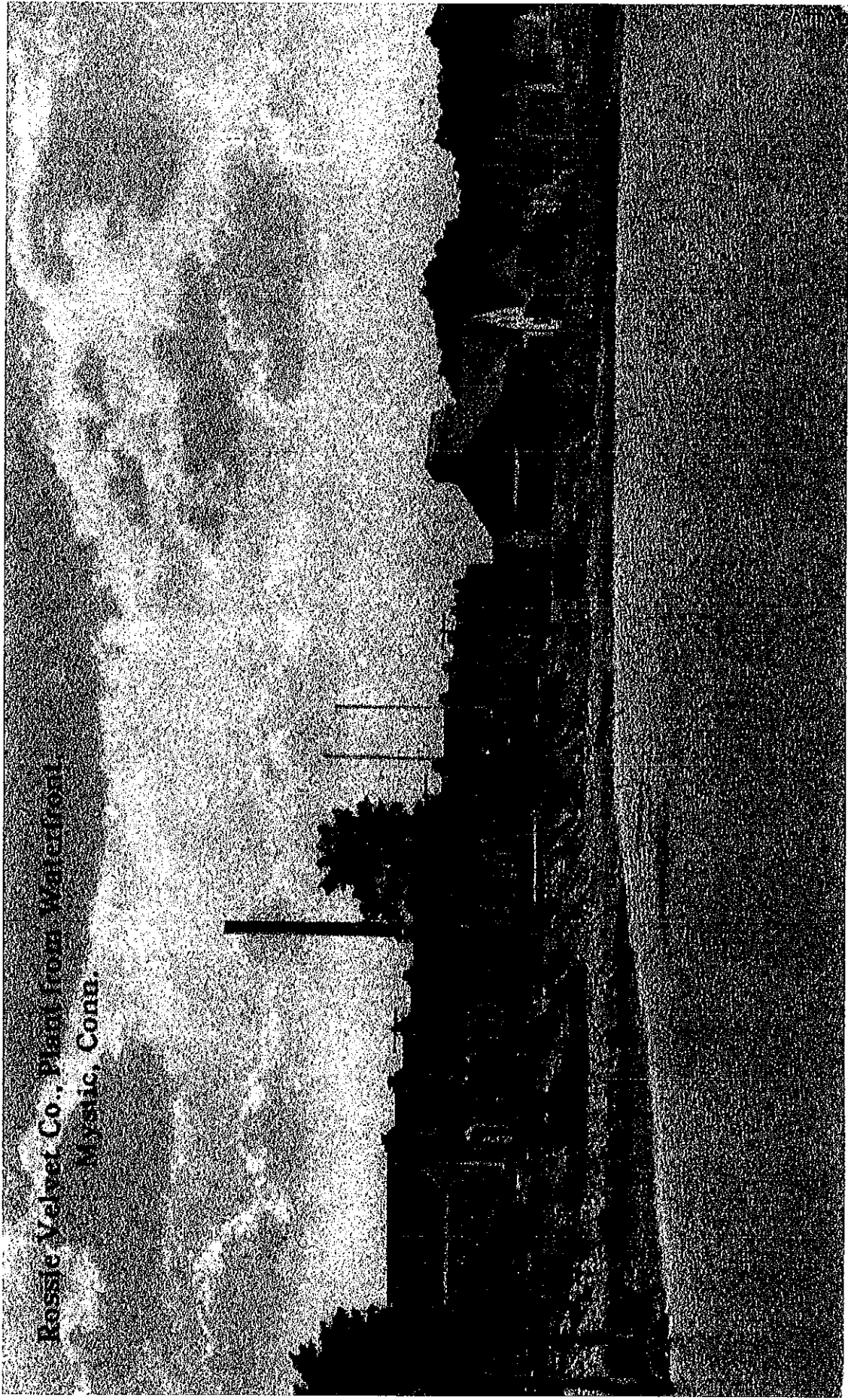
10. Adjourn

As there was no further business to be discussed, the meeting was adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Sandy Tissièrè
Recording Secretary



Rossie Velvet Co., Plant from Waterfront
Mystic, Conn.

Photo #1

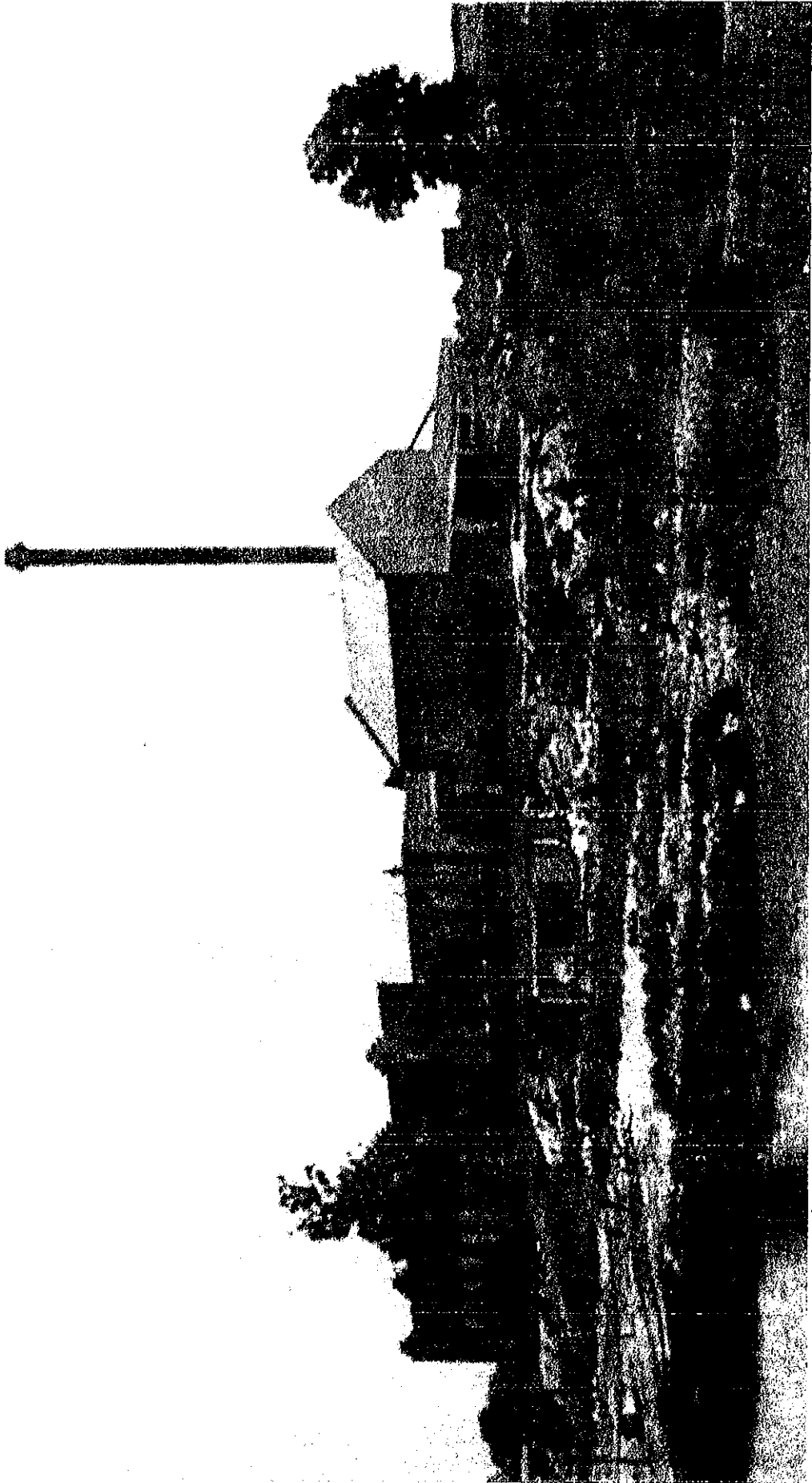


Photo #8

**Mystic River Boathouse Park
Notes on Field Visit and Historical Research**

Bruce Clouette, Historic Preservation Consultant

June 26, 2019

Field Visit

On Wednesday, July 26, 2019, Bruce Clouette met with landscape architect Chad Frost and two members of the Boathouse Committee to view the property at 123 Greenmanville Avenue on the Stonington side of the Mystic River in Mystic, Connecticut. The 1.4-acre property includes a two-story gable-roofed frame dwelling and a one-story, hip-roofed frame garage. The two buildings have been identified as contributing elements of the Rossie Velvet Mill Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2007. The participants examined the exteriors and interiors of both buildings.

Background Research

Kent+Frost Landscape Architects provided Clouette with copies of background research conducted to date, including the National Register nomination for the historic district, photographs of the site from Mystic Seaport and other local sources, and a series of Sanborn Insurance maps. This information was supplemented by researching the chain of title in the Stonington Land Records and desktop research in online historical newspapers, census records, and listings in the *Mystic, Stonington and Noank Directory*.

Current Plan for the Site and CTSHPO Review

The field visit was undertaken with the assumption that the plan for the site known as Option #5 would be pursued as the preferred course of action. That plan envisions relocating the house to the north and connecting it to newly constructed additions for training facilities and boat storage. Typically, the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office (CTSHPO) review and comment on an undertaking like this would request the following:

1. Adaptive re-use of the moved building that follows the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* (<https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards.htm>), specifically the Standards for Rehabilitation. Rehabilitation, unlike the other two types of treatment (preservation and restoration) usually involves changes to the building in order to make it function in its new role:

“The Rehabilitation Standards acknowledge the need to alter or add to a historic building to meet continuing or new uses while retaining the building’s historic character.” (Introduction to the Standards).

2. New additions that follow Rehabilitation Standard #9 for New Construction:

“The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.” This standard excludes two types of new construction: “fake historical” buildings that are so much like authentic buildings from the period that they could be mistaken for historic buildings, and modern construction that is so out-of-scale or stylistically advanced that it forms a visual intrusion into the otherwise historical landscape.

3. Written and photographic documentation of the buildings prior to demolition/relocation. CTSHPO standards for documentation require archival paper and photographic prints because the materials are deposited in the Connecticut Historic Preservation Collection at the University of Connecticut in Storrs. The historic research and photographic coverage assembled to date are sufficient to meet the standards for documentation; all that would be needed is a brief written narrative and archival packaging of the materials.
4. Interpretative installation or other public-education activity. For a site like this, a single slanted view panel, typically 24" X 36", would be appropriate, as would a town-hosted website. Thematic content could include the changing shoreline of the Mystic River, information on the long-time residents of the house, particularly the families of Walter Lovelace (resident from 1912 to 1950), and Alphonso Balestracci (resident from 1950 to 1960), and information on how the Rossie Velvet Mill used the site for coal unloading and storage and why coal was so important (Mystic's mills could not use waterpower).

Concise History of the Buildings

HOUSE

The National Register nomination identifies the house as the "Lovelace House" and dates it as ca.1900. This date is consistent with evidence in the Stonington Land Records (SLR), which records the house lot being sold for \$100 in April 1899 (SLR 48:61) and with the map and photographic evidence, in which the house first appears on the 1903 Sanborn insurance map. The side/rear porch and the rear-entry vestibule at the northwest corner do not appear on the 1903 map but are shown on the 1911 Sanborn map, suggesting that they are early but not original features. Ownership of the house parcel can be summarized as follows:

pre-1899	Elias Williams (no house)
1899-1910	Josephine and John B. Ward (SLR 48:61)
1910-1938	Rossie Velvet Company (SLR 55:385)
1938-1950	Walter Lovelace (SLR 76:235)
1950-1960	Alphonso and Idella Balestracci (SLR 90:337)

The house passed through a series of owners thereafter, including the J. Rossie Velvet Company, the Mystic River Realty Company, and George A. and Frederick H. Baumgarten.

The Wards, who were the first owners of the house, lived on Greenmanville Avenue but may not have actually occupied this house, since they also owned a large house nearby in which, according to the 1900 census, Mrs. Ward provided for a half dozen or so boarders. The house at 1123 Greenmanville Avenue may have been intended as a rental property.

The family with the longest association with the house is that of Walter Lovelace, who was born in Illinois in 1864. Although he only bought the house in 1938, listings in the Mystic Directory indicate that he lived there at least as early as 1912. At the time, the house was numbered 73 Greenmanville Avenue (we know this was the house because Velvet Lane was listed in the same directory as beginning at 74 Greenmanville Avenue, across the street). Walter Lovelace and his wife Mary had two children, Donald and Helen. According to the 1930 federal census, the Lovelaces paid \$15 a month to rent the house.

For nearly his entire working life, Walter Lovelace was the Rossie Velvet Company's engineer, the person who operated the mill's steam engine and supervised the firing of the boilers. Although he

had just a 7th-grade education, he was one of the company's most important employees, responsible for supplying the mill's industrial power safely and efficiently. According to the 1940 census, he was paid \$1,305 a month, a very substantial sum for that time.

Another interesting occupant of the house was daughter Helen O. Lovelace, who enlisted in the U.S. Navy during World War I. An article in the *Norwich Bulletin* reported that she was posted to the U.S. Naval Hospital in Washington, D.C., where she remained through the early 1920s.

After Lovelace sold the house (in 1950, the year after Mary Lovelace's death at the age of 81), the house was occupied for ten years by the family of Alphonso and Idella Balestracci. Alphonso Balestracci (1917-2011) worked in the Rossie Velvet Mill as a young man, but for most of his life, including his years at this address, he worked as a welder at Electric Boat in Groton, retiring in 1988 with 35 years of service. According to his obituary in the *New London Day*, he was well-known in the community, played baseball with the Mystic Red Wings, and coached Little League for many years.

GARAGE

Internal and documentary evidence indicates that the garage was built in two stages, in which a hipped-roof extension on the north end was added to a pre-existing hip-roofed building. One undated but probably ca. 1920 photograph shows the southern part as a small free-standing building, but by the time of the 1924 Sanborn map, the garage (indicated as having a capacity of 12 cars) had reached its current dimensions. Another garage of a similar size extended toward the river near the building's northwest corner. At some time in the not-too-distant past, large portions of the exterior wall were rebuilt, as indicated by the use of modern dimension lumber. Other modern alterations include large windows, an overhead door, and scored plywood siding.

The National Register document gives a date of 1898 for this building, the same date as the earliest part of the main mill, and identifies it as a former blacksmith shop. This attribution is not supported by the map evidence, which shows an earlier monitor-roofed frame building, identified as a "coal house" and approximately 35' x 50' in plan, at this location. The coal house also appears in a 1905-1910 postcard view of the site. Discontinuities in the garage's concrete foundation may reflect the re-use of portions of the footing of the earlier building. About this time, the mill was filling in the property, raising the level of land and building a dock on the river, presumably for coal-bearing vessels. The coal was delivered to the mill's boilers using a tunnel that runs under Greenmanville Avenue.

Since the establishment of the velvet mill in 1898, this portion of the property was owned by the mill or by the Mystic Industrial Company, a corporation that acquired land in cooperation with local manufacturing interests and made it available to them. It was united with the house lot and with several other formerly mill-related properties in the 1960s to form the current parcel.

Defining Characteristics of the House

Adaptive re-use presumes that the house will retain its "historic character." The historical and architectural significance of the house is as a turn-of-the-century workingclass home. The following features help define the house's character and support that significance:

Most important in defining historic character:

- Simple gable-roofed form
- Entrance roof and brackets
- Mixed clapboard and shingle siding

- Small brick chimney
- Two-over-two windows
- Simple cornice trim

Second order of importance:

- Porch details: turned posts, shaped rafters, simple railing (porch is early but not original)
- Interior window surrounds
- Interior paneled doors
- Original door hardware
- Interior newel post and stair railing

Modern elements:

- Asphalt-shingled roof
- Front entry door
- Ornamental vinyl shutters
- Interior wall, ceiling and floor finishes
- Interior plywood doors
- Interior partitioning
- Modern appliances

Other Observations and Recommendations

Under the standards for rehabilitation, there is no requirement to put back historic elements that are no longer in place. For example, it is obvious from the nailers under the current plywood sheathing that the roof was originally covered with wood shingles. If the existing asphalt-shingled roof needs replacing, there would be no requirement to use wood shingles (although it might enhance the look of the project).

Generally, the standards encourage the retention of historic fabric such as cornice moldings, windows, clapboards and shingles. However, deterioration and/or lack of functionality for the intended use may call for the partial or wholesale replacement of historic materials with accurate reproduction materials. The specification for the simple cornice molding could call for retention of the existing, with a custom-milled replacement molding replacing deteriorated portions. How much or how little needs to be replaced will probably not be determined until the project is underway. The existing wood shingles appear to be split, cupped, and otherwise severely deteriorated; complete replacement could probably be justified under the standards. Replacement of the clapboards may hinge on how important it is to create wall insulation and vapor barriers and whether it is absolutely necessary to do so from the outside (as opposed to removing the gypsum wallboard from the interior). Normally, a gloss or semi-gloss painted exterior surface would be appropriate for a house of this period, but given the salt-air environment, a case could be made for a flatter, pigmented-stain surface, since any gloss would only last for a few months anyway.

The windows appear to be in reasonably good condition but cannot be easily operated due to paint build-up. Reducing air infiltration and having operable windows as part of making the building work as an adaptive re-use could justify using high-quality wooden two-over-two replacement windows.

The proposal for the newly constructed parts of the project appears to be completely in conformance with the standards. The size and scale of the additions will have a minimal visual effect in terms of distracting from the surrounding historic buildings and will minimally obscure the view of the river. Use of wood siding and simple lines is the sort of compatible-but-not-replicative approach envisioned in the standards.

The Secretary's Standards for Rehabilitation are extensively used for historic buildings that are to be rehabilitated for new uses under the federal historic-preservation tax-incentive program. In reviewing these projects, CTSHPO has consistently taken the view that the project should be evaluated as a whole rather than on an item-by-item basis. With this in mind, it is likely that the unavoidable wholesale replacement of some items, such as windows and exterior clapboards and shingles, will be viewed more favorably if some effort is made to retain other items, such as re-using historic interior doors and door hardware for closets, re-using or reproducing the simple window surrounds, or re-constructing a portion of the porch.

Review of Existing Draft Memorandum of Understanding

The draft memorandum of understanding departs from usual CTSHPO practice in a number of ways:

1. Rehabilitations of historic buildings such as the house are usually explicitly tied to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Similarly, the design of the additions would normally be tied to the Standard for New Construction.
2. Instead of the general "end of life" stipulations, CTSHPO usually asks to review and approve plans for both rehabilitation and new construction. Getting review at the 30% and 90% levels is often more productive than putting everything off until the end. Thirty days for review and comment is the usual period.
3. Signatories to the agreement are usually limited to parties that are actually responsible for actions under the agreement. The State Historic Preservation Board, for example, has no statutory power to implement such an agreement, so I don't think they can or should be a signatory. The Boathouse Committee is in a different position; as a local stakeholder, it can sign the agreement as a Consulting Party, even though it has no authority or responsibilities under the agreement.
4. Usually there are provisions for amending an agreement and resolving any disputes.
5. Usually the agreement identifies the parties and the authority under which the agreement is being implemented. In this case, the parties would be the CTSHPO on the one hand and DECD and the Town on the other. The involvement of DECD would reference the proposed grant, and the authority would be the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act, under which CTSHPO reviews state projects that could impact historic properties. Although there are probably other state and federal permits needed for the project, I would not expect them to explicitly include historic-preservation considerations once the Town and CTSHPO agree.

The Town could choose to submit the existing draft agreement to the CTSHPO, it could revise it to accord better with CTSHPO practice, or it could simply ask CTSHPO to provide a draft agreement. I don't think that CTSHPO will accept or otherwise act on the draft agreement as it is written. The Town could also simply ask CTSHPO to put its understandings down in writing.

Conclusion

Retaining the house at 123 Greenmanville Avenue may have not been the first choice of some of project's proponents, but embracing the house's history may actually help engender local interest and support. The long-time connection between the house, Walter Lovelace, and the Rossie Mill is exactly the sort of association that the National Register nomination recognizes as the reason for extending the historic district beyond just the mill. The nomination also cites the ethnic history of the neighborhood as one of its points of significance, and everyone who was involved with the house had some immigrant heritage. John and Josephine Ward, the first owners, were children of English and Irish immigrants, Walter Lovelace was the son of an English immigrant, Mary Lovelace's parents were from France and Germany, and the last longtime owner-occupant, Alphonso Balestracci, was the son of Italian immigrants. Properly interpreted, the house can also stand as a reminder of an age when manufacturing jobs allowed workingclass people with limited formal education a chance to prosper. Finally, the story of Helen O. Lovelace poses intriguing questions: what prompted a young office worker to volunteer for the U.S. Navy? Was it in part Mystic's longstanding maritime heritage, a sense that Greenmanville was becoming rather small for a young person, or something else entirely? Even if we'll never know, the story itself brings the past alive in a way that many people may not have thought about.