July 12, 2022

Planning Board
Town of Tiverton, Town Hall
343 Highland Road
Tiverton, RI 02878

via email to Edward Rotella, Land Use Clerk, landuse@tiverton.ri.gov and Stuart Hardy, Temporary Chair, PBChair@tiverton.ri.gov

Copy to owner’s representative: James Towers, 24 Maple Road, Warren, Rhode Island 02885

RE: Concept Plan Review – Major Land Development 439 Main Road

Dear Tiverton Planning Board

Preserve Rhode Island, the nonprofit statewide advocate for historic places, appreciates the opportunity to comment on a proposed Concept Plan Review at 439 Main Road, Tiverton. The proponent proposes to demolish the historical house that currently exists on the lot to clear the way to construct a shared multi-family dwelling and commercial space.

The parcel includes the J Russell Hicks House, #78 in the inventory of Tiverton’s historic assets published by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission. The Federal period house (late 18th – early 19th century) has the classic 5-bay façade with a central chimney form. On the property are with stone walls and a barn. The condition of the building is not known.

A role of the Tiverton Planning Board in evaluating Concept Plans for Major Land Development is to assess the conformance with the town’s Comprehensive Plan. Tiverton’s Comp Plan calls for the retention of the historic and rural character of the town. Specifically, Tiverton’s Comp Plan requires, as a part of the local review process, that “owners and developers of historic properties first consider and prioritize plans that include the preservation and appropriate restoration of existing historic structures over demolition when drafting a submitting redevelopment plans for local approval.”

Historic buildings are intrinsic to Tiverton’s historic character. The Comp Plan recognizes that historic buildings are at risk given development pressures and laments the irreplaceable loss to the town’s quality of place. Once the building is demolished, it will be lost forever. Losing buildings one by one gradually erases the sense of place of Tiverton until character of the town, so highly valued in the Comp Plan, is eroded.

The resolution of disputes involving historic buildings is advanced by a full evaluation of alternatives – is demolition the only or the best outcome for the parcel? In considering the proposed project, we urge the planning board to require the proponent to assess the feasibility and desirability of preserving the
historic structure. Before considering whether to approve the proposed demolition, the planning board should require the project proponent to demonstrate why the historic building cannot be saved and integrated into the development plan. How could the project’s objectives be achieved with the historic building in place and integrated as a part of the overall development?

Preserve RI is prepared to help the project proponent assess the condition and feasibility of reusing the historic structure. Please call on us for our expertise in assessing the feasibility of saving historic places for new uses.

Sincerely,

Valerie Talmage
Executive Director

cc by email: Susan Anderson
Jamie French