

Village of Skaneateles
Historical Landmarks Preservation Commission
August 24, 2011

In the matter of the application for a Certificate of Approval from the Commission, submitted by Cyrus Weichert for removal or repair of the Northeast chimney and roof located at 81 East Genesee Street in the Village of Skaneateles.

Present: Charles Williams, Chairman
Pat Blackler, Member
David Neibert, Member
Katharine Dyson, Member
Mona Smalley, Member
Andy Ramsgard, Member
Beverly White, Member
Kihm Winship, Member

Elaine DuBois, Clerk to the Historic Commission
Cyrus Weichert, applicant

Absent: Karlene Miller, Member

Mr. Williams introduced himself, read the public notice and opened the meeting at 7:35pm. Mr. Weichert gave a presentation. He said, "This is largely the same presentation you saw the last time. (8/10/2011) As requested I went and secured quotes for three different scenarios. I've inserted those numbers into the presentation. If you flip through all the pictures you will see this page with 3 options for the chimney. The 3 options we discussed at the last meeting were a complete rebuild, which I received a price \$38,775. I had said the last chimney we removed cost \$30,000 and this seemed to jive. This chimney is 12 to 15 feet higher than the back chimney that I replaced last year for \$30,000. That is exhibit one, the detailed quote from Evans & Lau Masonry. Option 2 is a faux chimney. There are 2 quotes here. One for the masonry, to tear down what's there down to the attic floor. Then build the frame work for the faux chimney is \$7,985. Evans & Lau would rebuild a brick veneer on that frame work as part of the \$21,000. Both of those contractors require a structural report to ensure the floor can hold it. Option 3 is the demolition cost from Evans & Lau to get the chimney down below the roof is going to cost \$10,750 plus the \$783 cost to patch the roof.

Mr. Winship asked if there would be cost involved to get a structural report as requested by the contractors for the faux option.

Mr. Weichert replied, "There would be costs. There is a substantial risk that that floor won't have the bearing capacity, especially with those floors swaying as it is."

Mr. Neibert commented "Most of the faux chimneys I've seen don't sit on the floor. The framework is suspended by the roof rafters. So the actual weight isn't sitting on your ceiling. It's just right below the roof and then goes up."

Mr. Weichert said, "When they design a faux chimney they design some part of the structure to hold it, whether it's the roof or the floor or what, and this portion of the house was not built to hold a faux chimney. I'll tell you the roof rafters where this is located wouldn't hold the weight of a faux chimney. So there is going to be some reinforcement required and will take me to a higher cost than that \$29,000."

Mr. Williams asked the age of the roof. Mr. Weichert said it was probably about 18 years old and would have to be redone soon.

Mr. Williams asked if he knew where the water was coming in.

Mr. Weichert said water is coming in all the way down the chimney.

Mr. Williams asked if he had capped it.

Mr. Weichert said, "No, I found the problem in the wintertime. This spring I got a quote."

Mr. Williams said, "So you haven't capped it completely?"

Mr. Weichert said, "No, I have to do something."

Mr. Neibert asked if it was leaking around the chimney. Mr. Weichert replied, "All through it. Water is hitting the side of the chimney and coming in and going down."

Mr. Neibert said, "From the street, just looking at it, it looks in pretty good shape. The bricks look good, the bricks look pointed, it doesn't look like it's crumbling."

Mr. Williams asked if he or Mr. Evans had been on the roof to look at it. Mr. Weichert said Mr. Evans had been on the roof 2 times to look at it.

Mr. Williams said that his experience at 101 and 103 E .Genesee Street, "those chimneys came down to roof line and rebuilt from there. The bases of those chimneys were in good shape."

Mr. Weichert stated that the rear chimney in his house had a wood stove in it when they bought the house. "I wanted out. It's a beautiful hearth with a bread oven next to it. It's fabulous. We wanted to turn it back into a working fireplace. The mortar, all the way down to mantle was not secure. Eric was the only one we could find that would work on it. He took it down brick by brick. He looked at this chimney and said it was pretty much the same deal."

Mr Williams asked if you could see the brick in the attic. Mr. Weichert said, "yes"

Mr. Williams asked, "Has the mortar turned to sand?"

Mr. Weichert said, "If we are going to rebuild a chimney he is going to take it down until he feels comfortable"

Mr. Neibert asked if there was anything that feeds into that chimney or if it is non working.

Mr Weichert stated the fireplace was blocked off some years ago so it's a non functioning chimney.

Mr. Winship said, "So what you're saying is right now the rain, snow, water that's coming in is doing damage to the house?"

Mr. Weichert said, "Yes, I have a bigger repair bill than just the chimney. I have a lot of wood damage."

Ms. Smalley said, "If you do option number one or option number two the appearance from the outside will be the same, right? So, what do you want to do?"

Mr. Weichert stated he wants to do option number three. He said "while the chimney is visible while you are looking at it, I don't believe the view shed to anyone who's not looking for that chimney or the character of the view of the house will be affected. I live there and don't notice

those chimneys in the back. I certainly notice the ones in the front. Option two is the one of most concern to me because the house wasn't built for it."

Mr. Ramsgard said, "I don't agree with the options, and I don't agree with the prices. The first option of do nothing and sell the house is kind of funny to me. One of the most important features of a Greek Revival house is the symmetry of the chimneys. You don't buy into the historic district to save money. It has nothing to do with the district. The chimney in the back the one that was rebuilt has little or no impact on the look of the street elevation. There have been a lot of changes that you have made, I think everything has been approved, primarily because the look of the house has not been affected from the front, the main elevation, and probably what this Board cares about the most. Taking them down and not putting them back, is not the right look for a Greek Revival. The price, one it doesn't matter to me, because that has nothing to do with it. I know there are a hundred different ways to rebuild without taking them all the way to the ground. I've done it. If we make a decision based on money..."

Mr. Williams asked if the metal cap only covered the perimeter. Mr. Weichert said "Yes"

Mr. Williams asked why, if he had leaking did he not cap the center. Mr. Weichert said, "It's coming through the bricks, not coming through the center."

Ms. Blackler stated, "We had a session meeting 2 weeks ago and discussed most of this before. In fact we have been talking about this chimney for 6 weeks. We asked Mr. Weichert to apply, and have a public hearing set, and we were to vote today. Depending on the motion made tonight, I'm prepared to vote in the negative if it is anything but tear the chimney down. We are not here to put hardships on applicants. It is not like Cy has asked to cover the house with vinyl or taking the front porch off or even putting an addition on the side of the house. I just don't agree with Andy on that part. Mr. Weichert has been very responsible in taking care of the history of this house since he moved in and asking him to do anything with this chimney that costs those kind of prices is a hardship."

Mr. Weichert said, "I'd like to make a comment on the quotes. I originally came in here without the quotes. I was asked to get the quotes, and that's why I did them."

Mr. Williams asked if Mr. Evans removed a brick in the attic.

Mr. Weichert replied, "I don't know what he did, he went up and looked at the whole thing. He looked at the one on the other side and said that one could be re-pointed but this one has to come down."

Mr. Williams said, "For the record my degree is in ceramic engineering which includes bricks and mortar and cement. I'd like to know what has taken place to see how far down that bad part of the chimney is. I'll go with the fact that above the roof line is bad, but below that I have to see a brick removed from that spot to know if you need to spend the money to go all the way down. And you would want to know too."

Ms. Dyson said, "It seems to me that the job of this committee is to adhere to the mandate we have to preserve the Historic District and if you are going to tear down a chimney which balances a house, I have a problem with this. I don't have a problem with building a faux chimney to balance it, but I do have a problem just getting rid of it because, while your degree was in ceramics, mine was in design so, I really believe it needs to be retained in some form."

Mr. Neibert said, "I have an old house too. Every project is expensive. Nothing matches, nothing fits, the lumber isn't the same. You have a house that has been there for 180 years. You are the caretaker. That house will be there for 180 years after you are gone. As Kathy said, as a committee, our charge is to maintain, not to get into the cost, but maintain the look of the Historical District. As Andy said, that style has 4 chimneys. If every homeowner removes a

little here, the next owner removes a little there; the next owner does another little thing, in a period of time you have lost the historical significance of that structure because everybody who comes along is going to do some little thing to change it. But it all cumulates to the big picture and what you end up with is a bastardized structure that no longer is what it historically is. I am not opposed to removing the chimney, but some structure of a chimney needs to be put in there to maintain the historical integrity for the next 180 years and all the other owners that are going to come after you.”

Mr. Weichert said, “I appreciate everything you said, and Andy said. I wish you hadn’t asked me to get prices because I spent a lot of time last week getting them. I came in here asking for an exception, because I don’t think anyone who drives the street every day will ever say, “What a shame, he took that chimney off it will never be noticed.”

Mr. Neibert said, “The word drive is the wrong one, it’s the people who walk.”

Mr. Williams said, “People who are interested in old structures will. I was not here 2 weeks ago. Getting these quotes should have been a much more detailed examination by the mason as to what was involved. With the chimney not being completely capped since May or April after the snow that was not a good decision.”

Mr. Neibert said, “I can’t believe putting a faux chimney up is \$29,000.”

Mr. Weichert said, “The quote on the back chimney, he wanted to do hourly because he didn’t know what he was going to get into. I said no, I need a firm, fixed price. The price was \$10,000 just to tear it down to the roof.”

Mr. Ramsgard said, “It’s a very slippery slope if we start making decisions based on price in an Historic District. Where do you draw the line? If there is some architectural redeeming value to make a decision about removing a chimney or adding a chimney, I’m all ears about those kinds of questions. For Cy’s house we went through all the addition work and changes for the back. He got approval for all that stuff. And the reason why is they have a lot of significant impact to the original character of the structure. Your photo shows the house next door has the classic 4 chimneys. That is part of the look of the architecture for that period. There was a chimney in each room, they were built on the perimeter, that’s what it was about. I had my own chimney replaced and it didn’t cost me a tenth of these numbers. But I still don’t care because it’s not really about that, it has nothing to do with the numbers. If you break your leg after you’re 40 years old why fix it, just cut it off. There is no reason to consider price in this equation. The things to consider are what is the historical significance and is there any redeeming value to the 4 chimneys. In my head it’s either yes or no.”

Ms. Blackler said, “We could bring in a lot of exceptions we have made.”

Mr. Ramsgard said, “There were a lot of bad decisions made.”

Ms. White asked if there was some way they could help this applicant.

Mr. Ramsgard said there has to be a way to use modern materials to recreate the historic components.

Ms. White asked if Mr. Ramsgard could make some recommendations to Mr. Weichert. She said that he made good points and she feels the committee should be able to help someone that is trying to do the right thing.

Ms. Smalley said “I think the repair should be done in way to protect the integrity of the roof and the floors underneath but still maintain the architectural integrity of the chimneys just the way it is. I don’t care how he would do that as long as the chimney is up and everything is working underneath. What difference does it make to us?”

Mr. Neibert said, “I feel there’s a general feel that a faux chimney would be acceptable.”

Mr. Williams said, "Andy feels the cost estimates are way out of line, as do I. We really don't know what has to be taken down yet."

Mr. Ramsgard said, "Chuck my position on the record is that cost has no bearing on the decision. In my words it's irrelevant to the discussion. The relevance of being on this commission is what is the character and integrity of the piece of architecture. Some buildings have important pieces, and some less important pieces. There are some buildings in our historic district that I feel have no relevance to the historic district, and would be happy to see pieces and parts come down. Even on our historic buildings, there are additions and poor stewardship of the structures, that are irrelevant to the historical integrity of the building. A classic design of the Greek Revival is the 4 chimneys. That's what it is. If the Board wants to go beyond that, and vote to take down the chimneys, and then fine do that, but make your decision on the right issue and don't make it about cost. If we start making it about cost, why even renovate this house, just take it down.

Mr. Weichert said, "That's a little extreme and you're painting me out to be a bit of a villain, I'll remind you that this was a 3 family house that the back part was in such disrepair it was unlivable. I have not asked to do anything that was detrimental to the house. I'm really not doing it here. I'm asking for an exception to help keep my cost lower. You laughed at my suggestion to do nothing and sell the house, but that's a very real option for me right now. The only reason I got the prices was because I was asked too. If you think they are high, well I think every contractor's price I've ever gotten was astronomical."

Mr. Williams said, "We are trying to help you get a lower estimate."

Mr. Weichert said, "I'll take any recommendations you have."

Mr. Williams asked if there were any further questions. There were none.

Ms Smalley said, **"I would like to move that the necessary repairs be made providing the appearance and integrity of the present roof and chimney are maintained."**

Mr. Ramsgard said, "If I understand your motion, the point of your motion is to maintain the look and dimensional of the existing chimney with material, size and shape, so it esthetically looks the same. We don't care how it gets done." He stated there are many ways to do it.

Mr. Williams asked for a vote by raise of hands. The vote was five in favor, three opposed. Mr Williams, Ms. Dyson, Mr. Neibert, Mr. Ramsgard, and Ms. Smalley voted for the motion. Mr. Winship, Ms. Blackler and Ms. White voted against. The majority carried the motion. The motion was declared passed and the meeting was adjourned at 8:30pm.