

Historic Yorktown Design Committee

Minutes

February 15, 2023
East Room
York Hall
301 Main Street
Yorktown, Virginia

Members Attending: Carolyn Weekley – Chair
Jose Longoria – Vice Chair
Tom Tragle
Margaret Mack-Yaroch – Alternate

Staff Attending: Earl W. Anderson, AICP

Ms. Carolyn Weekly called the meeting to order at 6:58 PM.

New Business

None

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the January 18, 2023 meeting were approved unanimously.

Old Business

None

Applications for Certificates of Appropriateness

Application No. HYDC-231-23, 115 Church Street, Grace Episcopal Church Foundation

Mr. Earl W. Anderson submitted the staff report, which stated that this application submitted by the Grace Historical Church Preservation Foundation, seeks approval for the installation of six-inch half-round copper gutters and four-inch round copper downspouts on the existing Church and Sacristy at 115 Church Street. The structure does not comply with the twenty-five foot (25') front setback from Church Street but does meet the side and rear setback requirements as specified in the Yorktown Village Activity (YVA) district.

The structure is considered a nonconforming structure, as it is a historical structure and is therefore allowed to continue without any special approvals by the Board of Supervisors.

The subject property is located in the Historic Core, as defined by the Yorktown Historic District and Design Guidelines. Churches and other places of worship are authorized as a permitted by right use, pursuant to the terms of the YVA district. According to County property records, the structure was built in 1697 and is considered a Pivotal Building (a structure dating from 1865 or earlier) making it subject to the standards set out under Sections I.C.1. (Page 30) and I.E.2. (Page 45) of the Design Guidelines. He summarized the relevant standards for the gutters and downspouts.

Mr. Anderson noted that Grace Episcopal Church is one of the oldest structures in Yorktown and adding gutters and downspouts to it would not change its core look, if the gutters and downspouts blended into the eaves and walls. He stated it was the staff's belief that the proposed installation of six-inch half-round copper gutters and four-inch round copper downspouts would not be visually appealing and would stand out on the historic structure. He expressed that staff proposes a painted six-inch half-round gutter and four-inch round metal downspout, both painted the same color as the eaves and wall would be more visually appealing and merits approval. He stated that accordingly, it is recommended that the Committee require the gutters to be painted metal and that the application be approved.

Mr. David O'Brien introduced himself as a member of Grace Church for over 15 years and as the current junior warden responsible for the building and grounds. He stated the purpose and need for the gutters is due to mitigation of water through the walls and noted that they want to continue to preserve one of the oldest buildings in the village, as it dates back to 1697. Mr. O'Brien stated that the Church community puts a lot of time, energy, and money into keeping the building looking the way it does and added that gutters will keep all the work done both inside and outside from any further deterioration.

Mr. O'Brien showed two photos, the first one taken from the parking lot immediately across from the Church and the second photo from open space across the street. He said that unless attending church or walking right up to the building, the gutters will not be visible, as it sits somewhat back from the road and added that the gutters will not be that noticeable because of the way the building and the gutters will be oriented.

He also showed pictures of other buildings with copper gutters that showed examples of half-round copper gutters mounted on a white fascia board. Mr. O'Brien noted that the gutters themselves will patina very quickly, though initially, they will be bright copper, but within a short period of time, will take on this brownish patina. He stated that although they may not blend with that fascia board, they will blend with the roofline. Additionally, he noted that there are many Park Service buildings with copper gutters and said that on those buildings, the fascia boards are not a dark color and the copper gutters tend to blend

in with the roofline. Lastly, he noted several York County institutional structures that have copper gutters.

Mr. O'Brien opined that from the Church's perspective, they are ready to invest the money upfront to avoid long-term maintenance concerns and added that they are currently spending a ton of money on the parish hall to repair and replace rotted fascia boards, as a result of poor guttering. He said that they are also in the process of replacing the roof on the backside of the parish hall, which is asphalt shingles. He also noted that the copper gutters are soldered or brazed together and a painted aluminum gutter would have a broken-up look. Additionally, he stated that they are trying to avoid the maintenance required for an aluminum gutter, by having to caulk and repair cracks. Finally, he noted that an aluminum gutter in a marine environment is eventually going to pit and corrode and the paint will start to flake off and added that a copper gutter is a better choice for this historic structure given that it is architecturally similar to other buildings that are in the core of the village. He said he hoped that the Committee would approve the application as proposed with the copper gutters.

Mr. Tragle said that the village has many homes with copper gutters. He asked if the Church has had copper gutters before.

Mr. O'Brien stated that the Church did have gutters at one point. He said there are receivers for the downspouts that have since been filled in with concrete in the ground going back to the 1700s. He added the downspouts in the church walls have also been filled in. He noted that the downspouts come up about three feet high on the wall, so there is evidence that there were gutters on the structure.

Mr. Tragle opined that they were probably copper.

Mr. O'Brien said he assumed that they were.

Ms. Weekley said that it depended on when the gutters were put on and added that copper was not in used in the 18th century clarifying, it came into use in the 19th century. She said they may have been wood and asked where do you plan for the water to go?

Mr. O'Brien stated that the ground gutters there now will handle the distribution of the water, which ties into the storm drainage on the street.

Ms. Mack-Yaroch asked how the downspout will be located with the electric meter that is located on the wall.

Mr. Anderson said there are building code regulations that will require some distancing, but he did not know what they are off-hand.

Ms. Mack-Yaroch asked if the four-inch downspout would be enough to handle the water.

Mr. O'Brien stated that the company they engaged for the work said that the six-inch gutter and four-inch downspout would be enough to handle the water and prevent any overflow from the gutters spilling out.

Mr. Tragle noted that he recently went through the purchase of gutters and he felt the aluminum would be much more cost-effective.

Mr. O'Brien stated that copper gutters are going to cost five to six times more than aluminum. He rebutted that the Church feels very strongly that the copper is in better keeping with the aesthetics of the existing structures and that it would be more historically accurate and in better keeping with the other buildings that are close by.

Mr. Anderson stated that two of the homes on Church Street have white aluminum gutters.

Ms. Weekley asked about why there is a need to have the Park Service approve the gutters.

Mr. O'Brien said that an old easement runs through the cemetery and clips a portion of the Church itself, so the Church has always coordinated with the Park Service. He stated that he did not believe they are required, but wanted to make sure to have everyone's approval. He said he did not foresee a problem with the Park Service approval and noted that many of the historical structures nearby have copper gutters.

Ms. Weekley asked if the cupola had copper on it.

Mr. O'Brien stated that the cupola has copper on the roofing and there is also a copper strip across the front eave on the side of the Church that faces Church Street.

Mr. Longoria noted that Grace Church is beautiful and appreciates that it is a pivotal structure. He agreed that having the gutter match the white fascia board would hide the gutters but said that he thinks it is okay to have the copper gutters installed. He stated that it would look similar to the other buildings that are around it. He said that he totally understands why there is a need for preservation and he also agrees that with the aluminum gutters, there will be a lot of junctions needing upkeep. He stated that he appreciates staff's input from the Guidelines standpoint, but when comparing this historic building to the other buildings, with copper gutters, he sees how it fits.

Mr. Tragle echoed Mr. Longoria's comment. Mr. Tragle said that by looking around at all the other structures with copper gutters, he thinks the eventual patina will be more appropriate for the age of the Church. He stated that he thinks a painted gutter would look more modern, so he can go along with having copper gutters and downspouts on the Church.

Ms. Mack-Yaroch agreed that Mr. Longoria is absolutely correct and said while the proposal may not fall in line with the Guidelines, she does think that historically and design-wise it would look better. She feels that the patina will settle quickly and look more in line, historically, with the village and preserve the nature of this Church which is one of our landmark structures.

Mr. Anderson noted that there still needs to be a discussion about where the downspouts will go. He asked Mr. O'Brien if the downspouts going behind the edges would be problematic or not.

Mr. O'Brien said that he would certainly encourage them to put them behind, but he would need to defer to the gutter experts. He stated that he did not think there would be a problem with having the downspouts on the backside of the Sacristy. He noted that the Church is a longer run and he is concerned if they can get the angle to make that long run. He noted he will defer to the experts.

The committee discussed the location of downspouts and preferred the downspouts be hidden as best as possible and should not be located in the front of the building as a gutter in the front would be a distraction.

Mr. O'Brien agreed and stated the Church did not want them to be in the front, either and he would work with the gutter company to come up with a solution.

Mr. Longoria moved approval of the application to find the proposal consistent with the Guidelines and that the application be approved, subject to the specification and details submitted with the condition that the downspouts be located behind the Church and Sacristy.

By voice vote, the motion was approved unanimously.

Reports and Committee Requests

Mr. Anderson reported that there had been no recent administrative approvals.

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 7:56 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Earl W. Anderson, Secretary

Approved by HYDC: 