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CAPE COD
COMMISSION

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To: Wellfleet Historical Commission
From: Sarah Korjeff, Preservation Specialist
Date: January 8, 2020
RE: Preservation Hall Solar Panel Proposal

Per your request of 12/9/19, I offer the following advisory comments for consideration by the board regarding Preservation Hall's proposal to replace the historic building's slate roof with asphalt shingles and install rooftop solar panels. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like to discuss this further.

Background:

Preservation Hall was built in 1912 and is a contributing building within the Wellfleet Center National Register Historic District. The National Register nomination cites the building's distinctive stucco façade and its unique entrance and window forms. Preservation Hall is also the subject of a Preservation Restriction signed by the town and the non-profit Preservation Hall in 2008. The purpose of the restriction is "to assure the architectural, historic and cultural features of the exterior of the building will be retained and maintained forever for preservation purposes and to prevent any change of the exterior of the building that will significantly impair or interfere with its preservation values." The Preservation Restriction directs the town to apply the Secretary of the Interior's Standards when reviewing any proposed construction, alteration, repair or maintenance of the building.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties:

The Secretary's Standards for Rehabilitation state that removal of distinctive materials should be avoided, and deteriorated historic building materials should be repaired rather than replaced. The slate roof on Preservation Hall is a distinctive feature of the building, both because it helps to define the building's Mediterranean style, and because it is an uncommon roofing material in the region. While the building's form, its stucco façade material, and its architectural detailing are its most important features, the slate roof is also significant and was appropriately preserved in the original restoration effort.



Slate Roof Considerations:

Slate roofs have a much longer life span than other roofing materials. My understanding is that problems with slate roofs are often the result of failures in flashing and/or slate fasteners and in these cases repairs would be more appropriate than replacement. The National Park Service provides guidance on slate roofs through their Technical Preservation Services, noting that the lifetime cost of slate is similar to other types of roofing, and that repair rather than replacement is generally appropriate if less than 20% of shingles are damaged. To better inform your decision about whether replacement is warranted in this case, I suggest you request more information about the specific material failures that were identified on the roof, and find out whether the individuals who evaluated the roof have sufficient experience with slate roofs. I note that CBI Consulting of Boston is one experienced firm that was hired by the Town of Barnstable to evaluate and restore the slate roof on the Barnstable Town Offices building.

Repair is always preferred because it retains the historic material, but if it's determined that replacement of the roof material is necessary, new materials should match the original as much as possible. Given the high height of the eaves and the fact that the roof slopes are not extremely prominent, the board could find that asphalt shingles would approximate the look of the original slate material. Regardless of your findings on the main roof, I recommend that the slate roofs on the smaller entrance vestibules be preserved because they are most visible.

Solar Installation Considerations:

The proposal to place solar panels on the roof can be considered separately from the question of roof replacement. Many historic boards have specific guidance for roof mounted solar arrays and there are a range of opinions. Some require alternative locations such as ground mounted arrays or solar canopies to be considered before allowing them on historic buildings. Others restrict solar panels from front-facing or highly visible roof slopes but allow them above secondary facades. Because solar panels can be removed at a later date with little impact to historic building materials, they are considered 'reversible' and therefore frequently accepted. Any solar panel installation on the roof should follow the existing roof slope, should be stepped back from the front of the building so some of the original roof is visible, and should be installed with as little damage to historic building materials as possible.