



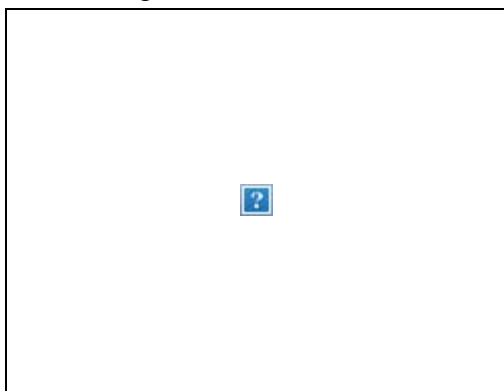
## HBDC OK's Historic Barn Demo

by Tim Wood

CHATHAM --- An historic barn on a busy stretch of Route 28, which just a few years ago was the subject of restoration efforts, will instead be demolished.

Plans approved by the historic business district commission last week call for replicating the barn at the Captain Nathan Harding House, the former LaRose property at 1566 Main St. in West Chatham. But those plans are tentative, the current owner said, and will depend on the ability of the future owner of the property, the Cape Cod Hook Fishermen's Association, to raise the money necessary to rebuild the 100-plus-year-old structure.

Two years ago, the West Chatham Association rallied volunteers to try to save the barn, which is something of a Main Street landmark and has been in dilapidated condition for a number of years. While some work was done on the structure, the effort was abandoned after owner Cliff LaRose opted out of an agreement to sell the association an adjacent parcel of open space.



*The Barn at the Captain Nathan Harding House, the former LaRose property in West Chatham, will be razed. The historic business district commission last week approved the demolition as well as plans to replicate the structure. TIM WOOD PHOTO*

David Oppenheim, who purchased the property last year along with his wife Gail, said the barn is "beyond any functional restoration." A private individual who was interested in moving the structure even had a barn restoration expert examine it, but the person said it was "past the point of saving." The expert said "the only thing worth saving is the memories," Oppenheim said.

Records at the Chatham Historical Society indicate the barn and house were build between 1904 and 1905. About a dozen years ago, the cupola came off the barn. Since then the interior has been open to the weather, Oppenheim said. Past efforts to fix it were "well meaning but feeble." Now the floor joists are rotted from moisture and powder beetles, and there are other significant structural problems.

"My first day in there I went through the floor," Oppenheim said.

Oppenheim is working with the Cape Cod Hook Fishermen's Association on restoring the main house to serve as the group's headquarters. Tentative plans call for eventually replicating the barn, which would hold meeting space and possibly an apartment. But that would come after the main house is restored

and renovated as office space. Completion of a new barn will depend on fundraising, and could happen at the same time as renovations are done to the main house.

"It could be a down the road thing, but our hope is that it's at the same time," said Oppenheim. "But there's no way we can guarantee it."

Others questioned Oppenheim's assessment of the barn's condition and urged the HBDC not to allow its demolition.

"Don't let this historic barn go down," pleaded Gloria Freeman. She said she toured the structure with an architect, engineer, roofer and carpenter and all agreed it could be restored. She pointed to the renovation of the former Sou'Wester building across the street, which also at one time was said to be beyond restoration. "What a loss that would have been," she said.

Norman Pacun said Oppenheim did not present enough information to justify demolition. "I haven't seen the affirmative need to demolish this barn at this time," he said, other than the statement that it's in "crummy condition."

The barn harkens back to a brief period where farming was an important part of the town's economy, he said. "This is a seminal building; there aren't many left in Chatham," he noted, adding that the commission has the authority to deny a demolition request.

In his 30 years of restoring buildings, "the barn is in the most unrestorable and unsafe condition of anything I've looked at," Oppenheim responded.

Commission members, who toured the structure prior to the meeting, agreed that it was in "very, very bad shape," in the words of commissioner Darci Sequin. Chairman Eric Whiteley said he understood the passion people felt for the structure, but the commission had to look at the bigger picture. Loss of the barn may be the cost of having the main house restored and preserved.

"This is a great benefit to West Chatham, taking a building that hasn't been painted since 1903 and bringing it back to life," he said. It's unfortunate the barn can't be restored also, but "the overall benefit that comes from the proposal is very positive."

Commission member Dan Sylver suggested that boards from the barn might be saved and reused. He also suggested a survey and sketches be done to preserve the details of the structure.

The commission voted unanimously to allow the demolition. The commission also approved the plans for renovation of the main house, as well as the structure that will replace the original barn.

The appearance of the main house will change little, other than alteration of an ell at the rear to accommodate handicapped rest rooms and some window changes to accommodate a new interior floor plan. The driveway on the west side of the building will be relocated to the east, and parking and the main entrance will be at the rear.

The replicated barn will be 28 feet wide and 32 feet deep, slightly smaller


than the current structure's 30-by-40-foot size. There will be a full basement and a dormer to the rear to accommodate either an apartment or additional work space on the second floor. A more appropriate connector will be built between the barn and house, replacing the flat wall that currently exists. The barn facade will not change, Oppenheim said.

"Our goal is to make it as close as people remember as possible," he said.

Commission members had questions about the appearance of a door that will be set into the larger barn door, and Oppenheim agreed to return prior to construction to review alternatives.

The project must still undergo further regulatory review. Oppenheim said the planning board will conduct a preliminary site plan review next month, and a zoning board of appeals hearing will be held in July. Offices are an allowed use in the district with ZBA approval. He's nearing completion on a floor plan to suits the Hook Fishermen's Association needs, as well as a final agreement on the sale of the property.

"Assuming all goes well, we expect to start work in late September," Oppenheim said.

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5/28/09



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