

Oakland Development Activities Meeting
October 24, 2019, 6:00 p.m.
Hosted by OPDC at the Western PA School for Blind Children
Project: 4040 Bigelow Blvd
Presenter: Stephen Casey, Stephen Casey Architects

The Oratory purchased the Ledge House—4040 Bigelow Blvd—in 2017 to be used as living and worship space. At that time, the Zoning Board of Adjustments designated the house as a religious assembly (limited) structure, which allows five unrelated people to reside in the home. Now, the property owners must abide by the religious assembly code including various technical safety requirements. One of these requirements, which the architects plan to include, is an assessable route and accessible restroom.

Over a year ago, the Historic Review Commission approved a slight extension of the first floor to solve foundation problems and add more chapel space. The extension did not exceed the structure's original footprint.

New additions that require HRC approval now are a slight modification to the roof and renovation of outdoor stairway to the basement. The modification of the roof will mostly affect the back of the structure and is consistent with the original architecture.

Q: What bond will be used on the new brick wall of the staircase?

A: We will use something traditional or Flemish bond, which is consistent with the neighbor's brick work.

Q: What material will the new railing for the staircase be?

A: Tubular steel and paint.

Q: The Oratory has taken great care of the property since they purchased it. I am hesitant about the staircase. What will it be used for?

A: The basement is used for storage. There is currently a very narrow staircase and these modifications will allow for more functional use and compliment the space.

Q: (Neighboring homeowner) My concerns are 1) the stairs are visible from Parkman Ave and 2) drainage. There are major drainage issues on Parkman. The wall created by the stairway might block drainage and the pavement beside the stairs might direct water towards our property line. Drainage issues were already exacerbated by a misplaced downspout on the 4040 Bigelow property. Can you grade the pavement properly so that it is not a problem? Maybe eliminate some concrete and add planting to catch storm water?

A: The downspout was removed so architects could see the structure's framing, but since this project has been delayed, it has not been completed. We apologize for not addressing that. The Oratory has a landscape plan in mind that will include proper drainage. The sidewalk slopes uphill and part of the backyard will be raised. We will have a grading plan to direct water in the appropriate direction.

Q: I have no concerns with the proposed modifications, as long as the drainage issue is dealt with properly.

Q: Are you proposing a change to the existing chain link fence?

A: The fence will remain the same height as the stone wall. We want to interrupt the fence to add a chain link gate, made of similar material.

Q: The chain link on that property was installed prior to Schenley Farms historic designation. Now, residents cannot install chain link fencing. It can remain if it's already on the property, but no changes can be made. You are likely to encounter push back at HRC and the neighborhood for requested modifications to the chain link fence.

A: We are reluctant to spend more of the Oratory's money on a more expensive alternative. We will address that concern if it is brought up at the HRC hearing.

The proposed gate is located set back from the Bigelow St. sidewalk.

Q: There is also a drainage issue at the low point of Fairfield Lane.

A: We will make sure that modifications use best practices and we will do what we can to alleviate drainage issues.

No HRC date is confirmed yet. Developer is hoping to attend the December or January HRC meeting.

Community members commented that there was previously a loitering problem near the property and that is why a gate was first installed. The border of the property is not well lit.

Q: If you're including an accessible route, shouldn't the surrounding area be well lit?

A: That route will mostly be used during daylight hours.

Q: Are there any security cameras on the property?

A: No.

Q: We encourage you to keep the loitering issue in mind when thinking about the gate placement/lighting.

A: We plan to add more low-lights in the garden, but we can consider additional efforts, such as wall washers.