

EDITORIALS

Protect a Landmark In Sag Harbor

The Sag Harbor Planning Board and a good number of residents have been arguing for over a year and a half about one of the village's landmarks. The so-called Gingerbread House, which overlooks a Civil War monument at the south end of the street, is not facing a wrecking ball or the indignities of ostentatious renovation, but an application to expand a building next door.

Many village residents fear that the new building would overshadow the Gingerbread House, which sits on a hill back a couple of dozen feet from the Main Street sidewalk. The neighboring property owner, Jon Gruen, an optometrist, would like to demolish a one-story gallery building there and replace it with a two-and-a-half story commercial building closer to the street and perhaps twice the size. This would sandwich the landmark between two tall commercial structures and spoil some of the village's charm.

We see a way that the village could resolve the conflict between business and history that has not been talked about. Simply rejecting the application, as some residents have called for, seems unacceptable. The owner of a commercial lot in a vibrant downtown like Sag Harbor's should be permitted to expand, within the limits of the existing historic district.

However, you have to laugh at the contention by Mr. Gruen's representatives that his structure would have no effect on neighbors. Clearly, a big new building would change the streetscape — for the worse — and perhaps encourage the owners of other commercial real estate to try similar ventures. Instead, Sag Harbor officials might ask Mr. Gruen whether he would sell the property to the village. The village could then demolish the building or move it to another site.

Before those involved in the application howl that it can't be done, we would direct their attention to East Hampton, where, using some money from the Community Preservation Fund and some of its own, the village bought a defunct car dealership near the Post Office for \$5 million and knocked it down. Today, a wide green greets motorists as they enter the village from the east. In doing so, a hidden, privately owned historic building, the Eelpt, a 19th century grade school, has been made visible. The similarities are obvious. In fact, there is far more of a clamor for protecting the Gingerbread House than there was to remove the dealership in East Hampton.

Just over \$516,000 has been spent on preservation buys for two parcels on the Southampton Town side of Sag Harbor Village. According to official figures through the end of May, Sag Harbor has contributed \$2.9 million to the Southampton Town fund. And it is important to remember that the buying power of today's preservation fund dollars is greatly expanded by the town's ability to borrow against future fund revenue. Obviously, the money is available to create a small green in the center of Sag Harbor, and, by doing so, help preserve the integrity of one of the village's notable landmarks.

THE
EAST HAMPTON
SHINES
FOR ALL
STAR