



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Northeast Region
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106-2878

IN REPLY REFER TO:

1.A.2. (RS-PA)

October 15, 2015

Mr. Rick Dalton
Park Manager
Delaware Canal State Park
Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
11 Lodi Hill Road
Upper Black Eddy, PA 18927

Dear Mr. Dalton:

Thank you for submitting the redevelopment plans for the Delaware Canal property known as Odette's located in New Hope, Pennsylvania. And thank you for providing the opportunity for members of my staff to visit the site on August 25, 2015.

The Odette's property, with its 18th century stone tavern, is a contributing property within the Delaware Canal National Historic Landmark (NHL) District, which runs for over 60 miles along the west bank of the Delaware River. The Delaware Canal was recognized as a nationally significant historic resource by the Secretary of the Interior on December 8, 1976, when it was designated as an NHL. This canal system, which opened in 1831, was one of the most important of its time and contributed to the industrial development of the Delaware Valley in the 19th century. Unlike many of its contemporaries, the canal and its associated resources has enjoyed a remarkable degree of preservation under the management of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which has operated it as a state park for over 80 years.

At this time there is not a formal role for the National Park Service (NPS) under Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (54 U.S.C. § 470 et seq), but the NPS has the responsibility for maintaining current information on changes to designated NHLs and working with NHL stewards in seeking the best treatments that will ensure the continued status as an NHL (54 U.S.C. § 461 et seq). It is under this second authority that we submit these comments to you in the hopes that your department can play a role in averting what we hold to be a serious threat to the integrity and character of the Delaware Canal.

The 18th century tavern building that stands as the core of the property known as Chez Odette (1961-76), and more recently as Odette's Restaurant, is one of only 12 buildings in addition to

the canal itself that are identified in the 1976 NHL nomination as contributing to the history and integrity of the Delaware Canal. The building retains integrity and is not diminished by the subsequent 20th century additions. This building played a key role in the navigational history of the Delaware River and predates the actual construction of the canal by some 40 years, when it first served as a way station for rafting and coal barge operations on the river.

The proposed redevelopment of the Odette's site has changed over time and has become progressively more threatening to the Odette's building itself as well as the Canal in general. There are three major aspects to the project that are problematic. First, is the proposed total demolition of the historic inn. There may be some who believe that the building has lost integrity and is no longer a prominent visual element in the historic district; however, we disagree. While our staff was not able to enter the building during the site visit, it appears to retain its full stone structure on all four sides and the 20th century additions do not obscure it from view, especially from River Road where it marks the southern entrance into New Hope. We realize that river flooding poses some severe limitation on the use of the building today, but the importance of this unique piece of Delaware River history argues for special consideration in its treatment. Demolition represents total and permanent loss.

Second, the new structure(s) proposed for the site present a scale and mass that is wholly out of character with both the canal and the adjacent New Hope historic district, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The new building will be 70 feet deep and fill the island between the two canal sections, leaving only a very restricted canal tow path. It will stretch 220 feet along the canal. It will also be four stories high. This introduces a density that is not in keeping with the character of the small-scale buildings that now distinguish the canal right-of-way nor the character that predominates through the New Hope historic district. Instead, it will pose an intrusive shift of density and design.

Third, the construction of the new building will require substantial footings or foundations that will be within a few feet of historic masonry canal walls. We believe that no matter how much care is taken in constructing this new structure there will likely be vibrations and changes in ground water that could cause serious and irreparable damage to the historic structure of the canal itself.

In addition, the restrictions that will be imposed on the historic canal tow path will both physically and visually limit the visitor experience to your park in this section of the canal. The tow path today is used by joggers, cyclists, walkers, fishermen, and through hikers. My staff noted that even on a Tuesday morning there was a steady stream of visitors passing along the path on the Odette's site. Even if the free passage of park visitors is provided for in this new development the character of that development will not be consistent with the historic character that the Commonwealth has worked so hard for so long to maintain along the canal.

We wish to add that even though the 20th century alterations to the structure to create Odette's Restaurant has not been formally recognized by the National Register of Historic Places, it appears that these alterations could add another layer of significance, possibly at the national

level, for its association with Odette Myrtil (1898-1978), who was a significant figure in the history of the American theater and American film. She was also a leader in the arts community that distinguished New Hope and Bucks County, Pennsylvania in the middle of the 20th century. Her restaurant, which she established at this site in 1961, held a regional and possibly national reputation in its day.

We acknowledge that the site, together with its buildings, presents some serious challenges to adaptive reuse, but we believe that the current project could irreversibly harm the historic fabric and the character of the Delaware Canal NHL District. We would hope that your agency, the New Hope community, the current owner of the property, and other interested parties could work together to see a sensitive use developed for the site, one that preserves the historic building, protects the canal structure and respects the character of both the NHL district and the town district.

We would be pleased to offer our assistance in these discussions. Our office could help show examples where structures in flood plains have been preserved. For example, the original Philadelphia Water Works NHL, located at the Fairmount Dam on the Schuylkill River, was limited in its reuse because of its history of flooding. After years of struggle and searching, the building was renovated as an interpretive center with exhibits that can either be removed from the flood waters on short notice or are designed to tolerate direct flooding.

The Odette's site history, inclusive of the pre-canal operations, the hundred years of canal operations, and the subsequent history as both a Commonwealth park and a restaurant managed by Odette Myrtil, is far too important to have it redirected by a use that will destroy that history and character. Please contact Bill Bolger at bill_bolger@nps.gov or 215-597-1649 if you wish to discuss how we may assist you.

Sincerely,



Bonnie J. Halda
Chief, Preservation Assistance