

Renovation draws flak in historic area

Oakdale home is in landmarked Idle Hour colony

BY RACHELLE BLIDNER
rachelle.blidner@newsday.com

A house that has been renovated in a historic area of Oakdale without adhering to landmark rules is raising concerns for residents and preservationists.

Officials say the home, located in the Idle Hour Artists Colony built in the late 1800s, is out of character with the rest of the neighborhood and has been renovated without proper permits.

"The number one thing we want is to perpetuate the artists colony the way it is and not let it be a memory," said Maryann Almes, president of the Oakdale Historical Society.

The home is in the center of the artists colony, which was built as the farm extension of the William K. Vanderbilt estate, Idle Hour. Chicken coops, horse stables and pig sties were converted into residences by artists in the 1920s.

Almes said the renovation is "alarming" because it occurred even with landmark protections in place.

Islip Town last year ordered work at the home to stop and cited the homeowner for code violations. A public hearing is

scheduled next month on a permit request needed to continue construction.

Homeowner Kenneth Giordano said his house never matched others in the colony, noting his 29,000-square-foot property on Princess Gate is larger than the typical lot.

"There's no uniform homes in the area," Giordano, 62, said.

He referred questions to his attorney, Barry Tuminello of Bay Shore, who did not respond to requests for comment.

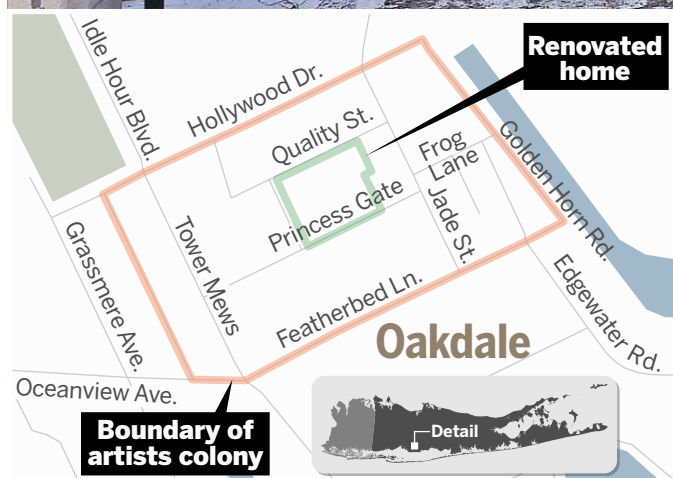
Oakdale residents describe the colony as idyllic, noting its architectural resemblance to European villages. Visitors are greeted by a clock tower and brick archways. The connected houses are so small that they have been nicknamed "Hobbit houses" and the neighborhood dubbed "Munchkinland."

The colony has been protected since the 1970s by an Islip Town planned landmark preservation overlay district, which requires homeowners to get approval for exterior changes.

Giordano purchased the 1967 home for \$390,000 in 2016, property records show. The L-shaped, ranch-style home now stands out, with gray vinyl siding and a metal roof.

Town officials ordered construction to stop on Sept. 13, and code enforcement issued violations related to building without permits on Dec. 29, officials said.

Giordano's house is in a "gray



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area" because it was built decades after the historic homes and is still in the landmark district, said Christopher D'Antonio, the town's senior

planner. Giordano must still comply with landmark rules and obtain a town certificate of appropriateness and building permit to renovate.

Giordano, who runs West Babylon-based Six G's Roofing, applied to the town planning board for a certificate of appropriateness on Sept. 13, records show.

If the planning board denies the certificate, it could require that the home be reverted back to its prior appearance, though that decision is unlikely, D'Antonio said.

"I don't want to think about the gnashing of teeth involved in that action, because it's a private property owner," D'Antonio said.

Giordano's representatives have been working with town officials on the design and plan to add a brick veneer on part of the home and a cupola, a small

State plan fosters test participation

BY JOHN HILDEBRAND
john.hildebrand@newsday.com

A 200-page New York State education plan that includes steps to discourage student test boycotts and encourage participation in college-level courses in high school has won approval from the U.S. Education

Department.

The plan, drafted under the leadership of state Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia, is aimed at carrying out provisions of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, adopted in 2015.

The law gives states more flexibility in setting and enforcing

standards for schools as compared with the former No Child Left Behind law, which ESSA replaced.

New York is among 11 states with plans approved this week by U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. The latest round of approvals brings to 27 the total number of states given

Washington's OK.

Approval means such states will continue receiving federal education aid, which in New York State's case totals about \$1.6 billion annually.

DeVos cited New York's educational blueprint for its emphasis on crediting districts for the number of high school students

taking college-level courses of the sort sponsored by the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs.

DeVos also observed, in news releases that accompanied this week's approvals, that plans submitted by New York and other states "should not be seen as a ceiling, but as a foundation."

The new federal law, like its predecessor, requires at least 95 percent of students to participate in annual state English and



JAMES CARBONE

domelike structure adorning the roof, D'Antonio said.

Gwyeth Smith Jr., who lives across the street, said he hopes the "beautiful" renovation will increase area property values, which have "taken a dive" in the past 10 years.

"Frankly, I think it is a wonderful addition to the community," Smith, 72, said.

Other area residents said they are concerned that the home's renovation could pave the way for other properties in landmarked areas to be altered. They said they especially worry about how it would impact an effort to get landmark district designation for the Vanderbilt estate's

Kenneth Giordano defends fixes to his home, above, saying there are "no uniform homes in the area."

main house on the former Dowling College campus.

Devin Kennedy, who grew up in the artists colony, said the renovation "is going to set the tone for what's going to happen with the rest of the neighborhood."

"I knew it at its most magical," Kennedy said of the area. "I don't want it to lose its aesthetic, along with the creative spirit that was there as well."

The public hearing will be held at 6:30 p.m., Feb. 1, at Islip Town Hall.

math tests. The statute also requires states to spell out what action they would take in cases where schools did not meet that level of testing.

Lack of participation is a major issue in the state — and particularly on Long Island, where hundreds of thousands of students in grades three through eight have boycotted exams in English Language Arts and math in recent years.

The state's newly approved

plan takes a restrained approach to boycotts, providing that districts draw up improvement directions for schools that fall below the 95 percent participation rate.

If schools fail to make such changes, regional BOCES districts can step in as consulting agencies to provide support. Elia, in a statement, said the plan "reflects more than a year of collaboration with a comprehensive group of stakeholders."

CURRAN MAY FACE SKIRMISH ON BOND

Seeks to borrow \$45M, but funds already set aside

BY CELESTE HADRICK
celeste.hadrick@newsday.com

Democratic County Executive Laura Curran may face her first skirmish with the Republican-controlled Nassau County Legislature next week when committees consider her request to borrow \$45 million to pay a court judgment won by two men exonerated in a 1984 rape and murder.

The request comes after the U.S. Supreme Court last week declined to hear Nassau's appeal of the 2014 award to John Restivo and Dennis Halstead, whose convictions in the rape and murder of Lynbrook teenager Theresa Fusco were overturned after they had spent nearly 18 years in prison.

The administration wants to borrow \$45 million to pay \$36 million in damages as well as legal fees and interest.

But the plan could face opposition from Republicans and at least one member of the county's financial control board because former County Executive Edward Mangano in 2016 set aside \$45 million to cover the judgment after Democrats killed his request to borrow the money.

To appeal the award, the federal court required the county to either reserve cash in a bank account or put up a bond as proof it could pay.

Legislative Democrats — including Curran, who was then a Baldwin legislator — in July 2016 voted against borrowing. They argued that the county had enough money in reserves and a litigation fund to finance the award.

Because borrowing requires a supermajority of the legislature — 13 votes — Democrats blocked the plan even though all 11 Republicans voted in favor.



ED BETZ

JOHN RESTIVO

Exonerated in June 2003 of the rape and murder of Lynbrook teenager Theresa Fusco after he had spent nearly 18 years in prison.



ED BETZ

DENNIS HALSTEAD

Convicted with Restivo and also exonerated in June 2003. Their civil suit ultimately put Nassau County on the hook for \$45 million.

At the time Democrats also were voting against borrowing in an attempt to force Republicans to hire an inspector general to oversee county contracts.

Asked why the borrowing was needed now when the county had the cash in a bank account, Curran spokesman Michael Martino said, "The money was set aside in order to secure the right to appeal the case, and now bonding would be used to support that cash."

He declined to explain further and also declined to say whether the county expected to spend the cash for other purposes.

Borrowing requires approval of the Nassau Interim Finance Authority, a state board in control of the county's books. A NIFA spokesman said the board would "consider" the borrowing request if the legislature approves it.

But NIFA member Chris Wright said NIFA "ceased approving borrowing for settlements some time ago, and while this is a meaningful settlement, I don't see any reason to resume borrowing for operating costs."

He said, "If the prior administration complied with the court order and segregated the funds, the current administration shouldn't need to borrow those same funds."

Deputy Presiding Officer Howard Kopel (R-Lawrence) said he had yet to make up his mind.

"I don't know if NIFA will allow this," he said. "Secondly, the Democrats have always been against this. This would be regressing, going back and borrowing for judgments . . . This would solve a lot of budget issues if they could do that."

Kopel said, "I'd like to hear more from the administration on how they will handle this."