

James R. Maxeiner
111 White Plains Road
Bronxville NY 10708

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By E-Mail

Bronxville Zoning Board of Appeals
200 Pondfield Road
Village Hall
Bronxville NY 10708

Re: Application ALT-171-21, 115 White Plains Road
Response to letter of Ashley Ross, dated October 25, 2021

Dear Members of the Bronxville Zoning Board of Appeals:

I am responding to Ms. Ashley's letter to the Board dated October 25 but made available to me only earlier this week.

I regret that Ms. Ross feels "wholly unwelcome in our new town." Earlier this week, I met with her Architect, Anderson Kenny, in person for the first time. We had a substantive conversation in my family room. We both agreed that it is important that the Rosses and the Maxeiners be on good terms no matter how this proceeding turns out, since we both hope to be living here together for decades into the future.

In 1989 my family was welcomed to the Village of Bronxville by our then new neighbors, the Conlons and the Dhrymes, just as we in later years welcomed successors to the Village. We will welcome the Rosses, too, when they come to Bronxville. But we have yet to see them. I think they will be surprised by the similarities between our two families, just separated by 32 years.

Besides assuring the Rosses that we will welcome them to the Village of Bronxville, I write to clarify two factual matters (and not to argue law).

The principal point in this letter is that Ms. Ross's letter and the artist's rendering of what she wants her home to look like, makes all too clear, that I "understood the drawings." What I called "a garage and car park," in her letter she calls "a motor court ... and carriage house." No matter how they are termed, both would damage our lot, injure the neighborhood and urbanize our Village. The artist's rendering shows that front yard and the house would disappear behind the Carriage House and Motor Court and would burden our backyard with the Carriage House but six feet away.

Ms. Ross's architect, Anderson, and my wife, Andrea, could have a nice discussion about Tudor Carriage Houses, for her Ph. D. is in Tudor history. Tudor-style is beyond my ken, but I have strong feelings about whether garages of any style belong in residential front yards in my neighborhood: they do not.

Ms. Ross's letter confirms that I was right to speak of a car park and not of a mere driveway. It is a "Motor Court" that she wants in her front yard. A Motor Court, she writes, will create "a charming welcome for our family and guests." She is not looking for a practical addition—a parking update—but for an ornament to her new house.

I assume that Ms. Ross does **not** have in mind the usual American understanding of Motor Court, that is, a motel.¹ She has in mind, I believe, a specific builders' definition as defined in one published article:

A motor court is not the same as a driveway.

It designates a special area for vehicle parking. Equally important, it [provides] a stylish transition space for guests approaching the front of the home.²

A construction company's Internet promo describes what many people adding motor courts are looking for: a grand entry way that becomes part of the home, a stylish transition from one space to another, and a place for that extra car or recreation vehicle:

[L]ets clear up a misconception: A motor court is not the same as a driveway. Sure, it is a special area for vehicle parking, but it is also a sophisticated hardscape that contributes both form and function to your home. It becomes part of your home and provides a stylish transition from one space to another.

Practically speaking, it provides extra parking: a must if you have more than one or two vehicles or if you entertain often. Also, if you have [a vehicle] like a motorcycle, Segway, or golf cart, a motor court will let you keep them out of your garage and ready to play.

... Creating a motor court is making another dramatic space for your family and guests to enjoy. As they set foot on the motor court, they transition from the outdoor world to the serene ambience of your home. A motor court, in this instance, acts as part of a **grand entryway**.³

In another article, replete with many illustrations, one professional tells how to design the "gracious motor court" that Ms. Ross apparently wishes:

Motor courts can be a great area for hosting a party or playing with the dogs. They can also work as elegant, secluded entries for high-profile homes. If you'd like to contemplate a motor court for your own home, here are [three of] five design elements you'll want to consider: ...

1. Size and shape. Motor courts are where cars and people meet, so scale is important. They can be any shape but need to be designed so a vehicle can move easily — and safely — around. To get started, think about whether you want a car to turn around in the space or just drive through it. ...

¹ Although, who knows? The Comprehensive Plan looks for a boutique hotel in the Business District. The Village has had need for overnight accommodations ever since the Gramatan Hotel was torn down.

² "Motor Court," in *Driveway Construction* (October 13, 2015), <https://exteriorworlds.com/motor-court/> (emphasis in original).

³ Cornerstone Blog, "Adding a Motor Court," (September 17, 2015), <https://cornerstonebuildersswfl.com>.

2. **Placement.** Motor courts should be placed near buildings. Because they are a transition space between car and building, they are typically adjacent to the home or garage. They could also be useful near outbuildings for loading or as a place to turn around.

This motor court located in front of the home acts as an entry room connecting the garage and front entrance. A court in front of your home is typically more formal, and materials should match or enhance your home.

Find an architect or designer near you. ...

3. **Barrier.** A common feature of motor courts — and what really sets them apart from just being oversized driveways — is the barrier. Enclosing the space with walls or fences creates a room and a feeling of security. ...⁴

I do not think Motor Courts, any more than Carriage Houses, belong in front yards in my neighborhood!

*

Ms. Ross's assertion that our garage is "on the property line, mere inches from our fence" is not true. While our blue garage is adjacent to her backyard solid stockade fence, the garage was there fifty years before her solid stockade fence! The 1947 garage is a lawful pre-existing non-conforming use.

What is inches away from her solid stockade fence is an inexpensive, portable, assemble-it-yourself storage unit tucked in between our garage and her fence. The sole criterion for purchase was that it had to be narrow enough to fit the space. I placed it there some twenty-years ago for the children's bicycles when they were growing up in Bronxville. The unit has no foundation, other than a sheet of plywood; if the Rosses wish, we will have it removed as soon as we can get someone to do that for us.

*

We are anxious to have good relations with our future neighbors. We could see not objecting to encroachments on their side yard set-back requirements for a backyard garage and car park, or Ms. Ross describes them, for a "carriage house" and "motor court" We would like to see the over-height, half-solid stockade fence in their front-yard cut down to size.

Sincerely yours,

James R. Maxeiner

⁴ Sean Lewis, "We Can Dream: How to Design a Gracious Motor Court," *Houzz* (September 24, 2017) <https://www.houzz.com/magazine/we-can-dream-how-to-design-a-gracious-motor-court-stsetivw-vs~91116611>.