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SPECIAL PERMIT APPLICATION

For

Kurt and Aviva Will South Branch Farm LLC 40 Viets Road Sandisfield, MA 01255

Tax Map 44, Lot 45.2

Dated: November 21, 2023

List of Exhibits

Will Application for Special Permit South Branch Farm LLC 40 Viets Road, Sandisfield

Exhibit A: MassGIS Map

Exhibit B: Crisp Architect Plans (9 pages)

Exhibit C: Existing Conditions Plan, L-102, dated February 28, 2023

by Greylock Design Associates

Exhibit D: Google Earth close-up of existing house

Exhibit E: Plan entitled Will Residence Existing v. Proposed dated November 14, 2023

by Greylock Design Associates

Exhibit F: Detail of GDA Plan

PROJECT NARRATIVE

1. Project Description

Kurt and Aviva Will are renovating and enlarging their house in Sandisfield, and require a Special Permit from this Board to increase an existing nonconformity involving the front setback.

The subject property is located on the west side of Viets Road, and is identified as Tax Map 414, Lot 45.2. The record owner is South Branch Farm LLC by deed recorded in the Berkshire Southern District Registry of Deeds in Book 2392, Page 19. The property is 5.02 acres in area. The project is not in the jurisdiction of the Wetlands Protection Act or other such regulations. See Exhibit A, MassGIS Map

The property is improved with an existing house and detached garage. The property and existing house comply with Sandisfield zoning requirements in all respects except the front setback of 30'. A small portion of the house and porch project into the front setback a distance of approximately 4.5 feet.

The Wills are requesting permission from the Select Board to replace the small portion of the existing house and porch with new construction on the existing, and to add an unenclosed porch along the front of the house. The new porch would extend an additional nine feet into the setback. See Exhibit B, Crisp Architect Plans.

The remainder of their planned renovation of the existing house conforms in all respects to zoning and does not require any permit from this Board. The construction will require an expansion of the existing subsurface sewage disposal facility.

2. Applicable Zoning

As stated above, the Wills' existing house conforms to the current dimensional requirements of the Bylaw in all respects except for the small portion of the house and porch that extend approximately four and a half feet into the front setback.¹ The Bylaw requirements and the existing and proposed conditions are as follows:

¹ The house is not parallel to the property line, and thus the distance from existing house and porch ranges from 26'1" (3'9" into the setback) to 25'1" (4'9" into the setback).

DIMENSIONAL REQUIREMENT		EXISTING CONDITION/ STRUCTURE	PROPOSED CONDITION/ STRUCTURE
Minimum Lot Size	1 acre	5.020 acres	No change
Frontage	200'	333.95'	No change
Minimum Lot Depth	150'	608.4'	No change
Front Setback	30'	25.1' to 26.1'	16.1' to 17.1'
Rear Setback	30'	30'	No change
Side Setback	30'	30'	No change

See Exhibit C, Existing Conditions Plan, L-102, dated February 28, 2023 by Greylock Design Associates; Exhibit D, Google Earth close-up of existing house; Exhibit E, Plan entitled Will Residence Existing v. Proposed dated November 14, 2023 by Greylock Design Associates ("GDA Plan"); and Exhibit F, Detail of GDA Plan.

Those portions of the house and porch that extend into the front setback are protected pre-existing nonconformities as they have existed more than 10 years. See M.G.L. c. 40A, §7 (structures in existence for a period of at least 10 years shall be deemed, for zoning purposes, to be legally non-conforming structures subject to section 6 and any local ordinance or by-law relating to non-conforming structures).

A. The State Zoning Act Governs Changes to Pre-Existing Nonconforming Structures

Changes to pre-existing nonconforming single-family structures are governed by the Zoning Act, M.G.L. c. 40A, §6. Local zoning bylaws must provide the minimal protections set forth in Chapter 40A, §6. Local bylaws can be more lenient, but cannot be stricter, than the statute:

General Laws c. 40A, § 6, however, creates a statutory requirement that "sets the floor" throughout the Commonwealth for the appropriate protections from local zoning bylaws to be afforded properties and structures protected under that statue. See Rourke v. Rothman, 448 Mass. 190, 191 n.5, 859 N.E.2d 821 (2007). As such, the statute prescribes "the minimum of tolerance that must be accorded to nonconforming uses." (citation omitted). See id. A municipality's bylaws may not afford fewer protections to preexisting nonconforming structures or uses than does the governing statute. See, e.g., Schiffenhaus v. Kline, 79 Mass. App. Ct. 600, 605, 947 N.E.2d 1133 (2011), quoting Planning Bd. of Reading v. Board of Appeals of Reading, 333 Mass. 657, 660, 132 N.E.2d 386 (1956) ("It is axiomatic that '[a] by-law cannot conflict with the statute' ").

<u>Bellalta</u> v. Zoning Bd. of Appeals of Brookline, 481 Mass. 372, 386 (2019); see also Gale v. Zoning Bd. of Appeals of Gloucester, 80 Mass. App. Ct. 331, 337 (2011).²

The Sandisfield Zoning Bylaw complies in this respect with the minimum standards dictated by the Zoning Act. The Bylaw provides, in relevant part, that "[p]re-existing nonconforming structures or uses may be extended, alter[ed], or change to another nonconforming use by special permit from the Board of Selectmen provided that the Board finds that such change, extension, or alteration shall not be substantially more detrimental than the existing nonconforming use to the neighborhood." Bylaw, Section 5(b).

B. The Zoning Act and the Sandisfield Zoning Bylaw Include an Exception for Certain Changes to Pre-Existing Nonconforming Residences

The portion of Section 6 of the Zoning Act that governs changes to pre-existing nonconforming single-family is known as the "second except clause." The Sandisfield Zoning Bylaw, Section 5, mirrors the requirements of the Zoning Act. The Zoning Act includes a special exception from zoning changes for single- and two-family residences:

Except as hereinafter provided, a zoning ordinance or by-law shall not apply to structures or uses lawfully in existence or lawfully begun, ... but shall apply to any change or substantial extension of such use, ... to any reconstruction, extension or structural change of such structure and ... to provide for its use for a substantially different purpose or for the same purpose in a substantially different manner or to a substantially greater extent except where alteration, reconstruction, extension or structural change to a single or two-family residential structure does not increase the nonconforming nature of said structure. Pre-existing nonconforming structures or uses may be extended or altered, provided, that no such extension or alteration shall be permitted unless there is a finding by the permit granting authority or by the special permit granting authority designated by ordinance or by-law that such change, extension or alteration

² See also 160 Moulton Drive LLC v. Shaffer, 22 LCR 555, 562 (2020) (Foster, J.) (finding that bylaw provision which arguably would have imposed additional criteria for modifying pre-existing nonconforming structure were reasonably interpreted as not intended to apply, as it would have imposed restrictions beyond those provided by § 6); Gottfried v. Betron, 25 LCR 1, 11 n.19 (2017) (Piper, J.) ("The local bylaw may grant greater indulgence than the minimum required under G. L. c. 40A, § 6.... In other words, § 6 only controls when a bylaw creates more onerous restrictions on non-conforming uses and structures than § 6.")

shall not be substantially more detrimental than the existing nonconforming [structure or³] use to the neighborhood"

M.G.L. c. 40A, §6 (emphasis added).

Massachusetts courts have established standards for the application of the Section 6 framework.

i. First Required Finding by the Select Board

Under the Section 6 framework, the "second except clause" requires the special permit granting authority (in Sandisfield, the Select Board) to make:

[A]n initial determination whether a proposed alteration of or addition to a nonconforming structure would 'increase the nonconforming nature of said structure. This initial determination requires the permitting authority to "identify the particular respect or respects in which the existing structure does not conform to the requirements of the present by-law and then determine whether the proposed alteration or addition would intensify the existing nonconformities or result in additional ones.

Bellalta v. Zoning Bd. of Appeals of Brookline, 481 Mass. 372, 380 (2019)(internal citations omitted), citing Willard v. Zoning Bd. of Appeals of Orleans, 25 Mass. App. Ct. 15 (1987).

The "second except clause" "is directed to differentiating between those changes to nonconforming residential structures that may be made as of right, and those that require a finding of no substantial detriment under the second sentence of [G. L. c. 40A] § 6. Bellalta v. Zoning Bd. of Appeals of Brookline, 481 Mass. 372, 381 (2019), quoting Deadrick v. Zoning Bd. of Appeals of Chatham, 85 Mass. App. Ct. 539, 550 (2014). Only if a modification, extension, or reconstruction of a single- or two-family house would increase the nonconforming nature of said structure must it be submitted for a determination by the board of the question whether it is 'substantially more detrimental than the existing nonconforming use' pursuant to the sentence that follows the second except clause G. L. c. 40A, § 6. Bellalta v. Zoning Bd. of Appeals of Brookline, 481 Mass. 372, 381 (2019).

Since the reconstruction of the house in the same footprint as the existing house and porch does not increase the nonconforming nature of the structure (i.e., is no closer to the street than the existing structure), no special permit should be required for this work:

Concerns over the making of small-scale alterations, extensions, or structural changes to a preexisting house are illusory. Examples of such improvements could include the addition of a dormer; the addition, or enclosure, of a porch or sunroom; the addition of a one-story garage for no

³ The words "structure or" were inserted by courts.

more than two motor vehicles; the conversion of a one-story garage for one motor vehicle to a one-story garage for two motor vehicles; and the addition of small-scale, proportional storage structures, such as sheds used to store gardening and lawn equipment, or sheds used to house swimming pool heaters and equipment. Because of their small-scale nature, the improvements mentioned could not reasonably be found to increase the nonconforming nature of a structure, and we conclude, as matter of law, that they would not constitute intensifications.

Bjorklund v. Zoning Bd. of Appeals of Norwell, 450 Mass. 357, 362-63 (2008) (footnotes omitted).

Thus, while the reconstruction of the existing structure should not require a special permit, the addition of the new porch would require such a permit.

ii. Second Required Finding by the Select Board

If the Select Board determines that the proposed alteration or addition – the new porch - would intensify the existing nonconformities, the Select Board must make a second finding, that is whether the proposed modification would be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing nonconforming structure. M.G.L. c. 40A §6; Bellalta v. Zoning Bd. of Appeals of Brookline, 481 Mass. 372, 381 (2019); Willard at 21.

The requested reconstruction and minor change to the porch could not reasonably be considered substantially more detrimental. As addressed below, the proposed changes are not - by any measure - detrimental to the abutters, to the area, or to the town.

C. Application of 40A §6 to the Proposed Construction

In considering the impact of the proposed work, it is necessary first to review the status and condition of Viets Road and the potentially-impacted properties.

Viets Road in the relevant location is a dirt road that is not maintained by the Town. The road is rough to the north of the Will property and it is worse to the south. In that direction, the road is no longer passable. There is quite literally no through traffic on Viets Road.

The Board previously raised a question as to the potential impact of the proposed structure on any theoretical future maintenance of the road. Even if the Town were to begin maintaining Viets Road, the proposed structure would have no impact whatsoever. The traveled way is located on the far side of the Town layout. Even if the Town decided to make a sizable investment in this unused road by expanding the width of the traveled way, there could still be more than 30 feet between the closest sideline of the road and the proposed porch. Moreover, the Bylaw does permit structures in the setback without concern about interfering with the use of roads. Specifically, the Bylaw permits fences to be located along the actual street sideline to a height of 10 feet. Bylaw, Section 8(d)(2).

In terms of other impacts, there would be no impact whatsoever on abutting properties. The surrounding area is mostly wooded, except for areas that are farmed. There are no houses in the vicinity of the Will house. See Exhibit A (MassGIS map). Moreover, the property on the far side of the road is also owned by the Will limited liability company, South Branch Farm LLC, as well as the property directly to the south of the parcel in question. As the owner of the subject property also owns the property across the road, there would be no detriment to or complaint from the owner of that property as a result of the proposed work. Moreover, as the owners' septic leach field is on the property across the road, the owner would have no incentive to sell this parcel.

As the Will house is served by a private well and subsurface sewage disposal system, the proposed work will not create any burden or expense for the Town. To the contrary, the improvement of the existing house while maintaining the architectural vernacular by including a front porch will only benefit the Town as the assessed value of the house, and thus the real property tax paid to the Town, will increase.

The proposed work will be an unqualified benefit, and will not create any additional congestion, light, noise, or other negative impact on the abutters, neighborhood, or Town.

Effect on Unrelated Applications for Extension of Pre-existing Nonconforming Structure Further Into Setback

The grant of this requested Special Permit would not set a negative precedent in the Town of Sandisfield. Each property, each house, and each requested relief is distinct. This Board will never be requested to consider an application with identical facts to those set forth in the Will application.

Each such future application must be considered in light of the facts particular to the property, the structure, and the relief requested – as well as whether the project would be "substantially more detrimental" to the neighborhood. This Board, as Special Permit Granting Authority, has discretion to make certain findings, but that discretion must be exercised in the context of the law of this Commonwealth and the Zoning Bylaw of the Town. Town boards are not permitted to create and apply a rule that no such application will ever by granted.

As demonstrated, the proposed reconstruction of the small portion of the structure already in the front setback, and the addition of a porch further into the front setback, is permissible by law and could not be considered substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing nonconformity.

Conclusion

The Select Board is respectfully requested to grant a Special Permit (1) authorizing the alteration of the pre-existing nonconforming house located at 40 Viets Road to permit the addition of a front porch extending an additional nine feet into the front setback, and (2)

making a finding that no special permit is required for the reconstruction of the existing structure on the same footprint. If the Select Board does not determine that no special permit is needed for the reconstruction on the same footprint, then the Board is requested to grant a Special Permit both for the reconstruction of the existing structure and the addition of the new porch.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Alexandra H. Glover

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MassGIS - 40 Viets Road, Sandisfield

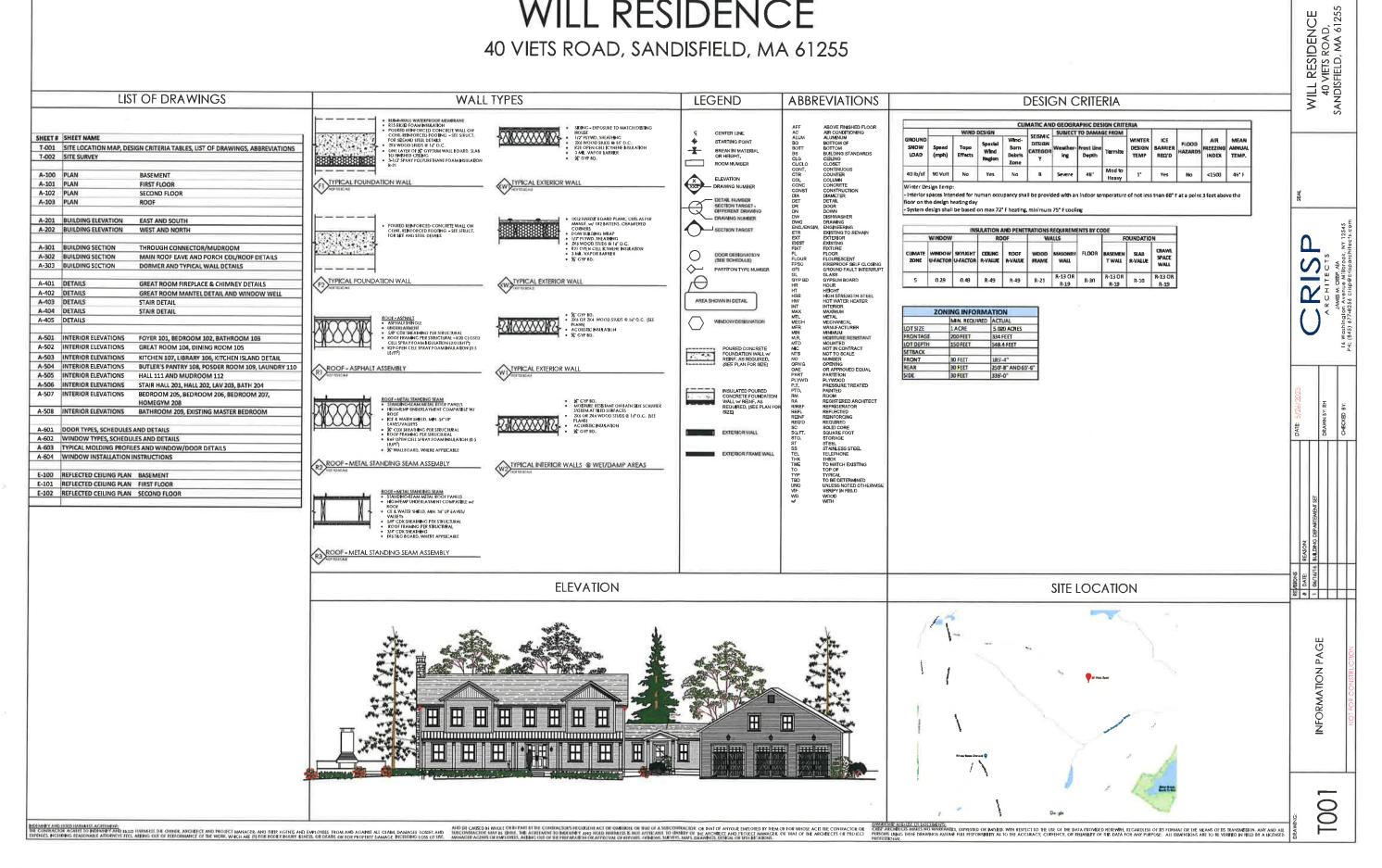


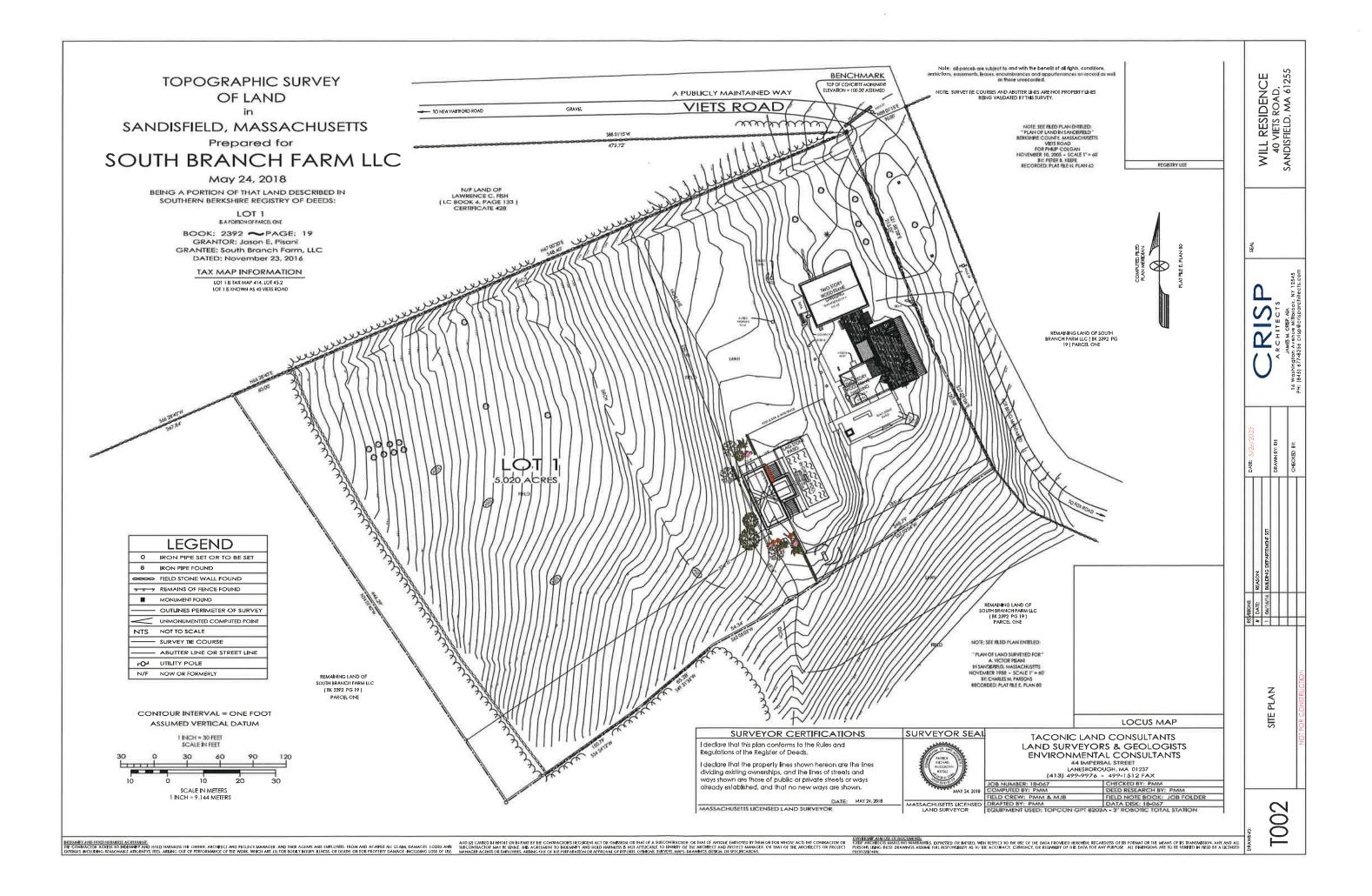
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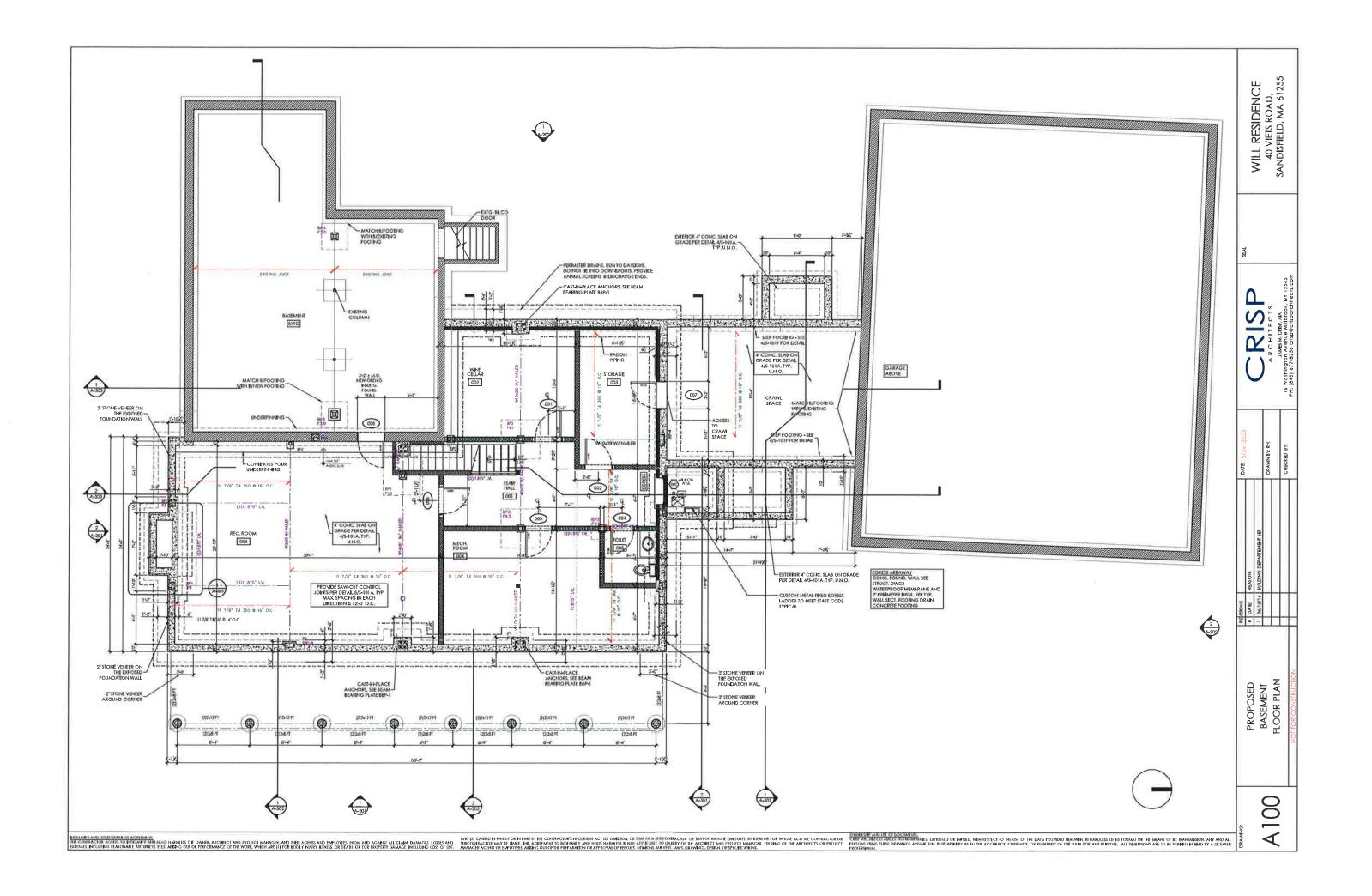
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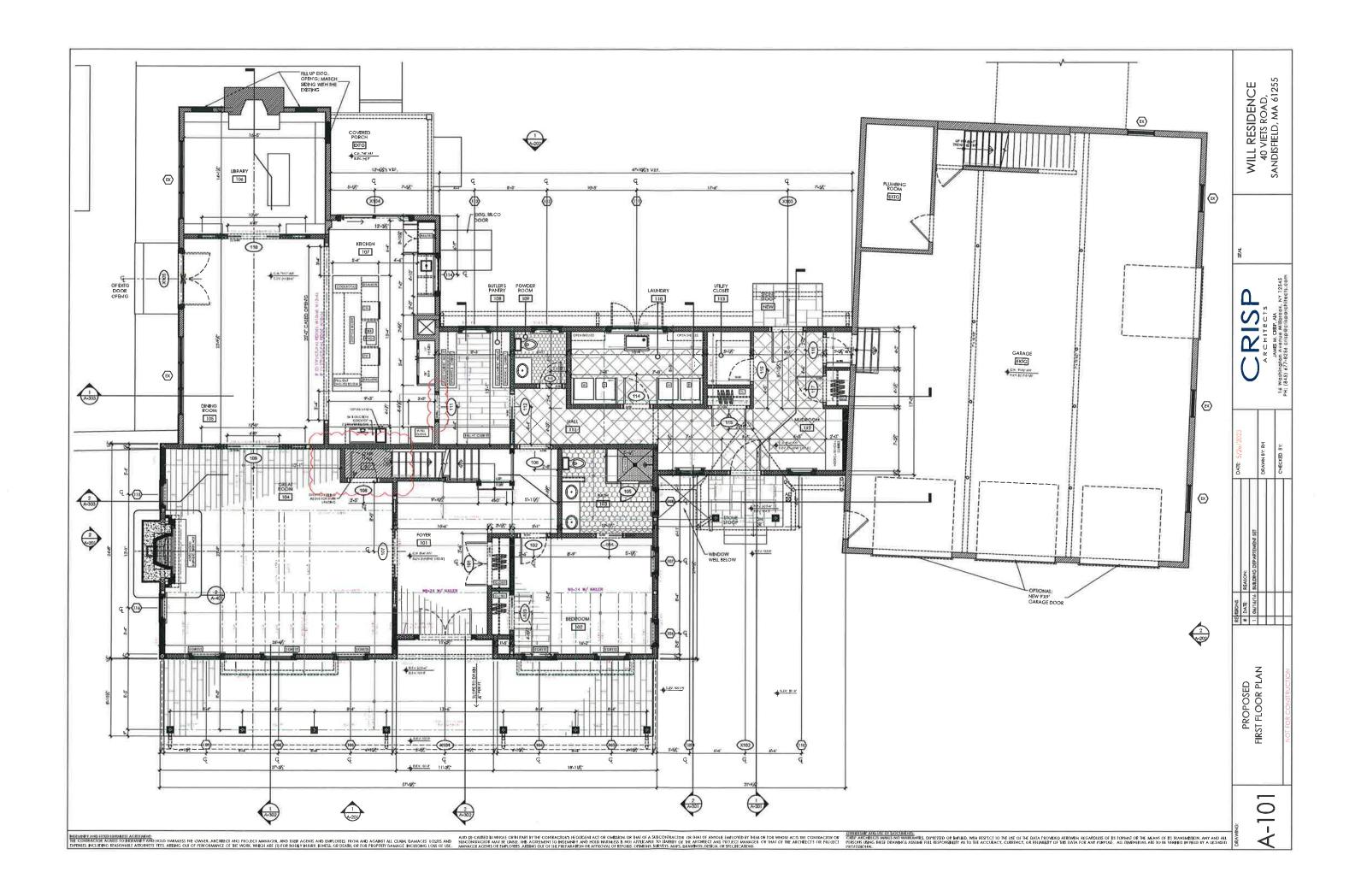
WILL RESIDENCE

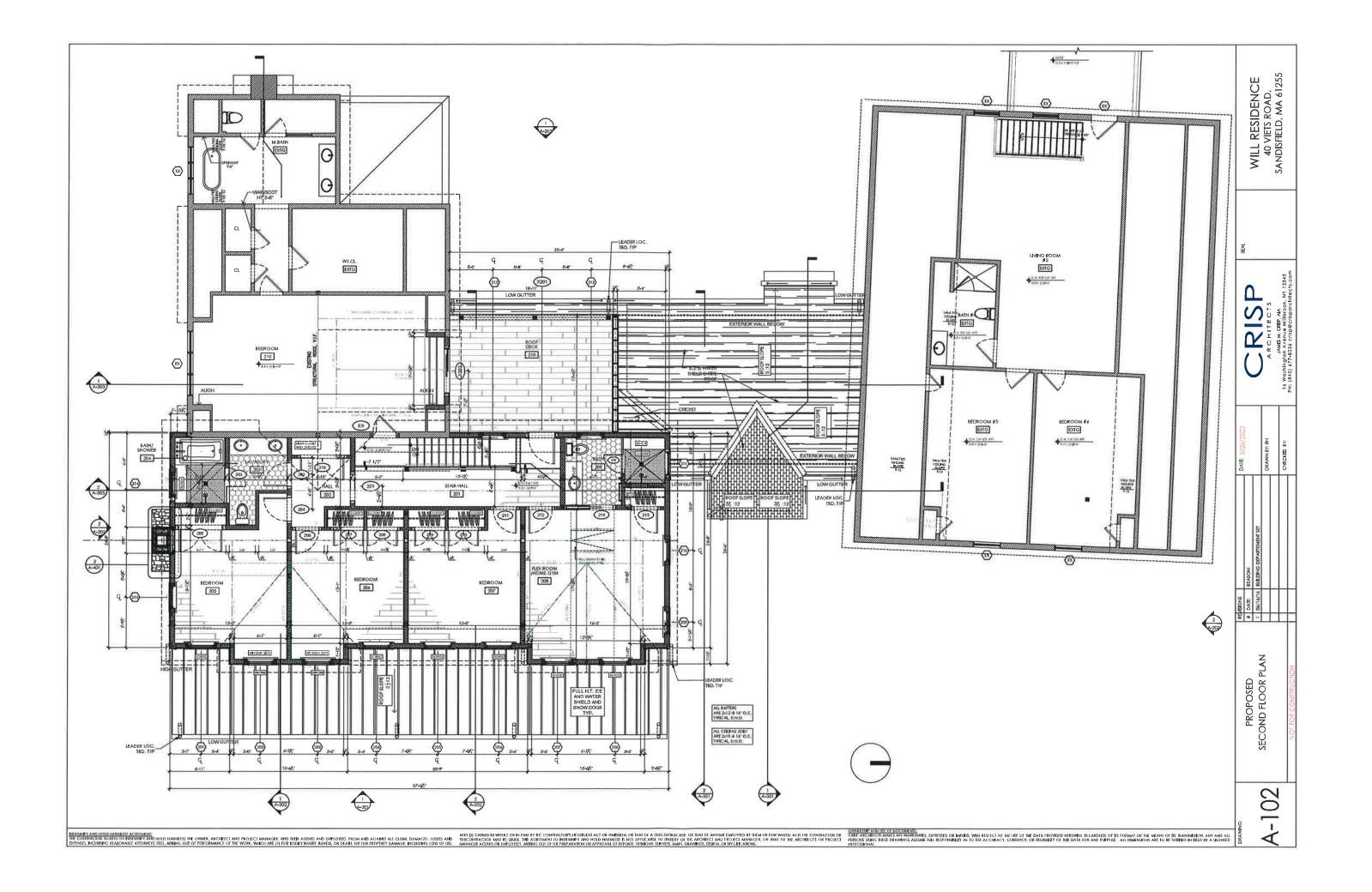
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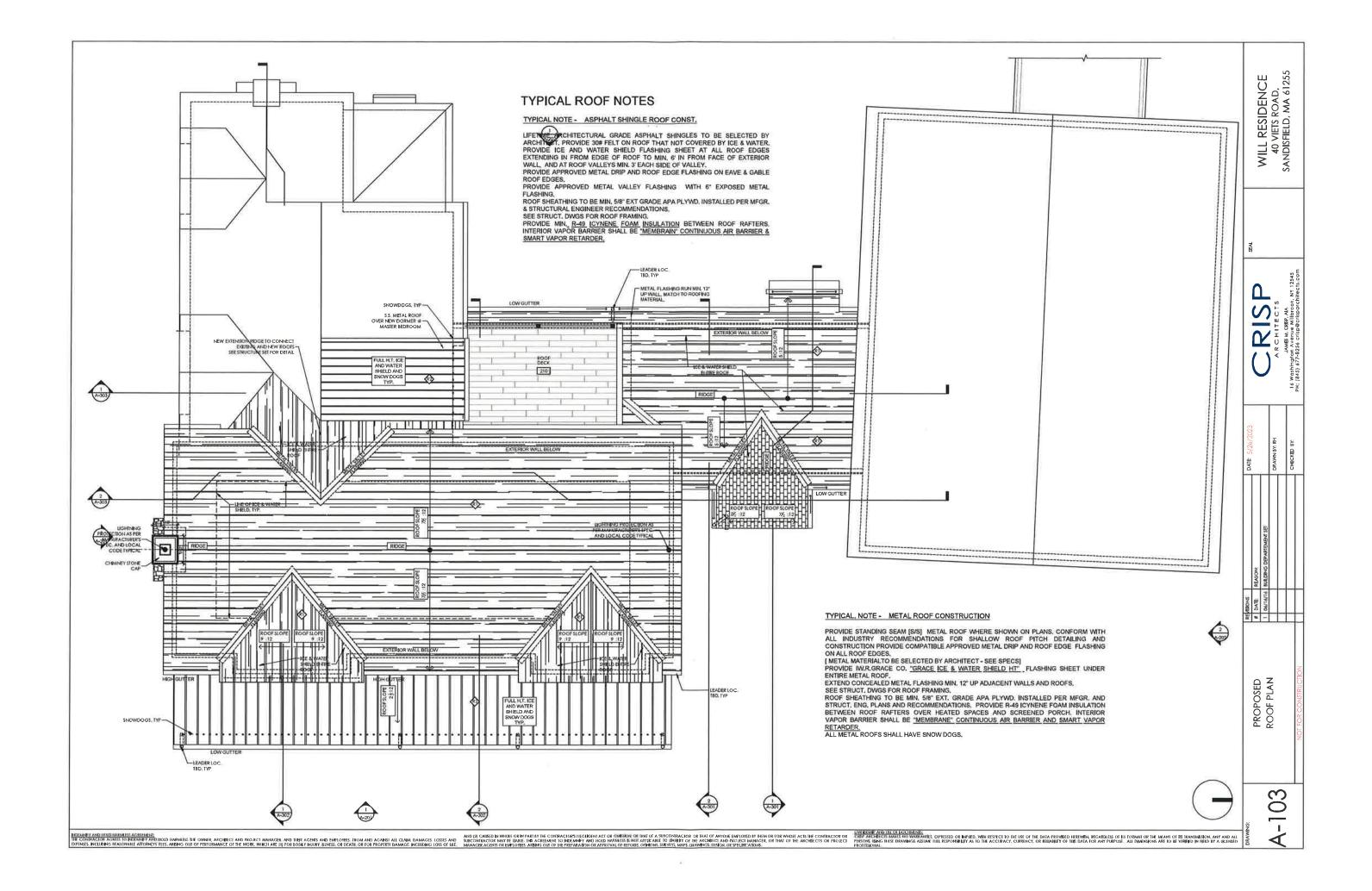




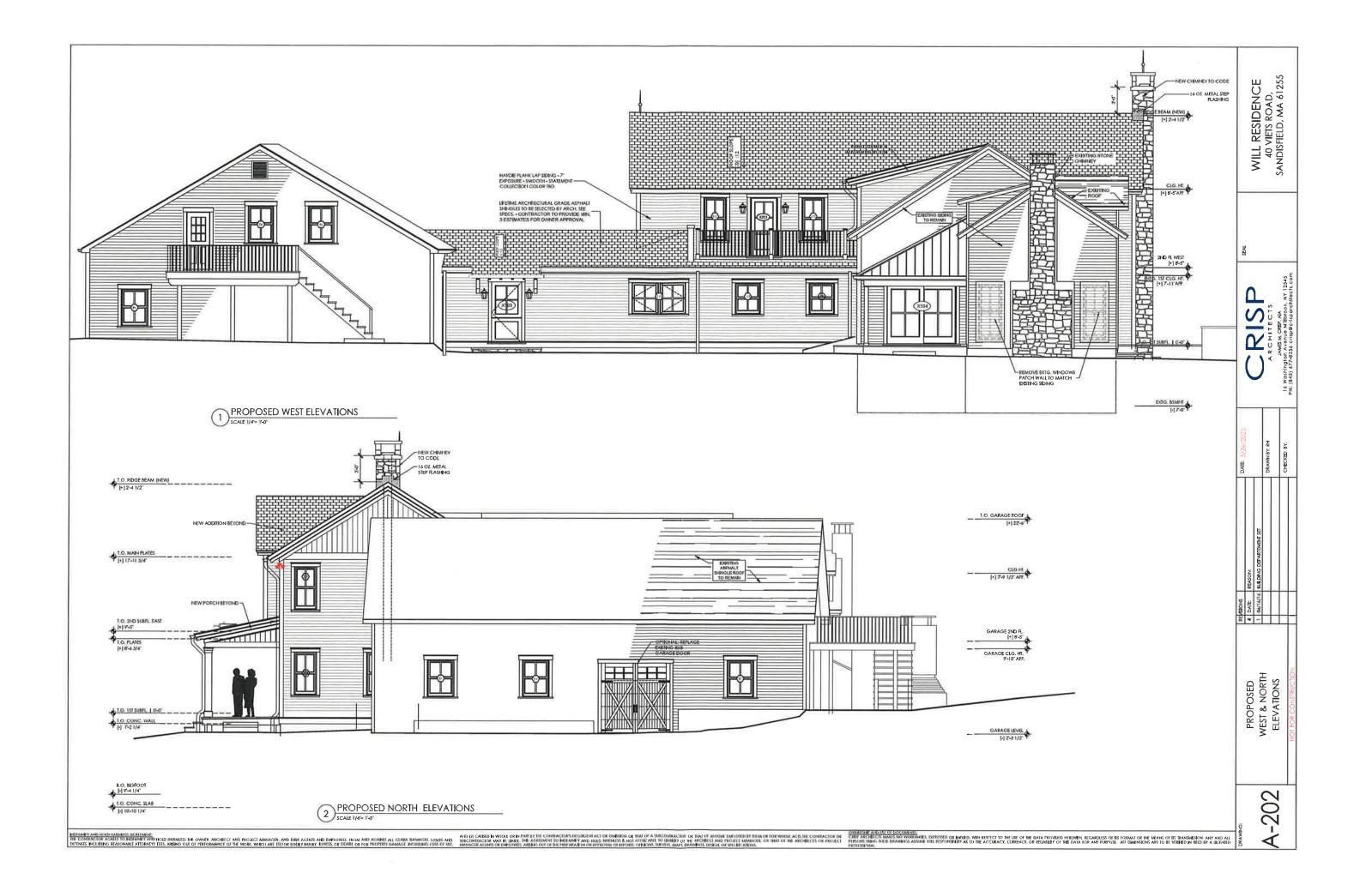


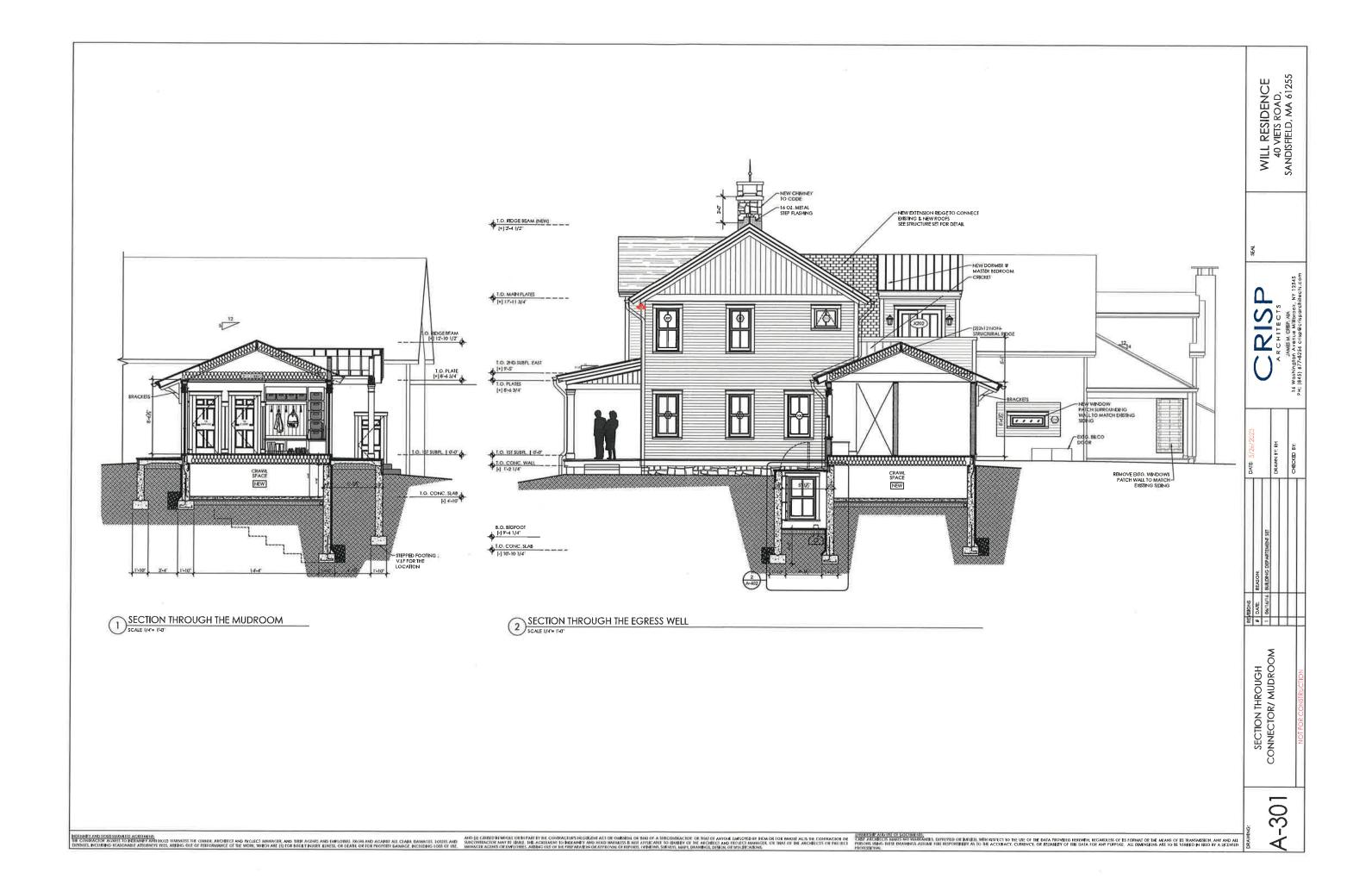


















Google Earth Aerial View - 40 Viets Road



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