



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
**JOSEPH A. CURTATONE**  
**MAYOR**

*HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION*

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**ALTERATION TO A HISTORIC PROPERTY STAFF REPORT**

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Site: 170 Summer Street, c. 1865 – John Howie House  
Case: HPC 2016.079 Central/Atherton/Spring Summer Local Historic District

Applicant: Seth Kintigh, Owner  
Address: 170 Summer Street, Somerville MA 02143

Application Date: September 29, 2016  
Legal Notice: *Change 1920s porch columns and trim to match Victorian half of porch. Replace front door with Victorian doors. Add solar panels on top of lower roof and southern side of upper roof. Add iron fence around yard.*

Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness  
Date of Public Hearing: October 18, 2016

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**I. Building Description**

*Architectural Description:*

Built c. late 1860s' this Italianate house is noteworthy for its well - preserved mansard-roofed form and especially its intact east porch with its numerous original elements. Prominently sited at the northeast corner of Summer and Harvard streets, this house is perched at the southern crest of Spring Hill. Indeed, ground at the front of the house is at an elevation higher than that of the rear of the property.

This L-shaped Italianate house is composed of a one-bay-by-two bay main block and a two-bay-by-one bay rear ell. The house's two components rise two-stories from a red brick basement to bell cast mansard roofs. Both the edges of the main block and rear ell are accented by narrow corner boards. The narrow, one-bay Summer Street elevation exhibits a one-story bay. The windows of the bay surmount a flared wood shingle-sheathed apron and are surmounted by rectangular panels set off by raised moldings. The bay is enclosed by a bracketed hip roof. Above this bay is a double, fully-enframed window that culminates in a bracketed, cornice-headed lintel. Above the one-story bay is a double window that is fully-enframed and bracketed. Above the double window is the roof's bracketed cornice. A single flat-roofed dormer is in evidence



at the Summer Street roof slope. In general, windows of both the main block and rear ell are fully-enframed and cornice-headed.

The house's east facade features a remarkably intact entrance porch complete with slat work railings and square posts. The porch posts rise to a slat work transom located beneath the eaves of the porch's-shed roof. Marking the entrance is a pair of curved arches exhibiting spandrels enlivened by Gothicized gingerbread tracery. A rectangular transom surmounts the front door.

#### *Historical Context/Evolution of Structure or Parcel:*

170 Summer Street by virtue of its tree-shaded setting, still manages to convey a picture of rural-suburban Spring Hill before the building boom of the 1880s and 1890s resulted in a more densely built-up neighborhood. Built c. 1865 to 1870, this house was evidently built for John Howie, "designer." Howie commuted to work in Boston's financial district. In 1871, his office is listed at 55 Franklin Street. By 1877, he worked at Summer Street, corner of Devonshire Street. Interestingly, by 1879, Howie is listed as a designer working in New York-City. Howie did not however sell the property despite his relocation to New York. Henry D. Howie, a salesman who commuted from Somerville to 53 Summer Street, Boston, is listed here as a boarder in 1879. The house remained in the Howie family until the early 1900s.

By 1903, George Brewer, insurance salesman, lived at 170 Summer Street. He commuted to work at an insurance agency located at 66 Batterymarch, Boston. Brewer, his wife Mary and son John H. Brewer lived here until at least the early 1920s. By 1930, seven members of the James Ormond family, including five nurses, are listed at this address including: Mrs. Catherine Ormond widow-of James, Roy J. Ormond, machinist; Elizabeth Ormond, nurse; Helen Ormond, nurse; Margaret Ormond, nurse; Mary-E. Ormond nurse and Catherine Ormond, nurse. By 1940, the number of Ormonds living under the same roof had been reduced from seven to three, including the nurses Catherine, Margaret and Mary.

## **II. Project Description**

### *Proposal of Alteration:*

1. Change 1920s porch columns and trim to match Victorian half of porch.
2. Replace front door with Victorian doors.
3. Add solar panels on top of lower roof and southern side of upper roof.
4. Add iron fence around yard.

## **III. Findings for a Certificate of Appropriateness**

### *1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:*

C/A	Seth Kintigh	2013.007	1. The 3-tab asphalt roof is replaced with scalloped architectural, synthetic or slate shingles for all or part of the mansard roof and will be reviewed by Staff.
C/NA	Seth Kintigh	2013.039	1. Repair and replace rotted siding; 2. Patch roof until new roof can be installed; and 3. Renovate kitchen and bathrooms provided that there are no alterations to the windows
C/NA	Seth Kintigh	2013.091	1. Install stainless steel chimney liner and replace chimney cap.

### *2. Precedence:*

1. Change 1920s porch columns and trim to match Victorian half of porch.

No cases have been found for this precise alteration. One case of new columns where the original entry was unknown at 34 Bow Street (2005) was granted a Certificate of Appropriateness. There have been numerous alterations of porches to more historically informed styles.

2. Replace front door with Victorian doors.

Certificates of Appropriateness or changed front doors were issued for 50 Bow Street (2004) and 24 Summer Street (2015). A new matching second front door was approved for 81 Benton Road (2014)

3. Add solar panels on top of lower roof and southern side of upper roof.

In the past few years, the Commission has reviewed several requests for solar panels. These have generally received Certificates of Appropriateness or Non-Applicability depending upon placement and visibility of the panels under guideline for roofs - #5 (see below). 148 Morrison Avenue (2016) and 8 Westwood Road (2016) are not visible from the public rights of way. 46 Mount Vernon Street (2015), 23 Pleasant Avenue (2013) and 22 Summer Street (2013) have panels set well back from the road. A Certificate of Hardship was issued for 302 Lowell Street since the panels were located on the front of the house (2016)

4. Add iron fence around yard.

The Commission has granted a number of Certificates of Appropriateness for historically inspired metal fences and the relocation and installation of salvaged fences. These were 25 Atherton (2014), 27 Chester Street (2011), 58 Columbus Avenue (2014), 47 Franklin Street (2014), 8 Mount Vernon Street (2010), 1 Summer Street (2005), 45 Walnut Street (2013), 28 Warren Avenue (2003), and 3 Westwood Road (2005).

### 3. Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The columns, trim and fence will be highly visible because the house is on a corner lot where Summer Street, Harvard Street and Benton Road meet. Two solar panels will be on the sunny slope of the upper roof. Another seven panels will be on the flat lower roof around the chimney and will be invisible or barely visible from the street.

- *What are the Existing Conditions of the building / parcel?*

The last building permits found were for the construction of the garage in 1924 and the repair or construction of the porch in 1916. As noted earlier, the house was in the same family from 1930 until this year and has been neglected for some time as can be evidenced by the lack of building, gas, plumbing or electrical permits of any sort. Fortunately, this also means that much of the house is in its original condition and has not been much altered.

*The primary purpose of the Preservation Ordinance is to encourage preservation and high design standards in Local Historic Districts, in order to safeguard the architectural heritage of the City. Guidelines have been developed to ensure that rehabilitation efforts, alterations, and new construction all respect the design fabric of the districts and do not adversely affect their present architectural integrity.*

- *Does the proposal coincide with the General Approach set forth in the Design Guidelines?*

- A. *The design approach to each property should begin with the premise that **the features of historic and architectural significance described in the Study Committee report must be preserved.** In general, this tends to minimize the exterior alterations that will be allowed.*
- B. *Changes and additions to the property and its environment that have taken place over the course of time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes to the property may have developed significance in their own right, and this significance should be recognized and respected (LATER IMPORTANT FEATURES will be the term used hereafter to convey this concept).*

- C. *Whenever possible, deteriorated material or architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced or removed.*
- D. *When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence of the original or later important features.*
- E. *Whenever possible, new materials should match the material being replaced with respect to their physical properties, design, color, texture and other visual qualities. The use of imitation replacement materials is discouraged.*
- F. *The Commission will give design review priority to those portions of the property which are visible from public ways or those portions which it can be reasonably inferred may be visible in the future.*
  - *Does the proposal coincide with the appropriate Specific Guidelines as set forth in the Design Guidelines?*

### **Windows and Doors**

1. *Retain original and later important door and window openings where they exist. Do not enlarge or reduce door and window openings for the purpose of fitting stock window sash or doors, or air conditioners.*
2. *Whenever possible, repair and retain original or later important window elements such as sash, lintels, sill, architraves, glass, shutters and other decorative elements and hardware. When replacement of materials or elements is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence. If aluminum windows must be installed, select a baked finish that matches as closely as possible the color of the existing trim. Investigate weather-stripping and storm windows with a baked enamel finish as an alternative to the replacement of historic sash.*

There will be no alterations to the door openings. The replacement of the late Victorian era door with circa 1860 double door will be the only change.

### **Porches, steps, trim and other exterior architectural elements**

3. *Retain and repair porches and steps that are original or later important features, including such items as railings, balusters, columns, posts, brackets, roofs, ornamental ironwork and other important decorative items. If new pieces are needed, they should match as closely as possible the style, shape, scale and materials of the old. Avoid replacing wood posts and railings with metal ones, or wood porch decks with concrete.*

The porch posts, balusters, rails and other detailing will replicate the form and materials of the oldest portion of the porch.

### **Roofs**

1. *Preserve the integrity of the original or later important roof shape.*
2. *Retain the original roof covering whenever possible. If the property has a slate roof, conserve the roof slates. Slate is a near-permanent roofing material, and deterioration is generally caused by rusted roofing nails.*

7. ***Utility equipment, such as television antennae, air conditioners, solar collectors and other mechanical units should be restricted to the rear of the property or on portions of the roof that are not visible from a public way.***

The roof shape will not be altered. Should shingles need to be replaced during the solar panel installation process, the replacement shingles shall be of the same durability, tabbing, profile and color as those currently existing on the roof. No existing character-defining features will be removed. Two solar panels will be on the sunny slope of the upper roof. Another seven panels will be on the flat lower roof around the chimney and will be invisible or barely visible from the street.

That said, Staff advises the Commission that under M.G.L. Chapter 184 §23C, property owners shall not be unduly prevented or restricted from the installation or use of solar energy systems.

### **Landscape Features and Paving**

1. *The general intent of this section is to preserve the existing or later essential landscape features that enhance the property.*
3. *The existing landforms of the site should not be altered unless shown to be necessary for maintenance of the structure or site. Additional landforms will only be considered if they will not obscure the exterior of the structure.*
4. *The original layout and materials of the walks, steps and paved areas should be maintained if significant grade changes constitute an important feature of the structure or site. Consideration will be given to alterations if it can be shown that improved site circulation is necessary and that the alterations will accomplish this without altering the integrity of the structure.*

There are no changes to the essential landscape features. The proposed fence will be composed of traditional materials and constructed in a style that would not be mistaken for historic but would complement the historic building. The metal fence would have vertical pickets.

### **III. Recommendations**

*The Staff recommendation is based on a complete application and supporting materials, as submitted by the Applicant, and an analysis of the historic and architectural value and significance of the site, building or structure, the general design, arrangement, texture, material and color of the features involved, and the relation of such features of buildings and structures in the area, in accordance with the required findings that are considered by the Somerville Historic District Ordinance for a Historic District Certificate. This report may be revised or updated with new a recommendation or findings based upon additional information provided to Staff or through more in depth research conducted during the public hearing process.*

Staff determines that the alteration for which an application for a Historic Certificate has been filed is appropriate for and compatible with the preservation and protection of the c. 1865 – John Howie House, Central/Atherton/Spring Summer Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Seth Kintigh, Owner, a Certificate of Appropriateness with the following conditions.**

1. All appropriate building permits shall be obtained prior to the start of any work.
2. If changes are necessary to the proposed design for which this Certificate of Appropriateness was issued, new plans shall be submitted to Historic Staff prior to commencing the work.
3. The 1920s porch columns, rails, balusters, and trim shall match the earlier Victorian era details on the porch.
4. The front door shall be replaced with two arched window doors as shown.
5. A total of nine solar panels may be placed on the upper roof of the main house and the upper roof of the kitchen ell, minimally visible from the public right of way.

6. Should shingles need to be replaced during the solar panel installation process, the replacement shingles shall be of the same durability, tabbing, profile and color as those currently existing on the roof.
7. An iron fence may be installed and shall have spearhead pickets and a faceted seedpod post top (King Metal Products, Item # 45-670 and related styles and Item # 45-3003-4).
8. The fence shall be an alternating short and tall picket design no higher than 4'.
9. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that it was executed in accordance with this Certificate and approved plans.

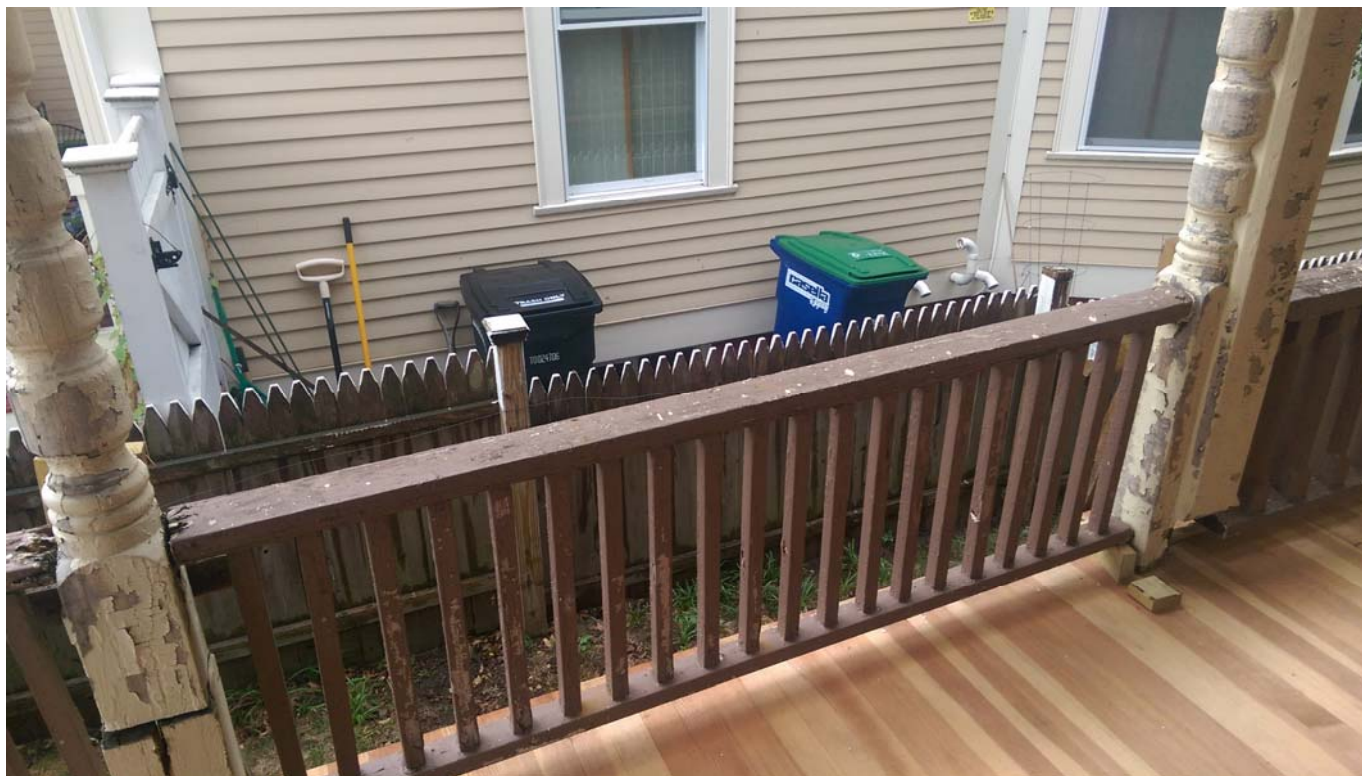




















King Metal Product    **Item # 45-670**



**Item # 45-3003-4**

