



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

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

ALTERATION TO A HISTORIC PROPERTY STAFF REPORT

Site: 25 Russell Street c.1845 Philemon Russell House
Case: HPC 2016.019 Single Building Local Historic District

Applicant Name: Diane Asadorian Masters & William Masters, Owners
Applicant Address: 25 Russell Street, Somerville, MA 02144

Date of Application: March 30, 2016
Legal Notice: *Add & replace windows; move exterior staircase; & construct addition on rear.*
Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: April 26, 2016

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: From the 1985 Survey Forms
This appears to be one of the earliest homes between North Street (now Massachusetts Avenue) and Davis Square. The Russell House is significant as one of the only well-preserved examples of a three-bay, 2 1/2-story Greek Revival side-hall farmhouse in Somerville. The Russell House is sited with its enclosed gable end to the street. Notable features include the 6/6 divided moveable sash throughout, the entrance offset to the right and framed by transom and sidelights, and the full-width one-story Doric porch. Wide corner pilasters support two wide, overlapped boards representing the frieze and architrave of a Classical entablature. The structure has a slate roof, and a two-story rear ell.



25 Russell Street, 2015

HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL: From the 1985 Survey Forms

The Russells owned this land in 1838, in pre-Revolutionary times. This area was known as "Watson's Plain". Philemon Russell was a farmer and nurseryman who subdivided his 50 acres of land in 1845. The subdivision included Orchard, Russell, and Cottage Place, and straddled North Cambridge and Somerville.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

1. Construct a rear addition (not visible from the public right of way).
2. Add and relocate windows on north and south sides.

3. Relocate door and exterior staircase on rear ell.

See the final pages for details and photos.

II. FINDINGS

1. *Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:*

The Applicants would like to construct a rear addition (not visible from the public right of way), and add and relocate windows on north and south sides; and relocate a door and exterior staircase on rear ell. The existing ground floor north window will be replaced with Pella Architect series SDL wood window with putty glaze grilles. The new window on that side would match it. See emphasis below regarding existing replacement windows.

C/A	Stephen & Louise Bayle	2003.045	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Remove existing aluminum gutters and replace with wood gutters to match those on the front porch with Staff review and approval (C/A); 2. Replace missing fourth column to match existing (C/A); 3. Restore front porch to original configuration (C/A); 4. Remove railings and balusters from front porch (C/A); 5. Install steps at side of porch to driveway (C/A); 6. Remove existing clapboard, install Tyvek® and new cedar clapboards with the same shadow line and exposure as existing and retain as many of the original clapboards as are feasible (C/A); 7. Replace bluestone on driveway with Boston brick pavers (C/A); 8. Install bluestone chimney caps on all chimneys (C/A); 9. Remove existing casement windows on east and west sides of house (C/NA); 10. Replace with 6/6 double-hung windows to match existing (C/NA); 11. Remove existing new casement window in kitchen pantry and first floor stairwell and replace to match original 6 pane casement on upper floor (C/NA); 12. Install 2-story metal spiral staircase from tenant's bedroom to provide second means of egress (C/NA); 13. Repoint brick foundation (C/NA); and 14. Replace broken and missing slates on roof (C/NA).
C/A	Diane & William Masters	2015.057	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applicant shall obtain all appropriate building permits prior to commencing work. 2. The pavers shall be either Autumn, Beacon Hill or lighter version of the Quarry Blend Boston Colonial Pavers by Ideal in a running bond. 3. The driveway shall be extended to just before the bay window on the south side and terminated with a fence and gate to match the existing. 4. If the approval differs from the plans, new plans shall be submitted to Historic Staff prior to commencing the work; 5. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate and approved plans.

2. *Precedence:*

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*

Construct a rear addition (not visible from the public right of way). Additions have been added to several buildings.

- Add and relocate windows on north and south sides; Relocate door and exterior staircase on rear ell.

Egress windows and stairs have received Certificates of Appropriateness for the relocation or alteration on the following properties: 15 Adams Street (2003); 419 Broadway (2005); 198 Central Street (2015); 75-77 Columbus Avenue (2005, 2008); 30 Forest Street (2003); 46 Mount Vernon Street (2003, 2014); 15 Westwood Road (2002); and 16 Westwood Road (2014).

Window openings are occasionally altered or relocated. Most such cases were located on the rear of the building and received Certificates of Non-Applicability due to lack of visibility. Only two Certificates of Appropriateness for the relocation of visible windows have been issued. The owners of 8 Mount Vernon Street (2014) and 44 Meacham Road (2015) added and moved windows on the side of the house for greater symmetry. The windows matched the existing other windows in the building.

3. *Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

Staff has confirmed that because the addition is only one story tall, it will not be visible from the public right of way. Therefore the Commission should grant a Certificate of Non-Applicability for the alteration based upon the approval of the following alterations.

A second story window on the south side will be replaced by an egress door and the existing egress will be replaced by a second window to match the existing. Only the upper portion of the windows and doors are obliquely visible from above a Milton Street garage at a distance. Relocating the egress is made necessary by the construction of the new addition.

The proposal is to replace an existing ground floor window on the north side Pella Architect series SDL wood window with putty glaze grilles and a new opening for a matching Pella window. This is visible from Orchard Street and does not meet the HPC Guidelines for windows. See photo.

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

The house is in good condition. It is located near the corner of Russell Street and Orchard Street near the Cambridge line. The proposed addition and attendant window/door alterations are not visible from the street or minimally visible from Milton Street. The window on Orchard Street is located centrally along the wing of the north wing.

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

GENERAL APPROACH

The primary purpose of Somerville's Preservation Ordinance is to encourage preservation and high design standards in Somerville's Historic Districts, in order to safeguard the City's architectural heritage. The following guidelines ensure that rehabilitation efforts, alterations, and new construction all respect the design fabric of the districts and do not adversely effect their present architectural integrity.

- 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.*
- 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.*

The addition and the exact fenestration were not discussed on the Form B. Beyond the proposed window/door alterations on the interior will be replaced. A window on the north side is proposed for replacement and a new window installed next to it. The proposed windows will be Pella Architect series SDL wood windows with putty glaze grilles. Original material will be replaced. See above for the discussion of visibility.

HPC Guidelines for Windows and Additions.

C. 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.*

The alterations are not proposed for the sole purpose of inserting stock windows or doors but to maintain egress from the second floor while adding additional space to the ground floor. See plans A1-3 and A4-1. The proposed window on the north side will bring added to light and symmetry to the small room. However this would make an asymmetrical arrangement on the exterior that would not be particularly noticeable from Orchard or Russell Streets due to the location of a concrete block walls.

Replacement windows should have the same size, shape and detail to match the original window design. However, the Applicants propose to replace the original window with a replacement Pella Architect series SDL wood window with putty glaze grilles rather than replicating the existing windows as the previous owner did.

E. New additions

1. *New additions should not disrupt the essential form and integrity of the property and should be compatible in size, scale, material and character of the property and its environment. Where possible, new additions should be confined to the rear of the house.*
2. *It is not the intent of these guidelines to limit new additions to faithful copies of earlier buildings. New designs may also evoke, without copying, the architecture of the property to which they are being added, through careful attention to height, bulk, materials, window size, and type and location, and detail. A building should not, however, be altered to an appearance that predates its construction.*
3. *New additions or alterations should be done in a way that, if they were to be removed in the future, the basic form and integrity of the historic property would remain intact.*

The new addition will be set back from the south edge and in the rear of the building. It will not be visible from the public right of way.

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 not fully appropriate for and compatible with the preservation and protection of the 25 Russell Street Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant** Diane Asadorian Masters and William Masters, Owner for a new addition at 25 Russell Street **Certificates of Non-Applicability and Appropriateness** with the following contingencies.

1. Applicant shall obtain all appropriate building permits prior to commencing work.
2. The addition and egress stairs as described in the plans by Mayer & Associates, Architects dated March 30, 2016, shall receive a Certificate of Non-Applicability due to lack of visibility (Section 2.f).
3. The accompanying window and door alterations made necessary by the size and shape of the new addition shall receive a Certificate of Appropriateness due to the distance and angle of view.
4. A new window may only be installed on the north side wing adjacent to the existing window with the following requirements:
 - a. The existing windows shall match the existing in all dimensions, including
 - i. glass,
 - ii. millwork and
 - iii. installation details.
5. If the plans submitted to the Inspectional Services Division differ from the plans approved by the Historic Preservation Commission, the new plans shall be submitted to Preservation Planning Staff prior to commencing the work;
6. Preservation Planning Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that it was done in accordance with the Certificates issued and the approved plans.





25 Russell Street from Orchard Street

Location of proposed new window. The existing window to the left would be replaced with a Pella Architect series SDL window to match. The window to the right was installed by the previous owner in 2003.

See plans A1-3 and A4-1.



25 Russell Street from Milton Street

Location of proposed egress door and window alterations. Proposed new addition is on floor below.

See Plans A1-1 and A2-1,