



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 / District(s) **26 Summit Avenue – 1885 John Sylvester House, Aldersey-Summit Local Historic District**
Case: **HPC 12.105**

Applicant Name: Michael Dull
Applicant Address: 26 Summit Street, Somerville, MA 02143

Date of Application: September 24, 2012
Legal Notice: Replace 3-tab asphalt shingles with architectural shingles; and replace existing skylights on rear of the building.

Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: October 16, 2012

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

1. Architectural Description:

One of only a few brick dwellings in the area, this house is unusual not only for its use of building materials, but also for its elaborate use of craftsmanship in the finely detailed Queen Anne trims. English prototypes of Queen Anne architectural details are evidenced in the foliated designs in gable peaks, the frieze on the main facade, the butt shingled second story, the oriel bay supported by three decorative brackets in the gable peak, the large ornamented chimney, and the irregular massing. Alterations to the property include new iron columns supporting the entrance porch roof and new fencing along the sidewalk.



26 Summit Avenue

Some alterations of this house likely include removal of decorative railing above the bay on the

south side of the house at the second level and atop the east bay at the 3rd level, as such railings were in place in the Watertown house at one point. Additionally, the wooden porch support posts have been removed and replaced with metal.

2. Historical Context/Evolution of Structure or Parcel:

Prospect Hill, one of the most substantial residential neighborhoods evolved throughout the late 19th century. Prior to that, it was an agricultural community of farms. Large tracts of land were purchased by real estate investors and well-to-do merchants in the mid-1800s. Much of Summit Avenue was part of the 1870 subdivision plan for Ira Hill (Plan Book 17, Plan 88). Surrounding land at that time was owned by Vinal Heirs.

This dwelling was one of the last constructed on Summit Avenue and was originally owned by John E. Sylvester who was a spike manufacturer with a Boston factory.

Prospect Hill represents Somerville's most prominent landscape feature in the northeast section of the city overlooking Boston. It was farmland until the third quarter of the 19th century when several subdivision plans divided the area into house lots that led to the beginning of the development patterns of these residential neighborhoods.

From 1835, the passenger railroad as well as horse car omnibuses linked Union Square and the general area to Boston. This area became a highly desirable place to live for its proximity to Boston combined with its remoteness from the more congested portions of Somerville.

The area on which present-day Summit Avenue sits was subdivided in 1870 into 48 lots. The area was owned by Ira Hill, who owned not only the area of Summit Avenue but what would become the south side of Highland Avenue to the south side of Summit Avenue, with lots on both sides of Vinal Avenue from Highland to Pleasant Avenues. This area is composed of Grandview, Pleasant and Summit Avenues. Interestingly, Summit Avenue was only extended to Vinal Avenue after 1884.

Sturgis & Brigham was a leading Boston architectural firm in the late 1800s. It was formed in 1866 and dissolved amicably on August 1, 1886. Brigham went on to practice with John Spofford (Brigham & Spofford) from March, 1888 to February, 1892 and then with Charles Coveney and Henry Bisbee (Brigham, Coveney & Bisbee) from June, 1906 until his retirement in 1919 at age 78. At all other times, Brigham practiced alone. John Hubbard remained in solo practice until his death in 1888 at age 54.

The firm is credited with initiating fusion of the complex eclectic references of the English Queen Anne revival with American colonial design. The resulting New England houses by Sturgis & Brigham and other Boston architects defined the shingle style in one of the most original and distinguished epochs of American architectural history, from which other notable architects, such as Henry Hobson Richardson, emerged.

The most important building credited to Sturgis & Brigham is the original Museum of Fine Arts building in Copley Square, one of the first buildings in the United States to use ornamental terra cotta. Previously, the firm designed the Edward Perkins house in Jamaica Plain ("Pinebank") using this same terra cotta and it was hugely successful and the house became somewhat of a spectacle, drawing local architects such as including H.H. Richardson to see the material in actual use.

Other designs established Sturgis & Brigham as a groundbreaking design firm. Anglican Church of the Advent on Brimmer Street in Beacon Hill is unique in American ecclesiastical design for its fusion of contemporary English elements (BOS.15696). The Hunnewell Cottage in Wellesley, Mass. (WEL.133) is credited with being the first

Queen Anne house in the United States and the Edward N. Hooper House in Cambridge, Mass. (CAM.300) is considered the first Georgian Revival house in the United States.

Sturgis & Brigham were also known for their seaside “cottage” designs and the firm would design in the most fashionable areas of Newport and coastal Massachusetts, including for such clients as Edward D. Boit house (“The Rocks” in Newport, 1866), Robert Cushing house (“The Ledges” in Newport, 1868), T.M. Davis House (“The Reef,” Newport, 1876), Charles Codman house (Cotuit, Mass., 1867), Martin Brimmer house (Beverly, Mass., 1870), Henry Cabot Lodge house (Nahant, Mass.), George Abbot James House, (“Lowlands,” Nahant, Mass. 1867), Henry P. Kidder House (“Netherfield,” Pride’s Crossing 1886), among others.

Although Sturgis died just after the dissolution of the firm, Brigham continued to design important buildings for 30 more years. Most important are a series of public buildings in Fairhaven, Mass. donated to the town by local patron H.H. Rogers of Standard Oil fame. These buildings include the Fairhaven Town Hall (FAI.31), Millicent Library (FAI.32), Fairhaven High School (FAI.133), Tabitha Inn (FAI.42), Rogers Memorial Church (FAI.96), Parish House (FAI.29) and parsonage (FAI.50), all of which are on the National Register, except for the Tabitha Inn. Moreover, Brigham designed the rear wings of the Massachusetts (BOS.4029) and Maine State Houses as well as the Christian Science Mother Church extension (BOS.7520), which is the basilica of the world-wide Christian Science faith.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. *Proposal of Alteration:*

1. Replace 3-tab asphalt shingles with GAF Slateline shingles in weathered slate color; and
2. Replace existing skylights on rear of the building.

III. FINDINGS FOR A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

1. *Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:* No applications for work have been received in the last 12 years for work on this property. The only building permits found were for work done in 1981 and earlier. The Owner renovated the building at that time and no major work has been undertaken since then. The current proposal involves repairing the leaks in the existing roof which is now over 30 years old. Due to Staff recommendations, he is proposing to use the GAF Slateline® shingles rather than the CertainTeed Landmark® shingles which are closer in color, size and shape to the original slate shingles. The skylights to be replaced are minimally visible from the Vinal Street.
2. *Precedence:* The Commission has heard many cases of up-grades from 3-tab asphalt to architectural asphalt shingles in past years. The style approved has been dependent upon the particular style of the building and what the original roofing material might have been. Recent alterations approved have been Slateline® shingles for up-grades from 3-tabs on the following originally slate-roofed buildings at 19R Aldersey Street, 78 Columbus Avenue, 14-16 Laurel Street, 88 Munroe Street; and for originally wood shake roofs at 26 Bow Street, 28 Highland Avenue and 6 Westwood Road.



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5. *Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?* This building on a Prospect Hill side street is highly distinctive and therefore quite visible. The roof and gables are very much a part of the architectural design of the building.
 - *What are the Existing Conditions of the building / parcel?* The roof is over 30 years old and at the end of its life. The owner would like to upgrade the roof to make it look closer to what it has been with a longer lasting shingle.
 - *Does the proposal coincide with the General Approach set forth in the Design Guidelines?* The proposed alteration meets HPC 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.** There are several residential buildings on Garfield Street in Watertown designed by Charles Brigham, most of which retain their original slate roofs.*
 - 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. The proposed architectural shingle matches the size shape and color of the traditional slate shingle found in Somerville.*
 - 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?*

B. Roofs

1. *Preserve the integrity of the original or later important roof shape. The roof is unaltered*
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. The slate was removed at an unknown date, prior to 1980.*

3. *Whenever possible, replace deteriorated roof covering with material that matches the old in composition, color, size, shape, texture and installation detail.* The proposed material matches slate shingles in shape and size with a color that refers to the original stone material.
4. *Preserve the architectural features that give the roof its distinctive character, such as cornices, gutters, iron filigree, cupolas, dormers and brackets. Downspouts should be inconspicuously located and should be painted to match the color of the siding.* No other alterations are being made.
5. *New dormers will be permitted if they are related to the forms, proportions, size and arrangement of existing windows, and constructed in matching materials and colors. If possible, new dormers should be confined to the rear of the house.* No dormers are proposed.
6. *Skylights with flat profiles may be installed on the rear of the property.* The existing skylights are of 2 different types, minimally visible from the street on the rear of the building. The replacements will have a flat profile.
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. If no other placement is possible, air conditioning and other cooling units on street facades should be of the slim-line type or set flush with the surface of the building and painted the same color as the window trim.* No new utility equipment is proposed.

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 Aldersey Summit Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Michael Dull a Certificate of Appropriateness.**



26 Summit Avenue