



**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: 57 Meacham Road Jacob and Charles Skinner - Johnson, Frank House  
Case: HPC 2016.073 Campbell Park/Meacham Road Historic District

Applicant Name: Bruce L. Veliz, Skillville Corp. for Ben Livermore, Owner  
Applicant Address: 23 Boutwell Street, Wilmington, MA

Date of Application: September 22, 2016  
Legal Notice: *Remove slate roof from 1/2 building; install architectural shingles and solar panels.*

Staff Recommendation: Denial  
Date of Public Hearing: November 15, 2016

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Historic and Architectural Significance  
See attached survey form.

Existing Conditions  
The existing structure is a wood-framed vinyl-sided building with a slate roof in good condition.

Proposed Work and Recommendations  
The Applicant seeks to install solar panels on the side of the roof that provides optimal sun orientation. The applicant is working with the City's Solar program that is supported by Sunbug Solar.



The applicant, through their roofing contractor, originally applied to remove half of the slate roof and replace it with architectural shingles. The contractor explained that this was necessary in order to install panels. Staff met with representatives of Sun Bug Solar to discuss the staff's understanding of the Somerville Historic District Ordinance pursuant to MGL Chapter 40C and M.G.L. Chapter 184 §23C, in particular as it relates to solar installations. The Commission cannot "*forbid or unreasonably restrict the installation or use of a solar energy system.*" This is typically understood to permit solar installations, as they are 100% removable, with limited impact on the historic building upon which they are installed. But, the application that was made here was different. The applicant was seeking to permanently remove the slate roof, thereby removing the most substantial remaining historic building material that is visible on this structure. A slate roof, with care, can last over 200 years and is more sustainable than asphalt roof shingles.

After meeting with the representatives of Sun Bug Solar, the Staff recommended finding a way to retain the slate and to install the system. Solar panels are mounded on a set of rails, and the rails are mounted on the roof. The only point where a solar installation impacts a roof is where the rails are affixed to the roof rafters, through the roofing material. At these points, slate roofs would break. While it is more expensive and more complicated to install, it is possible to install solar panels on slate roofs. The installer would only the need to remove and store the handful of slates that sit directly under the locations where rails are secured into the roof. If the slates are retained, they can be reinstalled if the solar installation is ever removed from the roof.

However, Sun Bug stated that this particular case makes such an installation difficult. Because installers cannot walk on the slate roof, a bucket truck or similar piece of heavy equipment would be necessary to install the rails and panels. But, because of the distance between structures on Meacham Road, there is no room to use such equipment at the site.

Therefore, the Applicants has proposed to remove approximately 600 slates to allow for the installation of the equipment. This area would be re-roofed with architectural asphalt shingles. Reports were submitted stating that the existing roof and walls could support the added weight of the array if the slate were to be removed and asphalt shingles installed and that the roofing company was experienced working with slate roofs. (See attached.)

No Assessment was provided analyzing the ability of the roof structure to support the panels with the slate roof retained.

*1. Proposal of Alteration:*

1. Add a solar array to the roof:
  - i. Remove slate shingles to allow for installation of solar array and wiring;
  - ii. Install solar array;
  - iii. Install architectural shingles.

See the final pages for details and photos.

## II. FINDINGS

*1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:*

C/A	2002.030	Caroline Normand & David Zraket	1. Remove pipe handrail and portion of chain link fence; 2. Install a wooden handrail to match existing porch railing on both sides of front stairs.
C/NA	2002.052	Caroline Normand & David Zraket	Repair and replace rotted stairs and porch skirt in-kind with rails and newels previously reviewed by the Commission.
C/NA	2006.068	Carrie Normand & David Zraket	1. Replace 18 vinyl windows with 1/1 and 2/1 Marvin Ultimate Insert double-hung vinyl windows.

*1. Precedence:*

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*
- Add solar panels on top of lower roof and southern side of upper roof.

This is the first proposal for the installation of solar panels on a slate roof. In the past few years, the Commission has reviewed several requests for solar panels on asphalt shingle roofs. 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) 22 Summer Street (2013) and 170 Summer Street (2016) 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).

## 2. Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The portions of the roof where the array will be placed are visible from Meacham Road.

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

The slate roof is in good condition.

- *Is the proposal more appropriate than the existing conditions?*

No. It is not appropriate to remove any of the original slate roof which can last hundreds of years and is a major historical architectural characteristic of buildings of this style and era. Removal of the slate roof on one side of the building would seriously impact the historic value and character of the building.

- *Is the proposal more in-keeping with the age, purpose, style and construction of the building?*

No. This would be a major alteration and loss of historic fabric. It is not an alteration bringing the building closer to its original style and intent.

- *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 roof is visible from the public right of way. The roof was not discussed in the Form B. No historic material will be replaced or altered. The applicant has not indicated an intent to retain the slates that are removed.

## 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. However, approximately 600 slate shingles would be removed for the solar installation. No other existing character-defining features will be altered. The array will consist of sixteen panels located on both sides of the dormer on the south side of the building. The proposed new roof on half the building would be GAF Timberline® with a white aluminum drip edge. According to the roofer's scope of work, the slate would be disposed of. This is not in-keeping with the preservation of this important architectural characteristic of the district.

Based upon the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, the National Park Service Brief 3 Improving Energy Efficiency in Historic Buildings states:

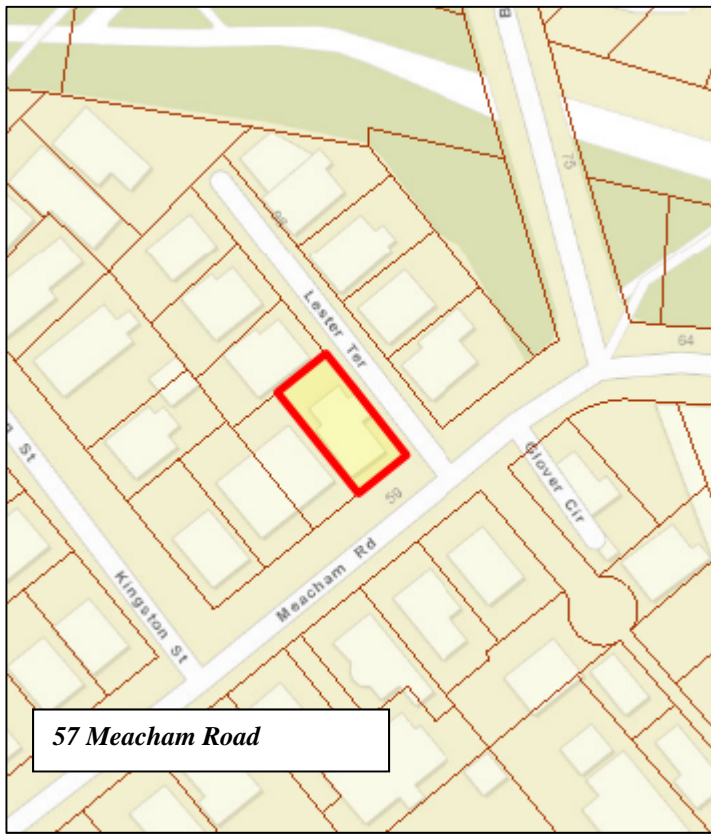
"Active solar devices, such as solar heat collectors and photovoltaic systems, can be added to historic buildings to decrease reliance on grid-source fossil-fuel powered electricity. Incorporating active solar devices in existing buildings is becoming more common as solar collector technology advances. Adding this technology to historic buildings, however, **must be done in a manner that has a minimal impact on historic roofing materials and preserves their character** by placing them in locations with limited or no visibility, i.e., on flat roofs at a low angle or on a secondary roof slope." (Emphasis added.)

### 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 appropriate for and compatible** with the preservation and protection of the Campbell Park/Meacham Road Historic District; and **would cause substantial detriment or derogation** to the District therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission deny a Certificate of Appropriateness to remove half of the slate roof** because it does not meet Guidelines for Local Historic Districts.

If the applicant is able to find a way to install panels on this roof without removing a substantial portion of the slate roof, staff would reassess this request and adjust the recommendation accordingly.







# Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

## Scanned Record Cover Page

<b>Inventory No:</b>	SMV.193
<b>Historic Name:</b>	Glover, Henry R. House
<b>Common Name:</b>	Skinner, Jacob and Charles - Johnson, Frank House
<b>Address:</b>	57 Meacham Rd
<b>City/Town:</b>	Somerville
<b>Village/Neighborhood:</b>	Davis Square
<b>Local No:</b>	
<b>Year Constructed:</b>	1892
<b>Architect(s):</b>	
<b>Architectural Style(s):</b>	Colonial Revival
<b>Use(s):</b>	Multiple Family Dwelling House
<b>Significance:</b>	Architecture
<b>Area(s):</b>	SMV.N: Campbell Park - Meacham Road Historic District
<b>Designation(s):</b>	Local Historic District (10/31/1989)
<b>Building Materials(s):</b>	Wall: Vinyl Siding; Wood Foundation: Brick



The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) has converted this paper record to digital format as part of ongoing projects to scan records of the Inventory of Historic Assets of the Commonwealth and National Register of Historic Places nominations for Massachusetts. Efforts are ongoing and not all inventory or National Register records related to this resource may be available in digital format at this time.

The MACRIS database and scanned files are highly dynamic; new information is added daily and both database records and related scanned files may be updated as new information is incorporated into MHC files. Users should note that there may be a considerable lag time between the receipt of new or updated records by MHC and the appearance of related information in MACRIS. Users should also note that not all source materials for the MACRIS database are made available as scanned images. Users may consult the records, files and maps available in MHC's public research area at its offices at the State Archives Building, 220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, open M-F, 9-5.

Users of this digital material acknowledge that they have read and understood the MACRIS Information and Disclaimer (<http://mhc-macris.net/macrisdisclaimer.htm>)

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Massachusetts Historical Commission  
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125  
[www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc)

This file was accessed on: Wednesday, September 21, 2016 at 4:55: PM



FORM B - BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
80 BOYLSTON STREET  
BOSTON, MA 02116

LHD-10/31/89 (10)  
P1-DAVIS SQ  
USGS BOST, N  
SELT A

AREA

FORM NO.

IN

193

Davis Square

SOMERVILLE

57 Meacham Road

ic Name Henry R. Glover

(developer)

Present residential

Original residential

TION

1892

deeds / directories

Italianate / vernacular

Architect

Exterior Wall Fabric synthetic siding

Outbuildings

Major Alterations (with dates)

mid-20th century synthetic siding

Condition fair

Moved Date

Acreage 2310 sq. ft.

Setting West side of well established

residential street of late 19th

century dwellings of varying

architectural elaboration.

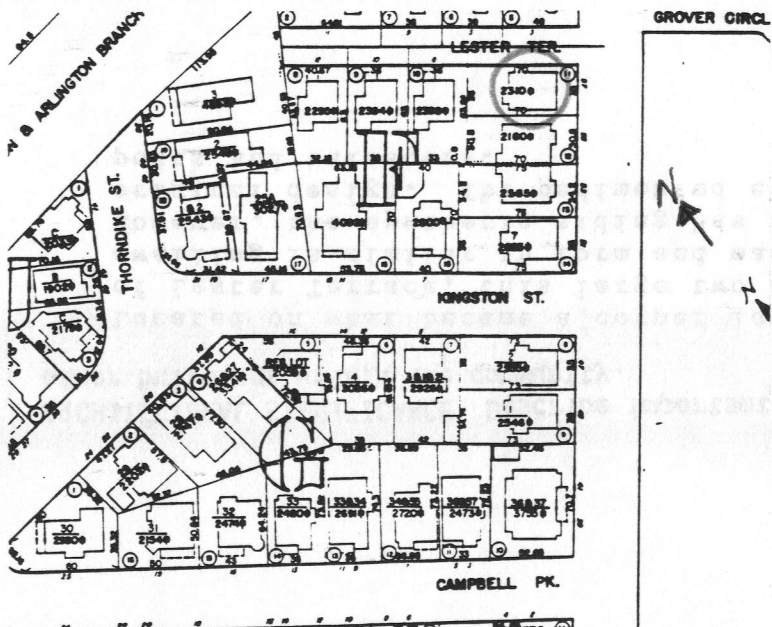
Recorded by Gretchen G. Schuler  
Somerville Historic

Organization Preservation Commission

Date March, 1988



Sketch Map: Draw map showing property's location in relation to nearest cross streets and/or geographical features. Indicate all buildings between inventoried property and nearest intersection(s). Indicate north



UTM REFERENCE

USGS QUADRANGLE

SCALE



**NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA STATEMENT (if applicable)****ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE** Describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within the community.

Located on what became a corner lot with the turn of the century laying out of Lester Terrace, this large two and one-half story, temple gable-end dwelling is similar in form and massing to other houses on Meacham Road. However, the synthetic siding has altered the overall effect of the original design. The pedimented entrance porch retains wood unadorned posts and balusters.

**HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE** Explain the role owners played in local or state history and how the building relates to the development of the community.

The property is one of many houses in the immediate area that was built in the 1890s when the subdivision was created. Although the subdivision was laid out in 1847 by George Meacham there was no development until the 1890s. Much of the land on Meacham Road was owned by Henry Glover and Charles H. Saunders of Cambridge in the 1870s and 1880s. Glover, a real estate investor from Cambridge built many of the houses, sold some, and retained others for rental income.

Much of the Davis Square area became home for railroad and streetcar commuters and is evidence of the suburban building boom of the late 19th century. Streetcar service along nearby Massachusetts Avenue to Porter Square and to Davis Square provided easy access to Boston and Cambridge for employment. This area was also home for many Somerville workers. By the 1870s Davis Square was evolving into a commercial center with several commercial blocks and good transportation with the Somerville Horse Railroad Company and the Boston and Maine Railroad.

City directories indicate that those who lived here, Jacob and Charles Skinner and Frank Johnson were salesmen. No other information is available about the nature of their business.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES**

1. Atlas of Middlesex County, Somerville: 1895 ("Henry R. Glover").
2. City Directories, 1890s
3. Registry of Deeds, Middlesex County: Book , Page .



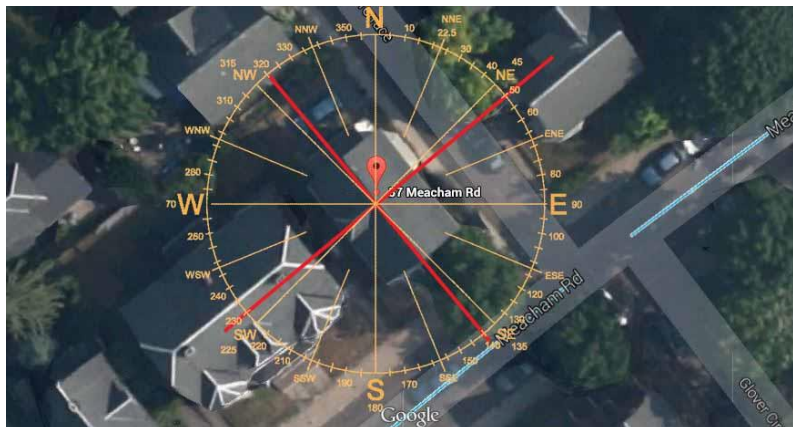
10/25/16

Sarah White  
City of Somerville  
93 Highland Avenue  
Somerville, MA 02143

Dear Sarah,

Enclosed is the requested answers about the solar project at 57 Meacham Rd, Somerville MA so that we may be included in the next historical preservation committee hearing

-The slate is intended to be removed by Skillville Corp on the southwest dormer side of the roof. Skillville has stated that they have removed slate before.



-The approximate number of shingles to be removed should be around 6

-Sunbug will install a solar array consisting of 16 panels resembling the following layout.



If any further information is needed about the proposed project before the hearing feel free to contact myself or Sarah.

Regards,  
Chris Miller  
617 250 7331