



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

HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION

ALTERATION TO A HISTORIC PROPERTY STAFF REPORT

Site: 17-19R Aldersey Street
Case: HPC 12.098

Historic Name: circa 1850 Gothic Revival House
District: Aldersey Summit LHD

Applicant Name: RCG Aldersey LLC, Owner
Applicant Address: 17 Ivaloo Street, Suite 100, Somerville, MA 02143

Date of Application: 8/29/12

Legal Notice: Remove and salvage existing carriage house roof slates for repairs on main building (not visible); replace with asphalt shingles on upper roof of carriage house (not visible); replace slate (not visible) and asphalt shingles of the mansard on the carriage house with architectural or decorative asphalt shingles; replace existing wood gutters of house and carriage house with aluminum gutters; and remove existing picket fence.

Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness

Date of Public Hearing: 9/16/12

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

This house is a fine example of a three story, Second Empire dwelling built on one of the larger residential lots in the Prospect Hill area. Although there is a center entrance with a projecting central pavilion the plan is asymmetrical with a side ell that is incorporated into the straight edged mansard roof. Intact architectural detail includes the paired cornice brackets, segmental arched dormers, patterned slate roof, wood block quoins, and cut glass panels on the paired entrance doors. There is a full length, wrap porch with a decorated balustrade and lattice screening on the side section. In all likelihood, this was added in the early 20th century. Similar detail is found on the mansard cottage at the rear of the property which is a converted stable.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:

The property is one of the best examples of a well conserved Second Empire house on a large double lot in the residential district of Prospect Hill. Aldersey Street is part of a plan of building lots drawn up for Quincy A. Vinal in 1868. [Plan Book 15, Plan 63/64]. Most of the land in this section of Prospect Hill was owned by the Vinals. This was part of a larger parcel conveyed to Ira Hill and Edwin M. Bacon, real estate investors in 1869. Within two

months Hill and Bacon had this house built and sold to Adoniram J. Taylor, carpenter and house builder. It is possible that he may have built this house and subsequently purchased it. It is thought that Taylor was the carpenter who built the Enoch Robinson House at 36 Atherton Street. The "Round House" is noted for its unusual round shape and is the only such design in Somerville.



II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

1. Remove and salvage existing carriage house roof slates for repairs on main building (not visible);
2. Replace with asphalt shingles on upper roof of carriage house (not visible);
3. Replace slate (not visible) and asphalt shingles of the mansard on the carriage house with architectural or decorative asphalt shingles;
4. Replace existing wood gutters of house and carriage house with aluminum gutters; and
5. Remove existing picket fence.

See the final pages for details and photos.

II. FINDINGS

1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

As rental property with an absentee landlord, there has been no contact with the owners in the past 12 years. However, it has recently changed hands. The new ownership has spent some months reviewing the condition of the building, assessing its needs and meeting with the HPC Staff. A Certificate of Non-Applicability was been issued for the following repairs.

1. Repair and replace siding and trim in-kind as needed;
2. Recaulk or replace lights on all windows in-kind as needed;
3. Replace storm windows;
4. Repoint masonry including chimneys with mortar consistent to the existing in color, texture, tooling, and vapor permeability;
5. Install new flashing in-kind where needed;
6. Replace asphalt roofs and install flashing in-kind;
7. Repair and replace lower mansard on main house with slate shingles in kind as needed using salvaged slate shingles from the carriage house roof that are not visible from the public right of way;
8. Replace asphalt shingle on carriage house, porches and the upper roof of both buildings with asphalt shingles in-kind
9. Replace aluminum gutters in-kind; and
10. Paint.

The current proposal involves the removal a slate roof from the carriage house, not visible from the public right of way and therefore exempt from Commission review, removing the 3-tab asphalt shingles from the carriage house roof and replacing them with architectural or other decorative shingles; using the slates from the carriage house to repair the main house roof and have some in reserve for future repairs, replacing the wood gutters with aluminum K-style ones and removing the picket fence.

11. Precedence:

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*
No Certificates of Appropriateness have been issued for the repair and replacement in-kind of slate roofs which would receive a Certificate of Non-Applicability for repair and replacement in-kind, although Certificates of Appropriateness have been granted for the re-installation of missing slate roofs. Items not visible from the public right of way are exempt from Commission review.

Staff could not find many instances of wood gutters replaced by aluminum. These cases were for 91 Boston Street, 16 Cross Street East and 27 Warren Avenue where there was a mix of wood and aluminum gutters. All three of these property owners received Certificates of Hardship to make the buildings consistent. Two cases where the applicants wanted to replace the wood gutters with copper gutters were denied.

A Certificate of Appropriateness was issued for the removal of a picket fence at 47 Vinal Avenue

3. *Considerations:*

- What is the visibility of the proposal?

The slate roof removal and repairs would not be visible from the public right of way. The gutters on the main house are extremely visible. The picket fence delineates the front yard.

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

The buildings have not been maintained and need a great deal of work, now underway. The existing gutters are a mix of wood and aluminum; down-spouts are missing. The picket fence is constructed with stockade style pickets that have not been painted for several years and is in general disrepair.

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

HPC Specific Guidelines do not explicitly address fences. Municipal preservation guideline research regarding fence location advises that fences are appropriate when placed in a rear yard with minimal visibility, or are considerably set back from the streetscape to allow the property owner privacy, pet control or security. Additionally, the placement of a fence along lot lines confirms historic lot patterns of historic neighborhoods

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.

- 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.*

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.*
3. *Whenever possible, replace deteriorated roof covering with material that matches the old in composition, color, size, shape, texture and installation detail.*
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.*
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.
6. Skylights with flat profiles may be installed on the rear of the property.
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.

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.*
2. *It is recognized that often the environment surrounding the property has a character, scale and street pattern quite different from that existing when the building was constructed. Thus, changes must frequently be made to accommodate the new condition, and the landscape treatment can be seen as a transition feature between the structure and its newer surroundings.*
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.

No changes to the features described in the Form B will be altered. The existing roof on the carriage house as seen from Aldersey Street is 3-tab asphalt shingle. This is an inappropriate material. The proposals for either type of roofing material references the existing slate but cannot be mistaken for it.

Gutter material and shape are considered to be two of many character-defining features of a building. A change in these would lead to a lack historical architectural integrity and would compromise two of those character-defining features that help to define the historic significance and architecture of the house.

Picket fences are appropriate although the current one seems to be a little rustic for the sophisticated Mansard house and carriage house on this lot.

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 17-19, and 19R Aldersey Street a Certificate of Appropriateness** for the removal of the picket fence because the current fence is not appropriate and an open lawn with the granite edging alone is more likely to have been the original design.; a **Certificate of Non-Applicability or Hardship** to replace all gutters in-kind based on the physical evidence; **Certificate of Non-Applicability** for the removal and repair of the slate roof; and a Certificate of Appropriateness for either of the proposed changes to the 3-tab asphalt roof on the carriage house.

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Site: 17-19R Aldersey Street
Date: September 19, 2012



