



**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:	58-60 Atherton Street	c.1845 Greek Revival Double House
Case:	HPC 2016.059	Single Building Local Historic District Spring Hill National Register District
Applicant Name:	Indian LLC	
Applicant Address:	PO Box 381155, Cambridge MA, 02138	
Date of Application:	July 27, 2016	
Legal Notice:	<i>Alter front porch</i>	
Staff Recommendation:	Certificate of Appropriateness	
Date of Public Hearing:	August 16, 2016	

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**I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION**

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:**

With the four Greek Revival houses of Harvard Place and Monmouth Street, and the nearby 44-46 Atherton, this double Greek Revival house is unique to Spring Hill. Although windows and the porch and cupola have been altered, the double entries and gable treatment retain their original appearance.

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:**



*58-60 Atherton Street, c. 1981 Photo*



*58-60 Atherton Street, 2008 Photo*

Among the

first houses built in George Brastow's 1843 subdivision of "Spring Hill" (See area form, Spring Hill). Originally Atherton was known as Beech Street. Original owners may have included a physician.

The Spring Hill Historic District retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Somerville's largest and most intact pre-Civil War residential district, the neighborhood was a planned subdivision whose success was tied directly to the introduction of public transportation to Somerville in 1841. The development was financed by real estate speculator George Brastow and designed

by well-known landscape architect Alexander Wadsworth. The district's most intensive period of development (ca. 1843-1870) was overlaid with subsequent growth as three-deckers were built as infill during the city's last phase of residential development (ca. 1885-1910). The Spring Hill Historic District thus fulfills criteria A and C of the National Register of Historic Places on the local level.

Most of the district's buildings were erected between 1845 and 1870. The area's original street plan, a grid on a sloping hill organized around Harvard Street is also intact. Views to Cambridge at the south - primarily of Harvard Yard - are uninterrupted, and the original space of the neighborhood is imaginable, if not completely intact.

The earliest buildings erected in the Historic District shortly after the area's initial subdivision were 8 double Greek Revival-style houses of which seven survive intact (46-48, 56-60, and 65-57 Atherton, 1-3 and 9-11 Harvard, and 23-25 and 31-33 Monmouth). All these houses were built ca. 1845-1848. The Frost-Swan House, 46-48 Atherton, is the least altered of the group, and retains its original windows, Doric-columned full width porch, and octagonal cupola centered on its gable ridge.

## II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### *1. Proposal of Alteration:*

1. Rebuild front porch to the same footprint (6' x 21') as the former porch.
2. The steps would run the length of the porch.
3. The porch roof will be supported by 8" round columns springing from the porch deck.
4. The porch would be roofed with flat roof and have a simple entablature.

The applicant would like to rebuild the front porch to the same dimensions as the one that unfortunately collapsed recently. It will not replicate the original porch but will be based upon other entries built in the Greek Revival style.

See the final pages for details and photos.

## II. FINDINGS

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

Certificates of Non-Applicability were issued in 2001 to reconstruct the porch and 2006 to re-roof the building.

### *2. Precedence:*

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*
  - i. *Alter front porch.*

There have been no alterations reviewed by the Commission of the porches of similarly designed Greek Revival houses on Spring Hill.

### *3. Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The front porch is visible from Atherton and Spring Streets.

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

The double house has not had its original full width porch since at least 1981. See photo above. The house was turned into a multi-family in 1998.

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

The proposed porch is a vast improvement upon the previously existing porch, an open un-detailed structure with 2" x 4" railings and 4" x 4" posts, in that it has a roof with an enclosing entablature that is similar to the remaining porch roofs of the sister Greek Revivals on Spring Hill. The columns are much smaller than the original columns and do not have the same spacing as the original columns. This means the footings will not be optimally located for a later enlargement of the porch to its original dimensions.

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

The proposed porch design is based upon other Greek Revival Style houses that do not have the full width colonnaded porch that is characteristic of many Greek Revival houses.

- *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 loss of the full width porches on some of this group of Greek Revivals was discussed in the Form B. The photo taken at the time of the survey shows the former porch to be replaced by one closer to the original design. No existing architectural features will be changed. The replacement of the porch is based loosely on the existing full width porches in the design of the entablature with its cornice, frieze and architrave bands found on the other Spring Hill double Greek Revival Houses, but not on the actual evidence. The new porch shall be wood. The porch is visible from the public right of way.

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

1. *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.*

All original features of the porch are missing. There is ample physical evidence on other houses in Spring Hill of those features. The proposed new porch is based upon Greek Revival style houses elsewhere. See attached drawings.

### **III. RECOMMENDATIONS**

*The Staff recommendation is based on a complete application and supporting materials, as submitted by the*

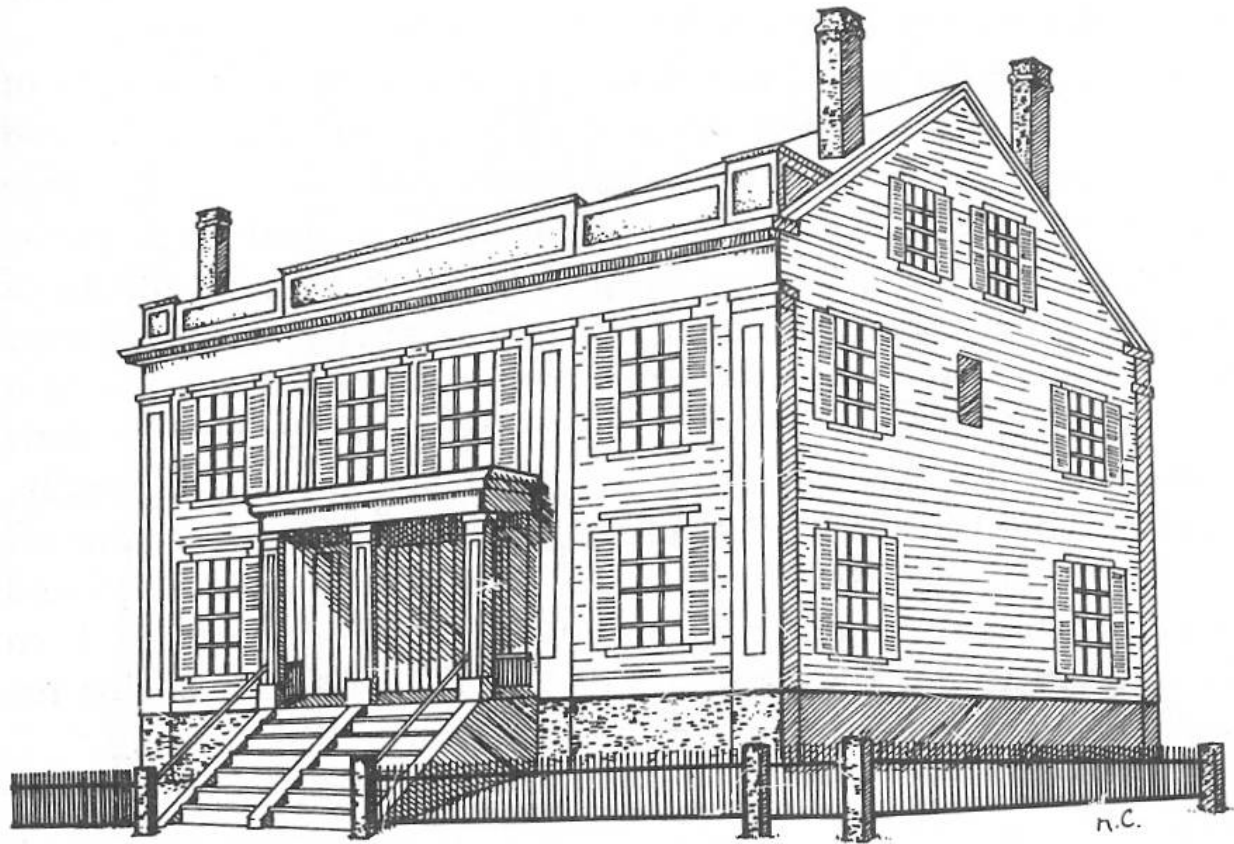
*Applicant, and an analysis of the historic and architectural value and significance of the site, building or structure, the general design, arrangement, texture, material and color of the features involved, and the relation of such features of buildings and structures in the area, in accordance with 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 derogatory to the 58-60 Atherton Street Local Historic District due to the alteration being an improvement on the existing conditions; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Indian Trust, Owner a Certificate of Appropriateness** for the alterations to 58-60 Atherton Street with the following contingencies.

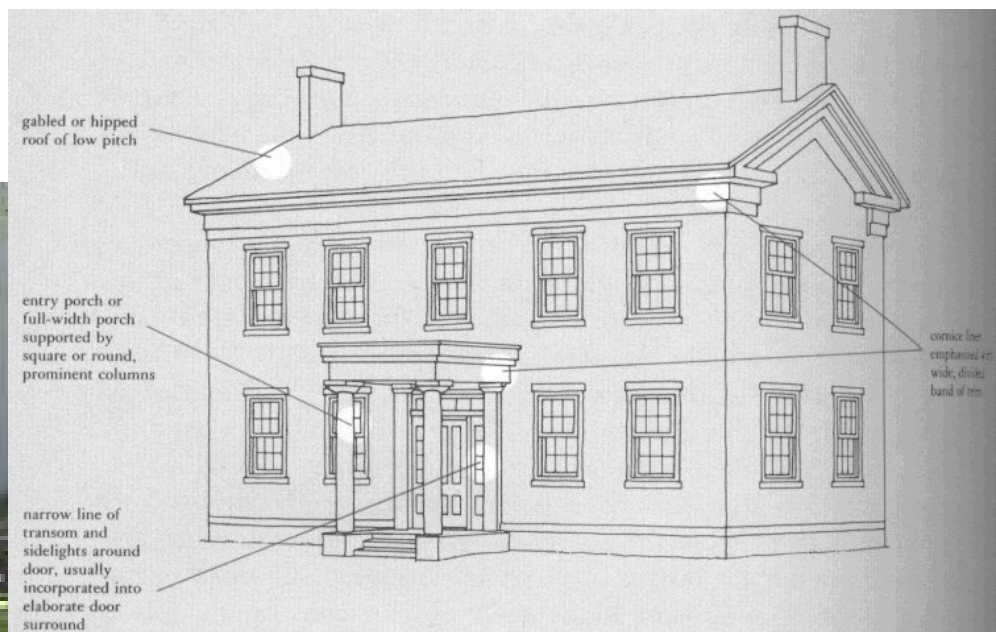
1. If there are alterations from the approved Certificate, new plans shall be submitted to Historic Staff prior to commencing the work.
2. The porch shall be rebuilt to the same footprint (6' x 21') as the former porch.
3. The steps shall run the length of the porch.
4. The porch roof will be supported by 8" or larger fluted round columns springing from the porch deck.
5. The porch would be roofed with flat roof and have a simple entablature to match the existing double Greek Revival porches at 1-3 Harvard Place, 23-25 and 31-33 Monmouth Street, and 46-48 Atherton Street.
6. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate and approved plans.

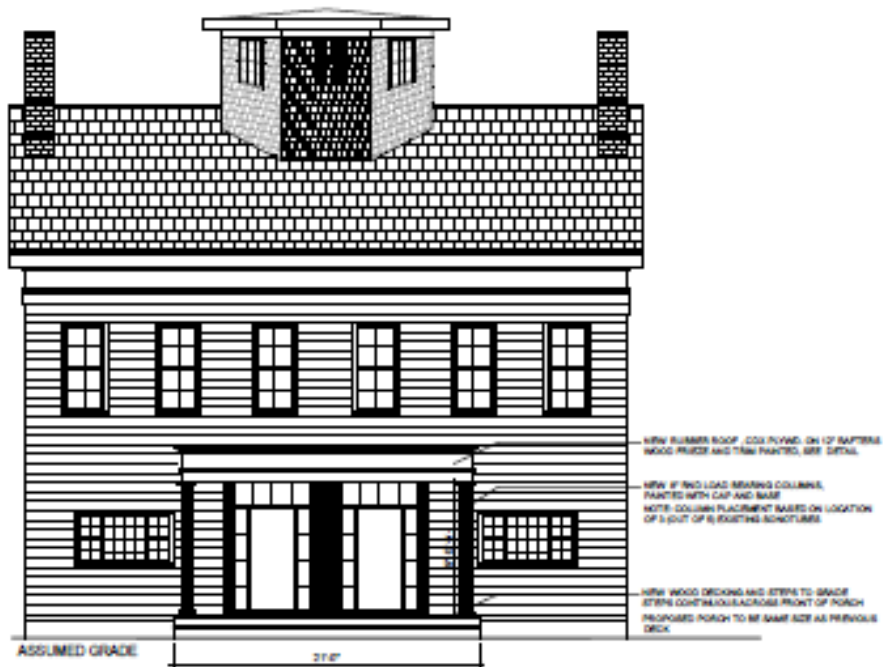




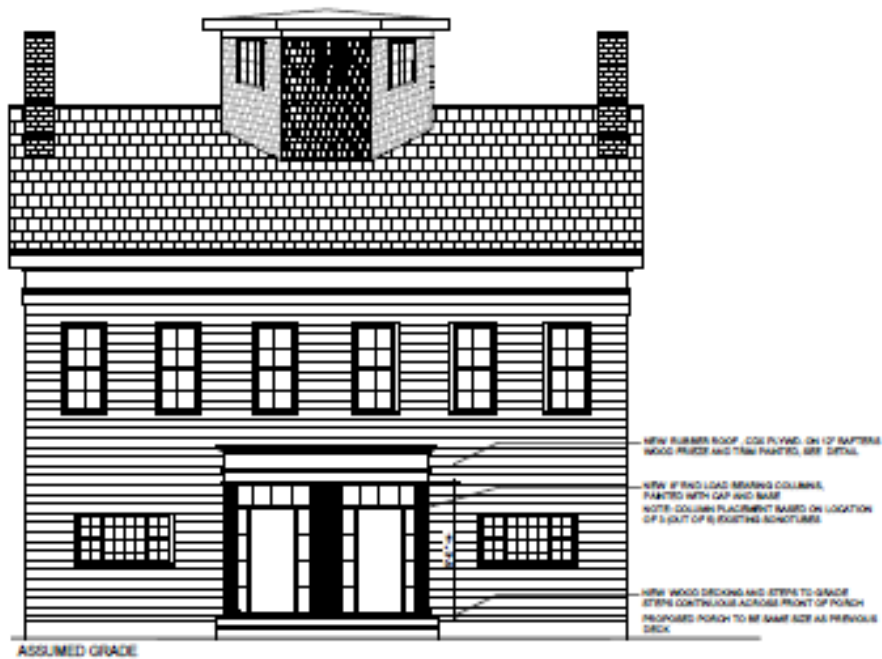


*Fig. 27. Parapets, once common, have in most cases disappeared. This Portland duplex was drawn from an old photograph.*





Proposed Front Elevation



Proposed Front Elevation



