



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:	81 Benton Road	c.1890 Lemuel Snow, Jr. House
Case:	HPC 2013.075	Single Building Local Historic District
Applicant Name:	Gordon Swartz, Owner	
Applicant Address:	81 Benton Road, Somerville, MA 02143	
Date of Application:	May 21, 2014	
Legal Notice:	<i>Addition of second front door on porch.</i>	
Staff Recommendation:	Conditional Certificate of Appropriateness	
Date of Public Hearing:	July 15, 2014	

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: From the Form B.
This pattern-book Queen Anne house bears a resemblance in both form and decorative vocabulary to its neighbor at 85 Benton Road and both may possibly be the work of the same builder. 81 Benton Road is a 2-story gable-roofed house with a full-height gabled polygonal bay offset to the left. The gable roof of the bay projects slightly and is supported by over-scale consoles. The shed-roofed entrance porch has bulbous turned posts and openwork frieze. The placement of doors and windows suggest a sidehall floor plan.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL: The 1986 Form B has little information regarding the historic context of this building. This house and its neighbor 85 Benton Road are the only two houses shown on the street on the 1895 Bromley Atlas. By 1900, five more houses had been constructed on Benton Road. According to a 1996 Planning Board report, the house had been an illegal rooming house. The new owner at that time was regularizing the house as a 2-family.

It is known that Lemuel Harlow Snow, Junior was the owner in 1895. The School Board gave him a posthumous citation for 22 years as a truant officer in 1908. According to a brief biography in *Historic Leaves*, he also worked for many years as a street car conductor on the old Cambridge Street Railway.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. *Proposal of Alteration:*

Originally constructed as a single-family house, 81 Benton Road had been subdivided into two units with a shared entry. According to the Applicant, the interior arrangement of hall and doors made the second floor unit fully accessible to the ground floor tenants. The Applicant is reluctant to sacrifice the existing interior details of the house to achieve privacy for tenants of both floors and would like to install a second door matching the original door as an exterior entry into the front parlor in the original floor plan. The Applicant would like to install a second front door matching the original at right angles to the original front door.

See the final pages for details and photos.

II. FINDINGS

1. *Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:*

81	Benton Road	C/NA	Gordon Swartz	2014.029	1. The driveway shall be installed to match the existing in texture, size, shape, and installation detail. 2. The third floor rear deck shall be repaired and replaced in-kind to match the existing in texture, size, shape, and installation detail. 3. The missing, broken or loose slate shingles on the roof shall be replaced in kind to match the existing in texture, size, shape, and installation detail.
81	Benton Road	C/NA, C/A	Chris Riopel	1996.009	1) In-kind replacement of several wood window sashes. 1) Remove wrought iron handrail on front steps and install wood handrails and balusters to match existing porch rail as closely as possible; 2) Remove rear chimney and add a dormer on the rear of the building 3) Install a wood balustrade on top of rear addition for a deck; 4) Replace two second story windows with smaller wood windows and remove one small window at the rear of the southern elevation; and 5) Replace existing aluminum gutter with new wood gutters on front porch.

1. *Precedence:*

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*
- *Addition of second front door on porch.* No similar cases could be found. There is one large very eclectic Queen Anne house within a Local Historic District that has this configuration of doors pre-dating its designation in 1985. This second door is smaller and less prominent than the original front door which has been retained due to its smaller size and location. This precedent has not been reviewed by the Commission and does not meet the Guidelines. See photo.

3. *Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The proposed second door is visible.

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

The house was converted officially to a two family in 1996. The Applicant states that the interior arrangement of the building cannot be reconfigured to provide privacy for both units in the building. There is one entry to the house set deep within the front porch with a Queen Anne style window over the stairs to the south. See photos.

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

This proposed arrangement of front doors is unusual. Typically on a two- or three-family house, there are either side by side doors or an entry vestibule with one door to the exterior. The house was constructed as a single-family and converted to an illegal rooming house. The house has been used since 1996 as a two-family home with no further change of external conditions.

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.*

The front door was not called out in the Form B. The house is a typical Queen Anne with an impressive front entry porch, door and side window illuminating the stairs.

- C. *Whenever possible, deteriorated material or architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced or removed.*

No deteriorated material will be replaced.

- D. *When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence of the original or later important features.*

The Applicant intends to remove the existing door, a portion of the clapboard wall and replace both with matching doors.

- 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 Applicant intends to replace install a new doors which will not match the existing in design, color and proportion.

- 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 new doors would be visible from the public right of way.

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.*

The Applicant intends to insert a second door opening into the parlor and to match the existing door in all respects.

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 historic door would be retained.

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.

If the Applicant can demonstrate that there is no alternative way to provide a secure entry into both units of the house

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 81 Benton Road Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Gordon Swartz a *conditional* Certificate of Appropriateness for 81 Benton Road based upon the following conditions and contingencies:**

1. The historic door would be retained.
2. The second entry door into the 'front parlor' ground floor unit match the existing in terms of
 - a. Materials
 - b. The window glazing shall have the same dimensions in height, depth and width as the existing front door.
 - c. The new door shall have all the same proportions as the existing door including height, width and depth.
 - d. The door shall have panels to match the existing panels in size, depth, number, location, and other details.
 - e. The door casing shall have matching dimensions and details.





81 Benton Road. 2013

