



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:	39-49 Bow Street	c.1900 Apartment Rowhouses
Case:	HPC 2016.049	Bow Street Local Historic District
Owner Name:	Bow Somerville Apartments LLC, Owner	
Owner Address:	369 Lindsay Pond Road, Concord, MA 01742	
Date of Application:	July 6, 2016	
Legal Notice:	<i>Replace stair and decking material, Alter railings on rear porches.</i>	
Staff Recommendation:	Conditional Certificate of Appropriateness	
Date of Public Hearing:	August 16, 2016	

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

DESCRIPTION: *From the 1975 form B and the 1990 Form A.* Since the 17th century, the junction of a main route between Charlestown and Cambridge (Washington Street) and the road to the farms and dairies in the western portion of the Neck has been the site of commercial establishments serving travellers and tradesmen.

The sandy soils deposited by the nearby Miller's and Mystic Rivers gave the area its first name, Sandpit Square, which was changed to Union Square during the Civil War. After the war prosperous merchants like Philip Eberle, a shoe store proprietor and owner of the prominent Eberle Building (31-34 Union Square) began building imposing three- and four-story



brick and frame buildings with commercial space on the ground

39-49 Bow Street, 1975 Photo



floor and offices and meeting halls on the upper floors. These commercial enterprises served the employees and residents of the factories and industries that developed along the rail lines and rivers east of the square. At the turn of the 20th century, the Union Square area was also a central point for streetcar and rail transport serving Boston workers who lived in Somerville.

As the oldest and largest commercial area in Somerville, Union Square was the initial and primary location for many businesses who later branched out to other locations in the city, particularly many of the financial and institutional entities. In the early years

of the 20th century several prominent historic buildings were replaced with more modern, lower structures and the square assumed most of its current appearance. The construction of several buildings of recent vintage and the rehabilitation of others, attests to the continued vitality and importance of this distinct, historic commercial area.

This Federalist Revival apartment block is built in a crescent shape to conform to the curve of (Bow and Summer) street(s). The building has granite sills and lintels and granite keystones in the brick arches over the three entrances. There are two string-courses at each story: the two top floors have belt courses at the sill and lintel lines to form a continuous band around the entire facade. The brick is embellished in only two places: at the first floor level the string course drops from lintel level to the middle of the window height to follow the base-line of the doorway arches; between the second and third stories the brick forms an interesting non-continuous checkered pattern projecting from the building surface by several inches. This seems the only exception to the Federalist stylistic norm that the facade have a minimum of embellishments. The arched door openings and relatively flat and simple facade are both Federalist style elements.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

1. Replace stair and decking material,
2. Alter railings on rear porches.

The Applicant would like to

- Replace all railings at all rear decks for first and second floor
- Replace all railings at third floor elevation
 - a. Railings to be composed of a bottom and top rail *with* 1 ¼ spindles. All to be fir wood. Primed and painted (See photo for an example of the proposed product after its painted)
- Replace decking on stairs and on second floor decks with fir decking to be nailed down with stainless steel ring shank nails. Primed and painted
 - a. Composite decking 5/4 x 6 on third floor deck (picture 3) this deck is not visible from the street (See photos) only railing will be visible.
 - b. The material will be Veranda Nantucket Gray. Home Depot stock product. Fastened *with* color matched screws.
- Wrap posts and second floor outer rim joist *with* pre-primed wood and paint
- Prime and paint all new trim and decking.

Their intention is to follow guidelines set forth by Historical commission by installing all wood products where necessary. They would prefer to install PVC trim, composite decking and pressure treated railings throughout if possible but understand they need to follow the guidelines as they apply to this property. They believe the third floor decking will not be visible from the street and therefore they propose to use composite decking on the third floor where it would be more exposed to the weather as opposed to the fir decking on the second floor landings and stairs.

See the final pages for details and photos.

II. FINDINGS

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| • <i>Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:</i> | | |
| C/A | Andre Vigneau, Advance Painting and Contracting, Dupuis Realty | 2003.031 1. Replace double-hung windows on front of building with JB wood tilt replacement windows |

39-49 Bow Street has been owned as rental property by one family since at least 1983. No building permits were found for repairs or maintenance after 1983 when the rear decks were rebuilt to the third floor by B. Faulkner. There have alterations to the doors and windows at unknown dates since no building permits were issued for the changes.

1. Precedence:

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*
 - Replace stair and decking material,
 - Alter railings on rear porches.

No cases of the replacement of wood for stairs or decking with non-traditional materials have been found. Stair and porch railings are frequently missing or have been altered over time.

There are also several instances where a generic railing has been used to indicate that the original railings were unknown. These include 143-145 Perkins Street (2003), 24 Pleasant Avenue (2014), 23 Porter Street (2010), 25 Russell Street (2003), 101 School Street (2007), 24 Summer Street (2015), 27 Warren Avenue (2010), 10 Westwood Road, 50 Vinal Avenue (2005), 45 Vinal Avenue (2007) and 222 Morrison Avenue. The accompanying posts have varied according to the style and age of the building.

3. *Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The steps and porches are visible from Summer Street. See photos.

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

The existing porches are of an inappropriate style for the building and do not meet building code. See photos.

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

The existing porches were rebuilt in 1983, two years prior to the historic designation of the building. The design of the railings was not appropriate to the style of the building.

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

While the proposal is to use non-historic materials for a portion of the porches, stylistically the proposed posts, railings and balusters would be of a generic style indicative of the lack of information as to the original forms and styles used on the original rear porches and would not detract from the character of the building. The posts will be wrapped giving them a slightly beefier appearance to the existing posts. The stairs will be reconfigured slightly to meet code. Posts will be wrapped to give them more visual weight.

- *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 rear porches, stairs, and handrails were not discussed in the Form B. There is no documentary evidence of the original design; however, the original materials were wood as indicated on the Sanborn Map of 1925. The stairs and porches are 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.*
2. *Fire escapes are very conspicuous features and, as a rule, should only be placed on the rear of the building, or where they are least visible from a public way. If installation on the street or side façade cannot be avoided, fire escapes should be designed and constructed with the same attention demanded by other major alterations and repairs, and are subject to the review and approval of the Commission.*

The Sanborn Maps give the configuration of the original porches and their material – wood. Over the years, the Commission has developed a generic porch rail, baluster and post system that works well with various building styles. The Applicants are proposing a variant on this system.

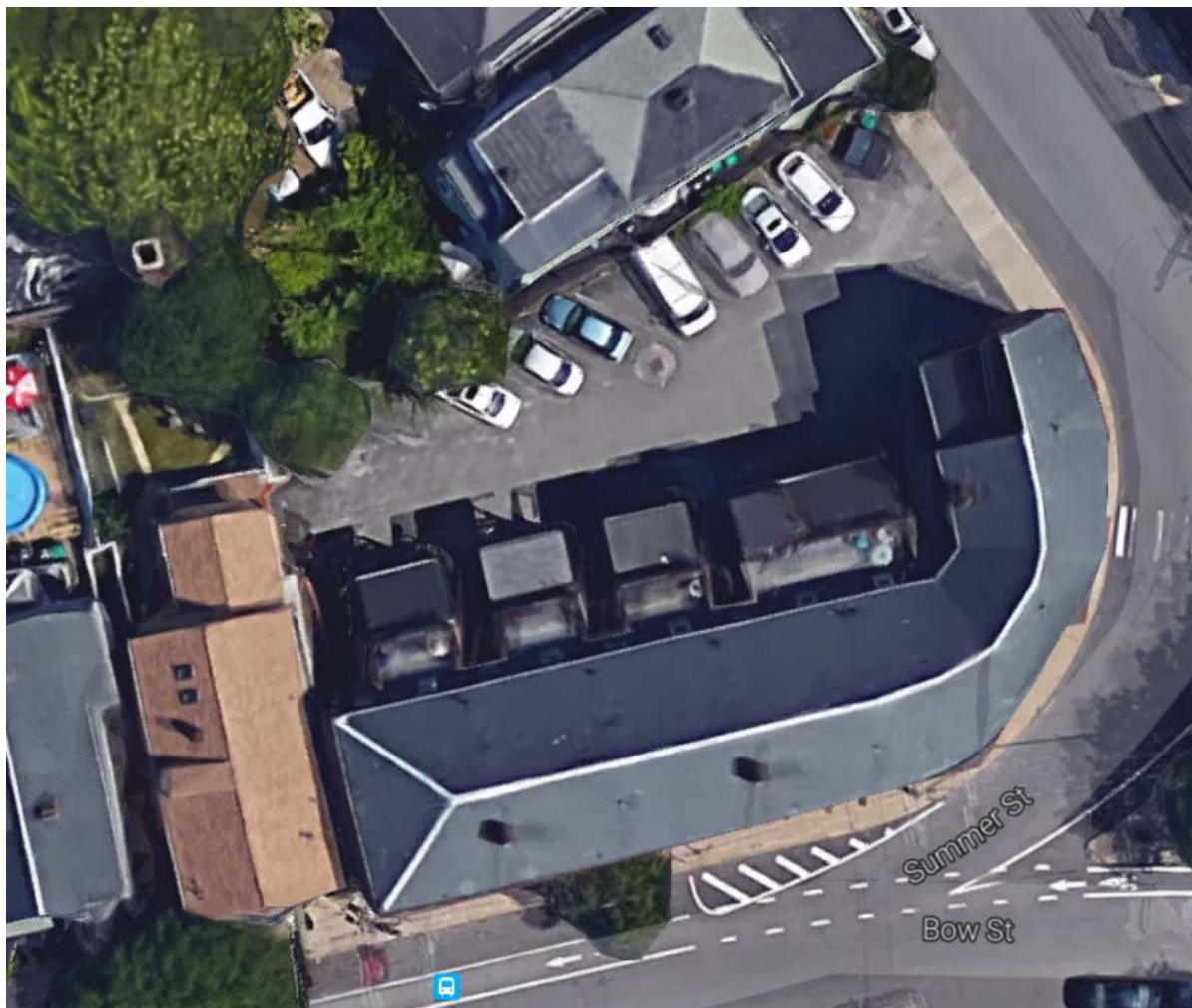
III. RECOMMENDATIONS

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 Bow Street Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant** Bow Somerville Apartments LLC, Owner **a Certificate of Appropriateness** for the repair and replacement of the rear porches at 39-49 Bow Street with the following contingencies:

1. If the changes are necessary to the proposed design for which this Certificate of Appropriateness was issued, new plans shall be submitted to Historic Staff prior to commencing the work.
2. All rear decks shall be replaced on the first and second floors.
3. All railings shall be composed of a bottom and top rail with 2" square wood balusters, hand and foot rails.
4. The stairs shall be rebuilt with wood steps and risers.
5. The deck material shall be wood except the third floor which may use Veranda Nantucket Gray composite decking
6. The posts shall be wrapped to the dimensions of 5" x 8" over the existing posts.
7. Railings, balusters and posts shall be painted.
8. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate and approved plans.









3rd floor deck



proposed rail and posts