



**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: 198 Central Street c.1880 Cutler Downer Mansard Rowhouse  
Case: HPC 2015.015 198-200 Central Street Local Historic District

Applicant Name: Dean Cassassa, Owner  
Applicant Address: 13 Highland View Avenue, Winchester, MA 01890

Date of Application: April 1, 2015  
Legal Notice: *Alter rear doors, windows, and porch for egress.*  
Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness  
Date of Public Hearing: May 19, 2015

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**I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION**

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:** From the Form B

*192-200 Central Street is a five-unit Second Empire-style brick row. The steep, straight-edged roof line indicates that it was built during the final years of that style's popularity. The overall proportions of the building are tall and narrow. Notable features include the full height, polygonal bays, recessed entrances, and boldly projecting cornices. The building also retains a scallop-shingled slate roof and projecting dormers with bracketed supported broken pediments.*

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:** From the Form B

*192-200 Central Street was built ca. 1880 by local real estate broker and Winter Hill resident Cutler Downer. Brick rowhouses began to be built for middle class residents in prestigious neighborhoods such as Winter Hill in the late 19th century.*



**II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

*1. Proposal of Alteration:* See the final pages for plans and photos.

1. Reverse the location of windows and doors on the rear elevation of the rear ell;
2. Relocate egress stairs from second floor and first floor;
3. Replace first floor porch with a patio; and
4. Install HVAC equipment at ground level next to the south east corner of the ell.

## II. FINDINGS

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

192-200	Central Street	C/NA	Jim Sleeper, Contractor	2003.013	1. Remove damaged slate shingles and replace with new Pennsylvania Gray (scalloped) slate shingle; 2. Install membrane roof and sealant; 3. Repair and replace missing and rotted wood trim, including window trim, pediments, crown moldings, cases, cheeks, soffits, fascia, gutter, frieze board, dentils, brackets and rope moldings in-kind as needed; and 4. Repaint.
198	Central Street	C/A	Dean Cassassa	2014.084	1. The head house shall be removed.  2. The skylights shall not be visible from the public right of way.

### 1. *Precedence:*

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*
  1. *Reverse the location of windows and doors on the rear elevation of the rear ell;*
  2. *Relocate egress stairs from second floor and first floor;*
  3. *Replace first floor porch with a patio; and*
  4. *Install HVAC equipment.*

The proposed alterations are minimally visible from the public right of way. There have been requests for an alteration to the fenestration on rears of other buildings visible from the public right of way: 137-145 Central Street, 144 Morrison Avenue, 8 Mount Vernon Street. There have been requests for alterations to the second means of egress or fire escapes, and there have been requests for additions. Some of these alterations are very visible from the public right of way such as at 137-145 Central Street and reflect the changing needs of the inhabitants.

HVAC equipment will be located on the patio where it is not visible from the public right of way.

### 2. *Considerations:* See photos at the end of the document

The current owner of 198 Central has undertaken a complete rehabilitation of the interior with several rooms reconfigured. He would like to rationalize the interior/exterior placement of doors and windows on the rear ell. These proposed alterations are all minimally visible at an angle from between 65 and 63 Adams Street and obscured by a large tree and porch latticework. The distance is such that details are not clear.

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The rear ell of the building is visible at an acute angle from Adams Street. Due to the trees and distance, a clear photo of the porches and windows is not possible; therefore the alterations would be minimally visible.

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

The rowhouses have numerous owners. On the whole, the building is in generally good condition but reflects a diverse ownership of the individual entries over time. The rear of the building shows a more diverse history of change than the main façade on Central Street but is minimally visible from Adams Street due to a similar rowhouse complex also erected by Cutler Downer. The back of 198 Central Street already has many alterations that do not reflect the intent of the original owners but reflects the changing life patterns.

- *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.*

The rear of the building is not discussed in the Form B.

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

No historic materials will be altered.

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

No replacement of significant architectural features will be undertaken. The existing openings have already been altered.

- 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.*

No historic materials will be replaced.

- 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 of the building is minimally visible from Adams Street.

## **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 opening locations will not change. The size and shapes of the openings have already been altered when the rear mansard became a clapboard wall.

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. If aluminum windows must be installed, select a baked finish that matches as closely as possible the color of the existing trim. Investigate weather-stripping and storm windows with a baked enamel finish as an alternative to the replacement of historic sash.*

The window sash will match the rest of the sash in the building. The doors may not be 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.*

The rear porches do not retain any original or important features.

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 fire escape is not visible from the public right of way.

### 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 192-198 Central Street Cutler Downer Row Houses Local Historic District due to the location and visibility of the proposal; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Dean Cassassa, Owner a Certificate of Appropriateness** for the alterations noted below with the following contingencies. A **Certificate of Non Applicability** shall be issued for the installation of HVAC units and the construction of a patio due to their lack of visibility to the public right of way.

1. The location of windows and doors on the second floor rear elevation of the rear ell may be reversed; and
2. The egress stairs from second floor and first floor may be relocated.

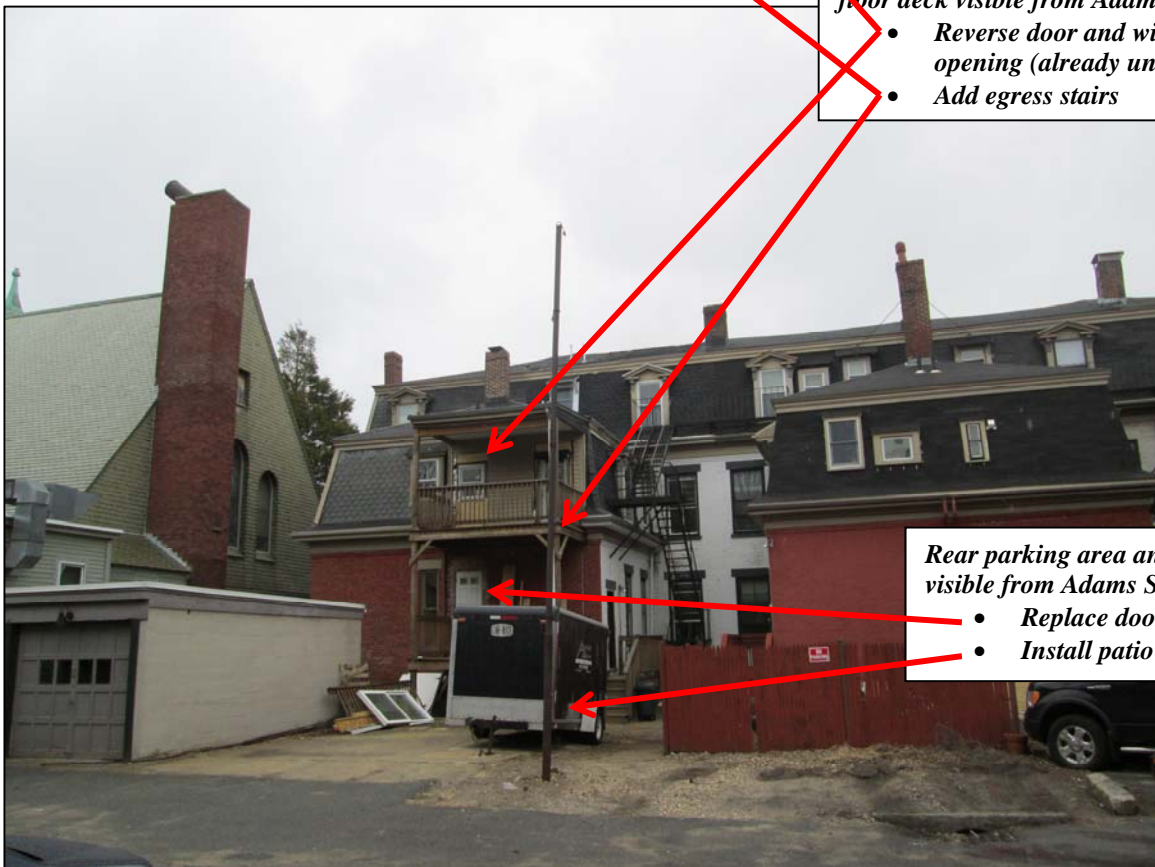






*Rear of building from Adams Street  
mansard dormer and corner of second  
floor deck visible from Adams Street.*

- Reverse door and window opening (already underway).
- Add egress stairs



*Rear parking area and ground floor not  
visible from Adams Street.*

- Replace door with window
- Install patio and HVAC.

