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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 / District(s):	27 Chester Street / LHD & NR Property
Case:	HPC 2013.022
Applicant Name:	Francis X. & Susan F. Colannino
Applicant Address:	27 Chester Street
Date of Application:	5/10/2013
Legal Notice:	<i>Install salvaged granite stone wall</i>
Staff Recommendation:	Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing:	6/18/2013

I. Building Description

Architectural Description:

27 Chester Street is a 2½ story, two-family dwelling constructed in the elaborate Queen Anne style with a side-hall entry interior plan. This structure is an excellent example of this style as it displays many stylistic hallmarks of the period. Of architectural note is varied the roofline, the corner tower with turret, and covered porch with turned posts, brackets, and elaborate decorative woodwork. Notable aesthetic elements include a variety of shingles arranged in patterns, stained glass windows, and decorative woodwork throughout the façade.

Historical Context:

The house, c. 1885-1895, is illustrated in the 1895 Somerville Atlas. The 1884 Atlas shows an empty parcel. The MHC survey form notes the property as the Clifton Bacon House and assigns an 1885 construction date. Clifton M. Bacon was a Boston coal dealer and his family owned the residence in the late 1880s and early 1890s.

27 Chester Street, front façade (photo, 2013)



II. Project Description

Proposal of Alteration:

The Applicant proposes to install a granite wall and posts along the Orchard Street property line. The granite wall and posts date from the 1870s and belonged to a vacant Fort Hill property, as the house burned down approximately fifty years ago. The wall would form the foundation for an iron fence, which would run the length of the wall. The wall/fence would not exceed 48" in height; the granite posts are approximately 4' in height while the retaining wall is 30". The iron pickets would be 18" in height, mounted into the top of the granite wall, and would be consistent in proportion to the previously approved iron gates.

27 Chester Street: Orchard Street façade (photo, 2013)



SZO - The maximum height for front yard fences is 4 feet while the maximum height for side and rear yard fencing is 6 feet.

III. Findings for a Certificate of Appropriateness

Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

July 2011, the HPC issued a Certificate of Appropriateness to install two iron gates on Chester and Orchard Streets using salvaged posts and pickets, new spear pickets with 'acorn' finials, and pineapple tops for the posts (HPC 2011.059).

August 2011, the HPC issued a Certificate of Appropriateness to install an iron gate for the patio to match those previously approved for Orchard and Chester streets (HPC 2011.074).

Precedence:

The installation of a retaining wall or low fence is not an uncommon request, although the proposed use of salvaged granite from another property is uncommon. Its presence, however, is not historically inaccurate. A similar precedence can be found on 10 Chester Street, at the Cambridge border. This structure is a Queen Anne style house similar in size and scale. A granite retaining wall runs the length of the Chester Street property line.

Certificates of Appropriateness have been issued for similar requests.

67 Florence Street, an Italianate style dwelling, the HPC approved the construction of a brick wall with iron railings along the front of the property and the adjoining property with decorative ornamentation interspersed regularly both between the balusters and above the top rail (HPC 2012.026).

18 Benton Road, a Shingle style dwelling, the HPC approved alterations including the construction of a stone retaining wall similar to the existing house foundation (HPC 2005.22).

24 Chester Street, an Italianate style dwelling, the HPC approved the installation of a 46" high granite curbing posts with 3" wide cedar pickets; the top rail is approximately 40" in height (HPC 2009.015)

Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The granite retaining wall/fence will be highly visible along the Orchard Street property line. The wall would form the foundation for an iron fence, which would run the length of the wall. The wall/fence would not exceed 48" in height; the granite posts are approximately 4' in height while the retaining wall is 30". The iron pickets would be 18" in height, mounted into the top of the granite wall, and would be consistent in proportion to the previously approved iron gates.

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

This house has been fully renovated and is well-maintained. Over time, the Applicant has installed iron gates at three locations on the property. This proposal continues the effort to define the property boundaries.

The primary purpose of the Preservation Ordinance is to encourage preservation and high design standards in Local Historic Districts, in order to safeguard the architectural heritage of the City. Therefore, guidelines have been developed to ensure that rehabilitation efforts, alterations, and new construction all respect the design fabric of the districts and do not adversely affect their present architectural integrity.

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

- 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.*

The Applicant proposes to add salvaged a granite wall with posts to the property. Although this proposal is for a new retaining wall and fencing, the wall and posts are of a historically appropriate material, granite and iron, and belonged to a property dating from the 1870s. Precedence already exists on the same street with regard to the granite retaining wall, but not the iron pickets and rail.

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

The Applicant intends to salvage the granite from an empty parcel of land. This alteration will enhance the historic nature of the building and help to define the property boundary. The materials and type of wall/fence proposed are historically appropriate.

Does the proposal coincide with the Specific Guidelines as set forth in the Design Guidelines?

H. Landscape Features and Paving – (3) *Additional landforms will only be considered if they will not obscure the exterior of the structure.*

The addition of the proposed retaining wall/fence will not obscure the exterior façades of the structure.

Fences – (1) Natural materials should be used for fences and walls especially those that can be seen from the street. Appropriate materials are wood, brick, stone and cast iron.

Granite and iron are natural materials and are thus historically appropriate for a fence or wall on the Orchard Street property line.

Fences – (2) Fences should not be used to screen front yards; rather front yard fences should be open and decorative in nature.

The proposed wall and fence would be ornamental and serve to enhance the Orchard Street property line, rather than distracting or obscuring the historic building. The wall would form the foundation for an iron fence, which would run the length of the wall. The wall/fence would not exceed 48" in height; the granite posts are approximately 4' in height while the retaining wall is 30". The iron pickets would be 18" in height, mounted into the top of the granite wall, and would be consistent in proportion to the previously approved iron gates.

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 further research.

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 recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Francis and Susan Colannino a Certificate of Appropriateness to install the proposed salvaged granite wall and posts, with iron pickets at 27 Chester Street. The wall/fence shall not exceed 4' in height and shall be constructed in a manner that is consistent with the HPC approved drawing (date stamped 6/10/2013).**

