

From: Kristi Chase, Preservation Planner, and
Brandon Wilson Executive Director
RE: Recommendation for 5/15/2012

HPC 12.016 – 25 Clyde Street

Applicant: Stateside Realty, Owner

Historic and Architectural Significance

See attached survey form. The form was done as part of the original 1985 surveys, which is why it has far less information about the building and its original owner and other occupants than would be expected today. Staff has done some additional research on the building

Architecturally, this is a classic high basement workers cottage constructed of brick. While it is called a brickworkers cottage, this is more due to the materials, style and location of the building than actual ownership. Clyde and Murdock Streets have several of these buildings but this is the only one designated as a Local Historic District. According to *Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge:*

Vol. 5: Northwest Cambridge. "Workers cottages were often placed up on a high basement, an adaptation that was especially common ... This high foundation has been

attributed to the impracticality of excavating a cellar in the marshy ground where most were located. But its use in areas without water problems suggests that a more practical reason was the availability of inexpensive brick from neighboring clay pits as an alternative to digging a cellar and lining it with stone. In addition the high brick basement was often employed as space for cooking or as a shop, though the floor was often dirt."



The Tufts brickyards were located just down Clyde Street and fronted on Cedar Street. They were still very much in operation at the time. On the Clyde Street side of Cedar, Asa Murdock also owned brickyards as well as in Cambridge. An April, 1858 plat of building lots once owned by Asa Murdock shows this lot as having been sold to Henry Timney, junk dealer who also owned the lot across the street. The building can also be seen on the 1858 Walling Map, thereby dating the construction of the house to that year. The 1874 and 1884 Hopkins Atlases show the current



configuration of the house with the exception of the enclosed porch/side entry into the building. A stable was located on the rear west side of the property.

By 1895, the structure had been converted to living space with a new stable indicated on east side rear of the property. The building was then enlarged by 1900 to connect the rear structures. It is not known when the stable/living area was removed. In the 1895 and 1900 atlases the property is shown as owned by Francis Timney.

A Building Permit dated 1917 was given to A MacDougall to alter a wagon shed. In 1925, he received another Building Permit to construct a new side under the ell. In 1934, he constructed 3 car garages and 1935 he added an addition for storage purposes.



More recent work was done by Jessie Parsons, the previous owner. According to Building Permits, in 1997, the attic was insulated and he received a Certificate of Non-Applicability to replace windows. According to HPC files, these windows were supposed to be 6/6 true divided light wood windows to match the existing ones. As can be seen from the photographs, this did not happen as permitted. She also made some repairs to the brick foundation at that time. A Building Permit was issued to William Parsons in 2004 for the removal of the chimney to roof level without the knowledge or approval of the Commission rather than repair it per Violation Notice, although it appears to have been crudely rebuilt.

Existing Conditions

The house is in fair to poor condition. The yard has been paved right up to foundation of the house, resulting in water damage to the sills. The rear portion of the building does have a foundation but the aforementioned drainage issues have also washed out much of the mortar in the crawlspace. Windows have been inappropriately replaced. The chimney was rebuilt with large crude pointing.

While not under the jurisdiction of the Commission, it should be noted that, as might be expected with a house of this vintage and style, floors and ceilings are slanted or bowed. Where the kitchen and a bathroom are located in the basement/lower level does not meet Building Code especially in regards to ceiling height. Some doors have been sealed.



The probably 1934 garages are sized for trucks, have a metal prefabricated structure and are located at the back edge of the property.

Proposed Work and Recommendations

Owner seeks a **Certificate of Appropriateness** (C/A) in accordance with the Historic Districts Act, Chapter 40C of the Massachusetts General Laws, as amended, and the City of Somerville Ordinance (Sections 7-16 – 7-27) for the following:

Continued from 4-17-12 meeting due to insufficient information.

1. Replace former non-historic windows with 2/2 double-hung wood replacement windows (C/A);
2. Construct or rebuild the second floor entry stairs (C/NA);
3. Install fencing around rear and sides of the lot (C/A); and
4. Construct on same lot behind existing 1-family dwelling, where garages were demolished, a free standing 2-unit structure designed to resemble workers cottages (C/A)

The following items were approved at 4-17-12 meeting

5. Demolish existing garages at the rear of the property (C/A);
 6. Remove east side enclosed entry (C/A);
 7. Replace entry with a window (C/A);
 8. Rebuild brick foundation (C/NA);
 9. Infill lower level entry to the street (C/A);
 10. Enlarge rear addition to accommodate second stairway (C/A);
 11. Replace wood shingle siding with wood clapboard (C/A);
 12. Remove inappropriate replacement and other windows (C/A);
 13. Repair or replace all rotted sills (C/NA);
 14. Replace or replicate exterior trim to match existing as needed (C/NA);
 15. Remove minimally visible chimney (C/A);
 16. Replace roof (C/A);
 17. Construct a new deck on west side rear (C/A);
 18. Remove asphalt from the entire yard (C/A);
 19. Install cobble and stone aggregate parking areas (C/A); and
 20. Landscape the remaining area (C/A).
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1. Replace former non-historic windows with 2/2 or 6/6 double-hung wood replacement windows (C/A);

The Applicants have submitted to versions of the house with both 2/2 and 6/6 windows. HPC Guidelines for windows state:

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.*
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 original windows have been altered or replaced over time. The oldest known photos in the 1986 Form B show 6/6 windows on the gable end of the main body of the house.

2. Construct or rebuild second floor entry stairs (C/A);

In theory this should be rebuilt in-kind. However, these stairs and railings are not original to the building. Staff **recommends** that a **traditional design be used** to replace them. They should be constructed of wood and not of a modern design. The vertical slats of the stair skirt are designed

to keep blowing litter from accumulating and to hide trash barrels. The proposed landscaping does not allow for access to the area beneath from the end and no access is indicated from the front. Perhaps this is because of the conceptual and schematic nature of the plans presented. These are a marked improvement over the stairs seen in the last iteration. Staff **recommends** granting a **Certificate of Appropriateness** for the change.

3. Install fencing around rear and sides of lot (C/A);

Applicants indicate a slat rail fence, but may be willing to construct a more appropriate fence than those shown on the plans. This style would not be as appropriate as a picket fence for a house of this vintage and style.

Generally speaking the HPC Guidelines do not address fences per se. However, it is clear that the Guidelines recommend that historic buildings not be obscured by changes in the landscape. "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 Guidelines further state that "The general intent of this section is to preserve the existing or later essential landscape features that enhance the property." Fences "...can be seen as a transition feature between the structure and its ... surroundings." It should be noted that fences and gates often define the boundary between a historic property and its surroundings, both streetscape and neighboring properties. Railings atop walls, handrails for site stairs, trellises, and similar structures are often also prominent features in the landscape. Staff **recommends** granting a **Certificate of Appropriateness** for a **simple wood picket fence** along the front and side yards based upon their frequency in historic photos of buildings in Somerville.

4. Construct a free standing 2-unit structure designed to resemble workers cottages on lot with an existing 1-family dwelling (C/A).

HPC Guidelines for Additions state:

1. *New additions should not disrupt the essential form and integrity of the property and should be compatible in size, scale, material and character of the property and its environment. Where possible, new additions should be confined to the rear of the house.*
2. It is not the intent of these guidelines to limit new additions to faithful copies of earlier buildings. New designs may also evoke, without copying, the architecture of the property to which they are being added, through careful attention to height, bulk, materials, window size, and type and location, and detail. A building should not, however, be altered to an appearance that predates its construction.
3. *New additions or alterations should be done in a way that, if they were to be removed in the future, the basic form and integrity of the historic property would remain intact.*

Noting that under the **Somerville Historic District Ordinance**:

- (6/ a. Considerations of Commission. In passing upon matters before it the Commission shall consider, among other things, *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 to similar features of buildings and structures in the surrounding area. In the case of new construction or additions to existing buildings or*

structures, the Commission shall consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the building or structure both in relation to the land area upon which the building or structure is situated and to buildings and structures in the vicinity, and the Commission may in appropriate cases impose dimensional and set back requirements in addition to those required by applicable ordinance or by-law. The Commission shall not consider interior arrangements or the categories of exclusions specified in paragraph c of this Section.

The Commission may after public hearing set forth in such manner as it may determine the various designs of certain appurtenances, such as light fixtures, which will meet the requirements of an historic district and a roster of certain colors of paint and roofing materials which will meet the requirements of an historic district, but *no such determination shall limit the right of an applicant to present other designs or colors to the Commission for its approval.*

The Commission shall not make any recommendation or requirement except for the purpose of *preventing developments incongruous to the historic aspects or the architectural characteristics of the surroundings and of the historic district.*

SOMERVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT ORDINANCE:

(6/a) In the case of new construction or additions to existing buildings or structures, the Commission shall *consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the building or structure both in relation to the land area upon which the building or structure is situated and to buildings and structures in the vicinity*, and the Commission may in appropriate cases impose dimensional and set back requirements in addition to those required by applicable ordinance or by-law.

The Commission shall not make any recommendation or requirement except for *the purpose of preventing developments incongruous to the historic aspects or the architectural characteristics of the surroundings and of the historic district.*

HPC GUIDELINES FOR INFILL CONSTRUCTION

A. *Size, Shape and Proportion*

New building facades should be designed to look appropriate to, and compatible with, adjacent buildings. If there are no immediately adjacent structures, the applicant should look to nearby structures and blocks.

1. *Building height should be similar to nearby buildings, respecting the predominant heights of existing houses or commercial structures.*
2. *Facade proportions (ratio of width to height) should be similar to those of surrounding buildings to create or complement streetscapes and views with the area.*
3. *Roof forms should follow predominant styles of adjacent buildings.*
4. *Utility connections should be placed to minimize visibility from the street.*

B. *Materials.*

1. *Materials should be compatible with those used in adjacent structures or, when there are no immediately adjacent structures, buildings within the surrounding area. Exterior surfaces should be painted or otherwise finished in a similarly compatible manner.*
2. *Materials of foundation walls should be compatible with those of nearby buildings. If use of matching materials is impractical, substitutions that are not obtrusive should be used.*

C. Details

1. *Door and window height-to width ratios should be similar to those in neighboring structures. The pattern established by the relationship of window or door openings and the surrounding wall area should respect the neighboring structures. The percentage of glass to wall should approximate that of neighboring structures.*
2. Facade elements which can help give a new structure a historically appearance include:

Window hoods and lintels;
 Entrances with porches and balustrades;
 Cornice lines with architectural detailing;
 Brick work with quoins, corbels, and other details;

Friezes;
 Gables;
 Columns and pilasters; and
 Chimneys

On the whole the Staff likes the ideas behind the proposed addition because it meets the guidelines above. The new structure would be located behind the original house, is no taller, and repeats the roof shapes and gables. The additional units proposed are no longer in a separate building and gives a different effect. However, Staff believes that the connection between the buildings as redesigned, does meet all the above criteria. It is separable from the original building without damaging the completely rebuilt historic house. The rhythms of the roof shapes echo those of the workers cottages in the neighborhood. The openings are similar and the materials proposed are in-keeping.

Because this is neighborhood of closely packed workers cottages, the new building would appear to be more of the same, rather than an encroachment unlike some of the new buildings at the Maxwell's Green end of the street **recommends granting a Certificate of Appropriateness.**

Inappropriate alteration and building on Clyde Street



Other Houses on Clyde Street

