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:	49-55 Davis Square	c.1914 Hobbs Building/Somerville Theatre
Case:	HPC 2015.019	Single Building Local Historic District

Applicant Name: Daniel Klasnick, Applicant for Verizon Wireless
Applicant Address: 220 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington, MA 02424

Date of Application: May 21, 2015
Legal Notice: *Collocate cell equipment*
Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: July 21, 2015

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

49-55 Davis Square - 2001 photo

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: From the Form B *The Hobbs Building,* designed by Funk and Wilcox, *prominently located at the central intersection of Davis Square, is typical in style and scale to the few remaining structures of its age in the square. In addition to a 1200 seat theater, the building was designed for numerous commercial and recreational uses including a bowling alley, billiard and pool room, a cafe, 23 business including 10 stores along the street level, 5 offices, and a 750 seat meeting hall with dance floor. Its plan is more complex than the other five theaters that existed in Somerville by 1914 when it opened. This sole survivor of the vaudeville era in Somerville is also the oldest theater built for the purpose of showing silent movies and vaudeville acts in the Boston area and was a possible prototype for the Strand Theatre (1918) in Dorchester designed by the same architects.*
This three story Neo classical Revival with style building is made of yellow-grey brick accents in stone, including a simple-geometric pattern on the two major facades facing Holland and Dover streets, classical details on the storefronts, and a dentil cornice. The corner of the front facade has a distinctive three story ornamental archway that marks the theater entrance, while the side facade has five large arched windows on the second floor for the meeting hall.

The exterior of the Somerville Theatre is somewhat altered although not irreversibly. Only two of the original ten storefronts several have been combined to create one larger storefront. The others are gutted and their door and window openings have been covered over with cement. Window openings originally blank are now in use and the

sash have been replaced over the years, but there is no change in ornaments from the cornice and parapet over the theater entrance.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL: From the Form B
The development of Davis Square is typical of Somerville's growth which paralleled the development of the railroad. The city began losing its rural character in 1843 when the first tracks of the Fitchburg Railroad were 1aid. Gradually pasture 1and, market gardens and country estates gave way to residential subdivisions with their own commercial centers. Davis Square was the estate of Person Davis, a grain merchant, and was suburbanized by the twin pressures of the Boston a Main Railroad Arlington line which came through in 1870 and then the coming of the electric streetcar in 1889 which converted the area to the transportation hub of a streetcar suburb. This trend is still in effect today as evidenced by the opening of the Davis Square MBTA station in 1984 within 50 feet of the location of the original B & M station and immediately adjacent to the theater.

As the City grew, centralized commercial squares developed within neighborhoods. The Somerville Theatre is the culmination of the suburbanization of Davis Square. Built In 1914 by Joseph O. Hobbs, a local businessman and lawyer, the theater provided commercial, recreational and cultural facilities for the community. The availability of public transportation made the appeal of the theater broad based. As one of six theaters that sprang up in the city between 1908 and 1914, it indicates the expanding population's need for nearby entertainment facilities. By 1925, ten theaters existed in the community. A total of fourteen different theaters existed in Somerville between 1908 and 1940; however, they were never all operational at one time. Some theaters were part of lodges or fraternal organizations and only operated for a few years.

The Somerville was the first theater built exclusively to show silent conjunction with revues in vaudeville shows. Its opening year was successful but a demand for live performance 1ed to its conversion as-a stock house in 1915. For the following seventeen years The theater produced a steady stream of plays ranging from comedies like 'Charley's Aunt' to musicals like 'Leave it to Jane' to serious drama like 'Why women Leave Home'. Busby Berkeley acted directed and tried out his radical choreography here before going to Hollywood. Nationally recognized artists such as Tallulah Bankhead and Francis X. Bushman appeared in productions as did 1ocal performers like Kay Corbett and her sister. Kate Smith made her debut here at the age of 18 in 1927.

By 1932 the Depression had taken its toll and stock was no longer profitable. The theater, under the direction of the Viano family, closed briefly and reopened as a notion picture theater, again mirroring events elsewhere in the greater Boston area. At this time, the interior was redone in the unique Art Deco style which remains intact today. By 1940, it was one of eight movie theaters pro-viding popular entertainment for the community, and today it survives as the only one still in operation. Over the years, Somerville's other theaters faced similar financial problems carpeting with television and other forms of entertainment and closed down one by one. The Somerville theatre has been continuously in use as an entertainment and cultural resource since 1914 and this tradition continues today with the current theater operator's programming of films and live concert performances.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

1. Collocate cell equipment as per plans by Dewberry Engineers for Verizon Wireless dated 7/13/2015:
    a. Construct one 3'6" x 5' x 10' fiberglass chimney on near the south-east corner and one 3' x 3'5" x 10' fiberglass chimney near the north side to be painted to match existing building to contain alpha, beta and gamma sector antennas;
    b. Install to façade mounted condensers on north elevation;
    c. Install vertical conduits; and
    d. Install additional equipment not visible from the public right of way and located on the roof of the building.

See the final pages for details and photos.

II. FINDINGS

1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

C/NA	Mel Fraiman	2008.044	1. Interior renovations of office space; and 2. Installation of condensing unit set back from edge approximately 40'.
C/A, C/NA	Sprint Spectrum PCS	2003.006	1. Install an electrical base unit inside the fly loft structure on the roof (C/NA); and 2. Install 3 separate vent pipes to hide 6 antennae on the roof of the Somerville Theatre at locations to be determined (C/A).
C/A	Clearwire, Environmental Resources Management	2010.022	1. Install BTS Equipment, BH and panel antennae mounted to an existing fly-loft on the roof A. All antennae that are labeled "paint to match." These antennae will be flush mounted to the façade of the building and painted to match the exterior façade of the building. At approximately 50' elevation they are very hard to see. These antennae include the 2 Wimax antennae on the western wall shown on sheet L1. B. The 4 antennae labeled "inside (P) stealth chimney)." These antennae will be concealed by a stealth chimney constructed of fiberglass. C. The paint should contain a range of colors close to the honey colors of the building façade for the chimney, and range of colors for the red brick to match the rear façade. 'Mortar' should not be white but match the existing mortar and that the width of the 'pointing' be appropriate to the location.
C/NA	Sprint/ BF Properties	2012.072	1. Install and replace three (3) new panel antennas to be located within new stealth canisters that will match the height and width and in the same locations on the rooftop as the existing antennas and canisters. 2. Affix remote radio heads to-the base of the tripods not visible from the public right of way; 3. Install cabling within the existing cable tray affixed to the roof to connect the antennas to equipment cabinets located in the equipment room, which is located within the fly loft; 4. Install two (2) new cabinets within the existing equipment room; and 5. Replace the existing GPS antenna with a newer model, located in the same location as the existing GPS antenna.

1. Precedence:

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*
  Cell equipment has been installed as noted above on the Hobbs Building/Somerville Theatre as noted above. No other historic structures host such equipment.

3. Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*
  All sides of the building are visible from the public way therefore the proposed condensers are also visible. The building is set off from others, allowing a view from a distance of the roof. The 'chimneys' become prominent features as they rise 9' above the parapet.

- *What are the Existing Conditions of the building / parcel?*
  The Theatre already has a lot of cell equipment on the roof, much of it not noticeable from the public right of way. Pipe style 'stealth chimneys' house sprint antennae. The roof also has

ventilation equipment and the fly loft intended to manipulate stage sets and lighting. See photos at the end of the document.

- *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.*

There will be no alterations or replacement to architectural features discussed in the Form B. The proposed alterations are located on the roof and on the least prominent side of the building adjacent to similar utilities.

B. Roofs

7. Utility equipment, such as television antennae, air conditioners, solar collectors and other mechanical units should be restricted to the rear of the property or on portions of the roof that are not visible from a public way. If no other placement is possible, air conditioning and other cooling units on street facades should be of the slim-line type or set flush with the surface of the building and painted the same color as the window trim.

City ordinances encourage the collocation of cell equipment. The proposed equipment is located where it will be most effective for its purpose. Attempts have been made to camouflage the equipment and minimize its presence.

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 Somerville Theatre/Hobbs Building Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Daniel Klasnick, Agent**

for Verizon Wireless a Certificate of Appropriateness for the collocation of cell equipment on 49-55 Davis Square with the following contingencies.

1. Collocate cell equipment as per plans by Dewberry Engineers for Verizon Wireless dated 7/13/2015:
    a. Construct one 3'6" x 5' x 10' fiberglass chimney on near the south-east corner and one 3' x 3'5" x 10' fiberglass chimney near the north side to be painted to match existing building to contain alpha, beta and gamma sector antennas;
    b. Both chimneys shall be painted to match the range of the honey colors of the building façade for the alpha/beta chimney, and the range of red brick colors to match the rear façade for the gamma chimney. 'Mortar' should not be white but match the existing mortar and that the width of the 'pointing' appropriate to the location;
    c. Staff shall review and approve the paint color match prior to installation;
    d. Install to façade mounted condensers on north elevation;
    e. Install vertical conduit for the refrigerant condenser on the north elevation and paint it to match; and
    f. Install additional equipment not visible from the public right of way and located on the roof of the building;
2. If the approval differs from the plans, new plans shall be submitted to Historic Staff prior to commencing the work;
3. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate and approved plans.