



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: 13-19 Highland Avenue c.1884
Case: HPC 2015.050 Single Building Local Historic District

Applicant Name: Frank DiCenzo, Contractor for 13-19 Highland Avenue LLC
Applicant Address: 5 Bradford Road, Woburn, MA 01801

Date of Application: July 24, 2015
Legal Notice: *Alter front steps.*
Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: August 18, 2015

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:
from the 1988 Form B

There are two panel-brick apartment houses that have similar massing and main facade fenestration, however, a turn of the century remodeling altered the roof of 17—19. Both were built with mansard roofs and pedimented dormers. The remodeling altered the mansard roof to a Dutch Colonial roof line with half-timbering of the accentuated dormers and a round-headed dormer (scallop shell) in the central bay.

The main façade of each building has two entrance doors at the central bay flanked by squared, projecting bays of two, 6/6 sash each. The building material is brick which is common on Highland Avenue but is representative of a new building period of apartment houses in Somerville.



13-19 Highland Avenue, c. 1988 photo

HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL: from the 1988 Form B

Highland Avenue, once known as "Church Street" and formerly "Barberry Lane" was built in increments. The first section was completed in the 1840s from east to west and extended only to Central Street. By 1852, according to the Martin Draper Map of Somerville, there were several houses and the Somerville High School (now the City Hall). Towards the end of the 19th century when Highland had been continued through to Davis Square, the

eastern end of it became the civic center of Somerville and surrounding residential development was convenient to transportation, to the commercial area at Union Square and to the civic center and park at Central Hill.

The brick construction was indicative of a new building era in Somerville. Prior to this most residential construction had been single and two-family dwellings of frame construction. With the significant increases in population from the 1880s there was a need for increased and moderate housing. Many late 19th and early 20th century apartment houses were made of brick. The two brick apartment houses were constructed by Charles E. Clark, contractor from Boston and Stephen Fuller, carpenter of Somerville. Clark lived at #19 from 1887.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

1. Replace failing brick steps with brick and stone steps.

The Applicant would like to replace the brick steps of both apartment buildings with brick steps with a bluestone or granite surface which would be more durable and sleeker than the existing brick ones similar to the steps between the buildings.

See the final pages for details and photos.

III. FINDINGS

1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

Repairs	C/NA	Burt Faulkner	2008.013	1. Repair asphalt roof in-kind.
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2. Precedence:

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*

Replace failing brick steps with brick and stone steps. Three cases were found for the replacement of concrete steps with granite or brick and granite: 74 Mount Vernon Street (2010), 27 Warren Avenue (2013) and 18 Westwood Road (2013).

3. Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The new steps and walkway are visible.

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

These buildings are prominently located at the beginning of Highland Avenue. They have had several modernizations over the years including the brick entry stairs and porches. Last winter's storms did a lot of damage to the mortar on the front steps on both buildings which have been reset and repointed. 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.*
similar to what can be seen in the historic photo.
- 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 stairs were not discussed in the Form B. The deteriorated brick will be replaced. The Applicant said that the original stairs and entry porch were wood but they have not been so for the last 30-50 years. The stairs are visible from the public right of way.

Landscape Features and Paving

- 1. *The general intent of this section is to preserve the existing or later essential landscape features that enhance the property.*
- 4. *The original layout and materials of the walks, steps and paved areas should be maintained if significant grade changes constitute an important feature of the structure or site. Consideration will be given to alterations if it can be shown that improved site circulation is necessary and that the alterations will accomplish this without altering the integrity of the structure.*

There are no alterations to the essential landscape features. There are no changes to the layout of the steps. The new stone faced stairs will not alter the essential integrity of the house or the district.

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.

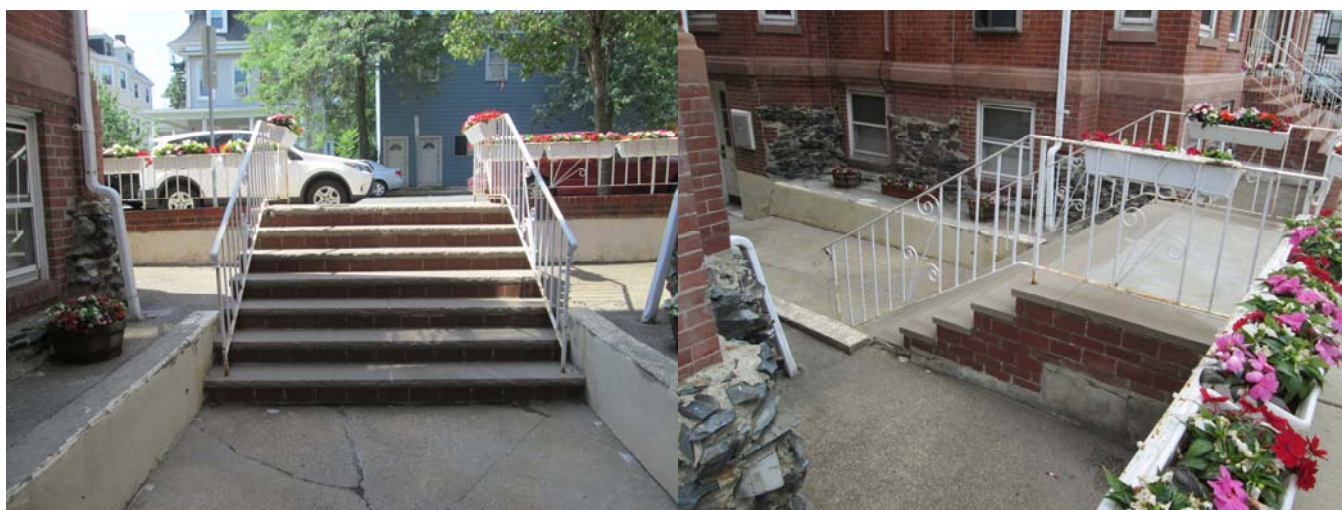
Staff determines that the alteration for which an application for a Historic Certificate has been filed is appropriate for and compatible with the preservation and protection of the 13-19 Highland Avenue Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Frank DiCenza, Contractor for 13-19 Highland LLC a Certificate of Appropriateness** for the installation brick and granite steps on 13-15 and 17-19 Highland Avenue.

- 1. Applicant shall obtain all appropriate building permits prior to commencing work.
- 2. The front steps of 13-15 and 17-19 Highland Avenue shall be rebuilt with brick facing and bluestone or granite treads to match the central steps between the buildings.
- 3. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate.



13-19 Highland Avenue

18 Westwood Road. 2011



Brick and stone steps between the buildings



17-19 Highland Avenue showing the fracture patterns of the bricks after repointing.