

To: SHPC  
From: Kristi Chase, Preservation Planner, and  
Brandon Wilson, Executive Director  
RE: Staff Recommendations 06/19/12

### **HPC 12.052 – 28 Highland Avenue – sidewalk and entry revisions**

Applicant: Ron Lombardi, City Engineer for the City of Somerville and Ron Mesard, trustee for the condo association.

#### Historic and Architectural Significance

See attached survey form.

#### Existing Conditions

The City has been upgrading its intersection for better access for persons with disabilities. The sidewalk will be regarded in front of the house where a bus stop is located. This bus stop is fairly busy and often has several people waiting.

#### Proposed Work and Recommendations

The Applicant seeks a **Certificate of Appropriateness (CA)** to:

1. Install curbing, steps and a handrail as part of the re-grading of the public sidewalk in front of the building (C/A).

The City of Somerville is upgrading the Wheel Chair Ramp at the corner of Walnut Street and Highland Avenue. To comply with code, the sidewalks (both Walnut Street and Highland Avenue) will need to be lowered. In doing so, the entrance ramp (already somewhat steep) to the front steps of # 28 Highland Avenue becomes steep enough to create a safety issue in inclement weather. Also, the sidewalk along Highland Avenue would need to be unconventional in that a level pedestrian travel path (adjacent to the area of the proposed curb) and then slope down to the Highland Avenue curb. This is a very active Bus Stop and the change in slope is undesirable. More so the US mailboxes would no longer be able to be level.

#### HPC Guidelines for

##### **H. 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.
2. *It is recognized that often the environment surrounding the property has a character, scale and street pattern quite different from that existing when the building was constructed. Thus, changes must frequently be made to accommodate the new condition, and the landscape treatment can be seen as a transition feature between the structure and its newer surroundings.*



3. The existing landforms of the site should not be altered unless shown to be necessary for maintenance of the structure or site. *Additional landforms will only be considered if they will not obscure the exterior of the structure.*
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.*

As can be noted above, HPC Guidelines for landscaping are very general. However, Staff believes that the proposed alterations do meet those Guidelines in that the visibility of the building and the general layout of the entry access have not been altered.

HPC Draft Guidelines for landscaping state

#### **Site Grading & Landforms**

1. Existing landforms of a site should not be altered unless it is necessary to preserve the structural integrity of a historic building.
2. If significant differences in grade constitute an important feature of the structure or site, it is especially important to maintain the original layout and materials of the walks, steps, paved areas, and landforms.
3. *New or modified landforms may be considered only if they do not obscure the exterior of the structure.*
4. *New or modified landforms should not detract from the historic character of the site.*
5. *Special consideration may be given to landform modifications required to satisfy accessibility guidelines*

#### **Paving & Circulation**

##### **Walkways, Ramps, & Site Stairs; Driveways & Parking; Patios or Other Outdoor Use Areas**

*Walkways, ramps, and stairs are influenced by the historic patterns of use of the site. Driveways and parking areas, where original, speak to the transportation of the City and the property; where these features are later alterations to accommodate modern lifestyles; care should be taken to ensure that they do not distract from the site's historic nature. Paved patio areas and other formal spaces form outdoor rooms and contribute to a site's overall character*

1. Whenever possible, retain historic paving features and related elements, including materials and elements such as curbs and steps.
2. *New paving features and related elements should be constructed of historically appropriate materials.* Modern paving may be considered if its location, materials, and use in the landscape design are compatible with the historic character of the property.
3. Bituminous concrete (“asphalt” or “hot top”) should not be used for walkways, ramps, or patios. It may be considered for driveways and parking areas, but alternate materials are encouraged.
4. Driveways should not be prominent in the landscape design unless historically appropriate to the property.
5. Screen parking areas from public view with low masonry walls, wood fences, or landscaping.
6. *The color of durable materials should be compatible with the historic character of the property*

**Fences, Gates, Railings, Pergolas & Other Structures**

*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. The following guidelines address these elements when they are located in the landscape. (Porch railings, etc. are covered in the Porches section.)*

1. Preserve historic fences, and gates whenever possible, including ironwork such as hitching posts, boot scrapers, etc.
2. *New fences and gates should be compatible with the historic property in style, scale, placement, and materials.*
3. Fences, gates, and other landscaping elements (such as plantings) should *not obscure the historic building.*
4. *Front yard fences should be open and decorative. Do not use front yard fences to screen front yards.*
5. On public ways, the height of solid fences is restricted according to zoning code.
6. The finished side of any fence should face toward public view.
7. *Use historically appropriate materials for fences and gates.*
8. Fencing and plantings may be used to screen parking areas and mechanical systems.

Staff believes that the proposed alterations are in-keeping with both old and draft Guidelines and **recommends** granting a **Certificate of Appropriateness** for the proposed alterations.