



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): 11 Linden Avenue LHD & NR Property
Case: HPC 12.075R3

Applicant Name: Linden Tree Realty Trust
Applicant Address: 15 Linden Avenue

Date of Application: June 27, 2012
Legal Notice: *Revision to driveway and curb cut.*

Staff Recommendation: Conditional Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: July 16, 2013



NOTE: As this is the third revision of this case being presented to the HPC, this Staff Report is very similar to those received in the past. Staff has underlined the additional or modified language to help the HPC more efficiently understand what is included in this request for a revision.

I. Building Description

Architectural Description:

The Isaac Story House is a 2½ story Italianate dwelling with a side hall entry and side yard. Architectural features include a wide fascia with over-scaled corner brackets and a polygonal bay with decorative brackets. The side hall entry is sheltered with a flat roof over an open porch. The porch has unadorned columns and beaded molding.

Components of the side yard landscape, including the cobblestone drive, were discernable until the 1980s. By 1984, only the spatial setting remains. The dwelling is sited above street level and bordered by a bluestone retaining wall with granite posts.

Historical Context/Evolution of Structure or Parcel:

Located in the Spring Hill neighborhood, near Elm Street, the Isaac Story House is one of the earliest houses built within the immediate neighborhood, prior to major land subdivisions. While other transitional buildings that bridge the gap between the Greek Revival and Italianate styles are existent, the setting of the subject parcel (specifically the side yard) evokes a greater sense of space than many nearby properties. The side yard is located to the south of the existing house and, at an earlier period, would have offered views of Cambridge from the elevation of Spring Hill. Judge Isaac Story (b. 1818, Marblehead) lived here after moving to Somerville in 1853.

Judge Story practiced law in Boston and was a justice of the Somerville Police Court (1872) and of the Middlesex District Court. Indian artifacts have been found on site, near a large rock at the rear of the dwelling.

II. Project Description

From HPC 2012.075R2 Staff Report

The building and site plan have been revised to reflect the Zoning Board of Appeals recommendation on 1/17/2013 to make the units smaller.

The site plan has been revised to reflect the reduced size of the proposed structure. The revised plan illustrates that the proposed dwelling is approximately 45' in width by 33' in length. The proposal retains the minimum 8' left side yard setback for minimal visibility of the second principle structure. Dimensions for the six parking spaces have been reduced to 8' in width by 16' in length. The curb cut at the street will be modified; the left curb cut would be extended one foot to align more appropriately with the driveway itself, and the right cut will be reduced by three feet. This creates 14' of access, which is the minimum required by the Fire Department since the proposed building will have sprinklers. In addition, the granite pillar on the right side will be moved three feet to align with the new right side curb cut.

The new building design is similar to the previous design in that it emulates a carriage house or barn that has been converted into a habitable structure. The height of the structure, to the ridge of the roof, has been reduced from approximately 35' to 33'; however, this height does not include the cupola. Main differences include the cross gable roof, front entry door locations with an extended awning or hood, cornice return and depth of the eaves. There is no longer a shed dormer on the rear elevation. Window locations have been modified on every façade; however, in an effort to maintain the carriage house/barn feel, the primary façade does not group windows together. This reduces the amount of glass, a feature that frequently identifies modern residential or office uses.

Regarding the current proposal, as a result of an additional neighborhood meeting, the Applicant presents two options (A and B). After meeting with Historic Staff, the Applicant requests to move forward with option A. Both options shift the driveway and curb cut so as to retain the existing number of on-street parking spaces. The existing curb cut is 13' wide and is not proposed to change while the existing driveway opening, which is framed by a granite pier on either side, is currently 11' wide. The existing location of the right granite pier is to be maintained while the left pier is proposed to be moved further to the left, approximately 38". Landscaping on the right side would extend further, to the location of the existing granite pier, while the stone wall on the left side would be relocated further to the left and, in option A, align diagonally with the new location of the left side granite pier.

According to Commissioner DJ Chagnon, landscape architect, on 6/27/2013, of the options to move the left side granite post and reconstruct the stone wall, Option A would retain more of the historic landscape and would be a clearer guide to the base of the stairs for those driving into the parking area, rather than the existing L-shape configuration.

III. Findings for a Certificate of Appropriateness

Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

- A **Certificate of Appropriateness** (HPC 2011.115) was issued on 03/08/12 to:

1. Add 1 additional window on rear ell that matches all properties of the existing adjacent window, including style, material, casing, muntin profile, and reflectivity of the glass;
2. Rebuild porch without a roof on 2nd floor south side, based on the undated plans presented and marked approved on 2/21/12 and as located on the circa 1985 photograph on the Form B; and

3. Construct a free standing 2-unit building on the lot near to the existing 1-family dwelling with:
 - i. the general location and footprint as shown on the site plan dated 2/10/12;
 - ii. a design that resembles a barn/stable, constructed as shown in the conceptual elevations dated 2/10/12 that include:
 - a. massing, scale, and height of the building;
 - b. placement, and scale of the roof forms, including the cupola;
 - c. placement, scale and arrangement of the windows;
 - d. placement and detailing of the trim, and both siding and door design
- A **Certificate of Hardship** (HPC 2012.075) was issued on 07/19/12 to:
 1. Enlarge driveway entry up to 18' for compliance with access required by Fire Department; and
 2. Redesign the landscaping and paving to minimize the visual impact of the wide driveway opening.
 - A **Certificate of Appropriateness** (HPC 12.075R1) was issued on 5/1/2013 to:
 1. Reduce the parking dimensions to 8' wide by 16' long;
 2. Pavers for the pedestrian walkway shall be natural granite cobbles (grey in color) approximately 4"x6"x9"; and
 3. Pavers for the patios and entrance location shall be Stonehenge concrete unit 1'x1'x1' pavers by Unilock.

Precedence:

Due to building and site plan modifications, large projects often come back for revisions many times, such as is the case here. As a precedent that often causes projects to be caught in a circular pattern between review boards, Staff recommends minor changes to the building design and site plan be reviewed and approved by Staff.

In addition, as Staff is not certain that the request to alter the location of the left side granite pier will be necessary until this case is heard again by the ZBA, Staff recommends that the granting of a Certificate of Appropriateness be contingent upon approval of this site plan modification by the ZBA.

Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?* The granite piers are extremely visible and currently located in their original locations.
- *What are the Existing Conditions of the building / parcel?* The existing parcel is 12,480 square feet with a 2½ story single-family dwelling and is a single-building local historic district.

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. 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?*

The Commission determined previously that the addition of a second principle dwelling located on the same lot would be appropriate for the district if the structure is designed in a manner that is compatible with the characteristics of the historic district and sited so as to not overshadow the existing historic dwelling.

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 have been developed to 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.*

The historic dwelling located on the subject property has been issued a Certificate for the above referenced modifications. In addition, the large open side yard is a significant and historic feature of this property. The proposal includes 4' and 6' fences to shield the parking from the street and the neighbors. New plantings will help bring this parcel closer to the original site plan.

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

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.

The proposal attempts to retain as much of the side yard as possible and to conceal views of the parking area. Reducing the size of the new structure also helps retain as much of the side yard as possible with regard to the proposal. Alterations to the location of the left side granite pier and stone wall are not preferably; however, the features would be retained.

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.

Original materials of the existing walks, steps, and paved areas are being maintained and repaired as part of this application. In addition, new walks, steps and paved areas are also being added.

According to Commissioner DJ Chagnon, landscape architect, on 6/27/2013, of the options to move the left side granite post and reconstruct the stone wall, Option A would retain more of the historic landscape and would be a clearer guide to the base of the stairs for those driving into the parking area, rather than the existing L-shape configuration.

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 11 Linden Avenue Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Linden Tree Realty Trust a Certificate of Appropriateness to revise the driveway and curb cut according to Option A for 11 Linden Avenue.** Since this project necessarily came back to the HPC for review and still needs Special Permit approval from the Zoning Board of Appeals, in an effort to save time and be efficient, Staff also recommends that further minor changes to the building and site plan, should they occur, be subject to Staff review and approval. Staff also recommends that this Certificate of Appropriateness be contingent upon approval of this modified site plan by the ZBA.

11 Linden Avenue, aerial view

