



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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MAYOR

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

ALTERATION TO A HISTORIC PROPERTY STAFF REPORT

Site / District(s): 11 Linden Avenue
Case: HPC 12.075R4

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

Date of Application: August 28, 2013
Legal Notice: *Revision to modify building design.*

Staff Recommendation: Conditional Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: September 17, 2013



NOTE: This is the 4th revision being presented to the HPC, and the Staff Report is similar to those received in the past. The additional or modified language has been underlined to be more efficient.

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

The building design has been revised to reflect the Zoning Board of Appeals discussion on 8/07/2013 to better understand the relationship between barn/carriage house structures and their associated dwellings.

The building design has been revised to reflect the reduced height of the proposed structure. The height is proposed to be reduced from 33.5' to 29' in height; however, due to the grade at the site, the building would be constructed at a grade of 8' feet. The footprint would remain the same, 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.

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; however, this height does not include the cupola. Main differences are the side- gable roof form with a projecting bay on the front façade while two shed dormers and a gable dormer are located on the rear façade and the location and size of various windows. The primary façade continues not to group windows together. This reduces the amount of glass, a feature that frequently identifies modern residential or office uses.

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.

- **A Certificate of Appropriateness (HPC 12.075R2) was issued on 4/19/2013 to:**
 1. Modifications to revise the building design and site plan shall be consistent with the plans presented on 4/16/2013: Planting Plan (Sheet L1, 1/1/2013), Building Elevations (Sheet A-300, 4/4/2013), & Perspectives (Sheet AV, 4/4/2013); and
 2. Further minor changes to the building design or site plan shall be subject to HPC Staff review and approval.
- **A Certificate of Appropriateness (HPC 12.075R3) was issued on 7/17/2013 to:**
 1. Modifications to revise the driveway and site plan shall be consistent with the plan (Option A, dated 7/16/2013) presented on 7/16/2013;
 2. There shall be efforts made to soften the reconstructed wall to be less angular than the approved Option A which shall have Staff review and supervision through the reconstruction process;
 3. Approval of this modified driveway and site plan by the Zoning Board of Appeals; and
 4. Further minor changes to the driveway or site plan shall be subject to HPC Staff review and approval.

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 building design by the ZBA.

Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?* The proposed structure has been reduced in height from 41' 7.5" to 37' (difference of 4.5") and maintains the same size footprint. However, as the massing has been reduced, the structure is less visible than previous the previous proposal. size and, therefore, is less visible than the previously approved plans.
- *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.

The current request before the HPC regards altering the design of the structure, which includes reducing the massing to 1½ stories, **not** the addition of a second structure.

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.

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. While the stone wall is being modified to address street parking, this was previously approved.

- *Does the proposal coincide with the appropriate Guidelines for Infill Construction?*

A. *Size, Shape and Proportion - New building facades should be designed to look appropriate to, and compatible with, adjacent buildings.*

- 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.*

The new structure has been designed to be compatible with the existing historic structure and the surrounding neighborhood. Building height has been reduced to approximately 29' in height which is similar to the surrounding buildings. The façade proportions are reminiscent of a large barn or carriage house structure. As the massing has been reduced, this structure is more similar to the proportions of a typical barn or carriage house. The side-gable roof is common for barns and residential construction, though the front façade illustrates a projecting bay that extends the height of the building. As the new

structure is set back from the street approximately 100 feet and behind the original historic building, utility connections will be minimally visible, if at all.

B. Materials

- 1. Materials should be compatible with those used in adjacent structures. 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.*

The material used for the exterior should be solid (front to back) with no fake texture or grain. However, the proposed building is located far back from the street. While the HPC does not regulate paint color and the color has not been specified, there is a general understanding that the building will be painted upon completion. Material for the new foundation will likely be concrete; however, the foundation will have plantings to obscure any views of the concrete.

C. Details

- 1. Infill design can be approached with non-historic designs using simple neutral elements which will fit better with the character of the neighborhood. New designs generally should not copy existing structures, but must be consistent with the character, style and scale of those structures.*
- 2. 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.*
- 3. Facade elements can help give a new structure a historical appearance.*

The proposed building utilizes features typical of a historic carriage house or barn, such as the front gable, shingle cladding, and hayloft door. The design is compatible with the Italianate style of the existing house, but does not replicate key features. Window and door ratios are similar to and respectful of the neighboring structures. Various architectural elements have been incorporated to help the building fit contextually into the site and within the neighborhood.

Any such detail elements must be consistent with the design of the structure. Adding details typical of one historic period may be inconsistent with a structure typical of the style of another period.

Specific care was taken to ensure that details of the new structure are compatible in period and style with the existing structure.

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 building design 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 building design by the ZBA.

11 Linden Avenue, aerial view

