



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: 54 Meacham Road c.1892 Henry R. Glover (Developer) House
Case: HPC 2014.099 Meacham Road/Campbell Park Local Historic District

Applicant Name: Margaret Bruton, Owner
Applicant Address: 54 Meacham Road, Somerville, MA 02144

Date of Application: December 17, 2014
Legal Notice: *Remove fence.*
Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: January 20, 2015

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: From the 1988 Form B
Although the massing and plan of #54 is similar to most other templar, gable-end dwellings on Meacham Road, this house retains additional architectural detail that make it one of the most interesting buildings of the streetscape. The quarter-round fans flanking the gable peak window, the decorative cornice, the butt shingles in the gable peak, the side, two-story projecting bay, the slate roof, and the decorative saw-tooth shingles at the second story overhang all contribute to the visual interest created by the well-conserved dwelling.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:

From the 1988 Form B
The property is one of many houses in the immediate area that was built in the 1890s when the subdivision was created. Although the subdivision was laid out in 1847 by George Meacham there was no development until the 1890s. Much of the land on Meacham Road was owned by Henry Glover and Charles H. Saunders of Cambridge in the 1870s and 1880s. Glover, a real estate investor from Cambridge built many of the houses, sold some, and retained others for rental income.

Much of the Davis Square area became home for railroad and

streetcar commuters and is evidence of the suburban building boom of the late 19th century. Streetcar service along nearby Massachusetts Avenue to Porter Square and to Davis Square provided easy access to Boston and Cambridge for employment. This area was also home for many Somerville workers. By the 1870s Davis Square was evolving into a commercial center with several commercial blocks and good transportation with the Somerville Horse Railroad Company and the Boston and Maine Railroad.

City directories indicate residents of this dwelling worked as clerks.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

1. Remove encroaching fence.

The owners of 54 Meacham Road would like permission to remove an encroaching fence. The previous owner of 56 Meacham Road received a Certificate of Appropriateness to erect a fence in 2007 to keep in his dog and extended it onto the neighboring property. Due to more recent changes to 56 Meacham Road, the fence has made their side yard less accessible. The owner of 54 Meacham Road would like to reclaim the entirety of their yard. The fence will be cut at the property line. The current owner of 56 Meacham proposes to terminate the fence on his property with a decorative treatment of the remaining rails until such time as the fence needs to be rebuilt and the post moved closer to the lot line.

See the final pages for details and photos.

II. FINDINGS

1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed: There are no prior Certificates of Non-Applicability or Appropriateness for this property.

1. Precedence:

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*
- *Remove fence.*

The Commission has approved Certificates of Appropriateness for the removal of fences. Usually these are chain link fences to be replaced with wood ones. There are also two cases where front yard wood fences were removed and not replaced: 47 Vinal Avenue (2005) and 17-19R Aldersey Street (2012). There have been no cases where a portion of a fence was removed across a property line.

3. Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The fence is visible.

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

The fence to be removed is currently located at the end of the neighbor's driveway and crosses the side yard of 54 Meacham Road to the house. This fence received a Certificate of Appropriateness in 2007. Since then, a new survey was made and the driveway at 56 Meacham was widened, narrowing the side yard of 54 Meacham Road. The owners of 54 Meacham Road would like access to

the back yard from their side yard. 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.*

The fence was not constructed until 2007 and is therefore not on the 1988 Form B.

- C. *Whenever possible, deteriorated material or architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced or removed.*

No materials are being replaced.

- D. *When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence of the original or later important features.*

No architectural features are being removed or replaced.

- 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.*

No new materials will be used.

- 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 fence is 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.*

There are no alterations to the essential landscape features.

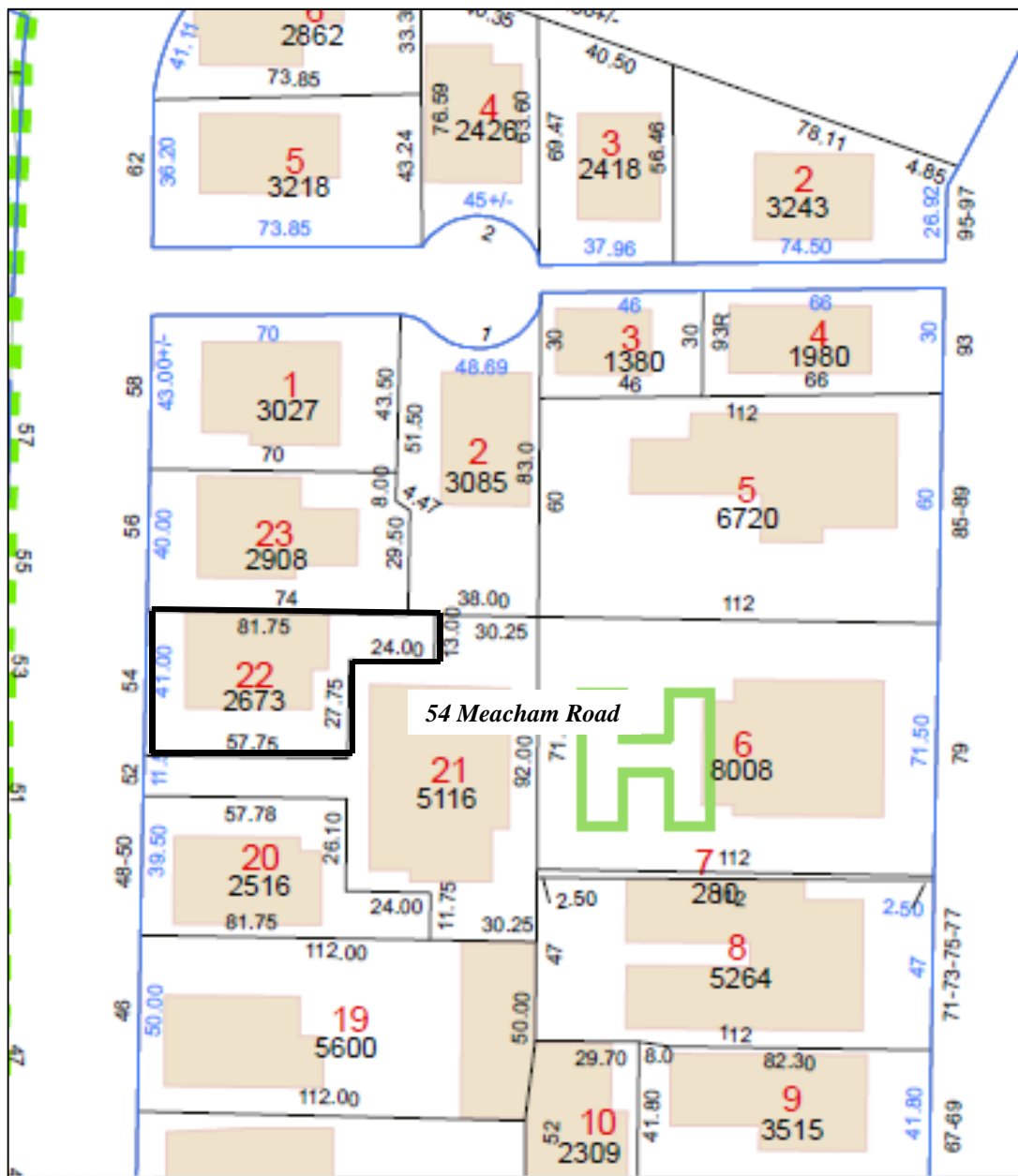
4. *The original layout and materials of the walks, steps and paved areas should be maintained if significant grade changes constitute an important feature of the structure or site. Consideration will be given to alterations if it can be shown that improved site circulation is necessary and that the alterations will accomplish this without altering the integrity of the structure.*

There are no changes to the layout.

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 Meacham Road/Campbell Park Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant 54 Meacham Road a Certificate of Appropriateness** for the removal of the fence on their side yard.



Driveway between 54 and 56 Meacham Road showing the encroaching fence on the right side rear of driveway.

