



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: 44 Meacham Road c.1892 Henry R. Glover (developer) House
Case: HPC 2016.075 Meacham Road/ Campbell Park Local Historic District

Applicant Name: Sarah & Colby Swettburg, Owners
Applicant Address: 130 Liberty Road, Somerville, MA 02144

Date of Application: September 6, 2016
Legal Notice: *Demolish c. 1920 concrete block garage*
Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: October 18, 2016

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: From the Form B

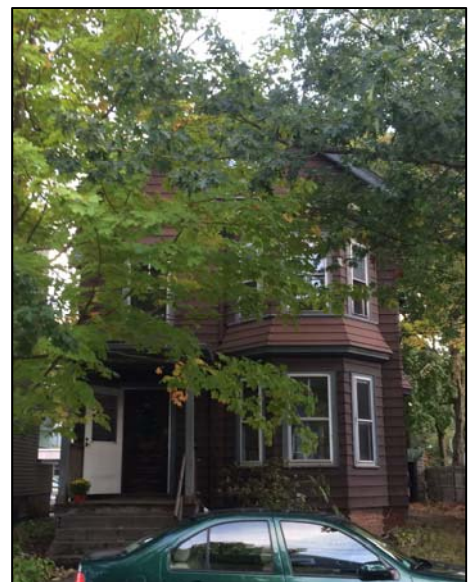
This house is like others on Meacham Road in plan and retains its two-story projecting bays, side-hall entrance and open porch. However, there is no visible architectural detail due to the application of synthetic siding.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:



44 Meacham Road 1988

The property is one of many houses in the immediate area that was built in the 1890s when the subdivision was developed. Although the subdivision was laid out in 1847 by George Meacham there was no development until the 1890s. Henry Glover and Charles H. Saunders of Cambridge owned all lots on the east side of Meacham from Orchard to the Union Rail Road Company property. Glover, a real estate investor from Cambridge built many of the houses, sold some, and retained



44 Meacham Road 2015

others for rental income.

Much of the Davis Square area became the homes of 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.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

- (1) Demolish c. 1920 concrete block garage.

See the final pages for photos.

II. FINDINGS

A. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

The owners are under-going extensive rehabilitation of the building.

Precedence:

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*
 1. *Demolish c. 1920 concrete block garage.*

Only two proposals for the demolition of a 1920s concrete block garage has been reviewed in the last 10 years for an historic property was at 57 Columbus Avenue (2012) and at 17-19 Aldersey Street (2014). While typical of the 1920s when hundreds if not thousands of such buildings were constructed for Model Ts and other popularly available cars, the concrete block garage is not within the period of significance for the Meacham Road/Campbell Park Local Historic District.

B. Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The existing garage visible the Meacham Road .

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

The garage is located at the southwest corner of the lot. It is in poor condition. The garage is typical but less ornamented than many garages of the 1920s. It was constructed approximately 25 years after the original house.

- *Is the proposal more appropriate than the existing conditions? Is the proposal more in-keeping with the age, purpose, style and construction of the building?*

Removing inappropriate later additions to a property is generally an improvement allowing for the interpretation of a historic district and its development.

- *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.*
- B. *Changes and additions to the property and its environment that have taken place over the course of time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes to the property may have developed significance in their own right, and this significance should be recognized and respected (LATER IMPORTANT FEATURES will be the term used hereafter to convey this concept).*
- 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.*
- 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.*

There will be no changes to the historic fabric as described on the Form B. The garage does not have any particular significance and is not a distinguishing feature of the Meacham Road/ Campbell Park Local Historic District. No historic material or features will be altered or replaced.

Demolition

- 1. *Demolition of part or all of a structure is considered to be an alteration to the exterior and is subject to the review of the Commission.*

The demolition of the garage will not significantly alter the building or the district in a negative manner.

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.

In accordance with Section 7.e of the Historic District Ordinance for the City of Somerville, "a public hearing on an application may be waived by the Commission if the Commission determines that the exterior architectural feature involved or its category or color, as the case may be, is so insubstantial in its effect on the historic district that it may be reviewed by the Commission without public hearing on an application, provided, however, that if the Commission dispenses with a public hearing on an application, notice of the application shall be given to the owners of all adjoining property and other property deemed by the Commission to be materially affected thereby as above provided and ten (10) days shall elapse after the mailing of such notice before the Commission may act upon such application. ..."

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; further Staff determines that the exterior architectural feature involved ... is so insubstantial in its effect on the historic district that the proposal will not affect the historic district generally, and "*may be approved without substantial detriment to the public welfare and without substantial derogation from the intent and purposes of th(e) Ordinance.*" (section 6.d.) therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Sarah & Colby Swettburg, Owners a Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish the c. 1920 concrete block garage at 44 Meacham Road because "the exterior architectural feature involved ... is so insubstantial in its effect on the historic district" with the following conditions.**

1. The exterior architectural feature involved ... is so insubstantial in its effect on the historic district.” that it may be reviewed by the Commission without public hearing on an application.
2. The Certificate of Appropriateness shall not be valid until 10 days after the October 11, 2016 notice to all owners of all adjoining property and other property deemed by the Commission to be materially affected thereby
3. All appropriate building permits shall be obtained prior to the start of any work.
4. The c. 1920 concrete block garage shall be demolished to grade.
5. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate and approved plans.



