



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: 44 Meacham Road c.1892 Henry R. Glover (developer) House
Case: HPC 2015.074 Meacham Road/ Campbell Park Local Historic District

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

Date of Application: October 28, 2015
Legal Notice: *Remove existing siding; add rear addition; and relocate/add windows*
Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: November 17, 2015

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

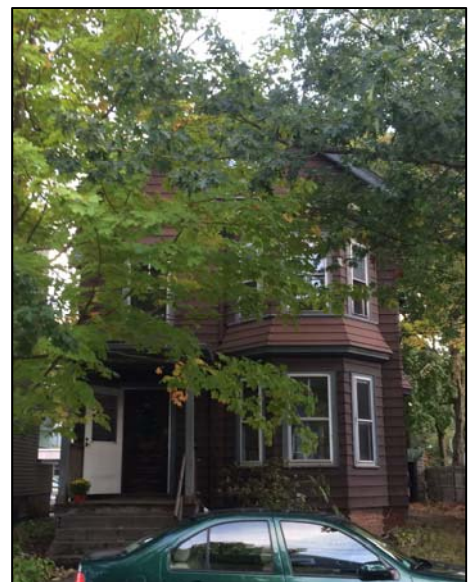
This house is like others on Meacham Road in plan and retains its two-story projecting bays, side-hall entrance and open porch. However, there is no visible architectural detail due to the application of synthetic siding.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:

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



44 Meacham Road 1988



44 Meacham Road 2015

investor from Cambridge built many of the houses, sold some, and retained 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) Siding scope – Entire structure, including bays, to be stripped of existing aluminum. Clapboards at body of structure & decorative wood shingles on the bay in kind - to be confirmed after existing is removed to see what is below.
- (2) Add missing brackets and other trim detailing as revealed.
- (3) Repair porch in-kind with new details based on existing evidence or on neighboring similar structures
- (4) Relocate two windows and add two windows on east elevation
- (5) Add small shed dormer to add code head height to stairs.
- (6) New addition on the rear of the building (minimally visible from the public right of way.)

See the final pages for details and photos.

II. FINDINGS

A. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

Despite the fact that 44 Meacham Road has been on the Local Historic District register since 1989, no Certificates or building permits have been found. The house was recently sold to new owners. Besides the Certificate of Appropriateness requested for the proposed alterations above A Certificate of Non-Applicability will be issued for the following changes:

- (1) Replace 3-tab asphalt shingles in kind.
- (2) Repair and replace in-kind siding and trim depending on what is found once the aluminum siding is removed.

1. Precedence:

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*

1) Relocate two windows and add two windows on east elevation

Only one Certificate of Appropriateness for the relocation of windows has been issued. The owners of 8 Mount Vernon Street (2014) added and moved windows on the side of the house. Most such cases were located on the rear of the building and received Certificates of Non-Applicability.

2) New addition on the rear of the building (minimally visible from the public right of way.)

Dormers have received Certificates of Appropriateness at the following addresses: 245 Beacon Street (2005), 53 Columbus Avenue (2015), 73 Columbus Avenue,(1996), 30 Forest Street,(2002), and 117 Washington Street (2011). These were small and located traditionally over stairs or in bedroom areas.

- 1) Siding scope – Entire structure, including bays, to be stripped of existing aluminum. Clapboards at body of structure & shakes at bay in kind - to be confirmed after existing is removed to see what is below.*
- 2) Add missing brackets and other trim detailing as revealed.*

3) *Repair porch in-kind with new details based on existing evidence or on neighboring similar structures.*

The Commission has previously granted numerous Certificates of Appropriateness for the removal of non-historically appropriate siding and the repair the replacement of the damaged and missing wood elements as revealed. Most recently, these include 83 Boston Street (2010), 6 Westwood Road (2003), 34 Bow Street (2004), 61 Columbus Avenue (2006), and 221 Morrison Avenue (2012). In all cases the siding beneath was repaired to match the existing. In this case, many details were stripped.

4) *New addition on the rear of the building.*

Additions have been permitted where they are minimally visible, at the rear of the property and of lesser visual importance. These have been located at 36 Cherry Street (2004), 25 Clyde Street (2012), 55 Columbus Avenue (2005, 2008), 57 Columbus Avenue (2012), 34 Day Street (2012), 140 Morrison Avenue (2015), 204 Morrison Avenue (2014), 221 Morrison Avenue (2010), 15 Munroe Street (2010), 23 Porter Street (2010), 380 Somerville Avenue (2011), 117 Washington Street (2011).

B. Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

All of the proposed work is visible from the Meacham Road although the addition will be only minimally visible due to set backs.

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

The house has been neglected for several years. No building permits were found after 1920, although aluminum siding covers the building. The roof has 3-tab asphalt shingle. Windows have no original detail visible. The porch has been altered. The architects and the owners are striving to bring the building as closely as possible to the original design of the building while modernizing it. Meacham Road and Campbell Park were developed by one developer and has a consistency of vision. Alterations are based upon the existing fabric of the building and the neighborhood. See photos at the end of the document.

- *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 modern materials is always an improvement. The proposed window alterations are in-keeping with many floorplans from the 1890s which had paired two windows on the side of the parlor and front bedroom as well as a front bay. Rear additions are common and will not disrupt the general massing and form of the building from Meacham Road.

- *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.*
- 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.*

The siding discussed in the Form B, is noted as a defect. No other details of the building were described. Other buildings on the street were noted as more intact. See the photo of 42 Meacham Road for a more complete idea of how 44 Meacham would have looked. The proposed addition on the rear continues the existing. The deteriorated and missing siding and details will be replicated once the aluminum has been removed. Repairs and replacement will be based upon the physical evidence found on the building and similar in appearance to that found on the neighboring building when there is no physical evidence. The materials will be traditional and match the existing in their physical properties, design, color, texture and other visual qualities. The entire project will be visible from Meacham Road but the addition will be visible from oblique angles at the rear of the building.

A. Exterior Walls

1. *Wood Siding: clapboards, shingles, board and batten, etc.*
 - a. *Retain and repair original or later important material whenever possible.*
 - b. *Retain and repair, when necessary, replace deteriorated material which matches as closely as possible.*
 - c. *Invest in quality paint and proper preparation.*
 - d. *Synthetic siding (aluminum, vinyl, artificial stone or brick) is prohibited because it severely compromises the appearance and integrity of old buildings.*

All siding and trim will be replaced in-kind when necessary once the inappropriate aluminum has been removed.

C. Windows and Doors

1. *Retain original and later important door and window openings where they exist. Do not enlarge or reduce door and window openings for the purpose of fitting stock window sash or doors, or air conditioners.*
2. *Whenever possible, repair and retain original or later important window elements such as sash, lintels, sill, architraves, glass, shutters and other decorative elements and hardware. When replacement of materials or elements is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.*

Two windows will be relocated on the south wall near the street and two windows added to the same wall. These will be the same size, shape and detail as close to the postulated original window design as possible.

E. New additions

1. *New additions should not disrupt the essential form and integrity of the property and should be compatible in size, scale, material and character of the property and its environment. Where possible, new additions should be confined to the rear of the house.*
2. *It is not the intent of these guidelines to limit new additions to faithful copies of earlier buildings. New designs may also evoke, without copying, the architecture of the property to which they are being added, through careful attention to height, bulk, materials, window size, and type and location, and detail. A building should not, however, be altered to an appearance that predates its construction.*
3. *New additions or alterations should be done in a way that, if they were to be removed in the future, the basic form and integrity of the historic property would remain intact.*

The new addition will be set back from the edges of the building and may not be visible from the public right of way.

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 Westwood Road Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Sarah & Colby Swettburg, Owners a Certificate of Appropriateness** to alter 44 Meacham road with the following conditions.

1. All appropriate building permits shall be obtained prior to the start of any work.
2. If the approval differs from the plans, new plans shall be submitted to Historic Staff prior to commencing the work.
3. The entire structure, including bays shall be stripped of existing aluminum.
4. The clapboards on the body of structure & any decorative wood shingles shall be replaced in-kind after confirmation of the styles of the materials.
5. Brackets and other trim detailing shall be replaced in-kind as revealed and or based upon neighboring buildings original fabric if totally missing.
6. The porch shall be repaired in-kind with new details based on existing evidence or on neighboring similar structures.
7. Two windows shall be relocated and two windows added symmetrically on the on east elevation as per plans by Boyes-Watson dated 10/28/2015.
8. Add small shed dormer to add code head height to stairs per plans by Boyes-Watson dated 10/28/2015.
9. New addition on the rear of the building (minimally visible from the public right of way) per plans by Boyes-Watson dated 10/28/2015.
10. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate and approved plans.





44 Meacham Road, west side



44 Meacham Road, east side



42 Meacham Road



Aluminum siding showing the casing around the windows and condition of the remaining window casings.