



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:	56 Meacham Road	c.1874 Mansard Cottage
Case:	HPC 2015.018	Meacham Rd/Campbell Pk Local Historic District
Applicant Name:	Sun Sasongko, Owner	
Applicant Address:	56 Meacham Road, Somerville, MA 02144	
Date of Application:	May 18, 2015	
Legal Notice:	<i>Install dry-laid wall, fence</i>	
Staff Recommendation:	Certificate of Appropriateness	
Date of Public Hearing:	June 16, 2015	

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: This side entry mansard cottage is located near the Davis Square end of the street, a few doors down from Seven Hills Park, near the corner of a private way (Glover Circle). It retains its original massing and is in fair condition, but lacks many of the architectural details found on similar cottages in Somerville. Vinyl siding has been applied over the original wood in 1976. The roof was originally replaced with 3-tab asphalt shingle in 1947. The windows have been replaced everywhere except the basement at an unknown date. There is only one dormer window in the front over the bay, while both sides of the house have two dormers each. The rear of the building has no dormers but does have a two-story ell toward the south side that takes up most of the side. The placement of the front door suggests a side-hall floor plan. The porch columns are square posts and are clearly replacements as are the stair rails and balusters.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:

Much of the present-day Davis Square was a portion of the 10-acre estate of Person Davis for whom the Square was named in 1883. Today, it is one of the largest commercial areas of the City, and is currently the most vibrant. Horse railway up Massachusetts Avenue from Harvard Square began in 1856-1857 to Porter Square and beyond. As a result of the construction of Holland Street completed in 1868, Davis Square came into existence. After the Civil War, several real estate developers were poised to take advantage of the Davis Square area's potential as the major focus for the commercial and residential life of the community. In 1871, the Lexington and Arlington Branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad reached Davis Square, further opening the area up for large scale

development. The surrounding area of Davis Square became the homes of railroad and streetcar commuters and is evidence of the suburban building boom of the late nineteenth century. Fifty-three trains a day and streetcar service from Davis Square provided easy access to employment in Cambridge and Boston.

This Mansard is one of 2 properties on Meacham Road that pre-date the 1890s development undertaken by Henry R. Glover. The 1874 and all subsequent atlases show the ownership to H.R. Glover for this lot and most of the others on the street. The 1884 City Directory included only 9 families residing on Meacham Road. All of them were blue collar workers. It is unclear exactly which houses were occupied by which tenants, as street numbers were not in common use at that time.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

1. Remove Cape Cod berm along sidewalk;
2. Construct a low 'dry-laid' stone wall to match the one along the driveway.
3. Construct a low fence on top of wall.
4. Add post to fence on the driveway.

The Applicant would like to replace the existing Cape Cod berm with a 'dry-laid wall to match the one along the driveway and the adjacent property. The new wall would be no higher than the existing berm and the wall on the adjacent property. He would also like to install a low picket fence on top of the wall and install an end post to the fence across the driveway. Typically such fences are located behind the walls not on top of them. however, the Applicant is concerned that the wall would be used as a bench by the public. The existing berm was likely installed in the 1950s and has suffered damaged from the winters storms and general age. The fence at the end of the driveway was truncated to the property line last year rather than extending onto the neighbors' yard. See the final pages for details and photos.

II. FINDINGS

1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

2001.030	Ben Ascher & Yenna Chan	C/NA, C/A, Denial	1. Repair and replace rotted wood on existing windows in-kind 2. Install a new dormer on the rear of the house to match in style and construction the existing dormers. 3. Install a skylight on the side of a mansard roof:
2002.004	Ben Ascher & Yenna Chan	C/A	Install skylight on upper roof.
2006.054	John Nye	C/NA	1. Repoint foundation.
2007.052	John Nye	C/A	1. Install a wood picket fence on both sides of the house with a gate in each side per photo attached.
2009.056	John Nye	C/NA	1. Repair front porch floor boards and stair rails, posts and newel post finial; and 2. Repaint.
2012.013	John Nye	C/NA	1. Install a washer and dryer vent on south side towards the rear along the driveway; and 2. Install a water spigot and hose bib on the garden side of the building.
2012.090	Sun Sasongko	C/NA	1. Install a new furnace to be vented through the north side near the rear; 2. Paint the vent to match trim or body; and 3. Install a pad for HVAC equipment behind the house.
2014.002	Sun Sasongko	C/A	1. The proposed windows along the driveway and side yard shall be set behind mahogany brick mold and on wood sills to match the existing in form, texture and dimensions. 2. The proposed replacement pigmented synthetic simulated divided-light awning windows shall be of a dark color to be approved by Staff.
2014.052	Sun Sasongko	C/A; C/NA	1. The existing gravel and dirt driveway shall be replaced with Redland Brick Co. Brick type "KF" pavers. 2. The deck stairs shall be relocated to face the rear of the property.

3. The new deck railings will be located at the currently existing location of the stairs and shall match the existing railings.
4. The brick patio shall be located behind the house and not visible from the public right of way.

1. *Precedence:*

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*
 1. *Remove Cape Cod berm along sidewalk;*
 2. *Construct a low 'dry-laid' stone wall to match the one along the driveway.*
 3. *Construct a low fence on top of wall.*
 4. *Add post to fence on the driveway.*

No requests have been considered for the removal of Cape Cod berms and their replacement with a 'dry-laid' wall. In the following cases, stone retaining walls that appear to be 'dry-laid' were granted Certificates of Appropriateness: 85 Benton Road (2003); 47 Columbus Avenue (2002); 8 Mount Vernon Street (2011), 74 Mount Vernon (2010) and 45 Tennyson Street (2014).

There is currently a picket fence on the property which received a Certificate of Appropriateness in 2007. The proposed fence would match it.

3. *Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The project is visible from Meacham Road.

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

The berm is crumbling near the walkway. The picket fence at the end of the driveway has been cut just short of the property line to allow for the installation of a post. See photos at the end of the document.

- *Are there are other considerations?*

Generally speaking, fences are not located on top of dry-laid walls but behind them. The connection between the post and the ground is critical to its appearance as a traditional element to the landscape.

- *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 entire project is visible from Meacham Road. The berm, driveway and fences were not discussed in the Form B. No historical architectural materials or features will be altered. No replacement of historic fabric is planned. The new materials proposed are traditional.

HPC Guidelines for landscaping which includes paths and driveways state:

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 major changes proposed are to the materials of the retaining wall/berm. The existing character of the street is primarily that of a 1890-1900 suburb.

Generally speaking the current HPC Guidelines do not address walls or fences *per se*. However, it is clear that the Guidelines recommend that historic buildings not be obscured by changes in the landscape. "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 Guidelines further state that "The general intent of this section is to preserve the existing or later essential landscape features that enhance the property." Fences "...can be seen as a transition feature between the structure and its ... surroundings."

2. *It is recognized that often the environment surrounding the property has a character, scale and street pattern quite different from that existing when the building was constructed. Thus, changes must frequently be made to accommodate the new condition, and the landscape treatment can be seen as a transition feature between the structure and its newer surroundings.*

There will be no changes to the essential character of the site.

3. *The existing landforms of the site should not be altered unless shown to be necessary for maintenance of the structure or site. Additional landforms will only be considered if they will not obscure the exterior of the structure.*

There will be no changes to the landform.

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.*

The building will not be obscured in any way, nor will the circulation pattern be altered. There will be no changes to the layout, only to the material of the low retaining wall and the addition of a low fence.

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; because no historic fabric will be altered and the proposed driveway material and alteration to the deck meet the Guidelines as discussed above. Therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Sun Sasongko, Owner of 56 Meacham Road a Certificate of Appropriateness** with the following contingencies.

1. The Cape Cod berm along sidewalk shall be removed; and

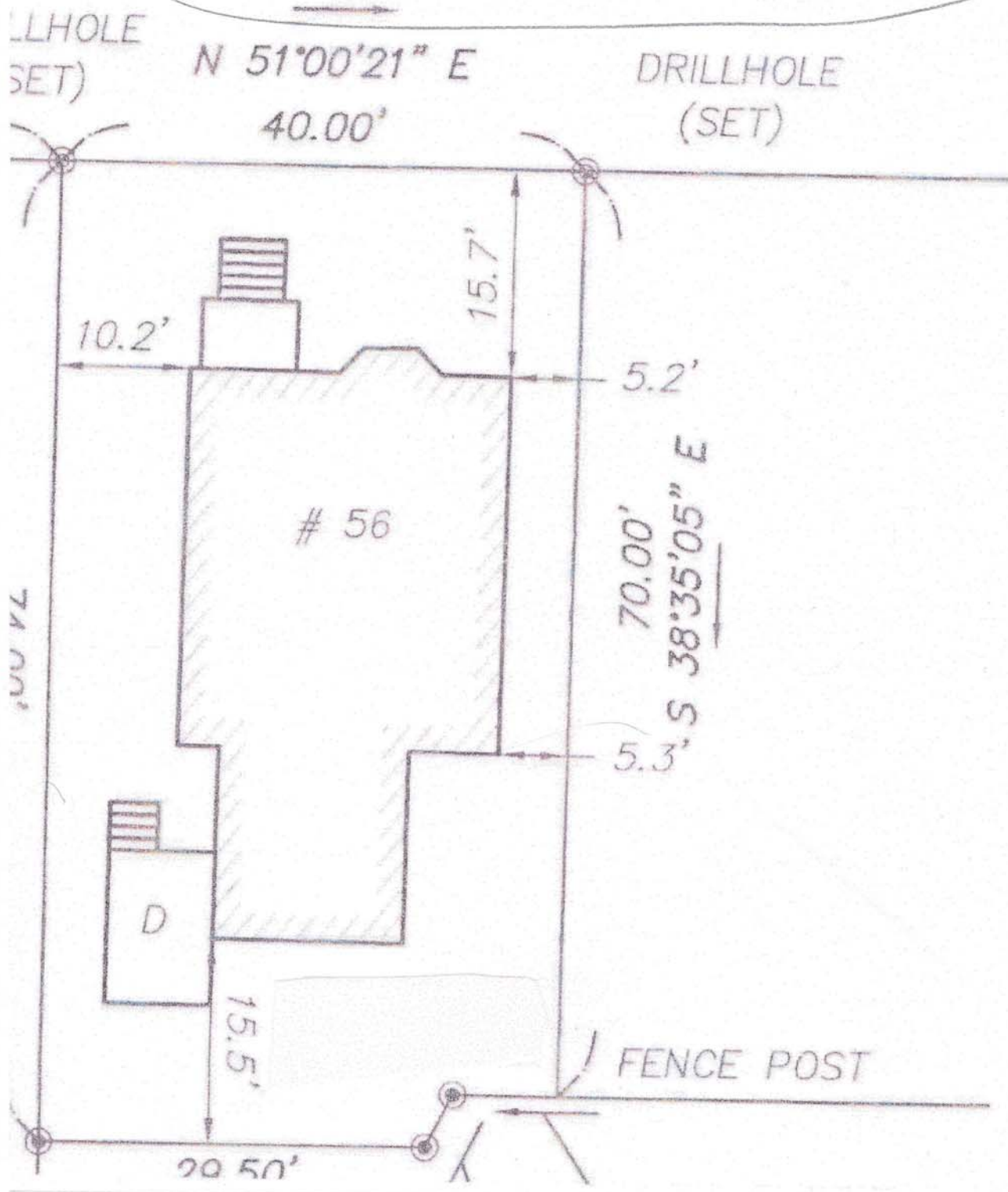
2. A low 'dry-laid' stone wall shall be constructed to match the one along the driveway.
3. A low fence may be constructed no taller than the existing fence from the sidewalk to the top of the posts and pickets.
4. The fence should be positioned behind the wall not located on top of it.
5. The fence posts shall match the existing fence and gate posts along the driveway and be no taller than 4' above grade.
6. A post shall be added to match the existing posts on the fence at the end of the driveway.
7. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate.



56 Meacham Road, 2014

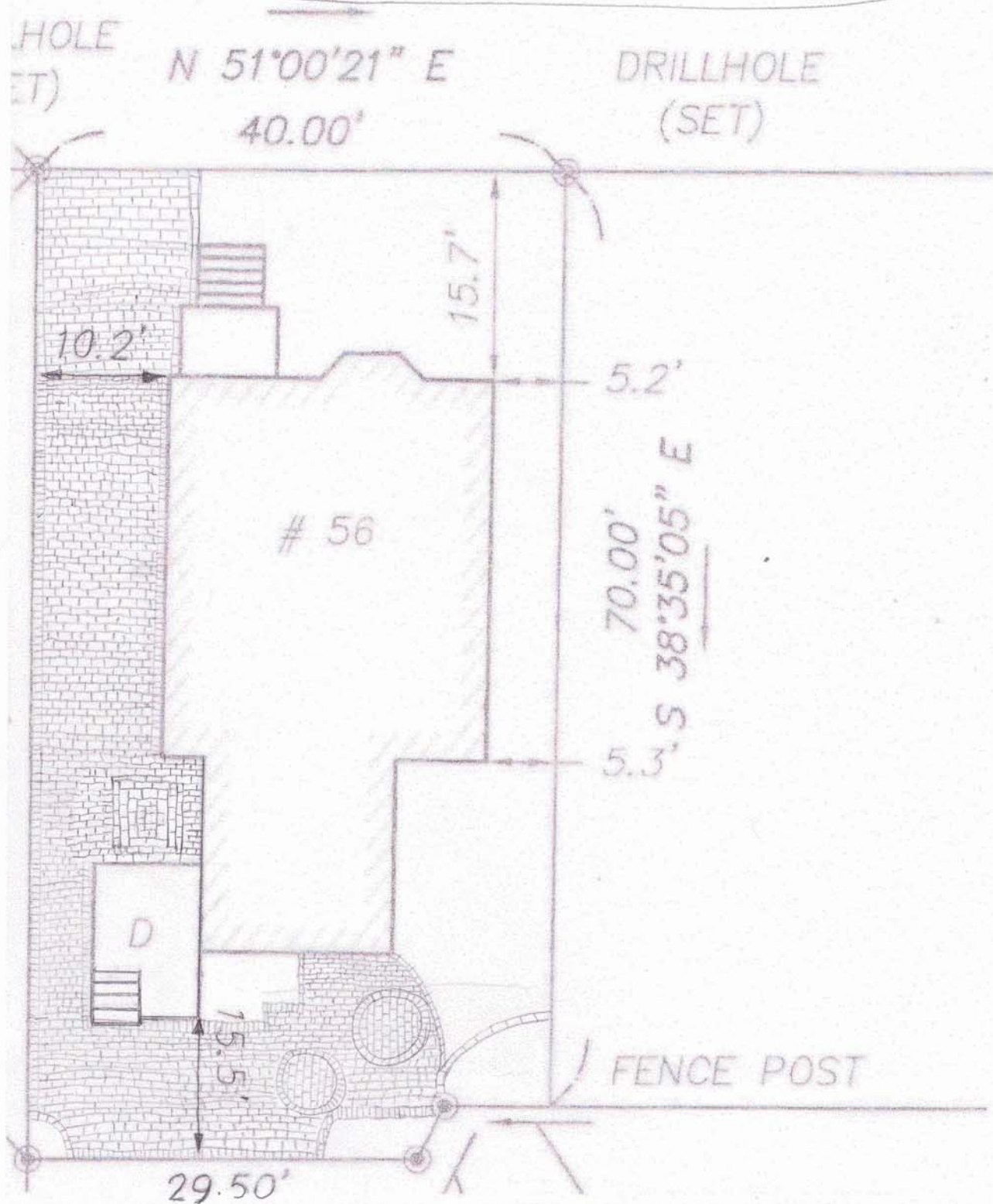
MEACHAM ROAD

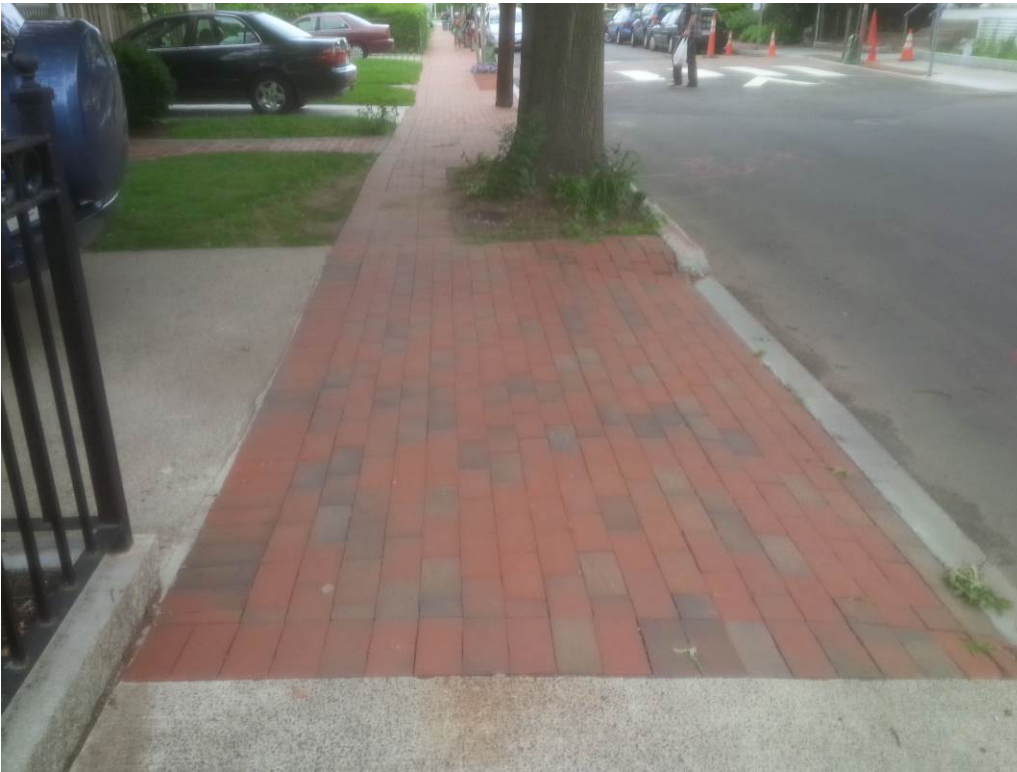
56 MEACHAM ROAD CURRENT PLOT PLAN



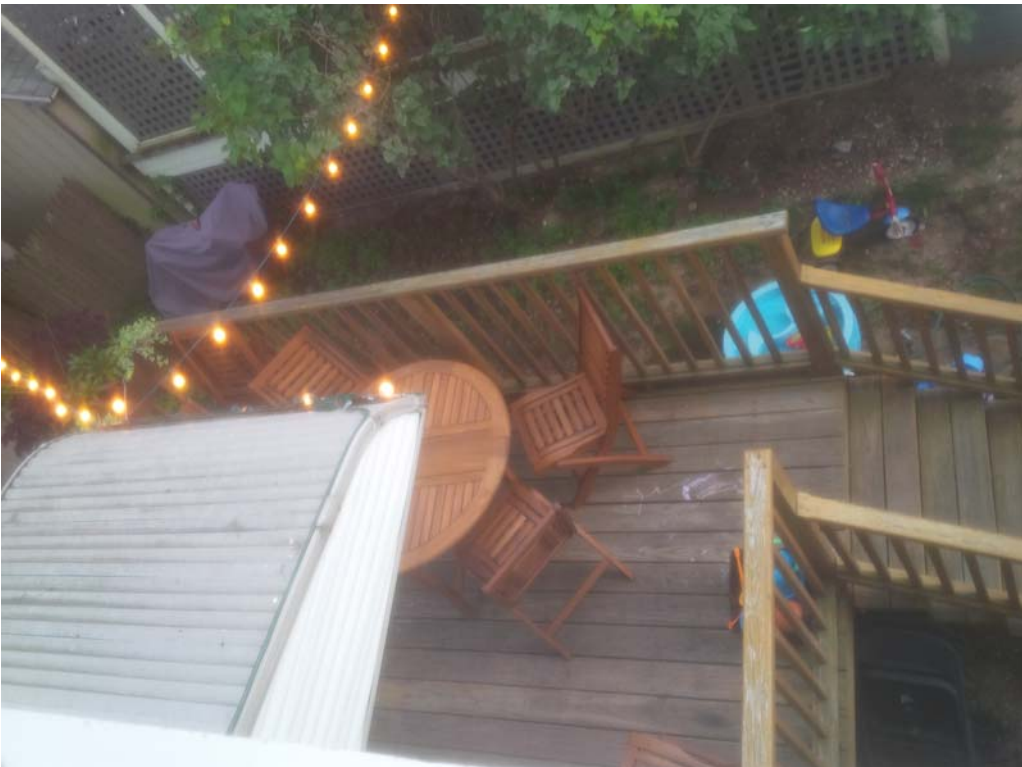
MEACHAM ROAD

56 MEACHAM RD PROPOSED PLAN





example of proposed driveway material used as sidewalk.



56 Meacham Road, 2014 stairs lead to driveway.