



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE  
MAYOR

*HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION*

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**ALTERATION TO A HISTORIC PROPERTY STAFF REPORT**

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Site:	148 Morrison Avenue	c.1870 William Pierce Rowhouses
Case:	HPC 2015.086	Single Building Local Historic District
Applicant Name:	Norman Campbell, Owner	
Applicant Address:	148 Morrison Avenue, Somerville, MA	
Agent's Name:	Astrid Blanco / Solar City	
Date of Application:	December 1, 2015 (Continued to January 19, 2016)	
Legal Notice:	<i>Install solar panels.</i>	
Staff Recommendation:	<i>Conditional Certificate of Appropriateness</i>	
Date of Public Hearing:	January 19, 2016	

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**I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION**

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:**

One of the only examples of a Mansard rowhouse in the area, this five-unit building is important for the light it sheds on the social and economic patterns of this area in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The clapboard-clad rowhouse is well-conserved, retaining its fine pedimented door hoods with heavy brackets, the paired sash pediment dormers over the entrances and the high profile lintels with brackets over other fenestration. The building is a focal point on the streetscape and sets the tone for the many other Mansard roof single and two-family houses on surrounding streets.



**HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:**

Located on the southeastern corner of Morrison Avenue and Clinton Street, the Mansard rowhouse was one of the first buildings in the immediate area. It is representative in style and scale of the types of dwellings built in the area in the 1860s and 1870s. It is also reflective of the economic status of residents in the area. Many of the local brickyard (Tufts brick Company) and railway workers settled in this part of Somerville. Morrison Avenue was one of the first streets developed and connected the western parts of Somerville, Davis Square and Powder House area with the Tufts Brick Yards. These brick yards were located only a few blocks east of this location. This area was also close to rail and later streetcar transportation.

The five-unit rowhouse was built by investor William H. Pierce who had a real estate and auctioneer business in Union Square. Pierce lived in one of the larger Somerville houses on Belmont near Summer

Street. The rowhouse continued to be rental property until the 1890s when at least one unit was sold to an owner / occupant, Andrew Wilson who worked as a local tinsmith.

## II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### *1. Proposal of Alteration:*

Install 19 solar electrical panels rated at 5.13 kw onto roof of existing home and to be interconnected with the home's electrical system. Structural upgrades will also be performed.

## II. FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the Commission require the Applicant and/or their agent to specifically identify the areas of the roof that will be subject to the installation of the panels as this information was not made clear in the application. From the documentation provided, it is unclear to Staff as to whether the proposed solar panels will be visible from a public way.

That said, Staff advises the Commission that under M.G.L. Chapter 184 §23C, property owners shall not be unduly prevented or restricted from the installation or use of solar energy systems.

*Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The Applicant and/or their agent must provide complete information regarding the visibility of the panels at the January 19<sup>th</sup> meeting.

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

The building is currently in very good condition with numerous replacement/restoration projects having taken place in the last few years.

- *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 affect 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.*

There will be no alterations of features discussed in the Form B.

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

Not applicable.

- 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 will be replaced under this application.

- 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.*

Given that this application refers to solar panels, item E is not applicable.

- 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 solar panels might be visible from a public way. Staff advises the Commission that under M.G.L. Chapter 184 §23C, property owners shall not be unduly prevented or restricted from the installation or use of solar energy systems.

*Porches, steps, trim and other exterior architectural elements*

2. *Fire escapes are very conspicuous features and, as a rule, should only be placed on the rear of the building, or where they are least visible from a public way. If installation on the street or side façade cannot be avoided, fire escapes should be designed and constructed with the same attention demanded by other major alterations and repairs, and are subject to the review and approval of the Commission.*

N/A

**Roofs**

1. *Preserve the integrity of the original or later important roof shape.*

The roof shape will not be altered.

2. *Retain the original roof covering whenever possible. If the property has a slate roof, conserve the roof slates. Slate is a near-permanent roofing material, and deterioration is generally caused by rusted roofing nails.*

Should shingles need to be replaced due to the solar panel installation process, the replacement shingles shall be of the same durability, tabbing, profile and color as those currently existing.

3. *Whenever possible, replace deteriorated roof covering with material that matches the old in composition, color, size, shape, texture, and installation detail.*

N/A

4. *Preserve the architectural features that give the roof its distinctive character, such as cornices, gutters, iron filigree, cupolas, dormers and brackets. Downspouts should be inconspicuously located and should be painted to match the color of the siding.*

No existing character-defining features will be removed.

5. *New dormers will be permitted if they are related to the forms, proportions, size and arrangement of existing windows, and constructed in matching materials and colors. If possible, new dormers should be confined to the rear of the house.*

N/A

6. *Skylights with flat profiles may be installed on the rear of the property.*

N/A

7. *Utility equipment, such as television antennae, air conditioners, solar collectors and other mechanical units should be restricted to the rear of the property or on portions of the roof that are not visible from a public way. If no other placement is possible, air conditioning and other cooling units on street facades should be of the slim-line type or set flush with the surface of the building and painted the same color as the window trim.*

Solar panels shall be installed in location(s) that are least visible from the public way, to the extent feasible.

### 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 recommends that a **conditional Certificate of Appropriateness** be granted to **Owner, Norman Campbell**, to install 19 solar panels at 148 Morrison Avenue.

Staff recommends that the following conditions be placed on the Certificate of Appropriateness:

1. All appropriate building permits shall be obtained from the Inspectional Services Division (ISD) prior to commencing any removal or replacement of the solar panels.
2. The Applicant/Owner shall contact HPC Staff should any aspect of this project proposal change including, but not limited to: size or location of replacement solar panels.
3. The Applicant/Owner shall inform HPC Staff once the installation of the solar panels is complete so that HPC Staff can coordinate with ISD personnel for final inspection.
4. Solar panels shall be of the smallest profile possible and shall not be of a color other than black.
5. Placement of solar panels shall be installed in (a) location(s) minimally visible from a public way and shall not be installed on the front roof elevation *to the extent possible*.