



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: 204 Morrison Avenue
Case: HPC 2014.091
Applicant Name: Ronald Dynneson, Owner
Applicant Address: 221 Morrison Avenue, Somerville, MA 02144
Date of Application: October 28, 2014
Legal Notice: *Install dormers, enlarge rear ell, and rebuild rear porch.*
Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: November 18, 2014



I. Building Description

Architectural Description: The following italicized text is predominantly from the survey Form B. *Constructed in 1871, 204 Morrison Avenue is a 2 ½-story, 2-bay, gable front Italianate dwelling with what was originally an L-shaped form, altered slightly by the addition of a rear wing ca. 1890. The house is set on a brick foundation and is currently clad in ca. 1960 aluminum siding although character-defining features such as paired brackets at the eaves, cornice returns and raised panels below the bay windows remain exposed. The roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles and a brick chimney rises from the ridge.*

The side hall façade entry is fronted by concrete steps and contains a modern wooden door with a four-part lunette window over four recessed panels with an exterior storm door. To the south of the entrance is a two-story, three-sided original bay window which is virtually intact. Both levels have a decorative cornice under the projecting eaves and raised panels below the windows. The base of the bay window has three horizontal openings filled with lattice work. The windows are also original – with wooden double-hung two-over-two windows on the front face, flanked by more slender 1/1 sash. All of the windows are fitted with exterior metal storm windows. Additional fenestration on the façade includes a single off-center 2/2 window above the entrance and another 2/2 window at the top of the gable.

The south elevation of the house is two bays deep with a single-story, three-sided bay window toward the rear. This bay window repeats the trim and detailing of the front, two-story bay window with the exception that it rests on a concrete-faced base. The north wall of the main house block is without openings. Projecting to the north from the rear of the main block is a smaller two-story ell of equal height. The north gable end of the ell is trimmed with projecting eaves ending in cornice returns and paired brackets that match the main, front gable.

Attached to the rear (west) of the cross-gable is a two-story, hip-roofed addition which was added ca. 1890. Like the original house, it displays paired brackets at the cornice and is set on a brick foundation. The windows on this portion of the house are slightly larger than those on the original house block. They also contain 2/2 sash but the tops of the windows extend to the frieze. The north and west (rear) elevations are a single bay wide and a single-story, two-bay porch (now enclosed by screens) spans the south

elevation with turned posts, turned balusters, and a bead board ceiling. In addition to the door on the first floor of the south porch, there is a modern glass-and-panel door above accessing the makeshift enclosed deck above. Projecting from the west end of the addition is a single-story storage shed.

Historical Context: The following italicized text is predominantly from the survey Form B.

The house at 204 Morrison Avenue is a key component in a varied streetscape of late 19th century wood-frame residences which includes gable front Italianate dwellings, mansard roofed cottages and Stick Style and Queen Anne variants. The combination of these dwellings illustrates the development of the neighborhood in a relatively short time span, fueled by improved transportation access.

The construction of this house reflects the speculative development of Morrison Avenue in the early 1870s following the introduction of railroad commuter service to Boston and Cambridge via the Lexington and Arlington Branch Railroad in 1870-1. The land on which this house stands was part of a larger parcel of 36,400 square feet sold by Nathaniel Morrison of Somerville and Ransom F. Evans of Boston to Thomas P. Beath of Boston in April 1871 for \$2,912 (MCSR Book 1154, Page 295). In January 1872 what is now 204 Morrison Avenue, including both land and buildings, was sold by Thomas Beath to Maria L. Austin, wife of Edward P. Austin for \$3,642 (MCSR Book 1195, Page 152). Austin worked as an astronomer at the Harvard observatory in Cambridge. He lived at what is now 204 Morrison Avenue only a short time. By the time of the 1875 directory he is listed as a Professor of Astronomy at Harvard and was boarding at 19 Everett Street in Cambridge. In 1881 the property was conveyed by Maria L. Austin and her husband to Corinne Smith, wife of Josiah Smith (MCSR Book 1563, Page 358). They may have rented the house before purchasing it in 1881. The 1887 directory lists Josiah Smith as a provisions dealer working at 42 North Street in Boston and living at 72 Morrison (later renumbered 204 Morrison). Widow Corinne Smith continued to live here after her husband's death. At the time of the 1910 Census she was sharing the house with her two granddaughters, Ruth, age 16, and Florence, age 9. By 1919 Ruth Smith had married Walter Marden and Corinne Smith conveyed the property to her (MCSR Book 4291, Page 496). At the time the deed indicates that the property included 9,164 square feet of land. In 1920 the Census indicates that the couple was living here with Corinne Smith, Walter's mother, Ella Marden, Albert Evans, a brother-in-law, Florence Evans, a sister-in-law, and Clara Walton, an aunt-in-law. Walter Marden worked as the manager of the Oscar Lundgren Co. in Boston, a tapestry (upholstery) house. The 1930 and 1940 Censuses show that Walter and Ruth Marden occupied the house by themselves.

II. Project Description

Project History: The Applicant went before the Zoning Board of Appeals in August 2014 and received approval for a Historic B & B use, contingent upon completion of the historic designation process. The Applicant also came before the HPC in August to request demolition of the garage, which was determined Significant but not Preferably Preserved, and to discuss the intended changes to the building with the HPC to obtain some feedback prior to a formal submission. Due to the existing ZBA approval, the HPC should be cognizant that certain revisions to the project would require the Applicant to go back to the ZBA. These are:

1. Changes that would contravene the legal notice, any finding, or condition original approval.
2. Changes that would detrimentally impact matters of substance identified in meeting minutes of original hearings.
3. Changes that would alter the character of the development.
4. Changes that would be so significant as to be noticeable to persons generally familiar with the original approval.

Project proposal: Alterations to the building include the addition of three gable dormers and an enlarged rear addition. Two dormers will be located on the left side roof plane and look toward Grove Street. A third dormer will be located on the right side roof plane, consistent with those on the other side. Each dormer will have one sash window in the gable with return eaves for compatibility with the Italianate style of the house; brackets were previously proposed for the dormer and the HPC advised to make these dormers of a more simple design. The existing 1890 hip roof rear addition will be enlarged through a gable addition that

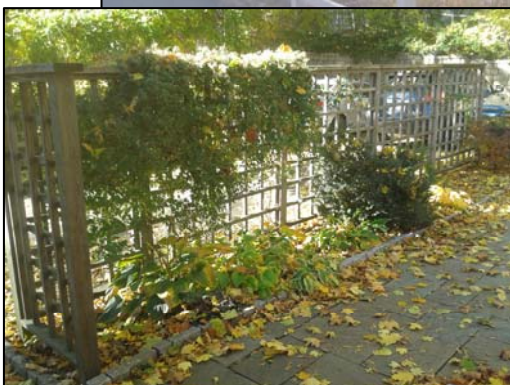
retains the hip roof form on the western portion of the rear massing. This addition will have one window and one door on both the first and second floors. New windows are proposed to be composed of wood and have one-over-one glazing. The rear porch will be reconstructed to be flush with the eastern façade of the building. The Applicant proposes to replicate the existing baluster profile of the first story rear porch at a length and railing height that will meet building code due to, 1) the existing 27" height of the balusters on the first floor, which does not meet code height even with the installation of a view panel; 2) the priority of the Applicant to have a railing the meets building code due to the Historic B&B use; and 3) the new two-story rear porch would not be original to the building. The balusters/railings would be consistent in height between the first and second floor. The altered porch will also incorporate a wheelchair lift at the rear and will be consistent with the existing porch with regard to Italianate style architectural detail.

Alterations to the site plan include the HPC approved demolition of the existing garage/shed at the rear of the driveway, the addition and screening of an enlarged parking area to be composed of brick pavers, new fencing, a new garden shed and a rear patio (also to be composed of brick pavers). The parking area would be screened with fencing, landscaping, and a new garden shed that is 12' x 8' x 9' (length-width-height). A 3.5' split rail fence will be located along the Grove Street and Morrison Avenue property lines and a 5'-8" fence will be located around the parking to mitigate views, which will enable vegetation to climb. A rear brick paver patio will be installed behind the existing dwelling with a brick paver path to the parking area and to the ADA lift. Last, the site will incorporate a new garden shed and a meandering (stone dust) pathway.



Top: 204 Morrison Avenue

Bottom (left to right): fence to screen parking; fence to locate along Grove Street; & proposed shed



III. Findings for a Certificate of Appropriateness

Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

This is the first time the owners have come before the HPC as a designated historic property. The garage was determined not Preferably Preserved in August 2014.

Precedence:

Certificates for multiple changes with a substantial impact to the visual identity of the property, such as the construction of dormers, the enlargement of rear additions, and the reconstruction of existing porch details in combination with hardscape changes to the overall site, are not commonly sought.

- There have been several cases where new dormers were constructed on historic buildings. For 245 Beacon St (2005) and 50 Bow St (2003), the replicated dormers were based upon historic photographs. 56 Meacham Road (2001) and 34 Day St (2010) replicated the existing dormers. 30 Forest St (2002) and 117 Washington St (2011) had small shed dormers added on the side and rear of their respective buildings.
- In 2011, 117 Washington Street added a one story rear addition in the location of the existing deck with siding to match existing shakes and in 2003, 6 Westwood Road constructed a new two-story addition.
- Porch details are routinely reconstructed due to the deterioration of materials which is often weather, construction, and use dependent. The Staff often issues Certificates for repairs and maintenance in kind while the HPC has issued Certificates for 47 Mt. Vernon St in 2013 to replace concrete steps with wood steps and handrails, balusters and newel posts and 222 Morrison Avenue in 2014 to replace wood railings with a simple generic style where the height of the porch railings shall be that of the original railings and shall meet building code and the replacement balusters shall be heavier weight.
- The HPC also routinely reviews alterations to hardscape such as driveway materials, retaining walls, pathways, and fencing. Various solutions are found for each property dependent upon the compatibility of the material proposed as well as the individual goals of each Applicant.

Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?* Due to the change in massing of the rear addition and the construction of three new dormers, the proposal will be highly visible from Grove Street and Morrison Avenue.
- *What are the Existing Conditions of the building / parcel?* The current owners sought historic designation to utilize the Historic B & B use; therefore, Staff encouraged the Applicant to request comments from the HPC prior to designation to ensure the HPC is in support of the proposed changes. In order to create interior space that will accommodate 6 guestrooms as well as innkeeper's quarters, the rear ell is proposed to be enlarged and new dormers incorporated into the existing roofline. The Applicant also has to meet the parking requirements, which makes necessary hardscape alterations to the existing site layout.
- *Does the proposal coincide with the General Approach set forth in the Design Guidelines?*

General Approach - The primary purpose of the Preservation Ordinance is to encourage preservation and high design standards in Local Historic Districts, in order to safeguard the architectural heritage of the City. Guidelines have been developed to 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.*

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.

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.

The design approach to alter the rear addition of this historic structure is compatible with the historic and architectural integrity of this building and the Morrison Avenue historic district as these proposed changes take into account the form and massing, architectural details, and compatibility with the adjacent historic district and Morrison Avenue streetscape. The original two-story, gable end form will be retained while the later rear addition will become enlarged and incorporate a new gable roofline; however, the existing hip roof will still be retained on the opposite side. Architectural details include the brackets, door hood, original windows and bays, which will not be altered.

Due to the Historic B&B use, this rear addition also requires some modification to doors, windows and the two-story rear porch. While all original window locations will retain their original windows, new window and door locations will incorporate a compatible wood material for windows and doors; however, these will be one-over-one, instead of the original composition of two-over-two in order to subtly discern the difference between original and altered. The proposed solution regarding the porch balusters, similar profile but building code height, also subtly illustrates this is not an original architectural feature.

***New additions** - 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.*

The enlarged addition retains the original two-story gable that fronts onto Morrison Avenue and is located at the rear of the house. This addition is compatible in size as the addition would remain flush with the original side façade of the building whereas the original portion of the addition would remain in the existing location. This addition is compatible in scale as the addition steps down from the main massing of the dwelling; the addition will be compatible with regard to material and character of the property due to the use of clapboards, wood windows, and compatible architectural features.

***Landscape Features and Paving** - The general intent of this section is to preserve the existing or later essential landscape features that enhance the property.*

The side yard at the corner of Grove Street and Morrison Avenue is a green space that has never been developed. The garage will be removed, pavers will create parking and pathways, fencing will be installed to mitigate views of parking and further define the parcel, and a new garden shed will be located near the corner. The Applicant proposes to enhance this area through the use of hardscape and fencing. Although this will alter the landscape, the intent is to retain as much softscape as possible and enhance this area of the property through additional vegetation and plantings which will serve as an amenity to the property and the larger neighborhood.

IV. 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 Morrison Avenue Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Ron Dynneson, owner of 204 Morrison Avenue, a Certificate of Appropriateness** for changes that include the construction of three gable dormers, enlarging the rear ell, and rebuilding the two-story rear porch. Staff recommends the following conditions: 1) the exterior sheathing shall be wood clapboards, 2) new windows only shall be one-over-one and composed of wood, 3) doors shall be composed of wood, 4) if the approval differs from the plans, new plans shall be submitted to Historic Staff prior to commencing the work (rear windows/balusters); and 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.



Proposed Bed and Breakfast for 204 Morrison Avenue, Somerville, MA.



The Morrison House

Bed & Breakfast

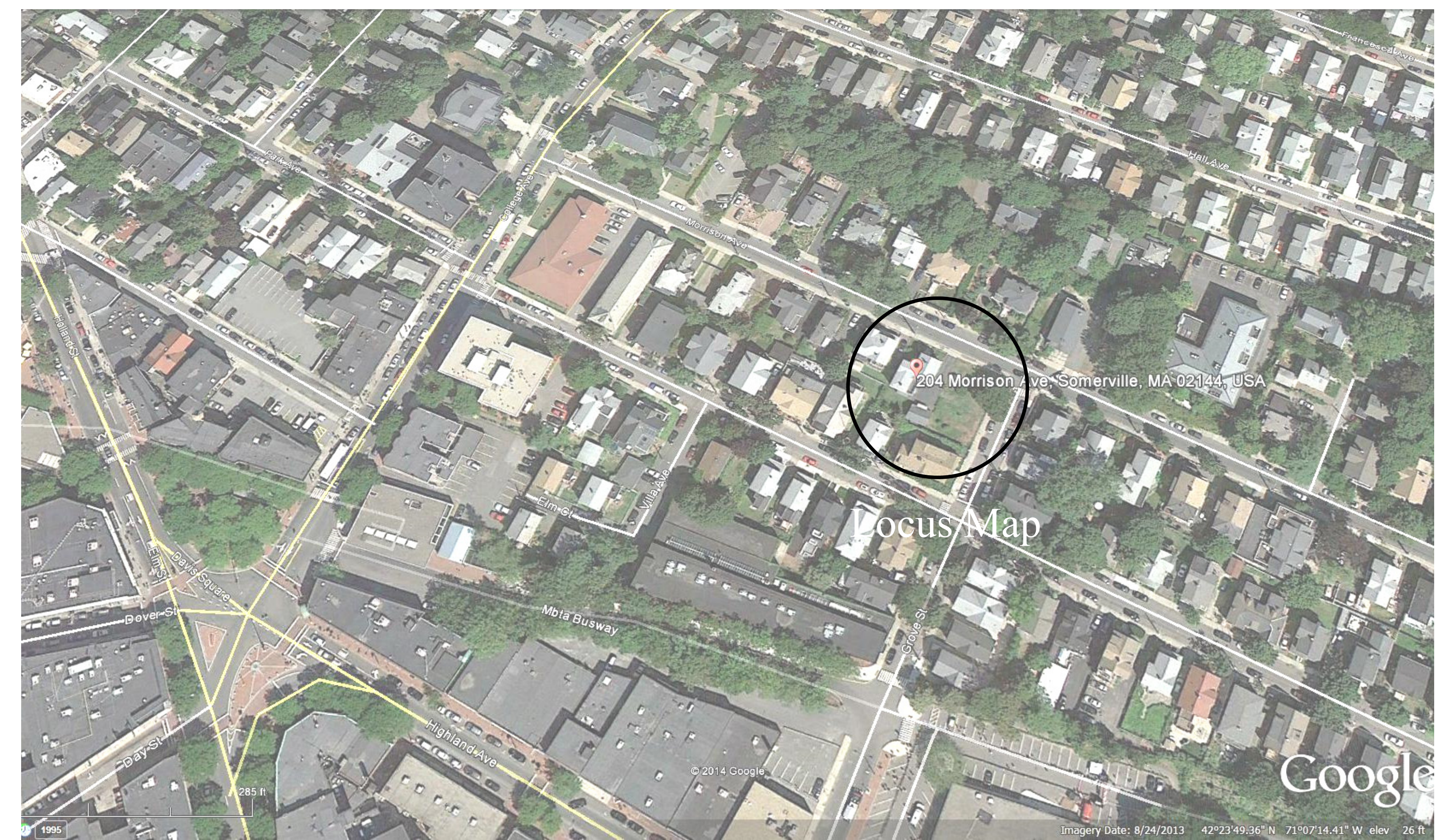
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August 8, 2014



View looking east along Morrison Avenue



Locality Plan



View looking west along Morrison Avenue



View looking north along Morrison Avenue



Bourque Design

Architectural Design from
Conception to Construction

Ron Bourque , Architect
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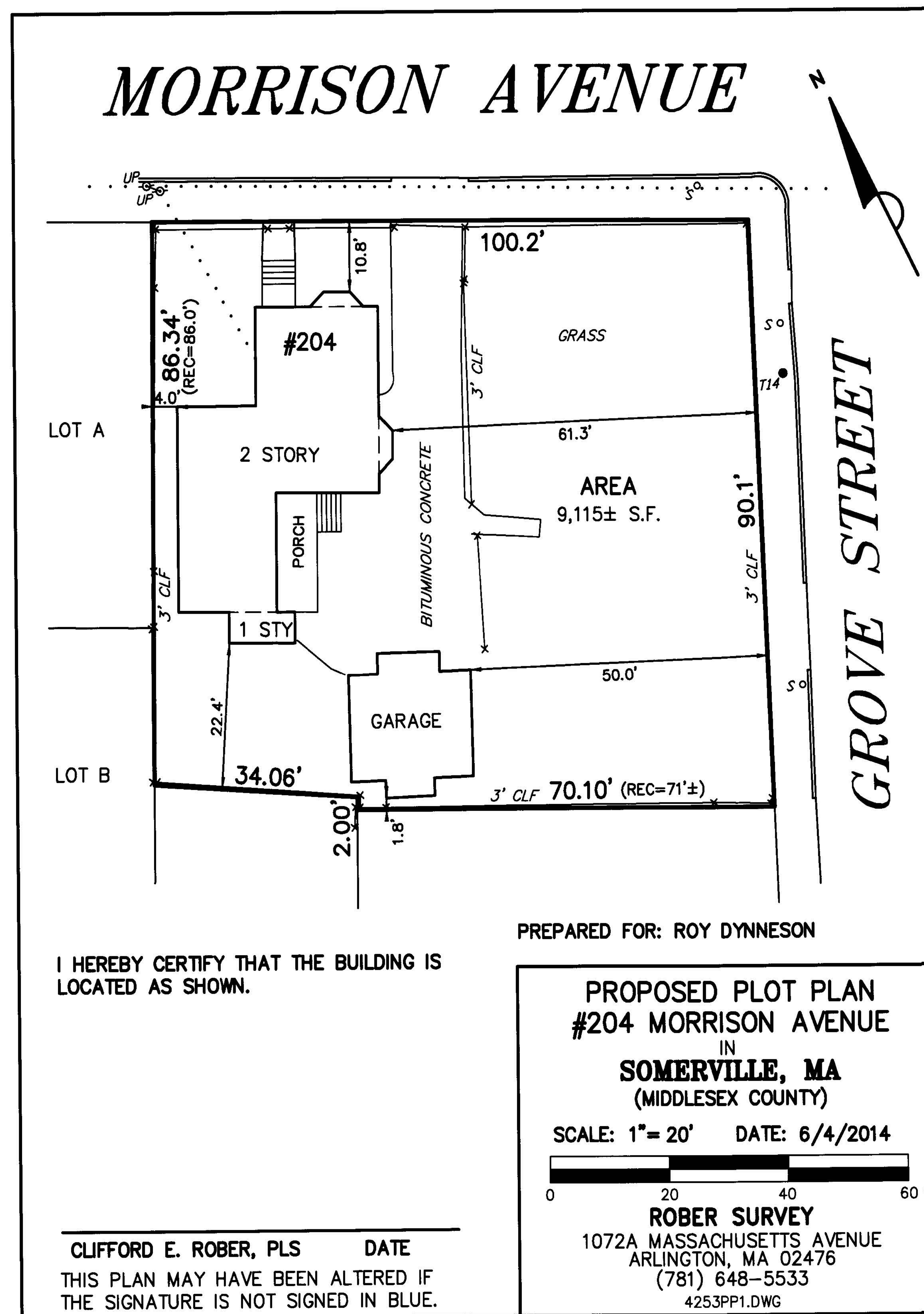
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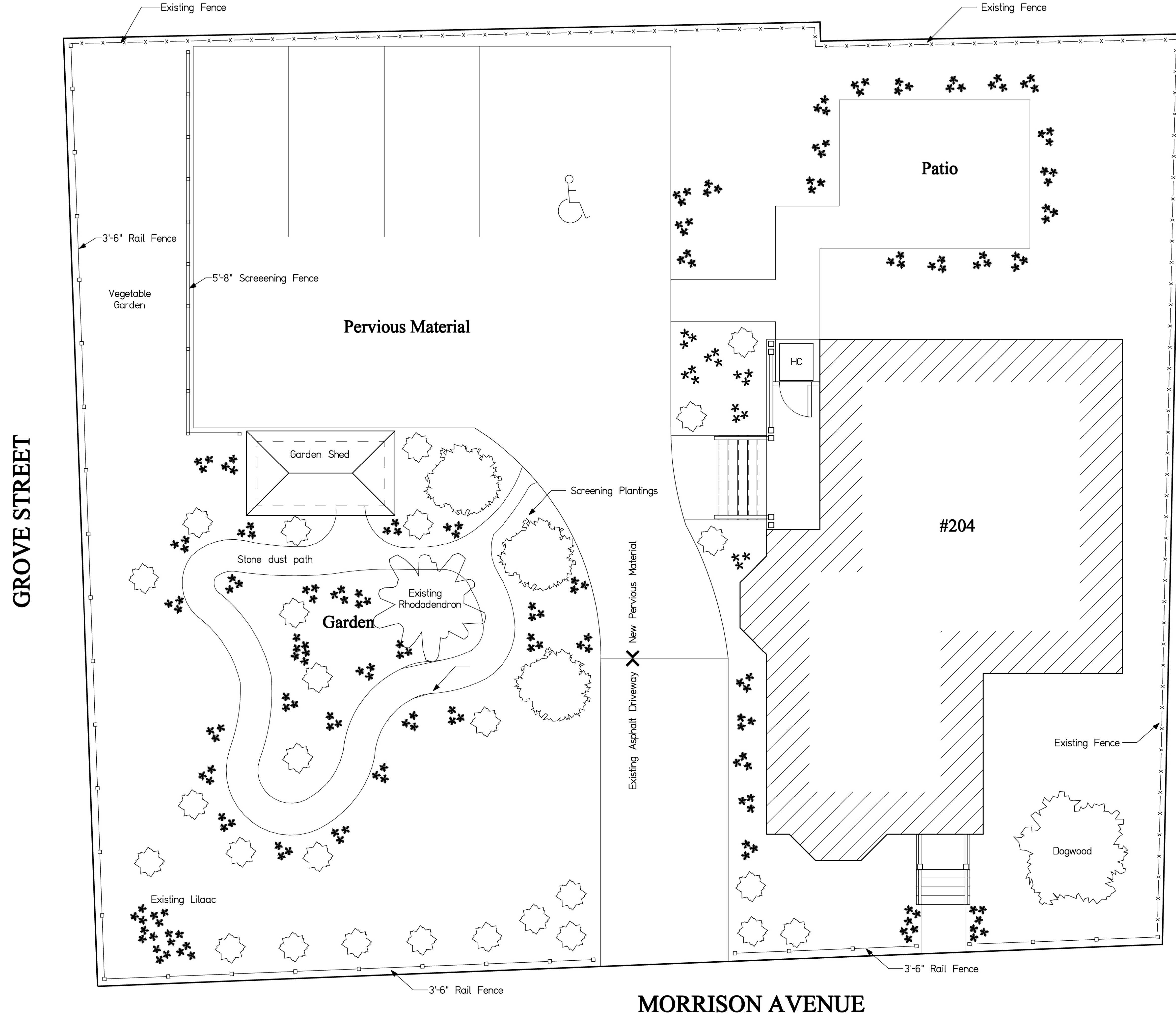
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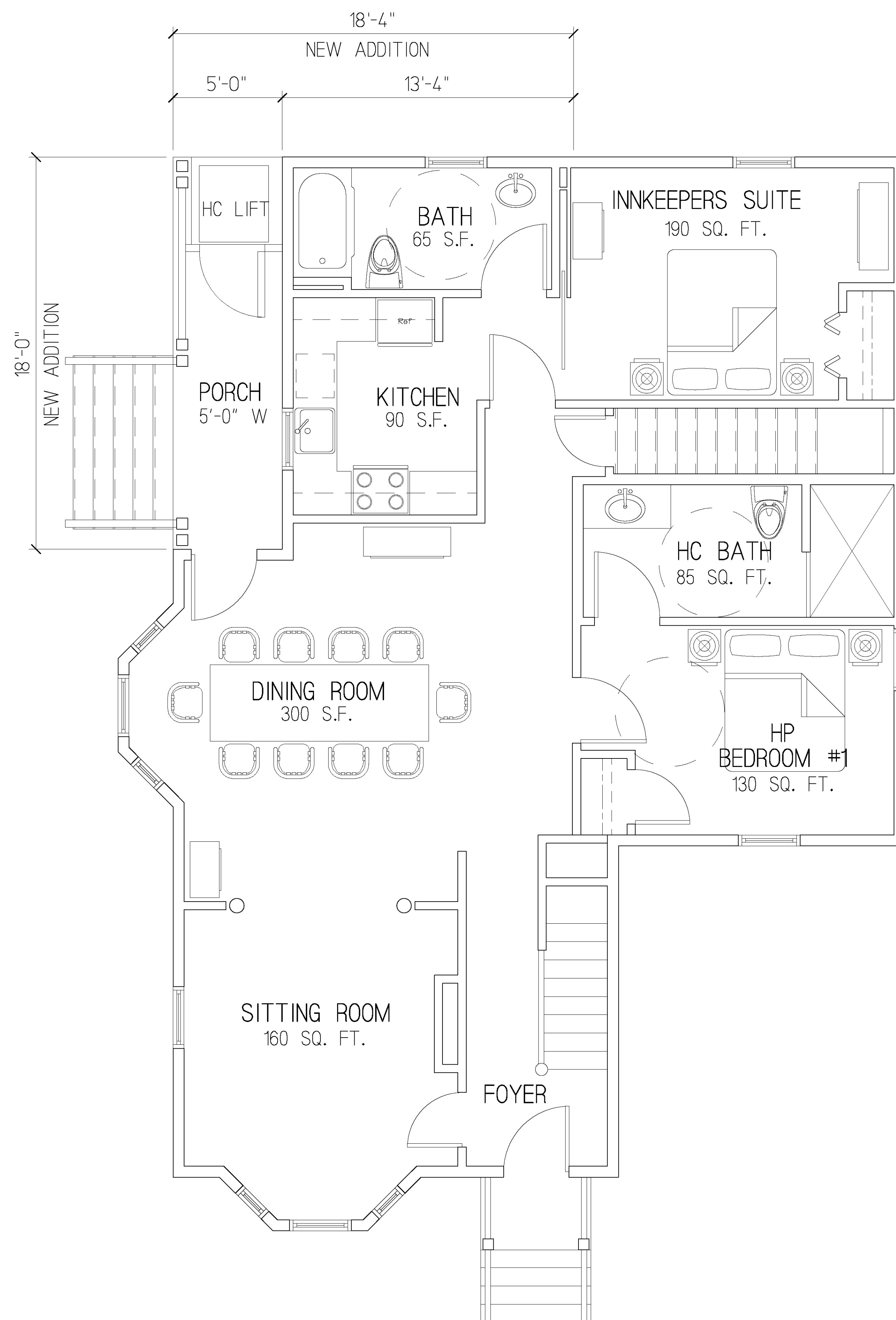
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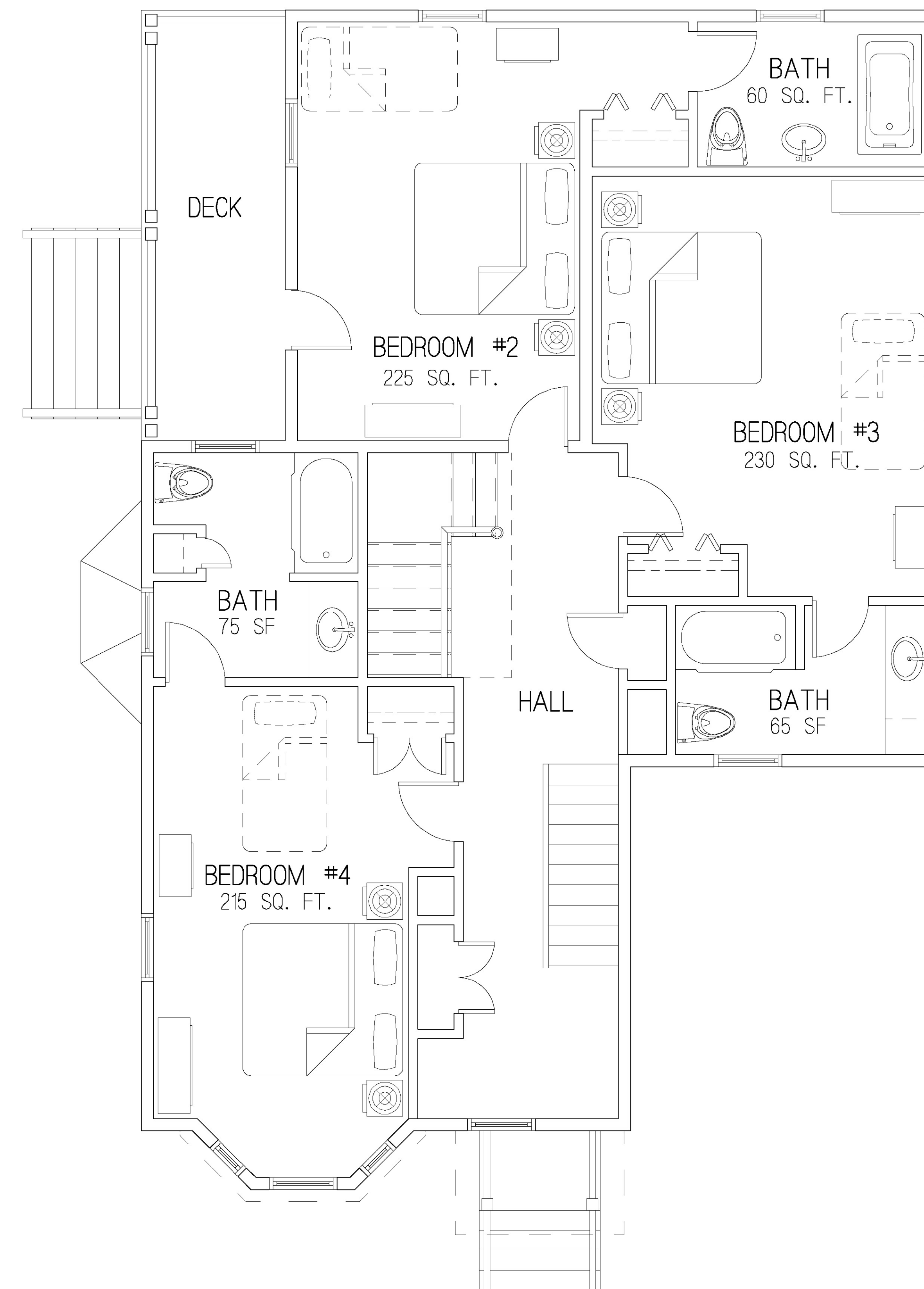
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Proposed First Floor Plan



Proposed Second Floor Plan



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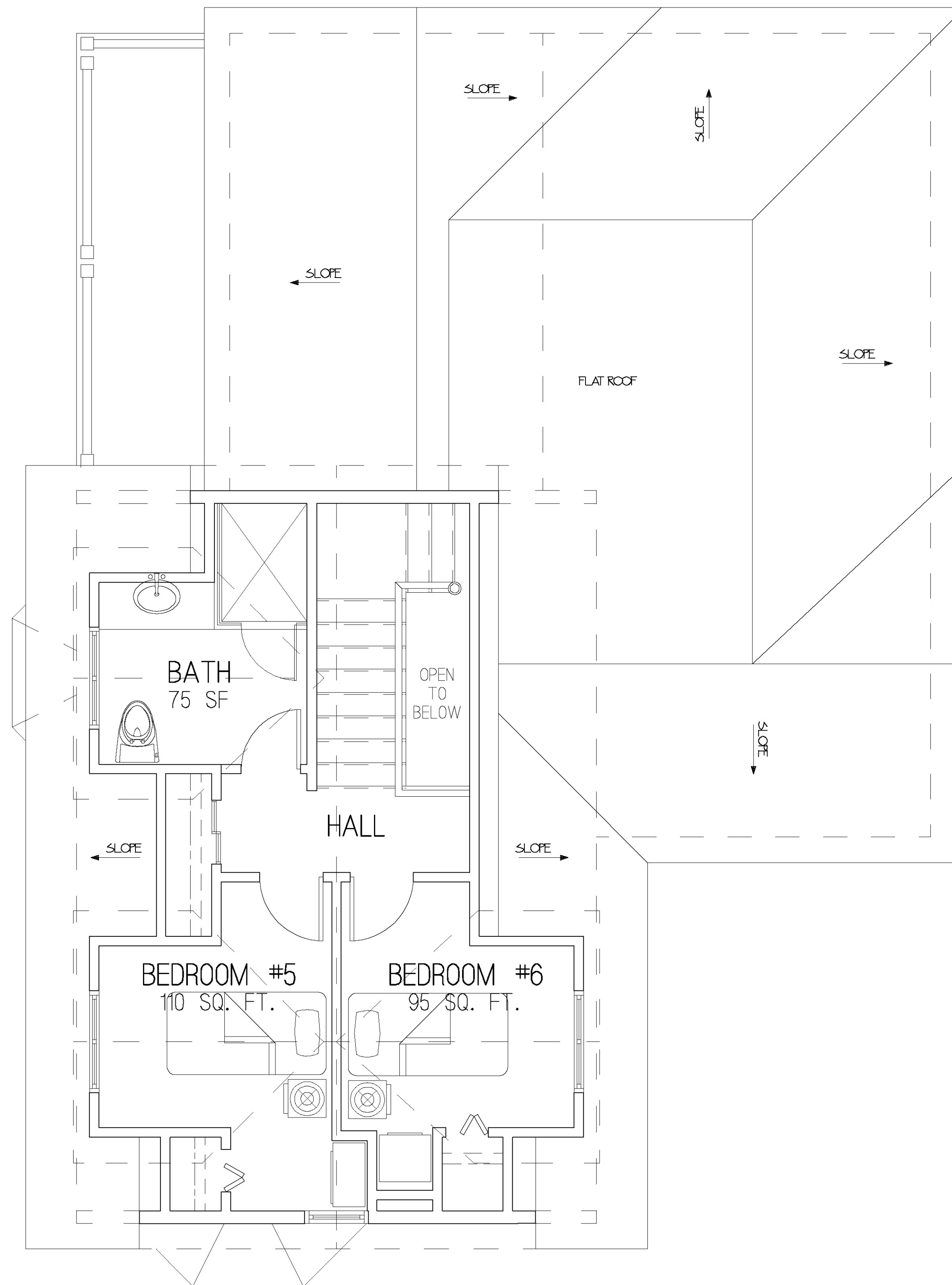
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Proposed Third Floor Plan



Front Elevation



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Left Elevation



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Right Elevation



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Rear Elevation



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Existing View



Perspective View



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Existing View



Perspective View



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