



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:	140 Morrison Avenue	c.1870 William H. Pierce Rowhouses
Case:	HPC 2015.012	Local Historic District
Applicant Name:	Brian & Katia Green, Owner	
Applicant Address:	140 Morrison Avenue, Somerville, MA 02143	
Date of Application:	April 2, 2015	
Legal Notice:	<i>Remove main chimney & rear deck, enlarge rear addition and enlarge basement windows.</i>	
Staff Recommendation:	Conditional Certificate of Appropriateness	
Date of Public Hearing:	April 21, 2015	

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 pattern of this area in the late 18th 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.



140 Morrison Avenue,

HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:

Located on the south eastern 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 the railway workers settled in this part of Somerville.



140-148 Morrison Avenue, 1985

Morrison Avenue was one of the first streets developed and connected the western parts of Somerville, Davis Square and Powder House with the Tufts Brickyards, 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: See the final pages for plans and photos.

1. Demolish existing rear deck and stairs;
2. Construct a 74 SF sunroom/dining room addition with painted wood exterior walls, wood windows and patio doors and a tan membrane roof;
3. Add small porch and stairs to the rear of the building;
4. Construct a shallow window well and install basement windows on the rear ell of the building;
5. Alter grade on east side of the building;
6. Add basement windows;
7. Remove existing chimney on the main roof; and
8. Replace chimney with Vintage Brick fiber cement board, in the Alexandria Buff.

The owners need more space for their growing family and would like to remain in Somerville. To do so, they need to enlarge the living space. Therefore they request a Certificate of Appropriateness to enlarge the existing rear ell of the building, dig and fence off a window well or alter the grade to maintain the path and to allow for windows in the basement. Due to reconfiguration of the house on the interior, they would like to remove the main chimney and if necessary replace it with Vintage Brick fiber cement board, in the Alexandria Buff.

The existing rear deck and stairs would be demolished and the basement and original rear ell extended to include the addition. The new section would have a membrane roof, more fenestration on the east side, a small porch and stairs leading into the back yard. Basement windows will be added to the original ell with a shallow well. A small landing porch and steps will replace the existing rear deck.

II. FINDINGS

1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

C/A	Brian & Katia Green	2003.052	1. Replace existing chain link fence at front, side with a "Sudbury" scalloped wood fence and at the back of property with a wood stockade fence from the rear corner of the building to the back. A gate is to be placed at the rear corner of the building where the two types of fencing meet per sketch dated 2/20/04.
C/NA	Brian & Katia Green	2004.022	1. Repair or replace in kind gutters, fascia, wood shingles at rear of house.
C/NA	Brian & Katia Green	2006.067	1. Repair and replace rotted and damaged planks; 2. Repair and replace rotted front door jamb; 3. Remove steel door at rear, not visible from public right-of-way and 4. Replace with a wood door.
C/A	Brian & Katia Green	2010.021	1. Replace existing windows on the side elevation with white aluminum clad or primed, full screen insulated glass window sash with simulated divided 2/2 lights except where previously replaced (kitchen & second floor rear); 2. Replace existing windows with white aluminum clad or primed, full screen insulated glass window sash with simulated divided 2/2 lights on ground floor rear facade, minimally visible from the public alley; and 3. Replace existing windows on the front façade with

double-hung wood 2/2 sash and casings of an appropriate size and sash pattern and storm windows

1. *Precedence:*

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*

1. Demolish existing rear deck and stairs;
2. Construct a 74 SF sunroom/dining room addition with painted wood exterior walls, wood windows on two levels; patio doors, and a tan membrane roof;
3. Add small porch and stairs to the rear of the building;
4. Add a shallow window well to the rear of the building with paired double-hung sash directly below the existing paired windows in the ell.
5. Alter grade; and
6. Install two basement windows on east side of the building;
7. Remove existing chimney on the main roof.

The Commission has granted Certificates of Appropriateness for the construction of additions on buildings in a Local Historic District and three Certificates of Non-Applicability not visible from the public right of way: one Certificate of Appropriateness for an addition was for an ADA elevator (55 Columbus Avenue, 2006); another for an enlarged roof addition (53 Columbus Avenue, 2015); three Certificates of Appropriateness were for structures minimally visible from the public right of way (8 Aldersey Street, 2006; 30 Day Street, 2010; and 221 Morrison Avenue, 2010), 117 Washington Street, 2011 added a one story rear addition in the location of the existing deck with siding to match existing shakes, and 6 Westwood Road, 2003 constructed a new two-story addition; and three Certificates of Appropriateness were issued for large additions that complimented the original structure (25 Clyde Street, 2012; 23 Porter Street, 2010 and 380 Somerville Avenue, 2011). All additions visible from the public right of way may be separated from the main building with little loss to the original historic fabric. The proposed addition falls into an intermediate category. It is much smaller than the three large additions approved between 2010 and 2012 and most similar to the 221 Morrison Avenue addition which was also visible from a secondary and little used public right of way.

The alteration of the grade to allow for the installation of basement windows has never come before the Commission at least since 2001. Window wells have been rarely reviewed by the Commission. Only one building received Certificates of Appropriateness: 75-77 Columbus Avenue, 2005 and 2008, enlarged basement windows for egress on secondary elevations minimally visible from the public right of way. 34 Day Street received a Certificate on Non-Applicability for a window well not visible from the public right of way. One alteration in grade has received Certificates of Appropriateness to allow for better vehicular circulation on the site: 11 Linden Avenue (2013).

Chimneys are frequently reconstructed as the mortar fails. Since 2001, two buildings have received Certificates of Appropriateness for the removal of a chimney – 30 Day Street because the chimney was minimally visible; and 140 Highland Avenue where building was an asymmetrical Queen Anne so the loss of the chimney would be less drastic, the chimney was a poor reconstruction, not considered character-defining and would be replaced with decorative red slates to match the existing roof pattern. It is far preferable to reconstruct a failing chimney with closely matching bricks than to lose a character-defining feature.

While many Certificates have been issued to repair and maintain chimneys, several have also been issued to alter chimneys with regard to location and reconstruction as well as to allow chimney caps. These Certificates often ensure the mortar characteristics will be maintained and that the cap does not obstruct the chimney. While there are no Certificates that identify brick veneers as part of their alteration, the overall concern is to maintain the chimney in-kind. Several Certificates of Non-

Applicability have been issued to remove and rebuild existing chimneys, and the replication of missing upper courses of chimneys based on physical or photographic evidence.

While the following do not completely meet HPC Guidelines, the Commission has granted Certificates of Appropriateness for reconstructed chimneys at the following locations: 178 Central Street (2004), 117 Washington Street (2011) 30 Bow Street (2013), 53 Columbus Avenue (2014) with Staff review to ensure that the bricks were the same size, texture, style and detailing to match the originals. The only chimney reconstruction completed was at 30 Bow Street.

3. *Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The rear of the building is visible from an un-named public right of way that serves 22 and 32 Clifton Street, as well as the rear of 140-148 Morrison Avenue although the rear of 140 Morrison is obscured by a 6' stockade fence. The side of the building where the grade will be altered and new windows added is visible from Morrison Avenue. The chimney is easily visible from Morrison Avenue along and the right of way at the rear of the building along with all the other chimneys in the row.

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

This is the end unit in a Mansard row. From Morrison Avenue, the houses retain a consistent character with replacement windows in at least two of the units. Each of the rowhouses has a single prominent simple chimney with an additional small chimney on the ell. The fencing is inconsistent along the row and with the period of the building. 148 Morrison has a large addition on the rear along Clifton Street. The remaining portion of the row has small double ells mirroring each other across the property lines. The fenestration in the rear varies slightly reflecting changing living patterns within the ells.

Due to the stockade fence only the top portion of the rear ell of 140 Morrison Avenue is visible. The current ell is shared by its mirror on 142 Morrison Avenue. The rear ells of the rowhouse are not identical having been changed by their owners over time. A brick walkway leads from the front walkway around the side of the house. There are no basement windows visible along the side of the house.

- *Is the proposal more appropriate than the existing conditions?*

While making no alterations to the exterior of the house is optimal and the existing condition of the building reflects its original age, purpose and style of construction. The proposal adapts the building to modern living with more space for each of the inhabitants in manner that is not derogatory to the William H. Pierce Rowhouses Local Historic District provided that the chimney is replaced with one that is identical to the other chimneys in the row in regards to shape, form, texture, and size of brick.

The complete removal of a chimney is not appropriate. The chimney currently exists and is an emblematic external manifestation of the building's historic internal configuration and use. Chimneys are considered character defining features. The replacement of existing fabric with replicas and non-historic materials is strongly discouraged as the replacement creates a false image of the historic fabric and eliminates the historic record.

On rare occasions, the Commission may take into consideration the distance from the street, the ability of a viewer to clearly see the alteration, and the durability of the proposed alteration. When the proposed alteration is a replica of the original and indistinguishable from it, the Commission may choose to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness for the alteration to the chimney with the contingency that the reproduction is an exact visual replica of the original.

The circulation pattern around the house is retained through the creative use of grading to allow for windows on the east side of the building.

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

The proposed addition does not detract appreciatively from the original structure and could be read as a logical expansion over time. The additional basement windows are appropriately sized and located to blend the old and the new. The removal of character-defining elements such as chimneys is not in-keeping with Local Historic District Guidelines as discussed below. However, the owners suggest the possibility of a faux chimney. The retention and reconstruction of the existing fabric is always preferable to its replacement with an imitation.

1. *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.

- 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.*
- Whenever possible, deteriorated material or architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced or removed.*
- When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence of the original or later important features.*
- 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 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 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, mansard form will be retained while the later rear addition will become enlarged to resemble an enclosed porch. Architectural details include the brackets, door hood, original windows and bays, which will not be altered.

Other than the chimney, no historical features will be removed. The back porch has been replaced numerous times. Openings will be made in the basement wall for windows and new brick to match the existing will be used where needed.

No replacement of missing architectural features will be undertaken. Gutters and trim on the new addition will match the existing.

No historic materials will be replaced other than the chimney. Existing windows are replacements.

The existing chimney is visible. The regrading, the new basement windows and the east side of the new addition will be visible from Morrison Avenue. The new addition will be visible from the un-named public right of way/alley serving 22, 32 Clifton Street and the rear of 140-148 Morrison Avenue.

SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

Masonry:

- Wherever possible, original masonry and mortar should be retained.*

- b. *Original mortar should be duplicated in composition, color, texture, joint size, joint profile and method of application.*
- c. *Deteriorated masonry should be repaired and replaced with material which matches as closely as possible the original.*

Wherever possible, original masonry and mortar will be retained. The owners are working with Spalding Brick to find bricks to match the existing as closely as possible in terms of texture, color, size and density. They originally proposed a fiber veneer panel for the chimney reconstruction, however recent e-mails and conversations about the properties and characteristics of the materials show a willingness to another approach using real brick veneer with characteristics that match the existing brick in form, texture, color, size and placement.

Roofs:

1. *Preserve the integrity of the original or later important roof shape.*
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.*
3. *Whenever possible, replace deteriorated roof covering with material that matches the old in composition, color, size, shape, texture and installation detail.*
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.*

There will be no alteration of the roof shape or materials. Chimneys are a major element in the visual cues of the history and use of a building. The elaboration or simplicity of a chimney, where it is located tells a lot about the building and its inhabitants. The existing chimneys are both very simple, indicating that they may have been truncated or rebuilt in a utilitarian fashion. No building permits were found for chimney repair.

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. If aluminum windows must be installed, select a baked finish that matches as closely as possible the color of the existing trim. Investigate weather-stripping and storm windows with a baked enamel finish as an alternative to the replacement of historic sash.*

Existing openings will not be altered with the exception of the ell and rear wall where the addition will be incorporated into the structure. New openings will be sized to match the windows above. No historic window elements will be replaced. New windows will match the existing replacement windows.

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 is located at the rear corner of the house. It will not be larger nor more important visually than the existing ell to which it will be attached. The addition will resemble an enclosed porch. The basement level will have an array of windows matching the array above. French doors will open onto a small landing and steps leading into the rear garden. The massing of the addition is such that minimal historic fabric will be removed.

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.*
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 existing landscape is modern however the layout has not changed since the building was constructed. No essential features of the landscape other than grade will be altered.

Summary: None of the historic fabric described in the c. 1985 Form B will be altered; however the form is very general and does not fully describe the building. Other than the chimney, no historical features will be removed. The back porch has been replaced numerous times. Openings will be made in the basement wall for windows and new brick to match the existing will be used where needed. Gutters and trim on the new addition will match the existing. The existing chimney is visible. The regrading, the new basement windows and the east side of the new addition will be visible from Morrison Avenue. The new addition will be visible from the un-named public right of way/alley serving 22, 32 Clifton Street and the rear of 140-148 Morrison Avenue.

The new addition is located at the rear corner of the house. It will not be larger or more important visually than the existing ell to which it will be attached. The addition will resemble an enclosed porch. The basement level will have an array of windows matching the array above. French doors will open onto a small landing and steps leading into the rear garden. The massing of the addition is such that minimal historic fabric will be removed. The former appearance could be restored.

Existing openings will not be altered with the exception of the ell and rear wall where the addition will be incorporated into the structure. New openings will be sized to match the windows above. No historic window elements will be replaced. New windows will match the existing replacement windows.

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.

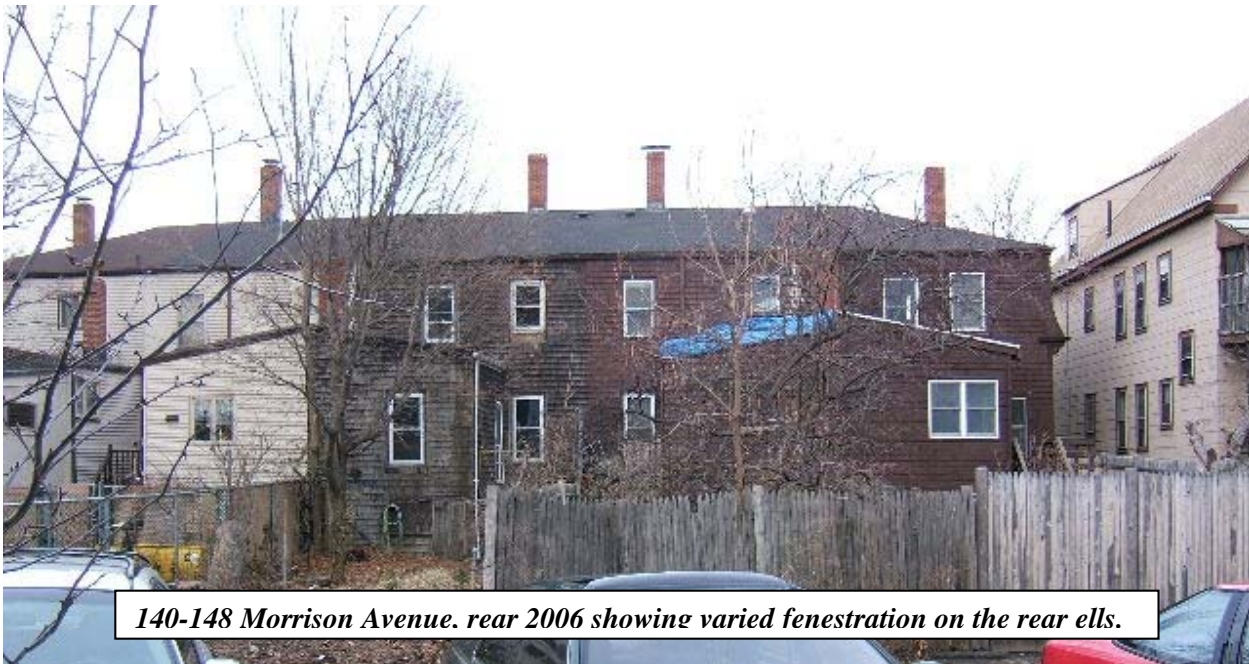
Staff determines that the alteration for which an application for a Historic Certificate has been filed is appropriate for and compatible with the preservation and protection of the William H. Pierce Rowhouse Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant the Owners of 140 Morrison Avenue a Certificate of Appropriateness** for the alterations noted with the following contingencies:

1. The addition shall be constructed as shown in the conceptual plans submitted on April 14, 2015 and attached.
2. The proposed new window openings shall be located and sized to match the width of the windows located directly above as shown in the conceptual plans submitted on April 14, 2015 and attached.
3. The grading shall be substantially as shown.
4. The retaining wall shall be grey stone colored Versa-Lok® or similar.
5. The new windows shall be Pella® Architect Series double hung windows with Integrated Light Technology.
6. The new doors shall be Pella® Architect series wood doors as shown below.
7. The stairs shall be simple wood with hand rails to match.
8. The concrete foundation shall have brick veneer to match the existing.
9. The brick veneer shall be consistent to the original in size, shape, and color of brick installed with traditional setting and grouting procedures.
10. The color shall be a variegated dark red/brick in a color to match the existing brick.
11. The chimney shall have traditional stepped metal flashing.
12. The termination of the chimney shall have a simple corbel to match the existing chimneys on the other houses in the row.
13. If the approval differs from the plans, new plans shall be submitted to Historic Staff prior to commencing the work (rear windows/balusters);
14. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate and approved plans.





140 Morrison Avenue, 2015 showing path on east side of house which will be regarded to allow the installation of basement windows.



140-148 Morrison Avenue. rear 2006 showing varied fenestration on the rear ells.



140 Morrison Avenue rear . 2006

