



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 2015.060
Applicant Name: Ronald Dynneson, Owner
Applicant Address: 221 Morrison Avenue, Somerville, MA 02144
Date of Application: August 27, 2015
Legal Notice: *Alter driveway and parking area.*
Staff Recommendation: Unable to recommend
Date of Public Hearing: September 15, 2015



September, 2015:

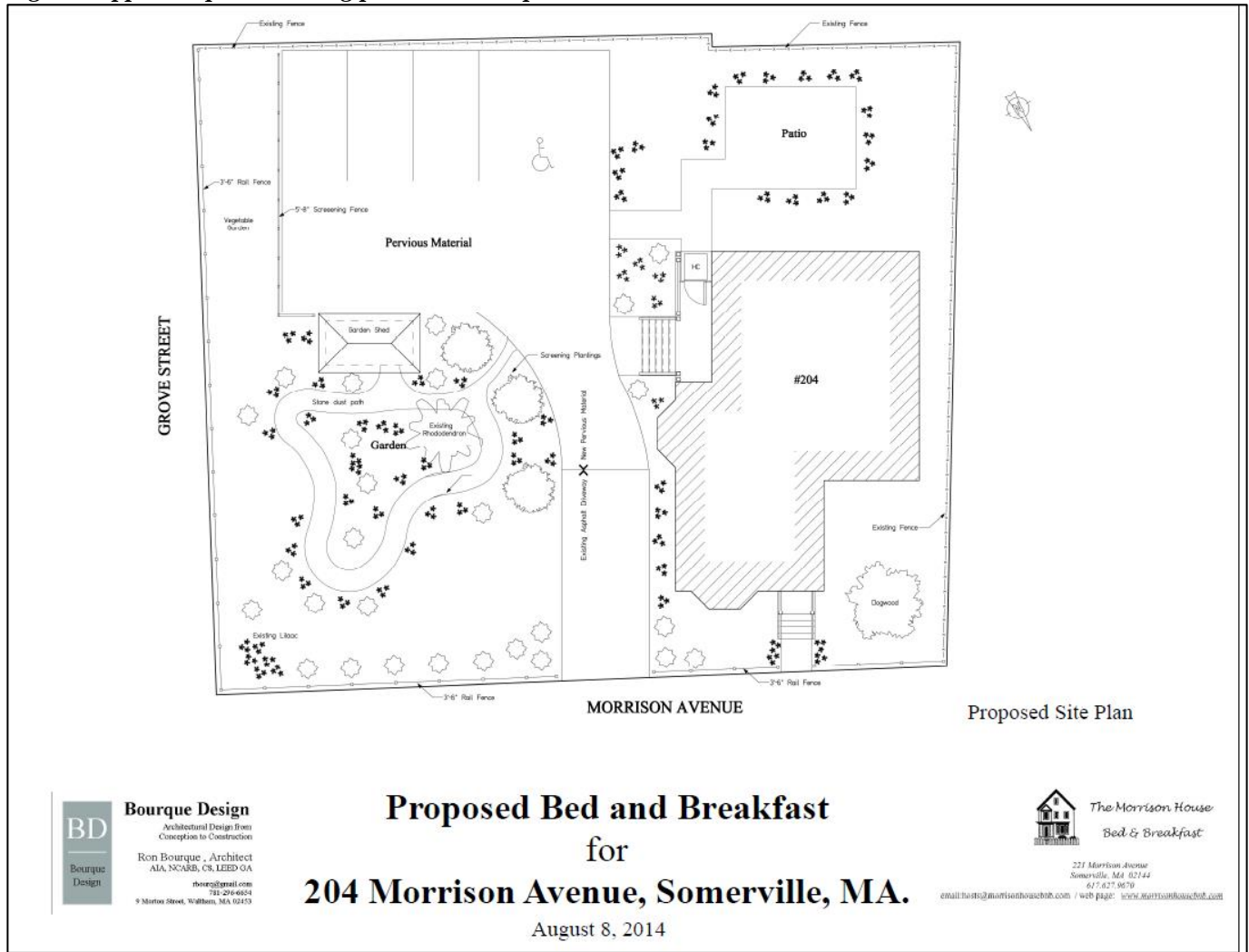
As a reminder of the parameters of this project, Sections I – IV below comprise the original staff report presented to the HPC in **2014** (project number HPC2014-091) regarding the proposal to convert 204 Morrison Avenue into an historic B&B. The final submitted plans were approved by the HPC and by the Zoning Board of Appeals.

The applicant has returned to the HPC to request an amendment to the approved plans.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

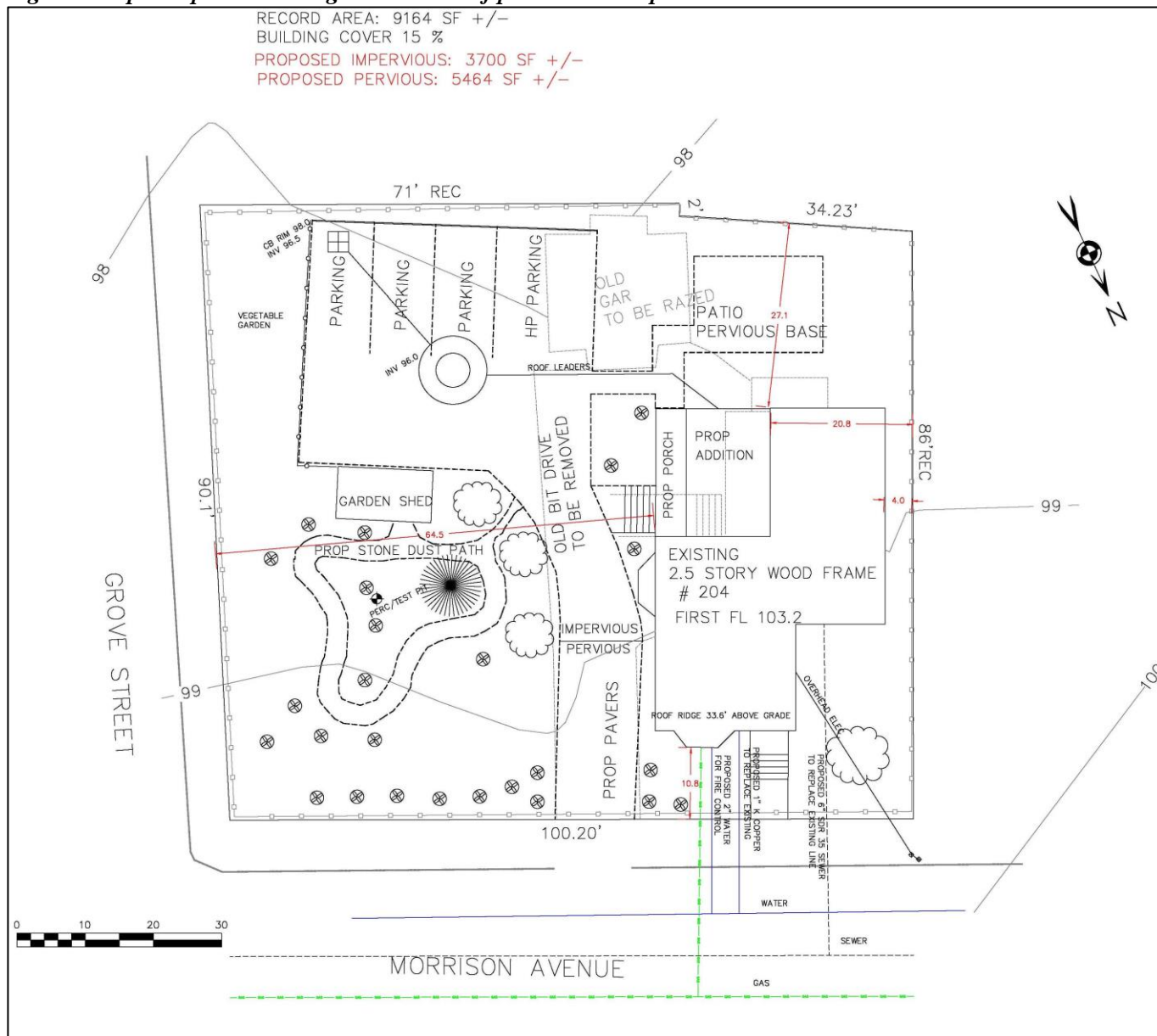
The applicant has returned requesting that the amount of pervious area approved on the original plans (both by the HPC and the ZBA) be converted to impervious area and vice versa. The HPC and ZBA originally approved plans dated August 8, 2014 which indicated a significant portion of the parking area and driveway would be finished with pervious material (see **Fig. 1** immediately below).

Fig. 1 – Approved plan showing pervious vs. impervious material areas.



The applicant has returned to request that this area now be covered with impervious material and that the area originally approved to be impervious material be converted to pervious material. This will leave a significantly larger area of the redeveloped property covered by impervious material (see **Fig. 2** immediately below).

Fig. 2 – Proposed plans showing the reversal of pervious vs. impervious material areas



In order for this conversion from pervious to impervious to occur, the applicant needs the approval of the HPC as well as the ZBA (as this is not considered a *de minimus* change) to which another application must be submitted and the hearing date duly noticed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After review of the original plans approved by the ZBA and the HPC and a review this new application, Staff finds that it cannot recommend that the proposed changes shown in Fig. 2 be approved.

This determination is based on the following analysis of the Landscape Features & Paving guidelines, item 4 as follows:

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 and land pre-date automotive uses, a time in which impervious materials were not used for the construction of walks, modern driveways and the like. The HPC has already made accommodations to the original layout by approving a parking area necessary for the proposed business; the HPC has accommodated the installation of non-historically sensitive materials with regard to the use of impervious materials to create drives and parking spaces; the HPC has accommodated changes regarding siting and design of driveway and parking in order to allow for necessary improved site circulation.

Impervious paving material is not appropriate to the time period of this structure and property, particularly not for one to be used as an historic B & B. The large area being proposed for coverage by impervious material would be visible from the public way (Grove Street and Morrison Avenue) as a 3'6" split rail style fence with some vegetation will soften the property lines but will not obscure the area in question from public sight lines.

Staff recommends that the originally-approved plans from 2014 are the most appropriate for this property.

The sections below constitute the 2014 HPC Staff Report for this project:

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 1/2-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



f Appropriateness

Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

| | | | |
|-------|-------------------------|----------|--|
| S/NPP | Ronald & Linde Dynneson | 2014.047 | c. 1881 workshop/garage |
| C/A | Ron Dynneson | 2014.091 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exterior sheathing shall be composed of wood clapboards; 2. The new windows shall be wood two-over-two, without low-e, but may be aluminum clad; 3. The doors that open onto the rear porch shall be a minimum of 50% wood; 4. Columns on the rear porch shall be the same proportions as the front porch; and 5. Balusters on the rear porch shall be either building code height and match as close as possible the existing baluster profile or the existing balusters may be reused. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The shed shall be painted one color or the trim pieces shall be removed; 2. The shutters on the shed shall be removed; 3. The two types of fencing shall be installed in accordance with the site plan; and 4. The concrete pavers shall be of a gray tone and installed in accordance with the site plan. |

Precedence:

- 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?* The proposed changes to the materials will be visible from Grove Street and Morrison Avenue
- *What are the Existing Conditions of the building / parcel?* The current owners sought historic designation through the Historic B & B clause of the City Ordinances and have made changes to the building to accommodate the new use.
- *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 only new proposed changes are to the permeable and impermeable materials used for the parking and driveway areas. These will be the reverse of the paving approved last year.

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 has been 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.

