



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: 222 Morrison Avenue c.1873 William Shedd House
Case: HPC 2014.012 Morrison Avenue Local Historic District

Applicant Name: Dorr Woodward, Owner
Applicant Address: 64 Orchard Road, Concord, MA

Date of Application: June 22, 2014
Legal Notice: *Alter porch skirt, railings, balusters and posts*
Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: July 15, 2014

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

This one and one-half story straight sided mansard cottage has a brick foundation, pedimented dormers set in an asphalt shingled roof, and an entry porch set into the inside corner of the L-shaped building footprint. It retains its original double front doors. The one-story polygonal bay is set off by small brackets at the corners.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:

Morrison Avenue off Elm Street was one of the first side



222 Morrison Avenue, 2014 photo



222 Morrison Avenue, 1988 photo

streets developed. It connected the western parts of the City with the Tufts brickyards to the east that were being platted for redevelopment in the late 1870s as the land was cleared of clay. Quarrying stone for building foundations along the ridge on the north side of Morrison Avenue uncovered a small amount of gold, which caused a flurry of speculation in a small mine that was rapidly depleted during the 1890s.

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.

William C. Shedd was a clerk at Jordan Marsh in Boston

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

The owner would like to rebuild the porch and replace all the damaged and missing materials. The previous owner made a number of small alterations since its designation in 1989 without coming to the Commission.

Rather than replace all this in-kind, the Applicant would like to upgrade the porch to a more appropriate style. Rather than matching exactly what can be seen on the 1880s photo, which in itself does not appear to be original, the Applicant would like to use the existing Mansard porches found elsewhere in the City as a basis of inspiration with weightier short turned balusters and larger newel posts on the stairs. ~~The Applicant has found that the turned balusters he preferred were too expensive and would like to install a simpler more generic railing assembly. He also needs to raise the height of the railing due to insurance requirements.~~ The new railings would be simple and set at the original height as can be seen in paint shadows on the corner boards. ~~The balusters will be about 1 5/8 inches square and set about 2 1/2 inches apart. The rails will be about 3 1/4 x 1 1/2 with the slight gable pitch on top to shed water and decorative carve outs on the sides. He would also like to model my rail and balusters after 45 Vinal Ave. He would also like to add a 'view panel' rail 7 inches above to get to the total rail height of 36 inches to meet building code as he is especially concerned with safety.~~ They would like to install a plain board skirt. The decking would be replaced in-kind and not altered. The porch posts would be retained ~~or replicated. They would like to use the simple board skirt seen on 257 Broadway and similar newels.~~ See the final pages for details and photos.

II. FINDINGS

1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

C/A, C/NA	Dorr Woodward	2014.012	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The replacement skirt shall be simple vertical boards. 2. The replacement wood railings shall have a simple generic style. 3. The height of the porch railings shall be that of the original railings as can be seen in the existing paint shadows on the porch. 4. The height of the hand rails on the stairs shall meet building code. 5. The replacement balusters shall be heavier weight turned balusters similar in style to those found on 257 Broadway and shall be reviewed by Staff and a member of the Historic Preservation Commission. (See attached photo.) 6. The replacement newel posts shall be similar in size and style to those found on 257 Broadway and shall be reviewed by Staff and a member of the Historic Preservation Commission. 7. The rotted porch supports, deck, fascia, gutters, porch roof, rafters or asphalt shingles on the porch roof shall be replaced with materials to match the existing in texture, size, shape, and installation detail. 8. If there are remaining repairs and alterations not covered by the accompanying Certificate of Appropriateness above, the Applicant must submit an Application for Work on an Historic Building to cover the remaining repairs. 1. The top of the porch railings shall be 27" high as can be seen in the existing paint shadows on the porch. 2. The turned replacement balusters shall be 2 1/2"
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			<p>nominal width and shall have an urn shaped profile similar in style to those shown. (See attached photo below.)</p> <p>3. The replacement newel posts shall be equal in width to the existing porch posts with chamfered corners to match those existing on the porch posts and either a pyramidal or a spherical turned cap</p> <p>4. Staff and a member of the Historic Preservation Commission shall review and approve the balusters and newel posts for conformance with the style and size approved by the Commission at the meeting.</p>
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1. *Precedence:*

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*
- There have been several instances where buildings have been returned to a previous condition based upon physical or photographic evidence, or of a design compatible with the porch when there have been no railings: 14-16 Aldersey Street, 257 Broadway, 141 Central Street, 56 Meacham Road, 58 Meacham Road, 49 Vinal Avenue and most recently 47 Mount Vernon Street.

There are also several instances where a generic railing has been used to indicate that the original railings were unknown. These include 143-145 Perkins Street (2003), 24 Pleasant Avenue (2014), 23 Porter Street (2010), 25 Russell Street (2003), 101 School Street (2007), 27 Warren Avenue (2010), 10 Westwood Road, 50 Vinal Avenue (2005), and 45 Vinal Avenue (2007).

- Staff found only 3 Mansard / Second Empire houses with their original railings and balusters present. ~~See below for photos of original or similarly turned railings.~~ Most of the porches have been replaced with the simple generic ones that indicate that they are replacing another inappropriate style, or are existing inappropriate metal ones. Staff also found a few that had maintained the character or the solidity of the original balusters, railings and posts. See photos below.
- Staff found only one case where the porch railings were raised to meet building code and insurance requirements. A Certificate of Hardship was issued in 2002 for 58 Walnut Street and 4-6 Pleasant Avenue because the buildings had many rental units; the work was done to comply with safety requirements set by the Insurance Company; and the additional height had been approached in a manner sensitive to the historic character of the building. In that case, considerable historic fabric was retained. See photos below.

3. *Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The porch is fully visible from the street.

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

The porch is in poor condition with unsafe decking and broken balusters. The balusters had been replaced with tall interior stair spindle style balusters that are now breaking. Hand rails are constructed with 2 x 6 lumber. A second stairway to the back yard is constructed with pipe rails. The porch floor is buckling and needs replacement soon. Porch posts have rotting and damaged bases. The porch skirt is vinyl lattice.

- *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.*

The porch details were not discussed in the Form B.

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

The materials used will be traditional. The existing materials are not original to the building except for the porch posts.

- D. *When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence of the original or later important features.*

The proposed architectural features are based on details found on the contemporary properties noted. The porch railing will be set at the historic height as can be seen in the paint shadows. The balusters will be ~~turned in an urn shape~~ **simple generic square in section**. The newel posts will be a simple **and match the posts in width**.

- 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 proposed materials used will be wood.

- 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 porch is fully visible from the public right of way.

- *Does the proposal coincide with the General Approach set forth in the Design Guidelines?*
- *When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence of the original or later important features.* There are no known historic photos of the property. The style of balusters and newel posts proposed are **generic so as not to be mistaken for replicas of original material**. ~~based on details found on other buildings of similar age and style.~~
- *Does the proposal coincide with the appropriate Specific Guidelines as set forth in the Design Guidelines?*

D. Porches, steps, trim and other exterior architectural elements

1. *Retain and repair porches and steps that are original or later important features, including such items as railings, balusters, columns, posts, brackets, roofs, ornamental ironwork and other important decorative items. If new pieces are needed, they should match as closely as possible the style, shape, scale and materials of the old. Avoid replacing wood posts and railings with metal ones, or wood porch decks with concrete.*

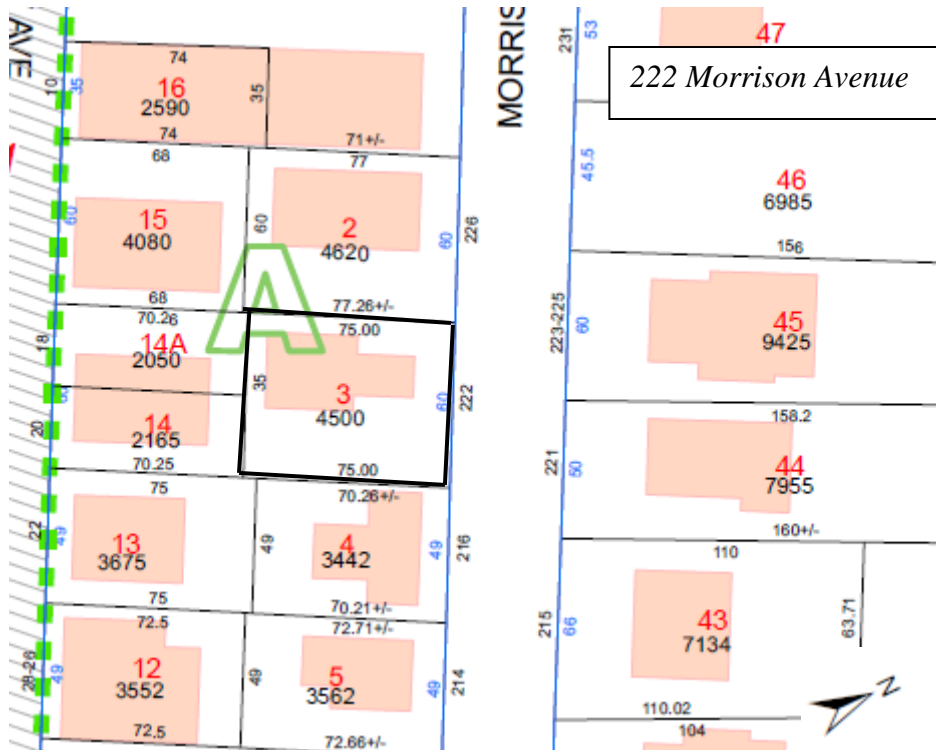
The porch will essentially be repaired, retaining the porch posts and other historic details. The proposed alteration would add handrails that are of a design consistent with the porch railings, ~~turned~~ plain simple balusters, and newel posts of other designated historic properties. A second rail will be added 7" above the one set at historic height. The second set of stairs descending into the backyard will be of the same design. This set of stairs is probably not original to the house. That section of porch railing was replaced with something else by the mid-1980s. The proposed skirt will be simple boards as can be seen on some of the designated properties shown below.

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 Morrison Avenue Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Dorr Woodward a Certificate of Appropriateness for 222 Morrison Avenue to replace the existing porch rails and railings with simple wood railings, ~~turned~~ simple square balusters of a heavier weight than the existing, and newel posts consistent with the existing porch balusters and rails shown on the examples below** because they meet guidelines noted above.

1. The new railings and balusters shall *exactly match those on the front of 45 Vinal Avenue in construction, size, shape, proportion, detail and material.*
2. The 6" newel posts shall be detailed to match the existing historic porch posts.







45 Vinal Avenue circa 1875 Mansard with modern balusters, railings at modern height and posts.



54 Atherton circa 1870 Italianate with turned balusters, railings at historic height and 'view panel'.



58 Walnut Street circa 1890 with decorative rail height extender based on second floor latticework pattern.