



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: March 17, 2014
Legal Notice: *Alter porch skirt, railings, balusters and posts*
Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: April 15, 2014

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

This one

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:



222 Morrison Avenue, 2014 photo



222 Morrison Avenue, 1988 photo

Morrison Avenue off Elm Street was one of the first side 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 new railings would be simple and set at the original height as can be seen in paint shadows on the corner boards. 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. 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: No prior Certificates have been issued or proposed for this property.

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.
 - 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.

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. The newel posts will be a simple.

- 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 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

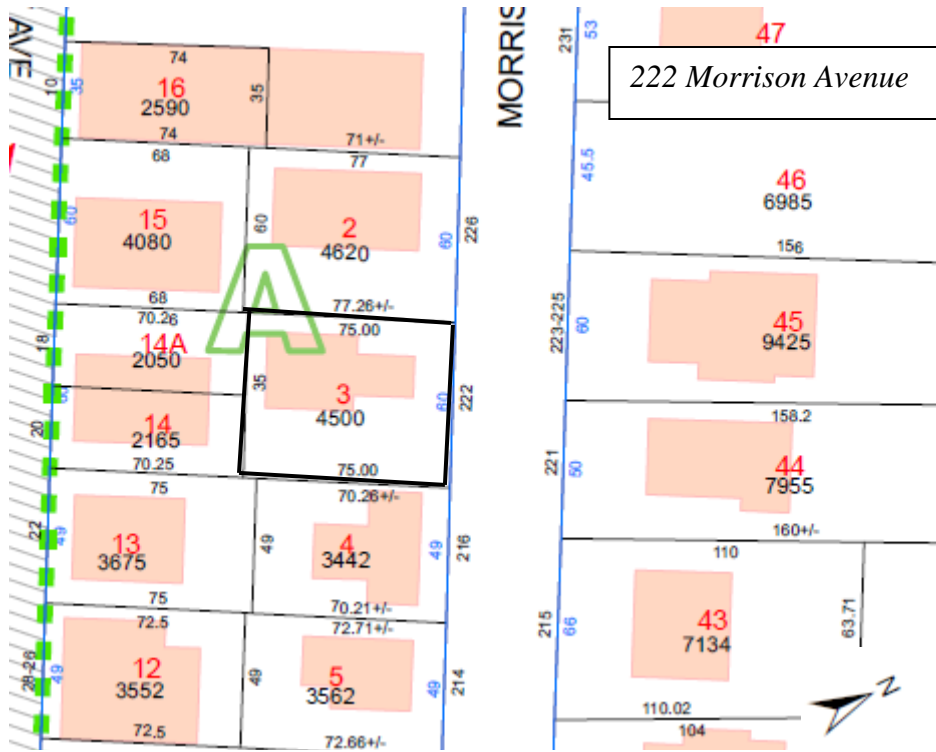
1. *Retain and repair porches and steps that are original or later important features, including such items as railings, balusters, columns, posts, brackets, roofs, ornamental ironwork and other important decorative items. If new pieces are needed, they should match as closely as possible the style, 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 balusters, and newel posts of other designated historic properties. 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.

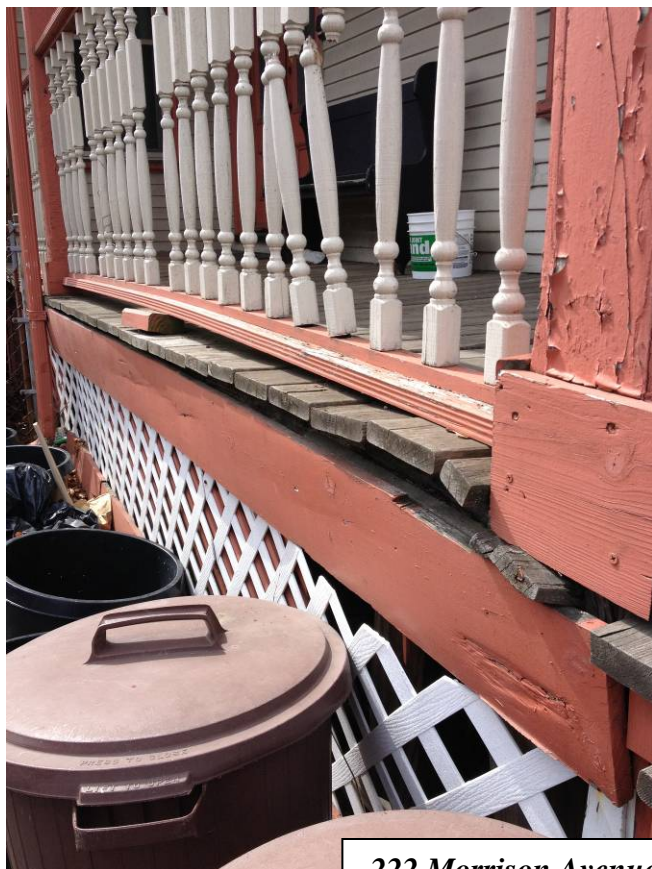
III. Recommendations

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.

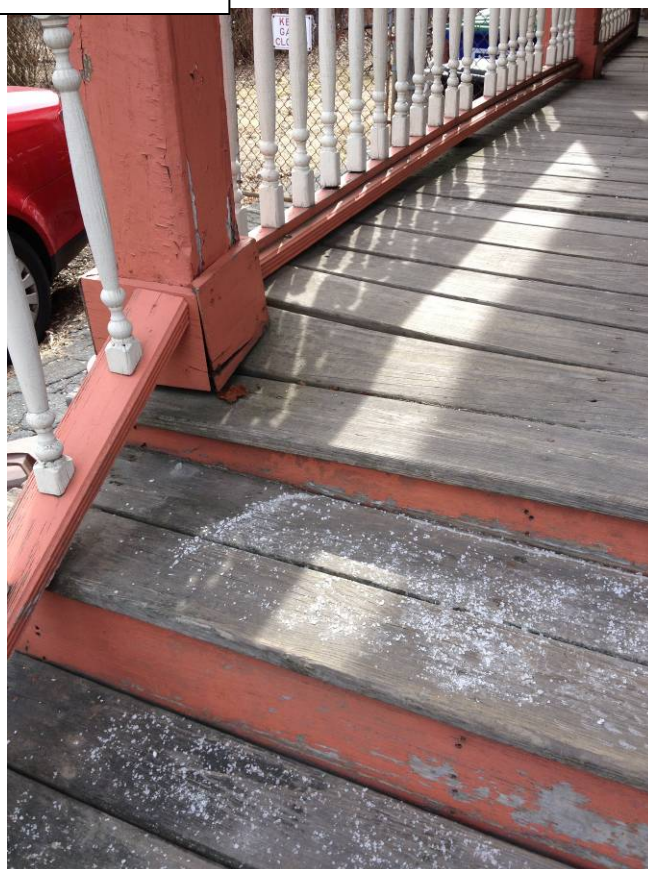
Staff determines that the alteration for which an application for a Historic Certificate has been filed is appropriate for and compatible with the preservation and protection of the Bow Street Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Dorr Woodward a Certificate of Appropriateness for 222 Morrison Avenue to replace the existing porch rails and railings with simple wood railings, turned 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.**





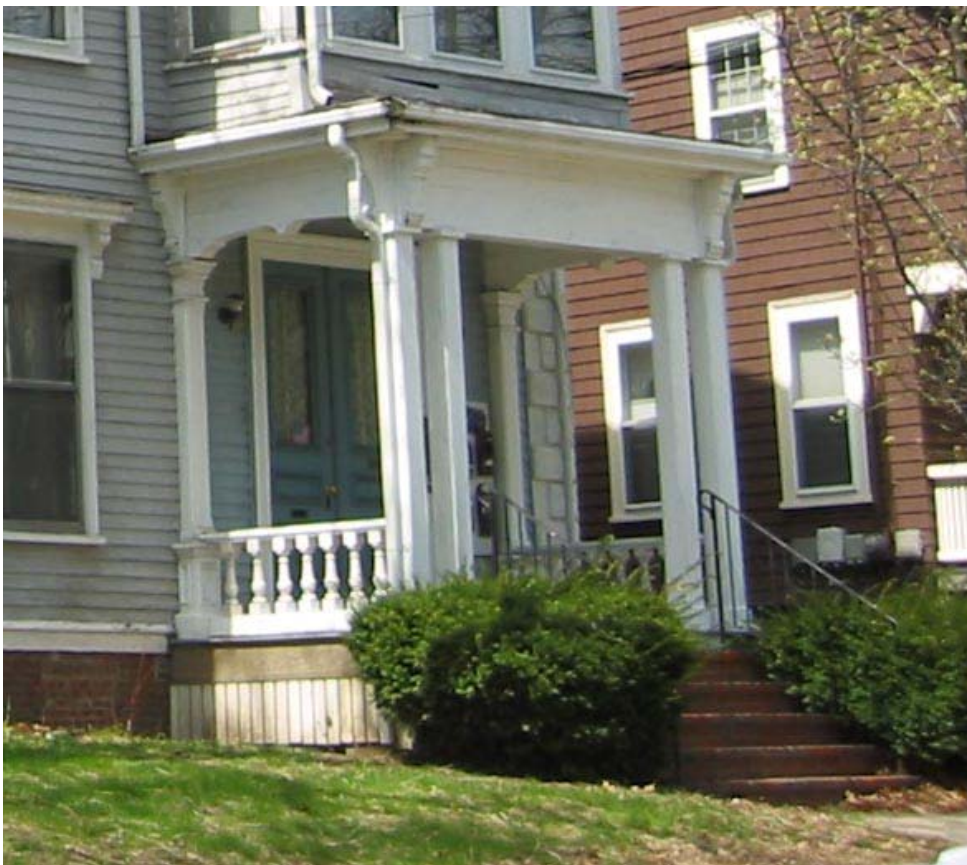


222 Morrison Avenue existing conditions





419 Broadway circa 1869 Mansard with original balusters, railings and skirt.



170 Central Street circa 1868 Mansard with original balusters and railings.



*205 School Street circa 1870
Mansard with original balusters
and railings, and modern stair
rail and newel posts.*



*257 Broadway circa
1877 Mansard with
modern balusters,
railings and newel
posts.*



69 Columbus Avenue pre-1884 Mansard with modern balusters, railings and posts.



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