



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: February 9, 2016
Legal Notice:
Revisions to porch design, and driveway and walkway paving.

Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: February 16, 2016

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: From the Form B
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: From the Form B



222 Morrison Avenue, 1988 photo



222 Morrison Avenue, 2016 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. According to the 1880 Census, William Shedd (39) was a bookkeeper. He lived on Morrison Avenue with his wife, Eunice (37); two children, Horace (14) and Anne (8); as well as his mother Sally (73).

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

The owner would like *ex post facto* approval of porch and paving alterations. The owner rebuilt the porch as approved by the Commission in July 2014 with one exception. He inset the porch steps after discovering physical evidence during the work that they had originally been inset from the edge of the porch. He also redid the walkway and the driveway with Unilock® pavers. The driveway stone is granite Cassova and the walk is rustic red Hollandstone. The driveway had been gravel worn down to the dirt and the walkways had been asphalt. <http://unilock.com/?s=cassova> and <http://unilock.com/?s=hollandstone>

He also would like to replace the chain link fence at the end of the driveway and install a new wood fence based upon a fence and gates found on Dane Street as seen in a *circa* 1913-14 photograph by Eugene H. Jones.

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
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			<p>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.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 ½" nominal width and shall have an urn shaped profile similar in style to those shown. (See attached photo below.) 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 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.
C/A,	Dorr Woodward	2014.012 R	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The new railings and balusters shall <i>exactly match those on the front of 45 Vinal Avenue in construction, size, shape, proportion, detail and material.</i> 2. The 6" newel posts shall be detailed to match the existing historic porch posts.

1. *Precedence:*

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*

The city has changed greatly since this house was constructed. The now ubiquitous automotive uses were non-existent. Instead there were drives leading to barns, stables and carriage houses. Fences were frequent boundaries to keep animals from the front yards, fields and gardens and to contain them on the property. They were not used to provide privacy.

- In cases when work has been undertaken and completed by an Applicant without review by the Commission, the Applicant is required to apply after the fact and if the work is not approved by the Commission, it must be redone to meet HPC Guidelines. One such recent case was 359-365 Broadway.
- This alteration was done based upon physical evidence. 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 age and style of the building. Usually the Commission reviews these alterations in advance.
- Staff knows of no other case of inset stairs on a building not set against the property line.
- The Commission has granted several Certificates of Appropriateness for the use of Uniblock® or similar pavers on driveways and walkways. These were 53 Atherton Street (2013), 27 Columbus Avenue (2002), 75-77 Columbus Avenue (2006), 53 Moore Street (2014), 204

Morrison Avenue (2014), 25 Russell Street (2015), 101 School Street (2011), 45 Tennyson Street (2014), and 45 Vinal Avenue (2007).

- Wood fences have also received Certificates of Appropriateness if they did not obscure the house and were stylistically appropriate to the building. Fences used to enclose the front yards or located close to the sidewalk are found at 85 Benton Road (2002), 178 Central Street (2002), 88 College Avenue (2003), 56 Meacham Road (2007 and 2015), 53 Moore Street (2009), and 156 School Street (2001). Several others were located at the ends of driveways and behind bays on the sides of the properties.

3. *Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The porch, parking and walkway are fully visible from the street. The fence will also be visible.

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

The porch was in poor condition with unsafe decking and broken balusters. As can be seen from the photos, the break in the porch floor and the sinking corner post coincided with the location of the original stairway. The walkways were uneven with broken asphalt. The driveway was dirt. The current fence at the end of the driveway is chain link.

- *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.*

Neither the porch details, the walk and driveway nor the fence were discussed in the Form B.

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

No original materials will be replaced. The porch materials have been replaced in kind. The deteriorated asphalt and gravel did not date to the period of significance of the house.

- 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 porch alteration is based upon the stringers found when the porch was disassembled for repair. No other original features will be altered. The driveway does not date the period of significance for the house. The proposed fence is based upon an historic photograph from the early 20th century.

- 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 wood is used for the porch and fence. The path and driveway used modern aggregates that resemble traditional pavers and will not be mistaken as original to the property..

- 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.*

All the work is 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.*

The location of the stairs is based upon physical evidence of their previous location. The style of the fence is based upon an historic photograph and relates stylistically to the modern porch railings.

- *Does the proposal coincide with the appropriate Specific Guidelines as set forth in the Design Guidelines?*

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 was repaired, retaining the porch posts and other historic details. The proposed alteration to the location of the steps was based upon physical evidence.

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.*

The major changes proposed are to the materials of the path and the driveway. The existing character of the street is primarily that of an 1850-1920 suburb with a few incursions of various automotive related buildings and paving.

Generally speaking the current HPC Guidelines do not address fences or walls per se. However, it is clear that the Guidelines recommend that historic buildings not be obscured by changes in the landscape. "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 Guidelines further state that "The general intent of this section is to preserve the existing or later essential landscape features that enhance the property." Fences "...can be seen as a transition feature between the structure and its ... surroundings."

2. *It is recognized that often the environment surrounding the property has a character, scale and street pattern quite different from that existing when the building was constructed. Thus, changes must frequently be made to accommodate the new condition, and the landscape treatment can be seen as a transition feature between the structure and its newer surroundings.*

Cars have taken over as the major means of transportation since this neighborhood was built. Spring Hill is residential in character than nearby Somerville Avenue due to the mature trees and well-kept gardens. The current parking area may have been sufficient for a Model T but the owner finds it undersized and would like to get the cars off the street and further away from the curb.

3. *The existing landforms of the site should not be altered unless shown to be necessary for maintenance of the structure or site. Additional landforms will only be considered if they will not obscure the exterior of the structure.*

Alterations of the landform will be by a proximately a foot on one side of the driveway next to the house to allow passengers and drivers to open the door without smashing it against a wall and lengthen the driveway sufficiently to allow cars to pull beyond the front edge of the house.

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 layout of the front walkway will not be altered. There will be no other grade changes proposed beyond those need to extend and widen the driveway. The materials will be changed from poured concrete to molded concrete blocks and granite posts and wall toppers. See photos.

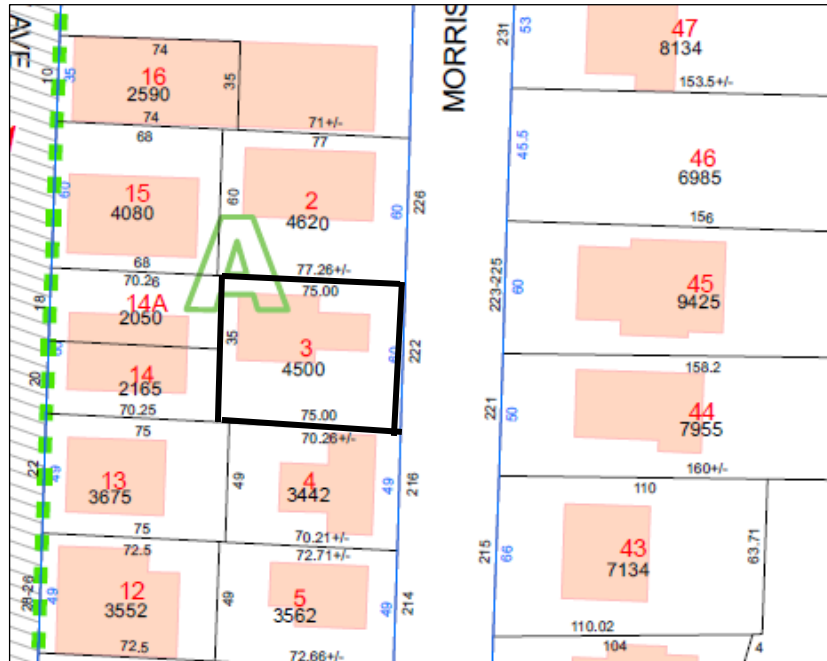
The Applicant's proposal for a unit block paved parking area will fit in with the neighborhood and not detract significantly from the street. The removal of the concrete wall and the concrete pads, which probably date from the 1950's or 1960's, would have no effect on the visibility or the layout. The installation of the pavers and retaining wall would clearly be modern.

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 alter the design of the existing porch, walkway and driveway and to replace the fence** because they meet guidelines noted above.

1. If the approval differs from the plans, new plans shall be submitted to Historic Staff prior to commencing the work;
2. The porch may remain as constructed;
3. The path and driveway may remain as constructed;
4. The chain link fence at the end of the driveway shall be replaced with a fence and gate with simple pickets top by a flat rail, a wide bottom rail at the base and a third rail near the top as shown on the photos below.
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.



222 Morrison Avenue. 1985



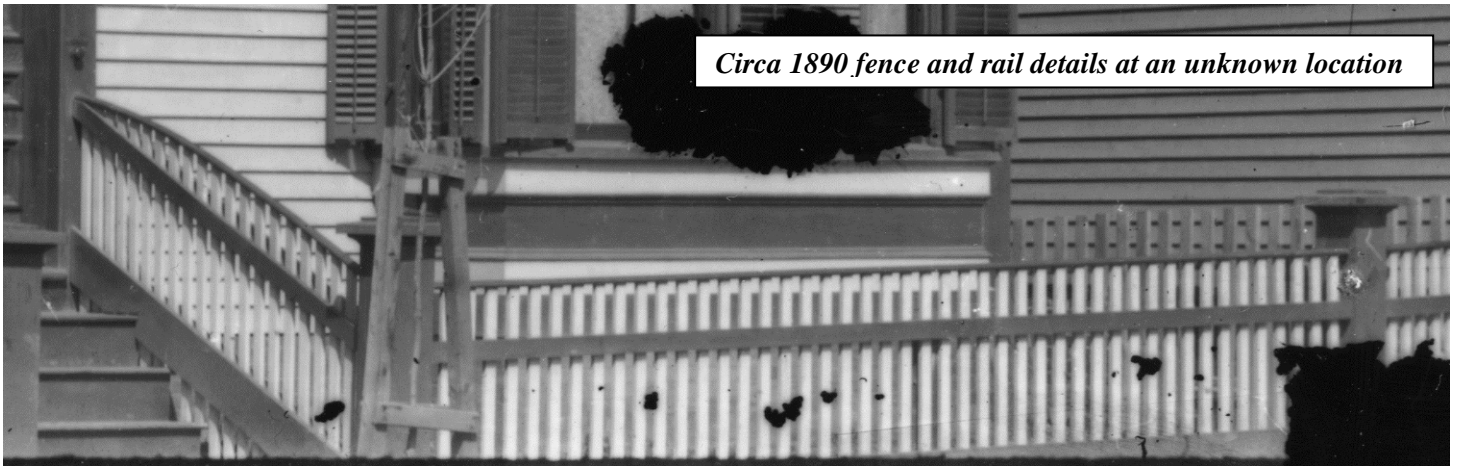
222 Morrison Avenue, 2014



222 Morrison Avenue, 2015



222 Morrison Avenue, 2016



Circa 1890 fence and rail details at an unknown location



Circa 1890 fence and gate details at an unknown location



13 Dane Avenue. circa 1913