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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:	17 Mount Vernon Street	c.1845 Fritz-Curtis House
Case:	HPC 2016.053	Single Building Local Historic District Mount Vernon Street National Register District
Applicant Name:	Martin Scott, Owner	
Applicant Address:	17 Mount Vernon Street, Somerville, MA 02145	
Date of Application:	July 21, 2016	
Legal Notice:	<i>Replace two windows; Replace fence</i>	
Staff Recommendation:	Conditional Certificate of Appropriateness	
Date of Public Hearing:	August 16, 2016	

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: From the Form B
The early suburban house at 17 Mt. Vernon Street was built 1845-1847 by an unknown housewright for Able Fitz and Edward Curtis a later owner. The house follows a traditional side hall plan of two stories with gable to the street and a rear kitchen ell. The design is of Greek Revival Style seen in the pedimented facade gable. However, the facade and side bay windows are set on a brick foundation, suggesting a latter remodeling ca.1910, matched by the beveled glass front door. A further remodeling is seen in the six/one sash windows that are likely of ca.1930 replacements, while the entry porch has been rebuilt ca.1970 with simple posts. The only original detailing is seen in the rear kitchen ell that retains a Late Federal form of the 1840s.



The Fitz-Curtis house is of note as an early suburban design on Mt. Vernon Street, likely remodeled in the early 20th century to its present form.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL: From the Form B
The early suburban house at 17 Mt. Vernon Street is dated 1845-1847 by deeds and tax records to Able Fitz as original the owner and Edward Curtis as second owner. The property was sold to Able Fitz, a miller, for a lot on Walker (Mt. Vernon) Street in 1845 with Fitz first assessed in 1847 at \$51.77, thus dating construction 1845-1847. Fitz is listed in the 1851 on Mt. Vernon Street and the house shown on the 1852 Map. In 1852 the property was sold to Edward Curtis and owned by Curtis on the 1857 Map. Curtis remains as owner through 1895 when he listed on the 1895 Atlas. The 1905 Directory lists Mrs. Mary Blanchard as resident. In 1925 two residents are listed, Daniel

Buckley, a laborer, and John Creed, a chauffeur, possibly indicating a remodeling as a two-family house, with Buckley listed as resident in 1940.

The Fitz-Curtis house is of historic interest as one of the early houses on Mt. Vernon Street, converted as a two-family in the early 20th century.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

1. Replace two replacement windows on the front north side of the second.
2. Replace fence with a taller and wider fence in the same location on the southeast corner of the house.

Two of the three replacement windows on the front of the building do not fit properly and are allowing air infiltration. These need to be fixed. As of September 14, 2016, the Contractor now plans to replace all three windows on the second floor front with Marvin replacement windows to match those existing on the side walls.

The existing 42" x 48" fence is falling apart and does not hide the garbage and the recycling carts, and utility meters adequately. They would like to make the fence a little larger to 54" x 60". The proposed fence is solid wood with a lattice top rather than the solid picket fence currently in place.

See the final pages for details and photos.

II. FINDINGS

1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

Martin Scott	2014.049	C/NA	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The rotted and damaged roof, steps, rails, balusters and posts of the front porch shall be repaired and replaced to match exactly the existing in texture, size, shape, and installation detail. 2. The replacement of the rotted and damaged back porch shall not be visible from the public right of way.
Walter Beebe-Center for Martin Scott	2015.032	C/NA	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The rotted and damaged roof, steps, rails, balusters and posts of the front porch shall be repaired and replaced to match exactly the existing in texture, size, shape, and installation detail. 2. The replacement of the rotted and damaged back porch shall not be visible from the public right of way. 3. The chimney may be removed provided that it is not visible from the public right of way. 4. If the chimney is visible, the applicant must come before the Historic Preservation Commission for a hearing and determination regarding the proposed alteration.
Mary Askew & Martin Scott	2016.032	C/NA	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The rotted and damaged soffits, rakes, and window sills shall be repaired and replaced to match exactly the existing in texture, size, shape, and installation detail. 2. The replacement of the kitchen windows and bathroom windows shall either shall: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Not be visible from the public right of way, or b. Match the existing windows in all dimensions and materials.

1. Precedence:

- Are there similar properties / proposals?
- Replace two windows on the front north side of the second floor.

There is no precedence for the replacement of two out of three windows with a different style and material to the existing.

- *Replace fence with a taller and wider fence in the same location on the southeast corner of the house.*

Several privacy fences have been installed and located part way back from the front line of a house, usually behind a bay window. The current fence is located along the front line of the house.

2. Considerations:

As of September 14, 2016, the Contractor and Applicants plan to replace all three windows on the second floor front with Marvin replacement windows to match the existing rather than just two of them.

The proposed fence would not hide the side of the house nor the bay window located toward the rear, merely the wheeled carts and utility meters. The proposed fence does not go up the side yard and is lower than the windows of the bay.

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The windows and the fence are fully visible from Mount Vernon Street.

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

The existing windows leak due to the casing and windows not being fully square. This has resulted in some water infiltration and sill rot as well as air infiltration.

The fence is about 10 years old and is falling apart. It does not adequately hide the garbage carts and utility meters.

- *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*
- C. *Whenever possible, deteriorated material or architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced or removed.*
- D. *When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence of the original or later important features.*
- 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.*
- 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.*

No historic fabric will be replaced or altered.

The windows are noted as possibly 1930s replacements, However the Contractor has noted that they are late 20th century and early 21st century replacements with Marvin replacement windows being the most recent and dominant type. The replacement windows will be 6/1 sash to match the existing. The original windows are long gone.

The fence was not specifically called out in the form B. The fence will be a standard plain wood fence with a lattice topper. The fence is not attached to the building.

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.*

The window openings will not be altered. The replacement window sash will match the existing top, bottom and meeting rails, stiles and muntins in size, shape, and installation details.

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.*

Draft Guidelines for Fences

Fences are prominent landscape features and should be constructed in a manner and design that is sensitive to the character of the historic structure and district.

- 1. Natural materials should be used for fences and walls especially those that can be seen from the street. Appropriate materials are wood, brick, stone and cast iron. Aluminum or tubular steel fencing that mimics wrought iron is allowed. Vinyl fencing is not allowed. Wood fencing should be stained or painted to match the house trim. Materials and style should blend with buildings, walls and fences found in the neighborhood.*
- 2. Fences should not be used to screen front yards, rather front yard fences should be open and decorative in nature. The maximum height for front yard fences is 3 feet along all public rights-of-way. Fencing may be used to screen parking areas or mechanical systems*

There are no alterations to the essential landscape features. There are no changes to the layout. The proposed fence shall be of wood, will be decorative and screen the utility meters and garbage cans. It will not be located on the front property line but set back to front edge of the house.

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 17 Mount Vernon Street Local Historic District and the Vernon Street National Register District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant 17 Mount Vernon Street a Certificate of Appropriateness** for new larger fence.

1. All appropriate building permits shall be obtained prior to the start of any work.
2. If changes are necessary to the proposed design for which this Certificate of Appropriateness was issued, new plans shall be submitted to Historic Staff prior to commencing the work.
3. The fence shall be 54" x 60" with a lattice top to be located on the south east corner of the house.
4. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate and approved plans.

A Certificate of Non-Applicability is in accordance with the Somerville Historic District Ordinance Section 10, Limited Coverage, which states, "Nothing in this ordinance shall be construed to prevent the ordinary maintenance, repair, or replacement of any exterior architectural feature within a historic district which does not involve a change in design, material, color or the outward appearance thereof ..." Further, the Ordinance states that Section 2.f, Definitions, which states, "Exterior architectural feature means such portion of the exterior of a building or structure as open to view from a public street, public way, public park or public body of water..." Therefore a **Certificate of Non-Applicability shall be issued** for repairs and maintenance in kind for the windows with the following contingency.

1. The replacement window sash will match the existing top, bottom and meeting rails, stiles and muntins in size, shape, and installation details.



