



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: 46 Mount Vernon Street c.1885 George Poole House
Case: HPC 2013.089 Single Building Local Historic District

Applicant Name: Ting Fang, Owner
Applicant Address: 46 Mount Vernon Street, Somerville, MA 02145

Date of Application: November 18, 2013
Legal Notice: Add 3rd floor egress, alter roofing material
Staff Recommendation: Conditional Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: January 21, 2014

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

The large two and one-half story house has an asymmetrical plan typical of Queen Anne houses in the late 1800s. The decorative treatment starts on the brick foundation which has terracotta sunburst insets. The plan has square projecting bays and a round corner second story tower with a square base set on the diagonal to the main facade-s projecting bay. The entrance porch is elaborated with scalloped braces and has a pediment on a shed roof with spindle screening. There are cornice brackets and a high chimney other details found on many decorative Queen Anne houses. The house also has some Stick Style

characteristics delineating the decorative shingle from clapboard sheathing.



46 Mount Vernon Street, c. 1898



46 Mount Vernon Street, 2004

HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:

Located between Broadway and Washington Street, main 18th century thoroughfares connecting Charlestown with Medford and Cambridge, just beyond the neck of the Charlestown peninsula, East Somerville became one of the most densely settled parts of Somerville by the mid 1800s, in part due to its topography, the fine soil for drainage, as well as clay for brick and pottery making. Along with several farms, shops, brick industries and pottery enterprises, most other residents were Boston businessmen.

Mount Vernon Street, which ran from Broadway to Perkins Street, was well-developed with many extant Greek Revival dwellings by the mid 1800s. By the 1870s Mt. Vernon had been continued down to Washington Street. During this period many substantial houses were built on Mount Vernon and Mount Pleasant, Pearl and Perkins Streets. At the same time brick apartment houses and small workers houses were constructed on nearby streets to accommodate the increasing number of workers in the area due to the expanding brickyards, spike factories, and potteries.

George S. Poole lived at # 46 from 1885. He was the Secretary and later President of the Warren Institution for Savings in Charlestown. Prior to that, he had served as first librarian of the Charlestown Public Library and in 1863 as assistant librarian for the Library of Congress. He served on the Somerville School Committee and was a member of numerous clubs and fraternal organizations.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

1. Add a second means of egress from the 3rd floor.

The owner proposes to enlarge the dormer window on the rear driveway side of the building to allow for access to a new spiral staircase to the ground level deck. This would be inserted into a corner of the building and would protrude 1' toward the driveway.

2. Alter roof material.

The current roofing material is 3-tab asphalt. The owner would like to replace it with dark colored Timberline architectural shingles because they would be longer lasting than the existing 3-tab but she cannot afford any of the other types proposed by her contractor.

See the final pages for details and photos.

II. FINDINGS

1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

2003.049	46	Mount Vernon Street	C/A	1. Construct a roof deck on one story rear addition with rails and balusters constructed as described in the plans, specifications and sketches and 2. Install wood egress stairs to rear yard.
2004.033	46	Mount Vernon Street	C/A	1. Reconstruct side deck.
2010.034	46	Mount Vernon Street	C/NA	1. Replace 5 JB Sash wood insulated glass windows in-kind, located in the living room, dining room and bedroom.
2011.061	46	Mount Vernon Street	C/NA	Letter regarding LHD Status and requesting that new meters be placed on the interior of the building.
2013.068	46	Mount Vernon Street	C/NA	1. The 3-tab asphalt shingles shall match the existing in texture, size, shape, and installation detail. 2. The JB sash replacement windows shall be repaired or replaced to match the existing in color, size, shape, and installation detail. 3. The gutters shall be replaced to match the existing in material, size, shape, and installation detail.

4. All damaged, rotten or missing wood trim shall be replaced to match the existing in material, size, shape, and installation detail.

1. *Precedence:*

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*

There is no exact precedent although Certificates of Hardship and Appropriateness have been issued for necessary alterations to provide second means of egress. Certificates of Hardship were issued when there was no good way to integrate the egress into the existing building in a manner that met other guidelines. Certificates of Appropriateness were issued in cases when the proposal was an improvement on existing conditions and brought the building closer to its original design and in a manner that was compatible HPC Guidelines and minimally visible from the public right of way.

2001.007 – 47 Mount Vernon (C/H)

1. Extend second floor landing of existing fire escape to reach existing back porch;
2. Make an opening in existing back porch for access to extended landing;
3. Replace final set of fire escape stairs;
4. Height of handrail to be set per building code requirement for handrails rather than the height for landings.

2003.011 – 30 Forest Street (C/H)

1. Replace existing approved double-hung window on Beacon Street elevation with an existing 4-panel door, which required as a second means of egress for Unit 1, after further clarification of design with Staff and their final approval.

2001.015 – 28 Highland Avenue (C/A)

1. Remove metal fire escape from the front of the building;
2. Install on the rear corner of the building porches and stairs as a second means of egress to all apartments per general plans submitted by the Applicant and dated 06/26/01, subject to the review and approval by the Staff of the details for cornice, columns, guard rails, balusters, skirting and decking.

2002.003 – 15 Westwood Road (C/A)

1. To replace an existing window to permit easier emergency egress from a legal basement apartment by lowering the sill to meet the 44" safety requirement providing that the replacement window be a Marvin french casement windows with an energy panel and a wood exterior.

2003.049 – 46 Mount Vernon Street (C/A)

1. Construct a roof deck on one story rear addition with rails and balusters constructed as described in the plans, specifications and sketches; and
2. Install wood egress stairs to rear yard.

2005.002 – 55 Columbus Avenue (C/A)

1. Remove existing structurally unsound fire escape;
2. Remove basement bulkhead entry;
3. Install new additions for egress and HP access to the side rear of the building consisting of:
 - a. New enclosed egress stair, and
 - b. New enclosed HP Lift;
4. Install new decks at 1st floor entry and 2nd Floor;
5. Install new exterior egress stair from 2nd Floor deck to grade).

2005.020 – 419 Broadway (C/A) (not executed)

1. Remove existing wood egress stairs from right side rear of building; and
2. Install new wood stairs on opposite side of building as per material samples and hand-drawn plans submitted at the Commission meeting.

2005.034 – 75 Columbus Avenue (C/A)

1. Enlarge one of four basement windows to meet second egress requirements;
2. Install replacement window in a style to be determined in a clear opening of 20" wide by 24" high and no higher than 44 inches off the floor;

2008.039 – 77 Columbus Avenue (C/A)

1. Enlarge one of four basement windows to meet second egress requirements;
2. Install replacement Andersen Woodwright 400 series VXW14 3' wide x 4' tall casement window; and
3. Create window well on west side of house near front.

2010.090 – 27 Warren Avenue (C/A)

1. Remove metal fire escape from rear of the building;
2. Remove the enclosed 2-story porch;
3. Frame the base structure on the same footprint in order to allow for the second means of egress of the second and third floors; and
4. Match the original fascia and roof with Staff review and approval.
 - a. Install a secondary fascia along the base of the second floor porch;
 - b. Wrap the posts with 6" x 6" lumber as tightly as possible;
 - c. Detail the porch posts with capitals and bases;
 - d. Install beadboard on second floor porch ceiling;
 - e. Install simple rails, either plain or fluted, and nominal 2" x 2" balusters with a nailing strip; and
 - f. Install vertical lattice or slat skirt at the base of the porch.

There have also been several cases of replacement of 3-tab shingles with architectural shingles. The appropriateness of the type of architectural shingle varies with style of the building. In replacing the roof of a Queen Anne Style house, the substitute roofing material should relate the original roof in form and shape if possible, of regular form and shape and of a scale similar to that of the original roof shingles. The Commission has not granted any Certificates of Appropriateness for the proposed Timberline shingle on a Queen Anne but has approved the following similar products for the Shingle style properties as noted below.

2002.036 – 3 Westwood Road (C/A)

1. Replace asphalt three tab shingles with driftwood Certainteed® Woodscape® architectural shingles.

2009.063 – 18 Benton Road (C/A)

1. Replace 3-tab asphalt roof shingles on house and garage with Timberline® Prestique® Grandé® architectural roof shingles.



Most recently the Commission granted a Certificate of Appropriateness for Timberlines to be used on a Mansard at 24 Pleasant Avenue.

Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The enlarged window and egress platform will not be visible from the public right of way. The spiral stairway will protrude behind the cross gable edge of the building about 1' and will be partially more visible when the house is viewed from in front of 48 Mount Vernon Street.

This roof is visible from Perkins Street and Mount Vernon Street.

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

The house had been well-maintained until the previous owner moved and then rented the property. He had altered the house into a 2-family in 2003. Egress had been established from the 2nd floor at that time. However, no occupancy permit was ever issued for the 2nd and 3rd floor unit. The new owner has been doing extensive interior renovations and would like to move in but cannot until the egress issue is solved. After consultations between the Owner, Staff, ISD, and a Commission Member, it was determined that the only feasible 3rd floor egress would be through a dormer not visible from the public right of way behind the cross gable. Other options had deleterious effects on character-defining features, were too close to the existing staircase or were too close to the lot lines. See photos at the end of the document.

Many repairs and upgrades have been undertaken since the owner took possession of this property at the end of May last year. It is not known when the roof was last replaced as no building permit was found for it. Her roofers have given a price for several grades and types of architectural shingles but due to the unexpected expense of constructing the egress from the 3rd floor, she said their budget is too tight for other types of roof shingles.

- *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.*

There will be no alterations of features discussed in the Form B.

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

There will be no replacement of existing materials beyond the 3-tab asphalt shingles.

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

No architectural features will be replaced beyond the roofing material. It is difficult from the photograph to determine whether the house originally had slate or wood roof shingles.

- 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 spiral staircase will be simple metal and not match any of the existing features.

The proposed architectural shingles do not match the existing 3-tab roof shingles nor does it match either of the possible original roofing material in any of their physical properties.

- 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 stairs will be partially visible on the southeast side behind the cross gable of the building near the driveway.

The roof is visible from both Perkins and Mount Vernon Streets.

Porches, steps, trim and other exterior architectural elements

2. *Fire escapes are very conspicuous features and, as a rule, should only be placed on the rear of the building, or where they are least visible from a public way. If installation on the street or side façade cannot be avoided, fire escapes should be designed and constructed with the same attention demanded by other major alterations and repairs, and are subject to the review and approval of the Commission.*

The fire escape/ second means of egress for the third floor apartment will be placed as inconspicuously as possible behind the cross gable and have as small a footprint as possible. It will protrude approximately 1' from the side when viewed from the front and will become more visible as one moves down to 48 Mount Vernon Street.

Roofs

1. *Preserve the integrity of the original or later important roof shape.*

The roof shape has not been altered.

2. *Retain the original roof covering whenever possible. If the property has a slate roof, conserve the roof slates. Slate is a near-permanent roofing material, and deterioration is generally caused by rusted roofing nails.*

The original slate or wood shake roof is long gone.

3. *Whenever possible, replace deteriorated roof covering with material that matches the old in composition, color, size, shape, texture, and installation detail.*

The original roof shingles would have been regular in size and appearance although they may have been plain or decorative. The existing roof is 3-tab asphalt shingles. Installation techniques for the architectural shingles are similar. 3-tab asphalt shingles do not resemble the original slate in composition, color, size, shape, texture or

installation details. Timberline architectural shingles are further from the characteristics of the original materials than 3-tab asphalt shingles.

4. *Preserve the architectural features that give the roof its distinctive character, such as cornices, gutters, iron filigree, cupolas, dormers and brackets. Downspouts should be inconspicuously located and should be painted to match the color of the siding.*

No existing character-defining features will be removed.

5. *New dormers will be permitted if they are related to the forms, proportions, size and arrangement of existing windows, and constructed in matching materials and colors. If possible, new dormers should be confined to the rear of the house.*

No new dormers have been installed.

6. *Skylights with flat profiles may be installed on the rear of the property.*

No skylights have been added.

7. *Utility equipment, such as television antennae, air conditioners, solar collectors and other mechanical units should be restricted to the rear of the property or on portions of the roof that are not visible from a public way. If no other placement is possible, air conditioning and other cooling units on street facades should be of the slim-line type or set flush with the surface of the building and painted the same color as the window trim.*

No new utility equipment has been added to the main visible façade of the building.

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 in part appropriate for and compatible with the preservation and protection of the 46 Mount Vernon Street Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Ting Fang, Owner a Certificate of Appropriateness** for the installation of a simple metal spiral fire escape behind the cross gable and situated as close to the inside corner as possible. **Staff does not recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission grant a Certificate of Appropriateness** for the replacement of 3-tab asphalt shingles with Timberline architectural shingles. **Staff does recommend granting a Certificate of Appropriateness** for an architectural shingle with regular right angle cuts and a larger scale. **A Certificate of Non-Applicability** has already been issued for replacement in-kind of 3-tab asphalt shingles.

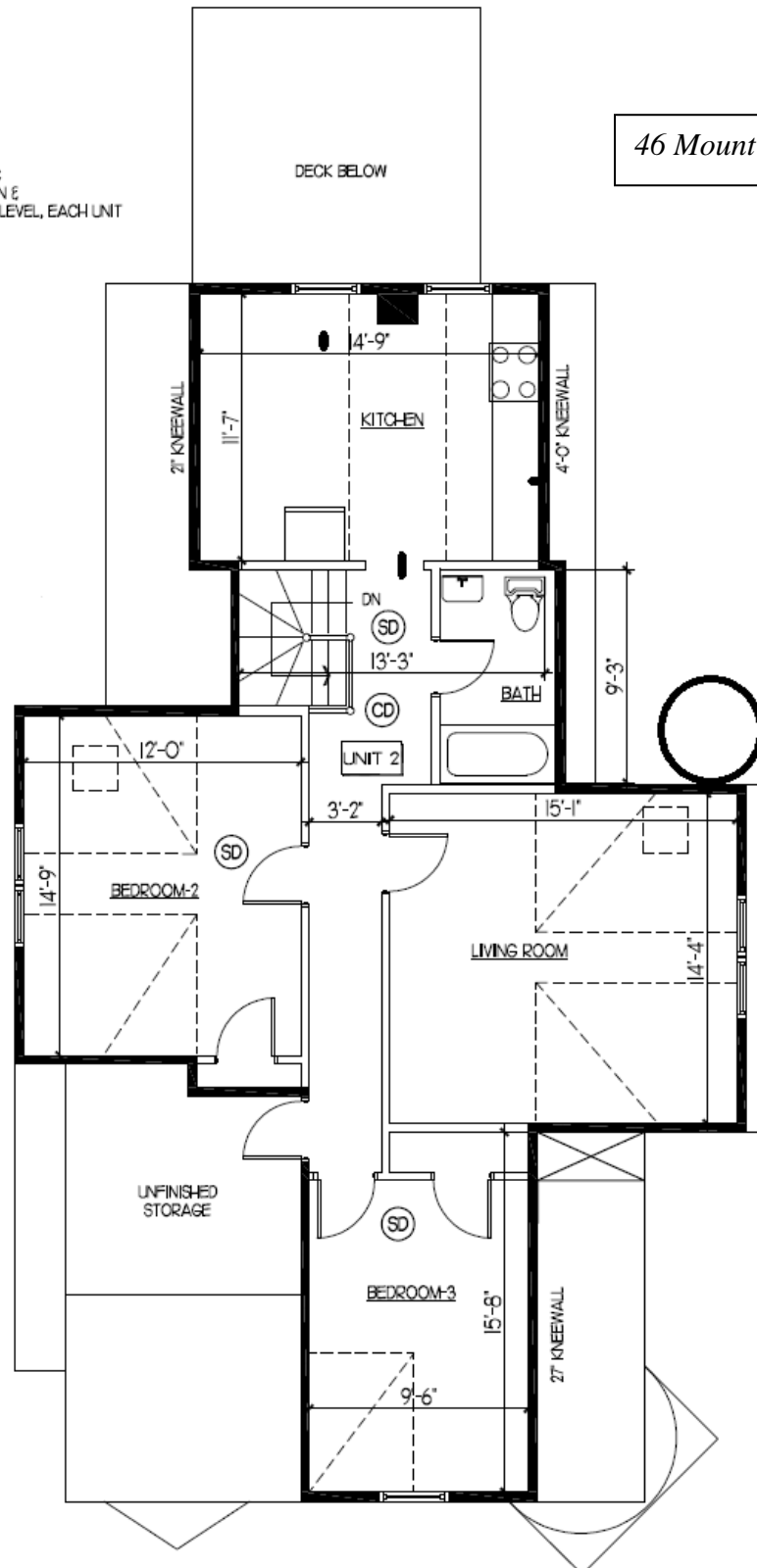


46 Mount Vernon Street

46 Mount Vernon Street
showing sight-lines

NOTE:
(SD) ADD HARD-WIRED PHOTOELECTRIC
SMOKE DETECTORS WHERE SHOWN &
(CD) CARBON MONOXIDE EACH FLOOR LEVEL, EACH UNIT

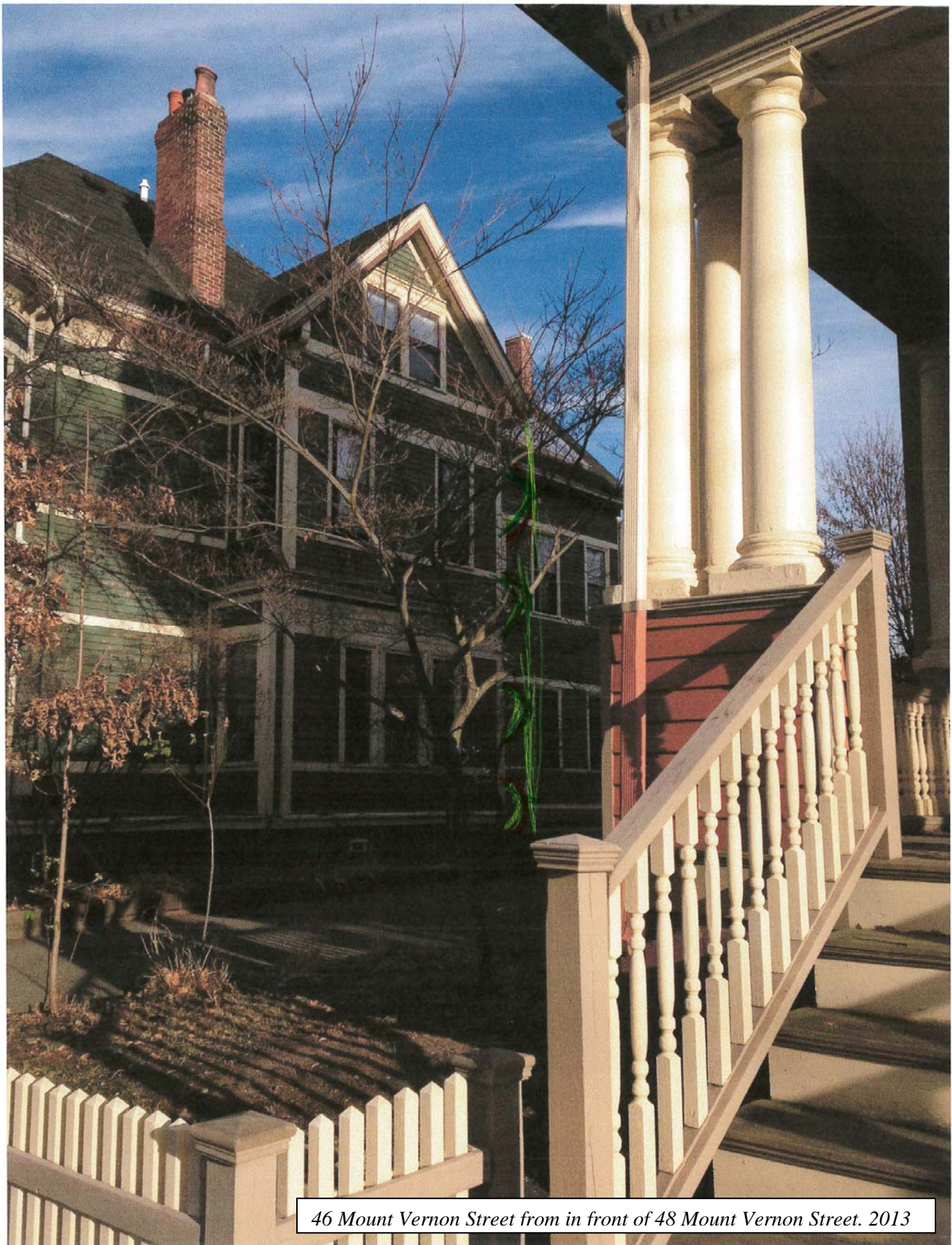
46 Mount Vernon Street



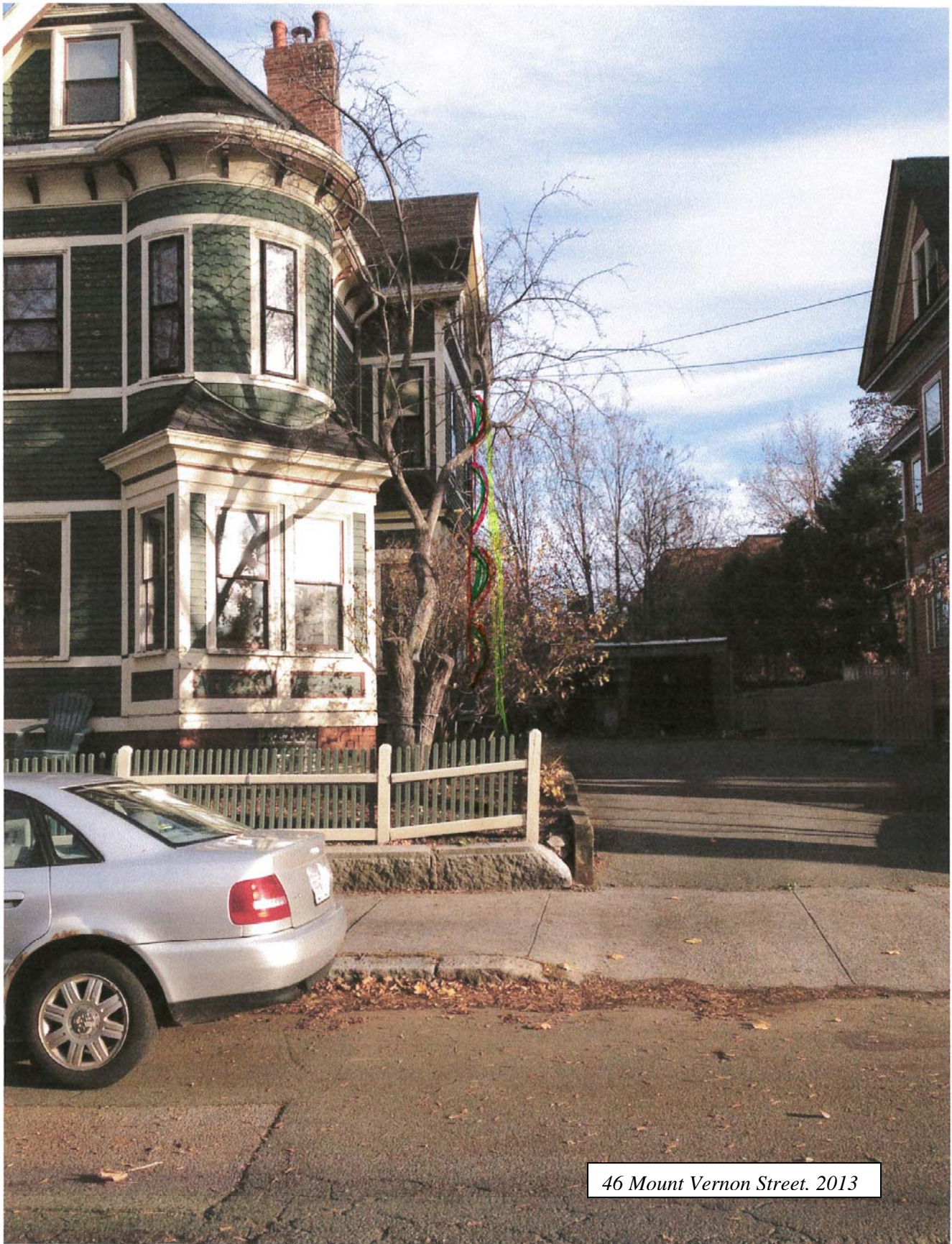
PROPOSED THIRD FLOOR PLAN
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"
968 SF +/-



46 Mount Vernon Street conceptual sketch



46 Mount Vernon Street from in front of 48 Mount Vernon Street. 2013



46 Mount Vernon Street. 2013

