



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE  
MAYOR

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

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ALTERATION TO A HISTORIC PROPERTY STAFF REPORT

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Site: 46 Mount Vernon Street c.1885 George Poole House  
Case: HPC 2015.067 Single Building Local Historic District

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

Date of Application: October, 2015 (Continued to November 17, 2015 then continued to December 15, 2015)  
Legal Notice: *Remove existing solar panels and install new panels in same location*  
Staff Recommendation: *Conditional Certificate of Appropriateness*  
Date of Public Hearing: December 15, 2015

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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 18<sup>th</sup> 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:*

Replace existing solar panels and install new panels in same location (see attached photos and

See the final pages for details and photos.

## II. FINDINGS

The existing and proposed solar panels are /will be visible from a public way. Staff advises the Commission that under M.G.L. Chapter 184 §23C, property owners shall not be unduly prevented or restricted from the installation or use of solar energy systems.

*Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The existing solar panels, and the proposed replacements, are/will be visible from the public way.

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

The building is currently in very good condition with numerous replacement/restoration projects having taken place in the last few years.

- *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 affect 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 materials except for the solar panels under this application.

- 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 under this application.

- 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.*

Given that this application refers to solar panels, item E is not applicable.

- 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 existing and proposed solar panels are /will be visible from a public way. Staff advises the Commission that under M.G.L. Chapter 184 §23C, property owners shall not be unduly prevented or restricted from the installation or use of solar energy systems.

*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.*

N/A

### **Roofs**

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

The roof shape will not be 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.*

Asphalt shingle replacement with architectural shingles was Staff approved under an earlier application.

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

N/A

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.*

N/A

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

N/A

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.*

Replacement solar panels will be installed in the same location as existing and visible from the public way. Staff does not recommend altering the location of the panels.

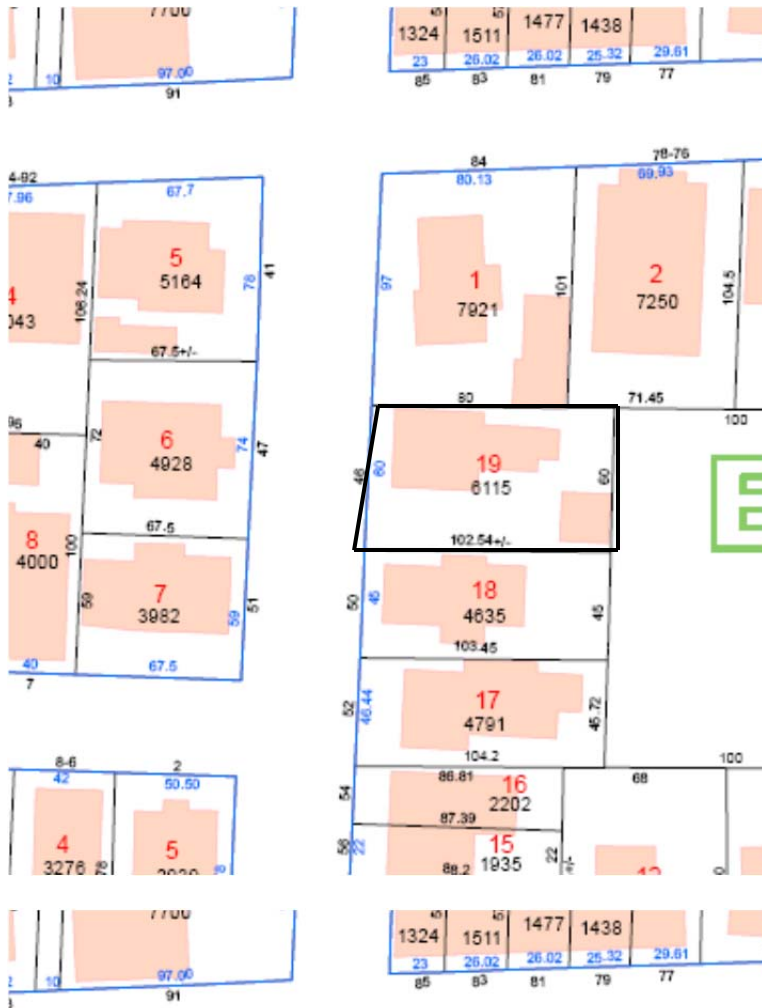
### III. RECOMMENDATIONS

*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.*

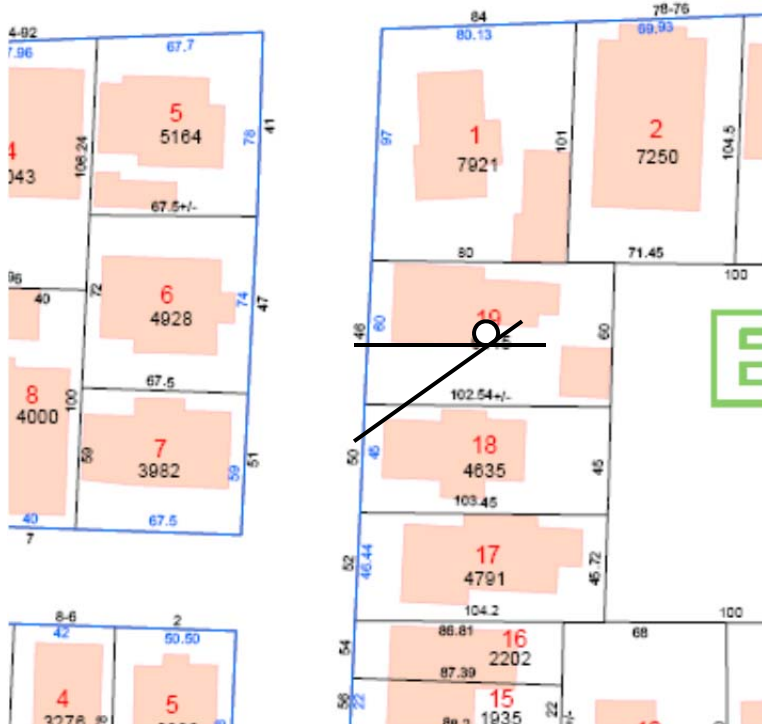
Staff recommends that a ***conditional Certificate of Appropriateness*** be granted to **Owner and Applicant, Ting Fang**, to replace the extant solar panels with new panels installed in the same location.

Staff recommends that the following conditions be placed on the Certificate of Appropriateness:

1. All appropriate building permits shall be obtained from the Inspectional Services Division (ISD) prior to commencing any removal or replacement of the solar panels.
2. The Applicant/Owner shall contact HPC Staff should any aspect of this project proposal change including, but not limited to: size or location of replacement solar panels.
3. The Applicant/Owner shall inform HPC Staff once the installation of the replacement solar panels is complete so that HPC Staff can coordinate with ISD personnel for final inspection.



46 Mount Vernon Street



46 Mount Vernon Street  
showing sight-lines





46 Mount Vernon Street – c. 1898 photo