



**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 / District(s): 8 Mount Vernon Street / LHD & NR  
Case: HPC 2013.035

Applicant Name: Barbara Castro  
Applicant Address: 8 Mt. Vernon Street

Date of Application: June 25, 2013  
Legal Notice: *Remove rear bulkhead shed, modify windows and reshingle.*

Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness  
Date of Public Hearing: July 16, 2013

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**I. Building Description**

*Architectural Description:*  
The subject structure is a 2½ story, two-family dwelling in the Greek Revival style with a side hall interior plan. Architectural details to note are the Doric portico that extends the width of the front façade, paneled corner pilasters that extend the full height of the building, and full-length first floor windows. While many dwellings along the Mt. Vernon streetscape are similar in style and detailing, this is an excellent and intact example.

*Historical Context/Evolution of Structure or Parcel:* The structure, c. 1840-1850, is illustrated on the 1852 Draper Map and is noted in the MHC survey form as the Ebenezer Davis house. Ebenezer was a maritime inspector in Boston and is an early member of the East Somerville community.

*8 Mount Vernon Street, 2012*

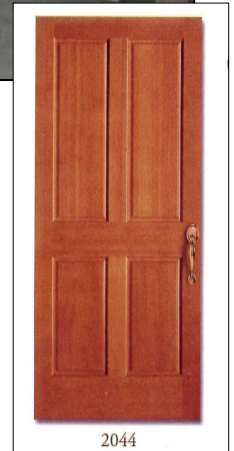


## II. Project Description

### *Proposal of Alteration:*

The Applicant proposes to remove the rear shed projection that covers the bulkhead door and stairs, and to alter the bulkhead/stair opening by installing a new door that would be flush with the exterior wall. The rear stair would be reconfigured to extend to the second floor and a new second story egress would be installed above the new basement/first floor door. The new doors would match and be simple design with four panels (see Simpson Door image). The historic window currently located on the first floor above the shed projection would be relocated to the second floor (to the right of the new door) and a second window (to replicate the historic window) would be installed below the historic window.

*8 Mount Vernon Street, rear bulkhead shed and deck, 2013*



*NOTE: The proposed new door that is to replace the bulkhead projection is illustrated on the last page of the plan set and is not illustrated correctly on sheet A201.*

Two small square windows on the first floor of the left side façade would be removed, infilled and reshingled to match the existing façade. One non-historic window on the right side façade would be removed and replaced with two hardwood windows and frames, which would match the existing historic windows below.

The Applicant also proposes to lower the basement windows on the right side façade, by two brick widths, to enable windows to open from the side, as opposed to from the bottom, which is difficult due to the height of the latch and often results in broken windows. The window sills and frames would also be restored during this phase of the project.

## III. Findings for a Certificate of Appropriateness

### *1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:*

June 2012, the HPC issued a Certificate of Appropriateness (HPC 2012.060) for the Applicant to cover a concrete wall and chain-link fence at rear of property with fieldstone to the height of 8' 5".

July 2011, the HPC issued a Certificate of Non-Applicability (HPC 2011.068) to remove paint from exterior wood trim; repair damaged and rotten wood; replace in-kind to match existing trim as needed; and repaint.

March 2011, the HPC issued a Certificate of Appropriateness (HPC 2011.036) to cover a concrete wall and chain-link fence at rear of property with fieldstone to the height of 6'; and construct a low stone wall around the garden area next to the driveway and the sidewalk.

November 2010, the HPC issued a Certificate of Appropriateness (HPC 2010.083) to install a metal fence with gates along the driveway and sidewalk property line.

There are a number of earlier Certificates issued for this property as well, since the current owners have been updating and enhancing this historic structure for close to ten years.

2. *Precedence:*

Removing small bulky projections, such as the one proposed, is not a common request but the removal of this projection would enhance the rear façade. Enclosing the bulkhead was likely not part of the original design but a later addition to eliminate water or snow from entering into the basement.

The relocation of windows is a common request; however, the replacement of non-historic windows with historically appropriate or replicated windows is less common.

The proposal to lower the basement windows is also an uncommon request. The slight relocation of these windows enables the windows themselves to remain in tact longer, since opening and closing would be less impactful due to the height, and would help ventilate the basement area which would be become usable space

3. *Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*  
Removing the projecting bulkhead shed is the least visible aspect of this proposal. This would only be visible from Mount Pleasant Street if the rear fence/wall were removed and there is no visibility from Mount Vernon Street. The remainder of the proposal- modifying the rear window and door fenestration pattern, reconfiguring the rear deck, relocating windows on the right side façade, removing windows from the left side facade, and lowering the basement windows- would be highly visible to one of the two streets.
- *What are the Existing Conditions of the building / parcel?*  
The building has been well maintained since the current owners have taken an interest in restoring and enhancing their home.

*The primary purpose of the Preservation Ordinance is to encourage preservation and high design standards in Local Historic Districts, in order to safeguard the architectural heritage of the City. Guidelines have been developed to 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.*

- *Does the proposal coincide with the General Approach set forth in the Design Guidelines?*
  - 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*  
Features described in the Form B, such as the portico, will not be altered as a result of this proposal. While one historic window on the rear façade would be relocated on the rear façade, this feature is not being removed and the fenestration pattern is being improved.
  - B. *Changes and additions to the property and its environment that have taken place over the course of time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes to the property may have developed significance in their own right, and this significance should be recognized and respected.*

The non-historic windows and doors proposed to be removed have not developed significance and are composed of materials that will not withstand the life of the building. The projecting shed could be viewed as having developed significance, but in reviewing the proposal, with an understanding for what the Applicant is ultimately trying to achieve (with regard to the interior plan), this component will no longer serve a purpose and is not integrated into the main structure.

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

The Applicant intends to repair basement window sills and frames as part of the application.

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

***C. 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.*

Although window and door openings will be relocated, the Applicant proposes to install historically appropriate windows and doors to replace these non-historic features. In addition, the features whose locations are to be altered are not known to be part of the original fenestration pattern.

*2. When possible, repair and retain original or later important window elements, such as sash, lintels, sill, architraves, glass, shutters and other decorative elements and hardware.*

The Applicant intends to repair basement window sills and frames as part of the application.

***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.*

The rear porch and various porch components are not considered a later important feature.

*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.*

The reconstructed porch will be a rear egress and fire escape for the second floor unit, which is located on the rear façade.

***I. Removal of Later Additions and Alterations***

*1. Each property will be separately studied to determine if later additions and alterations can, or should be removed.*

The projecting shed could be viewed as having developed significance, but in reviewing the proposal, with an understanding for what the Applicant is ultimately trying to achieve (with regard to the interior plan), this massing component will no longer serve a purpose and is not integrated into the main structure.

### 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 8 Mt. Vernon Street Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Barbara Castro a Certificate of Appropriateness to remove the rear bulkhead shed projection and install a new door at grade; modify the design of the rear egress/fire escape including windows and doors of the rear façade; relocate windows on the right and left facades; and lower basement windows on the right side façade at 8 Mt. Vernon Street. Alterations shall be done in accordance with submitted plans: Sheets AX201, A201, AX202, A202, AX203, & A203 (all dated 12/08/2011, except A203 is dated 7/02/2013) as well as the sketch that has been included as the last page of the submitted plan set dated 7/11/2013, which serves to illustrate the proposal for the new basement/first floor door.**

8 Mount Vernon Street

