



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

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

STAFF REPORT: ALTERATION TO A HISTORIC DISTRICT PROPERTY

Local Historic District: 23 Pleasant Avenue
Case: HPC 2014.019
Applicant: Timothy Brown
Address: 23 Pleasant Avenue, Somerville

Date of Application: March 26, 2014
Legal Notice: *Install solar panels*
Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Public Hearing: April 15, 2014



I. Area & Building Description

Historical Context: According to the Form B, Pleasant Avenue was part of an 1870s subdivision plan for Ira Hill, Elijah Walker and Horace Partridge (Plan book 17/Plan 88). Each side of the street was divided into seven lots, which were then sold for development. The subject lot was then subdivided further from Lot #28. The house was built by the prolific contractor Henry W. P. Colson, an insurance and real estate agent, who sold the parcel to Fred Haley in 1895 and built 49 Vinal Avenue next door.

Architectural Description: This structure is a gable-end form with a unique two-story projecting bay on the right side façade. This dwelling illustrates a side-hall entry plan with a bay window to the right of the front entry door, another above the entry door, and a third on the left side façade. The Queen Anne/Shingle styles provide a textured effect due to the use of clapboard and butt shingle siding while the Colonial Revival style is detailed in the swag design of the trim above the windows and frieze of the bays and porch.

II. Project Description

Proposal of Alteration: The Applicant proposes to install 10 solar panels on the right side roof plane in front of the projecting bay. The Applicant has received a previous Certificate (HPC 2013.047) from the HPC to install solar panels approximately 17 feet from the front roof edge. After working with the designers at Sungevity to understand the solar needs and limitations, retaining a 17 foot setback does not enable a feasible project.

Sungevity must ensure limited shadows are cast over the panels as impacting one panel affects the system as a whole. This understanding eliminated the option to locate panels behind the projecting bay as the chimney casts a large shadow due to the location near the center rear of the roof. The mounting system

itself rises approximately 3" from the roof plane. The conduit can be located in the attic and the component that would be required to be visible can easily be painted to match the exterior façade of the house.

The Applicant is making efforts to further a larger citywide goal, as outlined in Mayor Curtatone's inaugural speech which calls for the use of solar panels to reduce net carbon emissions to zero; therefore, Staff has worked with Sungevity to create two design schemes to present to the HPC. While both designs are visible from Pleasant Avenue, the two options are able to provide slightly different streetscape experiences.

Option 1 (SV4) locates four panels at the roof ridge in a landscape orientation with six vertical panels located beneath. This allows for a 4 foot setback from the front eaves and nearly 11 feet between the bottom roof edge, or soffit, and the solar panels.

Option 2 (SV6) provides a larger front setback, ranging from 7 feet to approximately 13 feet, with four panels located in a landscape orientation at the ridge of the roof. Six panels are then located vertically in two rows, which then provides a 5 foot area void of panels between the soffit and the lower edge of the panels. Sungevity, the solar company, prefers Option 2 as this option does not require a new contract with regard to the performance guarantee.

Both options will be visible from the streetscape; however, locating the panels higher up on the roof plane would provide a slightly different experience from the street that locating them farther back from the front façade.



23 Pleasant Ave, right side roof plane (photo 2014)

III. Findings for a Certificate of Appropriateness

Prior Certificates: Previous occupants have been issued a number of certificates for changes such as rebuilding the existing chimney (HPC 2002.047) and repairing gutters and shingles as well as reinstalling brackets (HPC 2005.048 & HPC 2007.015).

The current Applicant received a Certificate (HPC 2011.107) early in 2012 to remove a rear basement door and two windows on the rear and ell to replace with siding to match existing; install new bay window on ground floor rear; replace window on second floor with 2/2 double-hung Marvin wood window; replace window on the west side with a 1/1 double-hung Marvin wood window; remove and replace front, side and rear porch doors; install second stairs from rear entry landing into backyard; repair damaged clapboard, soffits, fascia, and trim in-kind; and repair wood windows in-kind as necessary.

Precedence: The Commission approved the installation of solar panels on 22 Summer Street in September 2013. The panels were located to be minimally or not visible from public rights-of-way.



22 Summer Street (photo 2014)

Considerations:

- *Visibility of the proposal*
Both Options 1 and 2 would be visible from Pleasant Avenue. While Option 2 allows for a larger setback from the front eaves, Option 1 may be less obtrusive, visually, from the ground.
- *Existing Conditions*
Located on a wooded residential side street of Prospect Hill, the house has been well maintained by the current and previous owners.

*Pleasant Avenue streetscape (photo 2014)**Design Guidelines – General Approach*

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?

The Pleasant Avenue Local Historic District is predominantly late 19th and early 20th century, showcasing the Queen Anne style; the Mansard roof is also prevalent in this area. Solar panels are a 21st century development and are generally considered to be a modern intrusion; however, other citywide goals should be taken into consideration as reducing carbon emissions and working with homeowners to allow changes that are not detrimental to the historic fabric, yet enable homeowners to embrace or utilize modern technology is increasing in popularity.

- 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.*

The roof material is currently asphalt shingle. The roof material was likely originally slate; however, as the roof material is no longer original, the proposal would not alter historic materials and is fully reversible.

Specific Guidelines - Roofs

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.

The panels will be set parallel to the roof and have a 3" profile. Due to the location of the chimney, projecting bay, and orientation of the building, this proposal is not feasible in a location that is not visible from the public way.

III. Recommendations

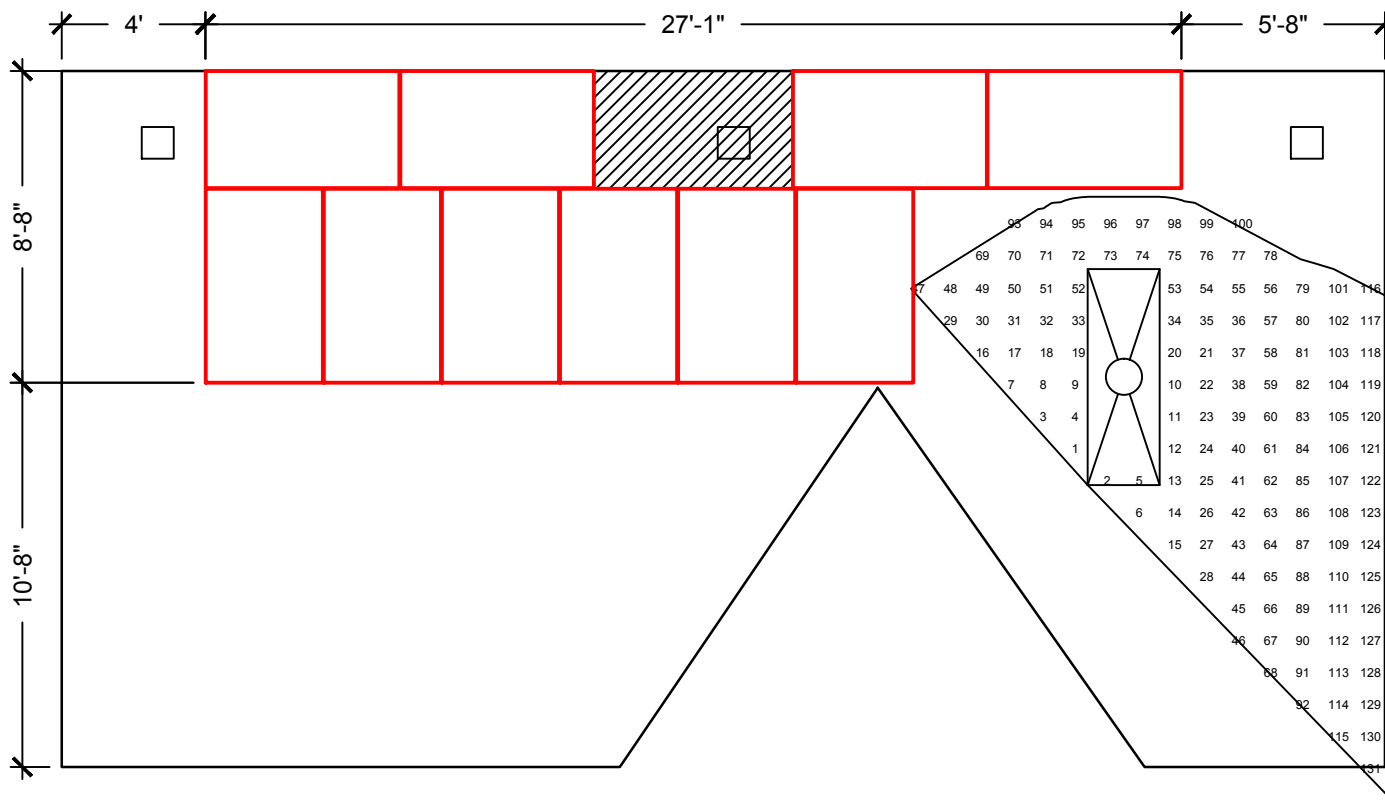
The Staff recommendation is based on a complete application and supporting materials, as submitted by the Applicant, and an analysis of the historic and architectural value and significance of the site, building or structure, the general design, arrangement, texture, material and color of the features 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 Pleasant Avenue Local Historic District; therefore Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Timothy Brown a Certificate of Appropriateness to install 10 solar panels on the right roof plane of 23 Pleasant Avenue in accordance with either Option 1 or 2.



23 Pleasant Avenue Local Historic District



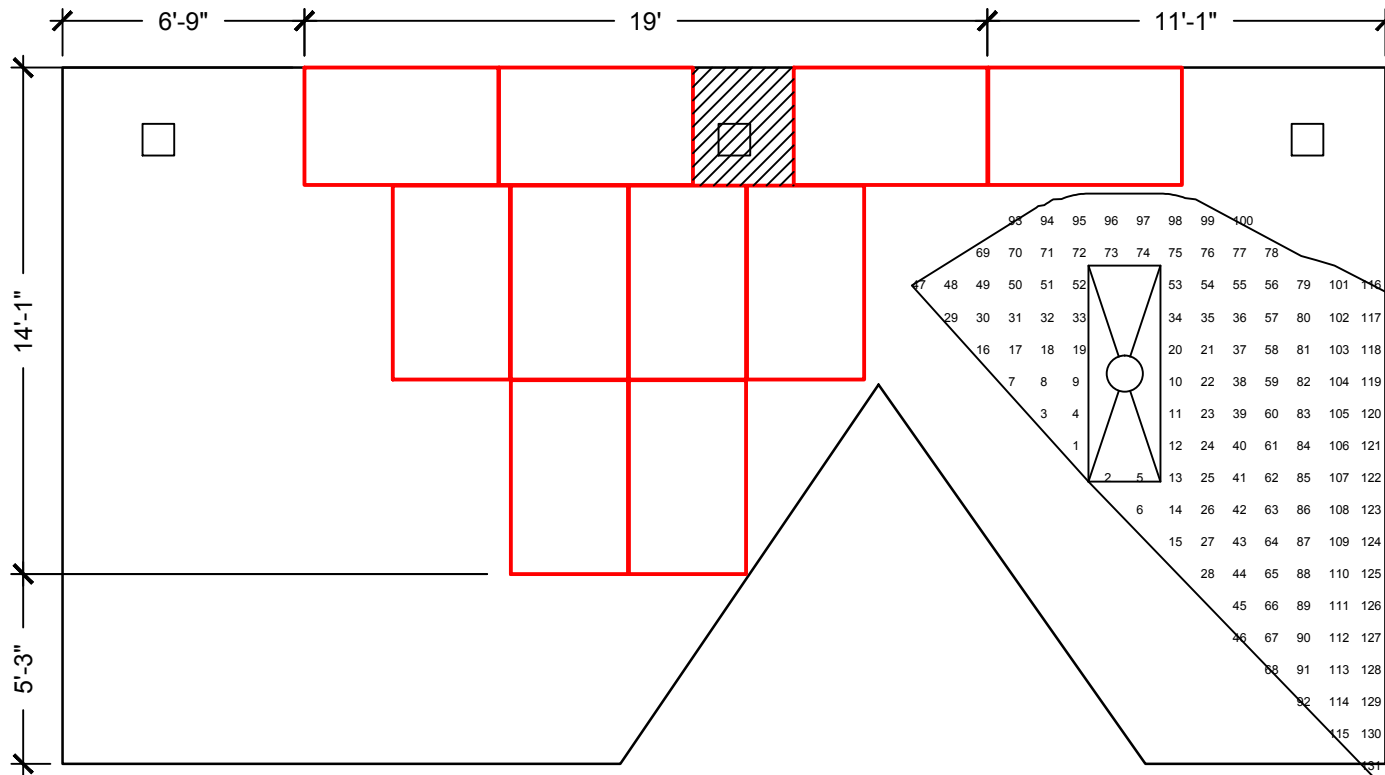
Proposed System		(10) ET SOLAR ET-P660250BB	Mods	Tilt	AZ
(1) SB3000TL-US-22 (240V)		65,72,79,86,93,95,94,90,83,74,67,67	10	45	116
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SUNGEVITY®
GENERATE POSITIVE™

PROPOSED SYSTEM 4

BROWN - 220129
23 PLEASANT AVE
SOMERVILLE, MA 02143
(617) 990-2783 ACCT#: 220129



SUNGEVITY®
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PROPOSED SYSTEM 6

BROWN - 220129
23 PLEASANT AVE
SOMERVILLE, MA 02143
(617) 990-2783 ACCT#: 220129

Proposed System	(10) ET SOLAR ET-P660250BB	Mods	Tilt	AZ
(1) SB3000TL-US-22 (240V)	65,72,79,86,93,95,94,90,83,74,67,67	10	45	116
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