



CITY OF
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC

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OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION

ALTERATION TO A HISTORIC PROPERTY STAFF REPORT

Site: 23 Porter Street

Case: HPC 12.097 (continued)

Historic Name: circa 1850 Gothic Revival House

District(s): Single Building

Applicant Name: Lalo Development Corporation, Owner

Applicant Address: 311 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA 02144

Date of Application: 8/29/12

Legal Notice: Replace all existing windows in existing historic building; relocate and install new windows as per plans; install new doors as per plans; and remove bulkhead and replace with door as per plans.

Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness

Date of Public Hearing: October 16, 2012

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

1. Architectural Description:

The asymmetrical plan with steeply pointed gables is characteristic of the Gothic cottages drawn by Andrew J. Downing in his popular **Cottage Residences** of 1850. The house is sited on the slope facing south for the once fine vistas looking to Cambridge. It has been altered with the addition of a second story balustrade over the enclosed side entrance porch with circa 1950s 6/6 windows and several additions to the rear of the building. The fenestration and entries have also been altered. Window locations were shifted and doorways closed. Most of the sash were replaced in the 1930s or 40s and are varnished wood on the interior and painted exterior. With the siding removed, it is possible to see the alterations in the openings on the original main block and alterations in the massing of the building that have been undertaken over the years.



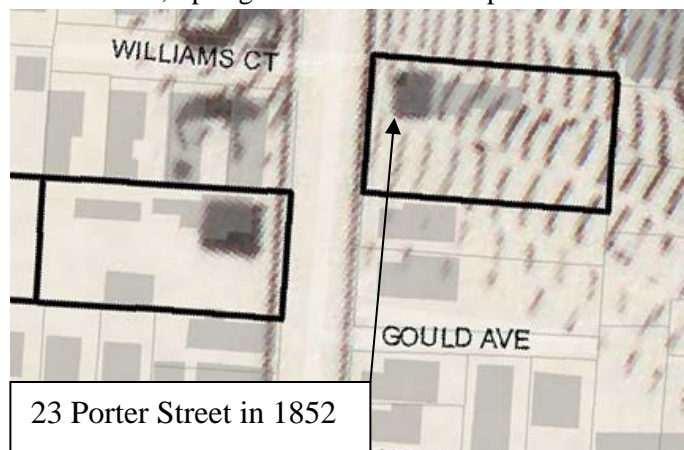


2. Historical Context/Evolution of Structure or Parcel:

Once divided into large agricultural tracts for Charlestown residents, Spring Hill evolved into a prime residential neighborhood of Somerville from the mid 1800s. Its topography lent itself to well-drained soil for agriculture and to fine vistas for the residential subdivisions that began with George Brastow's 1843 rectilinear plan for 72 house lots on Spring Hill.

With the exception of early farmhouses and the first Greek Revival double houses, the first houses built in the Spring Hill subdivisions were substantial single family homes built on ample lots. By the 1870s, with the expansion of the industries on Milk Row (now Somerville Avenue), and the horse car and later the streetcar on Summer Street from Union to Davis Square came the expanded development of this area with smaller single-family worker's

housing and attached rowhouses and larger tenements, built near the bottom of the hill on small court or terrace streets. Porter and Linden Streets were subdivided in 1844 having been the estate of A. Brackett. Porter Street, an



original rangeway, has a number of pre-1855 between Elm and Summer Streets. The Downing-Style cottages at #22 and #23 were probably built at the same time and once both had well-designed side yards. This is evident at #22. While #23 retains its large side lot, the landscaping has not been maintained and is being transformed into a landscaped parking area for the enlarge building.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

The Applicant proposes to change all existing windows to Pella Architect series wood windows with a putty type exterior muntins and spacers. The low emission coating will be a spatter-coated which has a less reflective aspect. They found that there was no consistency to the sash in the existing windows. Some have two over one sash, some two over two and in the replacement windows in the existing house there are no muntins at all, the windows are one over one. They would like to install windows with two over one sash consistent with those found on the front elevation of the house.

Other alterations were discussed at last month's meeting and were approved by the Commission.

III. FINDINGS FOR A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

No work was completed since it designation as a Local Historic District under the previous ownership and the building had deteriorated severely. Current owners have begun the construction of a new addition and full rehabilitation of the property.

As discussed and approved last month, due to the decrepit structural integrity of the existing house, the structural engineers, Roome and Guarracino, LLC required that plywood be installed over the entire structure to create a unified diaphragm around the entire envelope of the existing house to stabilize it. The windows were held in place only by the sash cords and weights as the casings on both the interior and exterior had been removed. An interior support system is also underway due to extensive carpenter ant and termite damage on many of the posts and to strengthen areas where additions and roof alterations were not properly tied into the building frame. The windows could not be retained *in situ* for this process and have been removed.

2. Precedence:

The Commission has rarely approved replacing original wood windows on the main facades of buildings. More typically they have been approved when replacing failing existing replacement windows have been up-graded from vinyl to wood with the least reflective glass available. The cases where this has not held true have been in cases of major rehabilitation (1 Summer Street, First United Methodist Church and 245 Beacon Street, Durell School), de-leading (137 Central Street) and for 22 Pleasant Avenue. In the first two cases, the existing windows were in extremely poor condition and inappropriate to a residence. In the last, the windows were a mixture of types from original to vinyl, many of which were in poor condition.

3. Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

This is a highly visible building due to its age and architecture. The change of materials and the renovations will make this building more prominent than it has been. Windows are the eyes of the building and a major character-defining feature.

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

See architectural description for the changes that can be documented. This property has been neglected for a very long time. The current owners bought the building and have been rehabilitating it to accommodate their parents along with a large new addition on rear to help pay for the alterations.

The existing wood windows date to the middle of the 20th century and do not have the characteristics of the original 19th century windows. Many are racked or falling apart. Because the sash cords are still attached to the weights, gravity is keeping the windows in place.

As can be seen from the photos once the siding was stripped, window and door openings have been altered with double windows inserted where once doors opened onto a piazza or single windows were centered on the gables. Paint shadows also indicate where there had been decorative panels located beneath the windows on the central bay of the façade closes to the street.

- *Does the proposal coincide with the General Approach set forth in the Design Guidelines?*

Portions of the general guidelines and the specific guidelines met are in bold italics below.

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.**

No further alterations visible from Porter Street are planned. All work done will bring the building closer to its original form.

- 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 (LATER IMPORTANT FEATURES will be the term used hereafter to convey this concept).***

No further changes are proposed beyond the window replacement and the restoration of the panels revealed by the siding removal.

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

Only the frame and sheathing remain of the original fabric. The paneling will be restored.

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

The replacement will be based upon physical evidence.

- 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 proportions and materials will be replicated as needed for the paneling. The proposed replacement windows will have putty mold and proportions to match the existing windows. Casing will be replicated to match the existing evidence.

- 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 proposed alteration will be visible from Porter Street.

II. SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

A. Exterior Walls

1. *Wood Siding: clapboards, shingles, board and batten, etc.*
 - a. *Retain and repair original or later important material whenever possible.*
 - b. *Retain and repair, when necessary, replace deteriorated material which matches as closely as possible.*

The paneling will be replicated as can best be determined from the paint shadows.

- c. *Invest in quality paint and proper preparation.*
- d. *Synthetic siding (aluminum, vinyl, artificial stone or brick) is prohibited because it severely compromises the appearance and integrity of old buildings. In those rare instances where, for reasons of hardship, synthetic siding is approved, the new siding must reproduce the dimensions of the original, including its relationship to corner boards, window trim and other architectural details, all of which must be retained. The application for a Certificate of Hardship must include precise installation specifications supplied by an expert.*

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.*

The proposed replacement windows will not alter the current window size or placement beyond those approved last month which were located in on the newer sections of the building and would give the building better symmetry.

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. If aluminum windows must be installed, select a baked finish that matches as closely as*

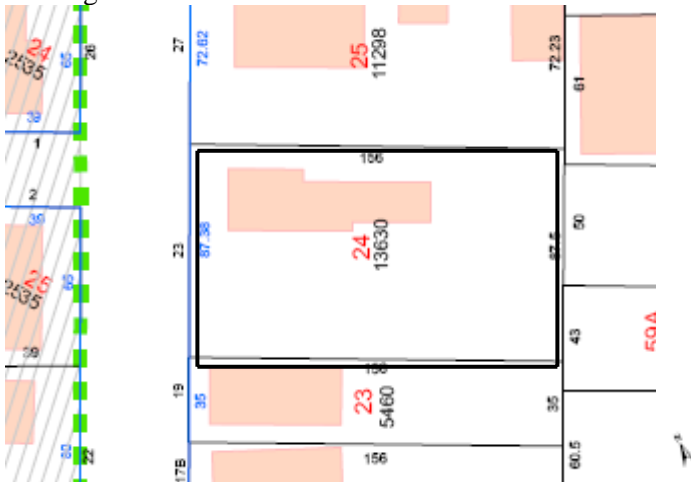
possible the color of the existing trim. Investigate weather-stripping and storm windows with a baked enamel finish as an alternative to the replacement of historic sash.

The proposed replacement windows will match the existing windows in size and proportions complete with a putty line profile.

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 proposed alteration is in agreement with the HPC Guidelines noted above and is compatible with the period of significance for this building and would not be “may be approved without substantial detriment to the public welfare and without substantial derogation from the intent and purposes of” the City’s Ordinance. This is based upon the materials submitted by the Applicant, the above findings, the Historic Staff recommends granting a **CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS** for the Applicant’s request to replace the existing windows with Pella Architect series windows



23 Porter Street