



**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: 25 Russell Street c.1845 Philemon Russell House  
Case: HPC 2013.075 Single Building Local Historic District

Applicant Name: Diane Asadorian Masters & William Masters, Owners  
Applicant Address: 25 Russell Street, Somerville, MA 02144

Date of Application: August 12, 2015  
Legal Notice: *Alter driveway.*  
Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness  
Date of Public Hearing: September 15, 2015

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**I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION**

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:** From the 1985 Survey Forms  
*This appears to be one of the earliest homes between North Street (now Massachusetts Avenue) and Davis Square. The Russell House is significant as one of the only well-preserved examples of a three-bay, 2 1/2-story Greek Revival side-hall farmhouse in Somerville. The Russell House is sited with its enclosed gable end to the street. Notable features include the 6/6 divided moveable sash throughout, the entrance offset to the right and framed by transom and sidelights, and the full-width one-story Doric porch. Wide corner pilasters support two wide, overlapped boards representing the frieze and architrave of a Classical entablature. The structure has a slate roof, and a two-story rear ell.*



25 Russell Street, 2015

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:** From the 1985 Survey Forms

*The Russells owned this land in 1838, in pre-Revolutionary times. This area was known as "Watson's Plain". Philemon Russell was a farmer and nurseryman who subdivided his 50 acres of land in 1845. The subdivision included Orchard, Russell, and Cottage Place, and straddled North Cambridge and Somerville.*

**II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

*1. Proposal of Alteration:*

1. Extend driveway
2. Replace gravel driveway with pavers.

See the final pages for details and photos.

## II. FINDINGS

1. *Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:* The previous owners did extensive repair work in 2003. Note that the previous owners intended to replace the bluestone pads on the driveway with brick pavers. Gravel was installed instead without approval of the Commission.

C/A	Stephen & Louise Bayle	2003.045	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Remove existing aluminum gutters and replace with wood gutters to match those on the front porch with Staff review and approval(C/A);</li> <li>2. Replace missing fourth column to match existing (C/A);</li> <li>3. Restore front porch to original configuration (C/A);</li> <li>4. Remove railings and balusters from front porch (C/A);</li> <li>5. Install steps at side of porch to driveway (C/A);</li> <li>6. Remove existing clapboard, install Tyvek® and new cedar clapboards with the same shadow line and exposure as existing and retain as many of the original clapboards as are feasible (C/A);</li> <li><b>7. Replace bluestone on driveway with Boston brick pavers (C/A);</b></li> <li>8. Install bluestone chimney caps on all chimneys (C/A);</li> <li>9. Remove existing casement windows on east and west sides of house (C/NA);</li> <li>10. Replace with 6/6 double-hung windows to match existing (C/NA);</li> <li>11. Remove existing new casement window in kitchen pantry and first floor stairwell and replace to match original 6 pane casement on upper floor (C/NA);</li> <li>12. Install 2-story metal spiral staircase from tenant's bedroom to provide second means of egress (C/NA);</li> <li>13. Repoint brick foundation (C/NA); and</li> <li>14. Replace broken and missing slates on roof (C/NA).</li> </ol>
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2. *Precedence:*

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*
- Replace gravel driveway with pavers.

Several properties have used modern pavers to replace either asphalt or gravel driveways. The Commission has granted Certificates of Appropriateness to replace existing paving materials with various types of pavers at 53 Atherton Street (2013), 27 Columbus Avenue (2002), 11 Linden Avenue (2013), 25 Russell Street (2003), 45 Vinal Avenue (2007) and 53 Moore Street (2014). 30 Bow Street (2001) was granted Certificate for an apron of granite pavers with a gravel driveway

3. *Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*  
The proposed alteration to the driveway is visible from Russell Street.
- *What are the Existing Conditions of the building / parcel?*  
The house is a Greek Revival constructed well before the current automotive era. Driveways are 20<sup>th</sup> century afterthought. The existing driveway is now gravel or peastone. See photos at the end of the document.

- *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.*
- C. *Whenever possible, deteriorated material or architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced or removed.*
- D. *When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence of the original or later important features.*
- 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.*
- 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 driveway was not discussed on the Form B. The driveway does not date to the period of significance of the house. No features of the house will be replaced. No original material will be replaced. The driveway is visible from Russell Street, a public right of way.

HPC Guidelines for landscaping which includes paths and driveways state:

### **Landscape Features and Paving**

1. *The general intent of this section is to preserve the existing or later essential landscape features that enhance the property.*

There are no changes proposed to the dimensions of the driveway. The existing character of the street is primarily that of an 1870-1900 suburb, with a few incursions of various automotive related buildings and paving.

Generally speaking the current HPC Guidelines do not address driveways per se. However, it is clear that the Guidelines recommend that historic buildings not be obscured by changes in the landscape. "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 Guidelines further state that "The general intent of this section is to preserve the existing or later essential landscape features that enhance the property." The paving "...can be seen as a transition feature between the structure and its ... surroundings."

2. *It is recognized that often the environment surrounding the property has a character, scale and street pattern quite different from that existing when the building was constructed. Thus, changes must frequently be made to accommodate the new condition, and the landscape treatment can be seen as a transition feature between the structure and its newer surroundings.*

Cars have taken over as the major means of transportation since this neighborhood was built.

3. *The existing landforms of the site should not be altered unless shown to be necessary for maintenance of the structure or site. Additional landforms will only be considered if they will not obscure the exterior of the structure.*

There are no alterations to the landform or pathways.

4. *The original layout and materials of the walks, steps and paved areas should be maintained if significant grade changes constitute an important feature of the structure or site. Consideration will be given to alterations if it can be shown that improved site circulation is necessary and that the alterations will accomplish this without altering the integrity of the structure.*

The materials will be changed from loose gravel to molded concrete blocks. See photos.

The Applicant's proposal for a unit block paved parking area will fit in with the neighborhood, not detract significantly from the street, and would have no effect on the visibility or the layout. The installation of the pavers would clearly be modern.

### 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.*

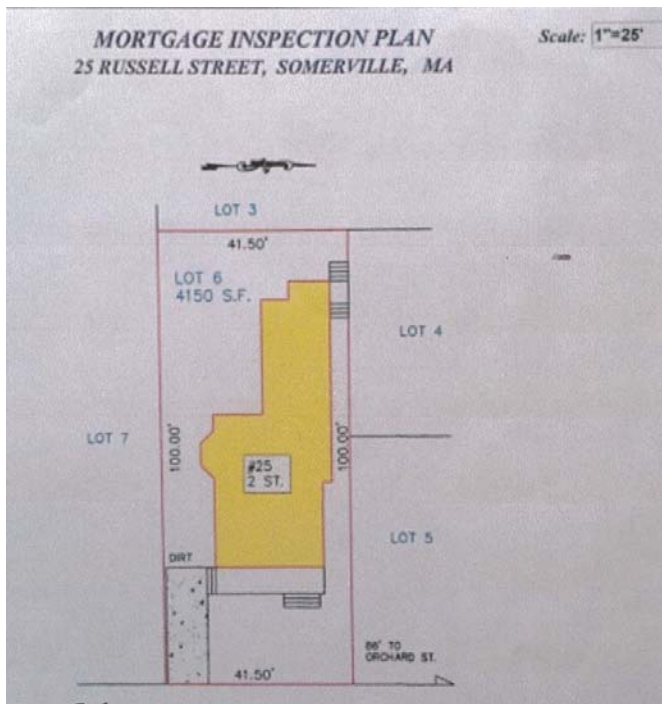
Staff determines that the alteration for which an application for a Historic Certificate has been filed is appropriate for and compatible with the preservation and protection of the 25 Russell Street Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant** Diane Asadorian Masters and William Masters, Owner a **Certificate of Appropriateness** for the installation of pavers on the driveway of 25 Russell Street with the following contingencies.

1. Applicant shall obtain all appropriate building permits prior to commencing work.
2. The pavers shall be either Autumn Blend or Beacon Hill Blend Boston Colonial Pavers by Ideal.
3. If the approval differs from the plans, new plans shall be submitted to Historic Staff prior to commencing the work;
4. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate and approved plans.













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#### FEATURES

- Classic rectangular shape
- Traditional Finish
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#### Dimensions & Coverage

Boston Colonial	4" x 8"	2 3/8" thick	4.5 pcs/sf	108 sf/cube
Boston Colonial	4" x 8"	3 1/8" thick	4.5 pcs/sf	84 sf/cube



Single Unit



Grouping



Autumn Blend



Beacon Hill Blend



Charcoal



Clay Re

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