



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

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

ALTERATION TO A HISTORIC PROPERTY STAFF REPORT

Site / District(s) 380 Somerville Avenue / LHD
Case: HPC 2013.076

Applicant Name: J&G Realty
Applicant Address: P.O. Box 377, Medford, MA

Date of Application: 10/02/2013
Legal Notice: *Replace Windows.*

Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: Wednesday, November 19, 2013

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Architectural Description:

Constructed c. 1892-1893, this richly ornamental Queen Anne mixed-use block is not a building form commonly found intact. Union Square has three such structures of this quality and scale (the other two are the Richmond and Drouet blocks) and the subject structure is the smallest of the three. The structure has an L-shape form and contains two retail storefronts with residential above. The main façade is essentially four bays; the Carlton Street façade is five bays; and the western façade is three bays with another four bays located in the rear ell. Noteworthy details include the use of oriels to relieve the rectilinear geometry of the building. The western half of the main façade and the center of the Carlton Street façade feature polygonal and bowed oriels as well as free-standing



triangular pediments. As the storefronts have been minimally modernized, these continue to illustrate original display window surrounds which consists of vertical and horizontal panels.

Historical Context/Evolution of Structure or Parcel:

This parcel originates from the Hawkins estate, a large tract that extended from Somerville Avenue to the Fitchburg Railroad tracks. This lot is numbered on a plan that dates March 15, 1893. The 1895 Stadly map illustrates a stable behind this structure and the directory lists a plumbing business at 7 Carlton Street, owned by William F. Bennett. 1920 directory research illustrates that the residential components were occupied by Irish and Italian families. In 1930, families of Irish descent continue to occupy these spaces.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Proposal of Alteration:

The structure was designated in 2010 due to a 2009 request to demolish the building. Simultaneous to designation of this structure, the HPC worked with the owner, agent and architect of the property to develop a mixed-use project that retains the existing historic façade and more fully develops the rest of the property. The project was approved by the Planning Board in 2011, but the project was put on hold due to the lease held by the retail tenant and the parcel was sold to the current owners in June 2012.

Wood windows in Units 1 and 2 were replaced with vinyl windows prior to the current owners, who purchased the property in June 2012. Upon purchase, 13 wood windows in Unit 3 were issued a permit and replaced with vinyl windows. Most recently, a permit was issued to replace 11 wood windows in Unit 4 with replacement vinyl windows. Currently, 8 of these 11 remaining wood windows have been replaced with vinyl windows and the wood windows have been discarded. The three that remain to be replaced are located on the corner of Somerville Avenue and Carlton Street.

Due to the unique situation that is presented here in that 1) the existing historic structure is shortly going to be severely compromised; 2) the vinyl windows have already been purchased; and 3) the permits were illegally issued by ISD, Staff recommends the following:

1. The dimensions of the remaining wood windows shall be documented in scaled plans and photographs to be submitted to Historic Staff within 30 days of the issuance of a Certificate;
2. Upon the intended construction of a new mixed-use building that retains the existing historic façade, new wood windows, matching the documented dimensions of the three remaining wood windows, shall be installed within the remaining historic façade of the existing structure;
3. Should the intended new building not begin construction by the end of 2015, the windows of Unit 2L shall be replaced with wood windows, matching the documented dimensions; and
4. The resulting Certificate that articulates these terms shall be recorded at the Registry of Deeds within 30 days of being issued a Certificate.

The Commission may also want to consider requiring the Applicant to paint the replacement windows.

III. FINDINGS FOR A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

1. Prior Certificates Issued:

October 2013, a Certificate of Non-Applicability was issued to repair and replace clapboards.

February 2011, a Certificate of Appropriateness was issued to:

1. Open up closed retail window openings on Carlton Street;
2. Replicate window size, location, and casings;

3. Install historically appropriate "magnum" windows to match original retail windows as needed;
4. Replace doors with an appropriate style;
5. Substitute replacement windows with 2/2 insulated clear glass wood or clad sash;
6. Replace simple wood shingles with decorative wood shingles to match existing pattern;
7. Replace missing conical roof on the corner of Carlton Street and Somerville Avenue;
8. Construct new addition/building to connect to existing building as shown in conceptual plans;
9. Add driveway on Carlton Street and proposed gate system;
10. Construct an addition on the rear and above part of the building as shown in plans; and
11. Remove concrete block structure and porches on the rear of the building.

February 2011, a Certificate of Hardship was issued to lower the entries to grade to meet ADA requirements; retain/replicate and document existing mosaic tile entries.

2. *Precedence:*

- The Commission routinely grants certificates to change windows. While certificates are not generally granted to change from a historic material to a modern material, such as vinyl, unless minimally visible from a public way, the Commission does work with Applicants to determine feasible solutions when ISD issues an illegal permit.

However, Staff is recommending an interim solution until the 2010 approved building is constructed as the Applicant was granted permits not authorized by the Commission. Through allowing the Applicant to finish installing the purchased windows, the building will appear more uniform and maintained for the duration this structure remains in the current state. As Staff is recommending to record the subsequent Certificate at the Registry of Deeds, the windows of the historic structure would be replaced as part of this project with those more historically appropriate than those initially identified in the previously granted Certificate. In addition, should the project not take place within the allowed time frame, under Staff's recommendation, the windows of only Unit 2L would be replaced with those matching the documented dimensions.

- In addition, a new system will shortly be put in place to ensure that proposals to alter historic properties have Historic Staff sign off first; therefore, if these changes require HPC approval, these will be caught before the changes are made.

3. *Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*
Unit 2L is located on the second floor at the corner of Somerville Avenue and Carlton Street.
- *What are the Existing Conditions of the building / parcel?*
The windows are in need of repair and the building is in need of some basic maintenance such as paint. The remaining three windows are likely repairable, however, 1) the existing historic structure is shortly going to be severely compromised; 2) the vinyl windows have already been purchased; and 3) the permits were illegally issued by ISD.

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 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 proposal does not coincide with the General Approach as the window material proposed is vinyl and not historically appropriate. However, Staff is recommending an interim solution until the 2010 approved building is constructed as the Applicant was granted permits not authorized by the Commission. By allowing the Applicant to finish installing the purchased windows, the building will appear more uniform and maintained for the duration this structure remains in the current state. As Staff is recommending to record the subsequent Certificate at the Registry of Deeds, the windows of the historic structure would be replaced as part of this project with those more historically appropriate than those initially identified in the previously granted Certificate. In addition, should the project not take place within the allowed time frame, under Staff's recommendation, the windows of only Unit 2L would be replaced with those matching the documented dimensions.

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.

The proposal does not coincide with the General Approach as the window material proposed is vinyl and not historically appropriate. However, Staff is recommending an interim solution, which is granting a Certificate of Appropriateness to replace 11 wood windows in Unit 2L at 380 Somerville Avenue. This Certificate is conditional upon the following conditions.

- The dimensions of the remaining wood windows shall be documented in scaled plans and photographs to be submitted to Historic Staff within 30 days of the issuance of a Certificate;
- Upon the intended construction of a new mixed-use building that retains the existing historic façade, new wood windows, matching the documented dimensions of the three remaining wood windows, shall be installed within the remaining historic façade of the existing structure;
- Should the intended new building not begin construction by the end of 2015, the windows of Unit 2L shall be replaced with wood windows, matching the documented dimensions; and
- The resulting Certificate that articulates these terms shall be recorded at the Registry of Deeds within 30 days of being issued a Certificate.

380 Somerville Avenue

