



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:	34 Spring Street	c.1852 Robinson-Lovejoy-Hodgdon House
Case:	HPC 2015.048	CASS Local Historic District
Applicant Name:	J. Murray & Sons, Contractor	
Applicant Address:	114 Broadway, Somerville, MA 02145	
Date of Application:	July 22, 2015	
Legal Notice:	<i>Alter siding</i>	
Staff Recommendation:	Certificate of Appropriateness	
Date of Public Hearing:	August 18, 2015	

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: From the Form B.

Built c. 1852-1856, 34 Spring Street, together with the neighboring, nearly identical residence at 38 Spring Street is an Italianate villa, that still serve as major 'place making' buildings within George O. Brastow's Spring Hill mid-nineteenth century residential development. Much of Spring Hill's identity as an early romantic suburban development hinges on the continued presence of these two houses. Despite changes to their fabric and fenestration, these houses retain integrity of siting and form, as well as of numerous elements. Indeed, enough survives within the realm of basic structural components, distinctive roof configuration and elements, such as window lintels and cornice brackets, to understand the original appearance of this charming duo. The survival of a cupola atop number 34 suggests that 38 Spring Street may have originally possessed this picturesque structural feature as well. Both 34 and 38 Spring Street have the distinction of being relatively early Boston area examples of the 'modern French roof' or mansard roof. This double-pitched roof was introduced to America as well as Boston in 1847 at the Deacon mansion (demolished) in Boston's South End.



34 Spring Street, 2009

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34 Spring Street stands on elevated terrain, mid-way up the south slope of Spring Hill. Overlooking a narrow, shrub-dotted front yard, 34 Spring Street is a T-shaped, two story Italianate villa. Rising from a brick

foundation to a bell-cast mansard roof, the mansard is crowned by a square cupola. The house is composed of a three-bay-by-two-bay main block and a two-story three-bay-by-one-bay rear ell. The edges of the main block are accented by narrow corner boards. Turning to the center of the main facade's first story, the front door is set off by simple vertical and horizontal boards, which in turn, are flanked by Doric pilasters; these flanking pilasters are echoed in the pilasters in evidence at either end of the main facade's first story. The replacement front door of the center entrance bay opens onto a full-length front porch. The porch floor rests on a wooden platform and supports square replacement posts that rise to support a flat roof. On either side of the front door are foreshortened windows that were originally full length. These windows were apparently altered during the c. mid twentieth century when asphalt sheathing replaced original clapboard sheathing. In general, windows are standard size and are fully enframed--complete with cornice-headed lintels (main block only). The house's windows contain 111 double-hung replacement metal sash. In addition to the main facade's first story windows, the window at the center of the main facade's second story has also been reduced in size. The facades of the main block culminate in deep bracketed cornices. While the main and south roof slopes retain original pairs of dormers with arched roofs, the dormers on the north slopes were removed to accommodate a pair of skylights.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:

Built c. 1852-1856, 34 Spring Street was one of the original pre-Civil War houses of George O. Brastow's Spring Hill residential development. Early residents of this house included a sea captain, machinist and painter, as well as purveyors of lumber, varnish, and the like. By the mid-1880s, Herbert Hodgdon, one of the early bicycle dealers of the Boston area lived here. During the second half of the twentieth century, the Lawrence C. Hallins, owners of the White Raven Hotel in Shirley, MA lived here.

*34 Spring Street was a first generation residence within the George O. Brastow's residential development on the south slope of Spring Hill. As early as 1843, Alexander Wadsworth, surveyor of Mount Auburn Cemetery platted a modified grid within the area bounded by Somerville Avenue, Belmont Street, Summer Street and Central Street. House construction in the new development mostly lagged during the 1840s, with the first wave of building taking place during the 1850s. Brastow was a real estate developer and local political figure who was the first mayor of Somerville after its incorporation as a City in 1872. Brastow set up housekeeping in a Greek Revival house at 152 Summer Street (demolished) around 1840. According to Henry C. Binford in *The First Suburbs*, Brastow was among a handful of influential developers who, beginning in the 1840s, began to petition local government for amenities such as road improvements and schools that would benefit their fledgling residential enclaves. Binford notes that "Among these veteran petitioners were men like George O. Brastow and Charles Foster, who promoted their own neighborhoods, paid for amenities from their own pockets, petitioned for government favors and also served without pay in town office."*

The Middlesex deeds present a tangled picture of the property's ownership during the mid-nineteenth century, indicating that George N. Robinson and/or Ezra Robinson lived here during the mid-1850s while Sarah Ann West, wife of George Warren West, acquired the property in the late 1850s. The Robinson also figure in the early history of 38 Spring Street next door. A deed of April, 1860 clearly relates to the ownership story of 34 Spring Street. At that time the G. W. Wests sell number 34 to Loyal Lovejoy of Boston for \$5,000. Interestingly, Lovejoy was a lumber dealer--one wonders if any of his lumber was used in the construction of Spring Hill houses.

Lovejoy sold the property to Lydia B. Hodgdon, wife of Alexander Hodgdon in May of 1862 for \$4,150. Mr. Hodgdon was a sea captain, formerly of Charlestown, Massachusetts. His place of employment is listed as Commercial (Wharf or Street?) in Boston. Interestingly, by the mid-1870s, Hodgdon's occupation is listed as ship chandler. By the mid-1880s, the Hodgdon listed at this address was presumably the son of Lydia and Alexander. Herbert Hodgdon sold bicycles--then a very new mode of transportation--on Tremont Street in Boston.

By 1895, a George Hodgdon, bookkeeper is listed here. By 1903, the Hodgdon family's forty year ownership of number 38 ended with new occupants setting up housekeeping at number 34.

Listed here during the early 1900s were Mrs. Ella F. LeBosquet, widow of Henry, as well as her bookkeeper son Charles. Also in residence at that time was Frederick L. Brown, a clerk in the North Faneuil Hall Market building. By 1910, traveling salesman Benjamin F. Baldwin and Ernest S. Far, carpenter, are listed at this address.

From the mid-1910s until at least the early 1940s, the Charles W. and Lawrence C. Hallin family was associated with this property. Charles is variously listed as a machinist or mechanic for an unspecified company while Lawrence was a manager. By the early 1940s, Charles' widow Hilda lived here with her brother-in-law, Lawrence and sister-in-law Bertha. The Lawrence Hallins divided their time between Spring Hill Somerville and their hotel called the White Raven Inn in Shirley, Massachusetts.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

1. Remove synthetic brick siding and replace it with clapboard.

See the final pages for details and photos.

III. FINDINGS

1. *Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:* This property has only recently been designated as a Local Historic District since 2011. Prior to that it has been in the Spring Hill National Register District since 1989 which has the same boundaries as the Central Atherton Spring Summer Local Historic District.

C/NA	Rick Fallone, Contractor	2014.079	1. Three-tab asphalt shingles shall be installed on the mansard roof to match the existing in texture, size, shape, and installation detail.
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1. Precedence:

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*
- Remove synthetic brick siding and replace it with clapboard.

There are numerous precedents in the removal of other synthetic and in-appropriate sidings. Since many of the buildings in the city have encountered unsympathetic alterations over time, the Commission, as a general rule, has approved any alteration that is an upgrade to the existing conditions and brings a building more into line with its historical period of significance. The following Local Historic District properties had inappropriate siding, such as asbestos or wood shingles, aluminum or vinyl siding which when removed revealed gave evidence of the original design of the building: 83 Boston Street (2010), 32 & 34 Bow Street (2004), 400 Broadway (2004), 13 Campbell Park (2012), 88 College Avenue (2007), 61 Columbus Avenue (2006), 221 Morrison Avenue (2010), 5 Westwood Road (2003), 6 Westwood Road (2003) and 117 Washington Street (2012). The owners of these properties were granted Certificates of Appropriateness for the removal of the inappropriate siding and then issued Certificates of Non-Applicability to make the needed repairs or replacements to the existing historic fabric based upon the physical evidence revealed.

3. Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The wall is visible from Spring Street and is located beneath the second floor porch..

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

The house is located halfway down Spring Street and adjacent to a very similar house in a residential neighborhood. The condominium association is undertaking extensive porch and deck repairs. The wall of the house under the

porch is covered with synthetic brick. The remaining walls of the house are covered with asbestos shingle. See photos at the end of the document.

- *Is the proposal more in-keeping with the age, purpose, style and construction of the building?*

The synthetic brick siding is inappropriate for the building. The proposal will return the siding to wood clapboard in-keeping with the original materials of the building.

- *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.*
- 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).*
- 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.*

No further alterations visible from Spring Street are planned. All work done will bring the building closer to its original form. No other changes are proposed. Once the synthetic brick is removed, the siding will be repaired or replaced in-kind to match the siding found based upon the physical evidence. The proportions and materials will be replicated as needed. There is no intention of replacing the 'brick' with cementitious siding to match the existing asbestos shingles. The proposed alteration will be visible from Spring 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 siding revealed will be retained if possible. The Applicant intends to replace the materials found in-kind and only if necessary.

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 Central, Atherton Spring Summer Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant J. Murray & Sons, Contractor for the 34 Spring Street Condo Association a Certificate of Appropriateness** for the replacement of synthetic brick siding with clapboard with the following contingencies:

1. The synthetic brick siding shall be removed.
2. Wood clapboard shall be installed on the first floor front wall to match the evidence of the clapboards found beneath the synthetic brick in exposure and installation.
3. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate and approved plans.





34 Spring Street, 2015