



**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 / District(s):	45 Walnut Street / LHD & NR Property
Case:	HPC 2013.026
Applicant Name:	Andrew & Lindsey Sudbury
Applicant Address:	45 Walnut Street
Date of Application:	5/30/2013
Legal Notice:	<i>Install 6' fence, two pedestrian gates and one driveway gate.</i>
Staff Recommendation:	Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing:	June 18, 2013

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**I. Building Description**

*45 Walnut Street (photo 2013)*

*Architectural Description:*

This structure is a 2½ story, single-family dwelling constructed in the Queen Anne style with a center hall interior plan. The house displays many stylistic elements of the period, notably the corner tower and turret, large massing, and varied roof lines. Decorative shingles and clapboard envelope the façade. Of note is the hooded gable on the front façade, embellished with decorative woodwork and a bay window within the gable. This house is an excellent intact example of the Queen Anne style in the Prospect Hill area. This parcel is unique in that the dwelling has three street fronts: Boston, Walnut and Munroe streets.



*Historical Context:*

The current structure on this property was constructed c.1884-1894. This property is listed on the MHC survey form as the Louville Niles House with an 1890 construction date. A structure with a different building footprint, however, appears on this parcel in the 1874 Somerville Atlas, which belongs to Mrs. Henry Bradshaw, part of the Bradshaw Estate. The 1884 Atlas illustrates the same building footprint. In the 1894 Atlas the building footprint on the parcel illustrates the corner tower and thus resembles the current structure. Louville Niles purchased the estate and erected the current house. Niles was well-known in the provision business, first at Niles Brothers and, later, when his company merged with Boston Packing and Provision Company. Niles was also an active real estate developer in the Prospect Hill neighborhood.

**II. Project Description***45 Walnut Street (pictometry photo, 2009)**Proposal of Alteration:*

The Applicants propose to install a historically appropriate wrought iron fence along the three street fronts of the property to help keep their children and dogs safe. The fence would have classic spear finials with pineapple capitals. Three gates will allow access to walkways, while a fourth sliding gate will provide access to the driveway from Boston Street. The current handrails located at the Walnut Street stair are proposed to be removed to accommodate the new fence and gate. The four foot fence would be located behind the row of hedges, along both Walnut and Boston streets. The Applicants also propose to install a combination 4 and 6 foot fence along Munroe Street, also to be located behind the hedges. Approximately 20 feet of fencing along Munroe Street would be 4 feet in height, while the 6 foot portion would enclose a portion of the side yard and a small patio area, along Munroe Street. At the 20 foot setback, the fence would begin to transition from 4 feet to six feet. The perpendicular portion that separates the front from the side yard would join with the Munroe Street section at the point where the height reaches 6 feet. The Applicants originally proposed a 6 foot fence around the entire yard; however, after talking with Staff regarding obstructing views of the historic dwelling, the Applicants decided to move forward with the current proposal.



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SZO – The maximum height for front yard fences is 4 feet while the maximum height for side and rear yard fencing is 6 feet.

**III. Findings for a Certificate of Appropriateness***Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:*

August 2007, the HPC granted a Certificate of Appropriateness for a number of exterior alterations, which include vinyl replacement windows (Marvin Ultimate, simulated divided light, double-hung), replacement of non-original door to match original wooden door, to raise window openings on the Boston Street façade by 6", and in-kind replacement the original door. The HPC also granted a Certificate of Non-Applicability to reconstruct and repair the original wood porch posts (HPC 2007.53).

September 2010, the HPC granted a Certificate of Appropriateness to install snow hooks and snow guards and a Certificate of Non-Applicability to repair storm damage to slate roof, gutters, and fascia (HPC 2010.64).

April 2013, the HPC granted a Certificate of Non-Applicability to remove and hand-strip 11 wood double-hung windows for the purpose of de-leading and repair (HPC 2013.014).

*Precedence:*

The installation of a wood fence, as opposed to iron, is a common request; however, the location, characteristics of the property, and homeowners' needs create a unique situation. In many cases, fences that are 6 feet in height only exist on one side of a property, for privacy purposes, and generally enclose rear and/or side yards.

1 Summer Street, the HPC granted the construction of a 5' iron picket fence around the property (HPC 2005.074).

28 Warren Avenue, the HPC granted the installation of a 36" wrought iron fence and gate at the head of the driveway adjacent to backyard (HPC 2003.032).

27 Chester Street, the HPC granted the installation of two iron gates using salvaged posts and pickets, new spear pickets with 'acorn' finials, and pineapple tops for the posts (HPC 2011.059).

*Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The fence is proposed to surround the perimeter of the property. Since the 4 foot portion would be located behind the hedges, this portion will be minimally visible a majority of the year. This portion would be more visible in the colder months when the hedges are bare. The 6 foot portion would be more clearly visible behind the hedges along Munroe Street, due to the height, as well as the location at the front yard setback; however, the height of the fence would obstruct views minimally due to the grade and proposed location of the fence.

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

The house and property are in excellent condition. Both the house and yard are well-maintained.

- *What are the Applicant's needs or requirements?*

The HPC should take into consideration the original proposal as well as the Applicants' need for a fence in certain areas to be at a height of 6 feet.

*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?*

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 Applicants propose to install a 4 and 6 foot high wrought iron fence that is historically appropriate for the style and period of the house. The height of the 4 foot fence, to be located behind the hedges, will be minimally visible, and therefore, will not obstruct the Boston or Walnut street facades. While the 6 foot portion will be more visible, due to the location and grade at which the fence will be located, the historic character of the house will still be understood and views will only be minimally obstructed as this portion of the fence encloses a section of the side and rear yard. The HPC should take into consideration the original proposal as well as the Applicants' need for a fence in certain areas to be at a height of 6 feet.

*Does the proposal coincide with the appropriate Specific Guidelines as set forth in the Design Guidelines?*

H. Landscape Features and Paving – (3) *Additional landforms will only be considered if they will not obscure the exterior of the structure.*

The height of the 4 foot fence, to be located behind the hedges, will be minimally visible, and therefore, will not obstruct the Boston or Walnut street facades. While the 6 foot portion will be more visible, due to the location and grade at which the fence will be located, the historic character of the house will still be understood and views will only be minimally obstructed as this portion of the fence encloses a section of the side and rear yard. The HPC should take into consideration the original proposal as well as the Applicants' need for a fence in certain areas to be at a height of 6 feet.

Fences – (1) *Natural materials should be used for fences and walls especially those that can be seen from the street. Appropriate materials are wood, brick, stone and cast iron.*

Wrought iron is a natural material and is historically appropriate for a fence at this location.

Fences – (2) *Should not be used to screen front yards, rather front yard fences should be open and decorative in nature. Fencing may be used to screen parking areas or mechanical systems.*

The proposed fencing would be iron and transparent but would also have an ornamental and practical component. While a majority of the fencing will be minimally visible, and therefore, will not obstruct views, the 6 foot portion of fencing along Boston Street will be more visible. However, this proposed enclosed area is located at the side and rear of the house, setback approximately 20 feet from the primary façade along Walnut Street. While this portion would still be visible, the enclosed area is necessary for their family needs.

### **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 further research.*

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 45 Walnut Street Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Lindsey and Andrew Sudbury a Certificate of Appropriateness to install a 4 and 6 foot fence, three pedestrian gates and one driveway gate at 45 Walnut Street. The fencing shall be constructed in a manner that is consistent with the HPC approved plan (date stamped 6/12/2013) and the style shall be consistent with that which was submitted (Sheet 1, date stamped 6/12/2013). Additionally, as there may be minor alterations to what is proposed, such as the transition between 4 to 6 feet in height, Staff recommends that additional minor changes be subject to Staff approval.**

*45 Walnut Street, aerial view*

