



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

HISTORIC DISTRICT ALTERATION STAFF REPORT

Site / District(s) 8-10 Walnut Street / Single-Building LHD/NR
Case: HPC 2012.122

Applicant Name(s): Francis D. Privitera
Applicant Address: 59 Union Square, Somerville

Date of Application: 11/01/2012
Legal Notice: Remove six wood fanlight windows, three wood sash windows, two white vinyl windows, and sash components from a window opening, all from the second story of the front façade; and install six white color aluminum windows within the existing openings.

Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: Tuesday, November 20, 2012

I. Building Description

Architecture:

The Somerville Journal Building is a Renaissance Revival commercial structure constructed in 1894. This masonry structure is representative of small business blocks built around the end of the nineteenth century. This structure is importantly associated with the Somerville Journal. Constructed on a raised basement that is separated by a stringcourse, the building retains its recessed main entry, corbelled cornice and relieving arches above the arcaded windows of the second story.

Historical Context/Evolution:

The Somerville Journal, established in 1870, was located in the Hill Building in Union Square until the subject building was constructed. Designed to house operations of the Somerville Journal, this structure had seven presses and related equipment as well as workspace for 50 employees.



II. Project Description

Proposal of Alteration:

On Friday, November 2, the Applicant/Owner, Frank Privitera, installed white aluminum replacement windows on the second story of the primary façade at the request of his tenant. The windows are insulated Low-E windows from Universal Window and Door. The installation was almost complete when a Stop Work order was issued. The remaining work to be complete consists of caulking around the fanlights above the six double hung windows.

The contractor that installed the windows did not obtain building permits prior to beginning the work; therefore, the Historic Preservation Commission was not notified. The contractor is currently storing the windows off-site until the situation is rectified.

The prior existing conditions were very poor and only three of the original six wood windows were still in existence (see image below). The two left windows had already been replaced with vinyl and the right window opening has components of the upper sash that remain but there is no glass or bottom sash. The remaining three wood double hung windows are clearly in disrepair as well as the six fanlights above. Additionally, the tenant states that the wood sashes disintegrated upon the removal of the three remaining wood windows.

Although the resulting situation is an unfortunate mistake, neither the owner nor the tenant knew that protocol had not been followed. The Applicant would like to correct the situation and requests a Certificate of Appropriateness to install six white aluminum replacement windows with fanlights that are one piece. The windows have already been installed (see image above) and are clearly an improvement to the façade of the building, though not in a historical sense. In terms of aesthetics, all the openings now have a window and all the windows are currently consistent and fit within the existing opening.



III. Findings for a Certificate of Appropriateness

1. *Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:*

There are no records of prior certificates issued by the HPC for the subject property.

2. *Precedence:*

The Commission rarely grants a Certificate of Appropriateness to replace original wood windows with alternate material replacement windows as this does not meet the Design Guidelines for Historic Structures. However, the Commission has issued a Certificate of Hardship for the replacement of original materials if proper procedure has not been followed and replacement materials have already been wholly or partially installed, or purchased in some cases. Often the Commission will attach conditions to Certificates of Hardship that are granted on account of lost procedure or cost so that future alterations are given an opportunity to restore the structure to a prior condition.

3. *Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The structure and windows are highly visible as these six windows and fanlights are located on the primary façade.

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

The existing conditions were poor. Two of the six windows had already been replaced with vinyl; one window is only left with components of the upper sash, and the three remaining windows are in such bad condition that the wood components of the windows turned into dust as they were removed.

Currently, the windows have been completely installed and are waiting for caulk to be added around the windows. The new windows, including the fanlight, are one piece.

- *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 must be preserved. In general, this tends to minimize the exterior alterations that will be allowed.*

Although the window feature has been materially altered, from wood to aluminum, the feature itself has been retained and the windows fit within the existing opening.

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

From photographs and statements by the tenant, Staff believes that the windows were likely not salvageable. Although the wood windows were replaced with aluminum, the feature still remains.

E. When possible, new materials should match the material being replaced with respect to physical properties, such as design, color, texture, and other visual qualities. The use of imitation replacement materials is discouraged.

The newly installed aluminum windows do not match the material being replaced; however, the design is consistent and since the previous windows had been painted white, the color is consistent also. Although Low-E does alter the reflective quality of the glass, there are now six windows that are match.

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

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain original and later important window openings where they exist. Do not enlarge or reduce window openings for the purpose of fitting stock window sash.

The original window openings have been retained. The window openings have not been enlarged or reduced.

2. When possible, repair and retain original and later important window elements such as sash, lintels, sill, architraves, glass, shutters, and other decorative elements and hardware. If aluminum windows must be installed, select a baked finish that matches as closely as possible the color of the existing trim.

The arcaded window feature retains the arch shape and size of the windows.

IV. Recommendations

Recommendations are based on a complete application and supporting materials, as submitted by the Applicant, as well as 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 on additional information provided to Staff or through further research.

For three (3) of the six (6) windows, two of which were previously vinyl and are located on the left side and one of which was previously plywood and located on the right side, Staff determines that the alteration for which an application for a Historic Certificate has been filed is reasonably appropriate for and compatible with the preservation and protection of the Local Historic District; **therefore, Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant 8-10 Walnut Street a Certificate of Appropriateness.**

For the remaining three (3) windows, originally wood and located in the center, Staff determines that the alteration for which an application for a Historic Certificate has been filed is not reasonably appropriate for or compatible with the preservation and protection of the Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission deny 8-10 Walnut Street a Certificate of Appropriateness.**

Since the replacement windows have already been purchased and installed at the expense of the building owner, who thought the correct procedure had been followed, and since the previous windows were in such a poor condition that safety was an issue, **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission issue a Certificate of Hardship for the remaining three (3) windows that were originally wood. Staff also recommends a condition that upon the future replacement of these three aluminum windows, the Applicant shall replace them with Commission approved wood windows.**

8-10 Walnut Street

