



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: 45 Walnut Street c. 1890 Louville Niles House
Case: HPC 2013.060 Single Building District

Applicant Name: Lindsey & Andrew Sudbury, Owners
Applicant Address: 45 Walnut Street

Date of Application: August 29, 2013
Legal Notice: *Replace driveway material*

Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: September 17, 2013

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: This large turreted Queen Anne is characterized by its asymmetrical massing, bands of decorative shingles, slate roof and 'half-timbering' in the gables. A low granite retaining wall surrounds the garden on two sides, punctuated by low granite posts with a shallow pyramidal cap.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:

The house was built around 1890 for Louville Niles, provisioner. Later in the decade his business grew to include meat packing as well. The house has one of the largest yards remaining in the area and gives a sense of turn of the 19th Century grandeur of Prospect Hill. The building was designed by Edwin K. Blaikie who designed several other homes on Prospect Hill.



II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

1. Replace and re-grade 22' x 54' driveway with new underlayment; and
2. Install granite posts found on property on either side of the driveway entry.

See the final pages for details and photos.

II. FINDINGS*1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:*

2007.053	C/A, C/NA	12/17/2007	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Replace vinyl replacement windows with Marvin Ultimate simulated divided light double-hung windows with 7/8" mullions with spacers and either 1/1 or 2/2 light patterns as appropriate and clear or low E II coating; 2. Change existing non-original single window on Munroe Street to Marvin Ultimate simulated divided light double-hung 2/2 window with 7/8" mullion with spacer; 3. Replace existing non-original door to match original wood door with Staff review and approval; 4. Raise existing original window openings on Boston Avenue by 6"; 5. Replace the original door with a new one to match original wood door with Staff review and approval. 6. Reconstruct/repair original wood porch post (C/NA).
2010.064	C/A, C/NA	9/24/2010	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Repair storm damage to slate roof, gutters, and fascia (C/NA); and 2. Install snow hooks or snow guards (C/A).
2013.014	C/NA	4/12/2013	1. Remove, hand strip for deleading and repair 11 wood double-hung windows
2013.026	C/NA	6/21/2013	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The proposed 4 and 6 foot fence, which includes three pedestrian gates and one driveway gate, shall be constructed in a manner that is consistent with the HPC approved plan (dated 6/12/2013), which locates the fence behind the existing hedges; 2. The style shall be of a more simple design, but similar to what was submitted (Sheet 1, dated 6/12/2013); and 3. The final design and height transition, between 4 and 6 feet, shall be approved by Staff prior to the installation of the fence. Additionally, the Applicants are encouraged to seek advice and help from the HPC and/or their Staff.

1. Precedence:

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*

Salvaged stone and metal fence and gate elements were granted Certificates of Appropriateness for use at 27 Chester Street in both 2011 and 2012 because they met HPC Guidelines for landscaping and fences.

3. Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The proposed posts would be visible at the rear property line Boston Street on either side of the driveway entry.

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

The building has been well-maintained as whole for several years by previous owners. Some elements such as the slope and surface of the driveway need attention. Currently the crest of the drive directs water into the building's foundations as well as out to the street.

Last month the Applicants received a Certificate of Appropriateness to install a fence, the proposed changes to the grading of the site and the installation of the posts have become part of this project. The posts have no known provenance but have been on site for several years as can be evidenced by their partial burial just inside the driveway. The original granite posts have smooth edges with rusticated sides. The proposed posts are individually distinctive. The shorter post will be located up hill from the tall post. See photos below for details.

- *Does the proposal coincide with the General Approach set forth in the Design Guidelines?*

HPC Specific Guidelines do not explicitly address driveways and fences.

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.*

The proposal will reuse posts found on the property and will not alter or obscure the original historic fabric noted in the MHC Survey Form. There is no possibility of the posts being perceived as original to the site despite being found there. Proposed re-grading of the driveway will not alter the perception of the grounds on which the house sits.

- 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.*

The new posts are granite that matches the existing in material but not in design. Their design is very different from the posts found on the property or elsewhere on Prospect Hill.

- F. *The Commission will give design review priority to those portions of the property which are visible from public ways ...*

The posts will be visible.

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.*

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.*

The re-grading is necessary for the maintenance of the structure. The re-grading will also help preserve the house from further water damage to its foundation.

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.*

No changes to the features described in the Form B will be altered. The proposed salvaged posts and re-graded driveway will not obscure any part of the original structures. The circulation pattern will not be altered.

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 Aldersey/Summit Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant 45 Walnut Street a Certificate of Appropriateness** to re-grade the driveway and install the granite posts found on the property because they meet Guidelines.





Driveway entry



Driveway showing slopes



Front steps with typical post



Short salvaged post



Tall salvaged post



Tall salvaged post detail