



**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:                   | 27 Warren Avenue   | c.1874 George Baxter House                        |
| Case:                   | HPC 2013.071   | Columbus Ave./Warren Ave. Local Historic District |
| Applicant Name:         | Darin DiNucci, Owner   |   |
| Applicant Address:      | 637 Boston Avenue, Medford, Ma 02155   |   |
| Date of Application:    | September 26, 2013   |   |
| Legal Notice:           | <i>Remove garage, concrete path, berm, steps and driveway; replace with unit block pavers and retaining wall, granite steps and asphalt.</i> |   |
| Staff Recommendation:   | Conditional Certificate of Appropriateness and Certificate of Non-Applicability  |   |
| Date of Public Hearing: | October 15, 2013   |   |

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**I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION**

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:**

This two-story Second Empire house has a full height bay and a side-hall entry floor plan. The siding is asbestos shingle. The windows are Pella replacement windows. The entry porch was partially rebuilt two years ago with modern rails and turned balusters at code height. The porch retains its rope-detailed posts, its elaborated bases and its brackets.

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:**

The Columbus Avenue/Warren Avenue Local Historic District is predominantly a cluster of Second Empire homes built in the 1870s and 1880s on the edge of Union Square and near the base of Prospect Hill. The development was platted on land owned by Ira Hill. The house may have been built by Thomas B. Blaikie, a builder who lived on Warren Avenue. Many of the properties have been rehabilitated over the last 25 years.



**II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

*1. Proposal of Alteration:*

1. Remove 20' x 20' 1931 concrete block garage with metal roof;
2. Replace 12'6" wide by 87' long concrete driveway with asphalt and pave to the rear of the garage with asphalt;
3. Replace concrete path with unit block pavers;
4. Replace low Cape Cod concrete berm with unit block retaining walls; and
5. Remove concrete steps and replace with granite steps.

Many of the proposed alterations have already been completed without oversight of the Commission or Building Permits. The Applicant has not demonstrated that 35% of the area of the lot will be of permeable material.

See final pages for sketched plans and photos.

## II. FINDINGS

### 1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:

|          |                |           |  |
|----------|----------------|-----------|--|
| 1996.001 | Thomas Tavares | C/NA      | reroof, fascia repair  |
| 2009.061 | Thomas Tavares | C/NA, C/H | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Replace rotted wood gutters with aluminum K-style gutters; and</li> <li>2. Replace rotted, damaged and lead-painted windows with 19 wood double-hung sash with 7/8" muntins, dark spacers between the panes, no Low-E insulated glass windows and 13 'american brown' vinyl double-hung sash insulated glass windows located as per attached. They should be installed so that a minimum of the vinyl framing is visible within the existing wood casings. (CH) and C/NA for 3. Install round not square aluminum downspouts where needed;</li> <li>4. Repair and replace the wood gutter over the main entry in kind;</li> <li>5. Repair and replace fascia, soffits, brackets and other exterior wood components in kind as necessary; and</li> <li>6. Re-roof mansard with shingles in-kind.</li> </ol> |
| 2010.090 | Darin DiNucci  | C/A       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Remove the enclosed 2-story porch;</li> <li>2. Frame only the base structure on the same footprint in order to allow for the second means of egress of the second and third floors; and</li> <li>3. Match the original fascia and roof with Staff review and approval.</li> <li>1. Install a secondary fascia along the base of the second floor porch;</li> <li>2. Wrap the posts with 6" x 6" lumber as tightly as possible;</li> <li>3. Detail the porch posts with capitals and bases;</li> <li>4. Install beadboard on second floor porch ceiling;</li> <li>5. Install simple rails, either plain or fluted, and nominal 2" x2" balusters with a nailing strip; and</li> <li>6. Install vertical lattice or slat skirt at the base of the porch.</li> </ol>   |

### 1. Precedence:

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*

1. *Remove 1931 concrete block and metal garage:* Three garages have been demolished on designated properties. 25 Clyde Street, truck garage; and 55 and 57 Columbus Avenue (2003 and 2012) 2- and 3-car garages. These structures were not specifically mentioned on the Form Bs as contributing to the historic fabric and were in poor condition.
2. *Replace 12'6" wide by 87' long concrete driveway with asphalt and pave to the rear of the garage with asphalt:* Eight cases were found with alterations of driveway materials: four property owners (53 Atherton Street (2013), 27 Columbus Avenue (2002), 73 Columbus Avenue (2006), and 45 Vinal Avenue (2007)) replaced asphalt or concrete with cobble style pavers; two (81 Eustis (2002) and 30 Bow Street (2001)) replaced dirt with pea stone and pavers; one (25 Russell Street (2003)) replaced blue stone with

brick pavers; and one (85 Benton Road (2003)) replaced asphalt with concrete. None of these are exact precedents.

3. *Replace concrete path with unit block pavers:* Four cases of replacement of concrete walkways to another type of paver were found: 75-77 Columbus Avenue (2006) – Ideal Block Millstone in gray; 101 School Street (2011) – Unilock Copthorne Camelot; 1 Summer Street (2006) – 4”x4” granite pavers; and 9 Westwood Road (2013) – City Hall brick pavers.
4. *Replace low Cape Cod concrete berm with unit block retaining walls:* No cases heard by the HPC mentioning either the replacement of poured concrete berms with another material, or the construction of terraced yards, were found. Unit block retaining walls replaced rotted landscape timbers at 18 Benton Road (2005) and 28 Warren Avenue (2002) and failing concrete walls at 85 Benton Road (2002), 27 Columbus Avenue (2002), and 73 Columbus Avenue (2006).
5. *Remove concrete steps and replace with granite steps.* Only one case was found for the replacement of concrete steps with granite: 74 Mount Vernon Street (2010).

### 3. Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

All the proposals are visible from the public right of way.

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

The Columbus Avenue/Warren Avenue Local Historic District is one of the most prominent in the City. Many of the houses on the streets have been renovated although there are still several houses in need of repairs and maintenance. A few houses have stables and carriage houses attached but most have neither garage nor stable.

The current owner, who had been partial owner of the building, inherited the rest of the building upon the death of the previous owner. The current owner and his deceased partner rehabilitated the building with Certificates from the HPC from 2009-2011 and money from the Housing Rehabilitation Program.

Neighbors alerted the Staff to the current alterations. The garage, driveway, walkway, berms and steps have been removed. The retaining walls, walkway, and granite steps have been installed. The 1931 garage had a hipped roof and hinged doors typical of the period. The driveway and walkway were concrete. The bottom two steps were concrete leading to a wood steps and porch. Concrete berms and brick edging delineated the yard.

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

*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. Therefore, 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.*

None of the changes to the property affect features mentioned on the 1988 Form B.

- 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).*

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century driveways and garages were added to older properties as the use of the automobile replaced the horse and streetcars as the dominant mode of transportation. These changes are not mentioned on the Form Bs. See **Carriage House to Auto House** by Reed and Hardwicke for a typology of popular styles. It is significant as a characteristic structure of the vintage automotive era when the Model T and Model A Fords were the car of choice for many.



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

The original materials are not being replaced in-kind. The proposed materials are either an upgrade such as the granite steps or a totally different material.

- D. *When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence of the original or later important features.*

No important features described on the Form B are being replaced.

- 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 materials for the walkway, and retaining walls do not replicate historic materials and have no basis for the alteration. The alteration of the concrete driveway to asphalt has no precedent.

- 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.*

All the proposed alterations are visible from the public right of way.

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

***D. Porches, steps, trim and other exterior architectural elements***

- 1. Retain and repair porches and steps that are original or later important features, including such items as railings, balusters, columns, posts, brackets, roofs, ornamental ironwork and other important decorative items. If new pieces are needed, they should match as closely as possible the style, shape, scale and materials of the old.*

The granite steps resemble the concrete ones in general form, color and size.

***H. 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.*

The existing slope of the hill has been flattened by the installation of retaining walls and terracing.

- 2. It is recognized that often the environment surrounding the property has a character, scale and street pattern quite different from that existing when the building was constructed. Thus, changes must frequently be made to accommodate the new condition, and the landscape treatment can be seen as a transition feature between the structure and its newer surroundings.*

No changes to have been made due to changes in the character, scale or street pattern of the surrounding environment.

- 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 addition of retaining walls levels the ground and terraces the yard rather than allowing the yard to follow the natural slope of the hill. Part of the brick foundation will be obscured by landfill. This alteration is not necessary for the maintenance of the structure.

- 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 essential layout have been submitted beyond the proposed widening of the driveway from 12'6" to the width of 14'.

***I. Removal of Later Additions and Alterations***

- 1. Each property will be separately studied to determine if later additions and alterations can, or should be removed. It is not possible to provide a single general guideline.*
- 2. Factors that will be considered include:*
  - a. compatibility with the original property's integrity in scale, materials and character;*

Garages of this period are frequently determined not significant on properties not designated as part of a historic district, being neither very early nor very unusual. For garages in an historic

district, the issue is whether the structure is part of the period of significance for the building and whether it is mentioned on the Form B. It is not called out. Precedence for the removal of the garage already exists in the same Historic District at 55 and 57 Columbus Avenue. The period of significance for this street and district are predominantly the 1870s and 1880s.

Driveways were constructed of dirt or cobble during the period of significance for this house. The driveway is not mentioned on the Form B. Early paved driveways were often paved with parallel linear concrete pads and were no wider than they needed to be. Precedent for the alteration of modern driveway materials has been to reflect the older styles that might have been used while still being modern in appearance.

Concrete berms were popular ways to delineate paths and driveways. Historically, terracing was an agricultural practice not usually associated with residential homes in Somerville. The proposed retaining walls and terracing alters the historic contours of the yard and street. Filling the area behind covers some of the brick foundation which was not intended to be below ground level.

Concrete steps were frequent alterations to all wood steps throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Granite was preferred on upper class homes.

*b. historic association with the property; ...*

#### **J. Demolition**

- 1. Demolition of part or all of a structure is considered to be an alteration to the exterior and is subject to the review of the Commission.*

See comments above.

### **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 Warren Avenue/ Local Historic District; therefore, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission grant Darin DiNucci a Certificate of Appropriateness with conditions to** remove 20' x 20' 1931 concrete block garage with metal roof; replace 12'6" wide by 87' long concrete driveway and pave to the rear of the garage *on the condition that concrete not asphalt is used and the driveway not widened*; replace concrete path with unit block pavers; and remove concrete steps and replace with granite steps. Staff **does not recommend** granting a Certificate of Appropriateness to replace the low concrete Cape Cod berm with unit block retaining walls but does **recommend a Certificate of Non-Applicability to replace the berms and contours of the yard to its historic form.**











Date: October 7, 2013  
 Case #: HPC 2013.071  
 Site: 27 Warren Avenue



