



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) 17 Westwood Road / Westwood Road LHD/NR
Case: HPC 2012.101

Applicant Name(s): Daniel Brenner and Heather Thompson-Brenner, Owners
Applicant Address: 17 Westwood Road

Date of Application: 9/10/2012
Legal Notice: Owners, Daniel Brenner and Heather Thompson-Brenner, seek to modify the front façade of a two-family dwelling by altering the front door and railing of the second story porch.

Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: Tuesday, October 16, 2012

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

1. Architectural Description:

Located on the corner of Benton and Westwood roads, this structure is currently a two-family dwelling with a cross-gable. This 2½ story, Shingle style residence was constructed in 1901 as a single-family dwelling. The building has a stone foundation and a slate roof. The front porch was enclosed after 1950. Whether the second-story deck is original to the structure is unclear; however, a number of dwellings on Westwood Road have second-story decks on the front façade.



17 Westwood Road: Front and right side façades

2. *Historical Context/Evolution of Structure or Parcel:*

Westwood Road was not developed until 1894 when Charles Bradshaw replatted the entire subdivision. Bradshaw moved Elm and Maple trees to landscape the street and by 1905, 17 houses had been constructed. Westwood Road represents a picturesque, yet planned nineteenth century upper class subdivision for an urban environment.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. *Proposal of Alteration:*

The property owners propose to add 9" of railing height to the existing railing of the second story deck and replace the louvered glass panel of the front entry door with a new beveled glass light, lock rail, and wood panel. These modifications are proposed for added safety. The additional railing height would be installed above the existing rail cap in a manner that will not harm the existing historic fabric, should the 9" of additional railing height be removed at a later date. The new railing height will be composed of wood with a 6" tall square beveled wood panel (5" wide) at each corner and at specific intervals between. Balusters 2" wide will be installed between the panels and along each side.

Planning Staff and Inspectional Services have determined that Special Permit approval is not necessary as the railing addition is a change that is cosmetic in nature.

The glass louvers of the front entry door will be replaced with a new beveled glass light, lock rail, and wood panel. The wood panel will be placed in the bottom portion of the door and will be consistent to the existing material. A new beveled glass panel will be placed in the top portion of the door and a new lock rail will be located between the new wood and glass panels. The existing door hardware will remain.



17 Westwood Road: Glass louvers to be removed and 9" of railing height to be added to existing rail height of second story deck

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 HPC has often granted Certificates of Non-Applicability to repair and maintain in-kind various porch and railing components, such as balusters. In some cases, Certificates of Appropriateness were issued for new railings that were to be constructed according to the 36"

building code requirement. 91 Boston Street (HPC 2011.100) and 27 Warren Street (HPC 2010.090) are two such examples. Although the proposed railing does not emulate railings of other dwellings along Westwood Road (see photo below), the added railing height will be attached on top of the existing railing cap and will be installed in a manner that is not detrimental to the historic fabric. This portion of railing could be removed at a later date. Additionally, a railing that is more consistent to other dwellings along Westwood Road would require Special Permit approval.



*Westwood Road:
Illustration of typical
railing and balusters
represented in the
Westwood Road Local
Historic District*

Replacing glass components within existing doors is not a common request that comes before the HPC. However, the Applicant proposes to keep the existing door to the enclosed porch (enclosure c. 1950) and replace the non-historic frosted glass louvered panels with a wood panel, lock rail, and single glass light panel, to be consistent with other doors along Westwood Road. The glass louvers of the entry door represent a later time period. Their removal and proposed replacement panels are in accordance with the late nineteenth century time period represented by the Westwood Road Local (and National) Historic District.

3. Considerations:

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*
The proposal is highly visible as the subject dwelling is located on a corner lot and alterations to the front entry and second story deck of the primary façade are part of the proposal.
- *What are the Existing Conditions of the building / parcel?*
The two-family dwelling was recently painted and the structure is well maintained.
- *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.

Significant features of the subject property will be preserved. The 9" of railing height to be added to the existing rail cap could be removed at a later date as installation/removal is not to harm to the historic fabric of the second story deck. The removal of the louvered glass panel will restore the front entry door to a period more consistent with the Westwood Road Historic District.

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.

The front entry porch was enclosed after 1950 and if the second story deck is an original component of the dwelling is unknown. However, since the porch was enclosed likely more than 50 years ago, at this point in time, the enclosed porch has historic significance as a later important feature. Therefore, the second story deck is also likely more than 50 years in age and, at this point in time, is also a later important feature. The additional railing height will not be detrimental to the existing railing or the second story deck due to the manner by which it will be installed.

- *Does the proposal coincide with the appropriate 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 Applicant does not propose to remove any original or later important features; the Applicant proposes to add 9" of railing height for safety. Although the additional rail height is a new component and adds height with balusters instead of wood shingles, the square design of the balustrades is consistent with both the Shingle and Craftsman styles and is also a generic type of baluster that is often added to historic buildings of any style.

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.

- + 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 Bow Street Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission grant 17 Westwood Road a Certificate of Appropriateness.**

17 Westwood Road

