



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: 1 Westwood Road c.1929 Somerville Museum
Case: HPC 2012.019 R1 Westwood Road Local Historic District

Applicant Name: Somerville Historical Society, Owner
Applicant Address: 1 Westwood Road, Somerville, MA 02143

Date of Application: June 19, 2014
Legal Notice: *Addition of short fence for ADA chair lift*
Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness
Date of Public Hearing: July 15, 2014

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: From the Form B

"The Museum building is a two-story Federal Revival building, executed in red brick, with brick quoins at the corners of the museum. A line of quoins defines a flat pavilion at the rear of the Westwood façade. This façade has its own enclosed pediment above the continuous cornice. A slate roof, whose ridge runs front to back covers the building. The front façade has an enclosed pediment, with a circular window in the middle. The centrally placed double entry doors on Central Street are surmounted by a fanlight with interlaced mullions and has a Federal Revival pedimented surround. Two square-headed 12/12 double-hung windows flank the entry. The second floor of the Central Street façade has an 8/8 double-hung window over the entry and is flanked by two round-headed double-hung windows with interlaced mullions. The two long sides have four bays of double-hung windows running back from the front façade. The upper windows have round heads, while the first floor windows have square heads. The rear of the northside wall is blank, while the rear pavilion on the Westwood façade has three bays. A single-leafed door is centered in the first floor of the pavilion and is flanked by two square-headed windows. Three square-headed windows are arranged above these openings on the second floor. The rear façade has an open pediment, with the main cornice returning across the rear quoins. There are six off-center, 8/8 double-hung windows on this facade. The lower windows each have a short transom.



"The main entry was changed to the Westwood Road door in 1986. Before this change, the first floor of the rear pavilion contained a door in the last bay and a small Palladian window to its right. The Palladian window was removed and the current configuration was built. The slate roof was replaced with new slates in 2012. The

Central St. doors were painted green in the late 1980s and were scraped and painted white in the restoration that occurred in 2013, in which the windows were also repainted.

"The Museum is situated within the Westwood Road Historic District. The street is lined with intact late 19th to early 20th century high quality architect-designed, Shingle Style, Queen Anne, and Colonial Revival houses. Of the twenty-one homes in the district (excluding the outbuildings), nearly all were designed for single-family use. A variety of original materials are still evident including shingles, fieldstone, leaded glass, and wrought iron work.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL: From the Form B

"This building is the home of the Somerville Historical Society, renamed the Somerville Museum in 1986. In 1897, a group of professionals, businessmen, religious, social, cultural, educational and municipal leaders came together to found the Somerville Historical Society. Many of these founding members were descendants of the original settlers.

"They donated their private archives and historical artifacts to the Society and met and published papers, called the "Historical Leaves" recalling their earlier experiences. These have proven over time to be an invaluable asset to the Museum. Between 1925 and 1929, the building was built as place for the members to meet and organize their artifacts and library. The Museum is the only cultural facility constructed by the community since its founding as a town in 1842, and remains a unique institution to this day supported by its members.

"The Museum changed its focus (and name) in 1986 to accommodate and encourage the development of arts and culture in Somerville, as well as history. The Somerville Museum now presents exhibitions featuring local visual arts, history and culture in the context of neighborhoods and community, as well as musical and dramatic performance series; develops hands-on history learning projects in collaboration with the Somerville Public School Department; and is available as a meeting place for local historical and cultural organizations."

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal of Alteration:

- 1. At the intersection of the ramp to the chairlift and the public sidewalk, install a short railing to match the proposed railings on the porch and stairs to prevent the creation of a tripping hazard per plans by Richard Graf, Fort Point Consulting Inc., dated January 21, 2014..*

The Museum has been maintained on a very small budget for a number of years. This has resulted in a backlog of projects major and minor to be undertaken. The most important being the repair and replacement of the slate roof in 2012-2013. The Museum received a grant to undertake these repairs.

The high cost of the repairs, especially the roof, triggered the need to bring the building up to modern ADA standards and entailed another capital campaign on the part of the Museum. Currently, the Museum is not accessible. There are stairs to enter the reception area, the exhibition halls and the bathrooms.

The main entry on Central Street is not in service because its doors originally came from the Central Library, are fragile and should not be heavily used. The side entry on Westwood Road has become the main entry. This is not visually the prominent. First-time visitors often don't realize that it is the main way into the building. The platform and stairs are cement and stucco with a simple iron railing, while meeting HPC Guidelines for being distinguishable from the historic building; they do not add anything to the building. In 2012, the Commission granted a Certificate of Appropriateness to alter the porch to meet ADA requirements along with issuing a Certificate of Non-Applicability for the extensive repairs which have been completed.

As the Architect and Board of Trustees refined the plans for the chairlift, it was discovered that due to the slope of sidewalk, a short railing would need to be added to prevent a trip hazard where

there would be a small discontinuity in the heights of the pavement at the approach to the chairlift. The railing would match those already approved for the stairs at the other end of the porch. See the final pages for details and photos.

II. FINDINGS

1. *Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:*

C/NA	Somerville Historical Society	2007.003	1. Repair in-kind and repaint all windows, front door and columns as needed.
C/NA, C/A	Somerville Historical Society	2012.019	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Repair and repaint all windows, exterior doors and trim in-kind; 2. Repair and replace all rotted and damaged wood trim and gutters in-kind as needed; 3. Repair and replace slate roof, copper flashings, gutter liner and valleys in-kind; and 4. Install snow guards in-kind. 5. Enlarge side porch to include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. A wheelchair lift, partially screened from view; b. A new roof with a painted wood entablature supported by tapered Doric columns; and c. New stairs.

1. *Precedence:*

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*
Install a short railing at the intersection of the ramp to the chairlift and the public sidewalk to prevent creating a tripping hazard to match the proposed railings on the stairs. An iron railing and granite curb was added against the sidewalk to separate the private access to the house from the public right of way where there was a grade change at 28 Highland Avenue in 2012.

3. *Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*
The new handrail will be visible and will be part of the new porch.
- *What are the Existing Conditions of the building / parcel?*
The Museum is not currently ADA compliant. The Commission granted a Certificate of Appropriateness in 2012 for a new side entry to the building that complimented the 1920s Federal Revival building and met the need for improved access. There is a slight slope to Westwood Road rising from Central Street to Benton Road. See photos at the end of the document.
- *Is the proposal more appropriate than the existing conditions?*
The proposed railing is neither more nor less appropriate than the current 1960s railing and matches the plans approved by the Commission in 2012.
- *Does the proposal coincide with the General Approach set forth in the Design Guidelines?*

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 stairs, pathway and handrails were not discussed in the Form B.

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

The deteriorated brick was replaced with a more durable material that is similar in appearance to what can be seen in an historic photo which appears to have light colored steps and pathway. The material could have been concrete or granite although the exact material is unknown. The handrails are different stylistically. Both styles are modern in effect.

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

There will be no replacement of materials

- 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 guard rail will match the planned and approved railings.

- 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.*

The railing abuts the public right of way.

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. Avoid replacing wood posts and railings with metal ones, or wood porch decks with concrete.*

The new short railing will match the previously approved railing.

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.*

There are no alterations to the essential landscape features.

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.*

There will be no changes affecting the general environment of 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.*

A slight rise in the grade will be made to tie in the chair lift to the path. The building will not be obscured.

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.*

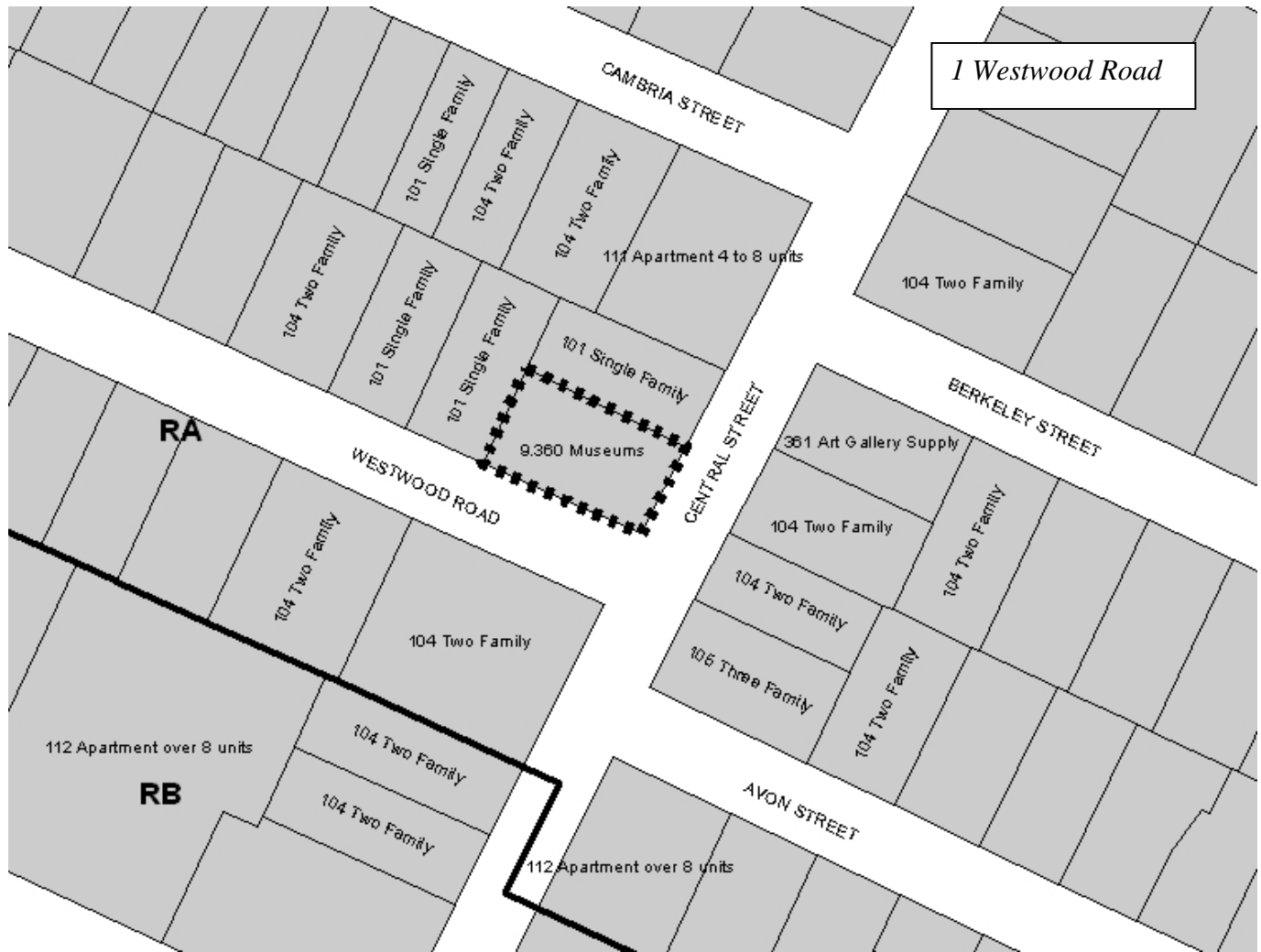
There are no further changes to the layout of the steps and pathway.

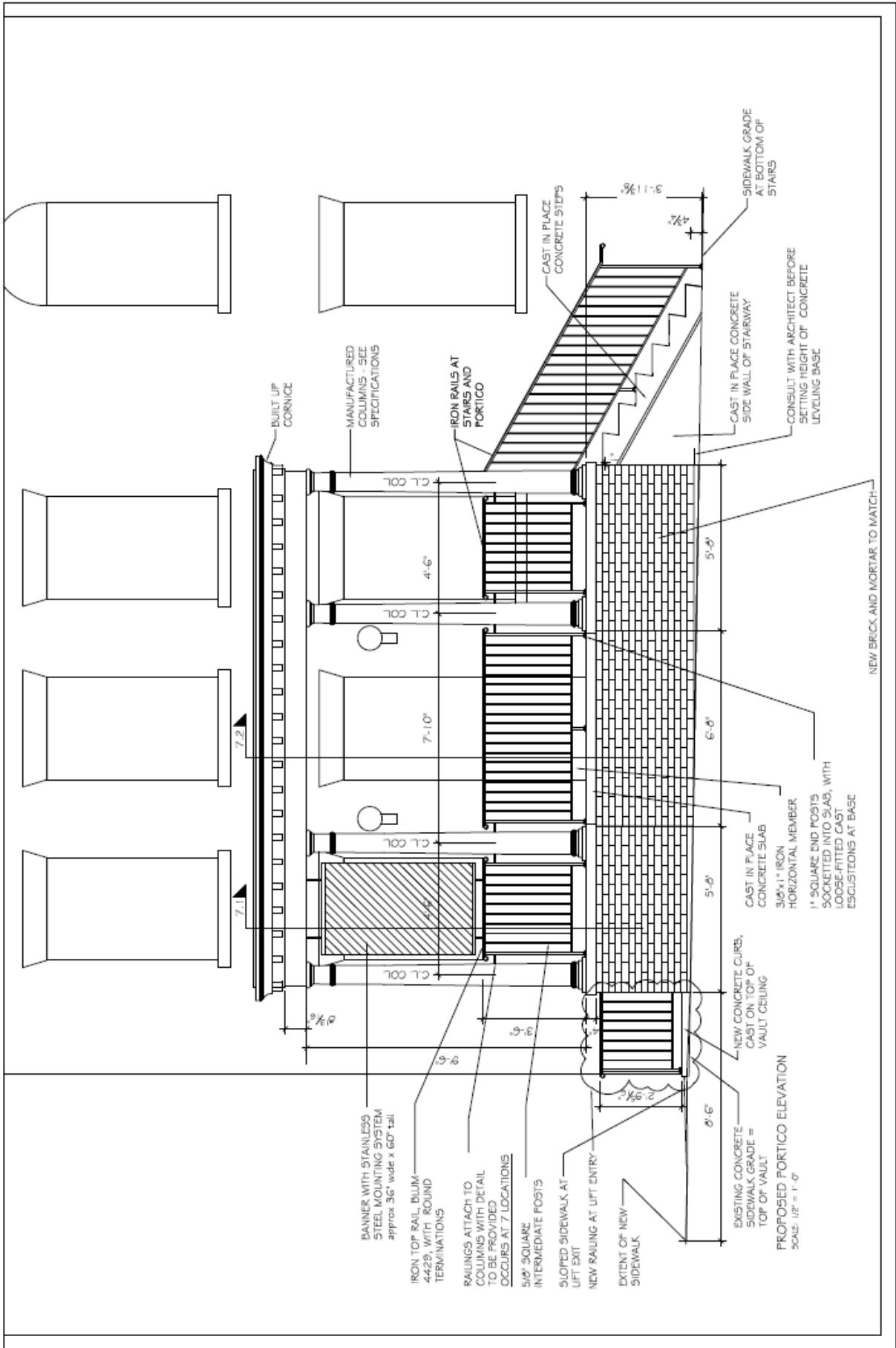
III. RECOMMENDATIONS

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 Westwood Road Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission grant 1Westwood Road a Certificate of Appropriateness** based upon the following:

1. A short railing shall be installed per plans Sheets 3 and 4 by Richard Graf, Fort Point Consulting Inc., dated January 21, 2014 at the intersection of the ramp to the chairlift and the public sidewalk.





Somerville Museum One Westwood Road Somerville, MA 02143	ADA Modification Shaftway Lift above Existing Slab		Fort Point Consulting, Inc. Development Advisors Richard Graf, RA 11 Franklin Avenue Chelsea, MA 02150 617.543.2110	
	June 2, 2014		PORTICO ELEVATION	SHEET 4

