



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 2015.073 Westwood Road Local Historic District

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

Date of Application: October 28, 2015
Legal Notice: *Alter Westwood Road entry to meet ADA.*

Staff Recommendation: *Conditional Certificate of Appropriateness*
Date of Public Hearing: November 17, 2015

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. Addition of an elevator required for access to the Museum by the disabled. A masonry and wood structure extends to the Westwood Road lot line and includes an elevator, sidewalk entry new main entry, and elevator stops at all 3 floors. The architectural elements are in the Colonial Revival style of the existing building and modify a façade that was previously modified in the 1980s.*

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 ADA 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 principal 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 extensive repairs which have been completed. The Certificate was revised in 2014 to include a short railing to prevent a trip hazard. These plans were denied by the Architectural Access Board (AAB) who required that a more direct path be installed for wheelchair access than the one proposed by the original design. The AAB also required that all the museums floor needed to be accessible. This has resulted in a much larger addition than the one originally envisioned.

II. FINDINGS

1. *Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:*

C/A	Somerville Historical Society	1997.013	1) Install a new flag pole with banner; and 2) Install new ground-mounted sign.
C/NA	Somerville Historical Society	2007.003	1. Repair in-kind and repaint all windows, front door and columns as needed.
C/A	Somerville Historical Society	2012.019	A short railing shall be installed as described in the 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.
C/NA, C/A	Somerville Historical Society	2012.019	1. Enlarge side porch to include: 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. 2. Repair and repaint all windows, exterior doors and trim in-kind; 3. Repair and replace all rotted and damaged wood trim and gutters in-kind as needed; 4. Repair and replace slate roof, copper flashings, gutter liner and valleys in-kind; and 5. Install snow guards in-kind.

1. *Precedence:*

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*

Construct an addition for ADA Access:

Alterations to meet ADA requirements are rare. Two received Certificates of Appropriateness. An addition was constructed at 55 Columbus Avenue (2005). The pitch of entry ramp was revised at the Armory at 191 Highland Avenue (2011) and the sidewalk was modified to act as an extension of the ramp.

3. *Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The addition is visible from Westwood Road and Central Street.

- *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. The Massachusetts Historical Commission holds a Preservation Restriction on the building dating from the 1986 renovations. The Restriction requires that the Palladian window shown at the end of the report be installed on the rear of the building at the same time as an elevator is added to the Museum.

- *Is the proposal more appropriate than the existing conditions?*

The proposal is more appropriate than the existing 1980s era steps and entry although some of the details still do not relate well to the building as a whole. Window casings are too delicate, and the location of the Palladian window is problematic since the location is neither period appropriate nor in keeping with the Preservation Restriction.

- *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.*
- C. *Whenever possible, deteriorated material or architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced or removed.*
- D. *When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence of the original or later important features.*
- 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.*
- 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 addition was not discussed in the Form B. Material will be removed from the building to accommodate the new addition with the LULA. There will be no replacement of materials although the Palladian window stored since 1986 will be reinstalled somewhere on the building per MHC Preservation Restriction. The new materials will be traditional. These consist of wood clapboard, casings and other trim elements. There is no clapboard on the brick building currently. The addition is visible from the right of way.

E. New additions

1. *New additions should not disrupt the essential form and integrity of the property and should be compatible in size, scale, material and character of the property and its environment. Where possible, new additions should be confined to the rear of the house.*

The proposed addition is compatible in size and scale. The difference in the material serves as a cue that distinguishes the new portion of the building from the old. An attempt has been made to reflect the Colonial Revival style of the 1920s in the detailing. The addition is located on the rear side but since it serves as the main entry to the building, it has been given more architectural prominence than is usual for additions to historic structures.

2. *It is not the intent of these guidelines to limit new additions to faithful copies of earlier buildings. New designs may also evoke, without copying, the architecture of the property to which they are being added, through careful attention to height, bulk, materials, window size, and type and location, and detail. A building should not, however, be altered to an appearance that predates its construction.*

The proposed addition is not a replica of an earlier building. Attention has been paid to continue the cornice line and retain and reuse the existing windows in a new location. New, more prominent entry doors have been proposed. The proposed clapboard sided addition is 3 bays wide and 2 stories high fitting beneath the pediment on the rear side of the building. This section of the building currently has a centrally located entry door flanked by two 12/12 windows with casings that match the rest of the building and three windows above. The proposal has re-used some of the windows from the brick wall but cased them more narrowly with less of a lintel. A door to the LULA or elevator is located to the left hand side of the addition on Westwood Road while the entry for the able-bodied is located on the side of the addition facing Central Street. The ADA door has a large transom to illuminate the foyer, while the other door has a fan top arch reminiscent of the Central Street entry. The proposal is to re-install the Palladian window on the wall of the addition replicating its original placement on the side of the building. This does not meet with the MHC Restrictions. Generally speaking, Palladian windows are centered and often found in the tympanum or gable, over a main entry, or as part of a series of such windows and other openings. The proposed location on the side of the building raises questions as it is a very unlikely place for a Palladian window. Staff has asked for an explanation regarding the original placement and the origins of the window.

3. *New additions or alterations should be done in a way that, if they were to be removed in the future, the basic form and integrity of the historic property would remain intact.*

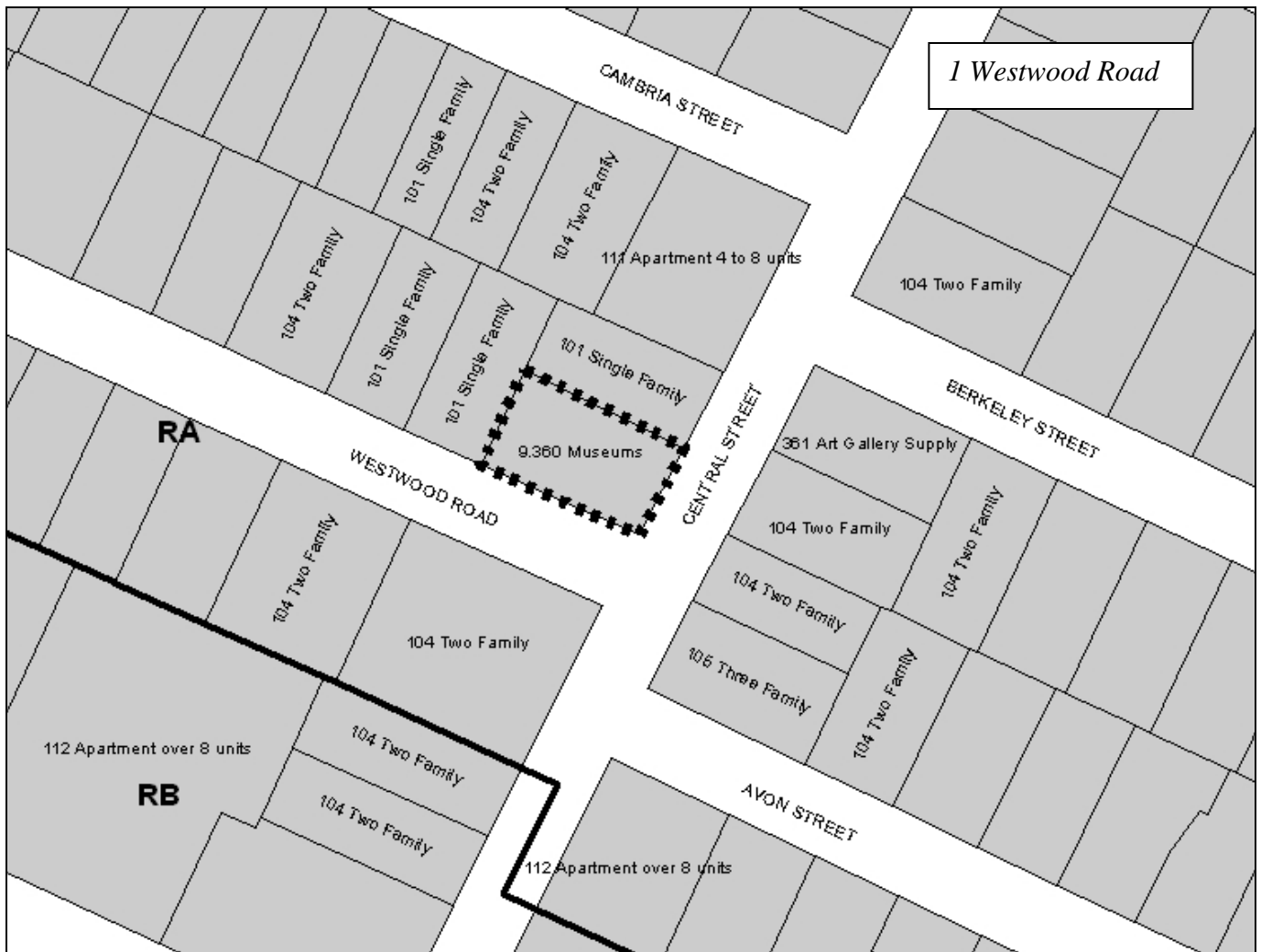
The addition would require the removal of some of the brick exterior walls of the building and the relocation of the existing windows.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

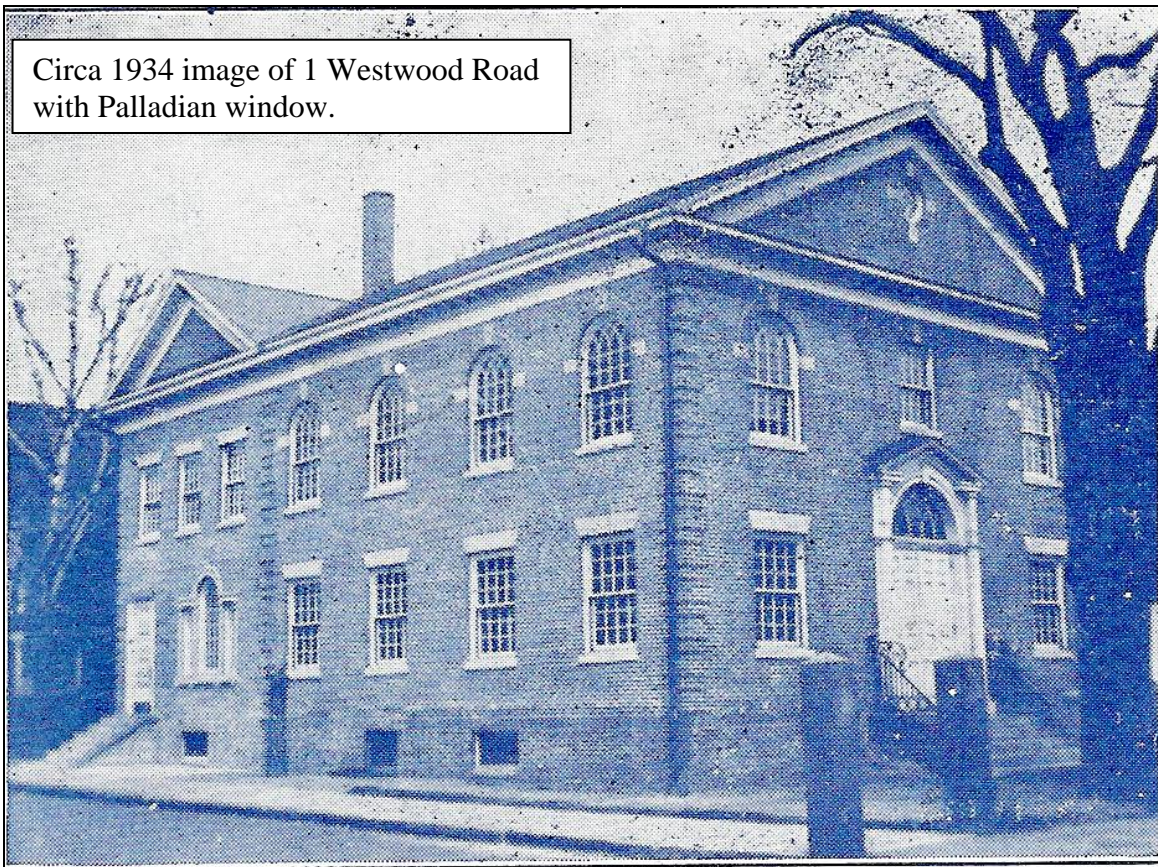
The Staff recommendation is based on a complete application and supporting materials, as submitted by the Applicant, and an analysis of the historic and architectural value and significance of the site, building or structure, the general design, arrangement, texture, material and color of the features 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 the Somerville Historical Society a Certificate of Appropriateness** for alterations to **1Westwood Road** based upon the following conditions:

1. All appropriate building permits shall be obtained prior to the start of any work.
2. If the approval differs from the plans, new plans shall be submitted to Historic Staff prior to commencing the work;
3. The Westwood Road entry porch and stairs shall be demolished.
4. An approximately 6'3" by 22'3" addition with new entry steps shall be constructed as per plans.
5. Only the amount of brick masonry necessary to accommodate the needed changes shall be removed to accommodate the installation of the LULA on three floors: basement, ground and second floors as well the necessary allowance for the open passage between the areas noted in the plans.
6. The ground floor left-most window is to be retained *in situ*.
7. The existing Westwood Road entry door and other windows shall be salvaged and reused on the addition.
8. The other ground floor and the second floor windows shall be relocated to the new exterior.
9. The Westwood Road side of the building shall have three windows on the third floor and two windows on the second floor that either are re-used existing windows or replicated to match.
10. The window casings shall reflect the current size and proportions of the cast stone window surround on the masonry section of the building.
11. The cornice line shall reflect the existing cornice.
12. The Palladian window shall be relocated to the rear of the building facing the parking area as per MHC Preservation Restriction.
13. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate and approved plans and prior to the Somerville Historical Society receiving Inspectional Service Division sign off.



Circa 1934 image of 1 Westwood Road with Palladian window.



1 Westwood Road, 2011 as altered in 1986.





Rear of the Somerville Museum showing the approved location of the Palladian window as required by the MHC Preservation Restriction

5. Other Provisions: The Palladian window, which will be crated and stored is to be reinstalled in a location approved by the Commission on the rear wall of the Somerville Historical Museum. Reinstallation of the window will occur at a future date when and if an elevator is installed in the Somerville Historical Museum.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the Grantor has hereunto set its hand and seal this 18th day of June, 1986.

SOMERVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

By: Paul M. Kelley
Paul M. Kelley, President