



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: 16 Westwood Road c.1911  
Case: HPC 2014.008 Westwood Road Local Historic District

Applicant Name: James Veneziano, Owner  
Applicant Address: 18 Westwood Road, Somerville, MA 02143

Date of Application: February 26, 2014  
Legal Notice: *Add widow's walk, replace 3<sup>rd</sup> floor front windows and redesign second means of egress on rear.*

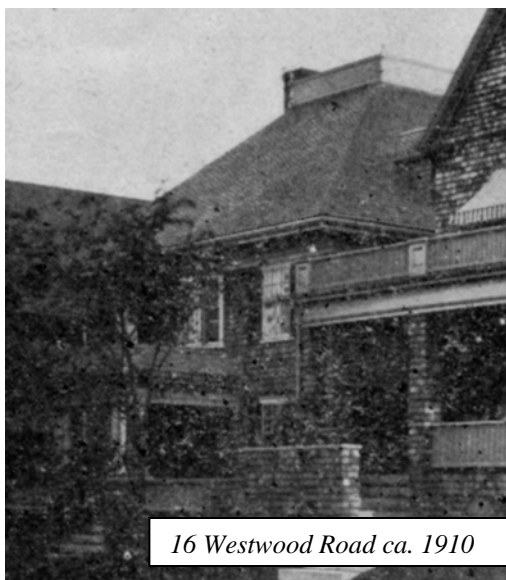
Staff Recommendation: Certificate of Appropriateness with conditions  
Date of Public Hearing: March 18, 2014

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**I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION**

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:**

This symmetrical 2 ½ story Colonial Revival four square house is located toward the Benton Road end of Westwood Road. It has a center entry with a colonnaded entry porch. The front door has side lights and is surmounted by a fanlight.



*16 Westwood Road ca. 1910*

A shallow bow front on the second floor has diamond panes in the upper sash.

Jerkin headed dormers are located on the sides of the hipped roof. A flat roof dormer was added circa 1968 and at some point the original widows walk was removed.



*16 Westwood Road 2009*

Architecturally, the house is very similar to those produced by the Radford Architectural Company of Chicago.

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

The property is one of several examples of Shingle style homes on Westwood and Benton Roads. Westwood Road was originally platted on the Shute estate and Benton farm in 1874, but was not developed until 1894, when hardware dealer Charles Bradshaw replatted the entire subdivision. To landscape the street, Bradshaw moved mature elms and maples from elsewhere on the estate to the street line and retained the estate's granite posts as the entrance to the road. Eight Shingle Style houses designed by Somerville architect J. St. Clair Harrold, were initially built by Bradshaw, and by 1905, a total of 17

houses had been constructed. The first owners on Westwood Road held a cross-section of Somerville business and professional interests at the turn of the century. Divided between Boston and local concerns, the owners included lawyers, pharmacists, shoe, jewelry and desk manufacturers, and dairy and produce dealers. Westwood Road is Somerville's closest representation of a picturesquely-planned nineteenth century subdivision and remains one of the City's finest collections of Shingle and Colonial Revival style residences.

This house was dated to 1911 by Building Permit issued to W. James as a single family house with asbestos siding, with a pitched roof and brick foundation.

## II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### *1. Proposal of Alteration:*

1. Add widow's walk as seen in historic photo.
2. Replace 3<sup>rd</sup> floor front windows with ones more stylistically appropriate.
3. Redesign second means of egress on rear.

See the final pages for details and photos.

## II. FINDINGS

### *1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:*

1988.001	16	Westwood Road	C/A	1. Replace two existing sliding glass and metal windows, located on the front of the building at the third floor level, with wooden one-over-one windows of the same size, with epoxied exterior mullions. The Certificate to include wooden shutters, to scale, similar to the shutters elsewhere on the house.
2003.025	16	Westwood Road	C/A, Denial	1. Replace rotted shingles, fascia, soffits and trim in-kind (C/NA); 2. Replace mixed wood and aluminum gutters with all metal gutters (C/H).
2004.038	16-18	Westwood Road	C/A, C/NA	1. Install a no higher than 6' fence with lattice top and gates between the garage and house on the Benton Road side of the house at 18 Westwood Road; 2. Install a 6' fence with lattice top and gates between 16 and 18 Westwood Road approximately 6' in front of the bay at 16 Westwood Road; and 3. Install a 6' lattice top gate at the rear corner of 16 Westwood Road on the east side. 4. Install a fence between 14 and 16 Westwood Road which is not visible from the public-right-of way.

### *1. Precedence:*

#### *1. Are there similar properties / proposals?*

1. Add a widow's walk as seen in historic photo.

There are no known cases of the replacement of this particular architectural element. However, the Commission regularly approves the replacement of elements based upon photographic and physical evidence. Details and missing elements have been replaced on 36 Atherton Street (2007), 83

Boston Street (2010), 34 Bow Street (2004), 438 Broadway (2005), 13 Campbell Park (2012), 28 Highland Avenue (2006), 140 Highland Avenue (2013), 8 and 18 Westwood Road (2011 and 2013) based upon photographic evidence. These elements ranged from replication of fencing to doorways to panels and siding materials.

There is a photo of the property next door which shows 16 Westwood Road in the background with the widow's walk clearly visible.

2. Replace 3<sup>rd</sup> floor front windows with a style more appropriate to its period and style than the existing casement windows.

The Commission rarely approves alterations to windows on the main façade. However, the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor dormers and windows are not original to the building. A number of modifications to the structure were made in 1985. A Building Permit from 1968 has been found for the construction of a dormer. According to the current owner, there had been one large window that was then modified in order to reconfigure the house as a side by side two-family.

No exact precedence has been found. Several basement windows on secondary and tertiary elevations have been altered for second means of egress and were minimally visible from public rights of way. One window on 30 Forest Street was altered to a Queen Anne style window to allow for a shorter awning window to replace a double-hung window. Most of the windows at 1 Summer Street were altered from leaded glass church windows to double-hung windows with the leading retained in the arches.

3. Redesign second means of egress on rear to include a covering over the door and stairs.

There is no exact precedent although Certificates of Hardship and Appropriateness have been issued for necessary alterations to provide second means of egress. Certificates of Hardship were issued when there was no good way to integrate the egress into the existing building in a manner that met other guidelines. Certificates of Appropriateness were issued in cases when the proposal was an improvement on existing conditions and brought the building closer to its original design and in a manner that was compatible HPC Guidelines and minimally visible from the public right of way.

#### 2001.007 – 47 Mount Vernon (C/H)

1. Extend second floor landing of existing fire escape to reach existing back porch;
2. Make an opening in existing back porch for access to extended landing;
3. Replace final set of fire escape stairs;
4. Height of handrail to be set per building code requirement for handrails rather than the height for landings.

#### 2003.011 – 30 Forest Street (C/H)

1. Replace existing approved double-hung window on Beacon Street elevation with an existing 4-panel door, which required as a second means of egress for Unit 1, after further clarification of design with Staff and their final approval.

#### 2001.015 – 28 Highland Avenue (C/A)

1. Remove metal fire escape from the front of the building;
2. Install on the rear corner of the building porches and stairs as a second means of egress to all apartments per general plans submitted by the Applicant and dated 06/26/01, subject to the review and approval by the Staff of the details for cornice, columns, guard rails, balusters, skirting and decking.

#### 2002.003 – 15 Westwood Road (C/A)

1. To replace an existing window to permit easier emergency egress from a legal basement apartment by lowering the sill to meet the 44" safety requirement providing that the

replacement window be a Marvin French casement windows with an energy panel and a wood exterior.

2003.049 – 46 Mount Vernon Street (C/A)

1. Construct a roof deck on one story rear addition with rails and balusters constructed as described in the plans, specifications and sketches; and
2. Install wood egress stairs to rear yard.

2005.002 – 55 Columbus Avenue (C/A)

1. Remove existing structurally unsound fire escape;
2. Remove basement bulkhead entry;
3. Install new additions for egress and HP access to the side rear of the building consisting of:
  - a. New enclosed egress stair, and
  - b. New enclosed HP Lift;
4. Install new decks at 1<sup>st</sup> floor entry and 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor;
5. Install new exterior egress stair from 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor deck to grade).

2005.020 – 419 Broadway (C/A) (not executed)

1. Remove existing wood egress stairs from right side rear of building; and
2. Install new wood stairs on opposite side of building as per material samples and hand-drawn plans submitted at the Commission meeting.

2005.034 – 75 Columbus Avenue (C/A)

1. Enlarge one of four basement windows to meet second egress requirements;
2. Install replacement window in a style to be determined in a clear opening of 20" wide by 24" high and no higher than 44 inches off the floor;

2008.039 – 77 Columbus Avenue (C/A)

1. Enlarge one of four basement windows to meet second egress requirements;
2. Install replacement Andersen Woodwright® 400 series VXW14 3' wide x 4' tall casement window; and
3. Create window well on west side of house near front.

2010.090 – 27 Warren Avenue (C/A)

1. Remove metal fire escape from rear of the building;
2. Remove the enclosed 2-story porch;
3. Frame the base structure on the same footprint in order to allow for the second means of egress of the second and third floors; and
4. Match the original fascia and roof with Staff review and approval.
  - a. Install a secondary fascia along the base of the second floor porch;
  - b. Wrap the posts with 6" x 6" lumber as tightly as possible;
  - c. Detail the porch posts with capitals and bases;
  - d. Install beadboard on second floor porch ceiling;
  - e. Install simple rails, either plain or fluted, and nominal 2" x 2" balusters with a nailing strip; and
  - f. Install vertical lattice or slat skirt at the base of the porch.

2013.089 – 46 Mount Vernon Street (C/A)

1. Install the proposed simple metal spiral fire escape behind the cross gable and situated as close to the inside corner as possible.

3. *Considerations:*

4. *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

The widow's walk will be visible.

The front dormer windows are visible.

The second means of egress is visible at a distance from Benton Road between 18 Westwood Road and its garage.

5. *What are the Existing Conditions of the building / parcel?*

Located on Westwood Road, the building is generally good condition. The owner lives next door. Since he received a historic image of his house he has been upgrading his house and now this one to somewhat match the photo. The building lost its widow's walk at an unknown date.

The dormer may have been constructed in 1968 per Building Permit records. It currently has 2 small casement windows that are both ill-proportioned and not compatible with the style of the house.

The second means of egress has reached the end of its functional life and needs to be fully rebuilt. Code now requires the door to have a covering.

See photos and plans at the end of the document.

6. *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 widows walk was not discussed in the Form B since it no longer existed. The front dormer was mentioned as a modern addition. There was no mention of the rear egress.

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

The widows walk would be replaced per the historic photo which is not highly detailed but does appear to have solid sides and urn-shaped posts with a finial of some sort.

The dormers on the side of the building are narrower than the front dormer and have double-hung windows. The proposal is to replace the sliding windows with double-hung windows on the front dormer in a style to be determined by the Commission. This was reviewed and approved by the Commission back in 1988, however, the details of the approved windows were not in the files but appears to have been 2/2 double-hung sash.

For the most part, the egress stairs will be essentially the same as the current ones with straight balusters instead of the lattice and a more traditional handrail. They have also proposed the addition of a roof which would extend over the back steps at an angle. A roof is required to shelter the egress door.

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

The widow's walk would be replaced per the historic photo which is not highly detailed.

The dormer and the second egress stairs are modern. Both of these elements will be altered.

- 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 replacement of the widow's walk will be in wood. It does appear to have either solid sides or simple balusters, and urn-shaped corner posts with a finial of some sort. The Applicant has suggested that it might be about 2 feet high.

The windows will also be double-hung wood sash. The applicant has said that he will use whatever style and configuration the Commission recommends.

The applicant would like to use Azek, Trex or other composite material for the modern egress decks, stairs, handrails and balusters. The roof will match the existing in materials. See plans for details.

- 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 widow's walk will be visible.

The front dormer windows are visible.

The second means of egress is visible at a distance from Benton Road between 18 Westwood Road and its garage. The new roof will be the most visible portion of the egress.

## **B. Roofs**

1. *Preserve the integrity of the original or later important roof shape.*

There will be no change in the roof shape of the main building. The new roof on the second means of egress will follow its contours down the rear of the building.

2. *Retain the original roof covering whenever possible. If the property has a slate roof, conserve the roof slates. Slate is a near-permanent roofing material, and deterioration is generally caused by rusted roofing nails.*

There will be no change in the roof material although there will be the addition of the widow's walk as documented.

3. *Whenever possible, replace deteriorated roof covering with material that matches the old in composition, color, size, shape, texture and installation detail.*

There will be no change in the roof material although there will be the addition of the widow's walk as documented.

4. *Preserve the architectural features that give the roof its distinctive character, such as cornices, gutters, iron filigree, cupolas, dormers and brackets. Downspouts should be inconspicuously located and should be painted to match the color of the siding.*

The widow's walk will be restored as documented although details are a little unclear from the photograph available.

5. *New dormers will be permitted if they are related to the forms, proportions, size and arrangement of existing windows, and constructed in matching materials and colors. If possible, new dormers should be confined to the rear of the house.*

There will be no new dormers.

### **C. Windows and Doors**

1. *Retain original and later important door and window openings where they exist. Do not enlarge or reduce door and window openings for the purpose of fitting stock window sash or doors, or air conditioners.*

The window openings will not be altered.

2. *Whenever possible, repair and retain original or later important window elements such as sash, lintels, sill, architraves, glass, shutters and other decorative elements and hardware. When replacement of materials or elements is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.*

2/2 double-hung sash with panes similar in size to those in the double-hung sash on the floor below might be the most appropriate.

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

2. *Fire escapes are very conspicuous features and, as a rule, should only be placed on the rear of the building, or where they are least visible from a public way. If installation on the street or side façade cannot be avoided, fire escapes should be designed and constructed with the same attention demanded by other major alterations and repairs, and are subject to the review and approval of the Commission.*

The second egress from the second and third floors is located on the rear of the building and extends away from the building. The footprint and configuration of the egress will remain the same although the details will be quite different. Lattice will be replaced by simple balusters. The proposed addition of a roof to protect the decks and the stairs will be visually quite strong. A smaller simple hood over the egress door would be sufficient to meet the building code and would not be visible from the public right of way.

## **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 James Veneziano, Westwood Road Trust a Certificate of Appropriateness** for the reconstruction of the widow's walk *with the proportions and style shown in the historic photograph*; the replacement of the sliding glass windows in third floor dormer with double-hung 2/2 windows and *shutters to match those on the first and second floors and installed in such a way that they appear to be operable*; and the reconstruction of the second means of egress *with a small roof hood over the door and not extending over the stairs*.













16 Westwood Road. 2013



16 Westwood Road from Benton Road, 2004