



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

KRISTENNA CHASE, *PRESERVATION PLANNER*
SARAH WHITE, *PLANNER & PRESERVATION PLANNER*

Case #: HPC 2018.115
Date: January 15, 2019

Recommendation: Denial, *Conditional Approval*

PRESERVATION STAFF REPORT (Revision 1)

Site: 1 Arlington Street
Applicant Name: Oanh Nguyen & Tuan Phan
Applicant Address: 1 Arlington Street
Owner Name: same as above
Owner Address: same as above

Petition: Oanh Nguyen & Tuan Phan, Owners, seeks permission from the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to install brick driveway, parking area & patio.

HPC Hearing Date: January 15, 2019

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. **Subject Property:** See Form B for details. The period of significance (c. 1858-1908) for the Charles Williams House is primarily late nineteenth century prior to the common use of automobiles. There is no historic evidence of a stable on the site or the original larger lot. Mr. Williams may have used streetcars to his place of business in Boston or one of the many livery stables. Mr. Williams is noted as owning one horse in the 1906 City Directory. Five livery stables are listed nearby on Broadway, Cutter, Gilman, Glen and Wheeler Streets.
2. **Background:** The Applicant has covered their entire front yard to the left of the main block of the building without a Certificate of Appropriateness approved by the Historic Preservation Commission. They told Staff that the yard had been covered with bricks which they removed. Those were the piles seen in their front yard. They claim that the paving would keep rain from entering the basement of



their house. The wrapping on the bricks seen in the 2017 photos was to protect their children from bumping into the sharp corners **although the pallets were unwrapped at some point between May and July of 2017 and remained unwrapped until the yard was bricked over. A former Commission Member, George Born who lived on Arlington Street in 2017 e-mailed the Staff about the delivery of the bricks and the general condition of the building. See attached e-mail from 2017.**

The Applicants were asked for verification that the bricks were old and had covered the yard. They provided close up shots of bricks in the ground with no establishing photos. The photos could have been taken anywhere, although it is likely that they are of the pathway to the family/servant entry.

After meeting with Staff, the Applicants have marked off the areas that they are willing to remove and to keep. The patio area was staged with their table and chairs. Two vehicles were parked in the area they want to set aside for parking. See attached photos.

- 3. Proposal:** They would like a Certificate of Appropriateness for alterations to the landscape. See attached photos and plans for details. **These include the use of 4"x8"x2" wire cut red bricks laid in a herring bone pattern to cover the front yard to use as a driveway and parking area, and a patio area.**

II 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 have been developed to 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.

The following portions of the Guidelines in ***bold italics*** are applicable in this case:

- 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.
- 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).
- 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 historic softscape has been replaced with hard materials to such an extent that the relationship of the building to its surroundings has been changed. All changes are visible from the public right of way.

I. FINDINGS FOR LANDSCAPING

GUIDELINES

The following sections of the “Landscape features & paving guidelines are also relevant to this case:

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.*
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.

Staff Findings:

Staff finds walkways, ramps, and stairs are influenced by the historic patterns of use of the site. Driveways and parking areas, where original, speak to the transportation of the City and the property; where these features are later alterations to accommodate modern lifestyles; care should be taken to ensure that they do not distract from the site's historic nature. Paved patio areas and other formal spaces form outdoor rooms and contribute to a site's overall character.

Staff finds that the current plan has much more ground coverage by hardscaping (brick) than was seen on the lot prior to June 2017. Staff finds that there is no evidence of the entire yard being covered with bricks. Recent photos of the building prior to 2017 show a concrete path to the main door and a bricked pathway from Arlington Street to the entry to the servant/family entry of the house. While there is a curb cut and double gates in the fence, there is no evidence that the driveway and parking area was ever covered with brick or other hardscape materials. These are not simply cleaned brick as claimed by the Applicants. Older images show no recent evidence of the yard being used regularly for parking. See 2013 and 2016 photos.

Staff finds that the bricks are all new as can be seen by their clean finish and sharp edges and corners. **The bricks installed in the yard have the striated surface found on wire cut bricks and are oversized. The proportions are not those of traditional bricks of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries.** Staff finds that too much of the yard has been covered with brick in a manner that is not historically appropriate. The areas are not differentiated by purpose.

The largest problem with the alteration the applicants have made is that there is no differentiation between the uses from a historic perspective. The amount of space devoted to those non historical uses is far more than would ever have been done. Too much area is devoted to automotive parking and driving area. **An open lawn was a typical of the era perhaps with trees to shade the house; laundry would have been hung behind the house. Porches and verandas would have provided sheltered outdoor seating areas for socialization. Two such porches have been enclosed between the main block and the ell. Bricks would have used for streets and sidewalks.**

Early Twentieth Century driveways were narrow double paths not much wider than the tires and spaced the width of the tires. Grass was grown in between the tracks. Parking area must be located beside or behind the building not in front of it.

Patios are not a historic element although formal gardens might have had small paved “rooms”.

The Staff also looked at the Secretary of the Interior Standards because this is a National Register District as well as a Local Historic District. In the section of the guidelines on site and setting the following was noted:

“The landscape surrounding a historic building and contained within an individual parcel of land is considered the building site. The site, including its associated features, contributes to the overall character of the historic property.

“As a result, the relationship between the buildings and landscape features within the site's boundaries should be considered in the overall planning for rehabilitation project work and the following was **not recommended**

Locating any new construction on the building site where important landscape features will be damaged or destroyed, for example, removing a lawn and walkway and installing a parking lot.

Placing parking facilities directly adjacent to historic buildings where automobiles may cause damage to the buildings or to important landscape features.

It may also be noted that the City's Zoning Manual does not allow parking in the front yard and defines how that is determined.

Staff concluded after a site visit, see attached photos, that the areas proposed are still much larger than would be appropriate for the circa 1852-1874 Italianate house and do not meet the conditions noted below.

III. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the information provided and an assessment of the proposal against the Somerville LHD guidelines, Staff recommends Denial of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the existing conditions and recommends a Certificate of Appropriateness under the following conditions.

1. All appropriate building permits shall be obtained prior to the start of any work.
2. If changes are necessary to the proposed design for which this Certificate of Appropriateness was issued, new plans shall be submitted to Historic Staff prior to commencing the work.
3. A dual path or ribbon driveway and a parking area for two cars with no more than 9' x 18' for each car to the left of the building and behind the edge of the building.
4. The patio shall be sized to be no more than 12' x 12'.
5. Brick may be used for the paving.
6. Uses of the various areas shall be clearly differentiated by brick edging, preferably in a vertical orientation.
7. All other currently bricked areas shall be removed and landscaping shall be installed (no hardscaping)
8. The landscaping proposal shall be reviewed by Planning Staff to ensure compliance with landscaping standards.
9. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate and approved plans.





2016



2013



2017



2017

2018



2018



2017 Aerial view showing brick delivery.





Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

Scanned Record Cover Page

Inventory No:	SMV.141
Historic Name:	Williams, Charles Jr. House
Common Name:	
Address:	1 Arlington St
City/Town:	Somerville
Village/Neighborhood:	East Somerville
Local No:	1025; 105
Year Constructed:	c 1858
Architect(s):	
Architectural Style(s):	Italianate
Use(s):	Single Family Dwelling House; Telephone Office
Significance:	Architecture; Communications; Invention
Area(s):	SMV.AY: Somerville Multiple Resource Area
Designation(s):	Local Historic District (3/11/1985); Nat'l Register Individual Property (8/18/1989); Nat'l Register MRA (9/18/1989)
Building Materials(s):	Roof: Asphalt Shingle Wall: Aluminum Siding; Wood; Iron



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Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc

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RM B - BUILDING

AREA

FORM NO.

SSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
BOYLSTON STREET
STON, MA 02116AY East
Somer-
ville

105 141

PI-E. SOM
USG-S-BOST,N

Somerville MRA

SECT A

ss 1 Arlington Street

ic Name Charles Williams Jr. House

Present residence

Original residence

PTION

ca. 1958

e map research

Italianate

ect unknown

Exterior Wall Fabric aluminum siding

Outbuildings none

Major Alterations (with dates) rear wing
mid to late Eastlakin trim added
ca. 1983

Condition fair/good

Moved no Date

Acreage less than one acre

Setting North west corner of Arlington

and Lincoln Sts., urban residential

neighborhood of late 19th century

Italianate and Second Empire houses

Recorded by Betsy Friedberg, Preservation
Planner

Organization Mass. Historical Commission

Date May 1986



etch Map: Draw map showing property's location
relation to nearest cross streets and/or
topographical features. Indicate all buildings
between inventoried property and nearest
intersection(s).
indicate north

See Attached Assessor's Map

IM REFERENCE Z E N
19 - 328/610 - 4694/510

SGS QUADRANGLE Boston North

CALE 1:25,000

NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA STATEMENT (if applicable)

The Charles Williams Jr. House is significant both historically and architecturally. Firstly, it is significant as the terminus of the first outdoor telephone line. Equally important is the building's architectural significance as a three-bay, center-gable Italianate house distinguished by an overlay of Eastlake trim, applied later in the 19th century. Retaining integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The Williams House fulfills Criteria A, B, and C of the National Register of Historic Places on the local level.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE Describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within the community.

One Arlington Street is a center gable Italianate house (ca. 1858) with a later (ca. 1888) overlay of Eastlake style trim. The Eastlake-style remodeling was extensive and was applied to the interior as well as the exterior. The 2 1/2 story-rectangular-plan house was a 2 story side hall built in several successive stages. Notable features include the elaborate gable screen, the pedimented entrance porch with paired columns, and the oversacle window hoods or canopies above the windows of the lower story. These canopies are supported by Eastlake-style braces, and carry elaborate iron cresting.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE Explain the role owners played in local or state history and how the building relates to the development of the community.

One Arlington Street was the terminus of the world's first outdoor experimental telephone line. Charles Williams Jr., who bought the house in 1876 and lived there until his death in 1909, was an early protege of Alexander Graham Bell, and a major force in the early development of commercial telephone service. Bell and Watson's first telephone (of the early gallows type) was developed at Williams's electrical shop at 109 Court Street in Boston in 1875. Although they later moved to larger quarters at 5 Exeter Place in Boston, where the first complete sentence was spoken over the wire, the manufacturing of early telephones took place exclusively at 109 Court Street until Williams's business was transferred to the Western Electric Company in 1883.

In early 1877, Williams arranged with Bell and a Mr. Hubbard to have the rights to manufacture telephones, and to lease them on a commission basis. On March 27 of that year work began on the world's first outdoor telephone line from Williams's 109 Court Street shop to his house at One Arlington Street in Somerville, a distance of three miles. Williams paid for the wire, the labor, and the house-top brackets. The line was finished on April 4, 1877.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Hopkins, G.M. Atlas of the City of Somerville, 1874

Beyond the Neck, The Architecture and Development of Somerville, Massachusetts
Office of Planning and Community Development, 1982.

SMV.141

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

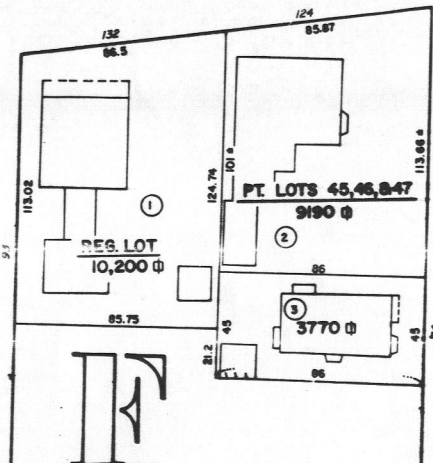
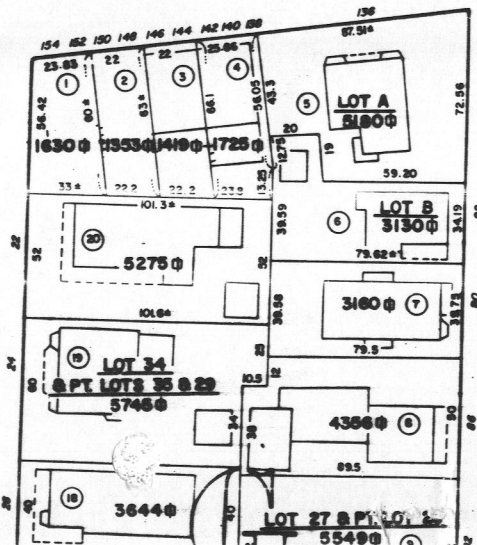
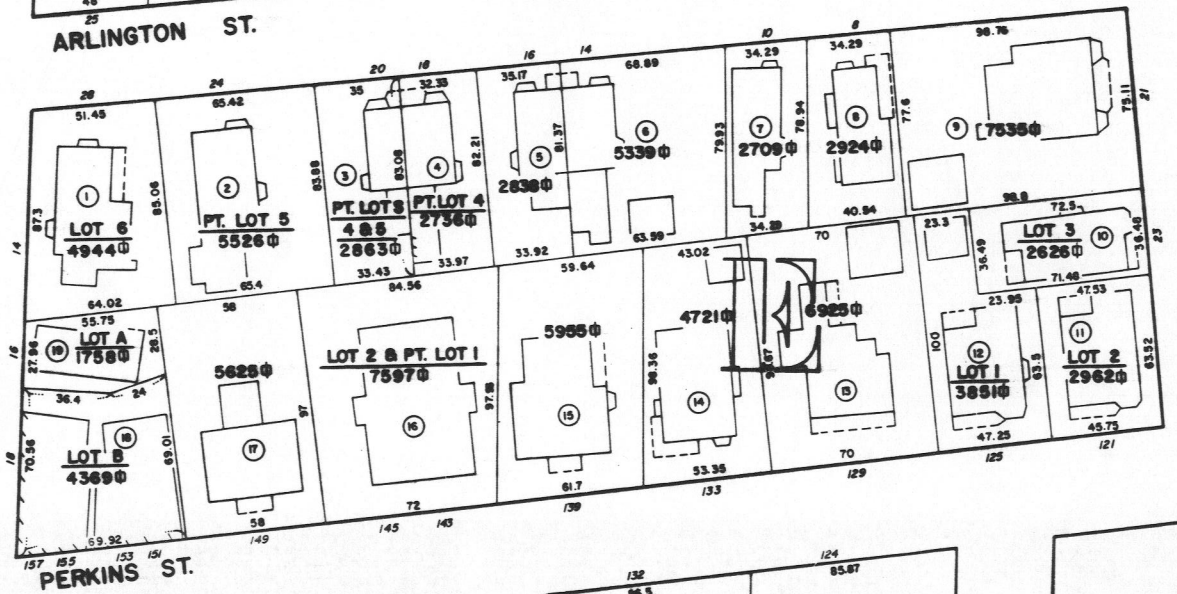
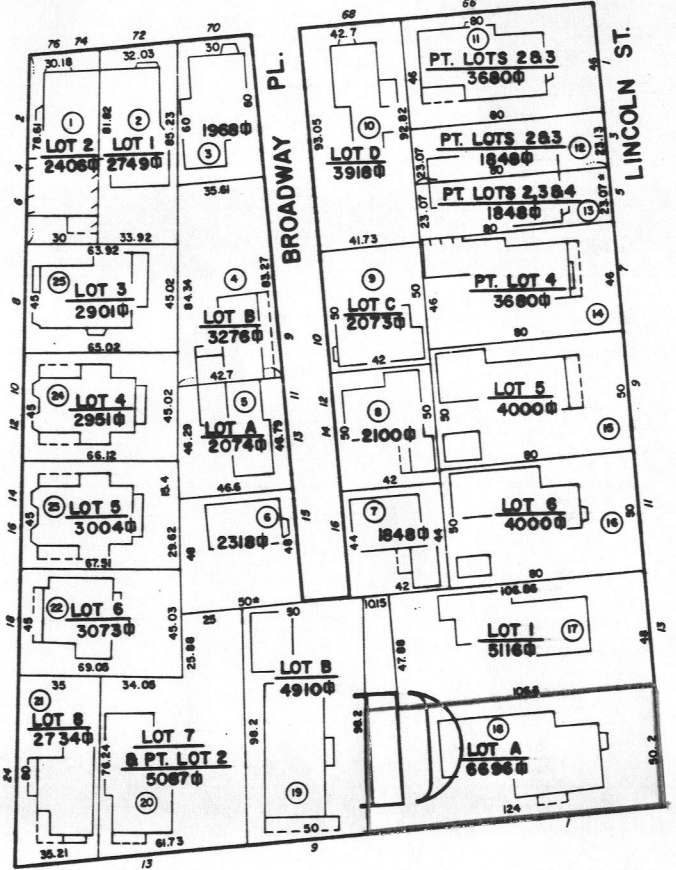
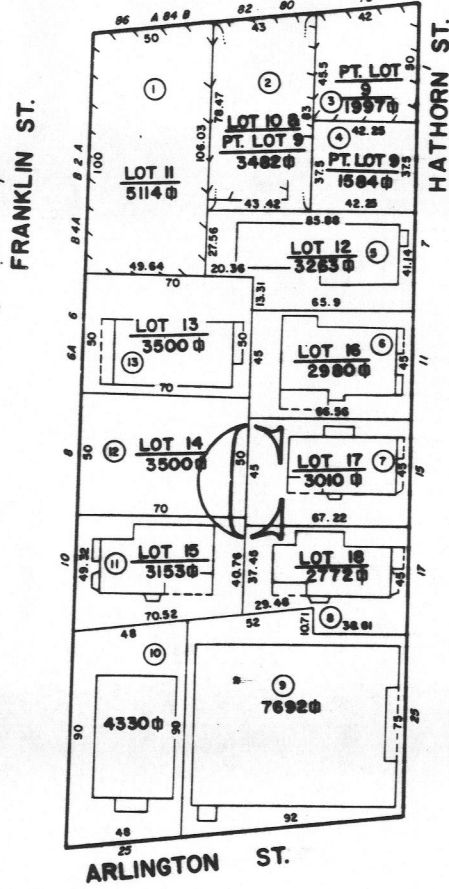
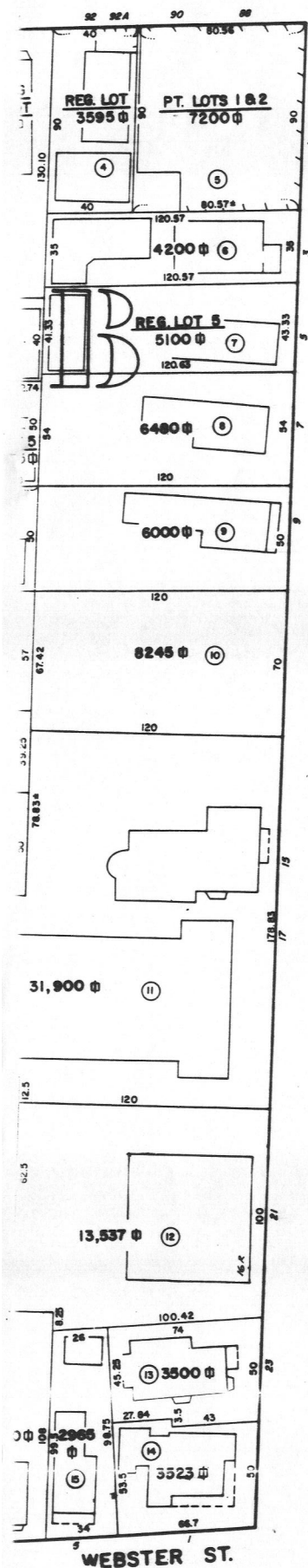
MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community: Somerville, MA	Form No: 105
Property Name: Charles Williams, Jr. House	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

Historical Significance (Continued)

To test this new technology, a steady stream of people poured into Williams's shop to talk over the line to his wife and others in Somerville. People quickly impressed, and by May 1 of the same year, Williams had installed the world's first commercial telephone line from the State Street, Boston, Office of his friend Roswell C. Downer to his house a 170 Central Street, also in Somerville.



From: George Born [<mailto:georgewalterborn@hotmail.com>]
Sent: Tuesday, May 23, 2017 12:40 PM
To: Brandon Wilson; Kristi Chase; Sarah White
Subject: Telephone House, Arlington St.

Just a couple of things relating to the Telephone House that caught my eye. Not sure which one of you would best be able to follow up with this, so am sending to all three of you.

Maintenance: A number of the significant, character-defining wooden Eastlake-style features of this building are deteriorating markedly. The attached photo may give some idea. Not sure how much the City can compel people to maintain designated historic buildings, but I wanted to let you know anyway.

Bricks: Quite a number of pallets of bricks have been delivered to the property, perhaps to pave part of the side yard (where there has long been a curb cut) or to create a patio. Bricks would seem to be an appropriate material for such a project, but I am unclear as to its extent. Not sure if this should be reviewed by HPC staff and/or the Commission. Does this require a building permit? Should one be posted?

Thanks very much. This is an important building in the neighborhood. I know it is under comparatively new ownership. Can we be gentle but firm?

George

To Whom It May Concerns,

We are Oanh Nguyen and Tuan Phan, the owners of the house at 1 Arlington street, Somerville. We are writing the statement to explain our case in more details. We are both really love history. From the bottom of our hearts, we love the value of history. We admire and respect great success that Mr. Charles William Jr. contributed to the world. So, we bring all of our efforts to get the house. We do not intend to make money from it, not to change it to condo, do business on it, or make any changes on it as others usually do. We just want to keep and protect house. Here is what happen. Almost two years ago, actually, we had not known about stones and bricks were buried under the dirt until we took out the grasses to grow some flowers in the yard and saw bricks under the dirt. We started to dig it wider and wider and discover that all bricks with thick layer of stones under them. We just simply thought that we clean them up and re-level them to bring them back as it was to make it look nice. If we don't grow flowers and find out the mystery, we don't even think about doing something with our parking because we have baby in that time. That is our real situation. We worked very hard by ourselves to dig it up and clean it carefully in many days. (The bricks just sat on the stones without any cement or construction.). We are very happy as we saw the old bricks are still in good safe and very high quality. The old bricks will live beautifully as they were forever. Nowadays, they don't make the good bricks like that anymore.

Following portions of the Guidelines are applicable in this case:

A. The design approach to each property should begin with the premise that the features of historic and architectural significance

Brick paving has been existing with the house. We don't change it. It is also suitable to Italianate architectural significance around the house. It matches with existing paving walkway and stair steps of the house.

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

We repaired it and keep it as it was.

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

Nothing changed. We don't make any changes.

Response to staff finding:

We don't agree some parts that staff findings section:

1- They state that *"There are not simply cleaned brick as claimed by the applicants."* And *"the bricks are all new as can be seen by their clean finish and sharp edges and corners."*

It is totally wrong. 100% of bricks is old bricks. Actual bricks will be shown

2- *"Staff find that too much of the yard has been covered with brick in the manner that is not historically appropriate. The areas are not differentiated by purpose" and "the largest problem with the alteration the applicants have made is that there is no differentiation between the uses from a historic perspective."*

The areas have never been differentiated by purpose before. We keep it as it was.

3- *"the amount of space devoted to those non-historical uses is far more than would ever have been done. Too much area is devoted to automotive parking and driving areas."*

It is not too much.

Total land: 6,696 square feet

Remaining landscape area is 2,686 square feet (39%)

4- *"It may also be noted that the City's Zoning Manual does not allow parking in the front yard and defines how that is determined."*

Parking in the yard (are not differentiated by purpose) has been existing for many years, at least before 1970s. It is considered as existing condition by the law. Evidence will be shown. (letters from Somerville seniors who live whole their lives in neighborhood)

Finally, we are encouraged to maintain, discover and record more about what we have not known in the past. We believe that all of us want to protect and respect historic designs as much as we can. We don't want to have any mistakes to architect designer, Charles Locke Eastlake and previous owner, Charles William Jr.

Many interesting things of history that we cannot see in the pictures, even you took closest pictures. In fact, it happened in many cases around the world. From the pictures or unaided eyes, we can see green color only but actually under it may be a huge castle or a village.

Many things are mystery. We should not destroy value things of history just because we don't have a record on it. We should not deny history based on pictures only.