



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
***MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT***  
**KATJANA BALLANTYNE**  
**MAYOR**

THOMAS F. GALLIGANI, JR.  
ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION  
*HISTORIC PRESERVATION*

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**ALTERATION OF A LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT (LHD) PROPERTY**  
**STAFF REPORT**

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**Site:** 24 Warren Avenue

**Case:** HPC.ALT 2022.53

**Applicant:** Emma Rose

**Owner:** Maryann Thompson

**Legal Ad:** *The Applicant seeks a Certificate of Appropriateness for after-the-fact approval of hardscape alterations.*

**HPC Meeting Date:** October 18, 2022



The purpose of a staff report is to provide the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) with a professional assessment of alteration proposals made for Local Historic District (LHD) properties. These assessments are based on the Historic District Ordinance (HDO) in compliance with M.G.L. Chapter 40C, and the associated Design Guidelines. A Staff Report is not a determination/decision and does not represent findings. A staff report does not constitute authorization in any form.

## **I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**Subject Property:** The locus is the c.1874 Second-Empire house known as the Benjamin Almy – Frank Ellis House. This property is located approximately within the Prospect Hill neighborhood. A full description of the property is provided in the attached Form B survey held by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC).

**Proposal:** The Applicant/Owner proposes the following:

- Retroactive\*\* permission to;
  - Remove a brick pathway and replace it with five flagstones on the left side of the property
  - Rebuild a brick patio on the left side of the property with a different layout
  - Remove a concrete curb along the driveway
- Construct a fieldstone retaining curb along the right side of the driveway

In September of 2021 Preservation Staff was notified that hardscaping work had occurred at 24 Warren Ave without receiving the required permissions. The Owner was notified of the issue by ISD, and they began the process of submitting a complete application.

Alterations to exterior features of Local Historic District (LHD) properties require review and approval by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). Pursuant to the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission Design Guidelines §1(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.*

**\*\*Note:** The HPC is not obligated to approve work that was done without permission.

## **II. ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSAL**

The HPC must make findings based on the Historic District Ordinance (HDO) in compliance with M.G.L. Chapter 40C, and associated Design Guidelines. The portions of the regulations that are applicable to the proposed alterations are discussed below.

The applicable Somerville LHD Design Guideline is ***H. “Landscape Features and Paving”***

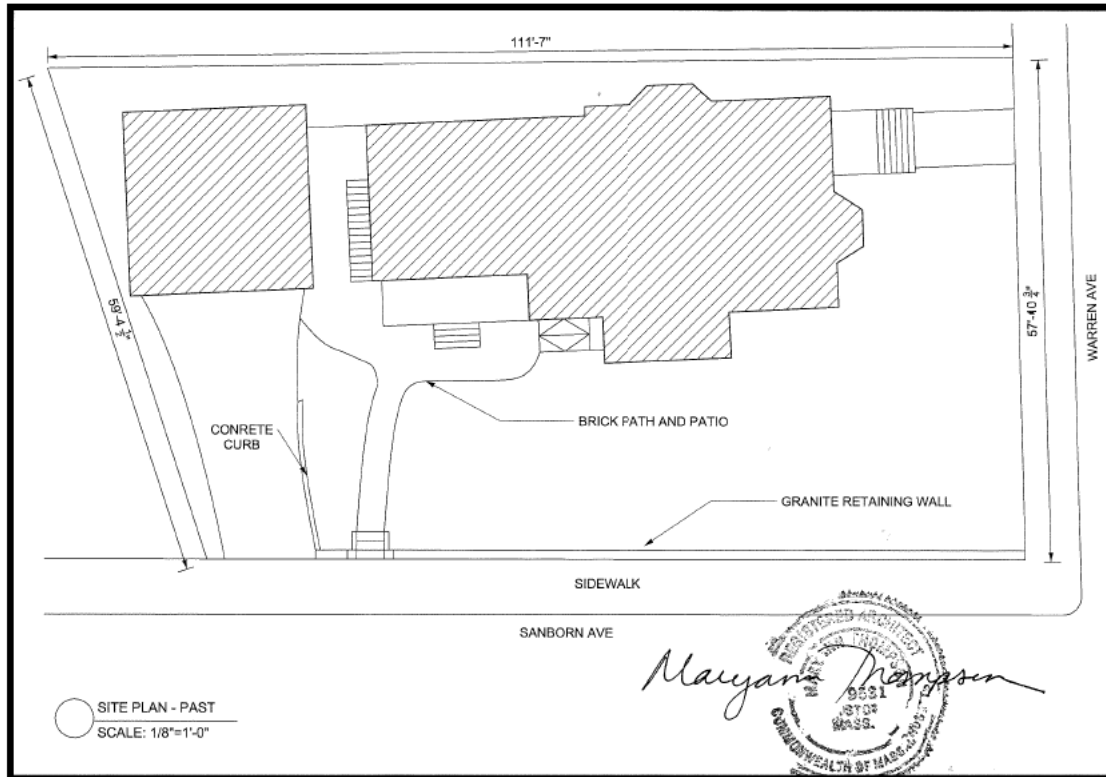
Due to the change in design elements being proposed, the HPC has purview over these features and the materials used.

### **Applicant proposal:**

The Applicant is seeking retroactive permission to remove a brick pathway and replace it with five flagstones, rebuild a brick patio on the left side of the property with a different layout, and remove a concrete curb along the driveway.

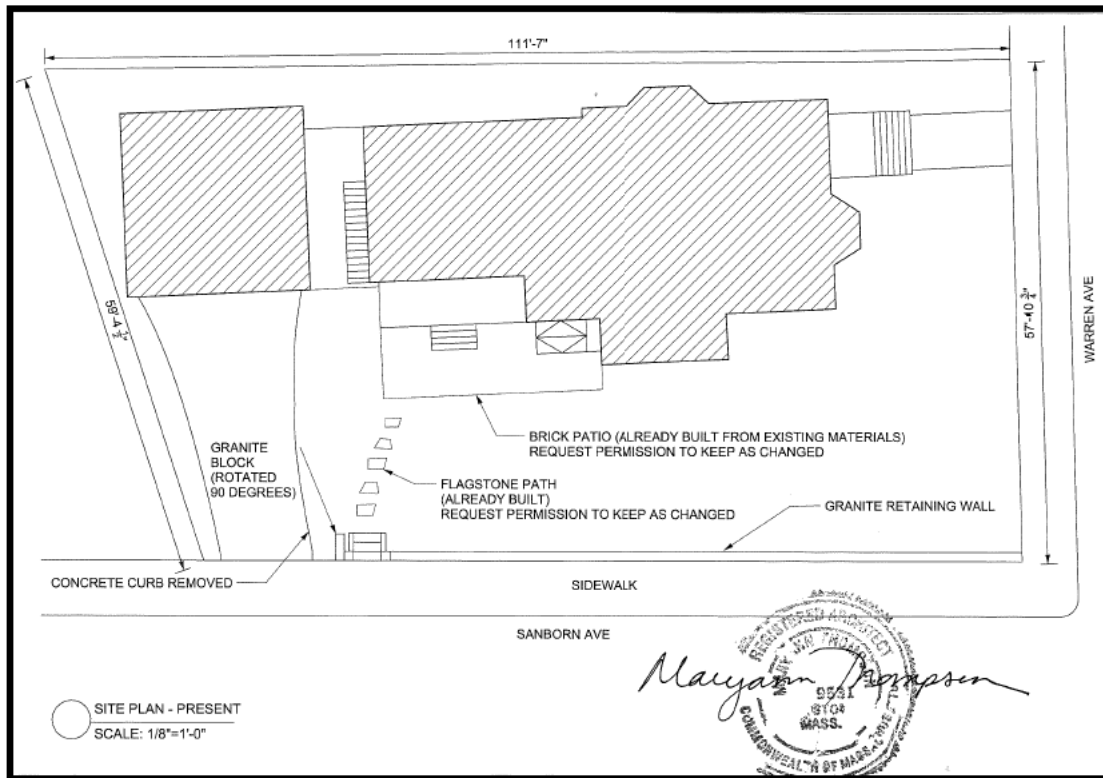
Originally, a clay brick pathway lead from Sanborn Avenue to the former brick patio on the left side entrance of the property. The original pathway and patio had become uneven, and the Owner wished to

level both the walkway and patio. The patio was rebuilt using the existing brick, but the size and shape of the patio was changed from what had previously been present. The Applicant has stated that so much of the existing brick was damaged that not enough bricks were leftover after rebuilding the patio to rebuild the walkway. Consequently, the brick pathway was replaced with five flagstones.

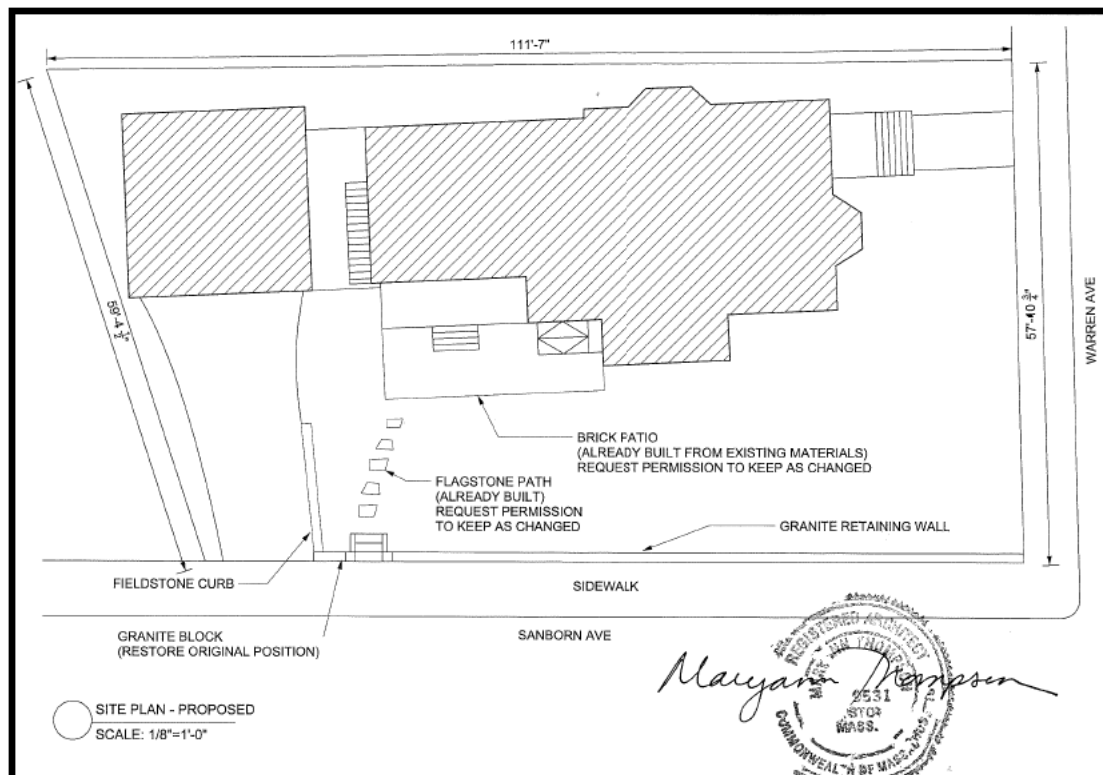


*Above: Site plan of 24 Warren Ave depicting conditions prior to hardscaping work*

(Continued on next page.)



Above: Site plan of 24 Warren Ave depicting current conditions



Above: Site plan of 24 Warren Ave depicting proposed hardscape

The Owner also moved a portion of the granite retaining wall and removed a concrete curb along the right side of the existing driveway. A granite retaining wall runs along the edge of the property on Sanborn Avenue with a break in the wall at the entrance of the aforementioned walkway. Between this opening and the driveway was a smaller segment of the retaining wall. The Owner moved this portion to run perpendicular to Sanborn Avenue. This and the removal of the concrete curb was done with the intention of later widening the driveway. The Applicant is requesting retroactive Commission approval for the removal of the concrete curb. Further, the Applicant proposes to replace the concrete curb with a fieldstone retaining curb where the concrete curb previously existed.

The Owner stated that they will replace the granite wall to its original location and thus that part of the scope is not under the purview of the Commission and can be reviewed at Staff level.

**Preservation Planning Assessment:**

Below are the relevant guidelines under *H. "Landscape Features and Paving"* and the assessment on how the work does or does not comply with those guidelines.

*1. The general intent of this section is to preserve the existing or later essential landscape features that enhance the property.*

*-and-*

*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.*

The proposed hardscaping does not comply with Guidelines # 1 or #4 of Section H regarding landscaping and paving. The original design of the brick patio was altered from the original design. While it does not comply with the above cited guidelines, the patio was rebuilt using existing brick and the change of the overall size and shape of the patio is not egregious.

The Owner removed clay brick from the walkway and replaced it with flagstone. Because of the period of the house and the vast brickworks active in Somerville at the time, brick would be a more likely choice of material rather than flagstone. Should the brick walkway have needed to be replaced it should have been replaced with brick or pavers that look like brick. Staff recommends that the brick walkway is replaced with either brick or pavers that look like brick.

Finally, the Applicant requests to replace the curb that was removed from the driveway with a fieldstone retaining curb so as to prevent soil from spilling on to the driveway. The Applicant requests the fieldstone because it should closely resemble the granite retaining wall along Sanborn Avenue. While it is preferable that the previous curb is replaced to match what was previously there, the proposed fieldstone curb will likely be minimally noticeable so long as it retains a similar size as that of the previous concrete curb. The proposed dimensions were not included in the application. As such, Staff recommends that should the HPC approve the fieldstone retaining curb that Staff has final review over height to ensure that the fieldstone curb remains as close to the size of the original concrete retaining curb.

Preservation Staff recommends the following conditions be included. Staff has provided a complete list of recommended conditions at the end of this report.

1. The Applicant/Owner shall rebuild the brick walkway using brick or pavers that resemble brick. The Applicant shall present the proposed material to Preservation Staff for final approval of the color and size.
2. The Applicant/Owner shall submit the proposed dimensions of the retaining curb to Preservation Staff for final approval.

## **VI. FINDINGS & VOTE**

When bringing the matter to a vote the HPC must state their findings and reasons on why they take their position.

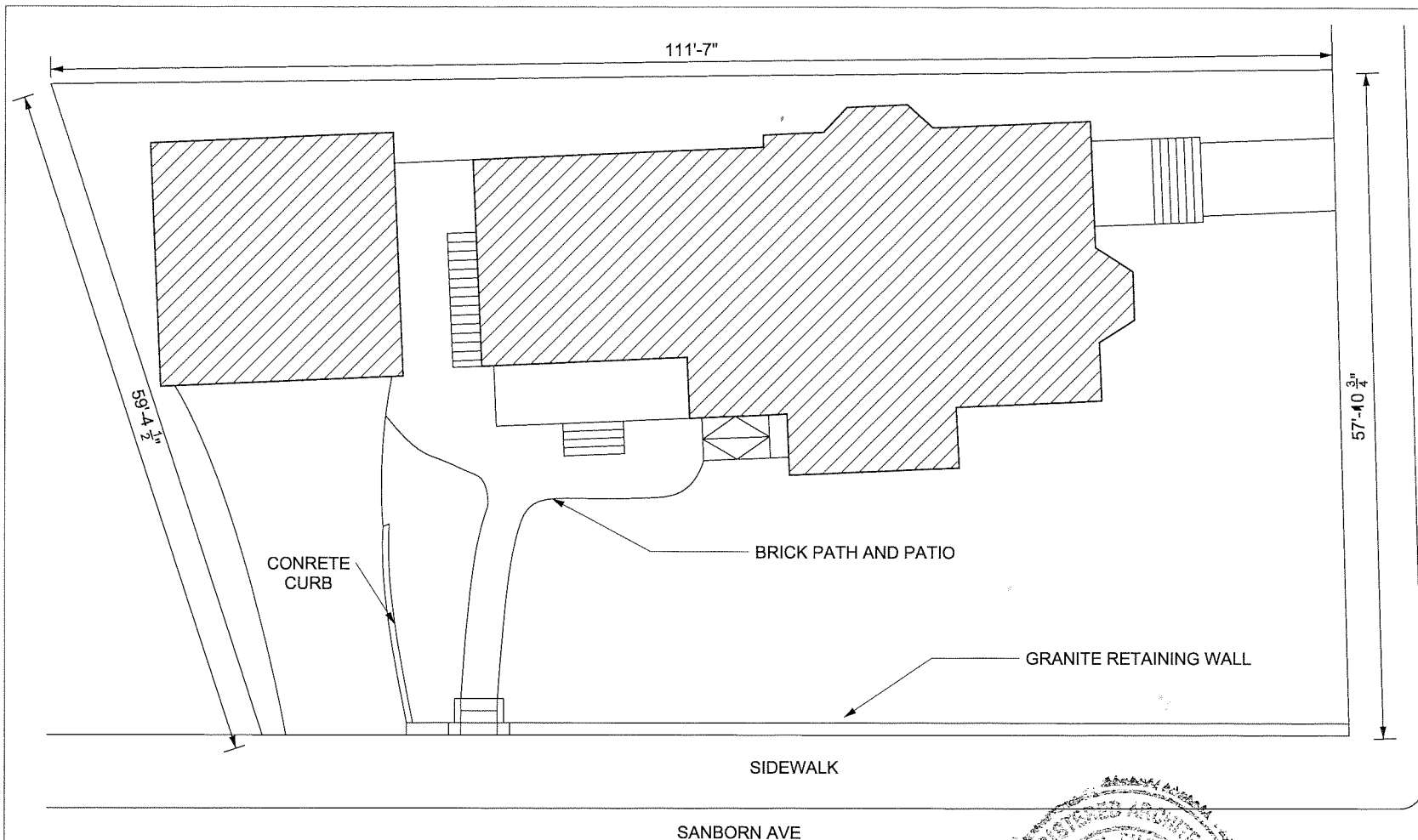
- The HPC must determine if, based on a review of the documentation presented, the proposed project complies with the Design Guidelines
- The HPC must structure their motion to include their own specific findings on the proposed project.

## **IV. RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS**

Preservation Planning recommends the following conditions be attached to any Certificate of Appropriateness that the HPC might grant for this project:

1. The Applicant/Owner shall file the Certificate with the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) by uploading it to the CitizenServe permitting portal with their application for zoning compliance/building permit.
2. This Certificate is valid for one year. If work has not commenced within one year of the HPC's date of determination, this Certificate shall expire, and the Applicant/Owner shall re-apply for re-issuance of this Certificate. Provided that no changes have been made to the proposal, this shall be a Staff-level re-issuance of the Certificate.
3. Any changes to this proposal made prior to the commencement of work or in-the-field changes shall be submitted to Preservation Planning for their review to determine if the changes come under the purview of the HPC. Failure to seek approval for changes may delay final signoffs/COs. The Applicant/Owner shall have Preservation Staff review the proposed fanlight's design, size, materials, and location prior to installation.
4. The Applicant/Owner shall rebuild the brick walkway using brick or pavers that resemble brick. The Applicant shall present the proposed material to Preservation Staff for final approval of the color and size.
5. The Applicant/Owner shall submit the proposed dimensions of the retaining curb to Preservation Staff for final approval.
6. A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be submitted to the Inspectional Services Department with a copy to preservation Planning at least fifteen (15) business days in advance of a request for a final inspection.

7. The Applicant/Owner shall contact Preservation Planning at [historic@somervillema.gov](mailto:historic@somervillema.gov) a minimum of 15 business days prior to final ISD walk-through so that Preservation Planning or their designee can confirm if the project was completed according to HPC approvals.



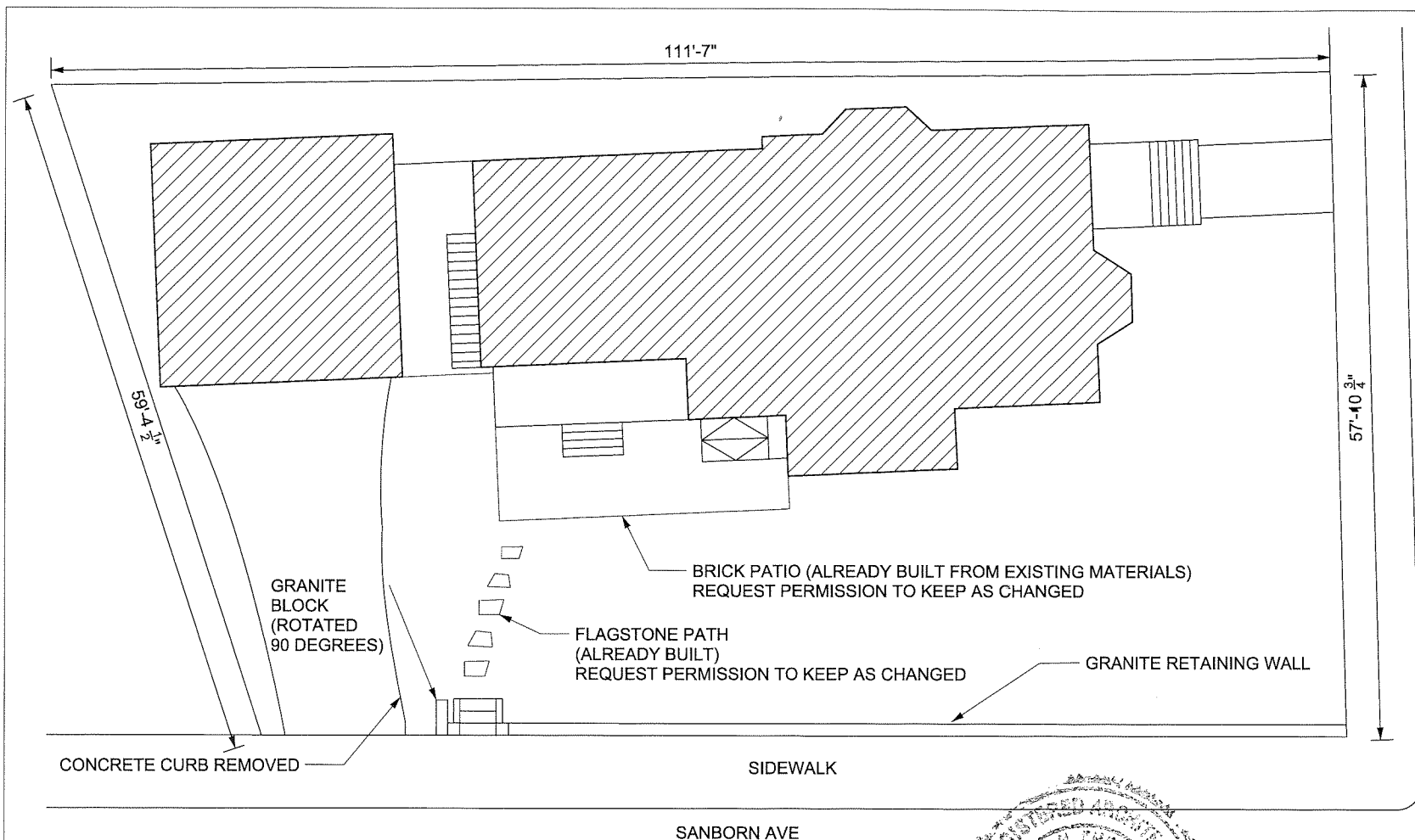
○ SITE PLAN - PAST  
 SCALE: 1/8"=1'-0"

*Maryann Thompson*

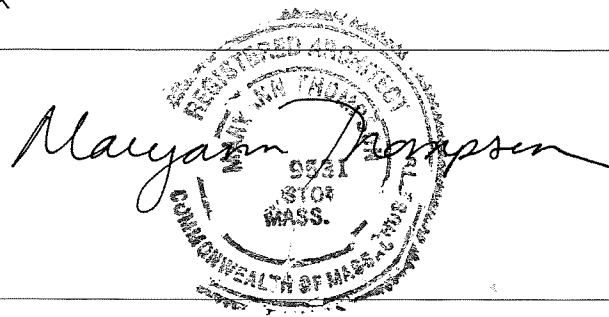
REGISTERED ARCHITECT  
 STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS  
 9881  
 18704  
 MASS.  
 COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

24 WARREN AVE. SOMERVILLE, MA 02143	OWNER: MARYANN THOMPSON	SITE PLAN - PAST	Maryann Thompson Architects





○ SITE PLAN - PRESENT  
SCALE: 1/8"=1'-0"



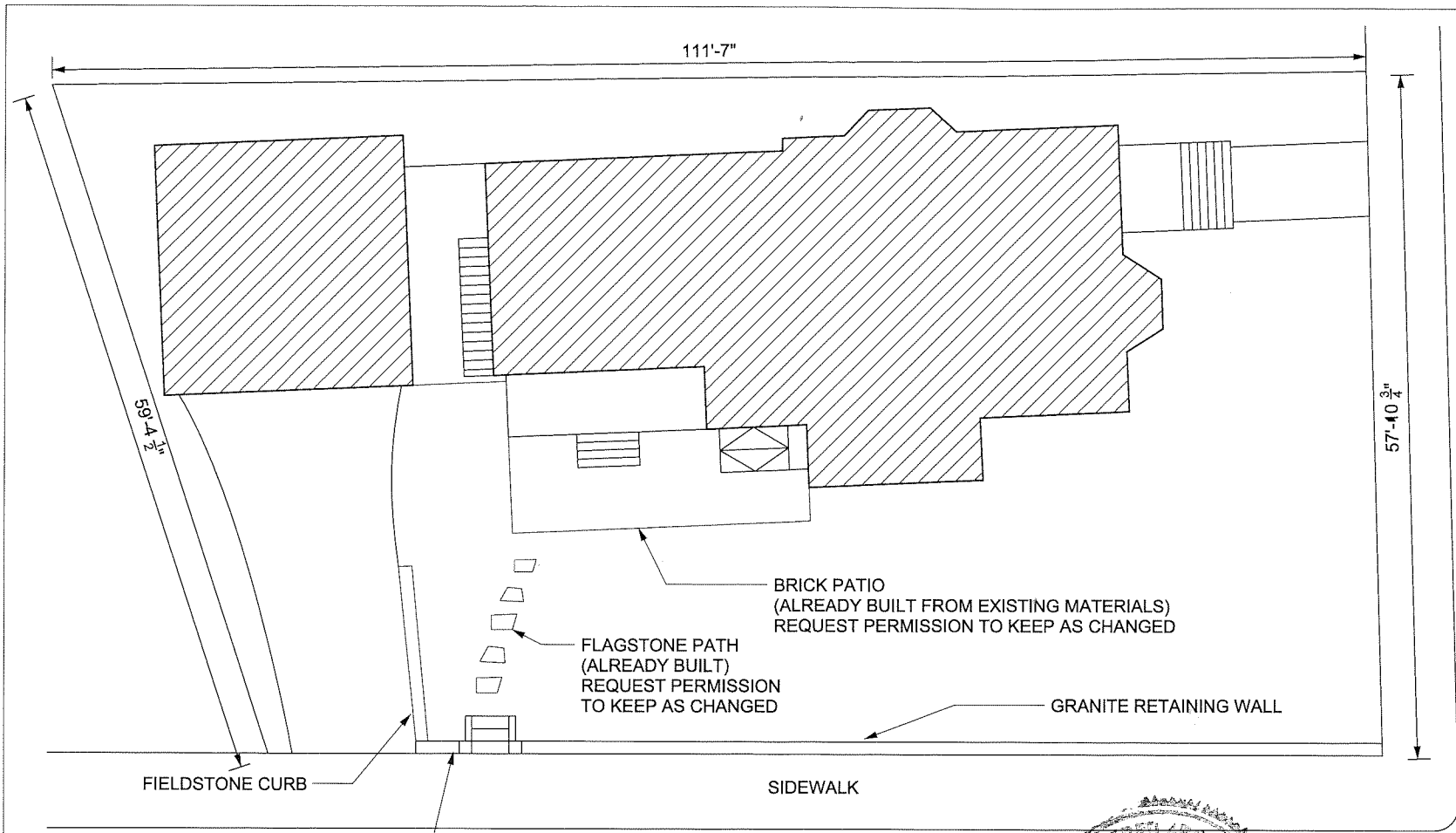
Maryann Thompson Architects

24 WARREN AVE.  
SOMERVILLE, MA 02143

SITE PLAN - PRESENT

OWNER: MARYANN THOMPSON

Isaac Watts  
T. 617.6108211  
E. iwatts@students.pitzer.edu



FIELDSTONE CURB

GRANITE BLOCK  
(RESTORE ORIGINAL POSITION)

SIDEWALK

SANBORN AVE

BRICK PATIO  
(ALREADY BUILT FROM EXISTING MATERIALS)  
REQUEST PERMISSION TO KEEP AS CHANGED

FLAGSTONE PATH  
(ALREADY BUILT)  
REQUEST PERMISSION  
TO KEEP AS CHANGED

GRANITE RETAINING WALL

WARREN AVE



SITE PLAN - PROPOSED

SCALE: 1/8"=1'-0"

*Maryann Thompson*  
 REGISTERED ARCHITECT  
 2531  
 BOSTON  
 MASS.  
 COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

Maryann Thompson Architects

24 WARREN AVE.  
SOMERVILLE, MA 02143

OWNER: MARYANN THOMPSON

SITE PLAN - PROPOSED

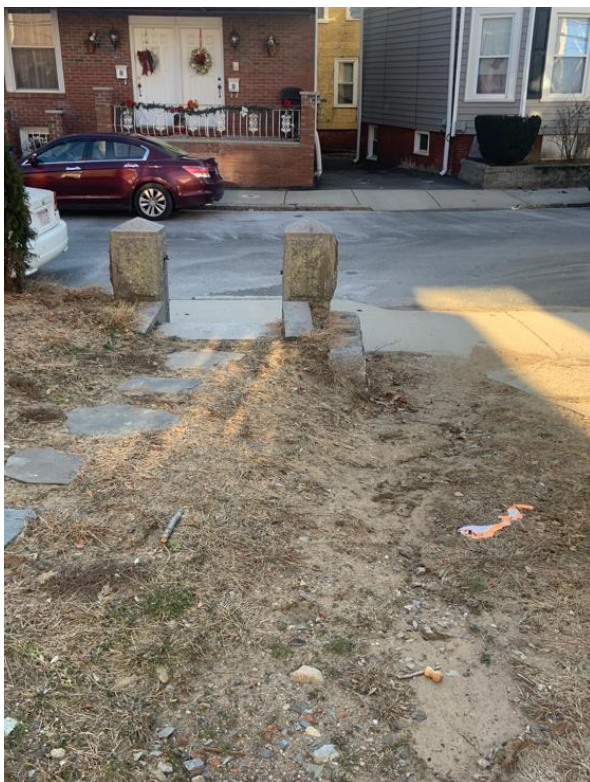
Isaac Watts  
T. 617.6108211  
E. iwatts@students.pitzer.edu

Photos prior to work commencing





Photos after work was completed



## The look of natural stone that's easier to install and at a fraction of the cost

Introducing the first Eco-Friendly mortarless concrete retaining wall system - AB Fieldstone Collection®. This innovative new product has unlimited possibilities in style and constructability. It is right at home in residential settings or up for any task on commercial projects.

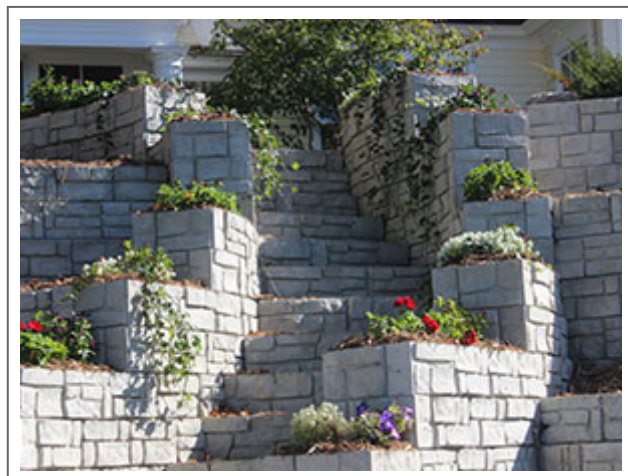
AB Fieldstone is an innovative new concept in the manufacture and use of segmental retaining wall (SRW) systems. By manufacturing this system in 2 pieces - the facing unit and the anchoring unit, Allan Block has opened the door to many benefits that are not only Green, but Natural and Friendly as well.



### Green, Natural, Friendly

AB Fieldstone is **GREEN**. Every block is made with locally recycled material in the back of the block. AB Fieldstone is **NATURAL**. Every AB Fieldstone facing unit is cast to emulate the look and feel of natural stone. Choose the look you want from our Series of styles. AB Fieldstone is **FRIENDLY**. The blocks are made in two pieces making them lightweight and easy to handle.

This innovative new product has unlimited possibilities in style and constructability. The AB Fieldstone Collection is right at home in residential settings where retaining walls 6 ft. (1.8 m) and under ([../retaining-walls/landscape-walls.aspx](#)) are typically called for, and up to the task on larger retaining walls 6 ft. (1.8 m) and over ([../retaining-walls/segmental-walls.aspx](#)).



AB Fieldstone Collection





AB Fieldstone Collection

[Why Choose AB Fieldstone ↗](#)[The Blocks ↗](#)[Anchoring Units ↗](#)[Series Styles & Textures ↗](#)[Available Colors ↗](#)

## Additional Resources



Retaining Wall Installation  
UNDER 6 ft. (1.8 m) tall  
(../retaining-walls/landscape-  
walls.aspx) or  
OVER 6 ft. (1.8 m) tall  
(../retaining-walls/segmental-  
walls.aspx)



Photo Gallery  
(../photos/photos.aspx)



Estimate (../estimating/estimating-  
tool.aspx)

## Proposed Materials Index

**Applicant Information:**

Maryann Thompson  
24 Warren Avenue, Somerville MA, 02143  
617.413.0071  
eangenrose@gmail.com

**Material:** Pennsylvania Fieldstone

**Source of Material:**

[T H McVeys Stone Co Inc.](#)  
[662 Arsenal Street, Watertown MA, 02472](#)

**Application of Material:** Retaining wall lining driveway to prevent erosion

**Material:** Burnt Clay Bricks

**Source of Material:** Previously Existing on Property

**Application of Material:** Restoring Existing Patio

**Material:** Flagstone

**Source of Material:** Previously Existing on Property

**Application of Material:** Restoring Existing Patio

# Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

## Scanned Record Cover Page

<b>Inventory No:</b>	SMV.260
<b>Historic Name:</b>	Almy, Benjamin - Ellis, Frank House
<b>Common Name:</b>	
<b>Address:</b>	24 Warren Ave
<b>City/Town:</b>	Somerville
<b>Village/Neighborhood:</b>	Prospect Hill
<b>Local No:</b>	
<b>Year Constructed:</b>	1874
<b>Architect(s):</b>	
<b>Architectural Style(s):</b>	Second Empire
<b>Use(s):</b>	Single Family Dwelling House
<b>Significance:</b>	Architecture
<b>Area(s):</b>	SMV.AW: Columbus Avenue - Warren Avenue Historic District
<b>Designation(s):</b>	Local Historic District (10/31/1989)
<b>Building Materials(s):</b>	Roof: Slate Wall: Wood; Wood Shingle Foundation: Brick



The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) has converted this paper record to digital format as part of ongoing projects to scan records of the Inventory of Historic Assets of the Commonwealth and National Register of Historic Places nominations for Massachusetts. Efforts are ongoing and not all inventory or National Register records related to this resource may be available in digital format at this time.

The MACRIS database and scanned files are highly dynamic; new information is added daily and both database records and related scanned files may be updated as new information is incorporated into MHC files. Users should note that there may be a considerable lag time between the receipt of new or updated records by MHC and the appearance of related information in MACRIS. Users should also note that not all source materials for the MACRIS database are made available as scanned images. Users may consult the records, files and maps available in MHC's public research area at its offices at the State Archives Building, 220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, open M-F, 9-5.

Users of this digital material acknowledge that they have read and understood the MACRIS Information and Disclaimer (<http://mhc-macris.net/macrisdisclaimer.htm>)

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Massachusetts Historical Commission  
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125  
[www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc)

This file was accessed on: Monday, August 6, 2018 at 1:42: PM



FORM B - BUILDING

LTD. 12/13/89 (10)  
P. PROSANT  
USGS. BOSTON  
SCOT. O.

AREA

FORM NO.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
80 ROXBURY STREET  
80

Prospect  
Hill

260

Town SOMERVILLE

Address 24 Warren Avenue

Historic Name Benjamin Almy - 1874-187

Frank Ellis - 1878

Use: Present residential

Original residential

DESCRIPTION

Date 1874-1878

Source maps / deeds

Style Mansard / Second Empire

Architect

Exterior Wall Fabric shingles

Outbuildings

Major Alterations (with dates)

Condition fair - good

Moved  Date

Acreage 5391 sq. ft.

Setting Northwest corner of Warren &

Sanborn, streetscape of mansard

roofed residential buildings, late

19th century

Recorded by Carole Zellie - 1980

Gretchen Schuler - 1988

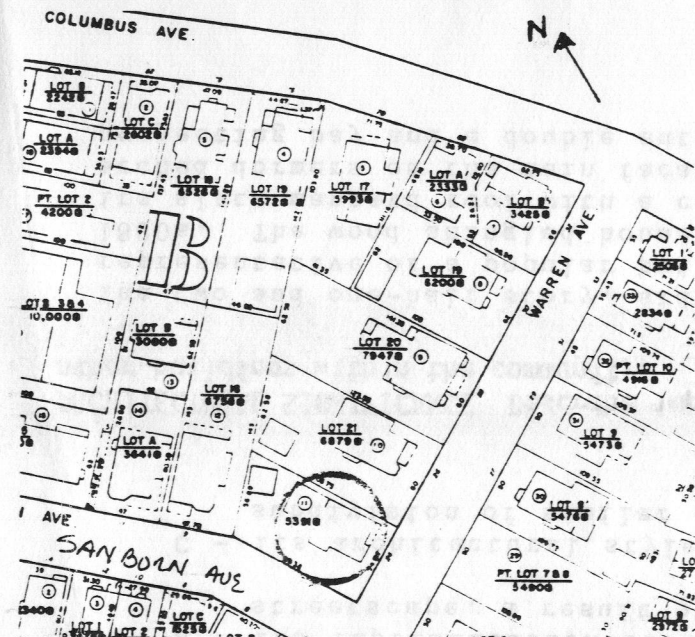
Organization Somerville Historic

Preservation Commission

Date April, 1988



sketch  
in  
sec  
del  
int  
Indicate north



JTM REFERENCE

USGS QUADRANGLE

SCALE

**NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA STATEMENT (if applicable)**

The property is significant for :

- A - its representation of a late 19th century suburban residential streetscape, a result of speculative development in Somerville.
- C - its architectural style and size as a part of a middle-class subdivision of similar architectural style.

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

The two and one-half story, side-hall entrance, Second Empire dwelling is representative of a popular building style in Somerville in the 1870s and 1880s. The wood shingled house is built on a brick foundation and retains its slate mansard roof with a concave profile. There are two segmental arched dormers on the main facade. Other details include a two-story projecting bay and a double entrance door with glass and wood panels.

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

The property is one of many houses in the immediate area that was built in the 1870s and 1880s when several other mansard roofed dwellings were constructed on Warren Avenue. In 1870 a subdivision plan was developed called a "Plan of Building Lots in Somerville Surveyed for Ira Hill and Others". The northern portion of Warren Avenue and a small part of Columbus Avenue were included in this plan. This was one of several such plans that Hill and other real estate investors had drawn up for Prospect Hill land. The area's proximity to Boston and to reliable transportation made it attractive to the middle class businessman.

Original land investor Ira Hill sold this lot to Benjamin Almy in 1872. The house was built by 1874 and in 1878 Almy conveyed the property to Frank Ellis, who commuted to Lowell to work as a currier foreman.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES**

1. Atlas of Middlesex County, Somerville: 1874 ("B. Almy"), 1884 ("F. Ellis"), 1895 ("L.L.M. Ellis").
2. Directories: 1880s, 1890s.
3. Registry of Deeds, Middlesex County: Book 1219, Page 643; Book 1471, Page 530.