



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
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HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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

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**Site:** 30 Bow Street

**Case:** HP23-000083

**Applicant:** Modern Love LLC

**Owner:** 30 Bow LLC

**Legal Ad:** *The Applicant seeks a Certificate of Appropriateness to alter an LHD property by installing a mechanical platform lift, and adding an accessible path.*

**HPC Meeting Date:** February 20, 2024



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 gable front style residence known as the Orcutt, W. House. This property is located within in 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 proposes the following within the purview of the HPC:

- Install a mechanical wheelchair platform lift
- Create an accessible path to the rear of the building

The Applicant is proposing to replace the rear deck. The only visible architectural feature are the porch stairs. The porch is not visible from the public way. The steps are not original to the building nor are they a later addition that has become historically important on their own.

## **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.

### **Install a mechanical wheelchair platform lift**

#### **D. New Additions**

The most relevant portion of the Design Guidelines is as follows:

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

Due to the proposed elements being visible from the right of way, the HPC has purview over these features and the materials used.

#### **Applicant Proposal:**

The Applicant proposes to install a mechanical wheelchair platform lift on the rear of the property adjacent to the rear deck. The platform lift is proposed to provide an accessible way into the building. The lift will be freestanding and sit on a concrete pad, while being flush against the building and deck.

The lift will be four feet and 2 inches wide (4'2") and 4 feet and seven inches (4'7") in diameter. When the ramp is down, it will be six feet and eight inches (6'8") in diameter. The ramp projects two feet and 1 inch (2' 1') when in use. It will not project past the existing left side bay window.





**Above:** *Proposed location of the mechanical lift*

**Above:** *Proposed location of the mechanical lift from the public way. The left side bay window can be seen, which will block most of the lift from public view.*

**Preservation Planning Assessment:**

The proposed platform lift will be visible from the public way.

Pursuant to the Design Guidelines:

*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.*

Most of the platform lift will be hidden from the public way due to the side bay window. Part of the lift will be visible when the ramp portion is down. The lift itself is an “Ameriglide – Hercules 750 Commercial Platform lift” and mechanical in materiality. This new addition will be confined to the rear of the building.

Pursuant to the Design Guideline:

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

The lift itself will be placed on a concrete pad and sit flush against the building. It will not be physically attached to the building in any way. If the lift were to be removed in the future, the basic form and integrity of the historic property would remain intact.

**Create an accessible path to the rear of the building**

**H. Landscape Features and Paving**

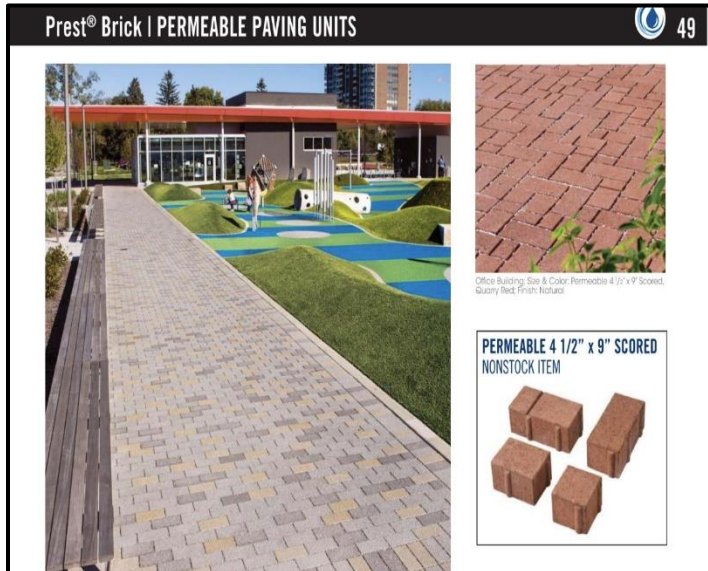
The most relevant portion of the Design Guidelines is as follows:

- *The existing landforms of the site should not be altered unless shown to be necessary for the maintenance of the structure or site.*

- *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 alteration the integrity of the structure.*

Due to the proposed elements being visible from the right of way, the HPC has purview over these features and the materials used.

**Applicant Proposal:** The Applicant proposes to install an accessible path constructed of permeable pavers. The accessible path and entry area at the foot of the porch stairs will be 290 square feet.



**Above:** Proposed paving material



**Above:** Proposed location of where permeable pavers will go

**Preservation Planning Assessment:**

The proposed accessible path will be visible from the public way.

Pursuant to the Design Guidelines:

*The existing landforms of the site should not be altered unless shown to be necessary for the maintenance of the structure or site.*

The existing landforms will not be altered. The accessible path will be replacing existing planting beds and driveway material (as shown above) with permeable pavers for accessibility purposes. According to the Applicant's plans, the driveway material will remain gravel with existing granite paver apron being removed and replaced with gravel. The current driveway and apron were approved by the Commission in April 2001.

Pursuant to the Design Guideline:

*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 alteration the integrity of the structure.*

There are no significant grade changes on this site. The only aspects of the existing driveway and landscaping that are being changed are the planters on the left side of the buildings and replacing part of the driveway material with permeable pavers. The proposed accessible path will improve site circulation

by providing ingress and egress through an ADA accessible path that will lead to the proposed mechanical wheelchair platform lift.

Due to the period of the house and the vast brickworks active in Somerville at the time, brick would be a likely choice of material were a property owner at the time able to afford to install a hardscaped walkway/driveway. The proposed brick pavers are reminiscent of brick and similar pavers have been approved by the HPC for other driveways elsewhere in the City.

Should the HPC vote to approve the pavers Staff has provided a recommended condition at the end of this report.

### **III. FINDINGS & VOTE**

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

### **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 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. The Applicant shall utilize Prest Brick Permeable Pavers, 4 ½" x 9" for the paved areas.
4. 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 sign-offs/Cos.
5. The Applicant 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.