



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

THOMAS F GALLIGANI  
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:** 57 Columbus Avenue

**Case:** HP23-000051

**Applicant:** David Bell & Monique Cole

**Owner:** Same as Applicant

**Legal Ad:** *The Applicant seeks a Certificate of Appropriateness to alter the exterior of an LHD property through the removal of existing exterior features and the installation of new exterior features*

**HPC Meeting Date:** March 19, 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.1877 Italianate structure known as the William High/William Canavan House. This property is located 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 proposes the following:

- a. Mudroom addition on the right elevation
- b. Windows and doors
  - a. Replace existing windows
  - b. Replace historic windows
  - c. Install new window openings
- c. Replace existing siding
- d. Alter portico on front façade
- e. Replace existing gutters and downspouts
- f. Remove rear chimney
- g. Install dormer on right elevation

## **II. Analysis**

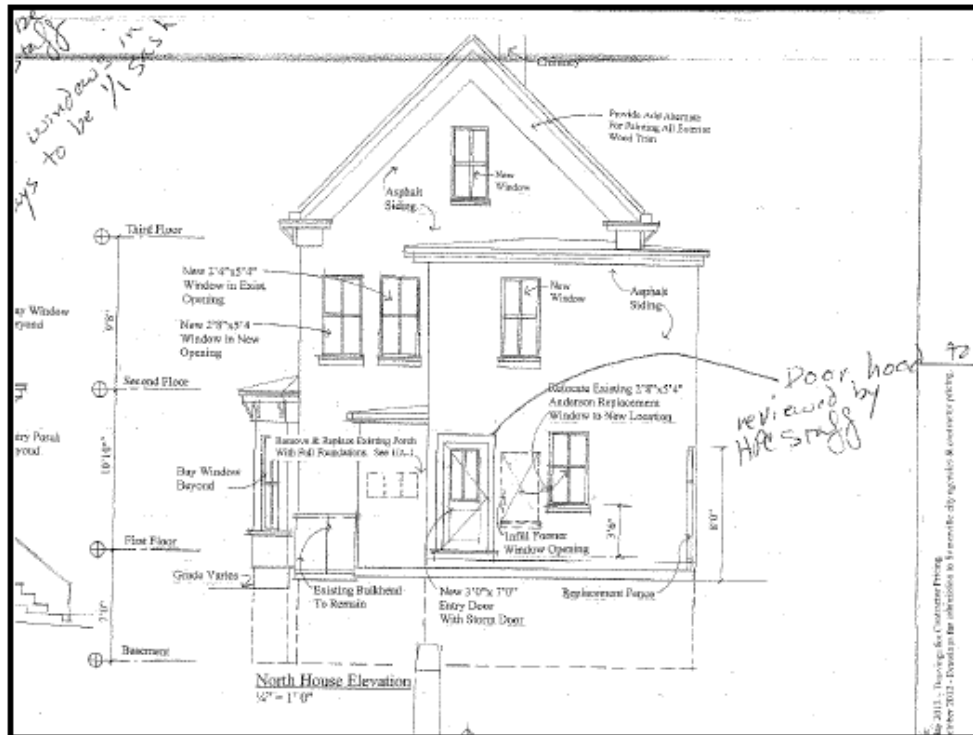
The HPC must make findings based on the Historic District Ordinance (HDO) in compliance with M.G.L. Chapter 40C, and associated Design Guidelines. Applicable regulations are discussed below.

### **A. Mudroom addition on the right elevation**

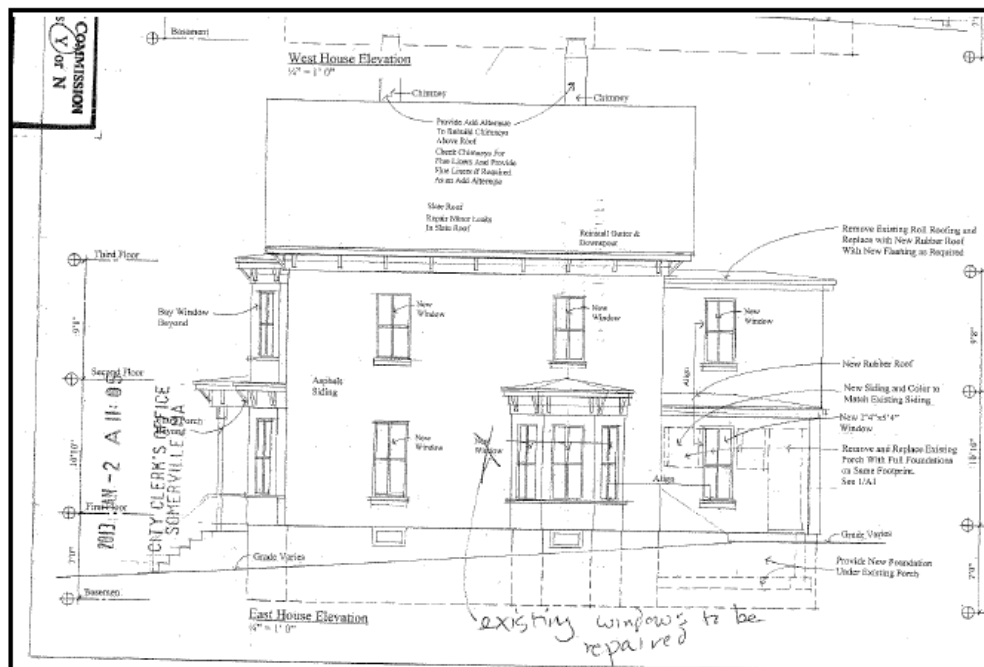
Due to the change of exterior features the HPC has purview over this work.

#### **Applicant Proposal**

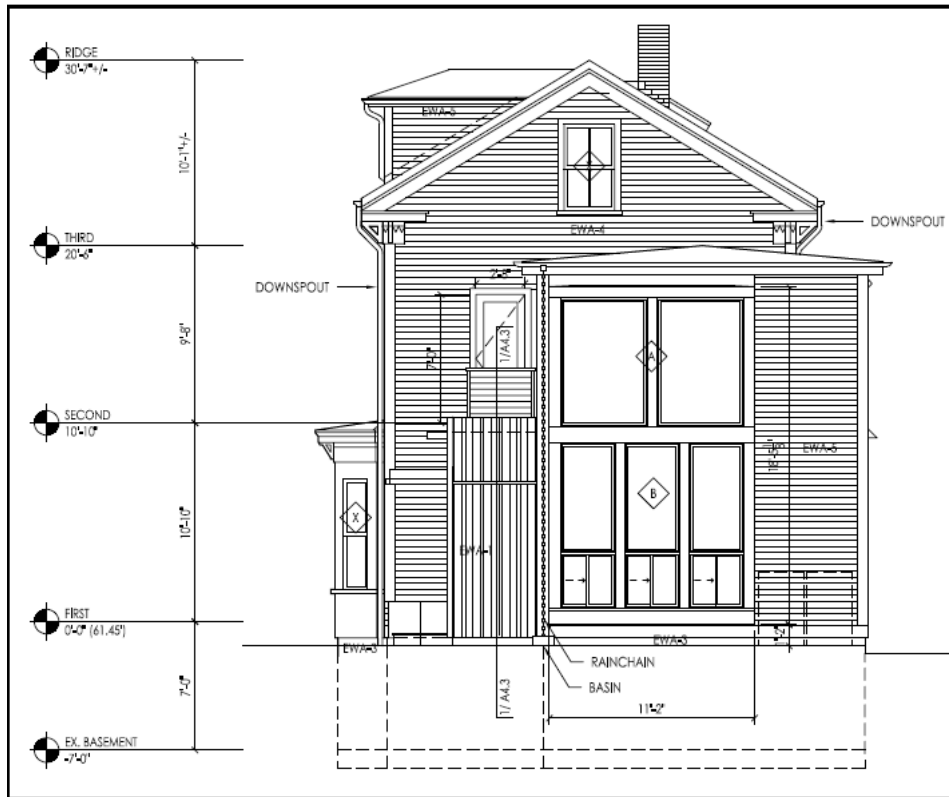
The Applicant proposes to alter a design for an addition on the right elevation. In 2012 the HPC approved the removal of an enclosed porch and its replacement with a permanent addition which will be the mudroom. The Applicant is currently in construction for this addition with the framing and foundation in place. The Applicant proposes to alter the original approval, using Nickel Gap Shiplap Western Red Cedar 2" wide vertical battens along the façade of this addition. Furthermore, atop this addition will be a deck accessed through a new door on the second floor with a cable railing around the deck. A large picture window will overlook the deck. The original approval from the HPC in 2012 did not include the deck or large picture window.



Above: HPC approved plans in 2012, rear elevation



Above: HPC approved plans in 2012, right elevation



Above: Proposed rear elevation



Above: Proposed right elevation

**Preservation Planning Assessment:**

The applicable Somerville LHD Design Guidelines is **E. “New additions”**

*“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.”*

- and -

*“It is not the intent of [the] guidelines to limit new additions to faithful copies of earlier building. New designs may also evoke, without copying the architecture of the property to which they are being added, though careful attentions to height, bulk, materials, window size, and type and location, and detail.”*

It is important to note that all portions of the structure are visible from a right-of-way given that Prospect Park is located behind the property. Parks are considered a public right-of-way. While the Applicant made an effort not to copy the historic structure exactly by using the vertical clapboards and square windows, these will distract from the historic building by drawing passerby’s eye to the addition. The siding should use wood horizontal clapboard that has the same reveal as the rest of the structure. The picture window overlooking the railing should be one or two double hung sash windows with a 2/2 design. The railing should utilize wood in a turned wood style. The addition will be differentiated from the rest of the structure through the lack of detailing below the eave line. Preservation Staff has included conditions in Section IV ‘Recommended Conditions’ below regarding the use of wood clapboard.

**HPC Determination:**

- 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.

**B. Windows and doors**

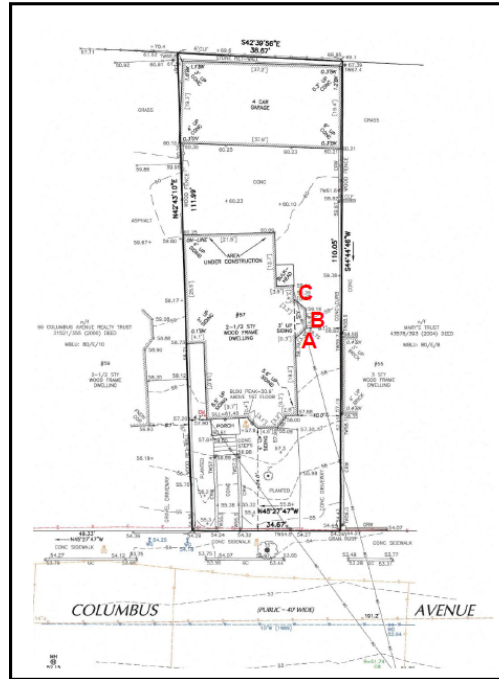
Due to the change of exterior features the HPC has purview over this work.

**Applicant Proposal**

The Applicant is proposing to replace existing windows throughout the structure. Only four of the original double-hung windows remain. Three of these original windows occur at the first-floor bay window on the east elevation (driveway side). The side windows (18" wide) are 1/1 and the center window is 2/2. Here the sash are in relatively good condition and the windows could be restored with better stops, ropes, etc. and could function if provided with better storm windows. The rest of the windows in the building are vinyl. The proposed replacement windows are 2/2 Marvin Ultimate aluminum clad wood sash windows.

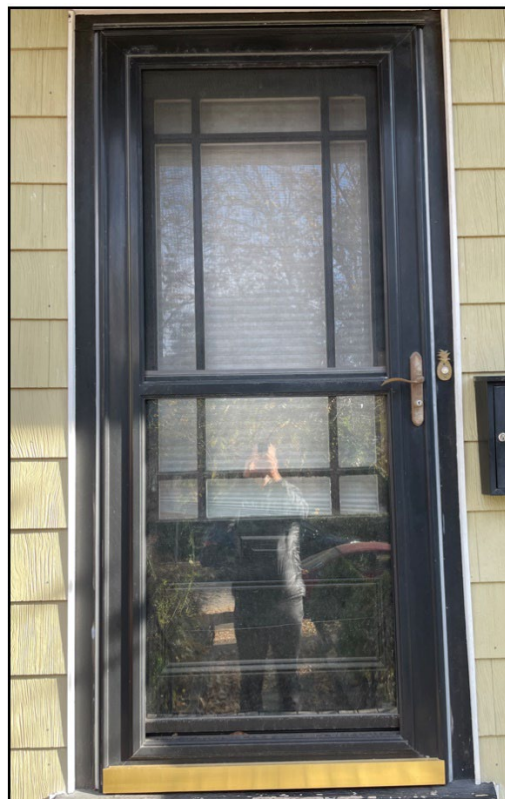


*Above: Existing bay windows*



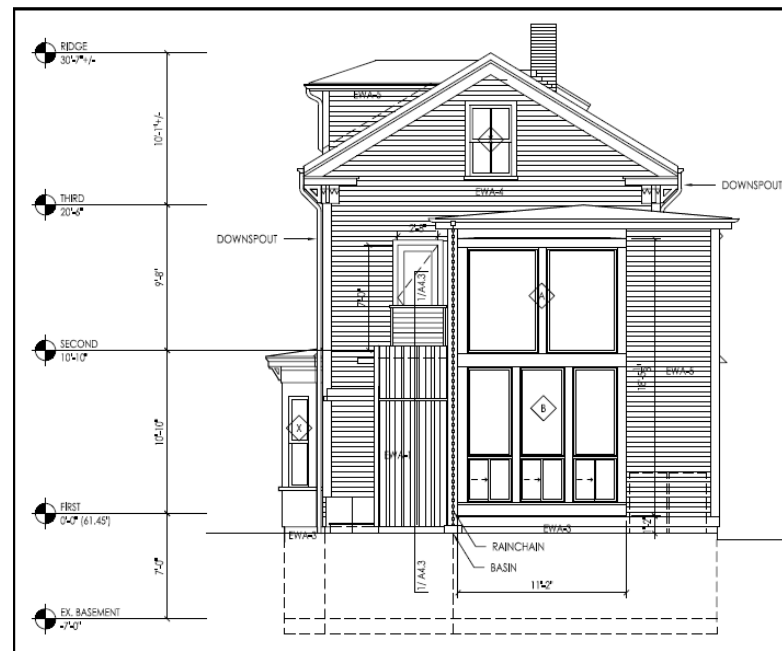
*Above: Site plan depicting historic bay windows*

The Applicant also requests to replace the wood front door with a replication that would meet the new energy code. The door was originally approved in 2012 by the HPC but the door was never installed.

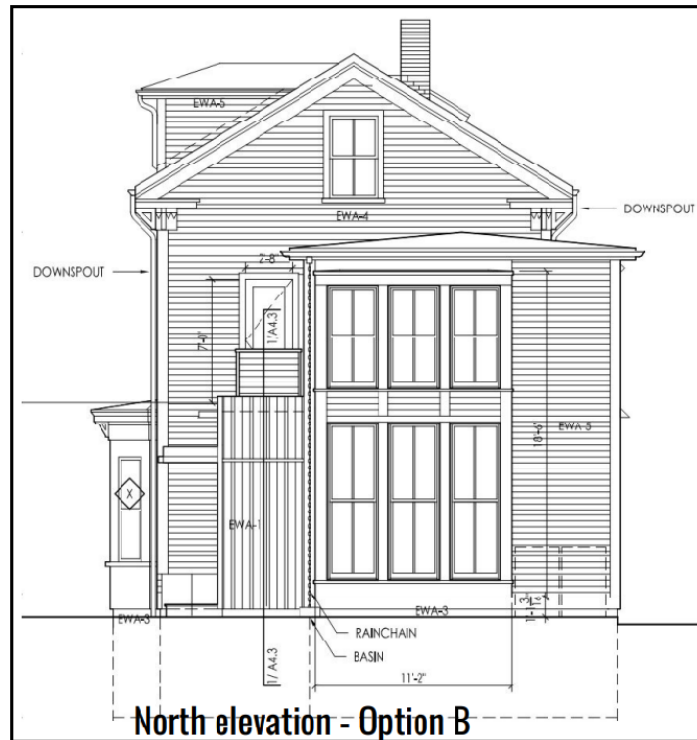


*Above: Existing front door*

**Option A**



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**Option B:***Above: Proposed rear elevation*

The Applicant also proposes a French glass door leading onto the proposed deck above the mudroom addition and another such door leading from the mudroom on the first floor to the side yard.

Finally, the Applicant proposes to install a new window on the West elevation. The Applicant states that on the West elevation outside of where the main staircase is located are the remaining framing for a window. They would like to re-open the wall in this location and install a salvaged stained glass window.

**Preservation Planning Assessment:**

The applicable Somerville LHD Design Guidelines is **C. “Windows & Doors”**

*“Retain original and later important door and window openings where they exist.”*

- and -

*“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.”*

The Applicant’s proposal to replace modern vinyl windows with aluminum clad wood windows is within keeping of the Design Guidelines by removing anachronistic windows with more historically accurate windows.

The original wood bay windows were applied to be replaced in 2012 but due to the condition and nature of these windows the HPC denied the request and instead conditioned the repair of these



windows. Per the Design Guidelines historic windows should be retained and repaired. Preservation Staff has included conditions in Section IV 'Recommended Conditions' below regarding the preservation and restoration of these windows.

The Applicant is proposing to replace the wood front door with a replicated door ensuring the door will match the style and appearance of the building. This proposal was also approved in 2012 by the HPC.

The proposed window installation on the rear of the property does not comply with the Historic Design Guidelines. It is important to note that all portions of the structure are visible from a right-of-way given that Prospect Park is located behind the property. Parks are considered a public right-of-way. Option A of the design is not consistent with the architecture and date of construction for 57 Columbus. Option B's window design is more appropriate for the style and architecture of the building. The inclusion of muntins and wood trim does make the windows depicted in Option B to look more consistent with the rest of the structure.

The proposed French glass door leading to the roof deck atop the mudroom and the door leading outside from the mudroom are not consistent with the style of the structure. Should the Commission approve the installation of these doors they should have an applied muntin grid to them with final design approved by Preservation Staff. Preservation Staff has included conditions in Section IV 'Recommended Conditions' below regarding these doors.

Finally, the proposed new stained-glass window to be installed on the left elevation ,second floor is in keeping with the Design Guidelines on retaining original window shapes and would restore a window that was enclosed.

**HPC Determination:**

- 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

**C. Replace existing siding**

Due to the change of exterior features the HPC has purview over this work.

**Applicant Proposal**

The Applicant is proposing to replace existing asbestos clapboard with fiber cement clapboard. The Applicant submitted images of wood clapboards beneath the current asbestos siding which does look to be deteriorated though the full damage is not clear. The Applicant proposes removing this wood clapboard as well.



*Above: Detail of exposed wood clapboard below asbestos clapboard*

**Preservation Planning Assessment:**

The applicable Somerville LHD Design Guidelines is A. ***“Exterior Walls”***

*Retain and repair, when necessary, replace deteriorated materials which matches as closely as possible.”*

*-and -*

*“Synthetic siding (aluminum, vinyl, artificial stone or brick is prohibited because it severely compromises the appearance and integrity of old buildings.*

The proposed work does not comply with the above referenced section of the Design Guidelines as it will not only utilize cement fiber clapboard but will also remove wood clapboard and replace it with synthetic siding.

Ideally, the Applicant would assess the quality of the wood siding that is below the asbestos clapboard and repair the existing wood siding where possible, and repair, in-kind, those sections that cannot be repaired. However, should the Commission find the clapboard too deteriorated to repair and replace Preservation Staff recommends that the Applicant replace the extant clapboard with wood clapboard that matches the material, dimensions, and details of the current wood clapboard.

Should the HPC vote in favor of replacing the wood clapboard, Preservation Staff has included conditions in Section IV ‘Recommended Conditions’ below.

**HPC Determination:**

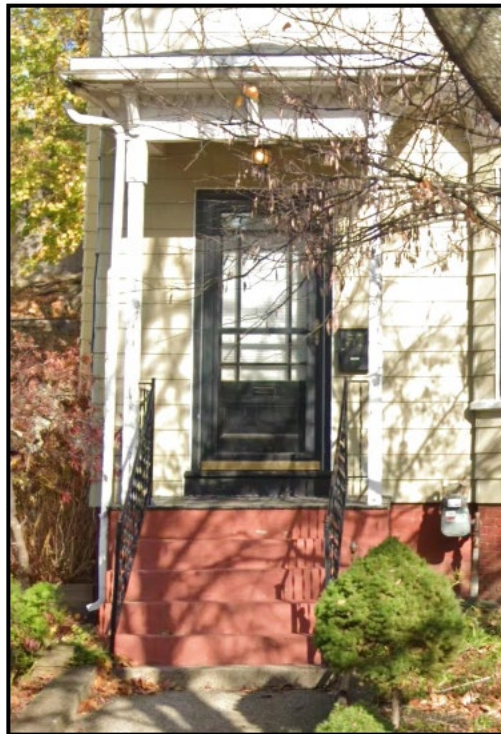
- The HPC must determine if, based on a review of the documentation presented, the proposed project complies with the Design Guidelines
- The HPC must structure their motion to include their own specific findings on the proposed project.

**D. Alter portico on front façade**

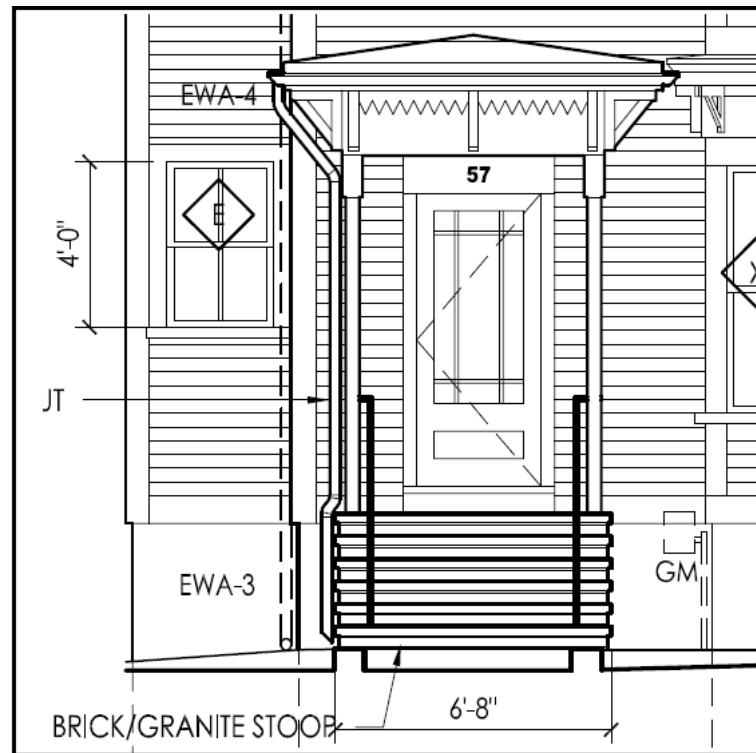
Due to the change of exterior features the HPC has purview over this work.

**Applicant Proposal**

The existing portico on the front facade has concrete masonry steps leading to a timber frame landing. The Applicant proposes to rebuild the base of the portico with brick as the Applicant states they found the remains of brick foundation below. The Applicant proposes granite for the stair treads.



*Above: Photo of existing portico*



*Above: Rendering of proposed portico*

**Preservation Planning Assessment:**

The applicable Somerville LHD Design Guidelines is **D. “Porches, steps, trim and other architectural elements”**

*“Retain and repair porches and steps that are original or later important features, including such items as railings. Balusters, columns, posts, brackets, roofs, ornamental ironwork, and other important decorative items. If new pieces are needed, they should match as closely as possible the style, shape, scale, and materials of the old.”*

The proposed plan to rebuild the front portico with brick and granite does not comply with the above cited guideline. Given the time of construction and style, the portico would have been constructed from wood with a brick foundation. The Applicant should rebuild the portico utilizing wood. Preservation Staff has included conditions in Section IV ‘Recommended Conditions’ below regarding the portico.

**HPC Determination:**

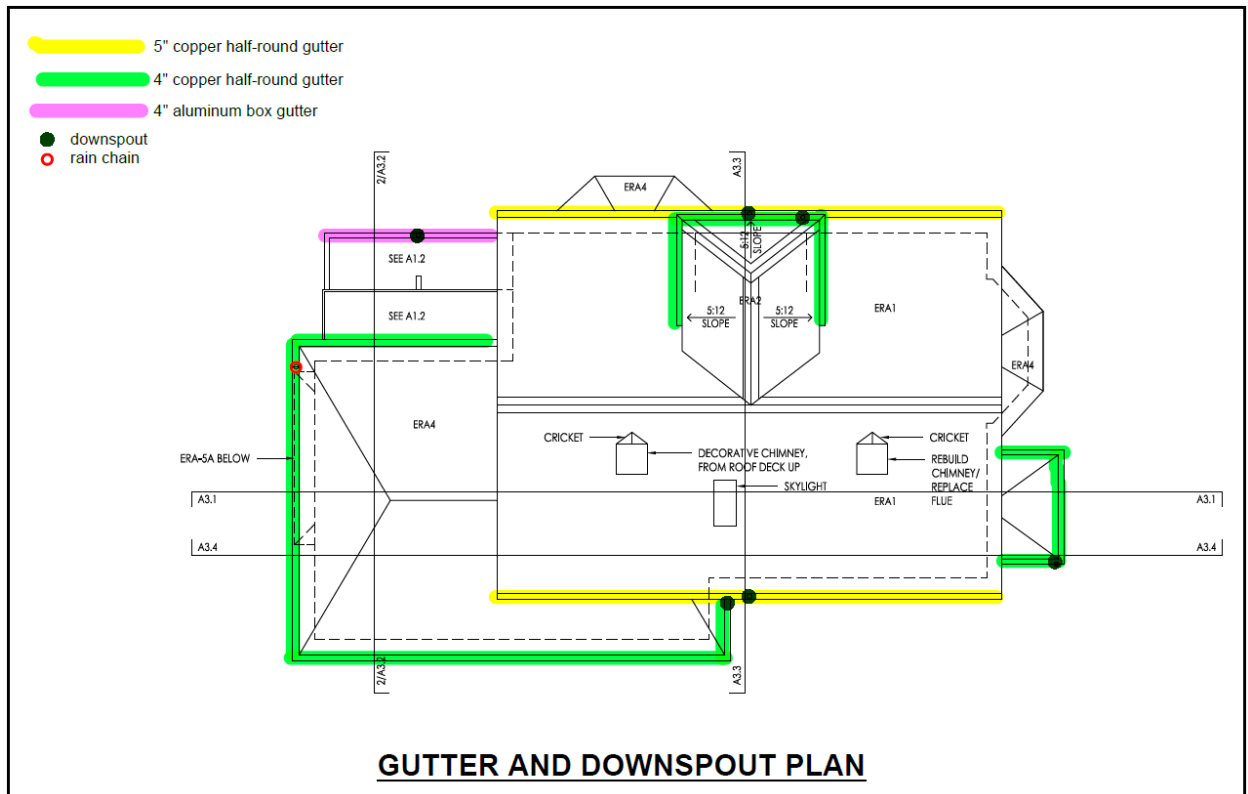
- The HPC must determine if, based on a review of the documentation presented, the proposed project complies with the Design Guidelines
- The HPC must structure their motion to include their own specific findings on the proposed project.

**E. Replace existing gutters and downspouts**

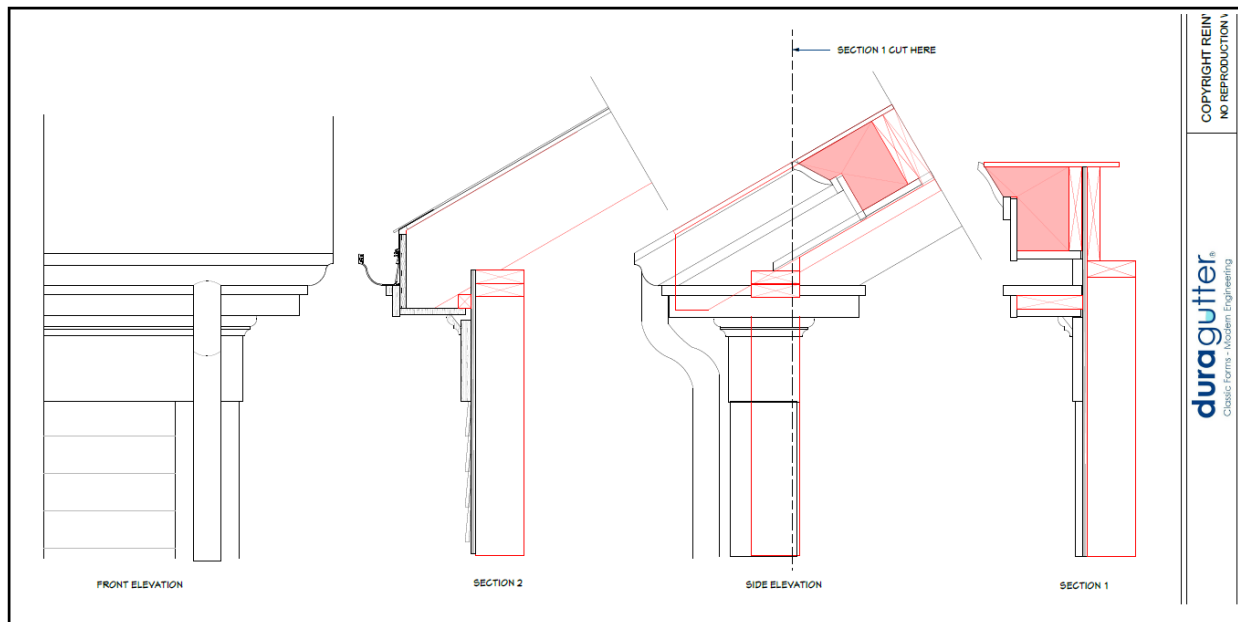
Due to the change of exterior features the HPC has purview over this work.

**Applicant Proposal**

The Applicant proposes to replace existing metal K style gutters with Duragutter OG product. The existing rectangular downspouts will be replaced with 4" round downspouts. The dormer and front portico will have the same style but 1" smaller. The mudroom is proposed to have a 4" coated aluminum box gutter and 3" square downspout.



*Above: Gutter and downspout plan*



*Above: Gutter sectional*



*Above: Copper round downspout*

**Preservation Planning Assessment:**

The applicable Somerville LHD Design Guidelines is **B. “Roofs”**

*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.*

Due to the date of construction and style of architecture a wood gutter would be more historically accurate than a copper downspout. However, the current gutters and downspouts are replacements, and Duragutter gutters have been approved by the Commission on other properties.



Additionally, the change in style and size for the mudroom will be a subtle way to differentiate the addition from the rest of the historic structure.

Should the Commission approve this request, Staff recommends that the new gutters and downspouts be wrapped in such a way that they match the portion of the building against which they rest. Preservation Staff has included conditions in Section IV 'Recommended Conditions' below regarding the above noted concern regarding gutters.

**HPC Determination:**

- 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.

**F. Remove rear chimney**

Due to the change of exterior features the HPC has purview over this work.

**Applicant Proposal**

There are currently two brick chimneys at 57 Columbus. One chimney is located to the front of the structure, and one is located towards the rear of the structure. The Applicant proposes removing the chimney towards the rear.



*Above: Photo of 57 Columbus depicting existing brick chimneys*

**Preservation Planning Assessment:**

The applicable Somerville LHD Design Guidelines is **B. “Roofs”**

*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.*

Both chimneys were likely installed at the same time the original portions of the structure were constructed. The HPC conditioned a Certificate of Non-Applicability in 2012 that both chimneys be repointed and restored. Additionally, the Design Guidelines state that the architectural features that give the roof its distinctive character should be preserved, as such both chimneys should be retained. Preservation Staff has included a condition in Section IV ‘Recommended Conditions’ below regarding the retention of both chimneys.

**HPC Determination:**

- 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.

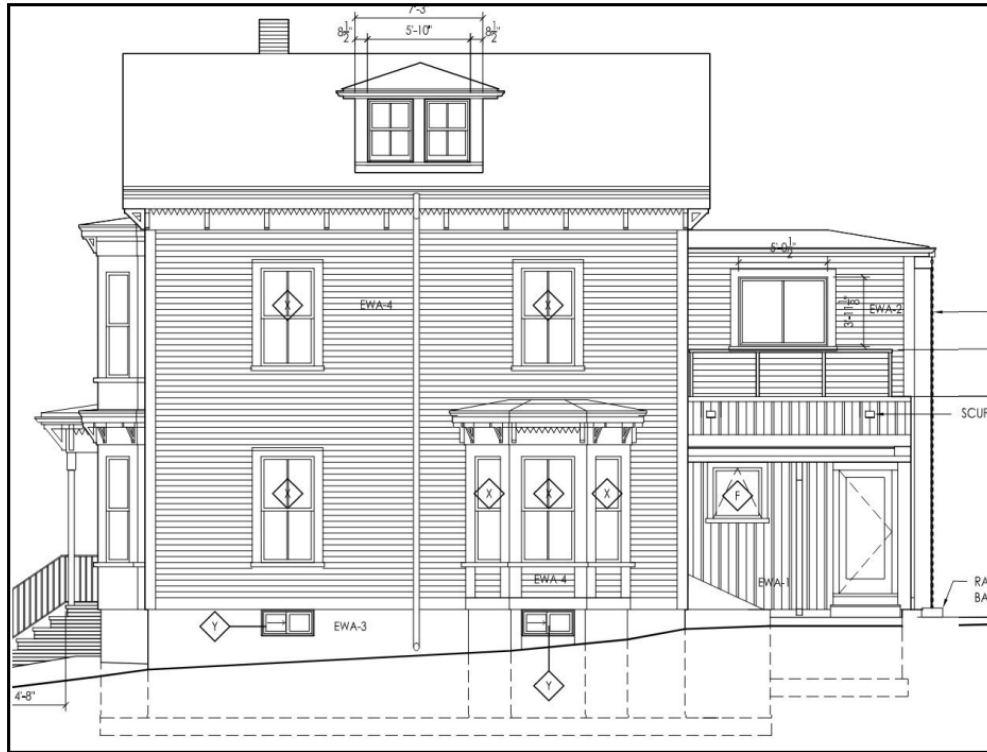
**G. Install dormer on right elevation**

Due to the change of exterior features the HPC has purview over this work.

**Applicant Proposal**

The Applicant proposes to install a new hip dormer on the left elevation with a width of 7’3”. The dormer would have two two-over-two double hung windows. The existing slate tiles located where the dormer will be installed will be removed and re-used on the new dormer. The siding for the dormer is proposed to use cement fiber clapboard matching the proposed siding for the rest of the structure.





*Above: Proposed right elevation showing proposed new dormer*

**Preservation Planning Assessment:**

The applicable Somerville LHD Design Guidelines is **B. “Roofs.”**

*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.*

The proposed style of the dormer conforms with the above cited design guidelines as the window does match the style of architecture for the structure.

**HPC Determination:**

- 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.

### **III. VOTE**

When bringing the matter to a vote the HPC must state their findings and reasons 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 front façade portico shall utilize wood steps, railings, landings, steps, and columns.
4. The door leading onto the rooftop deck shall utilize, raised profile muntins with final design to be approved by Preservation Staff.
5. The door leading from the mudroom addition to the side yard shall utilize, raised profile muntins with final design to be approved by Preservation Staff.
6. Siding for the mudroom additional shall be horizontal wood clapboard to match the rest of the building's facades.
7. Replacement gutters shall be wrapped to match the portion of the building against which they rest.
8. The replacement clapboard shall be made of wood.
9. Replacement siding shall reproduce the dimensions of the original clapboard, including its relationship to corner boards, window trim and other architectural details, all of which must be retained. The reveal must also be the same as that of the existing wood clapboarding.
10. Bay windows on the right elevation shall be restored.
11. Both brick chimneys shall be retained.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. The Applicant shall contact Preservation Planning at [historic@somervillema.gov](mailto:historic@somervillema.gov) a minimum of fifteen (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.