



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

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

Site: 57 Columbus Avenue

Case: HP24-000032

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: June 04, 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. Railings over the mudroom addition on the right elevation
- b. Alter portico on front façade
- c. Work to the rear chimney

II. Background

At the March 19, 2024, meeting of the HPC, the Applicant presented an application requesting the following items;

- 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

The Commission denied the mudroom deck railing, the front portico and the removal of the rear chimney as they felt they did not have enough information on these items to make a ruling. The Applicant is returning for these items and has submitted the requested additional information to support the request.

III. 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.

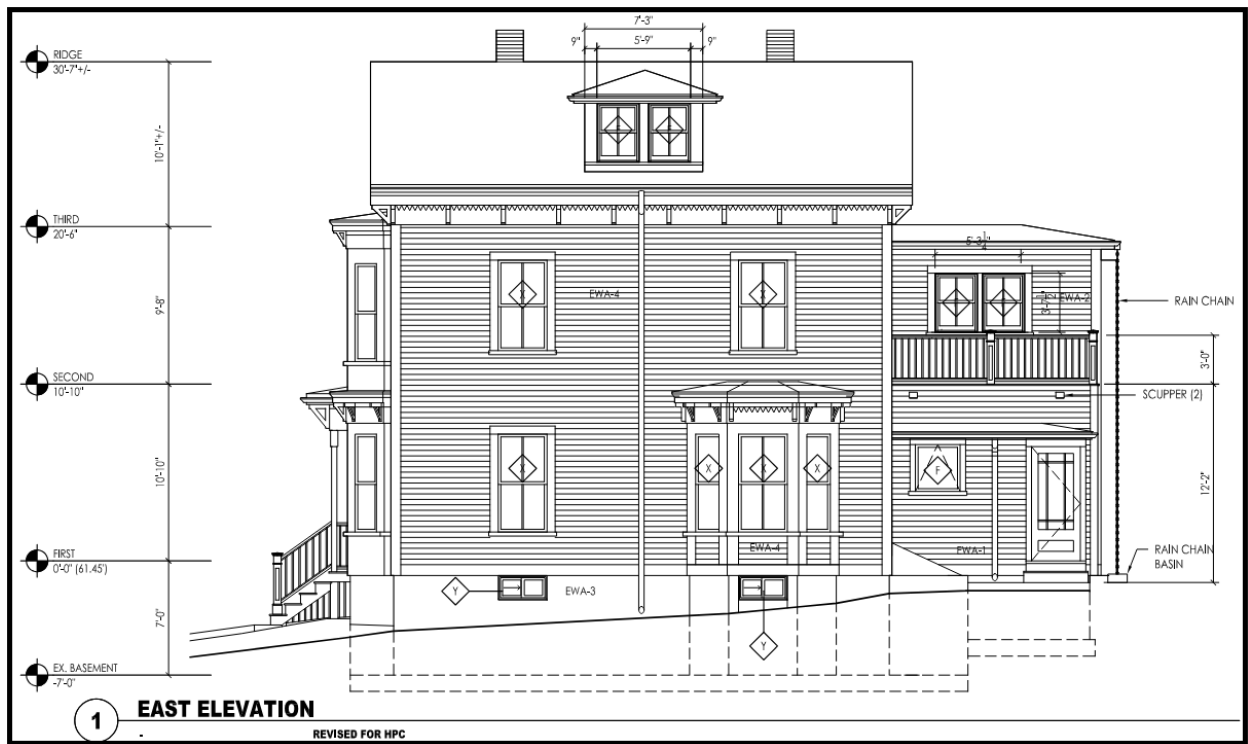
A. Deck railings over the mudroom addition on the right elevation

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. Furthermore, atop this addition will be a deck accessed through a new door on the second floor. The previous proposal was for a cable railing around the deck. The Applicant has updated the proposed railing to better reflect the wishes of the Commission at the last meeting

and the proposed railings will be turned wood to match the style of the wood railings on the front porch.



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. The updated proposal for railing is in line with Staff’s suggestion to use a more historically appropriate railing design. 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.

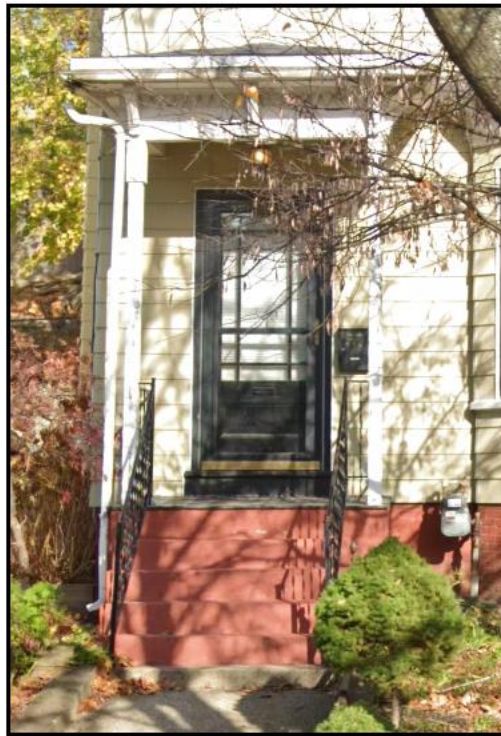
D. Alter portico on front facade

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

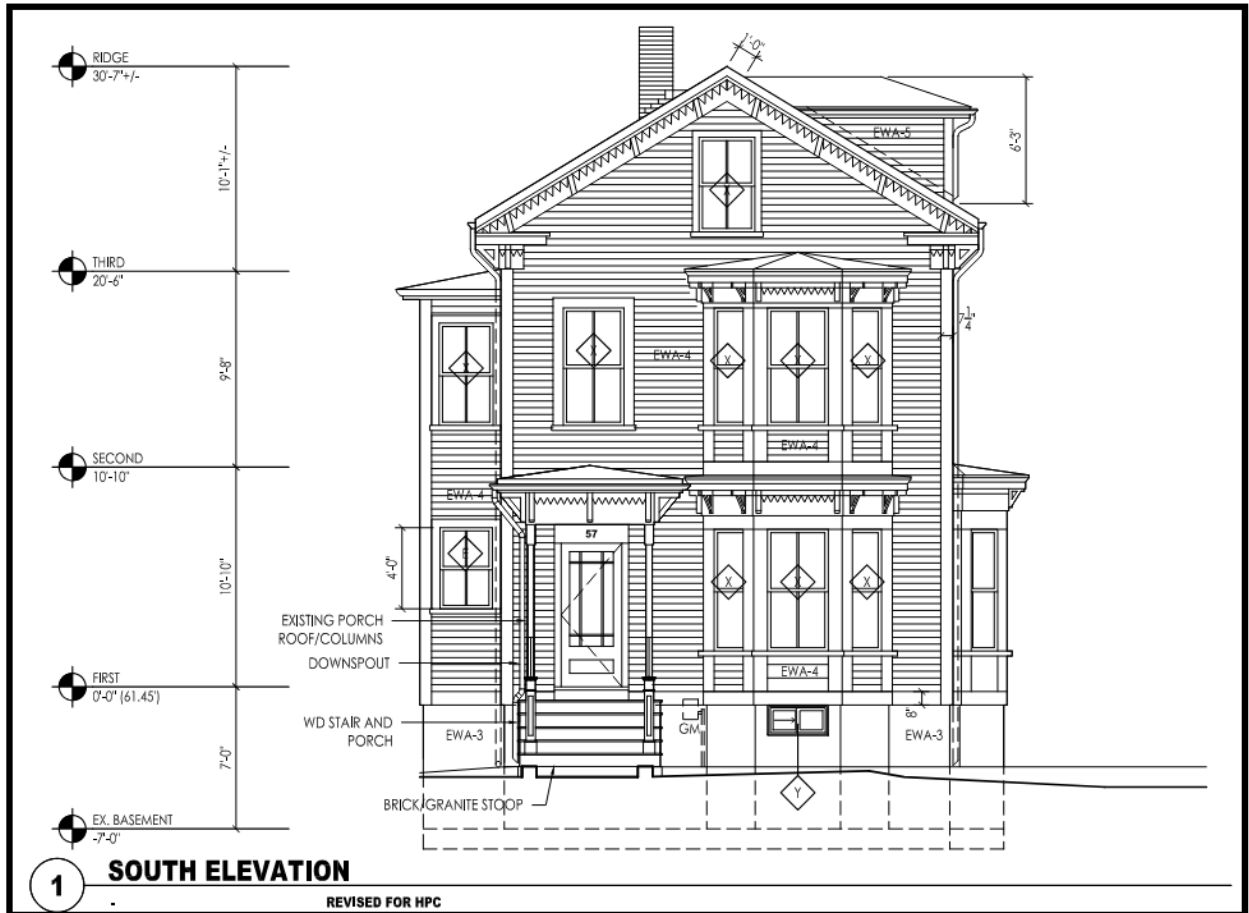
Applicant Proposal

The existing portico on the front facade has concrete masonry steps leading to a timber frame landing. The existing steps and landing of the portico are not original, although the roof and supporting columns appear to be. When the Applicant first came before the HPC they proposed to rebuild the base of the portico with brick and granite for the stair treads.

After discussion with the HPC the Applicant has updated their proposal to be that the portico's stairs, rails, and landing be re-built in wood.



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.”

Given the time of construction and style, the portico would have been constructed from wood with a brick foundation. The Applicant’s proposal to use wood with turned style-wood to rebuild the portico is compliant with the Historic Design Guidelines. 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.

F. 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 originally proposed to remove the chimney towards the rear. The Applicant has updated their proposal to retain both chimneys. The south chimney will continue to serve as a working fireplace. The interior portion of the north chimney will be unnecessary in the proposed design and will be removed; however, the exterior portion will remain. If, in the future the chimneys are deemed too unstable, the Applicant proposes to salvage the brick, and construct a wood back-up wall to which salvaged brick will be applied as a veneer to recreate the above-roof portion of the chimney.



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 finds the updated proposal to be compliant with the Design Guidelines. Preservation Staff has included conditions in Section IV 'Recommended Conditions' below regarding the rear chimney.

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 railings on the mudroom addition deck will be wood and match in style, to the front portico railings.
4. The front façade portico shall utilize wood steps, railings, landings, steps, and columns.
5. The exterior portion of the chimney shall be retained unless the chimney is deemed too unstable. Should the rear chimney be determined too unstable, the Applicant shall notify Preservation Staff. Should Staff agree with this assessment the Applicant shall be able to salvage and rebuild the exterior of the chimney.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. The Applicant shall contact Preservation Planning at 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.