



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

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

ALTERATION TO A HISTORIC PROPERTY STAFF REPORT

Site: 24 Warren Avenue
Case: HPC 2018.085 Columbus Avenue/Warren Avenue Local Historic District

Applicant Name: William Doyle, Owner
Applicant Address: 33 Wiley Road, Belmont, MA 02478

Date of Application: August 9, 2018
Date of Public Hearing: September 25, 2018

Petition: William Doyle, Owner seeks permission from the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to repair porches using mixed materials

Staff Recommendation: *Conditional* Certificate of Appropriateness and Certificate of Non-Applicability

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. **Subject Property:** The subject building is located on a residential side street off a main local arterial road. See Form B for details. It is the end entry of the Cutler Downer Rowhouse. The remaining portion of the building is not part of the Local Historic District.



2. **Proposal:** The Applicant proposes to repair porches using mixed materials. The Applicant asked his handyman to repair the porches. This was unfortunately done with vinyl rails, posts, balusters and skirts. He also used AZEK® and Trex® for the risers and treads. The posts were covered with AZEK®. Staff met with the Applicant who had not previously seen the completed work. He too was unhappy with the result. The current proposal is to replace all the rails, posts, balusters and skirts with wood to match the original front porch. The rear porch had a

very basic and inappropriate rail system. Posts will be completed with more detail. See the final pages for details and photos.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

FINDINGS FOR PORCHES

C. Porches, steps, trim and other exterior architectural elements

1. 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. Avoid replacing wood posts and railings with metal ones, or wood porch decks with concrete.
2. Fire escapes are very conspicuous features and, as a rule, should only be placed on the rear of the building, or where they are least visible from a public way. If installation on the street or side façade cannot be avoided, fire escapes should be designed and constructed with the same attention demanded by other major alterations and repairs, and are subject to the review and approval of the Commission.

The porch is an important stylistic element to the facade of a historic building because it frames the front entrance and sets the atmosphere for visitors. Porches also provide shade for adjacent rooms, help save energy costs, and often illustrate architectural style, which can help determine a construction date. In a densely built environment like Somerville, porches also act as a transitional area between private interior space and the surrounding neighborhood. Similar to porches, other transitional areas include balconies, decks, and covered entries.

Preservation Considerations for Porches

1. **The scale and massing of a porch should not be altered. All decorative details such as balusters, balustrades, columns, and brackets should be retained.**
2. Original masonry elements in porches should be retained and preserved. If mortar needs repair, the color and pointing should match the original mortar, if possible, and be compatible with that of the original masonry. Replacement masonry elements should be compatible with the style and materials of the historic building (for further details, see exterior siding and walls).
3. Even if an entrance is not used, it should remain in place if its porch is integral to the building design. Abandoned entries can be put back into use at a later date.
4. **If elements of the porch must be replaced, they should exactly match the originals in design and materials, based on photographic or physical evidence, or else they should make reference to the porch design of other houses in the neighborhood of the same style and period. Synthetic materials are highly discouraged.**
5. **Replacement posts and railings should match the proportions and stylistic elements of the existing porch,** or else, at the discretion of the SHPC, they may be designed to minimize their visibility. If prominent, new posts and railings should not look either too beefy or too skinny in comparison to other porch elements such as corner posts and other details.
6. **The spacing of replacement balusters should be in proportion to the style of the historic building.**
7. Cast or wrought-iron porch supports should not replace brick or wooden posts.
8. **Steps should be made of materials compatible with the style of the historic building.**
9. **Porch skirting may be made out of lattice or boards, either sawn or vertical. Synthetic materials, with or without fake wood grain, are not allowed. Lattice spacing should be**

tight enough to minimize the visibility of the interior space and structure under the porch.

10. Additional porch elements should not be added if they did not exist historically. For instance, the addition of decorative "gingerbread" brackets to a Craftsman-style porch is inappropriate.
11. Balustrades or railings should not be added unless there is historical evidence that a balustrade existed on the porch. **Railings that must be added for modern code considerations should be compatible with the design, materials and scale or the original porch.** If alteration to the height of the railing or balustrade is required by building code, new designs should retain the proportions of the original railing height.
12. The addition of a porch which would not have existed on a house historically, such as an elaborate, highly detailed porch on a secondary entrance, is strongly discouraged
13. Open porches and porticos should not be permanently enclosed or filled with windows.
14. **Pressure-treated wood must be painted or wrapped and match the style and appearance of other historic wooden elements.**
15. **Any new porch work must not destroy, damage, or obscure historic details and must be reversible.**

Staff Findings: Staff finds that the proposed alterations will minimally affect the perception of the existing building. The most visible portions of the porches will be returned to wood and will retain the historic character. The distance from the street will eliminate the obvious alterations of decking materials. The wrapped and detailed posts will blend with the design of the other mansards on the street.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Staff recommendation is based on a complete application and supporting materials, as submitted by the Applicant, and an analysis of the historic and architectural value and significance of the site, building or structure, the general design, arrangement, texture, material and color of the features involved, and the relation of such features of buildings and structures in the area, in accordance with the required findings that are considered by the Somerville Historic District Ordinance for a Historic District Certificate. This report may be revised or updated with new a recommendation or findings based upon additional information provided to Staff or through more in depth research conducted during the public hearing process.

Staff determines that the alteration for which an application for a Historic Certificate has been filed is not totally appropriate for and compatible with the preservation and protection of the Columbus Avenue/Warren Avenue Local Historic District; but will not have a "derogatory effect" due to distance from the street therefore **Staff does not recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission grant a Certificate of Appropriateness for the use of Trex® or other synthetic materials but does recommend granting a Certificate of Appropriateness (C/A) to remove the plywood from the porches and issue the Applicant a Certificate of Non-Applicability (C/NA) for the repair and maintenance of the porches in-kind to match the originals to John Ciccolo, Owner for work on 22 Flint Street.**

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. The front porch shall be returned to its previous details with wood porch rails, balusters, posts and skirts. (C/NA)
4. The rear porch posts, rails and balusters shall match the previously existing front porch. (C/NA)
5. The porches shall be rebuilt using Trex® floor boards and AZEK® risers (C/A)
6. All porch posts shall be wrapped in AZEK® to meet the original dimensions and design. (C/NA)
7. The porch skirt shall be made of a vertical or diagonal wood lattice. (C/NA)
8. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that it was executed in accordance with this Certificate and approved plans.





Before



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Before



Current