



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

*HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION*

KRISTENNA CHASE, *PRESERVATION PLANNER*  
SARAH WHITE, *PLANNER & PRESERVATION PLANNER*

**Case #:** HPC 2019.019  
**Date:** April 16, 2019

**Recommendation:** Conditional Approval

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**PRESERVATION STAFF REPORT**

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**Site:** 63 Adams Street

**Applicant Name:** Tobin Wells  
**Applicant Address:** 5 Burley Street, Wenham, MA 01984  
**Owner Name:** 63 Atherton Street Condominium Trust  
**Owner Address:** 63 Atherton Street

**Petition:** 63 Atherton Street Condominium Trust, Owners, seeks permission from the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to alter the front deck, hand rails and posts of the rowhouse.

**HPC Hearing Date:** April 16, 2019

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**I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

1. **Subject Property:** See attached Form B.
2. **Proposal:** The Applicant proposes to replace the deck with wood and the existing modern rail system with a more historically appropriate one with newel posts, balusters and railings. See attached spec sheets.

**II. FINDINGS FOR REPLACEMENT OF PORCHES, STEPS, TRIM AND OTHER EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS**

The Somerville LHD guidelines state that porches may be treated as follows:

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.*

There are no original features to retain. The Applicant intends to use the historically appropriate posts, rails and balusters from the J. P. Moriarty catalog. The deck will be wood posts and railings will separate 63 Adams Street from the rest of the rowhouses. The overly wide steps will be brought into historically correct proportions for a double entry.

### III. RECOMMENDATION

*Based on the information provided and an assessment of the proposal against the Somerville LHD guidelines, Staff recommends **CONDITIONAL APPROVAL** of the deck and railings with the following conditions:*

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 deck shall be wood.
4. The railings and posts shall be as shown in the attached spec sheets 12 & 13 from J. P. Moriarty.
5. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate and approved plans.

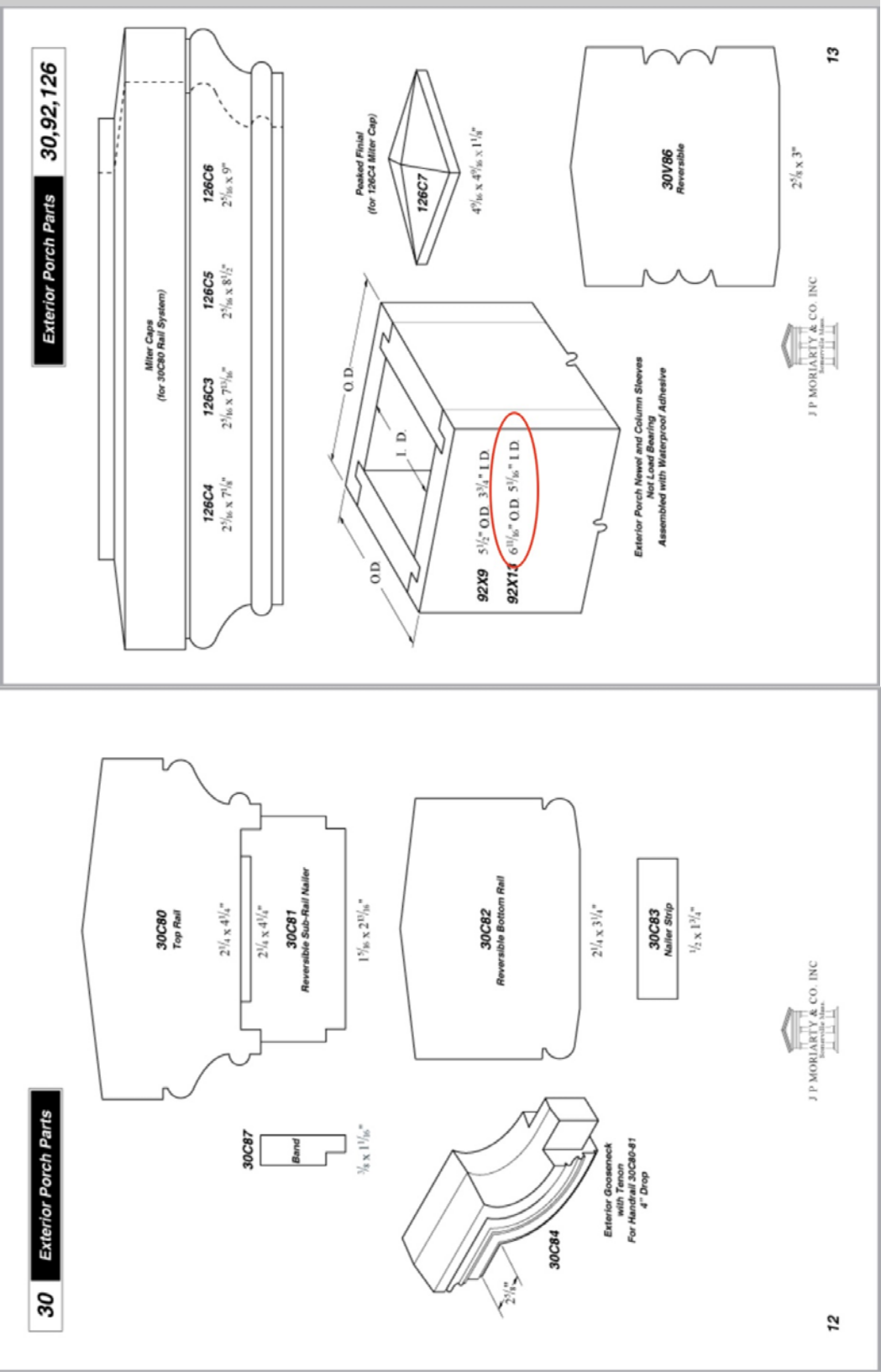






63 Adams Street - Existing railings and deck









Assessor's number	USGS Quad	Area(s)	Form Number
48 /A /40-41	Boston-North		SMV.144

Town Somerville

Place (neighborhood or village) Winter Hill

Address 55, 57, 59, 61 & 63 Adams Street

Historic Name Cutler Downer Row Houses

Use: Present Multi-family row houses

Original Single-family row houses

Date of Construction 1875-1883

Source Middlesex County atlases

Style/Form Second Empire

Architect/Builder Undetermined

Exterior Material

Foundation Stone

Wall Red brick and brownstone

Roof Slate shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures N/A

Major Alterations (with dates) Original masonry steps replaced by wooden steps and railings c. 1990s. Front doors and windows are modern metal replacements.

Condition Good

Moved ☐ yes ☒ no

Acreage 13,499 square feet

Setting Overlooks narrow front yards within densely built-up streetscape of late nineteenth/ early twentieth century wooden single-family and two-family residences.

Recorded by Edward W. Gordon

Organization Som.Historic Preservation Comm.

Date(month/day/year) 3/7/05

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION** ☒ *see continuation sheet*

*Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

Architecturally, 55, 57, 61 and 63 Adams Street rank among the most sophisticated masonry row houses built in Somerville during the late nineteenth century. Built about a decade after Somerville's incorporation as a city in 1871, 55 to 63 Adams Street symbolizes the City on the eve of rapid urbanization that resulted in more densely built-up streetscapes. Indeed, at the time of their c. 1880 construction, row housing like this, as well as 8 to 20 Summer Street near Union Square, were harbingers of the intensified development during the period of 1890 to 1910. Groups of attached brick or wooden residences were never the dominant house type in Somerville neighborhoods, scattered about as they are in Somerville, east of Central Street. The residential rows that were built represent speculative real estate development ventures, rather than custom built town houses that were constructed with a particular family in mind, as was the case in Boston's Back Bay.

The handsome row at 55 to 63 Adams Street encompasses five units. Constructed of red brick with brownstone sills and lintels, the salient feature of this group is the rhythmic repetition of five polygonal bays at the main facade, the deep, continuous molded cornice; as well as the march of polygonal dormers along the slate shingle covered expanse of the mansard roof. Each building exhibits an entrance bay and a two-story polygonal bay. These houses rise two-stories from low basements pierced by small square windows to bracketed, wooden-paneled cornices. Access to the front doors is provided by flights of wooden replacement steps of recent vintage. Original front doors have been replaced by modern metal-doors. The paired, off-center doors at numbers 59 and 61 provide visual interest. In general original 2/2 double-hung wooden sash has been replaced by modern metal 1/1 double-

**HISTORICAL NARRATIVE** ☒ *see continuation sheet*

*Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.*

The five-unit Italianate mansard row at 55, 57, 59, 61 and 63 Adams Street was built c.1880 for State Street custom house broker and "forwarder" Cutler Downer. A resident of Central Street, near Broadway in Somerville, Downer was a partner in Stone and Downer along with his brothers Roswell C. Downer and William Downer as well as Joseph Stone. The Downer brothers were in the forefront of using the telephone for both business and residential communication. In 1877, this firm ranked among the first companies to install a commercial telephone. At first, the firm's telephone was used primarily as a means of communication between the Downer family's mansion at 170 Central Street, Somerville and their State Street firm.

Cutler Downer made a fortune in Somerville real estate speculation, as well as with their Boston business. During the 1870s and 1880s, Downer assembled large parcels of undeveloped land on Winter Hill, particularly along Adams Street and Central Street, near Broadway. Downer owned back-to-back parcels on Adams and Central Streets. Around 1880, these parcels were developed as 55 to 63 Adams Street and 192 to 200 Central Street.

Adams Street was set out over the summit of Winter Hill from Broadway to Medford Street as early as 1850. Winter Hill, a 4000 foot long glacial drumlin rises to a height of 135 feet above sea level Adams Street was

**BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES** ☐ *see continuation sheet*

Bromley, George, **Atlases of the City of Somerville**, 1895; 1900.

Draper, Martin, **Map of Somerville**, 1852.

Hopkins, G. M., **Maps of the City of Somerville**, 1874; 1884.

Mc Alester, Virginia & Lee, **Field Guide to American Houses**. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.

Samuels, Edward A., **Somerville Past & Present**. Boston: Samuels & Kimball Company, 1897.

**Somerville City Directories**: 1869-70 to 1940.

Zellie, Carole, **Beyond the Neck: The Architecture and Development of Somerville, MA**, 1982, 1990.



Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

*If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

**INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET**Town:  
Somerville, MAProperty Address:  
**55,57,59,61,63 Adams Street**MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, BostonArea (s)  
Winter Hill**Form No:**  
SMV.144

Indicate each item on inventory form, continued below.

**Architectural Description**

hung sash. The windows of the tripartite dormers are of interest for their ornate, bracketed and broken pediments.

**Historical Narrative**

named for local farmer Joseph Adams, whose early 1780s house still stands at 438 Broadway. The first residential subdivision on Winter Hill was set out north of Medford Street along Adams and Central Street as early as 1847. Cutler Downer's parcels were located closer to Broadway and were assembled in the 1870s and developed in the 1880s.

By 1895, **55, 57, 59, and 61 Adams Street** were owned by Josiah Carter, while Thomas Hollis owned **63 Adams Street**, although neither Carter nor Hollis lived in Somerville. By 1900, a C. E. Robbins owned **55 to 63 Adams Street**. At that time, Cutler's brother, Roswell C. Downer, owned **63 Adams Street**.

In 1903, residents of these houses included: James T. Moses, engineer (**number 55**); Charles H. Stevens, "butter etc." (**number 59**); Bartlett P. Crenner, "leather, 26 High Street, Boston" (**number 61**) and S.A. Davis, physician (**number 63**). The only unoccupied house at that time was **57 Adams Street**.

By 1910, residents of this row included: Elmer F. Murch, *Boston Transcript* reporter (**number 55**); Edward E. Ames, salesman for an unidentified Boston company (**number 57**); Albert F. Holmes, purveyor of "musical goods", Court Street, Boston (**number 59**); leather goods dealer Bartlett P. Crenner (**number 61**) and Margaret E. Bergman (**number 63**).

By 1920, occupants of these houses included: Wallace B. Olson, an assistant manager at an unidentified Boston company (**number 55**); Winnifred E. and Herbert J. Darley, photographer (**number 57**), Margaret L. and Arthur M. Hooper, hotel clerk, Boston (**number 59**); W. A. Kelson (**number 61**); along with Sarah E. and Harris G. Leroy, Supt., Bunker Hill Boys' Club, Charlestown (**number 63**).

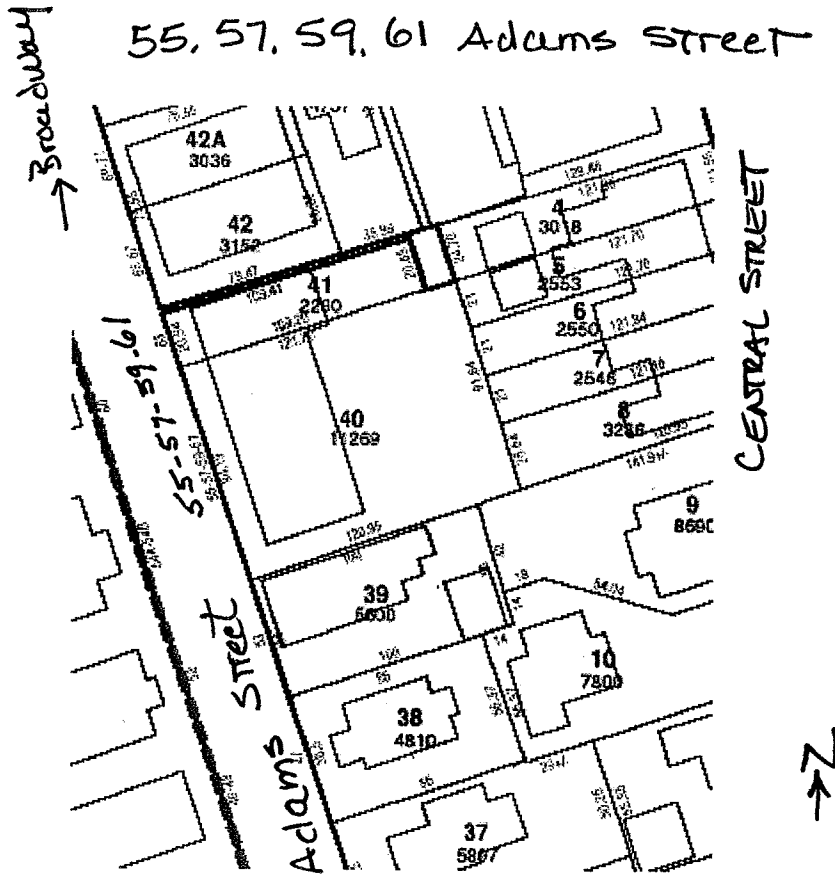
Listed here at the beginning of the Great Depression were: Gilliat R. Warren (**number 55**); Mrs. Ruth H. Dudley (**number 57**); Margaret L. and Arthur M. Hooper, operator (**number 59**) and Margaret B. and Charles F. Rowell (**number 63**). **61 Adams Street** was the only unoccupied unit within this row.

Interestingly, **55 to 61 Adams Street**'s houses are listed as unoccupied in the 1940 Somerville Directory. **63 Adams Street**'s residents were Annie Randall and her carpenter husband Joseph Randall.

**Already listed on the N. R. H. P.**



55, 57, 59, 61 Adams Street SMV. 144



MAP 48