



**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 2018.068

**Recommendation:** Denial; Conditional Approval

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**PRESERVATION STAFF REPORT**

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**Site:** HPC 2018.068

**Applicant Name:** Ronald J. Cavallo  
**Applicant Address:** 70 Victoria Street  
**Owner Name:** Joseph A. & Anna R. Cavallo  
**Owner Address:** 29 Freeman St. Arlington, Ma 02474

**Petition:** Ronald J. Cavallo, son of the Owners, seeks permission from the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to install a free-standing multi-unit mailbox.

**HPC Hearing Date:** July 17, 2018

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**I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**Subject Property:** The subject property, located in the Davis Square neighborhood, is part of the Meacham Road/Campbell Park Local Historic District (1985) and has been part of the National Register DOE and MRA since 1989. See attached Form B for more information.

**Proposal:** The Applicant has constructed a wood surround and stand for an old style USPS multi-unit mail box that the USPS no longer uses and would like replaced with one that matches their current regulations. The Applicant brought his idea to install the multi-unit mail box in 2016 and was asked to return to the Commission with his plans. He did not do so. The installed mail box does not meet current



USPS requirements for size and is mounted too high. The USPS has contacted Staff to resolve the issue, and approve a USPS approved multi-unit mail box. It should also be noted that the Post Office has their own rules regarding size and placement of their boxes, that once requested by the Post Office must be met. New mail boxes must be of a certain minimum size and placed 41”- 45” from the ground to the point of mail entry. The Post Office Representative suggested using the box shown below which has been installed at the State House. See attached e-mail from the Applicant for his thoughts on the structure.

## II. FINDINGS FOR LANDSCAPES

### H. Landscape Features and Paving

1. The general intent of this section is *to preserve the existing or later essential landscape features that enhance the property.*
2. It is recognized that often the environment surrounding the property has a character, scale and street pattern quite different from that existing when the building was constructed. Thus, changes must frequently be made to accommodate the new condition, and *the landscape treatment can be seen as a transition feature between the structure and its newer surroundings.*
3. The existing landforms of the site should not be altered unless shown to be necessary for maintenance of the structure or site. Additional landforms will only be considered if they will not obscure the exterior of the structure.
4. *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 altering the integrity of the structure.

Somerville does not have specific guidelines for free-standing mailboxes. However, they do meet the definition of a structure and must be reviewed for appropriateness. “**Structure means a combination of materials other than a building**, including a sign, fence, wall, hitching post, terrace, walk or driveway.”

“(T)he Commission shall consider, among other things, *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 to similar features of buildings and structures in the surrounding area.* In the case of new construction or additions to existing buildings or structures, the Commission shall consider *the appropriateness of the size and shape* of the building or *structure both in relation to the land area upon which the building or structure is situated and to buildings and structures in the vicinity*, and the Commission may in appropriate cases impose dimensional and set back requirements in addition to those required by applicable ordinance or by-law.”

**Staff Findings:** No other buildings in the Meacham Road/ Campbell Park Local Historic District have free-standing mailboxes. They retain their original mail slots or have additional boxes on the sides of their buildings near the door. Staff finds that the installed mail box, while the design of which was derived from existing building features does not compliment the original structure. The proportions of the post, based upon the corner posts of the porch are larger, the flutes are finer. The rectangular section of the post

makes it appear heavy and out of scale. The cap and external box give visual weight to the top rather than minimizing the effect of the installation. The mail box draws attention away from the details of the house rather than blending in to the surroundings. Staff finds that the generic box with pyramidal cap and small ball recommended by the Post Office draws less attention to itself than the box installed.

### III. RECOMMENDATION

***Based on the information provided and an assessment of the proposal against the Somerville LHD guidelines, Staff recommends that the Commission deny the request to retain the multi-unit mailbox currently installed and issue a Certificate of Appropriateness 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 Applicant shall install a United States Postal Service approved free-standing multi-unit box in the style shown in the color "black".
4. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that this was done in accordance with the Certificate and approved plans.



Installed Post Office box



Porch post used to derive the design

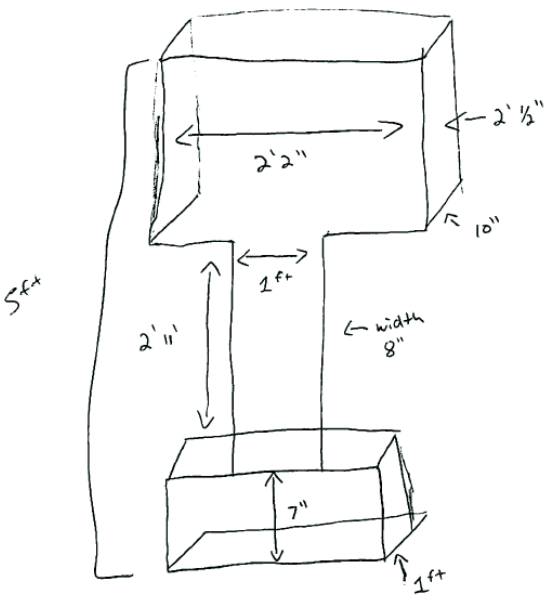


Box recommended by the Post Office  
Also available in Black, Gold, Bronze,





Mail Box



6/26/2018

Hi Kristi:

We have taken great pains and substantial expenditures to build a mailbox for my property at 27 Meacham Road. As previously discussed, building a mailbox room in the historic and fully restored foyer was an unacceptable alternative. Mounting mailboxes onto the exterior was also unacceptable as it would clutter the exterior (which is being restored) and additionally, there was insufficient wall space to do so. I would never allow such a configuration as it is reminiscent of the rent control era when landlords could have cared less.

The current mailboxes approved by USPC are heavy steel and not adaptable to a configuration that I consider acceptable for an historic structure. There are pseudo "victorian" add on that are hideous and unacceptable to me that are made out of PVC and steel. These "add ons" were proposed by the USP. I would never use them nor would the Historical Commission

approved them. I feel confident that the Historical Commission would consider what the USP would like to see as completely unacceptable. They certainly are to me.

Rather, with the understanding that the mailbox was part of the landscaping plan and out of the purview of the Historical Commission, perhaps erroneously although I would argue that the mailboxes are landscaping, we chose, at great expense to utilize the older style and far more attractive mailbox system and integrate it into a custom made structure that exactly parallels the detail on the original building. We have done so by making rubber moulds of some of the detail, having moldings custom milled to match the original structure and have had a cabinet maker make a fluted base that also exactly matches the existing structure. We have chosen to mount the mailbox following USP specifications mounting the system onto a concrete pad with a footing below the frost line and wrap the base with cobble stone to match the existing and new landscaping plan. We have stopped construction pending the review by the USP and Historical Commission.

As a general statement, the USP and the Historical Commission are not in sync. and should be. There are no good exterior mail systems approved for historical structures. Our custom designed and fabricated structure we believe does something that is quite good. There are no good alternatives for mail that we could find out that are approved that would be consistent with my goals for 27 Meacham.

I will walk you through what we have done and show pictures of the architectural elements that we have exactly fabricated so that you will understand our proposal.

1. We purchased a 4 gang mailbox that was approved for renovations of structures but not approved for new construction. We used said mailboxes because they could be encased in a custom built structure that could be exactly matched to the building column and porch posts.
2. We custom fabricated a code approved wooden base that was fluted to match the existing column and porch bases.
3. We cast circular victorian detail from the original wood detail to match the existing column and porch detail.
4. We have moldings milled to exactly match moldings on the column and porch detail.
5. We build a roof for said structure to make it weather proof and work with the existing structure.

I have attached photos of the moldings that were milled and not yet applied, the cast circles that we fabricated making rubber moulds and moulding material utilizing the original detail, the custom made base that has the fluting that matches the exiting column and porch detail and a quick sketch of the structure's dimensions.

To complete this project, it is our intention to:

1. add the cobblestone around the base to match the existing landscape
2. add the victorian detail and victorian moulding.
3. add band moulding that match the structure as needed.
4. apply a metal roof ( that would not be visible) for weather tightness to protect the structure and the mailboxes and the contents of the mailbox.
5. complete the landscaping around the mailbox. We have added arborvitae around it to soften the appearance of the structure and to create privacy.
6. paint the structure with black paint to match the sashes and the exterior doors and exterior trim detail.

The mailbox is part of an overall restoration of the structure which we hope to complete within the next 4 to 6 weeks to ready the building for a 3 coat paint job by a master painter. This is all part of a \$120,000 exterior restoration of the building that has been ongoing for some time but has obviously been done with care and accuracy and sensitivity to the structure; something I am know for doing throughout my career. The Meacham Road property is a wonderful building. Our restoration of the foyer that includes historic colors, victorian borders and mouldings that were either restored or brought back to the building, the installation of a leaded glass window of the exact size and style of the 1895 window (we searched nationwide for 4 months to find it), the installation of an historically accurate 1895 combination gas/electric foyer light etc. are all part of the ongoing restoration.

What the USP would like is hideous. The mailslot system in use for 50 years must go. I have spent over \$3,000 in design and construction of the current mailbox. If the said structure is not acceptable, I will have to comply with the current USP regulations which Historical will hate and which I will hate. So this seems like being caught in the "Twilight Zone" between Style and historical accuracy and good taste and the bullet proof requirements of the USP. If denied, I will have to comply with the USP. The mail people and my tenants hate the mail slot and I am through sorting mail and picking it up off the floor. So with that all said, Please see the following as attached:

1. The sketch of the mailbox dimensions.
2. A photo of the incomplete mailbox ready for the victorian details as mentioned and a two coats of exterior black paint.
3. photos of the custom milled moulding and castings.

Please call me with any questions or comments. I would greatly appreciate acceptance of our design and a request from the Historical Commission that our system be accepted and a request that the USP install the required lock for the mailboxes.

# Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

## Scanned Record Cover Page

<b>Inventory No:</b>	SMV.116
<b>Historic Name:</b>	Sparrow, Edmund House
<b>Common Name:</b>	
<b>Address:</b>	27 Meacham Rd
<b>City/Town:</b>	Somerville
<b>Village/Neighborhood:</b>	Davis Square
<b>Local No:</b>	1057; 152
<b>Year Constructed:</b>	c 1890
<b>Architect(s):</b>	
<b>Architectural Style(s):</b>	Queen Anne
<b>Use(s):</b>	Single Family Dwelling House
<b>Significance:</b>	Architecture
<b>Area(s):</b>	SMV.ay: Somerville Multiple Resource Area
<b>Designation(s):</b>	Local Historic District (3/11/1985); Nat'l Register DOE (9/18/1989); Nat'l Register MRA (9/18/1989)
<b>Building Materials(s):</b>	Roof: Asphalt Shingle Wall: Wood Clapboard; Wood; Wood Shingle



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Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Massachusetts Historical Commission  
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125  
[www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc)

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9/18/89 (2C)

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LHO-3/11/85 (2C)

MHC#  
1057

RM B - BUILDING

AREA FORM NO.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
BOYLSTON STREET  
STON, MA 02116

AY Davis Square 152 116

PI-DAVIS SQ  
USGS-BOST,N  
SECT A



Somerville WRA  
27 Meacham Road

Owner Name Edmund Sparrow

Present residential

Original residential

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION ca. 1890

Map Research map research

Style Queen Anne

Architect unknown

Sketch Map: Draw map showing property's location in relation to nearest cross streets and/or geographical features. Indicate all buildings between inventoried property and nearest intersection(s). Indicate north

Exterior Wall Fabric clapboard

Outbuildings rear stable converted to residential use

Major Alterations (with dates) none

See Attached Assessor's Map

Condition excellent

Moved no Date n/a

Acreage less than one acre

Setting city lot, on Cambridge/Somerville line, near Mass. Ave., one and two family late 19th century dwellings

GRID REFERENCE  
Z E N  
19 - 324/950 - 4695/720

Recorded by Betsy Friedberg, Preservation Planner

Organization Mass. Historical Commission

USGS QUADRANGLE Boston North

Date June 1986

SCALE 1:25,000

**NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA STATEMENT (if applicable)**

The pretentious Queen Anne-style house at 27 Meachan Road retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. It is a stylish and well-detailed example of a popular late 19th century Somerville building type, and fulfills Criterion C of the National Register of Historic Places on the local level.

**ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE Describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within the community.**

The house at 27 Meachan Road occupies an ample corner lot on the Somerville/Cambridge border. It is one of the most pretentious examples of the Queen Anne style in the Campbell Park subdivision. The 2 1/2 story house is based on a cross-gable plan, and exhibits typical Queen Anne variety in the size and placement of windows, dormers and bays. The wall surfaces are covered with clapboards, several patterns of wood shingles, and half-timbering. The gabled entrance porch contains robust Queen Anne turned posts and spindle frieze.

**HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE Explain the role owners played in local or state history and how the building relates to the development of the community.**

Campbell Park was a neighborhood developed at the close of the 19th century. Located adjacent to Davis Square, the area was convenient for middle-class workers employed in Boston who commuted daily on the nearby horsecar and steam rail lines. This stylish single-family residence may have been a "show" house for Campbell Park speculator Henry Glover. It is one of many one-and-two-family residences in Campbell Park built between 1885-1895.

Edmund Sparrow and wife, Merriah lived in this house near Davis Square where Sparrow maintained a hardware store in the E.S. Sparrow Hardware Building built in 1874 and demolished in the 1930s.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES**

Bromley, G. W., Atlas of the City of Somerville, 1895  
1904 City Directory

SMV.116

