

STAPLES FARMHOUSE - RESTORATION AND ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT

Suzuki School of Newton, 1615 Beacon Street, Waban, MA
Application for CPA Funding – Pre-Proposal -September 2025
HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Attachment 1: Analysis of Historical Significance

This building was individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986. It became a City of Newton Local Landmark in 2015.

The core of the present building dates to 1750, when it functioned as a farmstead. It served as a single-family residence for over 260 years and represents the oldest standing architectural link to Waban’s agricultural beginnings. It provides an important visual and historical anchor between the well-established residential neighborhood to its north, and the business and transport center to the west and south. Both the building and the front lawn remain important gathering places for neighbors and the wider community.

Reflecting the evolving ownership over three centuries, the full name of the historic house is the “Staples-Craft-Wiswall Farm”. In this proposal, we refer to the building as the “Staples Farmhouse”.

Deacon John Staples arrived in Newton in 1688, took control of 93 acres and built the first house on this site. He was a weaver by trade, and a prominent citizen, serving as Newton’s first public school teacher and the town clerk. He was also a surveyor and created the first known map of Newton. Deacon Staples married Mary Craft in 1690.

Moses Craft, a relative and foster child in the Staples household, ultimately inherited the property and built a new house (the present structure), following his marriage to Esther in 1729. He was a town selectman and a weaver by trade. The Craft family made alterations after the mid-18th century, including a rear ell added in 1768. It remained in the Craft family for two generations. William Wiswall II, a farmer and cousin of the Craft family, became the owner in 1824 when the property still included 76 acres. The Wiswall family likely made the Greek Revival updates typical of that time. A subsequent owner, a wealthy dry goods merchant called David Kinmouth, added Victorian features and another rear addition.

By 1875 the house belonged to William C. Strong, a prominent civic leader and developer. He was an innovative thinker and president of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. William and Mary Strong shaped not only the look of the house but also the nearby street facades along with driving the economic development of the village of Waban. At the close of the 19th century, large portions of open land formerly associated with this property were subdivided into residential and commercial lots. Throughout the 20th century, other owners continued to use it

as a single-family residence. It served as a rectory during a period when it belonged to the nearby Church of the Good Shepherd. Throughout these changes in ownership, many of the original features were preserved.

In 2015, the house was sold by the long-time owner who had been there for over 30 years, at the time of his retirement from his orthodontics practice, which had been operated from the 1980s outbuilding. A developer purchased the property and proposed a 24-unit apartment complex which would have involved partial demolition of the historic house. Ultimately this was not approved. The City of Newton designated the building as a City of Newton Local Landmark.

At that time, the Suzuki School of Newton Inc, a certified 501 (c) (3) organization founded in 1993, was seeking a new location for its expanding programs. Not only was the demand for the unique Suzuki approach to music instruction growing, but also the need for pre-school spaces in Newton had increased steeply since the Suzuki School founded its pre-school in 2009.

In 2017 the Suzuki School purchased 1615 Beacon Street for \$3.6 million, relying on financing raised through a 25-year \$2.3 million mortgage.

Attachment 2: Description of Historically Significant Features

The building is architecturally significant as an example of 18th century architecture, that incorporated over time features of the Federal, Greek Revival and Queen Anne Styles. It stands in its original location. The mid- 18th century farmhouse replaced an even earlier structure on the same site and likely incorporates part of the original foundations. The building inevitably evolved during changes in ownership mentioned above.

The house faces south directly onto Beacon Street. The main block is two and half stories, with clapboard walls, a fieldstone foundation, and a gambrel roof. The front façade is five bays wide with 6 evenly spaced sash windows on the second story.

The open veranda, which likely previously spanned 3 sides of the house, remains a distinctive feature of the front of the house, shed-roofed and supported by a colonnade of squared columns with simple brackets. The central entrance is flanked by full sidelights and topped by a cornice with frieze. The south-facing gable roof has three canted peaks. The pilastered flared and beaded trim around the front sash windows appears to date from an 1860 alteration.

By 1895, during the time of ownership by William Strong, the house displayed its Queen Anne era window bays with an attached out-building at the rear of the house.

The 4/4 windows on the front south face are larger than those on the two side faces. The windows on the west and east sides are topped by wooden, flat architrave hoods. On the east side, a three-sided bay window with elongated sash windows and a hipped roof is centered on the left side.

The gabled roof has two interior plain brick chimneys, located on the west and east sides. The articulated roof trim on all four sides of the house has returns.

Attachment 3: Summary and Justification of Proposed Treatment

The proposed plan for capital investment represents Phase II, following completion of Phase I amounting to \$2.3m in 2017-2024. Phase II has two components.

(a) Restoration including windows, porch, siding and gutters (\$282k)

Windows: As much as possible, the school aims to restore the original sash windows and incorporate appropriate mullions. The first-floor windows were restored during Phase I; the 2nd and 3rd floor windows now need attention. We are required to complete the lead abatement process on the upper floors. Throughout the house, there is an inconsistent variety of windows, with most being replacement windows including vinyl frames. The 1986 survey observed that at that time most of the windows have been replaced over time, while those on the first floor at the front façade are original. Other windows include double-hung vinyl 6/6 and 1/1 windows, 2/2 wood double hung windows, and floor to ceiling triple track windows. An attic window on the east façade of the rear addition was previously filled in.

We have detailed proposals and quotes for de-leading and either restoration or replacement of the windows on the second and third floors (rooms 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18, as well as Hallway 6 and 7, and Stairwells 2 and 3). This work needs to be carried out when the building is not occupied.

Front porch restoration: Decking, railings and trim need repair/replacement.

Siding: As recommended at the time of landmarking in 2015, it would be visually impactful to remove the aluminum siding in order to restore the exterior walls as close as possible to their original appearance. The metal siding has been there for over 50 years, likely since the 1970s. Until we remove the metal siding, we do not know exactly the conditions underneath. This work could be carried out when the building is occupied.

Gutters: These are in poor condition causing problems with water infiltration. The proposal is to replace them fully with white aluminum gutters. This work could be carried out when the building is occupied.

(b) Accessible Classroom Annex (\$2,250k)

The designs prepared by architect John LaFreniere aim to incorporate at the rear of the historic house to a two-story annex containing an elevator shaft. It is not possible to insert a vertical lift into the historic structure. The annex will provide about 2000 square feet serving 2 floors, not only allowing for the elevator shaft but also enabling an expansion with additionally badly needed classroom and community performance space. Our mission includes being able to welcome all community members to our programs and activities, and we are required to make sure rooms in the music school and the preschool are fully ADA compliant prior to 2028. Vetting and approval of the plans by city and state offices has been multi-faceted and this process is already quite far advanced:

- The **Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB)** provided a temporary variance from compliance with the American Disabilities Act. The extension granted now requires the installation of a vertical lift by June 2028, in addition to regular reporting on fundraising efforts. We are in regular and frequent communication with the MAAB.
- The plans were submitted to the **Planning Department** for the **Administrative Site Plan Review** on April 20, 2025. The review covered aspects related to zoning, drainage, parking and utilities.
- The **Inspectional Services Department** issued a determination with respect to waivers under “Dover relief” as related to alterations to historic buildings by non-profit organizations. Commissioner Ciccariello confirmed the waiver regarding (a) a small decrease in the non-conforming open space from 43.9% to 43.3% and (b) the inclusion of two free standing signs (letter of Aug. 20, 2025)
- The **Inspectional Services Dept** requested that the electric transformer be pole mounted rather than placed within the front setback (letter of Aug. 20, 2025).
- The **Waban Area Council** held a public community meeting on June 12, 2025, to review the current plans which were unanimously approved.

Attachment 4: Newton Historical Commission Review

- The **Newton Historical Commission** carefully reviewed the architect’s plans on February 22, 2024, considering the Landmark status of the building and the need the proposed rear addition to be compatible with the historic architecture. The NHC voted unanimously to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness (memo of Feb. 23, 2024)