



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

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HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DETERMINATION OF PREFERABLY PRESERVED STAFF REPORT

Site: 17 Porter Street
Case: HPC 2016.007
Applicant Name: Daniel A. & Amanda A. Casapriello

Date of Application: February 16, 2016
Date of Significance: March 15, 2016

Recommendation: Preferably Preserved
Hearing Date: April 19, 2016



**A determination of Preferably Preserved begins a nine month Demolition Delay.*

I. Meeting Summary: Determination of Significance

On Tuesday, March 15, 2016, the Historic Preservation Commission, in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (2003-05), made a determination that 17 Porter Street is Significant. Per Section 2.17.B, this decision is found on the following criteria:

Section 2.17.B - The structure is at least 50 years old;

and

- (i) *The structure is importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth;*

and / or

- (ii) *The structure is historically or architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of building construction, or association with a reputed architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures.*

According to *Criteria 2.17.B*, listed above, historic map and directory research identifies the structure as c. 1890.

In accordance with *Criteria (i)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings, due to its association with the streetscape, and Italian immigration patterns in the twentieth century. Despite alterations primarily on the side and rear, the house fits well with the orientation and scale of buildings on



Porter Street. The building is essentially a late nineteenth century building in close proximity to two Local Historic Districts and other buildings with similar massing and form. The amount of window reveal indicates that the original wood siding may still be extant beneath the current building skin.

In accordance with *Criteria (ii)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings due to its period, style, method of construction, integrity of form and massing, especially in the context of a group of buildings. The house blends with the neighborhood and does not have any distinguishing features beyond the large two-car garage addition on its south side rear. Despite alterations, the house fits well with the orientation and scale of buildings on Porter Street. While the removal of this particular building would not be a loss, the construction of another building that did not replicate the form and massing consistent with the neighborhood would damage the historic fabric of the street. It is architecturally important as one of grouping of similar buildings that characterize the neighborhood and streetscape.

II. Additional Information

Additional Research:

- No new information about the residents of 17 Porter Street was found beyond obituaries noting living relations at the time of death. The period between the 1884 searchable online City Directories and the 1900 Census is a void that is difficult to research without deed research.

Comparable Structures:

Two story gable-end dwellings with two or three bays are common throughout the City and compose a majority of the residential housing stock within the City. This building type is generally constructed as a single or two-family dwelling. Comparable structures along Porter Street and in this general neighborhood of the same dates and style include:

- 19 Porter Street
- 16 Porter Street
- 18 Porter Street
- 5 Linden Avenue
- 7 Linden Avenue



17 Porter Street

Predominant differences between the comparable dwellings and the subject dwelling are the number of windows on the second floor and in the gable. These buildings all have a square one story bay and a shed roof that also covers the entry way. Several small alterations to each of them over time have given each a slightly different character.



Above: 16 Porter Street, 18 Porter Street, 19 Porter Street



Above: 5 Linden Avenue, 7 Linden Avenue

III. Preferably Preserved

If the Commission determines that the demolition of the significant building or structure would be detrimental to the architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social heritage of the City, such building or structure shall be considered a preferably preserved building or structure. (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 4.2.d)

A determination regarding if the demolition of the subject building is detrimental to the architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social heritage of the City should consider the following:

How does this building or structure compose or reflect features which contribute to the heritage of the City?

The form and massing of this two-family dwelling represent a common residential building type within the City. The Porter streetscape and surrounding neighborhood are predominantly composed of structures similar to the form and massing of the subject parcel, and together, the buildings that form this streetscape illustrate the suburbanization of Somerville at the end of the 19th century.

- a) *What is the remaining integrity of the structure? The National Park Service defines integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance.*

The Commission found that integrity of this two-family dwelling is retained within the location and form, as well as, to a moderate degree, integrity of design. The structure retains integrity of location through siting and orientation as well as through spatial relationships to other buildings along Porter Street. The main massing component, two-stories with a gable-end, remains evident despite the rear and garage additions.

- b) *What is the level (local, state, national) of significance?*

The Commission determined that this structure is Significant due to a historical association with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to its architectural association within the streetscape, and the cultural and social history of the City due to its association with Italian immigration patterns in the twentieth century.

Despite alterations primarily on the rear, the house fits well with the orientation and scale of buildings on Porter Street. It is nearly identical to five other houses in the neighborhood, indicating that they were constructed by the same builder at the same time giving a sense of continuity to the streetscape. The construction of another building that did not replicate the

form and massing consistent with the neighborhood would damage the historic fabric of the street. It is architecturally important as one of grouping of similar buildings that characterize the neighborhood and streetscape.

The Commission found the subject building historically and architecturally significant due to its period, style, method of construction, integrity of form and massing, especially in the context of a group of buildings.

- c) *What is the visibility of the structure with regard to public interest (Section 2.17.B.ii) if demolition were to occur?*

The subject parcel is set with approximately the same set back as the other houses on the street. The buildings all have a rhythm based upon the gable ends and the widths of the lots.

- d) *What is the scarcity or frequency of this type of resource in the City?*

Two-story dwellings, both single and two-family, with a gable end roof are common throughout the City and dominate the Porter streetscape as well as many other streetscapes within the surrounding neighborhoods. There are three other buildings that began with the same form and massing on Porter Street and two on Linden Avenue. All show alterations over time, making each distinctive.

Upon a consideration of the above criteria (a-e), is the demolition of the subject building detrimental to the architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social heritage of the City?

The Commission determined that this structure is Significant due to a historical association with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to its architectural association within the streetscape, and the cultural and social history of the City due to its association with Italian immigration patterns in the twentieth century.

Significance is also due to the ability of the subject parcel to convey integrity regarding location and form as well as, to a moderate degree, design. The additional information provided and consideration criteria (a-e) listed above show that while this general type of dwelling is common in many neighborhoods throughout the City, it is very much a part of the associated streetscape. Therefore, Staff finds the potential demolition of 21 Porter Street detrimental to the heritage of the City.

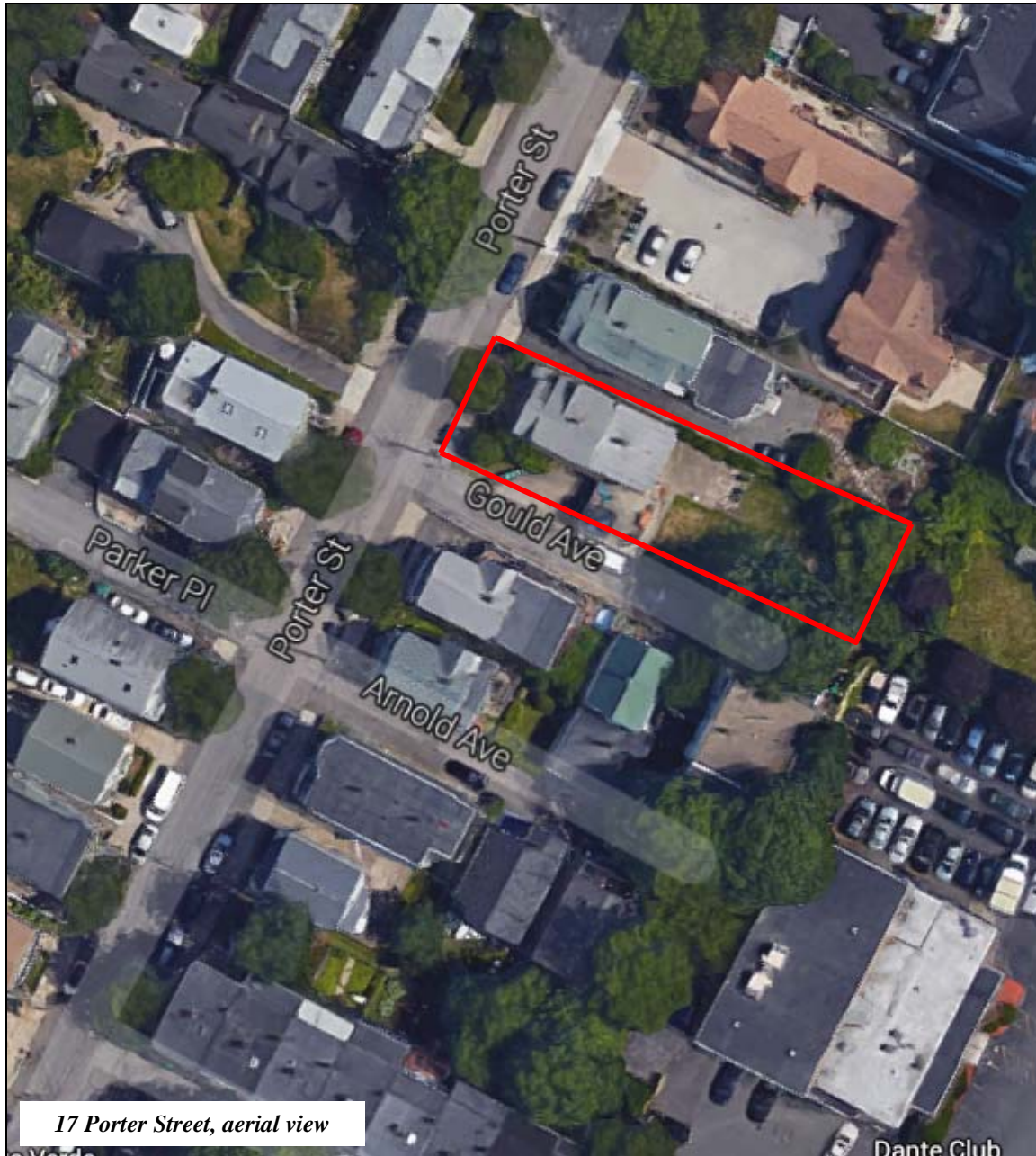
IV. Recommendation

Recommendations are based upon an analysis by Historic Preservation Staff of the permit application and the required findings for the Demolition Review Ordinance, which requires archival and historical research, and an assessment of historical and architectural significance, conducted prior to the public hearing for a Determination of Preferably Preserved. This report may be revised or updated with a new recommendation and/or findings based upon additional information provided to Staff or through further research.

In accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (2003-05), Section 4.D, Staff find the potential demolition of the subject structure detrimental to the heritage of the City, and consequently in the best interest of the public to preserve or rehabilitate. Therefore, due to the frequency of this type of residential dwelling and associated streetscape within the City, minimal remaining detail, number of enclosures and additions, and the location of the structure within the Porter Streetscape, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 17 Porter Street Preferably Preserved.**

If the Historic Preservation Commission determines the structure is Preferably Preserved, the Building Inspector may issue a demolition permit at anytime, upon receipt of written advice from the Commission that there is no reasonable likelihood that either the owner or some other person

or group is willing to purchase, preserve, rehabilitate or restore the subject building or structure (Ord. 2003-05, Section 4.5).



17 Porter Street, aerial view



17 Porter Street, street view