



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

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DETERMINATION OF PREFERABLY PRESERVED STAFF REPORT

Site:	88 Dover Street
Case:	HPC 2016.028
Applicant Name:	Mui Sin Chow & Nam Cheung
Date of Application:	April 25, 2016
Date of Significance:	May 17, 2016
Recommendation:	Not Preferably Preserved
Hearing Date:	June 21, 2016



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

I. Meeting Summary: Determination of Significance

On Tuesday, May 17, 2016, the Historic Preservation Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to determine the c. 1924 accessory building at 88 Dover Street 'Significant' because the building, per Section 2.17.B of the Demolition Review Ordinance 2003-05, is "at least 50 years old, and is or has been determined by the Commission to be a significant building or structure after a finding that the building or structure is either:

- i. "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 of Massachusetts, or
- ii. "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, and therefore it is in the public interest to be preserved or rehabilitated rather than to be demolished."

The subject building is found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, and social history of the City as an accessory structure typical of workshops that were once common in backyards throughout the city to support small business owners and for David Gaddis participation in the early 20th century labor movement. The building is a remnant of the pre-automotive age constructed for a dying use within city limits.



The subject building is found historically significant due to the location of the building within a context of structures which, together, create a setting that reflects the character of the place in which the subject building played a historical role, i.e. the suburbanization of West Somerville. The subject building is found architecturally significant due to the ability of the subject parcel to convey significance regarding location, form, and massing as well as integrity of design.

The period of significance for 88 Dover Street workshop begins at the time of construction, c. 1924, as West Somerville was largely developed for commuter housing. This period of significance follows the transition from horse to automobile as a major mode of transportation in the third decade of the twentieth century.

This building illustrates characteristics of a utilitarian wood frame workshop. The building is located within a context of buildings or structures which, together, create a setting that reflects the character of the place in which the subject building played a historical role, i.e. the modernization of West Somerville.

Qualities that continue to convey significance include the location of the building on the parcel and the spatial relationship to other buildings along Dover Street. The building retains integrity of design through its form and massing. Utilitarian workshops were commonly of the most simple form and design. The stylistic flourishes of contemporary 1920s design were generally eschewed in favor of functionality and cost.

II. Additional Information

Additional Research:

- No further information has been found.

Site Visit:

Site visits illustrate that the subject structure is located directly after the bend in the road (see photos). This dwelling is the only structure between the encroaching commercial development and the residential portion of the streetscape. While the rest of the streetscape is predominantly of historic building stock, there is new development that is beginning to alter the streetscape.

It could not be determined from cursory external investigation to what extent the building had been altered. The siding on the workshop extends to ground level. It is likely that the door and window on the front façade was originally an entry wide enough for carriages and automobiles. The side entry has a storm door and appears to be an entry in to a residential unit. Similarly the windows on the side of the building are residential in character. See photos at end of document.



Comparable Structures: Stables and barns had housing for animals and their fodder as a primary purpose as opposed the small workshops which needed programmed space for a particular trade. It should be noted that many small workshops have been lost in recent years, such as the broom factory on Tufts Street due to lack maintenance and foresight. The lack of a specific purpose that meets current zoning requirements workshops, stables and barns has led to the generally poor repair of these structures. These buildings are often not known until they come before the Historic Preservation Commission for their demolition. Some of the buildings recently lost have been the hay dealer's carriage house and storage at 333-335 Summer Street; the broom factory at 13 Tufts Street and the cabinet maker's workshop at 281 Highland Avenue.



However a few known accessory buildings still remain in use and in good condition. These include:

- 38 Meacham Road (LHD) – Owned a meat market owner, currently a home office.
- 88 College Avenue (LHD) – Owned by an undertaker, currently an artist's studio.
- 118 Heath Street – Owned by a gardener, currently storage.
- 12 Linden Place – Owned by a roofer, currently storage.
- 55 Vernon Street – Owned by an early automobile builder, currently 3 condominiums



Top: 38 Meacham Road (LHD); 88 College Avenue (LHD) 12 Linden Place;
Bottom: 118 Heath Street, 55 Vernon Street

These buildings attached to residential units have different forms and uses. Other than supporting the business activities of the original owners, there is little in common between them. Stylistically, the buildings range of from Queen Anne to Dutch Colonial to strictly utilitarian. Materials range from wood to cast concrete block. Construction dates range from the 1890s through c. 1910 for the early concrete block car factory.

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:

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

Small workshops located in the rear and side yards were once common throughout New England. Located near a transportation node of Davis Square, this building is a rare late link to the pre-automotive age. Harness makers and saddlers were an important business prior to the automotive. Horse drawn vehicles were still in use through the 1920s especially for local deliveries. The transition to automotive repairs and detailing occurred with the change of generations. Both businesses were much concerned with the care of leather used in vehicles.

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

In regards to integrity, the Commission found alterations, such as replacement windows, siding, doors and shingles, have modified the exterior appearance of this utilitarian building over the years; however, the location, form and massing remains intact and visible.

Qualities that continue to convey significance include the location of the building on the parcel and the spatial relationship to other buildings along Dover Street. The building retains integrity of design through its form and massing. Utilitarian workshops were commonly of the most simple form and design. The stylistic flourishes of design of the times were generally eschewed in favor of functionality and cost.

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

The Commission determined that this structure is Significant within a context of structures, which, together, create a setting that reflects the character of the place in which the subject building played a historical role in the suburbanization of West Somerville.

Middle class housing constructed to suburbanize West Somerville predominantly represents an aspect of local history.

- d) *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 highly visible along Dover Street and is located just after a bend in the road, which transitions the Dover streetscape from predominantly commercial, at the north end, to residential, at the south end. Although the structure is a cohesive component to the streetscape, 88 Dover Street serves as a hinge or pivot between the commercial and automotive end of the street and the residential character to the south.

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

Accessory buildings are rare in Somerville. The out buildings remaining within the City are usually late 19th century and early 20th century. Barns, stables and carriage houses were erected to serve those owners who could not and did not rely on the streetcars for their daily business. Other small buildings were constructed for use as workshops and stores. These are even more rare.

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 found the subject parcel Significant as a one-story gable end structure that is a comprehensive component of the residential portion of the Dover streetscape which, as a context of buildings, illustrates the suburbanization of West Somerville at the end of the 19th century. Significance is also due to the ability of the subject parcel to convey integrity regarding location, form, and massing as well as design. The additional information provided and consideration criteria (a-e) listed above conveys that this type of structure is now rare in many neighborhoods throughout the City. Due to the location of the structure at the bend in Dover Street, the subject structure acts as a hinge or pivot between the residential structures to the south with transportation/automotive structures to the north. Therefore, Staff finds the potential demolition of 88 Dover 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 location of this structure as a hinge or pivot between the commercial/automotive end of Dover Street and the residential component of the streetscape to the south, and its rarity as a workshop building attached to a residential unit, **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission find 88 Dover Street Harness Makers Shop 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).



