



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

DETERMINATION OF PREFERABLY PRESERVED STAFF REPORT

Site: 11 Fairview Terrace
Case: HPC 2014.086
Applicant Name: Wojciech Szczerba

Date of Application: October 1, 2014
Date of Significance: October 21, 2014

Recommendation: NOT Preferably Preserved
Hearing Date: November 18, 2014



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

I. Meeting Summary: Determination of Significance

On Tuesday, October 21, 2014, the Historic Preservation Commission, in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (2003-05), made a determination that 11 Fairview Terrace 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.*

In accordance with *Criteria (i)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings, that this structure is importantly associated with Harold A. Palmer, a prominent 1940s and 1950s era Somerville politician but not with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to the fact that Palmer had essentially retired from public life by the time he had the house constructed.

In accordance with *Criteria (ii)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings, that the house was architecturally significant due to the rarity of Ranch style houses within the City of Somerville, which is a dominant style of the mid-20th century.

II. Additional Information

Additional Research:

- While no additional information regarding Harold A. Palmer was found, Staff attempted to determine if he had, in his tenure as Acting Mayor or State Representative, done anything of lasting importance.
- While U.S. Census data is not yet public record for the years 1950 and 1960. The 1970 City Directory shows those residents over the age of 20 are Harold A. Palmer (b. 1906), realtor; Catherine Palmer, (b. 1914), at home; Kevin Palmer (b. 1945), broker; and Joan Palmer (b. 1947), senior clerk.
- A 1955 Building Permit was granted to H. Palmer to construct a 6-room wood frame single-family ranch house. No other building permits were issued for the house through 1999. All the windows except the bow window and probably the door have been replaced.

Comparable Structures:

Ranch style homes are characterized by a single story with a long low roofline, often with deep eaves. Dependent upon either a common rectangular massing or an asymmetrical L- or U-shaped massing, the roof form could be cross-gabled, side-gabled or a hip roof. Other features often include an attached garage, large windows, shutters, and/or sliding glass doors opening onto a patio. Exteriors are composed of a variety of materials such as stucco, brick and wood.

While the Ranch style represents post-World War II expansion into the suburbs on a national level, Ranch style dwellings are rare in Somerville. The City was predominantly built-out by the time this style came to be popular. Six Ranch style homes are known within the City; these have been documented and exhibit several of the characteristic features typical of this style. These Ranch style dwellings have either replaced previous buildings or are located in large side or back yards.



Above: 176 Albion Street – 1951, constructed in side yard - L-shaped, does not have attached garage or carport



Above: 79R Boston Street – 1960, constructed in back yard - L-shaped, does not have attached garage or carport



Above: 1 Munroe Street – 1962, constructed in side yard - Not L or U shaped, but has attached garage or carport



Above: 39 Murdock Street – 1965, replaced wood shed & garage - Not L- or U-shaped, does not have attached garage or carport



Above: 3 East Albion Street – 1964, vacant platted lot - L-shaped, does not have attached garage or carport



Above: 51 Waterhouse Street – 1978, replaced concrete block garages - L-shaped, has attached garage or carport

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?*

While this modern style is considered a suburban form, the Ranch style is not a typical style within the City due to having predominantly been built out by mid-century; however, these intermittently located Ranch style homes reflect limited mid-20th century residential infill development.

These Ranch style homes either necessitated the demolition of more contextual buildings or were constructed on further subdivided property. 11 Fairview Terrace was constructed in the side yard of a razed building.

- b) *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 one-family dwelling is retained within the location and form, as well as, to a moderate degree, integrity of design. The building does not exhibit all characteristics of a Ranch style house, but is understood by the roofline, L-shaped massing, large windows, clinker brick and wood exterior, covered entry door, and simple exterior trim. The building is clearly mid-20th century and represents the suburban ideals of the time.

While Ranch style houses are rare within the City, this building is not the first Ranch style dwelling, does not exhibit a high quality of design or architectural features, and was not designed by a well-known architect of the era. The building has undergone alterations to the main entry and to windows that detract from its mid-century appearance. Cracks in the masonry and water damage are further undermining the physical integrity of the building.

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

The Commission determined that this structure is Significant due to a historical association with Harold A. Palmer and due to architectural significance, predominantly with regard to location and form, within the context of the time period in which it was constructed.

No further information has been found giving Harold A. Palmer any significance beyond that of the local level.

- 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 located at the end of a cul-de-sac with only one other house. The right of way is narrow and does not lead to a path or other cut-through. The loss of this building would likely be noticed by only the direct abutters.

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

Ranch style buildings are rare within city limits.

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 HPC found 11 Fairview Terrace importantly associated with Harold A. Palmer, a prominent 1940s and 1950s era Somerville politician, but not with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City as Palmer had retired from public life when this house was constructed and had little lasting impact on the City of Somerville.

The house is architecturally significant due to the rarity of Ranch style houses within the City, which is a predominant style of the mid-20th century; however, these intermittently located Ranch style homes reflect limited mid-20th century residential infill development. These Ranch style homes, such as the subject dwelling either necessitated the demolition of more contextual buildings, or were constructed on newly subdivided property.

The house style is wide-spread elsewhere in the country but is not emblematic of the housing stock in the city. It is not an exemplary version of its type and is located where few would note its presence. Therefore, Staff do not find the proposed demolition of 11 Fairview Terrace detrimental to the architectural 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 not detrimental to the heritage of the City, and consequently not in the best interest of the public to preserve or rehabilitate. Therefore, due to the lack of information on Harold A. Palmer's legacy, frequency of this type of residential dwelling throughout the nation, and the building's lack of architectural distinction, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission do not find 11 Fairview Terrace 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).





