



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

DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE STAFF REPORT

Site:	290 Highland Avenue
Case:	HPC 2015.002
Applicant Name:	Brent A. Berc
Date of Application:	January 6, 2015
Recommendation:	Not Significant
Hearing Date:	February 17, 2015

I. Historical Association

Historical Context: Building permits and map research suggest that the house that had been located on Cedar Street on this corner was demolished and replaced by a Standard Oil Company brick service station with a 2 bay greasing station in 1931. At some point between then and 1955, when the building was remodeled, the station became a Socony Mobil station. Many of these stations had signature architecture that helped a motorist identify their preferred brand of gasoline from a distance.

Evolution of Site: Highland Avenue has been a major thoroughfare since the last quarter of the 19th century, while Cedar Street is one of the original range ways. As automobiles became the most common form of transportation, service stations proliferated on the edges of residential districts along the major routes of traffic. However, since the 1990s, many of these smaller service stations did not meet the branding needs of the national suppliers and could not easily be altered (from a conversation

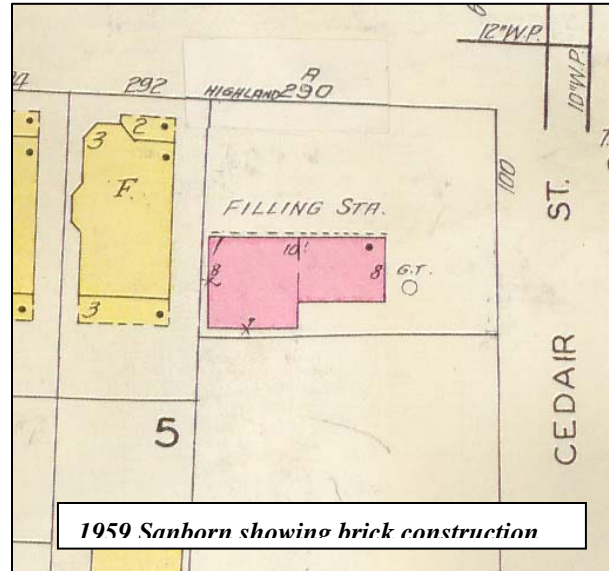


with the Beacon Street Gulfex owner), they were sold off to individual owners. These service stations evolved into corner convenience stores and often were closed due to an inability to compete with larger markets.

Architectural Description: The building is a small one-story L-shaped brick structure with an additional faux brick overlay on two sides. There is a modern pedestrian door on the east façade and a pedestrian door located near two garage doors on the western end of the main façade toward Highland Avenue. The rear of the building reveals a simple painted red brick façade with blocked windows and doors.

It is located on the inner corner of the lot to allow for signage, gas pumps, air hoses and other accoutrements of a service station. All that remains is the rectangular shell of the building and ample parking.

Summary: Constructed as a service station circa 1931, this one-story L-shaped brick building has a faux brick covering and other alterations. This building does not show any characteristic style or of its time period. There are no gas pumps or signage indicating its former use.



Findings on Historical Association

*For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either (a) **importantly associated with people, events or history** or (b) historically or architecturally significant (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B). Findings for (b) are at the end of the next section.*

(a) In accordance with the historic information obtained from **Findings on Historical Association**, which utilizes historic maps/atlas, City reports and directories, and building permit research, and through an examination of resources that document the history of the City, such as *Somerville Past and Present*, Staff **do not** find 290 Highland Avenue to be 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.

Findings: The subject building is not found importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events or with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to the lack of associations with any particular people who were influential in the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City.

II. Historical and Architectural Significance

The findings for historical and/or architectural significance of a historic property address the period, style, method of building construction and association with a reputed architect or builder of the subject property, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B).

The period of significance for 190 Highland Avenue begins with its construction circa 1931 as a Standard Oil Service Station.

Integrity

The National Park Service identifies historic integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance. A property should possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent or contain the values and qualities for which it is judged significant; therefore, the following is an identification and evaluation of these qualities and alterations as they affect the ability of the subject property to convey significance.

- a. Location: The building has not been moved.
- b. Design: The building is a simple flat-roofed l-shaped box with automotive and pedestrian openings
- c. Materials: The building is brick as evidenced on the Sanborn maps and has two sides covered with a white faux brick veneer.
- d. Alterations: It is likely that the eastern side of the building had numerous large windows to display goods for sale. Currently, there are no un-blocked windows on the rear and none on the street sides of the building. All the doors have been replaced. There is no evidence of any decorative brickwork on the main facades. There are the remains of a wood cornice on the rear of the building.

Evaluation of Integrity:

Does the subject parcel represent a distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction?

The size and the location of the building on the lot indicate that it had once been a service station. Although Highland Avenue is a major local artery, such buildings are not a part of the expected streetscape.

Does the subject parcel represent an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or region due to its singular physical characteristics or landscape?

While the building is located at the intersection of two well-frequented roads, it is not used as a landmark to describe a route or a relationship to other locations within the city.

Findings for Historical and Architectural Significance

*For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either (a) importantly associated with people, events or history or (b) **historically or architecturally significant** (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B). Findings for (a) can be found at the end of the previous section.*

(b) In accordance with the **Finding on Historical and Architectural Significance**, which addresses period, style, method of building construction, and association with a reputed architect or builder, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures, as well as integrity, which assess the ability of the property to convey significance, Staff do not find 290 Highland Avenue historically or architecturally significant.

Findings: The subject building is not found historically and architecturally significant due to its inability to convey a particular period, style or method of construction due to alterations; and its lack of association with a reputed architect or builder. The building is not part of a group of similar or related buildings.

III. 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 meeting for a Determination of Significance. 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.

For a Determination of Significance, the structure must be either (A) listed on the National Register or (B) at least 50 years old.

(A) The structure is NOT listed on or within an area listed on the National Register of Historic Places, nor is the structure the subject of a pending application for listing on the National Register.

OR

(B) The structure, circa 1931, is at least 50 years old.

AND

For a Determination of Significance under (B), the subject building must be found either (a) importantly associated with people, events or history or (b) historically or architecturally significant.

(a) In accordance with the *Findings on Historical Association*, which utilizes historic maps/atlas, City reports and directories, and building permit research, and through an examination of resources that document the history of the City, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission do not find 290 Highland Avenue 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.**

Findings: The subject building is not found importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events or with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to the lack of associations with any particular people who were influential in the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City.

OR

(b) In accordance with the *Findings on Historical and Architectural Significance*, which addresses period, style, method of building construction, and association with a reputed architect or builder, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures, as well as integrity, the ability to convey significance, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission do not find 290 Highland Avenue historically and architecturally significant.**

Findings: The subject building is not found historically and architecturally significant due to its inability to convey a particular period, style or method of construction due to alterations; and its lack of association with a reputed architect or builder. The building is not part of a group of similar or related buildings.

