



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: 82 Highland Avenue
Case: HPC 2013.083
Applicant Name: LaRosa Development

Date of Application: October 22, 2013
Recommendation:
Hearing Date: November 7, 2013

HPC received: October 22, 2013

I. Historical Association

Architectural Description: This vinyl sided 2-story plus mansard has an asphalt shingle roof, and 2 pedimented dormers on each side. There are no brackets along the eaves.

The second floor has a bay window each of the east, west and north sides which may have originally descended to ground level. Enclosed stairways can be seen on the east and south sides of the building. The eastern stairs are enclosed by vinyl and stone veneer and covered by a slanted roof. The southern stairway is constructed as a box rising to two stories. A mansard roof with dormers can be seen on the east side rear ell.



82 Highland Avenue, October 2013

The ground floor main façade is dominated by a wide-storefront with stone veneer, large windows and pull-down security grates, a signage. A stairway and entry to the apartments are located on the east side of the building. The west side has a smaller plate glass window with a pull-down security grate and no other fenestration. The south side addition against the asphalted yard has no windows visible.

Historical Description: The building appears on the 1874 Hopkins Atlas attributed to the ownership to Charles F Barton, carpenter who appears at this location in the 1869 Directory. By 1881 James Hall Jr, carriage manufacturer and his wife, a piano and harp teacher are living at 82 Highland Avenue. The 1995 Bromley Atlas shows Annie M. Milner, widow of John according to



City Directories as the owner. She lived at #82 with J. George Milner, Tufts student and Mirion H. Milner, teacher in 1903.

In 1906, F Clayton received a building permit to construct a stairway and chamber (probably the south side addition). This indicates that the house may have been turned into a 2-family residence because in 1913, two unrelated people, George C. Souther, auditor and Mrs. Margaret J. Pinkham, widow of John T are shown to be living in the house according to the City Directory.

By 1924, residents were Mary Burke, and Samuel and Jennie Finkelstein. Samuel Finkelstein, confectioner and Charles B. Lung, laundry shared the storefronts. The Finkelsteins lived at #82 through 1960. He had a variety store there in 1933. Harry Chin ran the laundry that year and lived in the other unit above the shop in 1933. By 1940, Star Cleansers, dry cleaning had taken over as the business with Samuel Levine, proprietor and his wife, Mabel living upstairs. Samuel Finkelstein took over the storefront across Prescott Street at 84 Highland Avenue, known as Sam's Lunch.

Other residents beside Samuel and Jennie Finkelstein included Alfred C Lincoln, machinist, Elizabeth Allen housewife and Florence Finkelstein, bookkeeper in 1950. In 1960, Samuel, storekeeper and Jennie Finkelstein, housewife, Alfred C Lincoln, machine operator and Louis Saulnier Jr., mechanic and Mary A Saulnier, housewife.

Architect: Unknown, 78 and 84 Highland Avenue appear to have been built at approximately the same time by the same architect.

Context/Evolution: Highland Avenue has been a major thoroughfare for most of the City's history. While by 1874, a number of houses had been constructed along the south side of Highland Avenue, which had been platted, there were still numerous lots that were not developed. The maps indicate that there had been a stable on the south east corner of the lot. The 1900 Sanborn map shows a wrap around porch at the corner of the building, the lot divided and the stable has been replaced with house.

A 1914 building permit to alter a store indicates that the first floor had been already altered for commercial use. By 1933, the Sanborn map shows that the ground floor of # 82 has been divided into 2 storefronts and the rear addition enlarged. The 1950 Sanborn showed no changes. According to building permits, in 1959, a fire escape was erected on the rear of the building from the 3rd floor to grade. From 1965 through 1999, the Ragusa family made further alterations to the building: asbestos siding (1965), exterior stairways and altered the storefront (1968), added the roll-up steel door (1979), vinyl siding (1988), asphalt roof shingles (1991), and new 12' x 5' addition (1993).

Summary: Originally built as a large single family, this mansard home has undergone numerous changes to the exterior throughout the 20th century. The current use with ground floor commercial with residential units above has altered the perception of the building.

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/atlasses, 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 82 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. No further information was found on any of the owners or tenants beyond the most basic information although many speak fondly of Sam's Lunch as a hang-out for students from the high school.

The subject building is not found to be importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to the lack of specific information.

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 82 Highland Avenue is the last 3rd of the 19th century as a suburban home that lined Highland Avenue similar to the mansards at 78 and 84 Highland Avenue.

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 design has altered over time leaving only the remains of earlier design such as the mansard roof and dormers.
- c. Materials: The materials have altered. No exterior materials reflect the original ones.
- d. Alterations: The roof and main body of the house can be seen on the second and third (mansard) floors. The first floor and rear of the building exhibit the largest alterations with the accumulation of enclosed stairways and the construction of two ground floor storefronts replacing a porch and the parlor floor of the house.

Evaluation of Integrity:

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

Although the building was constructed at the same time as 2 other nearby mansard houses on Highland Avenue, the intervening modern apartment building separates it on one side from one mansard and Prescott Street separates it on the other. The houses running down Prescott Street evince a number of different styles. It is not part of a distinguishable entity.

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 house has a familiar mansard roof and bay windows, the dominance of the storefront and the neighboring department building keep the house from becoming any sort of landmark.

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 82 Highland Avenue historically or architecturally significant.

The subject building is not found historically and architecturally significant due to the number of alterations. The roofline in the context of the other roofs of the group is not sufficient to carry the building's significance

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 1869, 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/atlasses, 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 82 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.**

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 82 Highland Avenue historically and architecturally significant.**







