



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

*HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION*

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**DETERMINATION OF PREFERABLY PRESERVED STAFF REPORT**

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Site: 82 Highland Avenue

Case: HPC 2013.083

Applicant Name: Gabriel & Gladys Ragusa

Date of Application: Tuesday, October 22, 2013

Date of Significance: Tuesday, November 19, 2013

Recommendation: Not Preferably Preserved

Hearing Date: Tuesday, January 21, 2014



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

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**I. Meeting Summary: Determination of Significance**

On Tuesday, November 19, 2013, the Historic Preservation Commission, in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (2003-05), made a determination that 82 Highland Avenue 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. 1869 because Charles F Barton, carpenter is listed at this location in the earliest (1869) Town Directory and therefore more than 50 years old.

In accordance with *Criteria (i)*, listed above, the Commission determined the structure 'Significant' because it was 'importantly associated ... with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the



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City.’ The businesses in the building exemplify the economic and social history of the City as typical of those serving the neighborhoods in which they occurred.

In accordance with *Criteria (ii)*, listed above, the Commission found to be architecturally ‘Significant’ in the context of a group of buildings in which the ground floor had been altered for commercial uses. It demonstrates a typical early 20<sup>th</sup> century alteration found throughout the City at corners where the street cars stopped. Homes were altered rather than razed. The building also retains its roofline, dormers, bays and essential massing above the ground floor demonstrating the character and style of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Mansard home.

## II. Additional Information

### *Additional Information:*

- Storefronts on ground floors were common throughout the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These were typically located at streetcar stops, attracting trade as people went about their daily business. They could be on the ground floors of residential apartment buildings or added to existing homes. In several cases the buildings were raised to accommodate a full sized retail space.
- 82, 84-86, and 90 Highland Avenue were constructed as single-family Mansards with added storefronts on the ground floor.

### *Comparable Structures:*

Predominant differences between the comparable nearby buildings and the subject building are in the individual arrangements. 84-86 Highland Avenue shows the storefronts added to either side of the house; 90 Highland Avenue has the retail/office space added to the front of the building; 2 Prescott shows a fully gutted ground floor with a side entry for the residential portion; and 54 Summer Street exhibiting the raised building variation common in the 1920s and 30s.



Left to right: 84-86 Highland Avenue, 90 Highland Avenue,



Left to right: 2 Prescott Street, 54 Summer Street

Examples from elsewhere in the City, show a similar pattern of alterations. The buildings below have all been raised up to allow for ground floor retail. 126 Pearl Street is dated 1922 on a parapet pediment.



Left to right: 158 Broadway, 160 Broadway, 126 Pearl Street

### 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?*

The form and massing of this mixed-use building represents a common alteration found throughout the City. The initial base structure in this case was a Mansard which was common in the areas of the City developed during the 1870s and 1880s. Storefront additions can be seen along most of the main streets located along the streetcar lines. As the City became denser and the cost of land compared with the cost of building an entire new structure for both purposes made it more favorable to either alter the ground floor or to raise the building up an entire story.

The upper portions of the buildings retain their original character while the storefront portions were altered with time to meet changing shopping patterns and changing aesthetics. The locations of the original entries and the keys to the floor plans are lost. This pattern holds true at 82 Highland Avenue as well. The dormers and fenestration of the upper floors remains clear despite the additions of egress stairs, while the storefronts were altered to reflect changing aesthetics.

- 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 mixed use building 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 Highland Avenue. The main massing component, two-stories including the mansard above the storefront, remains evident while the 1970s storefront attests to the 20<sup>th</sup> century uses of the ground floor. A stone veneer staircase to the second floor is located on the east side and another large staircase addition can be found on the southwest corner of the building. The interior of the store reveals structural columns placed to support the top two stories, two window casings and an interior door as the only remains of the ground floor of the house.

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

The Commission determined that this structure is Significant due to with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City.' The businesses in the building exemplify the economic and social history of the City as typical of those serving the neighborhoods in which they occurred.

They also found it architecturally 'Significant' in the context of a group of buildings in which the ground floor had been altered for commercial uses. It demonstrates a typical early 20<sup>th</sup> century alteration found throughout the City at corners where the street cars stopped. Homes were altered rather than razed. The building also retains its roofline, dormers, bays and essential massing above the ground floor demonstrating the character and style of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Mansard home constructed for the middle class.

- 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 on Highland Avenue and is located across from City Hall and the Central Park concourse.

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

As noted above, Second Empire or Mansard style houses are found throughout the City. Several similar unaltered Mansards can be found on Highland Avenue. Buildings altered in this fashion are still very common as demonstrated in the photos above.

***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' because the c. 1869 structure was more than 50 years old and 'importantly associated ... with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City.' The 20<sup>th</sup> Century businesses in the building exemplify the economic and social history of the City as typical of those serving the neighborhoods in which they occurred and architecturally 'Significant' in the context of a group of buildings in which the ground floor had been altered for commercial uses. It demonstrates a typical early 20<sup>th</sup> Century alteration found throughout the City at corners where the street cars stopped. Homes were altered rather than razed. The building also retains its roofline, dormers, bays and essential massing above the ground floor demonstrating the character and style of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Mansard home. The many alterations to the Mansard are such that it could never be returned to its original state. The information provided and consideration criteria (a-e) listed above convey that this type of dwelling is common in many neighborhoods throughout the City, as is the associated streetscape, and has minimal remaining architectural detail, other than form.



Therefore, Staff does not find the potential demolition of 82 Highland Avenue 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 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 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 on Highland Avenue, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission do not find 82 Highland Avenue ‘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).*

82 Highland Avenue

