



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:	17-27 Holland Street Johnny D's Uptown
Case:	HPC 2015.062
Applicant Name:	Carla DeLellis
Date of Application:	September 23, 2015
Date of Significance:	October 20, 2015
Recommendation:	NOT Preferably Preserved
Hearing Date:	November 17, 2015



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

I. Meeting Summary: Determination of Significance

On Tuesday, October 20, 2015, the Historic Preservation Commission, in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (2003-05), made a determination that 17-27 Holland Street 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;*

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. 1923.



The period of significance for 17-27 Holland Street begins in the early 1920s as a restaurant and shops and continues through to the present day as a prominent music club. See the Staff Report on the Determination of Significance for a full description.

In accordance with *Criteria (i)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings, due to the association of with businesses important to the local community, such as hardware stores, fish markets and restaurants from the 1920s through the 1960s.

In accordance with *Criteria (ii)*, listed above, the Commission also found the subject building historically and architecturally significant because it establishes the scale of the 1920s storefronts along Holland Street.

II. Additional Information

Additional Research:

- Map research revealed that three-story buildings on either side of and across the street from 17-27 Holland Street were constructed prior to 1900, thereby setting the scale for that section of Davis Square
- Building permit files from Inspectional Services do not provide further relevant information.
- In the opinion of Christopher Skelly at the Massachusetts Historical Commission, 'significance' is a separate determination from that of age, and is therefore not necessarily bounded by the 50 year determination.

Site Visit:

Another site visit conducted January 3, 2013 illustrates that the subject structure is located directly after the bend on the left side (see photo). There is one residential structure between the subject structure and the encroaching commercial development, while the remaining structures are all residential and predominantly historic building stock.



Holland Street, looking toward Teele Square from Davis Square with Johnny Ds between the blue building and the white building on the right.

Comparable Structures:

There are numerous one-story concrete block and brick storefronts scattered throughout the City but predominantly along major arterials. Predominant differences between the comparable dwellings and the subject dwelling are in the decorative pilasters, and elaborations of the parapets. Humbler buildings had brick facades while the more high-end buildings were of cast stone.



Top: 379 Somerville Avenue (c. 1920) and 96 Highland Avenue (c. 1926)

Bottom: 130 Broadway (c. 1925) and 99 Beacon Street (c. 1920)

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?*

As can be seen from the comparable 1920s storefronts, little of 17-27 Holland Street retains the character of the era. The building permit record indicates that the buildings have undergone numerous alterations and no longer reflect the 1920s from its main vista.

- 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 building is not distinguished architecturally, having a façade that dates predominantly to the 1970s or 1980s. The physical characteristics of the building are neither unique nor emblematic of its current use nor its historic use as restaurant, fish shop and hardware store.

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

The Commission agreed that the association to the local community businesses, such as hardware stores, fish markets and restaurants from the 1920s through the 1960s were important on the local level. However, since then, the music club has put Somerville on the map as venue hosting premiere musicians with world-wide reputations and has done so for over 25 years.

- 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 Holland Street and is located just across the street from the Davis Square MBTA stop and the Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates. Davis Square extends several blocks up Holland Street toward Teele Square to the west and east along Elm Street toward Porter Square. 17-27 Holland Street is centrally located within the Square.

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

Single story storefronts from the 1920s are common throughout the City. Several are in more intact condition than 17-27 Davis Square. There are also several establishments known for their music programming; only the Somerville Theatre is of the same caliber but on a different scale.

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 buildings themselves are not distinguished and do not retain the architectural character of the time of their construction. The buildings' primary significance lies in their current use as an internationally known music venue which can be relocated to a different building or continued within a new or re-constructed building. Alterations to the exterior are not indicative of the interior use. Therefore, Staff does not find the potential demolition of 17-27 Holland 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 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 commercial structure and associated streetscape within the City,

minimal remaining detail on the rear of the building, number of alterations, and the location of the structure within the Davis Square Streetscape, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission do not find 17-27 Davis Square Street 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).

