



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

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DETERMINATION OF PREFERABLY PRESERVED STAFF REPORT

Site:	53 Kent Street
Case:	HPC 2013.048
Applicant Name:	Kent Street Partners LLC
Date of Application:	July 31, 2013
Date of Significance:	August 20, 2013
Recommendation:	Preferably Preserved
Hearing Date:	September 17, 2013



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

I. Meeting Summary: Determination of Significance

On Tuesday, August 20, 2013, the Historic Preservation Commission, in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (2003-05), made a determination that 53 Kent 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 is both

- (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**
- (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.1850. The dwelling at 53 Kent Street is not clear to have been present on the 1852 Draper Map of Somerville.

In accordance with *Criteria (i)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings due to the retention of several architectural details that continue to illustrate the Greek Revival style, as an example of working class housing specifically associated with the Middlesex Bleachery, and as part of an early to



mid nineteenth century collection of housing associated with the early development and industry of Somerville.

In accordance with *Criteria (ii)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings, as the structure is a representative of mid nineteenth century working class housing stock due to the remaining integrity of the structure with regard to original form, massing, fenestration pattern, and material. In addition, due to the location of the building within such close proximity to a small collection of structures that represent the same cultural context, this dwelling is significant within a context of a group of buildings which, together, represent the early development and industry of Somerville.

II. Additional Information

Additional Research:

- Kent Street connected Beacon Street with Somerville Avenue, then Milk Row, as early as 1813. The first passenger railroad station in Somerville opened in 1835 and in 1842, the Kent Street Station opened near the Harvard Branch railway spur. Nearby, Kent Court became located near the Fitchburg Railroad tracks after the Civil War.



1852 Draper map with 53 Kent Street circled in red

- According to the 1858 Walling map, a small collection of mid nineteenth century structures along this portion of Kent Street and Kent Court appears to remain existent. Located near the Bleachery, these dwellings likely housed employees of the Bleachery, later industries that located in the immediate area, or the railroad. 45 Kent Street, a two-family, is identified as c.1830-1840 by the short eaves and windows. Another dwelling located at 6 Kent Court is identified as c.1750 and moved to its present location from Somerville Avenue. This structure has a gambrel roof, a five-bay façade that is one room deep and a rear lean-to. Several structures on Kent Court appear similar to the workers cottages located near the brickyards, three bays wide and one room deep with high brick foundations/



1858 Walling map with Kent Street and Kent Court circled in red

- Census data does not provide new information but does confirm that Nicholas Flemming was a resident of the subject dwelling in 1860. However, Nicholas is not found after 1860 and census data does not consistently list other members of the Flemming family.
- Building permit files from Inspectional Services provide minimal information. In 2012, a permit was granted to strip and reroof the roof.

Site Visit:

Site visits illustrate that the subject structure is isolated from the other residential structures, located on Kent Street and Kent Court, which share the same historic context. However, the subject dwelling is still within a close proximity to these dwellings and, together, these structures illustrate a period in Somerville that has been predominantly lost, other than a few interspersed dwellings along Somerville Avenue.



Corner of Kent Street and Kent Court, 2013.

These two streetscapes illustrate an early period in the historical context and development of the City.

Comparable Structures:

There are few structures that are comparable to the subject dwelling due to the age of the structure, the early historical context this structure represents and the continuing high level of architectural integrity that is retained. However, there are a number of single-family dwellings with a modest 1½ story massing located throughout the City. While there are comparable dwellings located along Kent Court, these have a high foundation and have a slightly later construction date. Comparable structures within the City and this general neighborhood include:

- 25 Clyde Street (LHD)
- 12 Hinckley Street
- 80 Hinckley Street
- Kent Court
- 8 Mount Pleasant (NR)



Top: 25 Clyde Street (LHD); 12 Hinckley Street; 80 Hinckley Street
Bottom: Kent Court view east; 8 Mount Pleasant (NR)

Predominant differences between the comparable dwellings and the subject dwelling are the orientation of the building, high level of architectural integrity, and height of the brick foundation. Other than 8 Mt. Pleasant, the comparable dwellings have a slightly later construction date. Most of the comparable structures have a side-hall entry, some with a porch, open or closed, and a similar fenestration pattern.

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 subject structure, c.1850, is a 1½ story gable-end dwelling in the Greek Revival style. There are a number of remaining architectural features, such as the cornice return and entablature frieze for both the main massing and the rear ell, six-over-six window sashes with mullions, and a front entry transom. In addition, a small collection of mid nineteenth century

structures along this portion of Kent Street and Kent Court appears to remain existent and to retain, at minimum, a moderate degree of historical significance and architectural integrity. While the subject dwelling is located slightly beyond the nineteenth century historical context that is more clearly presented on Kent Court, the structure located at 45 Beacon Street continues this context, linking Kent Street with Kent Court. In addition, the subject dwelling is associated with the Middlesex Bleachery as Nicholas, David and Timothy Flemming are identified in multiple directories as employees.

- 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 subject structure retains a high level of historical and architectural integrity due to the retention of original materials as well minimal alterations. In addition, this structure is part of a small collection of mid nineteenth century working class housing the represents the early development and industry of Somerville and is associated with the Middlesex Bleachery.

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

Working class housing constructed in association with Middlesex Bleachery employees predominantly represents an aspect of local history. However, as the age of this structure predates the earliest City map and due to retaining a high level of architectural integrity, this structure could date slightly earlier and therefore be of state significance.

- 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 the corner of Beacon and Kent streets; however, due to the humble massing of this structure, the visibility is often overlooked.

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

Dwellings from this time period and of this level of architectural integrity are extremely rare within the City and likely within the surrounding communities as well.

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 due to the remaining integrity of the structure with regard to original form, massing, fenestration pattern, and material and due to the retention of several architectural details that continue to illustrate the Greek Revival style. Additionally, this is a rare and intact example of working class housing specifically associated with the Middlesex Bleachery and is part of an early to mid nineteenth century collection of housing associated with the early development and industry of Somerville. Therefore, Staff finds the potential demolition of 53 Kent 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 detrimental to the heritage of the City, and consequently in the best interest of the public to preserve or rehabilitate. Therefore, due to the level of integrity, association with the Middlesex Bleachery as an intact example of working class housing, and as part of a mid nineteenth century collection of buildings, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 53 Kent 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).

Aerial view of Kent Street and Kent Court; 53 Kent Street is outlined in red.

