



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 SIGNIFICANCE STAFF REPORT

Site: 161 Linwood Street
Case: HPC 2015.014

Applicant Name: Herb Chambers Somerville Corp.
Date of Application: April 17, 2015

Recommendation: Significant
Hearing Date: May 19, 2015



I. Historical Association

Historical Context: With the advent of mass production of automobiles by Henry Ford and other manufacturers, cars became more affordable to the middle classes. Truck and automobile storage garages became common in the early 1920s. According to the 2002 publication **Carriage House to Auto House** by Roger Reed and Greer Hardwicke, multi-car garages of this type were constructed throughout the region to centrally house the vehicles that could not fit into densely packed urban neighborhoods. According to the City's Assessor's records, twenty-two of these storage garages are still extant. Only eight of them have been surveyed. During the same period, service stations and repair shops proliferated.

Evolution of Site: taken from the NR Nomination Form for 1 Fitchburg Street

Development of the Brick Bottom Neighborhood

(T)he streets of the adjacent Brick Bottom neighborhood were determined at a much earlier date. In June of 1857, the Boston & Lowell Railroad hired William Edson, "delineator" of the J.H. Bufford Lithography Company of Boston to create a plan depicting streets bordered by 31 lots in East Somerville. The plan was intended to both advertise the date of a public auction of these lots scheduled for June 30th, 1857 as well as depicting specific lots referenced in Middlesex County deeds. The plan notes that "A special train of cars will leave the depot of the Boston & Lowell Railroad at 3 1/2 o'clock P.M. on the day of the sale to accommodate gentlemen who wish to attend."

The Edson plan depicts a street pattern that, for the most part, is not currently in evidence. Although Linwood and Fitchburg Streets are still extant, the east-west street called Lowell (later London Street) is no longer extant and a north-south street called Chestnut at the eastern side of this tract was added later as an extension of Joy Street to Fitchburg Street. The eastern edge of

the tract is shown as bounded by the Boston & Lowell Railroad embankment (originally constructed by the Grand Junction Railroad during the early 1850s). ...

Between 1857 and the early 1900s, nine dwellings and three stables were built on the future site of the A&P food distribution center. The Boston & Lowell Railroad Company's seven lots were located at the southern margins of the Brick Bottom neighborhood. Irish families named Cunningham, Kelley, McGaffrey and Crowley occupied the houses that were built on these lots. The Irish were but one group within the Brickbottom neighborhood. Indeed, any discussion of the evolution of development ...should be considered within the broader context of the Brickbottom neighborhood. Bounded by the railroad tracks of the Boston & Lowell and Fitchburg Railroad tracks, as well as Somerville Avenue and Washington Street, Brickbottom, during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, had been an area of clay pits associated with brick making operations. While the Irish constituted a sizable percentage of Brickbottom, the neighborhood was, in fact, a melting pot. Represented within this neighborhood's small area were families of Portuguese, Italian, Greek and Eastern European Jewish heritage. During the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these ethnic groups were drawn to Brickbottom's inexpensive rental housing as well as its proximity to jobs in nearby factories as we Union Square commercial concerns. Additionally, Brickbottom's proximity to the industries located near Union Square was another reason for settlement in the neighborhood.

In 1925, the Brickbottom neighborhood was bisected by the Northern Artery, later the McGrath Highway. This division created by the new transportation corridor's presence hastened the Brickbottom area's transition from residential to light industrial and commercial. One result of this change of use was the shift in Brick Bottom's scale from one of modest, low-rise wooden residences constructed primarily of wood to larger masonry buildings. Gradually replacing the neighborhood's houses were the long rectangular forms of garages, warehouses and light industrial structures constructed of brick, concrete and metal. The two five- story warehouse and bakery components of the A&P complex are the tallest buildings ever built in Brick Bottom; therefore, for reasons of height alone, this complex is a major East Somerville landmark.

Early history of the property prior to its development as a garage was not investigated. The 1900 Sanborn map shows a house with two barns or stables on the lot. The Building Permit record was reviewed for information. Permits were issued to E. Robitaille for a 72 car garage with a flat roof and tar and gravel flat roof. By 1933, the Sanborn map shows the building to be used as truck storage for 40 vehicles. In 1936 "Robitaille" cut an opening in the rear wall of the garage. The Robitaille family can be found in early twentieth century accounts of Brickbottom, where they had a horse and buggy garage on Joy Street prior to World War I.

A 1947 Building Permit was issued to E. Scannell for a loading dock canopy, which may have been mis-entered since the Scannell family owned the garage next door at 151 Linwood Street.

During the late 1950s, the Brick Bottom neighborhood was demolished to make way for the Inner Belt Highway leaving a few industrial and automotive buildings.

In 1965 the Cortage Rental Company received Building Permits to erect signs. No other information could be found.

In 1977, the Blackhorse Realty Trust spent approximately \$10,000 to erect 'masonry paint'. This is probably the parged finish found over the original brick construction. The deed submitted to the property notes that the Tauro family owned this property since at least 1977. Finally in 1989 Tauro Realty removed 3 underground tanks and added 2 windows and a door.

Architectural Description:

This hip-roofed garage with a parapet consisting of a shallow central pediment flanked by two rectangular elements was constructed in 1924 to hold 72 automobiles by E. Robitaille. It is 5 bays wide by 8 bays long. These are articulate with buttresses. A small machinery shop wing is located about 3/4 of the way back from Linwood Street. Originally constructed of brick, only the front façade retains that character despite many layers of paint. The sides have been parged over and reveal the original brick where there has been spalling. Metal multi-paned windows on the side have been painted closed, while the remaining windows on the front façade retain their glass. According to the building permits, alterations include new door openings in 1936; a loading dock and canopy in 1947 by E. Scannell (although this may be in error as E. Scannell owned the adjacent property at 151 Linwood Street); and new doors and windows in 1989. As can be seen in the photos several of the openings have been closed or painted over. The roof has 5 skylights not visible from the public right of way. The roof is surmounted by 3 cylindrical vents with conical covers.

This structure is associated with the development of automobile commercial services, and as a large, well-executed, and preserved example of the early 20th century private garage, which were common throughout the City. The building represents twentieth century infill development within what was a residential neighborhood at the time of construction.

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 find 161 Linwood Street 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.

The subject building is found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to an association with the development of automobile commercial services and as a large, well-executed, and preserved example of the early 20th century private garage, which were common throughout 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 161 Linwood Street begins in 1924 as an automotive storage building and continues to the present day as an auto body repair shop.

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. The neighborhood altered in the late 1950s from residential to industrial due to the proposed construction of the Innerbelt Highway through the neighborhood.
- b. **Design:** The original design of this structure remains clearly evident. While several windows and doors have been replaced, added or removed, their original location is still understood.
- c. **Materials:** Except for the main façade this masonry building has been covered with a thin cement coating that hides the original brick. The two of the original metal windows are retained on the main façade and two on the western secondary façade. The roof is covered by a rubber membrane.
- a. **Alterations:** This structure has undergone a number of small modifications over the years, specifically with regard to exterior surface, and to the removed or replaced windows and doors. Although the alteration of these components reduces the remaining integrity of this structure, the openings have been preserved and the design intent of each façade remains clear.

Evaluation of Integrity: The building retains its original form and massing, and continues to represent a typical example of a c.1924 storage garage. Although several windows and doors have been removed and/or replaced, the original intent of design is still evident. In addition, the use for this property has remained consistent since the time of construction.

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

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?

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 find 161 Linwood Street historically or architecturally significant.

The subject building is found historically and architecturally significant due to an association with the development of automobile commercial services and as a large, characteristic and preserved example of the early 20th century private garage, which were once common throughout the City.

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 1924, 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.

This structure is associated with the development of automobile commercial services, and as a large, well-executed, and preserved example of the early 20th century private garage, which were common throughout the City. The building represents twentieth century infill development within what was a residential neighborhood at the time of construction.

The building retains its original form and massing, and continues to represent a typical example of a c.1924 storage garage. Although several windows and doors have been removed and/or replaced, the original intent of design is still evident. In addition, the use for this property has remained consistent since the time of construction.

(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 find 161 Linwood Street 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.**

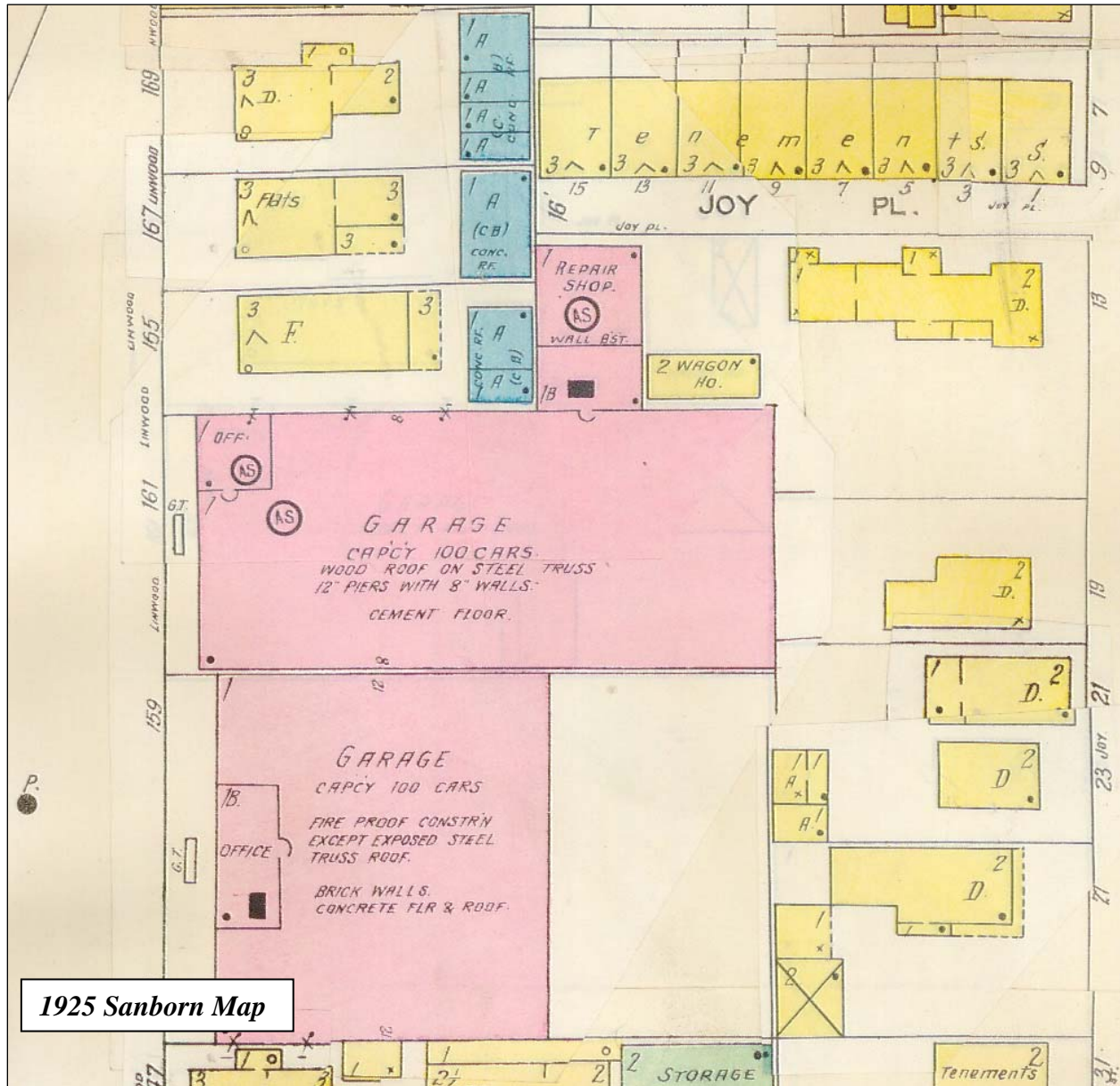
OR

(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 find 161 Linwood Street historically and architecturally significant.**

The subject building is found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to an association with the development of automobile commercial services and as a large, well-executed, and preserved example of the early 20th century private garage, a type which was common throughout the City.

The subject building is found historically and architecturally significant due to an association with the development of automobile commercial services and as a large, characteristic and preserved example of the early 20th century private garage, which were once common throughout the City.





161 Linwood Street showing brick construction, buttresses, parapet and partially enclosed metal windows.

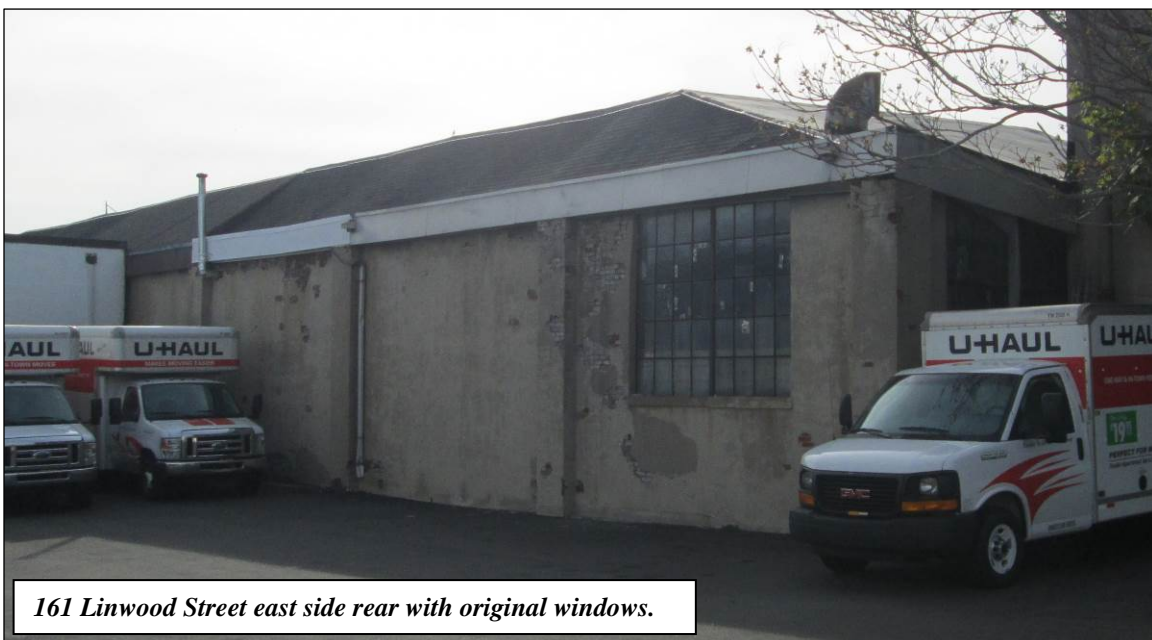




161 Linwood Street rear of repair shop wing



161 Linwood Street showing west side rear and repair shop wing.



161 Linwood Street east side rear with original windows.