



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: 350 Medford Street, aka Reid, Murdoch & Company Warehouse
Case: HPC 2014.031
Applicant Name: City of Somerville
Date of Application: May 27, 2014
Date of Significance: June 18, 2014
Hearing Date: July 15, 2014
Recommendation: Not Preferably Preserved



350 Medford Street, PAL (photo 2013)

I. Meeting Summary: Determination of Significance

On Wednesday, June 18, 2014, the Historic Preservation Commission, in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (2003-05), made a determination that 350 Medford 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, survey work identifies the industrial warehouse as c.1929.

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In accordance with *Criteria (i)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings due to an association with the industry and growth of Gilman Square in the late 1920s, the Reid & Murdoch Company, and the retention of Art Deco details on a large scale industrial warehouse.

In accordance with *Criteria (ii)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings as a representative of 1920s industrial growth of Gilman Square and due to the remaining Art Deco architectural detail of the structure with regard to original form, massing, fenestration pattern, and inlaid stone detail. In addition, due to the location of the structure within a collection of structures that represent the same cultural context, this structure is significant within the context of the group of buildings which, together, retain the historic development of Gilman Square, a small concentration of late 19th century commercial, fraternal, and industrial buildings.

II. Additional Information

National Register Eligibility: In February 2014, PAL, Inc. reports **the Reid & Murdoch Building eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.**

The Reid, Murdoch & Company Warehouse is significant at the local level under Criterion A and C in the areas of industry and architecture. Under Criterion A, the property is one of several large wholesale grocery firms that operated in Somerville and were a substantial component of the city's early twentieth-century economic activity. Reid, Murdoch & Company was a Chicago-based wholesale firm that also sold foods at the retail level under the Monarch brand. The company built their general offices in Chicago in 1914 and constructed a system of factories and warehouses throughout the country. They established a warehouse at Medford Street in 1929 to take advantage of its proximity to the Boston area food market and for the use of the adjacent Boston & Maine Railroad line. Under Criterion C, the property is a well-preserved example of early-twentieth-century industrial architecture that is demonstrative of period approaches to warehousing and loft engineering and also incorporates subtle elements of Art Deco design.



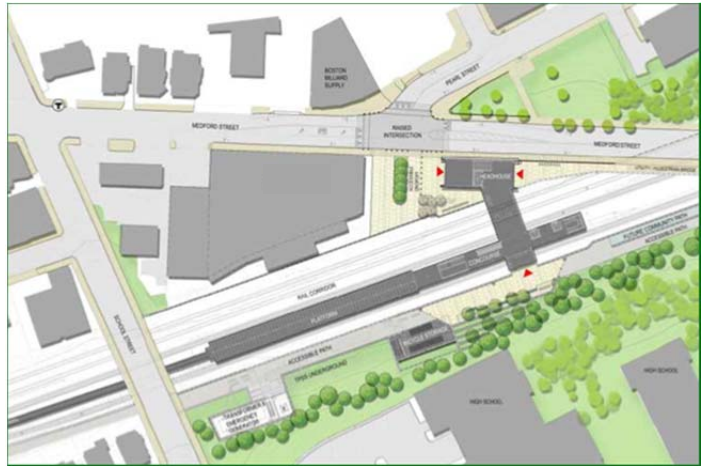
350 Medford Street, primary and south side façades (photo 2014)

Gilman Square Station Area Plan: In February 2014, the Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development published the Gilman Square Station Area Plan.

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The Gilman Square station will be located on the south side of Medford Street, opposite the intersection of Pearl Street and Medford Street. The station will include two new pieces of utility infrastructure. A storm water pump station will be built adjacent to the lower plaza, to help drain water from the train tracks. An electric power substation will also be built near the School Street bridge to provide power to the Green Line trolleys. Based on resident feedback the MBTA's current design of this substation is far smaller and more integrated into the nearby landscape than previous design iterations.

The station itself will be constructed close to the historic site of the former Winter Hill Station (once a stop on the Lowell Commuter Line) on the south side of Medford Street, opposite the Pearl and Medford streets intersection. The station will consist of a head house and one 'island platform' servicing both the inbound and outbound tracks of the Green Line.



350 Medford Street, proposed site of the new Gilman Square Green Line Station, current as of 6/2013

Current Development: The City of Somerville is expecting the MBTA to complete planning for site and building design for Gilman Square station soon. It is estimated that the MBTA will obtain ownership of the station area site by 2015 and will pay for demolition of the existing structure. In an effort to keep the project moving forward, the City has decided to request demolition of the existing historic structure. The MBTA has obtained the services of PAL Inc. who has recorded the building and determined its eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places.

Site Visit:

The building construction is a steel frame with exterior and interior masonry reinforcement. The ground floor is cement; the upper stories are wood frame. Site visits illustrate that the industrial warehouse has architectural merit, but the existing conditions present seismic and building code concerns. The wood floor of the upper stories, the masonry of the primary facade, and the deteriorated architectural details are the most pressing concerns. The exterior masonry has severe deterioration due to water damage. To address the degree of these deteriorated conditions, the remaining architectural integrity of the building would very likely be compromised. Some of the architectural details are and will be salvaged, but the exterior masonry is in very poor condition, particularly the primary facade. In addition, the extent to which the MBTA is required to remove significant portions of the existing building- to widen the right-of-way of the rail corridor and provide an accessible drop-off area to facilitate handicapped and disabled passengers arriving via

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The Ride program- will leave the building fatally compromised in light of its deteriorated condition.

Comparable Structures:

There are multiple structures in the City that are comparable to the subject building. The comparable structures are not located in the same neighborhood, have substantially different architectural detail- such as the lion's head Monarch emblem- and varying historical contexts. While some are more intact than others, each comparable structure illustrates an industrial building scale, rectangular form, and moderate architectural detail. Other comparable structures within the City:

- American Tube Works – Somerville Avenue
- Fruit Nut Cereal Co. – 259 Lowell Street



Left to Right: 438R and 440R Somerville Avenue (American Tube Works Bldg); 259 Lowell Street

Predominant differences between the comparable structures and the subject warehouse are the existing conditions of the masonry material, style and architectural detail. The comparable industrial structures are composed of masonry and retain some detail, but have been altered with additions and inappropriate windows. This type of industrial building is found in multiple areas throughout the City; however, the combination of scale, period of construction, and architectural detail noted by the subject structure, is not found elsewhere in the City.

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:

- How does this building or structure compose or reflect features which contribute to the heritage of the City?*

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The subject structure is a three-story industrial warehouse with a parapet in the Art Deco style. There are remaining architectural features, such as the stone pendants in the parapet and the lion head arched entrance with dropped pendants. This structure contributes to the heritage of the City as a large scale and architecturally intact industrial warehouse from the 1930s. This building shares a historical context with the other structures in Gilman Square, a c. 1900 square framed by three- and four-story commercial buildings, constructed around the intersection of Medford Street and Pearl Street.

- 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 shared context of Gilman Square and the retention of original fabric and fenestration patterns; however, the structural integrity of the building is severely compromised.

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

The twentieth century growth and development of Gilman Square as a commercial center in Somerville is of local significance. Sharing a historical context with the other structures that front onto the square is also of local 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 as an anchor to the Medford streetscape, a component of Gilman Square, and as the new Green Line Station. Residents, officials and the municipality have a vested interest in the development of this site.

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

Multi-story industrial warehouse structures articulating the level of detail from this time period are not found elsewhere in the City; however, many of the comparable structures that do remain are detailed differently, on a smaller scale, and from an earlier time period.

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 building Significant due to the remaining historical and architectural integrity which is illustrated through the association with the development of Gilman Square and the retention of Art Deco architectural details. While the structural integrity of the building is of large concern, Staff acknowledges that the MBTA is not able to salvage the building other than the architectural details that have been incorporated into a Gilman Square MOA, and that the coming Green Line Station is imperative to the growth and development of Gilman Square. Therefore, Staff finds the potential demolition of 350 Medford Street not detrimental to the heritage of the City, but is instead a catalyst for the growth and development of Gilman Square.

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

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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 existing conditions, remaining structural integrity, imperative growth of Gilman Square and the...understood recommendation of not PP, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission do not find 350 Medford 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).

