



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
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*HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION*

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**DETERMINATION OF PREFERABLY PRESERVED STAFF REPORT**

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Site:	4 Milk Place
Case:	HPC 2014.041
Applicant Name:	City of Somerville
Date of Application:	June 19, 2014
Date of Significance:	July 15, 2014
Recommendation:	NOT Preferably Preserved
Hearing Date:	August 19, 2014



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

*4 Milk Place, PAL (photo 2010)*

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

On Tuesday, July 15, 2014, the Historic Preservation Commission, in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (2003-05), made a determination that 26 Prospect 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;*

**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. 1870. The dwelling at 4 Milk Place Prospect is not illustrated on maps prior to the creation of Milk Place in the 20th century.

In accordance with *Criteria (i)*, listed above, the Commission disagreed with Staff findings due to the modest massing and form of a workers cottage, the long-term association as an income producing property, and due to the relationship of the parcel with the drainage and abatement of the Miller's River.

In accordance with *Criteria (ii)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings that the building is not significant in this category.

## **II. Additional Information**

### *Additional Research:*

Additional deed research, done by a qualified preservation consultant, presents historic context for the five buildings once located on this parcel - 4, 9, & 10 Milk Place, and 258 & 264-268 Somerville Avenue. Benjamin Allen laid out 18 house lots along Somerville Avenue and Allen Street in 1864. Two of these lots would later become Milk Place. Under George C. Bonner's ownership in 1871, these two lots were consolidated. Bonner was a conductor on the Fitchburg Railroad and boarded on Bonner Place, which is now 20 Columbus Avenue. Bonner is not known to have lived at this location, but was likely used for income. Filling in the Miller's River began in July 1873 and by 1874, Bonner's property became more valuable. Earliest known residents are from the 1880s; none are known to have significance.

### *Site Visit:*

Staff conducted a site visit of the house on August 5, 2014. Architecturally, 4 Milk Place is nondescript due to the vinyl siding, doors, and windows. There is a concrete block foundation which is a later alteration. The interior does not retain visible architectural detail and is in very poor condition.

### *Union Square Revitalization Plan:*

The 2012 Union Square Revitalization Plan has been informed by a shared community consensus to bring rail transit and new development to Union Square. In the early 1900s, electric streetcars made 88 stops a day in Union Square to bring Somerville commuters to their jobs in Boston and to bring commuters to the industries within Union Square. Since the streetcar system was removed, the local economy has declined. While Union Square has recently seen more retail and restaurant activity, the Square has not yet begun to meet the SomerVision goal of becoming a commercial job center. Union Square has been the subject of decades of plans and studies, which have involved extensive public participation. In 2009, the Board of Alderman approved new zoning for much of Union Square, developed in anticipation of the coming MBTA station, which was a product of more than 20 community meetings. The 2012 Revitalization Plan will allow for the 2009 zoning to be implemented in order to create the shared vision for this area.

The "North Prospect Block," abuts the new station and will benefit from development as a gateway to Union Square, thereby linking the transit station to the Square as well as providing new jobs and fiscal benefits. The Plan will allow the City to convey parcels to the MBTA in an expeditious manner, thereby ensuring that there will be light rail transit to Union Square.

### *Massachusetts Historical Commission:*

A letter dated August 6, 2014 from the MHC notes that the properties at 4 Milk Place, 26-28 Prospect, and 30 Prospect are included in the MHC "Inventory of Historic Assets;" however, none of these buildings are listed in the State Register, nor do they appear to meet the criteria of eligibility for listing.



*Aerial of Milk Place*

*Comparable Buildings:*

There are a number of single-family dwellings with a modest 1 1/2 story massing located throughout the City. These similar buildings represent the same time period of construction, but often have a historic context that is more intact with a higher level of integrity. Comparable structures within the City and this general neighborhood include:

- 21 Allen Street
- 282 Lowell Street
- 12 Hinckley Street
- 80 Hinckley Street
- 8 Mount Pleasant (NR)



Top: 21 Allen Street; 282 Lowell Street; 12 Hinckley Street

Bottom: 80 Hinckley 8 Mount Pleasant (NR)

Predominant differences between the comparable dwellings and the subject dwelling are the retention of a surrounding historic context and architectural integrity. Most of the comparable structures have a side-hall entry, some with a porch, open or closed, and a similar three-bay 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 form and massing of this single-family dwelling represents a popular 19th century residential building type within the City; however, the building does not contribute to a streets cape due to the location of the structure and the previously demolished buildings located along Somerville Avenue.



- 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 single-family dwelling is retained within the modest form and massing of a workers cottage, the long-term association as an income producing property, and due to the relationship of the parcel with the drainage and abatement of the Miller's River. While the massing and form remain intact, the lost historical context and original fabric adversely effect the integrity of this structure.

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

This building is of local significance. Although the building is associated with George Bonner, this was an income property and Bonner is not known to have resided at this location.

The Commission determined that this structure is Significant due to the modest form and massing of a workers cottage, the long-term association as an income producing property, and due to the relationship of the parcel with the drainage and abatement of the Miller's River.

- 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 moderately visible along Somerville Avenue, due to the setback. It is in the public interest to remove all the current uses which are located on highly polluted ground. Through the Union Square Revitalization Plan, in order for the area as a whole to be viable and to enable light rail transit, the individual parcels must be consolidated into organized development parcels; therefore, it is in the public interest to demolish.

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

This type of single-family dwelling is found in various neighborhoods throughout the City. Representative examples better retain their historical context as well as architectural integrity.

***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?***

This is a fairly common mid-19th century building type that is represented in multiple locations across the City. The building is mostly intact; however, the surrounding historical context has been altered, specifically on the remaining area of this parcel. The association with George Bonner is significant, but he is not known to have lived at this location. Last, due to the undesirable uses that have taken over the Prospect Street thoroughfare and drastically altered the urban landscape, the City has identified this area of blight as an urban renewal district, which will be developed to provide light rail transit to the Square. Upon consideration of these criteria, it is in the public interest to demolish.

#### **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 building within multiple neighborhoods, the loss of historic context, category of association with George Bonner, and due to the level of blight in the surrounding area as well as location within an identified urban renewal district, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission do not find 4 Milk Place 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).*