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

*HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION*

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**ALTERATION TO A HISTORIC PROPERTY STAFF REPORT**

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Site: 74 Mount Vernon Street c.1873 Walter H. Durell House  
Case: HPC 2016.095 Single Building Local Historic District

Applicant Name: Paul Turcotte, Owner  
Applicant Address: 74 Mount Vernon Street, Somerville, MA 02145

Date of Application: November 10, 2016  
Legal Notice: *Demolish 3 outbuildings.*

Staff Recommendation: Denial; *Conditional* Certificate of Appropriateness  
Date of Public Hearing: January 10, 2017

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**I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION**

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:**

See attached Form B

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT/EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE OR PARCEL:**

See attached Form B

**II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

*1. Proposal of Alteration:*

1. Demolish 2 c. 1913 & 1916 concrete block garage buildings
2. Demolish c. 1890 stable.

See the final pages for details and photos.

**II. FINDINGS**

*1. Prior Certificates Issued/Proposed:*

2002.025 Paul Turcotte C/NA, C/A

1. Install proper footings and rebuild deck and steps;
2. Install vertical lattice;
3. Scrape and paint surfaces as needed.
4. Replace upper section of handrail with wood handrails as per diagram; and
5. Remove existing porch deck, stairs and iron railing/handrail.



*74 Mount Vernon Street, 2016*

2010.045	Paul & Sharon Turcotte	C/NA, C/A	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Remove shrubs &amp; decaying railroad tie wall</li> <li>2. Replace the wood wall with New England field stone;</li> <li>3. Replace existing concrete stairs with granite steps;</li> <li>4. Install a brick landing;</li> <li>5. Construct a second stone retaining wall to define planting areas;</li> <li>6. Remove chain link fence on north side of property; and</li> <li>7. Define the boundary with cobble stones.</li> </ol>
2013.054	Paul Turcotte	C/NA	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All missing and damaged slates to be replaced with slates to match in composition, color, size, shape, texture and installation detail.</li> <li>2. The 3rd floor window sill shall be reconstructed in-kind.</li> </ol>
2016.031	Paul Turcotte	C/NA	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Applicant shall obtain all appropriate building permits prior to commencing work.</li> <li>2. The porches on the rear of the building shall be repaired. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Damaged floorboards, hand and foot rails, balusters and posts shall match the existing in material style, texture, size, shape, and installation detail.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Applicant shall contact HPC Staff upon completion of the work for sign-off that the work was done in accordance with the Certificate of Non-Applicability.</li> </ol>

#### 1. *Precedence:*

- *Are there similar properties / proposals?*
  1. Demolish 2 c. 1913, 1916 & 1922 concrete block garage buildings

Only three proposals for the demolition of early twentieth century concrete block garages have been reviewed in the last 10 years for an historic property was at 57 Columbus Avenue (2012), 17-19 Aldersey Street (2014) and 44 Meacham Road. While typical of the 1920s when hundreds if not thousands of such buildings were constructed for Model Ts and other popularly available cars, the concrete block garages are not within the period of significance for the Walter H. Durell House Local Historic District.

#### 2. Demolish c. 1890 stable.

No stables have been demolished on properties in a Local Historic District. All stables coming through the demolition review process have been determined 'significant' and unless they were irremediably altered and in poor condition 'preferably preserved'. As noted in the Form B, Durell was dealt in wholesale and retail sashes, windows, and doors. He would have needed his own conveyance for his business rather than relying on the street car and railway system than ran past the bottom of the street.

#### 2. *Considerations:*

- *What is the visibility of the proposal?*

One of the concrete block garages is visible from Mount Vernon Street. All the buildings are visible between buildings from Crescent Street. See photos.

- *What are the Existing Conditions of the building / parcel?*

The house appears to be well-maintained as are the outbuildings. The stable was built approximately 15-20 years after the house in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while the concrete block garages are 20<sup>th</sup> century. See photos and Structural Engineers Report at the end of the document.

- *Is the proposal more appropriate than the existing conditions?*

It is not appropriate to remove historic fabric that conveys the history and purpose of a property.

- *Is the proposal more in-keeping with the age, purpose, style and construction of the building?*

The removal of the 20<sup>th</sup> century garages is more in-keeping with the original house. These buildings are not associated with the original owners and their mode of living. They reflect the change from muscle power to motor power during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It is not appropriate to demolish the stable for which the original owner had a clear use and purpose relating to his business.

- *Does the proposal coincide with the General Approach set forth in the Design Guidelines?*

#### **GENERAL APPROACH**

*The primary purpose of Somerville's Preservation Ordinance is to encourage preservation and high design standards in Somerville's Historic Districts, in order to safeguard the City's architectural heritage. The following guidelines ensure that rehabilitation efforts, alterations, and new construction all respect the design fabric of the districts and do not adversely effect their present architectural integrity.*

- A. *The design approach to each property should begin with the premise that the features of historic and architectural significance described in the Study Committee report must be preserved. In general, this tends to minimize the exterior alterations that will be allowed.*
- C. *Whenever possible, deteriorated material or architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced or removed.*
- D. *When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence of the original or later important features.*
- E. *Whenever possible, new materials should match the material being replaced with respect to their physical properties, design, color, texture and other visual qualities. The use of*
- F. *The Commission will give design review priority to those portions of the property which are visible from public ways or those portions which it can be reasonably inferred may be visible in the future.*

The outbuildings were not discussed in the Form B. No historic fabric will be repaired or replaced. One of the concrete block garages is visible from Mount Vernon Street. All the buildings are visible between buildings from Crescent Street.

#### **Removal of Later Additions and Alterations**

1. *Each property will be separately studied to determine if later additions and alterations can, or should be removed. It is not possible to provide a single general guideline.*
2. *Factors that will be considered include:*
  - a. *compatibility with the original property's integrity in scale, materials and character;*
  - b. *historic association with the property; and*
  - c. *quality in the design and execution of the addition.*

The garages are not contemporary with the house, do not have any architectural relationship with the original house, nor have any historic association with Walter H. Durell; and the design is generic c. 1920s concrete block garage.

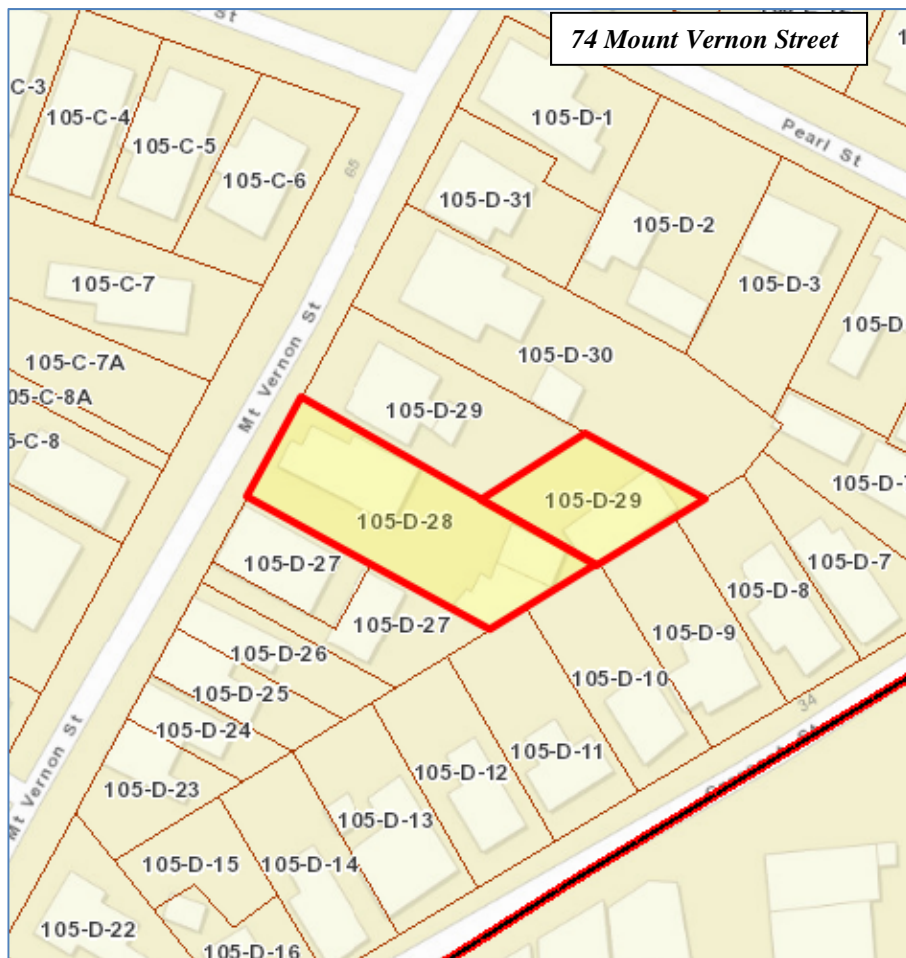
However, the stable is contemporary with Walter H. Durell, wholesale and retail dealer of sashes, windows, and doors. He would have needed his own conveyance for his business rather than relying on the street car and railway system than ran past the bottom of the street. The stable is a gable end 1 ½ story building with a tall loft opening. The siding is clapboard on the sides and front gable. The rear has asbestos shingles over-lying the original siding and a window in the gable. The wagon entry has been enclosed with vertical board and a pedestrian entry. One side has a chimney pipe and a window. While not an elaborate or high style stable/barn, the building cannot be mistaken for another kind of structure.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS

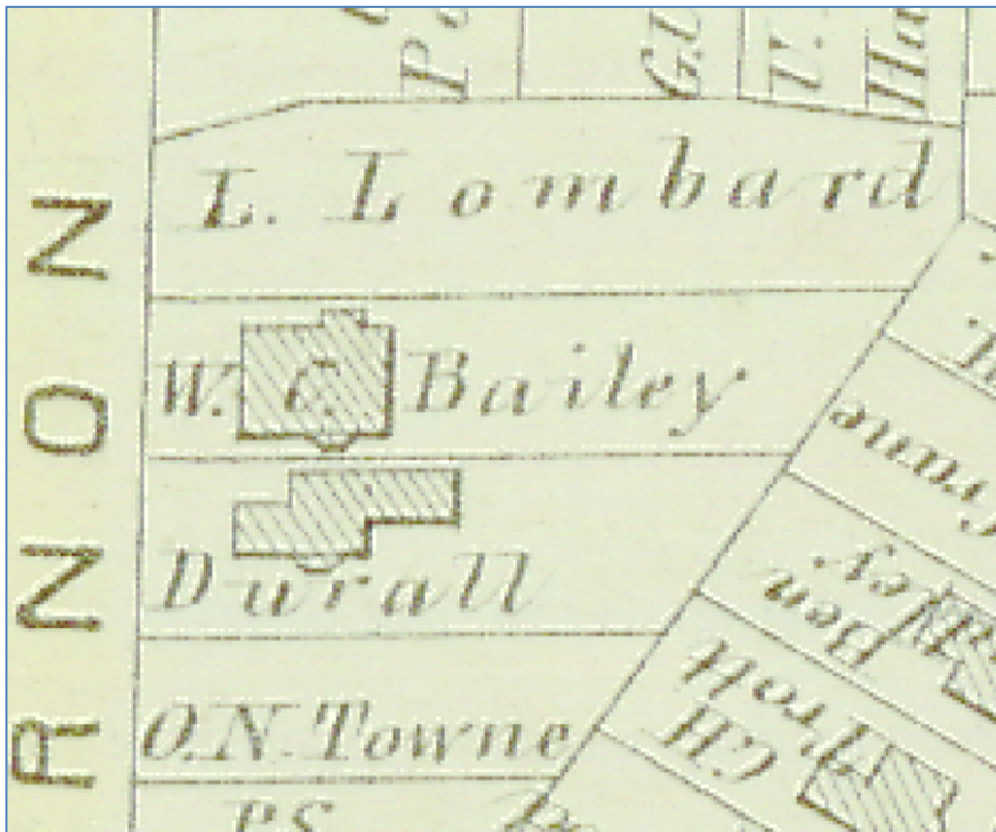
*The Staff recommendation is based on a complete application and supporting materials, as submitted by the Applicant, and an analysis of the historic and architectural value and significance of the site, The building or structure, the general design, arrangement, texture, material and color of the features involved, and the relation of such features of buildings and structures in the area, in accordance with the required findings that are considered by the Somerville Historic District Ordinance for a Historic District Certificate. This report may be revised or updated with new a recommendation or findings based upon additional information provided to Staff or through more in depth research conducted during the public hearing process.*

Staff determines that the alteration for which an application for a Historic Certificate has been filed is appropriate for and compatible with the preservation and protection of the Walter H. Durell House Road Local Historic District; therefore **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission deny a Certificate of Appropriateness to demolish the stable but grant Paul Turcotte, Owner, a Certificate of Appropriateness** with the following conditions.

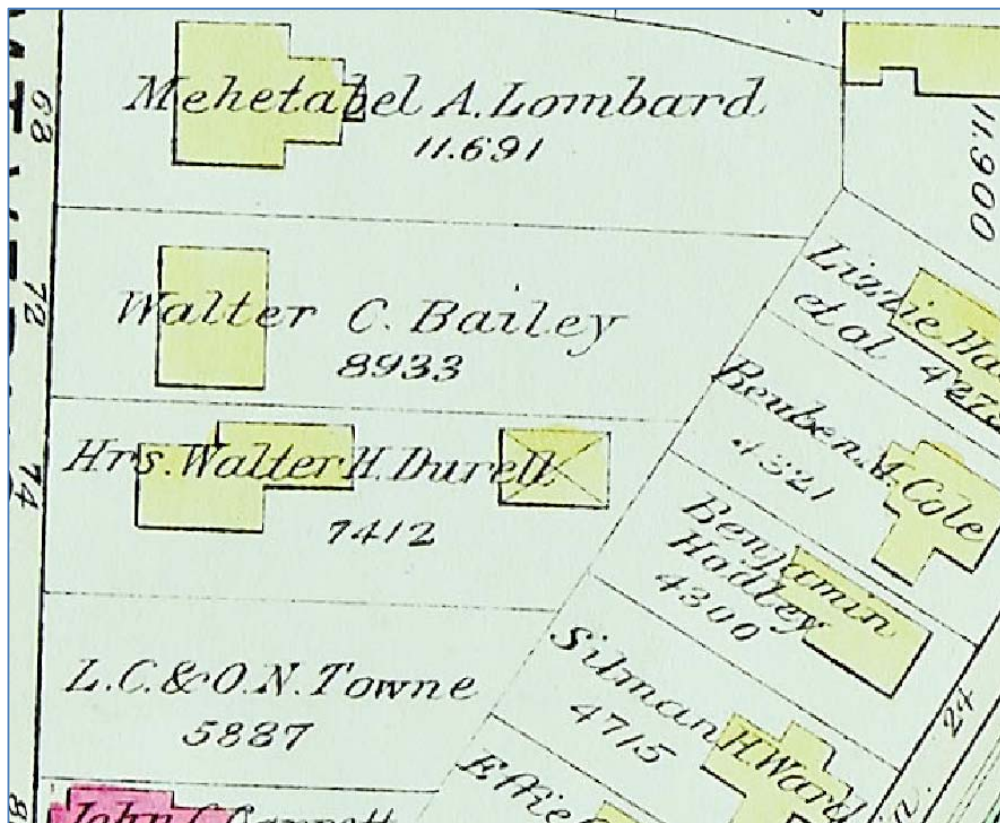
1. All appropriate building permits shall be obtained prior to the start of any work.
2. If changes are necessary to the proposed design for which this Certificate of Appropriateness was issued, new plans shall be submitted to Historic Staff prior to commencing the work.
3. The concrete block garages may be demolished.
4. The Owner shall work with the Commission to retain and reuse the stable.
5. Historic Staff shall issue a sign-off upon completion of the project that it was executed in accordance with this Certificate and approved plans.







1874 Hopkins (no change for 1884, which shows the same owners and buildings)



1895




*Doors, Windows, Sashes, Blinds.*

**WALTER H. DURELL,**

(Successor to S. P. Langmaid & Co.,)  
Wholesale and Retail Dealer in

**DOORS, SASHES, BLINDS,**  
Fence Pales, Framing Pins, Blind Trimmings, Glazed Windows, &c.  
**28 & 29 Charlestown Street, BOSTON, MASS.**  
Opp. Boston & Maine R. R. Depot.

*Doors of every quality at the lowest cash prices.  
Carpenters and others will find it to their advantage to call before purchasing.*



1883 City Directory



74 Mount Vernon Street











MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
80 BOYLSTON STREET  
BOSTON, MA 02116

AREA

FORM NO.

East  
Somerville

305

SOMERVILLE

Address 74 Mt. Vernon Street

Historic Name Walter H. Durell

Present residential

Original residential

Description

1873

Source maps/directories

Second Empire

Architect

Exterior Wall Fabric shingles

Outbuildings

Major Alterations (with dates)

Condition good

Moved Date

Acreage 7540 sq. ft.

Setting East side of Mt. Vernon, south

of intersection with Pearl St. Well

established late 19th century residential

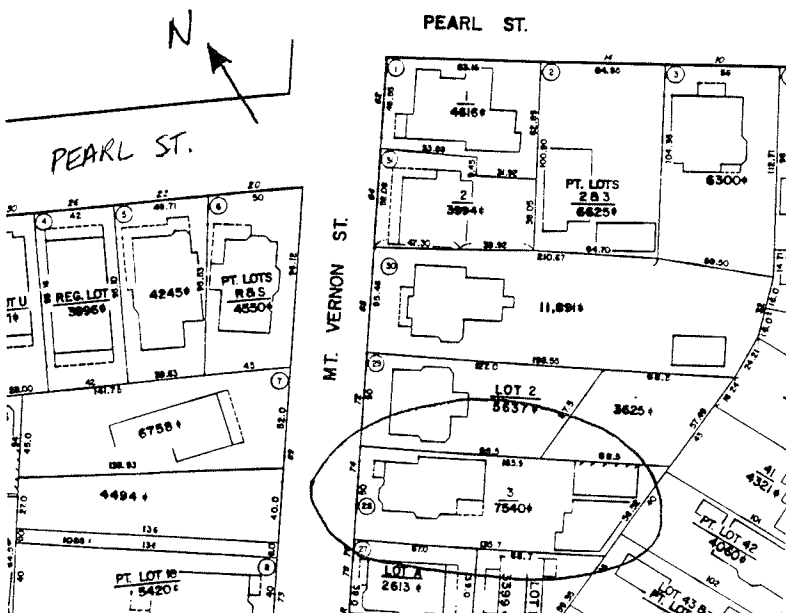
neighborhood.

Recorded by Carole Zellie - 1980  
Gretchen Schuler - 1986Organization Somerville Historic  
Preservation Commission

Date May, 1988

Sketch Map: Draw map showing property's location  
in relation to nearest cross streets and/or  
geographical features. Indicate all buildings  
between inventoried property and nearest  
intersection(s).

Indicate north



UTM REFERENCE

'S QUADRANGLE

SCALE

## **NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA STATEMENT (if applicable)**

### **ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE** Describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within the community.

This Second Empire dwelling is representative of a popular building style in Somerville during the 1870s but one of only a few examples on Mt. Vernon Street. This house is a side-hall entranced, two and a-half story dwelling with a mansard roof that has been altered with asphalt shingles. A three sided projecting dormer is located over a two story projecting bay. There is a side ell on north facade within the roofline. Well-maintained ornamentation includes brackets at the cornice line, and an open porch with square columns, brackets, and decorative details. Although the shingle siding is probably not original, there are decorative scalloped shingles on the projecting bay.

### **HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE** Explain the role owners played in local or state history and how the building relates to the development of the community.

East Somerville was one of the most densely settled parts of Somerville by the mid to late 1800s in part due to its topography and fine soil for drainage and clay for brick and pottery making. Broadway and Washington Street were main thoroughfares from the 18th century connecting Charlestown with Medford and Cambridge. Several farms cropped up in the East Somerville area and by the mid 1800s there were shops, taverns and industries with brickyards and pottery enterprises. In the mid 1800s most residents were Boston businessmen and from the 1870s many multi-family buildings were built to accomodate the increasing number of workers in the area due to the expanding brickyards, spike factories, and potteries.

Mt. Vernon Street, which only ran from Broadway to Perkins Street by the mid 1800s, was well developed with many extant Greek Revival dwellings. By the 1870s, Mt. Vernon was continued through to Washington Street and the area saw the greatest period of development when many substantial houses were built on Mt. Vernon and Mt. Pleasant, Pearl and Perkins Streets. At the same time brick apartment houses and small workers' houses were constructed on nearby streets. #74 was built by 1873 for Walter H. Durell, a wholesale and retail dealer in sashes, windows, and doors, who worked in Boston. His widow lived there through the end of the century.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES**

1. Atlas of Middlesex County, Somerville: 1874 ("Durall"), 1884 ("W.H. Durell")
2. City of Somerville, Beyond the Neck: The Architecture and Development of Somerville, Massachusetts, 1982.
3. City Directories: 1880s-1890s.



### To Whom It May Concern:

I have walked the 11,165 (by deed) square foot lot at 74 Mount Vernon Street, Somerville, and inspected the structures on the property---a three family, three story Mansard roofed house which is the principal structure and use, a 5 bay concrete block one story garage, a 3 bay, one story concrete block garage, and an adjacent, attached shed/barn, with a first floor partially of concrete block, with wood above for a partial second floor.

I have been asked to comment on the condition and benefit of the presence on the lot of the outbuildings, but not the Mansard, and to make some suggestions as to the long-term disposition of the property.

None of the garages and the shed are in good condition, and show the results of decades of deferred maintenance. I am not concerned that there are any compelling structural concerns that raise the prospects of failure in the near future, with the exception of the retaining walls approximately at the rear and right side lot lines of the property. These walls range from 4 feet to 12 feet of exposed masonry, and serve as both foundation walls bearing the weight of the garage and shed structures and their slabs and contents, and also as retaining walls separating the properties. They are comprised of rubble, concrete block, a small amount of reinforced poured in place concrete, and brick. These walls are decidedly not in good condition, but I cannot comment on their viability without further inspection. I find them of concern for several reasons, and if the outbuildings are kept, I would strongly recommend the hiring of a structural engineer to inspect these walls for their ability to both retain the difference in grade between 74 Mount Vernon and its neighbors, and also their ability to support the buildings. I suggest that the following specific issues and problems are given attention:

- The walls should be further inspected, including to determine whether they contain any steel reinforcing bars, which I believe is made necessary by the amount of "unbalanced fill", which ranges from 4 feet to 12 feet. The retaining wall on the south west side of the property, separating 74 Mount Vernon from 72 and 72R Mount Vernon, which is contiguous and appears to have been built contemporaneously, has completely failed and has been cited by Somerville ISD. These walls may have been built at the same time and in the same manner, and are obviously causes for concern.
- The structure which houses the three most southeasterly garage bays has foundation walls (also property retaining walls) that are over the property line, and encroach on three separate lots---now or formerly owned by Kennan, Fitzgerald, and Shi/Zou. This is a concern for determining ownership of the retaining walls and thus liability for the needed repairs and continuing maintenance, and also create an encroachment of use on those neighboring lots.

- The wood and concrete shed or barn disposes rainwater run-off from its roof and slab through a drain and scupper onto the properties owned by Shi/Zou and Fitzgerald. It is a violation of Massachusetts State Building Code (CMR 780) to dispose of run-off on neighboring properties, and presents liability that should be dealt with.

In addition to the specific problems posed by these out buildings, it needs to be noted that most of the 11,165 square foot lot is used for parking or vehicular access, and is paved with impermeable asphalt and concrete material. The lot is also graded so that all rainfall on the paved areas is discharged to Mount Vernon Street. This is in controversion to the standards that City of Somerville imposes on all new construction and most serious renovations, as it imposes the maximum burden on the City of Somerville storm water system. Any redevelopment of this site would require an engineered plan for dealing with all storm run-off, and not imposing it on the neighboring properties at Mount Vernon Street.

In summation, and apart from any aesthetic concerns or questions of the needed uses of the property owner, I believe that with the exception of the principal structure---the three family Mansard at 74 Mount Vernon---the lot needs a comprehensive redevelopment plan to deal with the civil engineering and structural engineering issues, and also the legal concerns created by the encroachment. I believe that such a plan would certainly require the removal of most if not all of the out buildings.

Sincerely yours,



Alex Van Praagh  
MA Registered Architect #50197  
MA CSL #106170  
95 Antrim Street, Cambridge MA 02139  
617-959-1158



**Mr. Paul Turcotte  
Ms. Bonnie Brown  
74 Mount Vernon Street  
Somerville, MA 02143**

**During the documentation of existing conditions of the structures at 74 Mount Vernon Street Somerville MA 02145, I have noted the following;**

**The main building on the property, a three family house, is in good repair.**

**The outbuildings, including 8 single bay attached garages and a two story wood/concrete, 2 car bay shed are all in poor condition, i.e.,**

**The bearing CMU walls between the garages have deteriorated near grade. The garage roofs will need structural repair work in the near future.**

**The exterior of the shed has not been maintained in many years. This exterior is in need of repair and replacement of major component parts.**

**My biggest concern about the structure is the retaining wall between 74 Mount Vernon Street and three abutting lots. This wall also serves as the foundation wall for much of the shed.**

**This retaining wall does not appear to have been properly engineered when built. There also exists an alarming amount of unbalanced fill. The combination of these conditions gives me concern. It is my concern that without immediate resolution, the remedy of conditions will continue to increase in cost and complexity.**

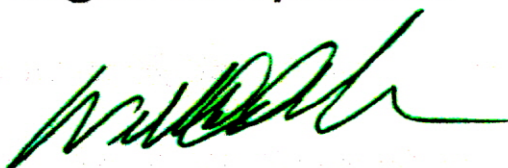
**In addition, there is a discharge pipe leading from the roof and slab of the shed which discharges onto a neighboring lot. This is in clear violation of Massachusetts Building Code.**

**These outstanding issues should be addressed in the very near future. They will not be easy to correct, given the multiple ownerships, access issues, and the grade differential.**

**Please feel free to call me about this.**

**Sincerely yours,**

**William A. Curdo,  
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Master Carpenter, est 1981  
857-488-7452  
bill@cdd-development.com**



1/6/17