



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

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION*

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**DETERMINATION OF PREFERABLY PRESERVED STAFF REPORT**

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Site:	360 Mystic Avenue
Case:	HPC 12.116
Applicant Name:	Richard Berg
Applicant Address:	100 Fellsway West, Somerville, MA 02145
Date of Application:	11/4/2012
Date of Significance:	11/20/2012
Det. of Preferably Preserved:	Unable to recommend
Recommendation:	Revision of Memorandum of Agreement for 356 Mystic Avenue

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

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

On Tuesday, November 20, 2012, the Historic Preservation Commission, in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (2003-05), made a determination that 360 Mystic Avenue is Significant. Per Section 2.17.B, this decision is found on the following criteria:

(A) *The structure is at least 50 years old;*

**and**

(a) *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**

(b) *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 (A)*, listed above, historic map and directory research identifies the structure as c.1887.

In accordance with *Criteria (a) and (b)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings that the subject building is significant for its role in the furniture industry spurred by the growth in population and a new middle class who needed inexpensive but fashionable furniture and as a center of employment.



This building is mentioned in Somerville Beyond the Neck and is eligible for the National Register according to Fitch & Hollister, Public Archaeology Laboratory, under criteria C, as the most intact example of a wood frame factory construction from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Somerville.

## II. Additional Information

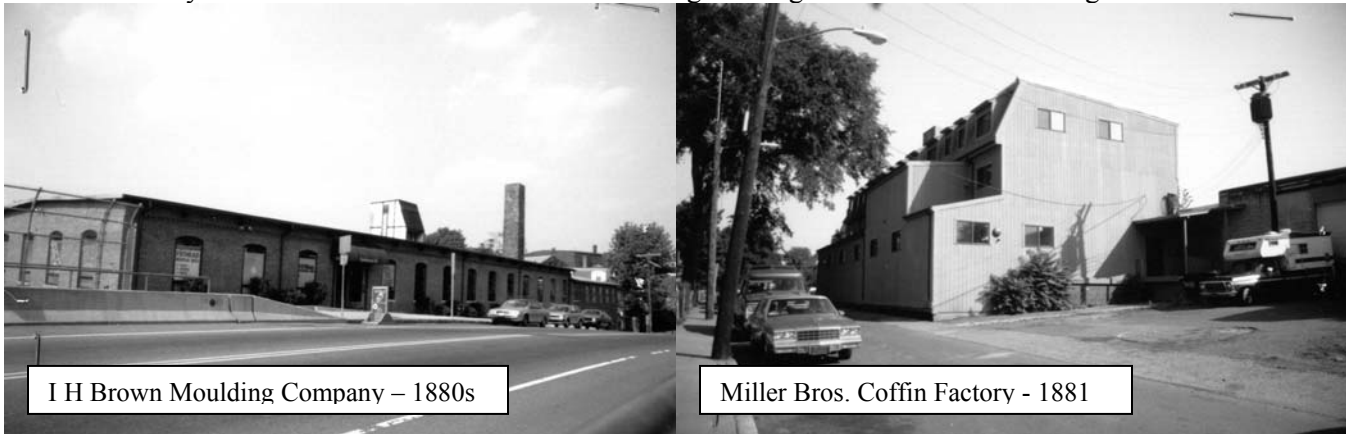
- The Applicant stated that several thousand dollars were invested into the preservation of this building for Phase II of the project. Staff reviewed the ISD files to confirm approval of the effort to stabilize the building. The building was stabilized to the satisfaction of the Inspection Services Division and the requirements of the Massachusetts Building Code in 2009.

Structural Engineers Reports from Roome and Guarracino (6/15/12) and Weston and Sampson (10/4/12) were presented at the November HPC meeting.

- Changes to the Building Code do not allow the building to be used or occupied as it now stands. The eighth edition of the MA Building Code and particularly the IEBC, along with MA amendments, is unfair to unreinforced masonry structures. Appendix A1 requires the evaluation for sheer load capacity as well as wind and seismic load. This applies to the wood frame structure because it is located on a high masonry foundation. A new foundation would present challenges to the superstructure. The warped, dried, cracked and split framing is not capable of supporting the load for public areas, is undersized and, structurally, is not in good condition. The extent of necessary renovations explain that the work would be at level three, which is why the wind and seismic load capacity would need to be addressed.
- Structural information has been presented which shows the building continues to deteriorate despite 2009 efforts to stabilize it as the elevator is peeling away from the building and severe problems with retaining walls and columnar supports continuing to sink and shift due to layers of peat sandwiched between layers of clay. These deep soil conditions will lead to further subsidence and distortion of the building. Raising the building and installing new supports, along with extensive repair and replacement would leave practically none of the original building untouched. Deep soil preparation and a different structural system need to be put in place to support any large structure under these conditions.

*Summary:* The Applicant made best efforts to stabilize the building but were unable to find an alternative short of demolition. Structural Engineers reports were received at the Determination of Significance on November 20, 2012, where the above information was received. Both engineers recommend to demolish the building rather than to preserve the building. The building cannot be used as it now stands. A different system of structural supports would undermine the historic integrity of the building and render it unusable. Furthermore, to leave the building empty and well maintained on the exterior is not financially viable, and to leave the building empty and neglected is an eyesore as well as a safety hazard.

*Comparable Structures:* Other mill buildings remaining in Somerville, however these are either masonry or have been altered to the extent of being unrecognizable as a mill building.



- Predominant differences between the comparable mill buildings and the subject dwelling are those of integrity, size and/or material.

### 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?*

One result of the City's rapid development between 1872 and 1900 was a significant growth in the building industries that furnished the newly built residences and offices. According to Zellie, many of these companies relocated to Somerville from Boston in the 1880s and 1890s. By 1928, the furniture industry was making \$1.4 million dollars in Somerville alone, according to the Somerville Journal, up 450% from 1923. It later became a tin can factory. This building on the corner of Wheatland Street and Mystic Avenue has had a factory of one sort or another for over 100 years meeting the needs of Somerville residents and others.

- b) What is the remaining integrity of the structure? The National Park Service defines integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance.*

Despite the fact that all wood sections are covered in vinyl siding and some of the building complex has been demolished, there can be no doubt that the building is an old industrial building. This late 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial complex consists of several attached wood-frame and brick structures and a square, brick chimney stack. The main factory on Mystic Avenue has 4-stories with a shallow-pitched gable-roof. It is a wooden structure with predominantly 6/6 wood sash windows, a brick first floor with segmental arch openings, and a central elevator tower, a brick smoke stack and boiler room area.

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

In 1990, The Public Archaeology Laboratory determined that the building to be eligible for the National Register under Criteria C as “possess(ing) integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and ... C. that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; ...” - as the most intact representative example of wood-frame factory construction from the late 19th century in Somerville.

*d) What is the visibility of the structure with regard to public interest (Section 2.17.B.ii) if demolition were to occur?*

While the building is highly visible, it has not been maintained. Public comments at previous meetings have noted the dilapidated state of the property and the lack of investment in the building by the owners over time. A well-maintained building in this location would be an asset whether it is old or new.

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

This is a very rare resource in the City. Wood mill buildings have been torn down or altered irretrievably while masonry structures tend to be better maintained and rehabilitated. See the 11 Miller Street structure noted above for comparison.

***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’. The factors that determined the significance of the building convey its original uses through the integrity of its architecture, and its rarity. Architecturally, the main portion of the building has a characteristic roofline and the fenestration pattern of a mill building, which still exists along with the smoke stake and brick portions of the factory. This massing, along with the masonry chimney and boiler building, still convey the industrial history of the site. It is also the last remaining unaltered wood mill building in the City.

The subject building is significant for its role in the furniture industry spurred by the growth in population and a new middle class who needed inexpensive but fashionable furniture and as a center of employment. This building is mentioned in Somerville Beyond the Neck and is eligible for the National Register according to Fitch & Hollister, Public Archaeology Laboratory, under criteria C, as the most intact example of a wood frame factory construction from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Somerville.

#### **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; however, **Staff is unable to recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 360 Mystic Avenue 'Preferably Preserved' due to the compromised structural integrity of the building and the existing Memorandum of Agreement regarding 356 Mystic Avenue, which requires the Owner to use best efforts to preserve the subject building.**

*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).*

360 Mystic Avenue

