



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

*HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION*

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**DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE STAFF REPORT**

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Site:	77-83 North Street
Case:	HPC 2012.082
Applicant Name:	Peter Stefanou
Applicant Address:	19 Conwell Avenue, Somerville, MA 02144
Date of Application:	7/25/2012
Staff Recommendation:	Not Significant
Date of Public Hearing:	August 21, 2012

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**I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION**

*Architectural Description:*

The structure is a one-story commercial building composed of red brick in an Art Deco style. The building has alternating concrete diamond and square embellishments, which emphasize the horizontal character of the building. These geometric motifs are consistent along both the North Street and Conwell Avenue facades. A capped roofline, known as coping, and brick headers aligned below the geometric motifs also accentuate the horizontal aspect of this building. Additionally, between each storefront, in an effort to differentiate each storefront, are fluted brick columns, flush with the façade, which have brick stretchers laid both vertically and at an angle.

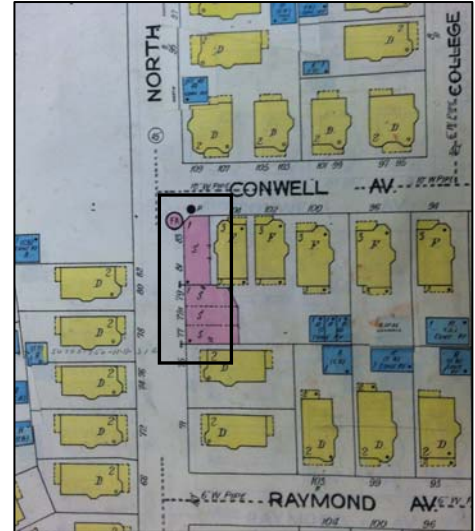
The Art Deco style was common for public and commercial buildings in the early 1920s and 1930s. This style tends to emphasize the horizontal and often has an asymmetrical façade, both of which characterize the subject structure.

*Historical Description:*

In 1874 (Hopkins Map, Plate M) the parcel was much larger. While North Street was in existence, as it was an early rangeway that extended from Broadway past Elm and into Medford, Conwell and Raymond avenues were not. The subject parcel was part of the estate of Thomas R. Cook, which had one dwelling, several outbuildings, and the tomb of Arnold Cook located on the property.

By 1895 (Bromley Map, Plate 23), the area had been subdivided into several lots and both Conwell and Raymond avenues were in existence. The subject property, along with 104 Conwell Avenue, were identified together as parcel 9815 and, along with several other surrounding properties, were under the ownership of Travelli, Blaney and Robinson. By 1900 (Stadley Map, Plate 17) the ownership had not changed and 104 Conwell Avenue was still associated with the subject parcel as lot 9815.

By 1925 (Sanborn Map, Plate 122), the subject building is in existence and, according to the Map, has the current shape and massing. The 1925 Sanborn Map illustrates the structure as a single story with one long storefront beginning at the corner of Conwell Avenue and North Street, extending to the center of the parcel (81-83 North Street), and three additional stores are located in the right portion of the parcel, situated perpendicular, with addresses 79, 77A, and 77 North Street (see picture). Additionally, the store adjacent to the corner store has an awkward jog in the footprint at the rear of the building where a three-story flat, or triple-decker, is constructed. This structure lies on the previously associated parcel located along Conwell Avenue.



*Corner of Conwell Avenue and North Street, 81-83 North Street*



*Left: 79 North Street*



*Right: 77-77A North Street*

*Context/Evolution of Structure or Parcel:*

Prior to 1924, there is no record of this building. The 1924 Somerville Directory states that Gaetano Simeone sold fruit at #77 but lived in Melrose; Charles and Agnes Wolf had a bakery at #79 and lived at 37 Fairfax Street; William and Emily Thayer sold provisions at #81 and lived nearby at 115 North Street. The following year, 1925, Adam and Anna Rausch operate the bakery at #79 and they live across the street at #78. By 1929-30, Angelo Piccirelli appears to have taken over #79 with a shoe repair store and by 1933 this store is being operated by John and Alice Tashjian, who live in a house at 10 Cambria Street. By 1940, #79 is still a shoe repair store, but is now operated by Maurice Sandler. Occupants beyond 1940 are not able to be determined without more in depth research.

Building permits associated with the property include a cement block garage in 1920 at #83 by C. Krausch; brick wall of stores in 1925 at #81 by W. Thayer (presumably William as mentioned above); projecting sign in 1951 at #83 by Mahers Market; tear out storefront, board, and shingle in 1954 by W. Maher; and various miscellaneous permits to raze floors, erect signs, and rebuild walls also by Mahers Market. The current owner, Peter Stefanou, purchased the property in 1993 from Mahers Supermarket.

This structure is currently located in a small RB district, which is surrounded by a much larger RA district within the Tufts University neighborhood.

*Summary:*

This single-story commercial structure, constructed as it currently stands by 1925, served the immediate neighborhood with necessary amenities for several years. Operated initially as three individual stores, two of these store owners remained consistent for at least 15-20 years. Upon establishment of Mahers Market, by 1951, this use continued to support the local neighborhood. Although research does not conclude an important association with persons, events, or City history, the consistent use of this structure to house neighborhood amenities speaks to the development of the surrounding neighborhood and how these amenities, in turn, supported the growing neighborhood.

## II. FINDINGS ON CRITERIA FOR DEMOLITION

*The structure must be either (1) listed on the National Register or (2) at least 50 years old.*

(1) 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.

- (2) The structure, circa 1920-1925, is at least 50 years old.

*The structure must be found either (1) importantly associated or (2) significant.*

(1) In accordance with historic map, directory, and voting list research, and through an examination of resources that explore the history of the City, such as *Somerville Past and Present* and *Somerville Beyond the Neck*, Staff do not find 77-83 North Street to be 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.

(2) Upon an evaluation of both the historic 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, degree of alteration, and scarcity or frequency, Staff do not find 77-83 North Street to be historically or architecturally significant.

*Evaluation Criteria to Determine Significance*

1. Period of Significance: *As the integrity of a building or structure is evaluated as it relates to the period of greatest significance, the period of greatest significance must first be determined.* The period of greatest significance for the subject structure is 1925-1940. Although this period likely extends beyond 1940, more in depth research would need to be done for verification.
2. Integrity: *The subject property must possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent or contain the values and qualities for which it is judged significant. "Sufficient" integrity is determined by examining the degree of overall change in appearance, based on the number of "detrimental" or "critical" (irreversible) changes.*
  - Detrimental changes include:
    1. *New, relocated or removed chimney* – One chimney does exist at the rear of the building, visible from the Conwell Avenue façade, but whether this was a later addition or relocated is unknown.
    2. *Rebuilt foundation* – There is no evidence of a rebuilt foundation.
    3. *Modern porch* – There is no porch.
    4. *Original windows changed at a later but still historical date; modern windows in original frames; original windows intact but extra windows added; change in shape or size of openings* – All windows appear to have been altered over time; there are possibly some original openings that remain.
    5. *Original doors changed at a later but still historical date; modern doors in original frames; original doors intact but extra doors added; change in shape or size of openings* - All doors appear to have been altered over time; there are possibly some original openings that remain.
    6. *Synthetic siding* – There is a building permit from 1954 that requests to tear out storefront, board up, and shingle.
    7. *Removal of outbuildings* – There is no evidence of outbuildings.
    8. *Recent change of location* – There is no evidence of a change in location.
    9. *Isolation from its original context (loss of historical setting)* – The original neighborhood context is still very much in tact.

*Summary:* While there are several detrimental changes, most pertain to boarding up the windows and doors of the individual storefronts.



- *Critical changes are irreversible, greatly alter the structure, and/or destroy more significant features.* Several portions of the brick wall have been rebuilt or infilled unsympathetically with the style and character of the structure. The single remaining storefront (77-77A) appears to have retained integrity of form only; however, the date of this storefront is unknown and may not be associated with the period of significance. New, or comparatively new mortar, has been added in several locations and the structure is in need of additional masonry repair. The amount of alteration that this building has been subjected to greatly alters the façade of the structure and, while the brick ornamentation is still visible, the portions of the façade that have been rebuilt and infilled have damaged several significant features.

*Whether a change is in fact critical to the integrity and further negates the historical value depends on:*

1. *The degree of the structure's significance* – Due to the number and extent of detrimental and critical changes the structure has accumulated, Staff finds the remaining significance of this structure to be minimal.
  2. *The proportion of significant features remaining* - The remaining significant features are the geometric motifs and rows of brick headers above the storefronts, though some have been removed and others are in severe disrepair. The fluted brick columns between the storefronts remain, but various components have also been altered or removed. While there are significant features that remain, these features are almost all in disrepair and/or incomplete.
  3. *If the significance was primarily dependent on the architecture* - The significance is no longer primarily dependant upon the architecture but how the consistent use of this structure supported and was supported by the surrounding neighborhood. While some architectural detail remains, which alludes to what the past appearance must have been, there is now such a substantial amount of detail that has been lost or is in extreme disrepair that the significance is no primarily dependent upon the architecture.
  4. *The appropriateness of the changes* - The changes to this structure are not appropriate. The visible changes significantly reduce the integrity of the architecture and are damaging to the remaining features.
3. Degree of Alteration: Building evaluations shall discuss the degree of detrimental or critical change to the building, and their effect on the architectural significance. A building should not be classified as historic if distinguishing features are removed or concealed, rendering the building less exemplary of a given style or period of architecture. The extent of detrimental changes primarily revolves around window and door alterations, which as a whole, have a large impact on the historic integrity of the structure. The critical changes of concern regard the various changes to the Art Deco brick façade, which have left the style of the building visible, but many features are either missing or have been unsympathetically repaired.
  4. Scarcity or Frequency: Scarcity shall be determined by knowledge of similar remaining structures, whether in type or style. If the subject structure is the only example, or of a few remaining examples of its kind, determinations regarding significance and integrity would be less severe than for resources that occur frequently. While this type of structure, single-story with multiple storefronts, is common throughout Somerville, the Art Deco style is not prevalent. However, there are some historically designated structures that resemble the Art

Deco style, such as 38-40 Bow Street (c. 1928) in Union Square and the Somerville Theatre, 49-55 Davis Square (c.1914), which received an Art Deco paint theme in 1932. Additionally, the Winter Hill Bank, at 5 Cutter Avenue just outside Davis Square, demonstrates this style at a much higher level. By the time this style came into popularity, the majority of Somerville was built out and, though other styles of the same period are better represented, the City does have some examples which retain more integrity due to their condition, style quality, and level of finish.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS

*These recommendations are based upon a historic and architectural analysis by Historic Preservation Staff of the application based upon the required findings of the Somerville Demolition Ordinance, and is based only upon archival and historical research, and a historical and architectural evaluation of significance conducted prior to the public hearing for a Determination of Significance. This report may be revised or updated with new recommendations or findings based upon additional information provided to the Historic Preservation Staff or through more in depth research conducted during the public hearing process.*

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- 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.
- + The structure, circa 1920-1925, is at least 50 years old.

*The structure must be found either importantly associated or significant.*

- In accordance with historic map, directory, and voting list research, and through an examination of resources that explore the history of the City, such as *Somerville Past and Present* and *Somerville Beyond the Neck*, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission do NOT find 77-83 North Street to be 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.**
- Upon an evaluation of both the historic and architectural significance, which addresses 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, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission do NOT find 77-83 North Street to be historically or architecturally significant.**

**77-83 North Street**

