



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:	26-28 Prospect Street
Case:	HPC 2014.042
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.*

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. 1858-1870. The dwelling at 26-28 Prospect Street may be one of 3 buildings illustrated on the east side of Prospect Street on the 1867 E. P. Dutton "Map of Boston and Country Adjacent."

In accordance with *Criteria (i)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings due to the association with prominent businessman and politician Clark Bennett and his family; with workers



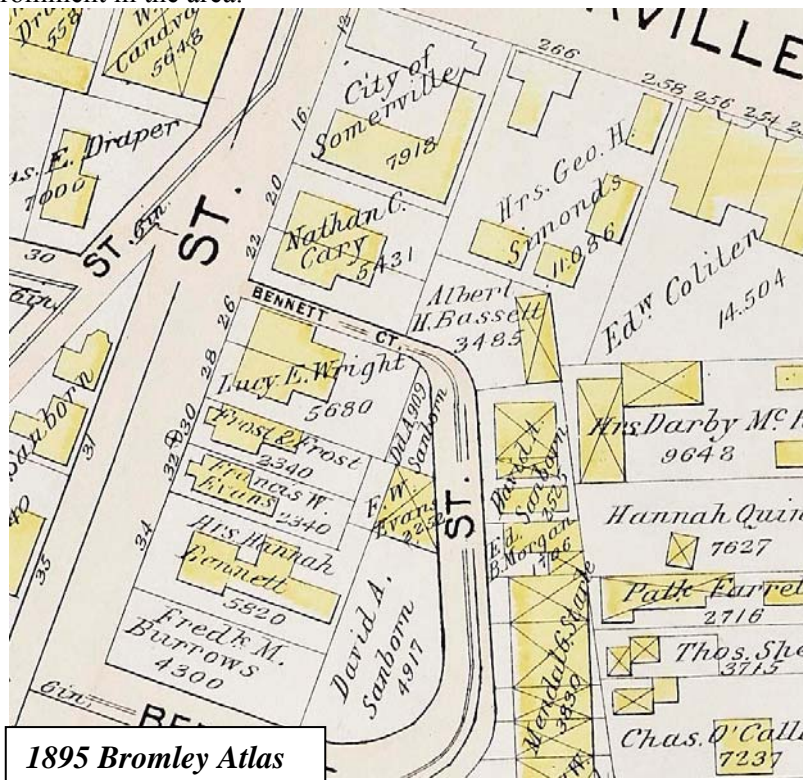
housing at the edge of Union Square; and the industrial uses of the surrounding area, particularly the glass and meat packing industries of Somerville and Cambridge

In accordance with *Criteria (ii)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings due to the ability of the subject parcel to convey significance with regard to location, form, and architectural integrity as an Italianate style house.

II. Additional Information

Additional Research:

The 1852 Draper Map, the 1874 and the 1884 Hopkins Atlases, the 1895 Bromley Atlas and the 1900 Stadley and Sanborn Atlases were reviewed to establish the context of the building. These maps illustrate the neighborhood was much more residential through 1900. Other houses illustrated on these research maps were demolished in the 20th century. After the light rail system was removed, the local economy collapsed and the current auto and salvage yards became prominent in the area.



Additional deed research, done by a qualified preservation consultant, notes that Clark Bennett lived at 34 Prospect Street (no longer existent) and the earliest known occupant for this building is Thomas Cadwallader, which is understood from the 1880 Census. While there are a few City Directories available on line and searchable, only the 1881 and 1884 Directories list the tenants of 26 and 28 Prospect Streets. Other known inhabitants prior to 1903 are Jason W. Gilpatrick (28 Prospect), carpenter; and Charles A. Preston (28 Prospect), clerk at Lincoln, Chamberlin and Company in Boston.

Site Visit:

Staff conducted a site visit and walked through the house on August 4, 2014, along with the preservation consultant. Architecturally, 26 Prospect Street is more ornately detailed than #28, specifically with regard to window lintels in the front and center rooms. The staircases are composed of turned newel posts, simple balusters and wide hand rails, typical of the mid-18th century and consistent with the level of detail that is visible within both units. Physically, the building has severe water damage, which has peeled wallpaper and damaged plaster throughout as well as weakened the subfloor in various areas of the house.

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.

Prospect Street, looking north toward Prospect Hill

*Comparable Structures:*

Union Square - Comparable structures are 2½ stories with a side-gable, a side-hall interior plan, and six bays. These comparable buildings can be found in the older sections of East Somerville and Union Square. This building type, within the City of Somerville, is generally constructed as a two-family dwelling with mirrored side-hall plans, though some have been altered into four-family dwellings. Comparable structures include four within the immediate neighborhood and are all c. 1860 and appear on the 1874 Hopkins Atlas.

10-12 Linden Street, 14-16 Linden Street, 35-37 Linden Street



Predominant differences between the subject dwelling and the comparable dwellings nearby are the siting of these houses within residential districts rather than along a major thoroughfare. These comparable buildings have been continuously inhabited rather than used for storage. While the similar houses in the immediate neighborhood have had several alterations, these still retain their architectural character and integrity.

East Somerville - Three more comparable located in East Somerville are designated Local Historic District buildings are also similarly sized and proportioned buildings in Local Historic Districts on Flint Street and Perkins Street in East Somerville. On Spring Hill, a number of homes with similar massing and form as well as Greek Revival details are visible on Atherton Street, Monmouth Street and Harvard Place



65-67 Perkins Street (c. 1840), 11-13 Flint Street (1858), 15-17 Flint Street (1860)

44-46 Atherton Street (c .1850), 1-3 Harvard Place (c .1850), 31-33 Monmouth Street (c .1850)

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 two-family dwelling represents a popular 19th century residential building type within the City. The Prospect Street streetscape on this side of the Fitchburg Railroad is predominantly 20th century light-industrial, concrete block structures.

With the exception of asbestos siding and the altered door entry, the exterior of the building is largely intact.

- 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 two-family dwelling is retained within the location and form, as well as integrity of design. On the whole, the building is less altered than its surrounding neighborhood. Due to previous demolition of the other 19th century houses that once lined both sides of Prospect Street, the street no longer reflects the era in which 26-28 Prospect Street was constructed.

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

This building is of local significance. Although the building is associated with Clark Bennett and his family, this was an income property. While Clark Bennett's house is no longer existent, he is not known to have ever lived here. The filling of the Millers River was one of Clark Bennett's activities with a lasting impact on the City. After his death, the houses on the property became predominantly rental units with tenants employed in the local industries.

The Commission determined that this structure is Significant due to a historical association with Clark Bennett and his family; with workers housing on the edge of the Union Square; and the industrial uses of the surrounding area, particularly the glass and meat packing industries of Somerville and Cambridge.



- 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 along Prospect Street near the middle of strip of light industrial uses ranging from scrap metal, and stone kitchen counters to the sale of radiators and used bathroom fixtures. 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 side-gable double house can be found in the older sections of Somerville, developed in the mid- 19th century, especially in the abutting neighborhood to the east, Spring Hill.

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 neighborhood is drastically altered in building type and use. The association with Clark Bennett is significant, but he is not known to have lived at this location nor does this building represent his longstanding contribution to the City by filling in the River. Last, due to the undesirable uses that have taken over this major 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.

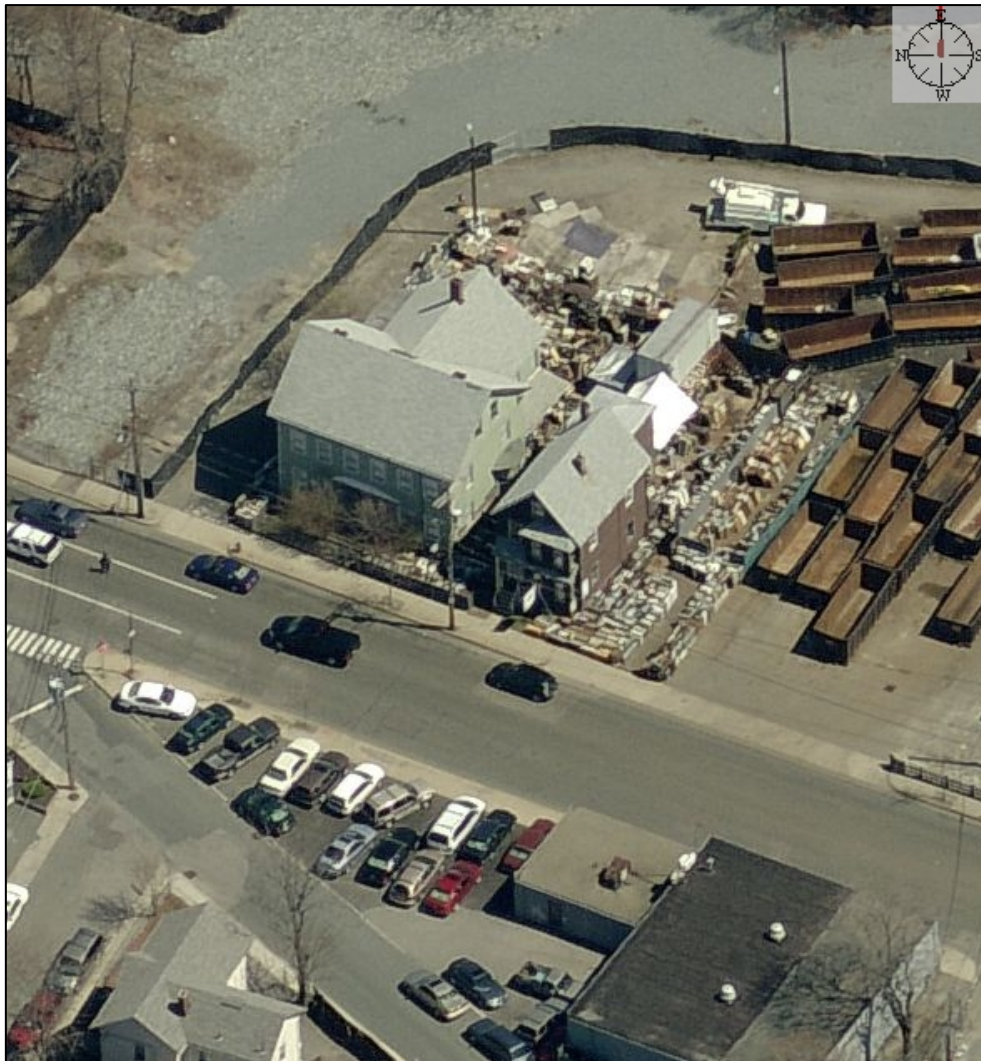
IV. Recommendation

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 Clark Bennett and his filling of the River, 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 26-28 Prospect 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).



26-28 Prospect Street and 30 Prospect Street, aerial view