



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: 314-316 Somerville Avenue
Case: HPC 2014.009
Applicant Name: Belmont Hill Corporation

Date of Application: February 27, 2014
Date of Significance: April 15, 2014

Recommendation: Preferably Preserved
Hearing Date: May 20, 2014



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

I. Meeting Summary: Determination of Significance

On Tuesday, April 15, 2014, the Historic Preservation Commission, in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (2003-05), made a determination that 314-316 Somerville Avenue 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 is both

- (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**
- (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.1890. The commercial structure at 314-316 Somerville Avenue is clearly located on the 1895 Bromley Atlas of Somerville.

In accordance with *Criteria (i)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings due to the retention of Italianate architectural details on a small scale commercial structure; as an example of Union Square commerce in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; through an



association with Patrick Rafferty, who was involved with City politics and is representative of immigrant groups who influenced the further development and expansion of Union Square; and as part of a nineteenth century collection of commercial structures associated with exponential growth at the turn of the twentieth century as well as the three-building collection of structures located on this parcel.

In accordance with *Criteria (ii)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings as a representative of late 19th century commercial growth of Union Square due to the remaining integrity of the structure with regard to original form, massing, fenestration pattern, and material. In addition, due to the location of the structure within a collection of structures that represent the same cultural context, this structure is significant within the context of a group of buildings which, together, represent the late 19th and early 20th century expiation of Union Square along Somerville Avenue.

II. Additional Information

Survey Form Information:

The following historical description in italicized text is taken from the 2010 PAL survey form.

The small commercial block at 314-316 Somerville Avenue, constructed ca. 1890 (and expanded in 1920), reflects the growing business potential of the Union Square area during the last decade of the 19th century. Between 1869 and 1891, local entrepreneurs erected no less than seven ambitious multi-level masonry commercial buildings on the blocks immediately surrounding the junction of Somerville Avenue with Washington and Bow streets. Development gradually spread along Somerville Avenue to the west of the Square as the City's population and employment opportunities increased. Immigrants from Ireland, Italy, Portugal, and Canada in particular were attracted to the area. Between 1850 and 1890, the number of residents grew dramatically from 3,540 to 40,152.

In the late 1870s, Irish immigrant Patrick Rafferty (born ca. 1814) owned a funeral home on the north side of Somerville Avenue at the corner of Church Street. By 1874, he also owned the property at the southeast corner of Hawkins Street, where sometime over the next decade he built the large commercial and residential block at 318-322 Somerville Avenue (SMV.1341) and the rowhouse behind it at 318R Somerville Avenue (SMV.1342) as additional income-producing properties. Rafferty is listed in City Directories for 1889 through 1892 as both an undertaker and an agent for the sale of lots. By 1895, he had added a small one-story shop adjacent to the larger block, which corresponds to the western portion of the current building at 314-316 Somerville Avenue. Since the Directories are not organized by street name until 1910, the tenants of Rafferty's shop are unknown until after that date. The 1911 and 1915 City Directories list a steam and gas fitting business operated by Samuel J. Leavis and Charles J. Doherty at 314 Somerville Avenue. Doherty had previously owned a plumbing business located at 297 Washington Avenue, according to the 1900 and 1905 City Directories. By 1918, Leavis and Doherty appear to have relocated to 297 Somerville Avenue, and no listings appear for 314 or 316 Somerville Avenue that year.

In 1921, a permit was issued for the construction of the detached concrete-block garage to the rear of the building, which appears on the 1933 Sanborn map. The permit refers to the commercial block as 314-316 Somerville Avenue, indicating that the second shop in the eastern half of the building existed by that date, although no record has been found of a permit issued for the construction of the addition. The Salvation Army received a permit in 1923 for interior alterations to the original shop at 314 Somerville Avenue. The following year, 1924, Israel Pally's produce market replaced the Salvation Army, and Fred J. Williamson's fish market occupied the recently constructed

attached shop at 316 Somerville Avenue. Pally remained in business through at least 1927. Beginning in 1929, Joseph Wasserman, a Russian immigrant, took over the produce market. Wasserman and his wife rented an apartment in the neighboring building (318-322 Somerville Avenue) in the early 1930s. The Wasserman family operated the market for over 60 years, through at least the early 1990s. Currently, a small bakery occupies the former market. The eastern half of the building (316 Somerville Avenue) housed Angelo Capone's shoe repair shop in 1925 and 1927, and as late as 1940 his relative Albert M. Capone continued to run the business at the same location. By 1950, the American Window Cleaning Company had replaced the shoe shop, and that business remained there until at least 1971. The eastern portion of the building functions presently as storage space for the nearby market at 318-322 Somerville Avenue.

Additional Research:

- Census data does not provide new information but does confirm that Patrick Rafferty was a resident of Somerville in 1880. Patrick is listed as an undertaker, as well as his son Joseph while his wife Meary, is listed as "keeping house."
- Building permit files from the Inspectional Services Division for this address have a violation notice for an "Unsafe Building or Structure" dated January 2013 due to being "severely damaged by a fire, water, and smoke at the #316 side of the building containing a bakery; floors, walls, ceilings charred or burnt through roof penetrations due to fire venting; wiring and plumbing destroyed." Prior to the fire, there is also an I.P.M. Assessment Report for #316 dated September 2010 which identifies other structural issues including gaps between the ground and siding due to insect rot, rear elevation water damage due to no gutter, open mechanicals, and brick spalling. The file was not clear if these items had been corrected prior to the fire.

Site Visit:

Site visits illustrate that the subject structure is part of two groups of buildings. This structure shares the commercial expansion context with other commercial structures that extend west along Somerville Avenue. This single story building also shares a context with the other structures on-site as these were all constructed by Patrick Rafferty for additional income.



Comparable Structures:

There are multiple structures in the City that are comparable to the subject building. However, these comparable structures do not also have an immediate context of related income producing structures that were constructed by the same developer. While some are more intact than others, each comparable structure illustrates a simple building form, small massing and minimal building frontage. Other comparable structures within the City and this general neighborhood include:

- 500 Medford St
- 15 Union Square
- 237 Holland St

Left to Right: 500 Medford St, 15 Union Square, 237 Holland St



Predominant differences between the comparable dwellings and the subject dwelling are the masonry material, style, and two-story massing. A majority of the single-story commercial structures are composed of masonry and have been drastically altered, but this type of structure is common within the City and the surrounding area. Many of the comparable structures that do remain intact, do not represent the Italianate style. Last, several of the storefronts that are similar in style and integrity, have a different type of massing.

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 subject structure, c. 1890, is a single-story commercial structure with a parapet in the Italianate style. There are remaining architectural features, such as the simple cornice with paired brackets and parapet, but the western storefront has seen more change than the eastern storefront. This structure contributes to the heritage of the City as a small, intact commercial storefront associated with Union Square development that expanded west down Somerville

Avenue. This building also shares a historical context with the other structures on-site as related income producing structures, also constructed by Patrick Rafferty.

- 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 subject structure retains a moderate level of architectural integrity due to the retention of original patterns and materials as well as location along Somerville Avenue; however, the structural integrity of the structure, according to ISD files, seems severely compromised.

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

The continued growth and development of Union Square as a viable commercial center in Somerville is of local significance. Sharing a historical context with the other structures on-site, as these were all constructed by Patrick Rafferty for additional income, is also of local significance.

- 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 on Somerville Avenue, but as the massing is more modest than the buildings on either side, this structure is not as prominent.

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

Single story commercial structures from this time period are found throughout the City in a variety of styles; however, many of them are less intact or have a different massing. There are possibly no other structures, which are similar to the subject structure and continue to share such a close association and historical context with buildings on-site.

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 due to the remaining integrity which is illustrated through the retention of Italianate architectural details, an association with Patrick Rafferty and other on-site structures, and the expansion of Union Square at the turn of the twentieth century. While the structural integrity of the building seems to be of concern, Staff has not learned of other structures that are of wood frame with similar massing and integrity, which also have such a direct association with other on-site structures.

Therefore, Staff finds the potential demolition of 314-316 Somerville Avenue detrimental to the heritage of the City.

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 or rehabilitate. Therefore, due to the level of integrity, the retention of Italianate architectural details on a small scale commercial structure; as an example of Union Square commerce in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; through an association with Patrick Rafferty, who was involved with City politics and is representative of immigrant groups who influenced the further development and expansion of Union Square; and as part of a nineteenth century collection of commercial structures associated with exponential growth at the turn of the twentieth century as well as the three-building collection of structures located on this parcel, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 314-316 Somerville Avenue 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).

314-316 Somerville Avenue

