



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE STAFF REPORT

Site:	314-316 Somerville Avenue
Case:	HPC 2014.009
Applicant Name:	Belmont Hill Corporation
Date of Application:	February 27, 2014
Recommendation:	Significant
Hearing Date:	April 15, 2014



314-316 Somerville Avenue, PAL (photo 2010)

I. Historical Association

Context/Evolution: The following historical description is taken predominantly from the 2010 PAL survey form. The survey text is italicized while the added information is regular text.

Union Square is the oldest and largest commercial district in Somerville, and its growth is tied to the residential and commercial growth of the City. Transportation improvements in the early part of the 19th century enabled further development in the area to support the rapidly growing population. Following the Civil War, local entrepreneurs established lucrative businesses in the Square and constructed numerous ambitious buildings. By the early 20th century, Union Square was a critical hub for automobile traffic, and it continued to develop commercially, adding auto-related enterprises to the mix.

Following the Civil War, both Union and Davis Squares evolved into larger commercial centers of a rapidly growing community. In 1872, Somerville incorporated as a city, and between 1870 and 1915, its population increased six-fold. Several local entrepreneurs capitalized on the growing markets and established themselves in Union Square. The Square's concentration of commercial enterprises served the employees and residents of the factories and industries that developed along the rail lines and rivers east of the Square. At the turn of the 20th century, the Union Square area was also a central point for streetcar and rail transport serving the many people living in Somerville and commuting to jobs in Boston (Zellie and Stott 1990:122). Somerville began a period of great expansion around 1900, in both population and construction activities. The town's population grew from 40,152 in 1890 to 77,236 in 1910. Almost half of Somerville's residential construction occurred between 1890 and 1900. Several Somerville investors built multi-unit rowhouses and apartment hotels in Union Square to accommodate the influx of residents.

The early 20th century introduced automobile traffic to Union Square, and vehicular circulation has significantly influenced the subsequent development of the area. After the 1920s, building construction in Somerville slowed dramatically, the result of a general decrease in fortunes that preceded the Depression years.

Historical Description: The following historical description is taken predominantly from the 2010 PAL survey form. The survey text is italicized while the added information is regular text.

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.

Architectural Description: The following historical description is taken predominantly from the 2010 PAL survey form. The survey text is italicized while the added information is regular text.



314-316 Somerville Avenue, primary and right side façades (photo 2014)

The subject structure, c.1890 and 1920, is a single-story commercial structure, *sited at the sidewalk on the south side of Somerville Avenue and faces north. It shares the large rectangular lot at the southeast corner of Hawkins Street with three other buildings. This building occupies the northeast corner of the lot and has a one-story, concrete-block garage directly behind it to the south. A three-story, mixed-use block stands at the northwest corner (318-322 Somerville Avenue, SMV.1341), and a three-story apartment block accessed from Hawkins Street (318R Somerville Avenue, SMV.1342) lines the south edge of the lot. A paved parking lot enclosed by a chain-link fence abuts the building to the east.*

The building's almost rectangular footprint measures approximately 33 feet wide by 35 feet long, with a 9 feet by 9 feet cutout at the southwest corner. It rises from a brick foundation to a shallow-pitched shed roof. The side and rear walls are red brick with no openings, and the primary facade (north) elevation is sheathed in clapboard. The simple wooden cornice has paired brackets.

The north elevation is divided into two storefronts. The east storefront has a recessed center entrance flanked by plate-glass window bays with flat wood surrounds and paneled bases. A wooden store cornice with paired brackets projects from the wall above the storefront. The entrance to the west storefront is located in the westernmost bay, and a double plate-glass window with paneled bases and a signboard across the top fills the rest of the flat wall. The store cornice

above the west storefront is obscured by a printed fabric awning.

Summary: *Development gradually spread along Somerville Avenue to the west of the Square as the City's population and employment opportunities increased. By 1895, Patrick Rafferty 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. The subject structure, c. 1890 and 1920, is a single-story commercial structure. The north elevation is divided into two storefronts, which both retain a fair amount of historic fabric.*

Findings on Historical Association

*For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either (a) **importantly associated with people, events or history** or (b) historically or architecturally significant (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B). Findings for (b) are at the end of the next section.*

(a) In accordance with the historic information obtained from *Findings on Historical Association*, which utilizes historic maps/atlasses, City reports and directories, and building permit research, and through an examination of resources that document the history of the City, such as *Somerville Past and Present*, Staff find 314-316 Somerville Avenue 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.

The subject building is found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City 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, and as part of a nineteenth century collection of commercial structures associated with exponential growth at the turn of the twentieth century.

II. Historical and Architectural Significance

The findings for historical and/or architectural significance of a historic property address the period, style, method of building construction and association with a reputed architect or builder of the subject property, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B).

The period of significance for 114-116 Somerville Avenue begins with the c. 1890 date of construction as a modest commercial structure in the Italianate style and continues into the present day as the use of this structure remains consistent.

Integrity

The National Park Service identifies historic integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance. A property should possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent or contain the values and qualities for which it is judged significant; therefore, the following is an identification and evaluation of these qualities and alterations as they affect the ability of the subject property to convey significance.

- a. *Location:* The subject structure is located along Somerville Avenue, just beyond Union Square. The location has not been altered and the structure is sited at the front of the lot. The location of this structure, as well as the other structures on this lot, represents how

development spread west down Somerville Avenue due to the increase in population and employment opportunity.

- b. Design: The original form, massing, and components of the original fenestration pattern are still evident. There are several remaining architectural features, such as the double cornice and brackets, possibly the bay window storefront on the east side, clapboard sheathing and left side masonry wall.
- c. Materials: The materials that compose this structure are predominantly wood, and masonry, with a brick foundation and a shallow-pitched tar and gravel shed roof.
- d. Alterations: The storefronts have been modified over the years as different commercial uses have utilized these two spaces; however, the massing, fenestration, and materials seem moderately intact.

Evaluation of Integrity:

The subject structure retains a moderate level of integrity due to the retention of original patterns and materials as well as location along Somerville Avenue. In addition, this structure is part of a collection of later nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial structures that represents the continued growth and development of Union Square as a viable commercial center in Somerville.

Findings for Historical and Architectural Significance

For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either (a) importantly associated with people, events or history or (b) historically or architecturally significant (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B). Findings for (a) can be found at the end of the previous section.

(b) In accordance with the *Finding on Historical 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, which assess the ability of the property to convey significance, Staff find 314-316 Somerville Avenue historically or architecturally significant.

The subject dwelling is found historically and architecturally significant 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 the group of buildings which, together, represent the late 19th and early 20th century expansion of Union Square along Somerville Avenue.

III. 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 meeting for a Determination of Significance. 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.

For a Determination of Significance, the structure must be either (A) listed on the National Register or (B) at least 50 years old.

(A) 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.

OR

(B) The structure, c. 1890, is at least 50 years old.

AND

For a Determination of Significance under (B), the subject building must be found either (a) importantly associated with people, events or history or (b) historically or architecturally significant.

(a) In accordance with the *Findings on Historical Association*, which utilizes historic maps/atlas, City reports and directories, and building permit research, and through an examination of resources that document the history of the City, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 314-316 Somerville Avenue 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.**

OR

(b) In accordance with the *Findings on Historical 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, the ability to convey significance, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 314-316 Somerville Avenue historically or architecturally significant.**

314-316 Somerville Avenue

