



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

*HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION*

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**DETERMINATION OF PREFERABLY PRESERVED STAFF REPORT**

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Site:	197 Washington Street
Case:	HPC 2012.134
Applicant Name:	Anthony Cota Sr.
Date of Application:	December 14, 2012
Date of Significance:	January 15, 2012
Recommendation:	Preferably Preserved
Hearing Date:	Tuesday, February 19, 2013



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

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

On Tuesday, January 15, 2013, the Historic Preservation Commission, in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (2003-05), made a determination that 197 Washington 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 identify the structure as c. 1860. The funeral parlor at 197 Washington Street is not indicated on the 1858 Walling Map of Boston and Vicinity but does appear to be illustrated on the 1860 Walling Map of Boston and Vicinity.

In accordance with *Criteria (i)*, listed above, the Commission agreed with Staff findings, due to the association of this structure with Samuel Holt, a member of the Common Council from 1884-85 and an Alderman from 1886-87.



In accordance with *Criteria (ii)*, listed above, the Commission disagreed with Staff findings that the structure is not historically or architecturally significant due to retention of the side-gable form, Italianate details (deep eaves with double brackets, square cupola and center pediment with fanlight), original site plan with semi-circular drive and, since 1933, use of the building as a funeral parlor.

## II. Additional Information

### *Additional Research and Historic Context:*

- Washington Street began as a 17<sup>th</sup> century trade route used by farmers to transport products to markets in Boston and Charlestown. Horsecar service was established along Washington Street in 1845 and Union Square developed as a center of commerce for the numerous industries and residences surrounding Washington Street, Somerville Avenue, and Bow Street.
- There is not a Samuel Holt listed on the 1860 census that is located in Somerville. Census data for 1870 states that two individuals by the name Samuel Holt are located in Somerville. One is listed as a C.C. Signal Master while the other is listed as a truckman. Census data from 1880 and 1890 do not have this name listed, but the 1900 census lists a Samuel Holt, age 73, that is consistent with the listing as truckman in 1870 who lives at 197 Washington Street.

### *Comparable Structures:*

Two-story dwellings with a side-gable and a center pediment on the primary façade are not common within the City. While other structures illustrate the same architectural components retained by the subject structure, such as the center pediment, double brackets and cupola, Staff does not have knowledge of a comparable dwelling from the mid-nineteenth century that illustrates all of the identified characteristics simultaneously. Staff is also not aware of another parcel in the City that has a similar landscape pattern, referring to the extensive front yard setback with semi-circular drive. Known comparable structures are:

- 58-60 Atherton Street (LHD)
- 37 Albion Street (LHD)
- 23-25 Monmouth Street (LHD)



*197 Washington Street*



*Left to Right: 58-60 Atherton Street; 37 Albion Street, 23-25 Monmouth Street*

### 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 structure is composed of several architectural components which are consistent with the Italianate style and, therefore, contribute to the heritage of the City. These components are the square cupola, deep eaves with double brackets and center pediment with fanlight. The infrequent nature by which these components are utilized together in a design scheme also contributes to the heritage of the City.

Additionally, this parcel reveals site plan features that were more commonly reflected during a previous time period and are now uncommon within the City. These features are the deep front setback and semicircular driveway. Due to the scarcity of these combined features along with the change in grade, which requires observers to gaze upward, the subject structure has become an icon to many residents in the City.

- 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 integrity of the subject structure to be retained within the original side-gable form as well as remaining architectural elements which are the square cupola, deep eaves with double brackets, and center pediment with fanlight. Additionally, the parcel retains integrity of location as the original site plan with semi-circular driveway and extensive front setback is still existent.

Another concern is that the surrounding context has changed considerably and no longer presents a historic context that is consistent with the subject structure. The various additions and modifications to the fenestration pattern also greatly alter the integrity of design and material; however, because combined features of the parcel and structure are rare, the loss of historic context and altered integrity of the structure should not be weighted as heavily.

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

The Commission determined that this structure is Significant due to the association of this structure with Samuel Holt and due to retention of the side-gable form, Italianate details (deep eaves with double brackets, square cupola and center pediment with fanlight), original site plan with semi-circular drive and, since 1933, use of the building as a funeral parlor.

The association with Samuel Holt represents an aspect of local history and the period of construction and associated site plan represents a transitional period, from agricultural to suburban, which also represents a local aspect of Somerville history. However, dependent upon how widespread and common the practice is of altering the use of large historic

structures from a residence to a funeral parlor, this aspect of Significance could represent a state or national level of 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 along Washington Street and is both a prominent and well-known historic resource within the community. Located at the base of Prospect Hill, the structure is setback more than 50 feet from Washington Street and looks down onto the Washington streetscape and neighborhood. Due to the large change in grade from the front to the back of the lot, the highly visible single-story front additions appear as part of the foreground, which allows visibility of the original side-gable form to be more apparent.

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

While two-story side-gable residential structures of the Italianate style are not uncommon, this type of structure is also not the more common building type that is represented today. What makes this structure and parcel unique is retention of the original site plan which includes the semi-circular driveway and extensive front setback as well as the unique square cupola feature. Although other comparative structures do illustrate a cupola, this feature is octagonal, not square.

***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 criteria listed above illustrate that this combination of features (square cupola, deep eaves with double brackets and center pediment with fanlight) is scarce within the City and due to the scarcity of these combined features, along with the change in grade, the subject structure is well known to many residents in the City. The integrity of the structure is predominantly upheld by the scarcity of these combined features as well.

#### **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, since prominent residential dwellings constructed prior to the Civil War and those that also retain their original site plan as well as uncommon features like a square cupola are so rare, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 197 Washington 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).*

*197 Washington Street, aerial view*

