



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

*Joseph A. Curtatone*

*Mayor*

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

KRISTENNA CHASE, *PRESERVATION PLANNER*  
SARAH WHITE, *PLANNER & PRESERVATION PLANNER*

**Case #:** HPC 2017.068  
**Date:** October 24, 2017

**Recommendation:** Preferably Preserved

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**PRESERVATION STAFF REPORT**  
*for*  
**Determination of Preferably Preserved**

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**Site:** 32 Webster Avenue

**Applicant Name:** 32 Webster Avenue LLC

**Applicant Address:** 32 Webster Avenue,  
Somerville, MA 02143

**Owner Name:** 32 Webster Avenue LLC  
**Owner Address:** 32 Webster Avenue, Somerville,  
MA 02143

**Petition:** Applicant seeks to demolish the existing structure.

**HPC Hearing Date:** October 24, 2017



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**I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

1. **Subject Property:** The subject property is a c.1852 -1874 Italianate residential structure that is currently uninhabited. See Form B for additional information.
2. **Proposal:** The Applicant seeks to demolish the existing structure.

**II. MEETING SUMMARY: Determination of Significance**

On September 26, 2017, the Historic Preservation Commission, in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (2003-05), made a determination that 32 Webster 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**

(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.*

The structure was determined 'Significant' due to an association of the property with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to its association with the glass industries of the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The nearby Union Glass Company provided jobs for many in the Emerson/Newton neighborhood.

The Commission agreed with the Staff findings that 32 Webster Avenue is importantly associated with the broad architectural history of the City. The subject building is found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to its association with popular architectural trends within the working classes and the early residential development of Union Square.

The Commission also agreed with the Staff findings that 32 Webster Avenue is architecturally significant in the context of a group of buildings on Newton and Emerson Streets

### **III. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The first known owner, Charles Pierce was a much loved resident of Somerville according to his Obituary in the Boston Globe.

The second owner, Charlotte M. Bowditch was the wife of Azell Bowditch, a noted horticulturalist and a member of the Boston Horticultural Society where his seed store was located. His seed catalogs are in the collection of Oregon State University.

“The Massachusetts catalogues in the OSU collection shed light on the early history of mail-order seed and plant shipping. In 1846, Walker and Co. offered seeds to any part of the country, with a note that orders “should be accompanied with a remittance or draft payable in Boston or New York”. In 1849, Breck sent fruit trees and seeds to any part of the country as well as the West Indies and Great Britain. In the same year, Hovey also accepted orders from the south and west and the West Indies and shipped “either direct or by the way of New York, or forwarded by any of the Express Lines or Railroads to any part of the country”. Winship’s catalogue said orders could be received by mail and shipped by rail to the western US and Canada, and Azell Bowditch’s fruit catalogue said, “Orders by mail will be promptly executed”. Despite these offers, getting seeds and plants delivered to remote areas at this time was both risky and expensive.”  
<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/seed/mid-19th-century/mid-19th-ma-cats-1840s-1850s>

#### *Comparable Structures:*

Two story gable-end dwellings with two or three bays are common throughout the City and compose a majority of the residential housing stock within the City. This building type is generally constructed as a single or two-family dwelling. Comparable structures of the same dates and style include:

- 1 Webster Street (LHD)
- 81 Pearl Street (LHD)
- 67 Florence Street (LHD)

They were all constructed for workers and inhabited by families for generations. For the most part they are well-maintained and retain much of their original character. 1 Webster Street, 81 Pearl Street and 67 Florence Street in East Somerville



*Above: 1 Webster Street (1851), 81 Pearl Street (1860); 67 Florence Street (c.1857).*

**IV. 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:*

*How does this building or structure compose or reflect features which contribute to the heritage of the City?*

- a) *What is the remaining integrity of the structure? The National Park Service defines integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance.*
  - The exterior of the structure (the only portion of the building within the purview of the HPC), retains a high degree of architectural integrity and reflects the evolution of this property through key eras of architectural change. The building is clearly 19<sup>th</sup> century and has had numerous alterations in keeping with working class housing in Somerville and the residential character and scale of the neighborhood. See the Staff Report on the Determination of Significance for more information

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

- The Commission found 32 Webster Avenue to be importantly associated with The structure was determined ‘Significant’ due to an association of the property with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to its association with the glass industries of the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The nearby Union Glass Company provided jobs for many in the Emerson/Newton neighborhood.
- The Commission agreed with the Staff findings that 32 Webster Avenue is importantly associated with the broad architectural history of the City. The subject building is found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history

of the City due to its association with popular architectural trends within the working classes and the early residential development of Union Square.

- The Commission also agreed with the Staff findings that 32 Webster Avenue is architecturally significant in the context of a group of buildings on Newton and Emerson Streets
- Staff has further found strong associations with horticulturalist Azell Bowditch (1828-1899). The house was in the name of his wife Charlotte M. Standish Bowditch.

*What is the visibility of the structure with regard to public interest (Section 2.17.B.ii) if demolition were to occur?*

- The structure occupies the key corner of Newton Street and Webster Avenue at the entry to a neighborhood of historically and architecturally interesting buildings associated with the Union Glass Company.

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

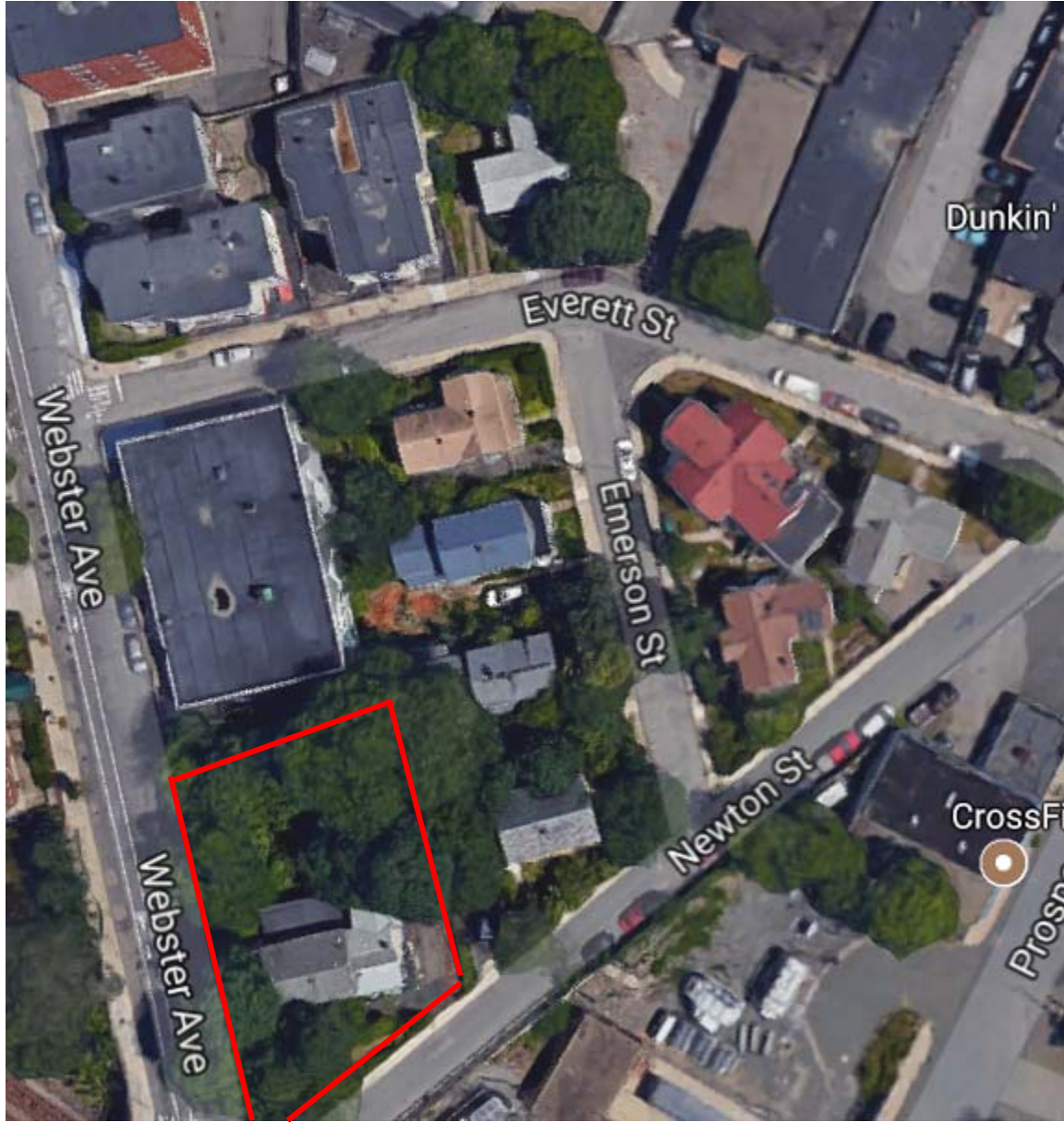
- Italianate style homes are common throughout Somerville with varying degrees of architectural integrity.

*Upon a consideration of the above criteria is the demolition of the subject building detrimental to the architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social heritage of the City?*

32 Webster Avenue is a key component of the streetscape expressing the historic and architectural nature of the neighborhood behind it.

## **V. RECOMMENDATION**

*Based on the information provided and an assessment of the building, Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission finds the property at 32 Webster Avenue to be **PREFERABLY PRESERVED**.*



**DEATH OF CHARLES PIERCE: Much Respected Resident of Somerville Passes Away.**  
*Boston Daily Globe (1872-1922): Jun 26, 1899; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Boston Globe*  
pg. 12

**DEATH OF CHARLES PIERCE.**

**Much Respected Resident of Somerville Passes Away.**

Charles Pierce, 72 years old, died early yesterday morning at his home, 69 School st, Somerville. He was a highly esteemed resident of the city. He had been in failing health all winter.

He was born in Gorham, Me. During his life he lived in Lawrence, Cambridge, New York and Somerville. In 1861 he founded a gas fitting business in Boston, which he conducted the remainder of his life. He was a member of John Abbott lodge of Masons of Somerville, past master of Putnam lodge of Masons of East Cambridge, and DeMolay commandery, Knights Templars, of Boston.

He leaves a daughter, Miss Bertha L, and a son, Lieut Fred W. Pierce, who served in Co M. 8th regiment, during the war with Spain. The remains will be taken to Lawrence on Wednesday for interment.

