



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

MINUTES

Tuesday, March 15, 2011
Third Floor Conference Room
Somerville City Hall

Staff Present: Kristi Chase, and Brandon Wilson (in and out).

Members Present: Kevin Allen, Dick Bauer, Natasha Burger, Tom DeYoung*, Ryan Falvey, Eric Parkes and Kelly Speakman.

Members Absent: Alan Bingham*, DJ Chagnon*, Sarah Degutis*, Abby Freedman, Derick Snare*, Brad Stearns* and Todd Zinn*.

*Alternates

Others present: Richard DiGirolamo, Campbell Ellsworth, James and Maria Freitas Erb.

The meeting was called to order at 6:40 pm.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

February 2011 Minutes

The Commission voted unanimously (5-0-2 (Natasha Burger and Kelly Speakman)) to approve the Minutes as amended.

EXPANSION OF LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS – Group D – VOTE



CITY HALL • 93 HIGHLAND AVENUE • SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS 02143
(617) 625-6600 EXT. 2500 • TTY: (617) 666-0001 • FAX: (617) 625-0722

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- Vote on final recommendations of the Commission on Group D to the BOA after the joint public hearing with the Legislative Matters Committee on February 22, 2011.

*The vote was unanimous (7-0) to **approve** the recommendation letter to the Board of Aldermen*

DELIBERATION OF HPC CASES

The Somerville Historic Preservation Commission will hold public hearings on the following applications, all in accordance with the Historic Districts Act, Chapter 40C of the Massachusetts General Laws, as amended, and the City of Somerville Ordinance (Sections 7-16 – 7-28):

HPC 10.90 – 27 Warren Avenue (continued from 10/19/10)

Applicant: Darin DiNucci, Owner, seeks a **Certificate of Appropriateness** to:

1. Remove enclosed 2-story porch ; and
2. Replace with open 2-story porch.

A conditional Certificate of Appropriateness was issued on 10/26/10 for the framing. The details are still to be determined.

Continued until April 19, 2011 per request of the Applicant.

DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE

HPC 11.21 – 52 Franklin Street, between 1857 and 1860

3/4/11

Applicant: Richard DiGirolamo, Attorney for Maria Freitas, Owner

Richard DiGirolamo, Campbell Ellsworth, James and Maria Freitas Erb presented, each taking a differing aspect of the building to discuss. *The house is situated on a 5500 SF lot. They believe that it is in the interest of the neighborhood to redevelop the lot. The building is the smallest and ugliest on the street. A portion of the building will need to be kept to allow for further development on the lot. They have met with Alderman Roche who is in support of their proposed project. The ledge presents some constraints on what can be done.*

The building was purchased a little over a year ago with the intention of making it the home of Jim Erb and Maria Freitas who had recently married. It is near Maria Freitas's parents and friends. She grew up on the street and was familiar with the house. Jim Erb is an experienced contractor and fully assumed that modernizing the house was a doable project. However, as they began working on the needed foundation repairs, and gutted the building to modernize it, the cost of the needed repairs mushroomed. The building was found to have profound structural problems that would be very expensive to repair. Part of the basement wall had moved 38" in from the sill of the building. One section of the building had ceiling heights of only 6'4" and the basement ceiling was lower still. They do not have the money to do this, so it was decided, while retaining a portion of the original building, to construct a larger 3-unit building on the site that would provide the financial offset.

Campbell Ellsworth, the architect, experienced in working with historical commissions, wanted clarification on what aspects of the building were considered significant. He disagreed with the Staff's initial assessment that the house was post and beam construction. While the major supports were larger than are used today and were pegged together, that was common practice at the time. There is no corner bracing. The basic construction was balloon framed. The dormers were probably installed after the fact. Campbell Ellsworth noted that they were probably the 'Velux® skylights of the day.'

Staff Recommendations were read.

No Public Comment was received.

Discussion: *Ryan Falvey applauded the Erbs' efforts to rehabilitate the house and as a businessman understood that at a certain point the bottom line forced decisions. They had made a significant attempt to save the building. Tom DeYoung felt that one should retain the façade which was the most characteristic and significant portion of the building. Eric Parkes thought that the building was significant even if it was not a classic post and beam structure, for its age as well as its role on the streetscape. Natasha Burger felt that the building was significant in the context of the streetscape but not of sufficient importance to be preferably preserved. Dick Bauer discussed the vernacular Greek Revival characteristics of the building derived from its roof shape and how the style would be simplified for a modest workers home as opposed to a more elaborated up-scale house.*

It was noted that Demolition Review is a 2-step process. The Applicants should not think of the decision as an out-right denial of their intention to demolish but one of importance and significance to the City's development. The next meeting would weigh the architectural and historical merits of the building against its condition and proposed replacement in the long term.

The building's relationship to the streetscape along with massing and form. It was decided that the façade on Franklin Street, along with the general massing and form were the most important physical features of the house.

Documents: *City of Somerville Ordinance section 7.28, Property Form B, Staff Memo re: architecture and history of the properties, Staff Recommendations, photos of the buildings by the Staff and the owners.*

Decisions: *The Commission voted unanimously (6-1) to determine 52 Franklin Street, a circa 1860 wood frame house 'significant' because the building was (Section 2.17) "at least 50 years old, and is or has been determined by the Commission to be a significant building or structure after a finding that the building or structure is either:*

- i. *"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 of Massachusetts, or*
- ii. *"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, and therefore it is in the public interest to be preserved or rehabilitated rather than to be demolished."*

Specifically, because its history is that of the workers neighborhood from before the Civil War. Architecturally, the house fits with the residential streetscape to the south of it.

DEMOLITION REVIEW UPDATE

HPC 11.02 Demolition – 39-43 Elmwood Street, circa 1898 wood-frame house and 1916-1919 concrete block buildings

Applicants: Charles Aggouras and Daniel DiPierro, GFC Development Inc

The working group held two meetings so far on 3/4/11 and 3/11/11 to develop site plans and save the house at 39 Elmwood Street. Developers now state that they plan to retain the house and develop around it. The next meeting will be on 3/25/11 to review the revised site plan and redesigned new houses.

STAFF REVIEW AND COMMENTS AS PER REQUEST OF OTHER DIVISIONS

HPC 11.15 – 11 Williams Court

2/25/11

Applicant: Planning Division

Placement of the dormers on 11 Williams Court is unlikely to adversely impact the rhythm of the street provided the dormers are not too large and too forward on the roof.

HPC 11.17 – 16 Butler Drive – St Polycarp’s Village, Phase II

2/25/11

Applicant: Planning Division

Staff forwarded HPC December 2010 Minutes which included the following comments: Materials such as a stone façade could help. An arched doorway might tie the building to the church. The east elevation could be broken with more articulation. Solar panels could be used to give more interest to the roof. Safety and privacy requirements were also mentioned. (HPC 10.109)

Recent black and white photos of the school, library and convent have also been reviewed for submittal to the Massachusetts Historical Commission as part of a Memoranda of Agreement prior to the demolition of the buildings noted below determined significant by the MHC but not by the SHPC on 3/21/06 (HPC 06.18)

HPC 11.18 – 75 Wallace Street

2/22/11

Applicant: Planning Division

Proposed changes to the house, such as siding replacement with clapboard, new dormers and windows, follow HPC Design Guidelines. Staff recommends keeping this property in mind for next year’s Director’s Awards.

HPC 11.22 – 485 Mystic Valley Parkway – Mystic Pumping Station 3/1/11
Applicant: Somerville Housing Authority

Review preliminary plans for site which includes 2 floors of housing inside shell of the building.

DEMOLITIONS AND CERTIFICATES OF NON-APPLICABILITY REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY STAFF

HPC 11.16 – 398 Broadway 2/15/11
Applicant: Celio Vincente, contractor for Edward Harvie, Owner.

1. Remove and replace existing decking and handrails on 3rd floor rear of the building with wood.

The existing condition is inappropriate but also minimally visible from Central Street.

HPC 11.20 Demolition – 115 Pearl Street, Portion of East Somerville Community School
Applicant: City of Somerville 2/28/11

This portion of the building was damaged by fire a couple of years ago. The school has been closed since then.

PROJECT UPDATES AND OTHER BUSINESS

Project Updates

- **LHD Expansion Project** (Brandon Wilson and Amie Schaeffer)
 - Group D: Vote tonight by SHPC & Legislative Matters Committee, and hopefully by BOA at their next meeting on Thurs. March 24th
 - Group E & F materials will be revised to reflect the larger, consolidated districts and then outreach to all of the owners in each group will start anew.
- **SHPC Subcommittee for Guidelines Revision** (Kristi Chase and Abby Freedman)
 - Subcommittee met last Thurs., Mar. 10th
 - Subcommittee will continue their work, next mtg. on March 31st.
- **Prospect Hill Tower and Site** (Brandon Wilson with Kristi Chase)
 - Presentation by TBA Architects, Inc. and staff to MHC on March 1st
 - MHC willing to re-consider eligibility of site for National Register listing
 - City to hire consultant to prepare a revised Eligibility Opinion reflecting new research and findings about the strategic importance of the battlefield site to the winning of the Revolutionary War
 - City DPW may be needed to stabilize the Tower structure during the short-term interim

- **Patriot's Day Event Planning** (Brandon Wilson and Amie Schaeffer)
 - Event is being planned in coordination with Historic Somerville and the Somerville Museum once again
 - First planning meeting held last Thurs. Mar. 10th; and need for another 10 volunteers to oversee the Colonial games and activities identified – any volunteers for this fun historic event?
 - Next meeting is on Thurs. Mar. 24th at 7:30pm at the Somerville Museum – All welcome!

- **2011 Preservation Awards Program** (Brandon Wilson and Derick Snare)
 - SHS Art and CAD students received photos of the properties for (4) Director Awards, (6) Preservation Awards, and (3) owners receiving an Inspiring Streetscape Award
 - Annual Awards Ceremony to be held at the Somerville Museum on Thurs. May 26th – please mark your calendars now!

- **Historic Properties Class for Real Estate Agents** (Brandon Wilson and Amie Schaeffer)
 - Sponsored by Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage as a continuing education course for 2 credits and held in Somerville City Hall for second time; last course held March 2008
 - Very well received, with over 100 registered and 98 attending
 - Presenters were Brandon Wilson (“Overview of LHDs and Preservation Commissions, with Somerville as a Case Study”), Kosta Ligris, Esquire (“Legal Aspect of the Historic Ordinance”) , Brad Stearns (“Common Problems and Solutions of Old House”) , and Sara Rosenfeld (“Role of the Real Estate Professional”)
 - Refreshments provided by SHS Culinary Arts
 - Course so popular that likely to be offered again using the same materials at their most usual Waltham training office.

- **Adoption of Zoning Ordinance Amendment for Historic Carriage Houses**
 - BOA adopted the ordinance in February, offering new benefits to owners of designated historic properties

- **Enhancements to SHPC Website** (Brandon Wilson)
 - In anticipation of Real Estate Course, additional materials posted to the Commission's website; check it out via <http://www.somervillema.gov/historicpreservation>, and via OSPCD's website: <http://www.somervillema.gov/Section.cfm?org=OSPCD&page=1360>

Other Business

- **SHPC Operational Affairs** (Brandon Wilson)
 - Orientation meeting and materials for four new appointments (Alan Bingham, Natasha Burger, Kelly Speakman, and Todd Zinn) to be re-scheduled shortly based upon new members' availability

- **Somerville Museum Capital Building Fund** (Brandon Wilson)
 - Matching grant of \$104,500 from Massachusetts Cultural Council for replacement of the slate roof and repairs to its wood windows, gutters and trim was successful by the deadline this week of March 15th!
 - Over 370 people and firms contributed to the Capital Building Fund, showing widespread community support for the project which is very helpful for future funding needs.
 - Many thanks to those on the SHPC who generously contributed to this effort!
 - Contributions are still welcome for additional work via http://www.somervillemuseumbuildingfund.org/fundraising_thermometer_capped

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 PM.

Upcoming Meeting Schedule for 2011: April 19, May 17, June 21, July 19, August 16, September 20, October 18, November 15, and December 20.

All of the applications summarized above are available for public inspection at the Commission's Office on the third floor of City Hall, 93 Highland Avenue, on Mon. -Wed. 9:00 am - 4:30 pm; Thurs. 9:00 am-7:30 pm; and Fri. 9:00 am-12:30 pm. Since cases may be continued to a later date(s), please check the agenda on the City's website, or call before attending (tel.: (617) 625-6600 x. 2525). Continued cases will not be re-advertised. Interested persons may provide comments to the Historic Preservation Commission at the hearing, by fax to 617-625-0722, by e-mail to kchase@somervillema.gov, or by mail to the Historic Preservation Commission, City Hall, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA 02143.