



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 2018.032

Date: June 19, 2018

Recommendation: NOT Preferably Preserved

PRESERVATION STAFF REPORT
for
Determination of Preferably Preserved

Site: 109-111 Prospect Street

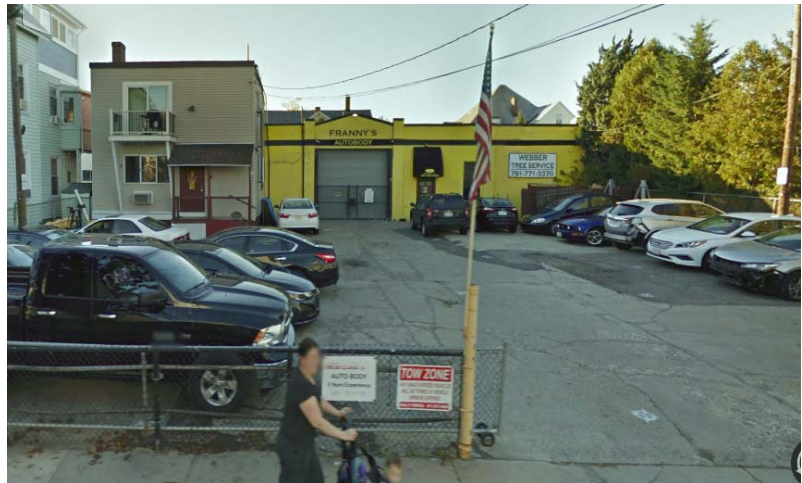
Applicant Name: 109-111 Prospect Street Somerville, LLC

Applicant Address: P.O. Box 610312, Newton, MA 02461

Owner Name: Same

Owner Address: Same

Petition: Applicant seeks to demolish the c. 1916 storage garage at 111 R Prospect Street



HPC Hearing Date: June 19, 2018

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. **Subject Property:** The subject property is a c.1916 storage garage at the rear of the lot at 109-111 Prospect Street designed by S.S. Eisenberg.
2. **Proposal:** The Applicant seeks to demolish the c. 1916 storage garage at 111 R Prospect Street.

I. MEETING SUMMARY: Determination of Significance

On Tuesday, May 15, 2018, the Historic Preservation Commission voted unanimously (7-0) to determine the c. 1916 masonry building at the rear of the property at **109-111 Prospect Street (111 R Prospect**

Street) ‘Significant’ because the building, per Section 2.17.B of the Demolition Review Ordinance 2003-05, is “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.”

The Commission also found **111 R Prospect Street** is found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to associations with growth of automotive use throughout the country and with the early career of a known architect, S.S. Eisenberg.

The subject building at **111 R Prospect Street** is found historically and architecturally significant due to associations with a reputed architect, S. S. Eisenberg.

The Commission also **did not** find the small office building/house at **111 Prospect Street** importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City or historically or architecturally significant.

II. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

“Samuel Saul Eisenberg was born on December 29, 1892, in Pinsk, Poland. He married to Ida Levine (b. 1892-1893 in MA; d. after Mar1964), daughter of Robert M. Levine. Samuel Eisenberg died on March 10, 1964, in Boston. Samuel Eisenberg immigrated to the United States in about 1901. He graduated from MIT in 1915.

“By 1920, he had begun practice as an architect, and by 1921 was working in partnership with Herman Louis Feer in the firm of Eisenberg and Feer. They remained partners until about 1936, after which they both continued as sole practitioners. At the time of his death in 1962, Herman Feer was a partner of William E. Nast.

“Eisenberg designed a number of public buildings, including the Massachusetts Civil Defense Center in Framingham, Chelsea High School, a dormitory at the Lowell State Teachers College, and housing for the elderly in Attleboro, Somerset, Swampscott, and Boston.” <https://backbayhouses.org/samuel-saul-eisenberg/>

From a 2007 Form B by Pauline Chase Harrell regarding a 1924 “ building was designed by S. S. Eisenberg, one of a number of successful downtown Boston-based Jewish architectural firms that also included Saul E. Moffie and Silverman, Brown and Hienan. At about this time, Eisenberg was also designing a number of large apartment buildings and substantial two-family houses along Commonwealth Avenue in the Aberdeen section of Brighton.”

Samuel Saul Eisenberg and his firm designed numerous buildings from the late ‘teens into the nineteen sixties. The firm he founded is still designing buildings to this day under another name. From their website, “EHA Design, Inc. Its predecessor, S.S. Eisenberg Associates, was founded in 1921, making it one of the oldest architectural firms in Massachusetts.”

Of all the buildings by Eisenberg’s firm MACRIS lists only 2 garage structures. One is from 1925 and the other is from 1958. Both are multi-story structures and do not resemble the 1916 storage garage at 111 R Prospect Street which was constructed shortly after he graduated from MIT in 1915.



Comparable Structures:

Commercial garages of a similar type and style were once common throughout the City and have become increasingly uncommon. While several private garages still exist within the City, few (if any) present a similar scale or level of design as the subject structure. In addition, the type of use that is commonly associated with buildings similar to the subject structure often encourages alterations that affect the architectural integrity of the building.

Comparable structures of larger scale and prominence within the City include: 297 Medford Street (1906); 92-96 Prospect Street (1917); 224 Somerville Avenue (1933); and 143 Jaques Street. Predominant differences between the structures are the size of the massing, use of materials, and remaining architectural integrity due to the degree of alteration, and the level of design



297 Medford Street (1906)



92-96 Prospect Street



143 Jaques Street



224 Somerville Avenue

II. 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.*
- b) The style, simplicity of architectural detail, and massing of this structure were common for this type of garage structure within the City. These features are the early use of stucco and the brick parapet details that relate to the Spanish Revival style becoming prominent as an exotic building style. See determination of significance for a summary of the historic architectural features of this structure.

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

- The Commission also found **111 R Prospect Street** is found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to associations with growth of automotive use throughout the country and with the early career of a known architect, S.S. Eisenberg.
 - The subject building at **111 R Prospect Street** is found historically and architecturally significant due to associations with a reputed architect, S. S. Eisenberg.
 - In regards to Samuel Saul Eisenberg, this garage was designed and constructed shortly after he graduated from MIT and is not typical of his mature work
- c) *What is the visibility of the structure with regard to public interest (Section 2.17.B.ii) if demolition were to occur?*
 - The structure is set well back from Prospect Street with a large front parking area. Houses on either side flank the lot and are set much closer to the front lot line, leaving the parking area the most visible characteristic of the parcel.

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

- Automotive service and storage garages expanded as a building type with the growth of car ownership in the late teens and twenties of the last century. As noted above, there are several extant garages of greater prominence in the city.

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?

Staff finds that while the garage is interesting for its connection to S.S. Eisenberg, Staff does not find that the building is characteristic of Eisenberg's oeuvre. Most of his buildings have brick facades with cast stone and concrete detailing. Staff finds that the architectural characteristics of the garage do not presage in any way Eisenberg's mature style.

The location of the garage at the back of the lot also does not give prominence to the structure. Any new construction on the lot would hide the building and would not have any public benefit to its retention.

III. RECOMMENDATION

*Based on the information provided and an assessment of the building, Staff does NOT recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission finds the property at 111 R Prospect Street to be **PREFERABLY PRESERVED**.*

