



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

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DETERMINATION OF PREFERABLY PRESERVED STAFF REPORT

Site: 227-229 Cedar Street
17 Murdock Street
Case: HPC 2017.032
Applicant Name: Cedar Murdock Partners LLC

Date of Application: May 25, 2017
Date of Significance: June 27, 2017

Recommendation: **NOT** Preferably Preserved
Hearing Date: August 1, 2017

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



I. Meeting Summary: Determination of Significance

On June 27, 2017, the Historic Preservation Commission, in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (2003-05), made a determination that 227-229 Cedar Street and 17 Murdock Street are 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;¹

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.*

¹ **Note:** The adjacent structure at 21-25 Murdock Street is less than 50 years old and therefore was determined to be not significant.

- According to *Criteria 2.17.B*, listed above, historic map and building permit research identifies the structures as c. 1920 and c. 1948.
- In accordance with *Criteria (i)*, listed above, the Commission found the structures significant due to their associations with the economic and social history of working class development of the City. In the opinion of the Commission, the buildings were evidence of the important small industries begun by immigrants.
- In accordance with *Criteria (ii)*, listed above, the Commission also found the subject buildings historically and architecturally significant due to the ability of the subject parcel to convey significance regarding location and form as well as, to a moderate degree, integrity of design. This can be seen in the flat roofs typical of small 20th century industrial buildings, the large chimney stack and the 1940s era metal windows.
- The period of significance for 227-229 Cedar Street and 17 Murdock Street begins in the 1920s as a steam laundry facility and continued until about 1973 when the property was bought by Cecil Marchionne and changed to a sporting equipment warehouse.

II. Additional Information

- No further information was found on the owner of White Banner Laundry or his business.
- No names of employees were found.
- *Environmental Report*: Petroleum derivatives have been found beneath the Cedar Street and Murdock Street buildings. In summary, ground contamination appears to have not yet started to flow from the Murdock/Cedar Street site onto adjacent properties. However, high enough levels of contamination have been found on the site to render them reportable and requiring remediation in order to prevent flow onto adjacent properties. A significant portion of the contamination is located beneath the building containing the chimney stack. In order to remediate this contamination, the building and associated stack must be removed. See attached.
- *Structural Report*: The chimney is un-reinforced brick and does not meet seismic code. See attached conditions report.
- *Comparable Structures*:
 - There are numerous concrete block and brick industrial buildings scattered throughout the City predominantly along the railway lines and major arterials. Recent immigrants continue to start or work in small businesses in old and new structures throughout the city. Many of them include laundries as well as restaurants, tailor shops, and gas stations.



Three intact storefronts on Beacon Street and Somerville Avenue from the same era as the 227-229 Cedar Street buildings.

Concrete block industrial buildings that are in current use or have recently been converted to other uses.



23 Rush Street – 1916 concrete block garage now used as millwork shop.



12 Marshall Street – 1912 garage now used as church



Corner of Albion and Lowell Streets – currently autobody, T-shirts, Boston Closet, and churches

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:

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

- One-story concrete block buildings are scattered throughout the City. The buildings are often of an industrial nature with simple unornamented form while the older portions retain allusions to granite, such concrete block structures are plentiful in the city. While the heritage of immigrant and unskilled labor can be seen during the day to day observation of activities around the property, it is not clear that the building's exterior itself tells this story.

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 Commission found that integrity of this industrial building is retained within the location and form, as well as, integrity of design. This can be seen in the flat roofs typical of small 20th century industrial buildings, the large chimney stack and the 1940s era metal windows. The variations in the block siding indicates the many alterations made to the buildings over time. Staff found many similar buildings. These are garages, churches and workshops which do not convey a particular significance to any of them through their architecture.

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

- The Commission determined that this structure is significant an association of the property with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to its associations with immigration and an important catalyst for the acclimatization and incorporation of unskilled workers into the community, spurring the development of workers housing and other businesses.
- Staff does not find these associations to be sufficiently important. There were and are numerous businesses located in similar buildings. Their architecture does not convey a particular business or use.
- The period of significance for 227-229 Cedar Street begins in the 1920s as a storefront which was enclosed during the 1940s to house a steam laundry facility in conjunction with 17 Murdock Street. This use continued until about 1973 when the property was bought by Cecil Marchionne and changed to a sporting equipment warehouse.
- Staff does not find these uses of particular and specific significance to the development of the City. Many other buildings and sites carry the same degree of importance.

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

- The subject parcels are visible along Cedar Street as a concrete block wall. The Murdock Street buildings are visible from the Street while much of the complex is interior to the block. The boiler chimney stack is located near the center of the lot, interior to several concrete block buildings.

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

There are numerous small buildings that served as bakeries, grocery stores, barbershops and laundries. They are often mistaken for garages due to their small size. The larger structures served and continue to serve a variety of roles.

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 Commission found the structures significant due to their associations with the economic and social history of working class development of the City. The buildings were evidence of the important small industries begun by immigrants.
- The Commission also found the subject buildings historically and architecturally significant due to the ability of the subject parcel to convey significance regarding location and form as well as, to a moderate degree, integrity of design. This can be seen in the flat roofs typical of small 20th century industrial buildings, the large chimney stack and the 1940s era metal windows.
- The period of significance for 227-229 Cedar Street begins in the 1920s as a storefront which was enclosed during the 1940s to house a steam laundry facility in conjunction with 17 Murdock Street. This use continued until about 1973 when the property was bought by Cecil Marchionne and changed to a sporting equipment warehouse.
- The buildings have been altered over time. The site is polluted and needs thorough remediation. The most unusual characteristic structure (the chimney) is not sound enough to be retained.
- The immediate historical context is changing, these buildings no longer fit within the residential or industrial context of the neighborhood. The local residents do not work in their own neighborhood. Workers are traveling further for work which is no longer located in the center but out from the urban core.
- The buildings are not importantly associated with a particular person or group. They have no particular architectural merit beyond the vernacular style used for utilitarian buildings in the early to mid-20th century. Numerous examples of the type of structure can be found throughout Somerville and the United States.

Therefore, Staff does not find the potential demolition of 227-229 Cedar Street and 17 Murdock Street detrimental to the heritage of the City.

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 do not 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, **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission do not find 227-229 Cedar Street and 17 Murdock 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).

Cedar and Murdock Streets, aerial view

