



**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 2017.072  
**Date:** October 24, 2017

**Recommendation:** Preferably Preserved

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**PRESERVATION STAFF REPORT**  
*FOR*  
**DETERMINATION OF PREFERABLY PRESERVED**

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**Site:** 249 Highland Avenue

**Applicant Name:** Cheung Kwan Yu  
**Applicant Address:** 128 Lincoln St., Ste 1101, Boston, MA 02111

**Owner Name:** Cheung Kwan Yu et al  
**Owner Address:** 249 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA 02143

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

**HPC Hearing Date:** October 27, 2017



**I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

1. **Subject Property:** The subject property is a c.1895 Queen Anne single family residential structure with asbestos shingle siding.
2. **Proposal:** The Applicant seeks demolish the existing structure to make way for a new building.

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

On Tuesday, September 26, 2017, the Historic Preservation Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to determine the c. 1895 wood-frame dwelling at Highland Avenue 'Significant' because the building, per *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 Commission found **249 Highland Avenue** to be 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. The subject building is found importantly associated with the writer and poet Sam Walter Foss, his family and friends for specific contributions to the cultural history of the City as well as associations with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to the Queen Anne Style architecture prevalent at that time.

The Commission also found **249 Highland Avenue** historically and architecturally significant due to their relationship to the streetscape and its place within a group of similarly important buildings and due to its building style – Queen Anne, which is emblematic of the period in which it was constructed and as one of several similarly designed buildings within the neighborhood.

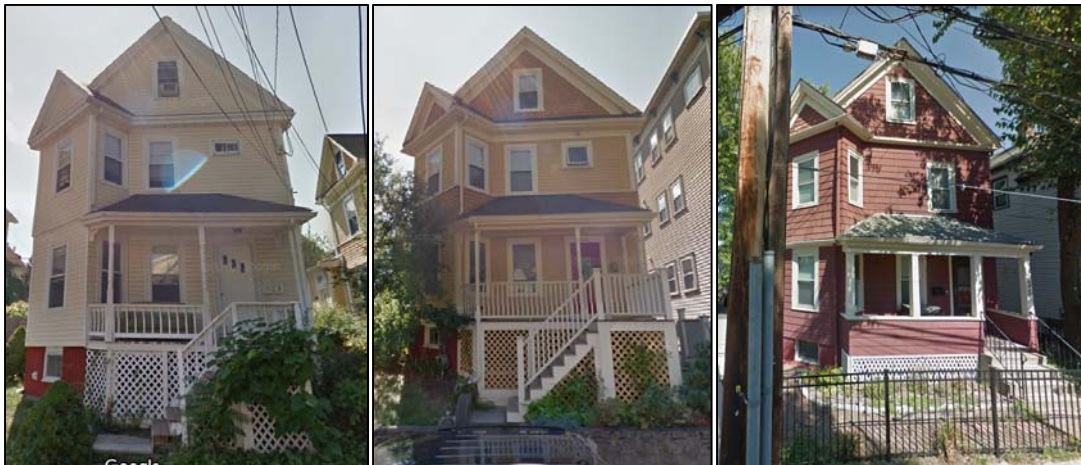
## II. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### *Comparable Structures:*

As shown on the maps, at least 4 other properties were constructed with the same footprint as 249 Highland Avenue. They share the same basic massing but with variations due to the topography, differentiation by the developer and the changing tastes of owners over time. Circular turrets are more common than the diagonal bay used in these buildings.

Comparable structures within the City include, but not limited to:

- 132 Hudson Street
- 134 Hudson Street
- 135 Hudson Street
- 245 Highland Avenue
- 381 Medford Street



*132 Hudson Street, 134 Hudson Street, 135 Hudson 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:*

*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 (asbestos shingles aside, which is easily removed).

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

- This structure is significantly associated with the nationally known poet and writer Sam Walter Foss who was also the City Librarian in the 1890s and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The largest park in the city is named for his son, Saxton Conant Foss and one of the editors of the Somerville Journal, May Pillsbury. Even today, his poems are regularly read to mark historic city occasions.
  - This structure historically and architecturally significant due to their relationship to the streetscape and its place within a group of similarly important buildings and due to its building style – Queen Anne, which is emblematic of the period in which it was constructed and as one of several similarly-designed buildings within the neighborhood.
- b) *What is the visibility of the structure with regard to public interest (Section 2.17.B.ii) if demolition were to occur?*



- Highland Avenue is a major local artery. The house is located among several similar buildings, some of who have c. 1910-1920 storefronts. There is a rhythm of gable roofs and low facades along the street interrupted by small front yards on the north side of the avenue. Removing the building would alter the rhythm.

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

- The City of Somerville has a large number of Queen Anne style buildings retaining varying degrees of architectural integrity. However, no other house has such strong associations with such a well-loved poet of the time.

*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?*

The Applicant's proposal to demolish the house would be detrimental to the cultural heritage of the City. Sam Walter Foss and his family continue to have relevance to the modern world.

### III. RECOMMENDATION

*Based on the information provided and an assessment of the building, Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission finds the property at 249 Highland Avenue to be **PREFERABLY PRESERVED**.*

