



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

Joseph A. Curtatone

Mayor

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

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

Case #: HPC 2017. 068

Date: September 26, 2017

Recommendation: Historically Significant

PRESERVATION STAFF REPORT
for
Determination of Significance

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: September 26, 2017*



* This is an off-schedule meeting due to the polls being open on September 19, 2017

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. **Subject Property:** The subject property is a c.1852 -1874 Italianate house on the corner of Webster Avenue and Newton Street. It is one of a number of buildings under consideration as part of the proposed Union Square. It should be noted that this property has been neglected for over a decade and as a result is in poor condition.

Located on the southern edge of Union Square, the Emerson-Newton triangle was set out in 1852-58 on land belonging to Robert Vinal. The streets first appear on the 1866 Map of Boston and its Environs

published by Baker and Tilden under the direction of H.F. Walling. Union Square has become densely settled with buildings shown on Bow Street, Prospect Hill and Washington Street. Nearby businesses seen on the map include the Wyatt Brickyards and the American Tube Works. The Union Glass Company was located just to the south of the neighborhood. By 1874 the neighborhood was fully built out. The Form B for this structure is attached to this staff report.

Staff found that not all information in the Form B was correct. The following excerpt from the 1869 City Directory finds Charles Pierce to be a resident of 32 Webster Avenue.

Phinney William, furniture, (74 Portland, B.), house 5
Jenny Lind [rimac, B.), h. Sycamore, n. Foster
Pickens Lysander W. planing mill, (cor. Causeway and Mer-
Pierce Charles, gas fitter, house Webster ave. near F. R. R.
Pierce Joseph I. carpenter, house Milk, near Elm
Pierce William, carpenter, house Sacramento, n. F. R. R.

TREMONT FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY of Boston. Capital,
\$200,000, Office, 97 State Street, Boston.

Integrity

The National Park Service identifies historic integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance. A property should possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent or contain the values and qualities for which it is judged significant; therefore, the following is an identification and evaluation of these qualities and alterations as they affect the ability of the subject property to convey significance.

a) *Location:* The building has been raised to meet the new grade needed for the railway bridge in 1911. See historic photo. It is located within a group of cottages from the same period at the southern edge of Union Square.

b) *Design:* The building is an example of workers' cottage. It has had several changes in its design over the years to meet the changing needs of its owners.

Original features include, but not limited to: general form and massing, window layout, gable ends, and 2-story rear ell.

c) *Materials:* The dwelling is constructed of wood with an early 20th century brick foundation. The roof has asphalt shingles.

d) *Alterations:* Many of the windows have been replaced, the original clapboarding has been (either removed or) covered over with aluminum. Original roofing material has been changed to asphalt shingles as is typical of most houses of this vintage. The house retains its original massing and form. The front porch was added in 1923, remodeled in 1963 with a further addition in 1967.

Evaluation of Integrity: The building is clearly 19th century and has had numerous alterations in keeping with working class housing in Somerville and the residential character and scale of the neighborhood.

II. DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Somerville demolition review ordinance requires a two-step process in order to allow for the demolition of a historic building or to invoke the 9-month demolition delay. The first step is to determine whether or not the building in question is "historically significant." In order for a building/structure to be determined "historically significant," pursuant to Section 2.17 of the ordinance, such a building or structure must be:

- A. *"...listed on, or is within an area listed on, the National Register of Historic Places, or which is the subject of a pending application for listing on the National Register,*

OR

B. “...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***

Staff Findings:

B(i) – Staff finds 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.

B(ii) – Staff finds that 32 Webster Avenue is architecturally significant in the context of a group of buildings on Newton and Emerson Streets

III. 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 Street to be historically SIGNIFICANT.

The physical integrity of this building is in doubt due to many years of neglect with windows open to the elements. The building was not properly “mothballed” or otherwise secured once it was no longer inhabited. The definition for demolition includes section 2.19 in which “**Voluntarily** means any act(s) done by design or intention, which is proposed, intended, or not accidental. An Act of God is not considered voluntary, but rather is regarded as an act done without the will or choice of the applicant (or owner, if different from applicant). For the purposes of this chapter, ***the destruction of a significant building or structure for failure to properly secure it shall be considered voluntary.***”

A full structural report should be submitted.

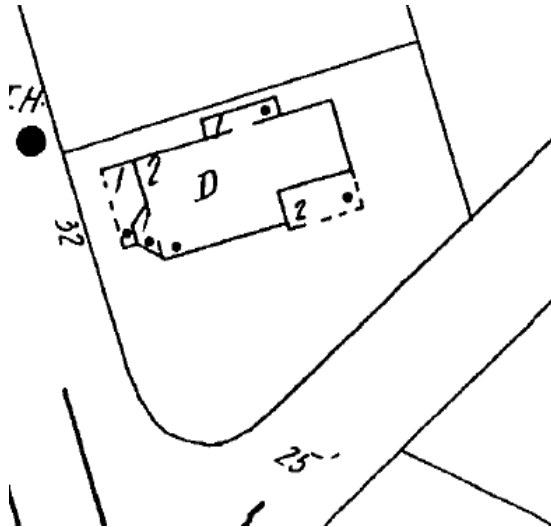


The image displays two historical maps of Everett, Massachusetts, showing street layouts and property ownership. The left map is a detailed view of the intersection of Everett Street and Emerson Street, with property owners like Amos, Neil, Guthrie, and Abram. The right map is a broader view of the same area, showing the intersection of Everett Street, Emerson Street, and Prospect Street, with property owners like Nathan W. Ames, Geo. T. Robinson, and Lydia P. Guild.

1895 Bromley Plate 7



1925 Sanborn Plate 77



1950 Sanborn Plate 4



32 Webster Avenue, 2016



32 Webster Avenue 2017



32 Webster Avenue 2017