



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

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

STAFF PRESENT
AMIE HAYES, PLANNER

MEMBERS PRESENT
JILLIAN ADAMS
ABBY FREEDMAN
ERIC PARKES

Minutes for 6/11/13 Public Meeting

The Somerville Historic Preservation Commission held a public meeting on **Tuesday, June 11, 2013, at 2:00 p.m.** in City Hall, 3rd Floor Conference Room, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss design components to incorporate into a Memorandum of Agreement regarding the proposed project at 92-96 Prospect Street. Three dimensional renderings and a DRAFT Memorandum of Agreement were distributed prior to the start of the meeting.

The Commissioners asked the Applicant and Architect to walk them through the changes that have been made from the previous renderings. They explained that the arched windows have been altered to double-hung windows with divided lights and a fixed divided light transom; the paneling for the center arch along Prospect Street has been lowered to allow for a divided light fixed window and transom above; a portion of the original window opening (right side of Prospect Street façade) that was previously infilled with glass block has been infilled with brick; and the transformer has been more appropriately illustrated with regard to size and shape.

The Applicant further explained that after speaking with NSTAR, the transformer is likely not to be replaced with a smaller unit nor placed underground. Thinking through the possibility of moving the transformer inside the masonry building, there was a consensus that this would present issues regarding access. Therefore, the discussion turned to using landscape to reduce the visual impact. The Commissioners commented that the gate illustrated in the renderings was helpful to conceal the transformer, but since the point of moving it was to utilize the door behind, and since this did not seem feasible, the Commissioners then focused on how to further reduce the visual impact of the transformer. Suggestions to use open steel gratings (such as the material often used as a fire escape), panels consistent with those used elsewhere on the property, or a trellis with vegetation would obstruct views. The final consensus was to increase the height of the existing gate and make the top portion more transparent, so as to not obstruct views of the masonry building.

The Commissioners commented on the use of natural wood panels and how this contributed warmth in contrast to the industrial nature of the interior building. The use of these wood panels also emphasizes the horizontal architectural component of the Prospect Street façade. The Applicant explained that the interior building would have either a Hardiboard or metal cladding. The possible use of opaque glass was suggested; however, the Applicant preferred the colored panel as this is flat and not reflective. Another suggestion was to use an insulated metal panel.



The discussion then turned to the Tremont Street façade, particularly the open steel grating that was used for the main entrance. Part of the decision to use this material concerns the industrial aspect of the grating as well as the transparency, so pedestrians can see into the building and view the courtyard. The HPC commented that the horizontal band does not align with the horizontal component of the façade. The Architect explained that this band was recessed to the interior façade and would not relate in the same manner as this component on the Prospect Street façade. The Commissioners did not have concerns regarding the recessed door. The Architect suggested a metal panel with a light to carry the horizontal aspect of the design through the entrance arch. The use of a metal bar to create a more defined entryway was suggested for the exterior portion of the arch. This could also be created with open steel grating, though the Commissioners preferred that this was not as wide as the horizontal granite and that this component was simple. Another suggestion was to reuse a metal truss as the horizontal band. This portion of the discussion brought up questions pertaining to lighting as well as questions regarding the existing street lamp situation.

The Commissioners inquired why the Applicant had decided not to “step” the side elevation walls. The Applicant explained that they did try this, but that, aesthetically, this did not look appropriate and this detail does not appear visually related to the Prospect Street façade. Commissioners noted that by not adding a “step” to the side elevation walls, the horizontal component was further emphasized. In addition, Commissioners noted that this was turning into an elegant project.

Last, the Commissioners focused on the gateway from the parking lot into the courtyard. The rendering of this component reminded them of a parking garage booth, which they thought was primarily due to the overhang on either side of the pillars/columns. The Applicant explained that they had tried to use an arch, but felt that the arch was out of place due to the emphasis on the horizontal aspect on this façade. The Commissioners suggested incorporating open steel grating, smaller posts that are lighter, and no overhang into the parking lot. Through discussion, the gateway evolved into having no roof or overhang, to include the use of open steel grating as two square posts with interior lighting and/or vegetation, and to be higher than the height of the adjacent masonry wall. The Commissioners noted that these posts should be anchored well as they will likely be hit by a car at some point. They also commented on the fence at the rear of the parking lot and suggested that this could be composed of open steel grating.

The Applicant furthered the use of this material by suggesting that they may incorporate the existing open steel grating staircase into the new development. The Commissioners liked this suggestion and also explained that retention of the steel trusses was an important element to maintain the overall feeling that this building was being preserved as opposed to partially demolished.

The discussion concluded at approximately 3:00 p.m. with the understanding that the Determination of Preferably Preserved would occur on June 18, 2013. Once this Determination has been made, the Applicant/Architect will give a brief presentation of the updated project and design. Staff will then recommend that the HPC vote to authorize the subcommittee members (plus one additional member to create a quorum), who met with the Applicant and Architect on 5/30/2013, 6/11/2013 and will again meet on 6/25/2013, to vote to approve the final MOA, of which final details will be determined at the meeting on 6/25/2013.