



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

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

STAFF PRESENT

AMIE HAYES, PLANNER
MELISSA WOODS, PLANNER (ARRIVE 4:10)
DAN BARTMAN, PLANNER (DEPART 4:40)
GEORGE PROAKIS, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING (ARRIVE 4:45)

MEMBERS PRESENT

JILLIAN ADAMS
ABBY FREEDMAN (ARRIVE 4:15)
ERIC PARKES (DEPART 4:45)

Minutes for 5/08/13 Public Meeting

The Somerville Historic Preservation Commission held a public meeting on **Wednesday, May 8, 2013, at 4:00 p.m.** in City Hall, 2nd Floor Executive Conference Room, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss solutions regarding how to incorporate building components and materials that are common to historic mixed-use buildings in Somerville and to generate recommendations for the Design Review Committee regarding the proposed project at 181 and 197 Washington Street, with specific consideration given to compatibility with historic structures in Union Square.

Photographs of historic buildings in Union Square were distributed as well as *HPC Guidelines for Additions and Infill Construction* (for use as a guide only). The meeting began with an overview of the proposed design, given by the project Architect, and focused on how the design reflects the surrounding historic context with specific reference to triple-deckers within the immediate adjacent area. The Agent for the Owner then gave a brief explanation of the restrictions this project is up against concerning any changes to the proposed materials, due to the affordable housing component, and that these two buildings (197 and 181 Washington Street) need to relate to each other in both design and material. The meeting moved forward with a more clear understanding for how the proposed buildings relate to nearby historic structures and the cost limitations regarding use of different materials.

Commissioners first noted the buildings are more suitable for a suburban office park than Union Square. Moving forward, they discussed historic, or traditional, design solutions regarding how to break up the large massing of these two buildings. Commissioners noted that due to the scale and location of the proposed buildings, a new and more urban context will be created as a result, and that later buildings will need to illustrate compatibility with the proposed structures. The discussion noted that, traditionally, buildings are articulated by three clearly defined horizontal elements- a base, middle and top- and vertically through a rhythm of bays. While an effort has been made to recreate the base, middle, and top pattern for the façade of both proposed buildings, further attention to detail could enhance the perception of these horizontal elements. The Commissioners requested that the rhythm of vertically articulated bays be consistent between both buildings. Concern was also expressed related to the length of the cornice line, for both buildings, and suggested that the “top” of both buildings feature a parapet, roof element, or change in massing to further visually differentiate the “top” from the stories below. Furthermore, Commissioners suggested that the cornice either be more bold in design or have more depth to add dimension and shadow, and that the building “bays” be reflected in the design of the building “top,” to visually break up the length of the cornice



and the overall massing. Regarding dimension, the Commissioners noted that the use of light and dark building materials on the rendering and the use of projecting bays above the first story could also add further dimension. There was also concern regarding the variety of window styles.

The discussion also addressed traditional storefront components including awnings, vertically divided storefronts, and a continuous knee-wall above the sidewalk grade. The Architect noted that the design does illustrate doorway niches to break up the storefront façade; the Commissioners encouraged the Architect to divide the storefronts even further, potentially by vertical supports that carry down through the massing to the ground. Commissioners noted that the landscape design and the prominence of the historic marker along the Washington Street sidewalk, needed to be more fully illustrated. Use of artwork to illustrate the historic structure was briefly discussed; this could be done by incorporating images of the historic structure, as well as various other Union Square scenes, onto exterior building materials (such as a porcelain panel) at street level.

The discussion concluded with Staff going over the list of items to address in the Memo from the HPC to the DRC regarding the subject project.

The meeting concluded at approximately 5:15 p.m.

Recommendation:

The preference of the Historic Preservation Commission is to retain and preserve the c.1860 Italianate structure at 197 Washington Street. This preference is compatible with the CCD zoning as one purpose of this District is to “preserve and complement historic structures,” (SZO §6.1.22.A.3).

Preservation of the historic building at 197 Washington Street, either on the current site or elsewhere on the property, could be accomplished by reducing the quantity of on-site parking spaces. The HPC notes two possible solutions to reduce the number of parking spaces. These solutions could also create additional space to be designated for equally important uses, such as open space. The Applicant could provide parking off site or, in accordance with SZO §6.1.22.G.7, Payment in Lieu of Parking. This means the Applicant may make either a cash payment in lieu of providing the required parking, or a partial cash payment combined with a partial provision of the required vehicle or bicycle parking.

If preservation of the historic structure is not feasible, to make the proposed structures more compatible with the existing historic building stock in Union Square and to provide an appropriate historical reference to the site, the HPC recommends the following:

- 1. Be more consistent with regard to articulating a clear base, middle, and top; while an effort has been made to recreate the base, middle, and top pattern for the façade of both proposed buildings, further attention to detail could enhance the perception of these horizontal elements.*
- 2. The vertical rhythm, or vertical articulation of bays, should be consistent between both buildings.*
- 3. The top of both buildings should feature a parapet, roof element, or change in massing to further visually differentiate the “top” from the stories below, and the building bays should be reflected in the design of the building “top,” to visually break up the length of the cornice and the overall massing.*
- 4. Regarding dimension, a cornice that is either more bold in design or has more depth would add dimension and shadow while the use of light and dark building materials, as well as projecting bays above the first story, could also be used to add dimension.*
- 5. Concern regarding the variety of window styles was expressed.*
- 6. Traditional storefront components should be included, such as awnings, vertically divided storefronts that are well defined, and a continuous knee-wall above the sidewalk grade.*
- 7. The historic marker should be relocated to a more appropriate location and a conservation plan should be provided to articulate a long-term plan to conserve this marker as well as note the type of treatment this historic artifact requires.*

8. *The use of artwork to illustrate the historic structure could be done by incorporating an image(s) of the historic structure, as well as various other Union Square scenes, onto exterior building materials (such as a porcelain panel) at street level.*