



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
*MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT*  
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*HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION*

**Updated Preliminary Study Report:**  
**72R Dane Street De-Designation**



*Top Photo: MHC Survey Form B, 1985  
Left Photo: 1998 HPC Site Visit Polaroid*



## **Summary Sheet**

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**Todd Zinn**

*Public Hearing Date: July 2014 (expected)*

*Board of Alderman Expected Vote: July 2014*

**INTRODUCTION**

On December 13, 2013, the owner of 72R Dane Street, Rimma Pevsner, filed an application to de-designate this structure as a local historic district. In response to this request, Staff drafted this Preliminary Study Report which includes a timeline of the documented alterations, an analysis of the historic significance based on recent primary material research, and an evaluation of integrity based on National Register criteria. This information will assist the Historic Preservation Commission in reviewing this case and forwarding their recommendation to the Board of Alderman. Based upon recommendations from the Historic Preservation Commission and the Planning Board, the Board of Alderman will make the final decision regarding the de-designation of 72R Dane Street.

**LOCATION**

The structure known as 72R Dane Street is located behind a triple-decker, near the corner of Dane and Washington Streets, at the rear of the lot and abutting Perry Park. This is a single-building district with only the rear structure designated as a local historic district. The rear and east façades are visible from Washington Street; the front, primarily the enclosed porch, is visible from Dane Street; and three of the four façades are visible from within Perry Park.



*72R Dane Street, aerial view from Washington Street and Perry Park*





Left: View from driveway (photo 2014)



Right: View from Perry Park (photo 1981)

## **DESIGNATION PROCESS & PARCEL HISTORY**

### **Summary**

*Previous circumstances and Certificates granted by the HPC document that a large portion of the half-story is an altered reconstruction. Other than the altered form and massing, there are no architectural features identified in reports that uphold maintaining local historic district status, predicated on an eighteenth century construction date. A review of the 1998 report shows insufficient documentation to assert an eighteenth century construction date. The report relies on unconfirmed information; therefore, the 1998 Board of Alderman decision is no longer based on all the known facts. Substantial changes to the structure since the 1985 designation and a lack of historical documentation call into question the historic significance and integrity of the structure. Therefore, Staff used primary source material to determine the significance of the structure and investigative site visits to evaluate the integrity of the building.*

### **Designation Process**

**1985:** The Board of Alderman established a Historic District Study Committee to:

- 1) Investigate historic resources throughout the City;
- 2) Create a Historic District Ordinance to establish the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC); and
- 3) Recommend to the Board of Alderman adoption of this Ordinance and the designation of several local historic districts.

72R Dane Street was designated a single-building local historic district as part of adopting the Historic District Ordinance. Only the rear structure on this parcel received historic designation; the triple-decker located along Dane Street is not part of this historic district. At the date of designation, Emilija Richardson owned this parcel.

### **Parcel History**

**August 1997:** A fire broke out at 74-76 Dane Street that involved both structures at 70-72 Dane Street. 72R Dane Street suffered heavy water and smoke damage, specifically on the front and right side façades, according to the Fire Department report. As a result, Emilija Richardson applied to the Historic Preservation Commission to raise the roof to accommodate a 7 foot ceiling height, add a shed dormer to the rear façade, and sheath the exterior in vinyl siding. At this time the previous owner also requested removal of the local historic district designation.

The HPC granted a Certificate of Appropriateness to Emilija Richardson (HPC 1998.02) to “raise the roof exterior a maximum of 2 feet at the eaves and raise the roof ridge a maximum of 2 feet, keeping the exact same pitch...” and to construct a dormer within the roof of the south façade. The finalized design was subject to review and approval by the Commission prior to receiving a permit. In addition, this Certificate noted that alterations to the eaves of the roof and trim would need to be addressed, but since the application did not reference these items, the Certificate advised Commission review upon final submission of the proposed dormer. The Commission denied the request for vinyl siding and the Applicant withdrew the de-designation request after a discussion with the Commission.

**March 1998:** The Applicant submitted a second request for de-designation (HPC 1998.11), whereby the Commission began the formal process. A study report was written and submitted to the Massachusetts Historical Commission as well as the Planning Board; both entities upheld the Staff recommendation to oppose this request. This recommendation was then forwarded to the Board of Alderman, who formally resolved that 72R Dane Street should not have the historic designation removed.

**1999:** Emilija Richardson submitted an application to install a dormer (HPC 1999.05) that was 9 feet long with a height of 5.5 feet. The Commission denied the application, stating that although progress had been made toward the design of an appropriate dormer as well as other alterations, the changes discussed were verbal and would need to be adequately reflected in a new application that should be supplemented with elevations. This was followed with another application (HPC 1999.12) that more clearly specified the dormer, exterior cladding, and windows. A Certificate was then issued for a shingle-clad dormer, 5'-2" in height and 9 feet long, with one centered wood window (two-over-two with true divided light). Asphalt three-tab shingles, lead flashing around the chimneys, a cast iron vent pipe, an aluminum gutter system, and two gable-end wood replacement windows (two-over-two with true divided light) were also granted as part of this Certificate.

**2003:** The current owner, Rimma Pevsner, purchased the property and was unaware until recent circumstances that the rear structure was a designated local historic district.

**November 2013:** On-going alterations to 72R Dane Street were brought to the attention of Staff. After a review of the changes and a site visit to the property, Staff determined that these changes are within jurisdiction of the Historic Preservation Commission and, therefore, are subject to review by the Commission. Upon sorting through details regarding why a Certificate was not requested for the installation of vinyl siding and windows, Staff came to understand that the contractor did not obtain building permits. The Inspectional Services Division immediately issued a stop work order and completion of the work is now on hold until the de-designation process is complete.

Second, Staff and the homeowner discussed how to address the situation. Due to the substantial changes made to this building, the homeowner questioned the value behind historic designation for this particular structure. Staff agreed to review the documentation, assess the existing materials, and process the de-designation request.

#### **January 2014 - Review of 1998 Study Report:**

➤ **The 1998 Study Report does not establish an eighteenth century construction date.**

The 1998 report asserts a mid-eighteenth century construction date, but no primary resource is cited to support this assertion. The 1998 report credits the 1982 architectural inventory report, *Beyond the Neck*, as ‘prominently’ featuring this structure in the Ward II/Cobble Hill chapter. The reference to this structure on page 15 states, “Two late-eighteenth century gable roofed houses also survive: ...and a small dwelling (ca. 1790) at

the rear of 72 Dane Street near Washington Street.” The photograph caption on page 91 reads, “72 Dane Street. ca. 1750. Near the route of Washington Street, this three bay house is situated near the intersection where the first resident of Charlestown ‘beyond the Neck’ settled.” The references to this structure do not provide a consistent construction date. Dane Street is referenced one additional time with regard to industry, but much more information is needed to rely on this book as a secondary resource.

➤ **The 1998 Study Report does not identify evidence of eighteenth century materials or workmanship.**

The 1998 study report does not identify characteristics or primary sources that support an early construction date. This report also does not discuss the simple millwork or other features that are or may still have been existent at that time. The report discusses existing conditions by acknowledging that prior to designation wood shingles were installed and the existence of clapboards beneath is unknown. The door is of “recent manufacture;” the windows and casings are nineteenth century; and both the chimneys and foundation need masonry work. The report asserts the “small size, simple appearance, and low-pitch roof” are reason enough to ascertain the house is from the eighteenth century. The report relies on unconfirmed information. As a local historic district, the structure was understood as having a rare historic significance and integrity due to the age of the structure. Therefore, Staff used primary source material to determine the significance of the structure and investigative site visits to evaluate the integrity of the building.

## **DETERMINATION of SIGNIFICANCE**

### **Ordinance Definition**

The Demolition Review Ordinance of Somerville defines significance as “any building or structure within the City which:

- A. Is 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. Is 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 person 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...”

### **Summary**

*Evidence to support historic significance based on an eighteenth century construction date is not provided in documentation that discusses the structure. The study report that serves to designate this structure as a historic district does not reference this building in the narrative. Map research confirms this structure was either relocated or constructed at the present location. Documentation at this time does not suggest an eighteenth century construction date; however, deed research, researching previous owners and the original parcel, and/or dendrochronology would provide additional information.*

## Documentation

**1981 Survey Form:** The National Register Nomination Form/Massachusetts Historical Commission survey form B (SMV.102), dated January 1981 and updated May 1986, identifies the building as c. 1730-1800. This form does not provide a primary source to support this construction date. This form states, “the building was likely moved to the present location,” but no date or former location are provided. The remaining information references the probability of an eighteenth century construction date, but does not provide reasoning why this construction date is accurate. The form also explains “no structures appear on this site on nineteenth century maps.” Bibliographic information reference the 1830 Hales Map of Charlestown, which illustrates a building footprint in the general area.

**1985 Study Report:** This report was written as part of the designation process to identify the historic significance and integrity of structures to be designated local historic districts. Properties proposed for historic designation in 1985 were properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places as identified in the 1980 Multiple Resource Area form. 72R Dane Street is not identified in the report, but the property is listed at the end of the report as a local historic district.

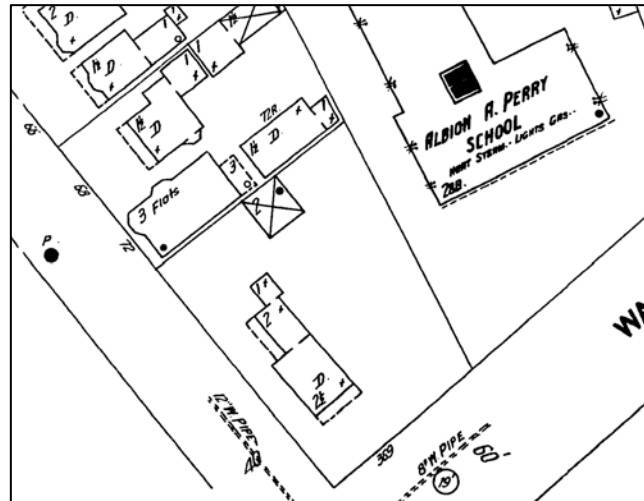
**1989 Multiple Resource Area Form:** The Multiple Resource Area nomination form (Section 7, Page 7) states the structure “appears to be a mid-eighteenth century survivor. It is a three-bay, 1½ story cottage whose low-pitched roof and simple millwork confirm its early origins.” Staff reviewed the major bibliographic references listed at the end of this report to yield information. However, the resources available to Staff did not provide useful information.

**January 2014:** Map research confirms this structure was either moved or constructed at the present location between 1895 and 1900, as illustrated by the 1895 Bromley Atlas and the 1900 Sanborn Map. The 1900 map illustrates a small addition at the east end of the building. By 1925, this addition was removed and a front entry porch was constructed. These maps do not identify owners and do not provide information regarding where the structure may have been previously located.

- Buildings from the mid-eighteenth century are a rare find. A structure from this early period is often difficult to determine due to the amount and variety of alterations made over time and due to the small number of existent maps for areas not highly populated prior to the mid-nineteenth century. Modest buildings of the mid-eighteenth century do not demonstrate high style architectural detail; however, a low-pitch roof and simple millwork characterize a variety of house types from multiple eras. The small massing and simple features raise additional questions, but do not confirm early origins. Without deed research, searching previous owners and the original parcel, and/or dendrochronology, an eighteenth century construction date is difficult to determine.



Left: 1830 Hales Map of Charlestown



Right: 1900 Sanborn Map, Sheet 56

## **EVALUATION of INTEGRITY**

### **National Park Service Definition**

The National Park Service defines *integrity as the ability of a resource to convey its significance*. The National Park Service determines integrity by evaluating seven key components that can exemplify integrity, whereby, various combinations of these components are able to convey the resulting significance. Local historic districts (LHDs) are determined by their level of integrity, i.e. their ability to convey the significance of the district. LHDs are composed of contributing and noncontributing buildings with varying degrees of integrity that, together, visually express the history of the City.

Buildings within LHDs are held to a specific standard to ensure that changes within the district do not negatively affect the integrity and significance of the district as a whole. Therefore, a single-building LHD should be a structure that is comprised of a high level of historic significance and integrity to stand-alone.

### **Summary**

The seven components of integrity are: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Below is an evaluation of each component as it relates to the subject structure.

- *Location: The structure suggests it was constructed on-site at the present location in the late nineteenth century.*
- *Design: The form, massing, and fenestration pattern have been largely altered. The floor plan indicates a nineteenth century construction date and working class housing.*
- *Setting: The setting characterizes working class housing in a moderately dense urban environment of the late nineteenth century.*
- *Materials: The materials do not support an eighteenth century construction date. Exterior visible materials are late twentieth century and the basement materials are broad representations of the nineteenth century.*
- *Workmanship: Nineteenth and late twentieth century workmanship are clearly known.*
- *Feeling: The property conveys a nineteenth century urban context of working class housing.*
- *Association: Research does not recognize any historic associations.*

*To retain integrity in a local historic district, a majority of the resources that compose the character of the district must possess a standard of integrity, even if- individually- the resources are undistinguished. Relationships amongst these resources must be relatively unchanged since the period of significance. Resources that do not contribute to the significance of a district must be considered when evaluating the integrity of a district. A historic resource cannot contribute significance if there are substantial alterations made to the resource beyond the period of significance and if the resource does not share the historic associations of the district. Under the National Park Service criteria to evaluate integrity, 72R Dane Street does not retain sufficient integrity to suggest an eighteenth century construction date. As a local historic district, 72R Dane Street does not appear to contribute to the significance of the local historic district. 72R Dane Street is considered a non-contributing building.*



## **Evaluation of Integrity**

**Location:** The structure is stated to have been moved to the present location in the early twentieth century.

### Evaluating the location of 72R Dane Street:

- Staff research into primary source materials indicates this structure was instead constructed at the current location.

## **Design:**

*Form/Massing:* 72R Dane Street was designed as a modest side-gable dwelling of 1½ stories. The structure has a simple massing and form with minimal architectural detail.

*Interior Plan:* This structure is a typical two-room, center-hall entry plan, see Figure 1. This plan type is commonly found in modest buildings of the early eighteenth century through the mid-nineteenth century. This plan is consistent with dwellings to house the working class, which often had few windows to retain heat, minimal detail, and simple massing. Working class housing of the nineteenth century consisted of small spaces to cook and sleep.

New England dwellings of the seventeenth and eighteenth century located chimneys in the center of the dwelling, on the backside of the stairwell or within the stairwell. The center chimney had an open hearth for each main room on the first floor and the floor plan was determined by the width of the chimney bay. The chimney placement allowed the occupants to retain as much heat as possible and to use each room for separate purposes such as public and private space. Center chimney plans disappeared in the early 19th century as new heat and structural systems made it possible to create more flexible plans.

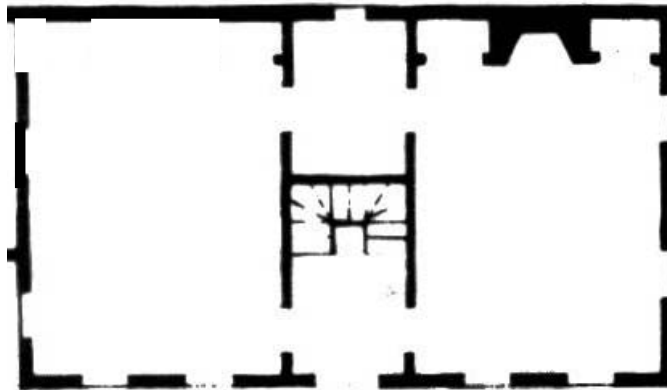


Figure 1: Center-Hall Entry Plan, modified to replicate 72R Dane

*Windows/Doors:* The fenestration pattern illustrates five bays on the primary façade and three bays on the rear façade. Overall, the fenestration pattern of this dwelling has seen significant change.

The window within the shed dormer (listed on the most recent Certificate) as well as all other windows appear to be vinyl. The small slider window on the rear façade is no longer consistent in size with the other windows. Two windows on the left side of the front façade also appear reduced in size. Wood trim is no longer visible surrounding any of these four windows. Some trim is minimally visible beneath the shingle cladding on the west side elevation; however, this façade is believed to be entirely replaced, due to both the 1997 fire and the change in building height. The eastern façade was once composed of two windows and a door in the left corner. Currently, the half-story window and door remain. A first story window was covered over, further altering the fenestration pattern.

### Evaluating the design of 72R Dane Street:

- The simple form and modest massing have been compromised;

- The interior is modified and includes a reconfiguration of the stairs. This dwelling does not reveal evidence of a centrally located chimney with an open-hearth fireplace. One chimney is located on the rear wall of the right side room and one is at the east end; and
- The fenestration pattern of this dwelling has seen significant change.



Left: Dane Street front façade 2014



Right: Dane Street rear façade, 2014

**Setting:** Located behind a triple-decker and abutting Perry Park, the current setting does not relay an open agrarian eighteenth century context, where this structure would have played a historical role. The 1980 MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report explains that during the Colonial Period (1676-1775) the “Division of Charlestown Commons in the 1680s created several farmsteads on Winter, Spring and Prospect hills by the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, many by Tufts family with houses along main highways. In addition, local brick making along the Millers and Mystic rivers and quarry sites around Spring and Powder House hills created a rural industrial zone for the Medford, Charlestown, and Cambridge area.”

Evaluating the setting of 72R Dane:

- The setting represents a moderately dense urban environment of late nineteenth century working class housing. Between 1900 and 1925, Sanborn maps illustrate the construction of adjacent triple-deckers as well as the rear dwellings that are visible today.

**Materials:** New England dwellings from the eighteenth century were of timber frame construction, created through a system of vertical and horizontal posts and beams with complex joinery. These massive hand hewn framing members were often meant to be visible and were decorated with molding called chamfers. Hand riven wood shingles and clapboards sheath the roof and exterior walls, held in place by hand wrought nails. Casement windows with leaded diamond panes were common through the mid eighteenth century. Access to larger panes of glass enabled the sash window with six-over-six lights. Traditionally, foundations were made of stone either dry-laid (without mortar) or dressed with mortar. Stone foundations were initially of rubble stone, irregularly laid in no particular pattern. Improved technologies during the late 1700s led to the use of cut or dressed stone.

Evaluating the materials of 72R Dane Street:

- The first and second floors are entirely sheathed in plaster and drywall. The framing of the building is not visible and not able to offer evidence regarding a construction date. However, the basement framing is visible and demonstrates a curious mix of subfloor framing members, saw markings, and nails. Many of the joists had been sistered to new framing members and the existence of a sleeper beam, which would identify where the

chimney bay or foundation would have been located, was difficult to determine. Further investigation could provide more information.

Saw markings on the joists are consistent with those of a circular sawmill (see Figure 2), but there are some small round timbers located near the sill or plates of the frame. Circular sawmills were introduced to New England approximately 1820-1840 and increased in popularity throughout the nineteenth century. The use of steam power in the early twentieth century resulted in the development of portable circular sawmills.

- The possibility remains that beneath current finishes, original materials or post and beam construction may exist. Due to recent site visits and historical research, Staff does not consider this very probable. The materials that currently exist illustrate the late twentieth century. Doors, windows, and exterior cladding are almost all vinyl and the roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles.
- Nails are visible from a variety of time periods (see Figure 3). While some are cut nails (1830s), the majority are wire nails (late 1800s). Staff did not find evidence of forged nails (pre-1800). A variety of material appeared specifically placed, so a more intensive investigation may unearth additional materials.
- Prior to recent changes, the casings, windows, and doors were nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
- The foundation of this structure is primarily composed of brick. The interior illustrates fieldstone irregularly laid with mortar. This is a common practice for building foundations. Brickmaking in Somerville and Cambridge is known as early as 1829 and 1832. Brickmaking is reported as early as the late seventeenth century in Medford, who is recognized to have dominated the industry.



Figure 2 – Circular sawmill markings



Figure 3 – Top: Handmade nail; Middle: Cut nail; Bottom: Wire nail

**Workmanship:** Circular saw marks, cut nails, and mortar laid brick and fieldstone foundations do not assert an eighteenth century construction date. Wood shingles and vinyl windows, door and siding on the exterior of this building does not demonstrate evidence of an eighteenth century building.

Evaluating the workmanship of 72R Dane:

- Workmanship visible in the basement framing asserts a nineteenth century building.
- Workmanship visible on the exterior of this building is evidence of the late twentieth century. This is documented in historic Certificates and building permits.

**Feeling:** The physical surrounding features do not convey a ‘rural industrial zone’ where dwellings were once sparsely located between farmland, orchards, and forests as well as rivers and quarry sites.

Evaluating the feeling of 72R Dane:

- This property conveys a nineteenth century urban context of working class housing, due to the location of the building behind a triple-decker, a second type of working class dwelling. This context is also conveyed through the simple form and modest massing of the structure.

**Association:** To date, historic research and documentation do not recognize an association between this structure and an important historic event or persons.

Evaluating the association of 72R Dane:

- Further research into the history of the structure could provide additional information.

## **REVISION to LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT BOUNDARIES**

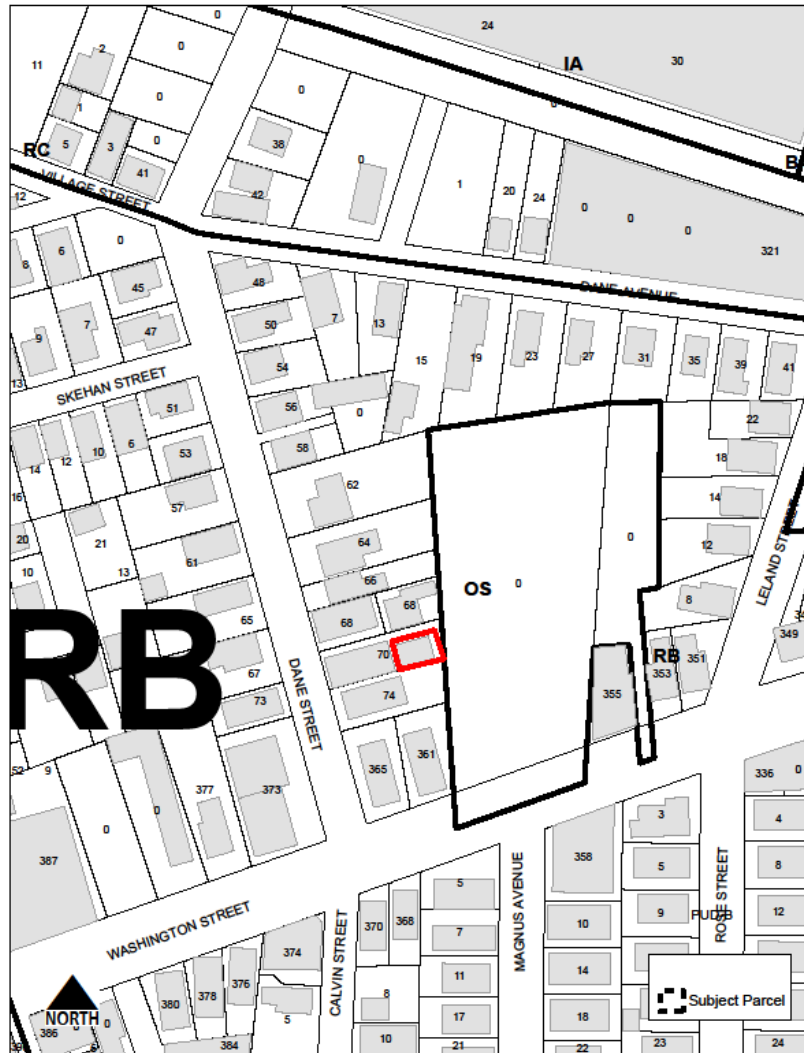
The structure 72R Dane Street is recommended for de-designation. This structure is a single-building local historic district. The de-designation of this structure would terminate the district.

The bulleted list below summarizes reasons for the recommendation, discussed within this Preliminary Study Report.

- **Designation & History:** The structure has documented evidence of unsympathetic and irreversible change. The 1985 study report does not uphold an eighteenth century construction date.
- **Determination of Significance:** Staff has no evidence to support historic significance based on an eighteenth century construction date.
- **Evaluation of Integrity:** The structure does not retain integrity as an eighteenth century resource and, therefore, is not able to convey significance. 72R Dane Street is a non-contributing building to the significance of the local historic district.

The following map should remove the boundaries around 72R Dane Street to indicate this structure is no longer a local historic district.





GIS map illustrating 72R Dane Street

## **PUBLIC PROCESS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Public Process**

This Updated Preliminary Study Report was presented to the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) as the Staff recommendation on January 23 and March 18, 2014. The HPC voted to support the request and forwarded a recommendation to the Planning Board. This Report will also be submitted to the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) for comments. The Planning Board will hold a meeting and vote to support or not support the HPC recommendation, and will forward their recommendation to the Board of Alderman. The request will then be heard at a joint public hearing between the HPC and the Legislative Matters Committee of the Board of Alderman. Abutters will be notified of the public hearing and the request will be advertised in a newspaper. The full Board of Alderman will vote at a later date to uphold or deny the request to de-designate 72R Dane Street as a local historic district.

### **Staff Recommendation**

The City of Somerville is composed of a number of historic resources that visually describe the history of the City. Upon adopting the 1985 Historic District Ordinance, several historic resources were designated as local historic districts. The intent of this Ordinance is to “Protect, enhance and preserve cultural and historical resources...Safeguard the City’s historical and cultural heritage...[and] Enhance the City’s image to residents, visitors and tourists...” The Historic Preservation Commission administers this Ordinance and is responsible for establishing the standard of integrity and significance that is to be conveyed by properties given historic designation status. Regulating the integrity of local historic districts ensures the ability of these districts to convey significance and serves to enhance the City’s image by safeguarding the heritage of the City. Maintaining historic district designation for buildings that do not uphold the established standard devalues the importance and purpose behind historic designation and compromises the intent of the Historic District Ordinance.

Staff recommends the Historic Preservation Commission support the de-designation of 72R Dane Street due to inappropriate changes that permanently alter character-defining features, unsupported evidence used to determine significance for historic designation, and insufficient integrity, whereby the structure is considered a non-contributing building to the local historic district.

### **Historic Preservation Commission Minutes & Recommendation**

- **January 23, 2014 HPC Meeting minutes:** *Rimma Pevsner presented her request for de-designation to the HPC. She purchased the house as part of a 4-unit lot in 2000, which consisted of a triple-decker and a small house at the rear and not visible from Dane Street. She was aware that the small house was older but not aware of a historic designation. They began what they considered improvements, such as the replacement of drafty windows and the installation of vinyl siding. They hired a contractor whom they told to get the necessary permits for the work and to begin the project while they were on vacation. She returned to find a Stop Work Order had been posted and the work was ¾ completed. The contractor had neglected to get the needed permits from Inspectional Services. Since then, she has been working with Staff to untangle the situation. She is familiar with historic buildings and lived in a nice Victorian in another town. She does not believe this building is of historic merit as it has undergone structural alterations by a prior owner of the property due to a fire in the late 1990s and is documented in City files. This included a dormer and raising of the roof to allow for a second floor.*

*Abby Freedman found the Staff Report very interesting, particularly the section on chimneys. She wondered if there was evidence of a central chimney. Staff clarified that there was no visible evidence in the basement. The location and saw markings on the floor joists did not identify themselves to be original but a combination of early and later replacements. Jillian Adams asked if*

scorch marks were visible anywhere because they could be an indication of the locations of hearths that may have been removed. Staff did not find evidence of this type of mark. Abby Freedman also asked about roof pitch as an indication of age. Staff noted that the pitch of the roof is due to the size and massing of the building. Jillian Adams does not want to question previous members of the Commission, but in her opinion they permitted alterations that the current Commission would not approve. A discussion between Alan Bingham, Jillian Adams and Abby Freedman then discussed the integrity of historic structures and the responsibilities of the Commission. The fire in 1997 led to a series of modifications to the structure. The responsibility lays with the previous Commission to ensure that the alterations did not affect the architectural and historical integrity of the building. The Commission needs to uphold standards that meet the intent of the Ordinance. Alan Bingham stated that de-designation is a huge step and should not be done for properties where small incremental changes had been made that devalue the inherent value of the historic property, especially not to reward such actions. Jillian Adams pointed out that the biggest alterations were undertaken just after the fire with Commission approval and were not the fault of the current owner. The current Commission needs to set a high bar for the integrity of designated properties and she believes this building no longer holds integrity. Abby Freedman noted that the request to de-designate followed the issuance of a Stop Work Order. Is there a way to impose fines for unapproved alterations? Staff said that no fines had been issued for any historic properties with unauthorized work. Staff would look into whether one could impose fines for the work undertaken without permits in this case.

Staff notes that the form of the building has been highly modified. The installation of vinyl siding over wood shingle siding was the most recent alteration. Staff reminded the Commission that they are responsible for upholding the intent of the Ordinance and this building does not have the integrity necessary to demonstrate its original significance; therefore, this structure cannot be justified as a local historic district. A discussion between Commissioners regarding when alterations are appropriate and become part of the historic evolution of a house was tabled for another time. Staff explained that the integrity, defined by form and massing, original materials, fenestration patterns and setting are all characteristics that had been altered from the alleged date of construction. Dick Bauer said that he was torn and while the integrity is impaired, 100% in all categories was not a requirement for local historic designation. He looks at integrity as a factor along with age and other considerations. If the building is pre-Civil War, it would be exceedingly rare. If it were circa 1900, it would have to be pristine. He does not find architectural integrity on its own enough to be the deciding factor; if the basic bones are visible underneath the alterations. Abby Freedman said she wanted more information even though what was presented was extensive.

Brandon Wilson found the de-designation request disturbing, especially the re-evaluation of prior commissions. Decisions are based on the interpretation of the law. There have been changes over time in the stringency of interpretation. She said that the issue here is that alterations have been made to a local historic district and the question is 'are they so significant that the building is no longer valid as a District?' Fire is generally an extenuating circumstance which undermines the structural integrity of a building. The Commission should think hard about the consequences of this precedent setting case, given that there may be cases where work was done by homeowners and contractors without permits that could undermine the integrity of a building and use that as an excuse. Staff noted that this building does not maintain its integrity and that each case would be evaluated on the same criteria as they come forward. The Board of Aldermen would look more favorably on the Commission if they understood the HPC standards are being upheld and that the Commission would be willing to de-designate properties that no longer uphold these standards.

Abby Freedman said fines should be levied for work done without approval by the Commission. It was noted that the contractor was the one responsible for the work and that he had not pulled a building permit. Rimma Pevsner said that she could not ask him to pay for the mistake. In her experience, he had always done a good job and followed the rules. Staff noted that once

*CitizenServe was up and running, no permits for historic properties could be issued without Staff approval; however, this system will not solve the problem of contractors working without permits.*

*The Commission then spoke about what further information they might need to make a decision on the Report. Abby Freedman and Dick Bauer asked about information maps could provide regarding possible pre-1900 origins of the house which was likened to workers cottages found on Dane Avenue and in North Cambridge. Staff explained that extensive research had been done using available documents and site visits, short of investigative demolition and thorough deed research which would be unlikely to give any more information. Abby Freedman reiterated that she would only recommend de-designation if the reason was due to changes caused by the 1997 fire.*

*The Commission voted 4-2 with Jillian Adams and Todd Zinn voting not to continue the discussion of de-designation, based on the Preliminary Study Report, until the February 18, 2014 HPC meeting.*

- **March 18, 2014 HPC meeting minutes:** Applicant, Rimma Pevsner, indicated that she had nothing further to add to the information in the Staff report. She said she values history and likes Victorian architecture but does not believe that this house has neither beauty nor history.

*There was no comment from the public.*

*(Taken directly from the 3/18/2014 updated Staff Report): Previous circumstances and Certificates granted by the HPC document that a large portion of the half-story is an altered reconstruction. Other than the altered form and massing, there are no architectural features identified in reports that uphold maintaining local historic district status, predicated on an eighteenth century construction date. A review of the 1998 report shows insufficient documentation to assert an eighteenth century construction date. The report relies on unconfirmed information; therefore, the 1998 Board of Alderman decision is no longer based on all the known facts. Substantial changes to the structure since the 1985 designation and a lack of historical documentation call into question the historic significance and integrity of the structure. Therefore, Staff used primary source material to determine the significance of the structure and investigative site visits to evaluate the integrity of the building.*

*Evidence to support historic significance based on an eighteenth century construction date is not provided in documentation that discusses the structure. The study report that serves to designate this structure as a historic district does not reference this building in the narrative. Map research confirms this structure was either relocated or constructed at the present location. Documentation at this time does not suggest an eighteenth century construction date; however, deed research, researching previous owners and the original parcel, and/or dendro-chronology would provide additional information.*

*The seven components of integrity are: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Below is an evaluation of each component as it relates to the subject structure.*

- *Location: The structure suggests it was constructed on-site at the present location in the late nineteenth century.*
- *Design: The form, massing, and fenestration pattern have been largely altered. The floor plan indicates a nineteenth century construction date and working class housing.*
- *Setting: The setting characterizes working class housing in a moderately dense urban environment of the late nineteenth century.*
- *Materials: The materials do not support an eighteenth century construction date. Exterior visible materials are late twentieth century and the basement materials are broad representations of the nineteenth century.*
- *Workmanship: Nineteenth and late twentieth century workmanship are clearly known.*



- *Feeling: The property conveys a nineteenth century urban context of working class housing.*
- *Association: Research does not recognize any historic associations.*

*To retain integrity in a local historic district, a majority of the resources that compose the character of the district must possess a standard of integrity, even if- individually- the resources are undistinguished. Relationships amongst these resources must be relatively unchanged since the period of significance. Resources that do not contribute to the significance of a district must be considered when evaluating the integrity of a district. A historic resource cannot contribute significance if there are substantial alterations made to the resource beyond the period of significance and if the resource does not share the historic associations of the district. Under the National Park Service criteria to evaluate integrity, 72R Dane Street does not retain sufficient integrity to suggest an eighteenth century construction date. As a local historic district, 72R Dane Street does not appear to contribute to the significance of the local historic district. 72R Dane Street is considered a non-contributing building.*

*Staff Report based upon the City of Somerville Ordinance sections 7.16 – 7.27, HPC Design Guidelines, and Massachusetts Historical Commission Property Survey Form, and site visits.*

*George Proakis gave an overview of the process to ensure that everyone was clear about who made what decisions. The Commission was to approve the Report to be sent to the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the Planning Board and then to the Board of Aldermen. Eric Parkes had listened to the recording of the previous meeting and was up-to-date with the testimony.*

*On Tuesday, March 18, 2014, the Commission voted 3-1 (Ryan Falvey, Eric Parkes, and Todd Zinn voting to support the Staff recommendation; Dick Bauer voting in opposition) to support the request to de-designate 72R Dane Street. After two deliberations (January 23 and March 18, 2014), the HPC upheld the Staff recommendation for de-designation. The Commission requested that the recommendation moving forward reflect that their vote of support was preceded by multiple lengthy discussions and was not a unanimous vote, nor were the Commissioners enthusiastic about voting to remove a historic property from local designation. While the HPC agreed with the Staff recommendation, regarding the intent of the Historic District Ordinance to uphold the standard of historic significance and integrity for local historic districts, the possibility that this building could be a relic from the 18<sup>th</sup> century still remains.*

### **Massachusetts Historical Commission Comments**

- *The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) sent a letter to Dick Bauer, HPC Chair, dated April 14, 2014. This letter states:*

*Your Local Historic District Preliminary Study Report has been received by the MHC.*

*For submittal purposes under M.G.L. Chapter 40C, this report is considered COMPLETE. Your report was received by the MHC on March 28, 2014. According to M.G.L. Chapter 40C, you must hold a public hearing at least 60 days from the date received by the MHC.*

*The MHC voted on April 9, 2014 to acknowledge receipt of the Preliminary Study Report for the de-designation of the 72R Dane Street Local Historic District.*

### **Planning Board Recommendation**

- *June 19, 2014, the Planning Board to a vote (4-0) to recommend approval for the de-designation of 72R Dane Street. The Planning Board received the updated De-designation Preliminary Study Report 5-27-2014 for review prior to the meeting on June 19, 2014.*

### **Board of Alderman, Legislative Matters Committee, Recommendation**

- *Date, minutes*
- *Recommendation: None at this time*

**Board of Alderman Vote**

- *Vote expected July 2014*