



Preliminary Study Report:
Morrison Avenue
Local Historic District
Enlargement

Somerville Historic Preservation Commission

7/15/2014

**Preliminary Study Report:
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Summary Sheet

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Study Committee:	Dick Bauer, Chair	Abby Freedman, Vice Chair
	Jillian Adams	Alan Bingham
	George Born	Natasha Burger
	Denis J. Chagnon	Tom DeYoung
	Ryan Falvey	Eric Parkes
	Derick Snare	Brad Stearns
	Todd Zinn	

Public Hearing Date: September 2014 (tentative)

Board of Aldermen Vote: October 2014 (tentative)

Total Properties: 1

Addresses: 204 Morrison Avenue

Conclusion:

This Preliminary Study Report proposes to enlarge a small multi (3)-building, non-contiguous district (the Morrison Avenue Local Historic District, currently composed of 197, 221, and 222 Morrison Avenue) by adding a fourth property – 204 Morrison Avenue. This Report presents the rationale for enlargement of the Morrison Avenue Local Historic District. As a group, these dwellings represent typical architectural styles, which developed in this area during the period of 1860's and 1870's, with #197 illustrating the Gothic Revival style, #222 as a Mansard roof cottage, and both #204 and #221 note the Italianate style. Together, these buildings form a fairly unified and intact nucleus that could be expanded even further, at a later date, once additional surveying is undertaken.

Historically, the Austin-Smith House at **204 Morrison Avenue (SMV.1359)** is associated with the development patterns that occurred in Davis Square following the construction of the train station. Architecturally, the house is a key component of the late nineteenth century Morrison Avenue streetscape, which is composed of residential wood-frame houses. The structure retains many of the features that define the Italianate style and period of construction, such as the return eaves of the roof, saw-cut brackets, and polygonal bays.

Introduction

A local historic district is an area officially designated by a municipality that “contains one or more parcels or lots of land, or one or more buildings or structures on one of more parcels or lots of land.” Local historic districts (LHDs) were first established in Massachusetts in 1955; since then, over 235 local historic districts have been created in communities throughout the State. All communities adjacent to Somerville and most within the Boston Metropolitan Area have locally designated historic properties due to the cultural significance of contributing properties and the various community benefits that result from this type of designation.

Case studies and research concerning the Boston Metropolitan Area, as well as the country as a whole, have found a correlation between local historic designation, improved property values, and neighborhood stabilization. This correlation is a direct effect of the protection that local historic district designation offers to owners from variations in the real estate market. Consequently, this protection inspires confidence in owners of locally designated properties that their investment will not be undermined by inappropriate alterations to either their own house, over time, or to a neighboring house. Designating a group of properties will often help protect neighborhoods against inappropriate development while, at the same time, facilitate preservation of the historic character and overall quality of the neighborhood. Additionally, the presence of a local historic district can often appeal to and assure potential buyers that the historic character and overall quality of a neighborhood will be protected long-term.

In Somerville, local historic districts are beneficial for a variety of reasons. For the community as a whole, local historic districts create a sense of place and preserve architectural character, which, in turn, attract new residents, businesses, jobs, and tourist dollars. Within existing local historic districts, infill development often produces better building design and site development because other criteria, such as historic compatibility, are taken into consideration and given priority. Local historic districts encourage both public and private investments, and reinforce awareness that Somerville is a city that cares about and respects its history as well as the quality of life for its residents. Annual events and programs such as the Prospect Hill “First Flag” Raising, the MilkRow Cemetery “Ghosts of Somerville,” and Preservation Awards demonstrate the City’s dedication to promoting Somerville history. Several historic walking tours, as well as a historic biking tour, are also sponsored each year by the City to highlight designated properties and other historic resources that may not be as well-known. Building and area survey forms, which underlie the creation of local historic districts, are an invaluable source of information about local history because they explain the significant role Somerville played in the development and growth of the region, as well as the founding of this country. This information then serves to help schools, libraries and similar resource centers develop educational materials to promote local pride and participation.

In summary, the designation of local historic districts preserves and protects the attributes of historically significant architecture within the City, inspires a greater investment in the community, and promotes widespread appreciation of local history that in turn increases civic pride.

Since 1985 Somerville has been a pioneer in the creation of single-building local historic districts. The majority of previous surveying efforts in Somerville have closely focused on the most architecturally significant and historically well-known sites, which are scattered throughout the community, rather than clustered in a few discrete areas; therefore, the designation of single-building local historic districts has been the most appropriate choice. This DRAFT Preliminary Study Report proposes to enlarge a multi (3)-building, non-contiguous district (the Morrison Avenue Local Historic District, which is composed of 197, 221, and 222 Morrison Avenue) by adding a fourth property – 204 Morrison Avenue.

Methodology

The Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and their Staff serve as the Local Historic District (LHD) Study Committee for the proposed Morrison Avenue Historic District expansion. The Commission is a fourteen member body formed in 1985 in accordance with the authority granted under the Historic Districts Act (Chapter 40C of the General Laws of Massachusetts). The Commission oversees the creation of all local historic districts in Somerville and administers both the Somerville Historic District Ordinance and the Demolition Review Ordinance. Community support to establish a LHD Study Committee was initiated following the publication of *Beyond the Neck: The Architecture and Development of Somerville, Massachusetts* in 1982. This book was written by Carole Zellie of Landscape Research, for a project overseen by the City of Somerville and funded through a grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). The research presented in *Beyond the Neck* was based upon an extensive survey conducted in 1980 and 1981. This comprehensive survey effort also resulted in several research reports which identified groupings of historic structures that comprise various neighborhoods, squares and commercial corridors throughout the City.

Architectural and historical data relating to the development of the City also comes from various places: the MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report for Somerville (1980), the Somerville Multiple Resource Area (MRA) Nomination Form to the National Register of Historic Places (1984), and several Final Study Reports (1985, 1989, 2003, and 2007) to establish new or expand existing local historic districts. All inventory forms, research reports, and study reports are available to the public for review at Somerville City Hall (93 Highland Avenue) and at the Massachusetts Historical Commission (220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston).

This Preliminary Study Report builds upon what has been presented in these other research documents and explains the rationale for adding a fourth property (**204 Morrison Avenue (SMV.1359)**) to an existing, multi (3)-building, non-contiguous district (**#197 (SMV.153); #221 (SMV.1337); and #222 (SMV.341)**) known as the "Morrison Avenue Local Historic District."

The primary impetus for this expanded district is a request from the owners of 204 Morrison Avenue to have their property designated as a local historic district. They seek eligibility for the "Historic Bed and Breakfast" use, which is outlined in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. In June 2009, the City amended its Zoning Ordinance to create an incentive for preserving some of the larger historic properties within its borders.

The amendment incorporated a new "Historic Bed and Breakfast" category within the Table of Uses. This provision allowed an owner to provide more than the previously capped maximum of three (3) rooms in an owner-occupied dwelling. Under the amendment, a "Historic Bed and Breakfast" can: a) contain up to nine (9) rooms for rent; b) be run by an operator whose principal residence was the facility, rather than by the property owner only; and c) only incur façade changes and/or alterations that conform to the guidelines and approval of the Historic Preservation Commission. Since this amendment only applies to buildings already designated as part of a local historic district (LHD), the amendment gives historic property owners the opportunity to generate new income from the additional rooms that they are allowed to lease in their structure. This income in turn can help owners maintain, and in some cases, restore the architectural integrity of their house or accessory structure. This provision also creates an economically feasible alternative to the common course of subdividing large historic properties into

smaller and smaller units of ownership, such as condominiums, which can result in disjointed facades due to the individual styles of multiple owners.

The owners of the subject property at **204 Morrison Avenue** are seeking approval from the City to designate the property as part of the Morrison Avenue Local Historic District in order to expand their current lodging business. In 2010 their property at 221 Morrison Avenue became the third property in the Morrison Avenue Local Historic District and also the first “Historic Bed and Breakfast” in Somerville. The owners’ input was instrumental in the development of the amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance which created the “Historic Bed and Breakfast” category. Their goal is to bring 204 Morrison Avenue closer to its original charm and character, much as they did 221 Morrison Avenue, which serves as their home as well as their business.

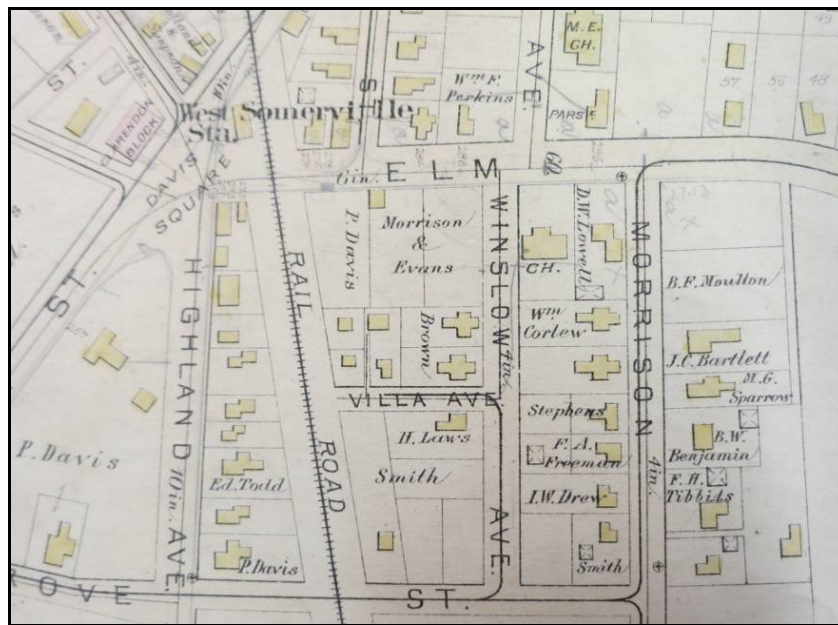
The owners of **204 Morrison Avenue** retained architectural historian, Lisa Mausolf, to research and document the architectural and historical significance of their house. She used a variety of sources including deed research, City directories, maps and U.S. Census data to determine the significance of the property and to complete the attached Form B survey (**SMV.1359**).



South side of Morrison Avenue looking west, #204 at left

Significance

Davis Square is a well-preserved early twentieth century commercial district. It is currently a thriving center of mixed uses, incorporating many commercial businesses, restaurants, offices, entertainment venues, and houses. Its earliest phase of notable residential development, a suburban building boom, occurred from 1865-1873. It happened largely in anticipation of and the subsequent introduction of the Lexington and Arlington Branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad to the area in 1870-1871. The new streetcar and train service into Davis Square provided the impetus for Nathaniel Morrison, a local man who became depot master, to plat acreage for a development just to the north of Davis Square, off Elm Street (now College Avenue) in the late 1860s and early 1870s. This area was developed by George Emerson, a pickle manufacturer, who purchased the land from Morrison.



Detail of 1884 Hopkins Map: Davis Square neighborhood including Morrison Avenue

Morrison Avenue, likely named after the original landowner, was one of the first streets developed in this area, and it connected the western parts of Somerville, now known as the Davis and Powderhouse neighborhoods, with the Tufts brickyards, located several blocks to the east. The street displays a range of architectural styles typically built in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, including Italianate, Gothic Revival, Mansard, and Queen Anne style residences. Historically, the Austin-Smith House at **204 Morrison Avenue (SMV.1359)** is associated with the development patterns that occurred in Davis Square following the construction of the train station. This land was part of a larger parcel that Thomas Beath of Boston purchased from Nathaniel Morrison and his partner Ransom Evans of Boston in April 1871. Beath was a carpenter and likely built the house at 204 Morrison Avenue and perhaps others in the neighborhood although he had left Somerville by 1875. Early owner residents of the house included Edward Austin (1872-1881) who worked at the observatory at Harvard, and Josiah Smith (1881-1905) who was a provisions dealer in Boston. Most of the area's inhabitants commuted to jobs in Boston.

Architecturally, the house is a key component of the immediate late nineteenth century streetscape of residential wood-frame houses. It retains many of the features that define its style and period, such as the

roof return eaves, saw-cut brackets, and polygonal bays found on an Italianate wood-frame structure. The architectural significance of the house was overlooked during earlier surveying work, likely due to its aluminum siding encapsulation. It is believed that the original clapboards are still intact under the current aluminum sheathing so that they can hopefully be repaired or replicated.



221 Morrison Avenue, also a B&B and located in the foreground, is included within the Morrison Avenue Local Historic District

The house at 204 Morrison Avenue (SMV.1359) has undergone some alterations in the last half of the 20th century such as the removal of the front porch on the side ell, the replacement of the front door and the application of aluminum siding. However, overall the house retains much of its late 19th –early 20th century character. The Somerville Historic Preservation Commission would like to see this trend continue, and believe that designating this building as part of a Local Historic District would advance this goal. It would allow the owners to become a “Historic Bed and Breakfast,” enabling them to add more rooms to let and increase the rental income available to future rehabilitation. It would also ensure that any new changes or additions to the building would be subject to the review and approval of the Commission and therefore be compatible with the historic integrity of the architectural style, as well as the overall historic character of the surrounding streetscape.



South side of Morrison Avenue: The first Mansard cottage is 222 Morrison Avenue, also included within the Morrison Avenue Local Historic District

Justification of Boundaries

The Morrison Avenue Local Historic District is a small multi-building, non-contiguous district which currently consists of three buildings and follows the lot lines of each property. Included in the district are **#197**, the Nathaniel Morrison House, dated ca. 1880 and designated in 1985 (**SMV.153**); **#222**, the William Shedd House, dated 1873 and designated in 1989 (**SMV.341**); and **#221**, the Warren-Sparrow House, dated 1870 and designated in 2010 (**SMV.1337**).

The house at **197 Morrison Avenue** is perhaps Somerville's best example of the picturesque Gothic Revival Style. It has many original features, including a lancet gable window, cusped bargeboards, and a floor length façade window. Together with the house at 201 Morrison Avenue it shares a ridge above Morrison Avenue, making it set back far back from the street. It is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. (See the Appendices for its Form B).

The house at **222 Morrison Avenue** is a well-conserved, one and a half story Mansard cottage, which is one of the best local examples of the modest housing built in the Morrison Avenue area in the 1870's. It still retains its clapboard siding, patterned slate roof, paired door entrance, paired brackets on the bay, and pedimented dormers. (See the Appendices for its Form B).

The house at **221 Morrison Avenue** is a two and a half story gable-front residence in the Italianate style. Typical of its style it exhibits return eaves accented by paired saw-cut brackets and a polygonal bay next to the sidehall entrance. The porch retained its present appearance in 1998. (See the Appendices for its Form B).

The Somerville Historic Preservation Commission supports Lisa Mausolf, architectural historian, who asserts that the subject property, **204 Morrison Avenue**, is also eligible to be part of the multi-building district. As a group, these structures represent the typical architectural styles which developed in this area during the period of 1860's and 1870's. **#197** illustrates the Gothic Revival style; **#222** is a Mansard roof cottage; and both **#204** and **#221** note the Italianate style. Together, they form a fairly unified and intact

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nucleus that could be further expanded into a larger district, at a later date, once additional surveying is undertaken. There are clearly multiple other properties, on both sides of Morrison Avenue, which display a similar architectural merit and would also be eligible for historic designation within a larger local historic district, if survey funds or staff become available to undertake the work. These additional candidates are not included within the boundaries at this time because their architectural and historical significance to the district have not yet been documented.

Morrison Avenue Local Historic District Map 7/15/2014



Structures currently part of the Morrison Avenue Local Historic District are shaded in purple; the proposed parcel, 204 Morrison Avenue is outlined in purple.

Property Street Index

The index is a list of the parcels and resources within the proposed Morrison Avenue Local Historic District. Information included on the property list is as follows:

- MHC #: Massachusetts Historical Commission inventory form number
'SMV' is the Somerville inventory prefix
- M-B-L: City of Somerville Assessor Map-Block-Lot numbers
- Address: Number and street where resource is located
- Style: Architectural style as identified on the MHC survey Form B
- Year: Approximate year of construction
- Hist. Name: First identified owner of name associated with the resource
- Status: National Register designation, as listed:
MRA = Multiple Resource Area
IND = Individual
LHD = Local Historic District designation previously established

<u>MHC #</u>	<u>M-B-L</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Style</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Historic Name</u>	<u>Status</u>
SMV.341	20-A-3	222 Morrison Ave.	Mansard	1873	William C. Shedd House	LHD
SMV.15320-B-38	197	Morrison Ave.	Gothic Rev. c.1870		Nathaniel Morrison House	MRA IND LHD
SMV.1337	20-B-44	221 Morrison Ave.	Italianate	1870	Warren-Sparrow House	LHD
SMV.135920-A-7	204	Morrison Ave.	Italianate	1871	Austin-Smith House(<i>proposed</i>)	LHD

Recommendation

This Preliminary Study Report proposes to enlarge a small multi (3)-building, non-contiguous district (the Morrison Avenue Local Historic District, currently composed of 197, 221, and 222 Morrison Avenue) by adding a fourth property – 204 Morrison Avenue. This DRAFT Report presents the rationale for enlargement of the Morrison Avenue Local Historic District. As a group, these dwellings represent typical architectural styles, which developed in this area during the period of 1860's and 1870's, with #197 illustrating the Gothic Revival style, #222 as a Mansard roof cottage, and both #204 and #221 note the Italianate style. Together, these buildings form a fairly unified and intact nucleus that could be expanded even further, at a later date, once additional surveying is undertaken.

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The City of Somerville previously adopted an ordinance creating and protecting historic districts in the City of Somerville known as Ordinance No. 1985-2, the Somerville Historic District Ordinance. The intent of this ordinance is to govern all local historic districts in Somerville including the establishment of new districts and the enlargement or reduction of existing districts. Each district adopted as part of the Ordinance is also defined by a map. The Somerville Historic Preservation Commission proposes that the Board of Aldermen adopt a map amendment to enlarge the Morrison Avenue Local Historic District with the addition of 204 Morrison Avenue. There are no recommendations to change the existing ordinance that governs the establishment, enlargement or reduction of a district and district commission, the procedures for review of applications, the criteria for determinations, or the exclusions from review. The existing ordinance is included as Appendix A.

CITY OF SOMERVILLE

ORDINANCE NO. 2014-__ IN THE BOARD OF ALDERMEN: _____, 2014

MAP AMENDMENT PURSUANT TO THE HISTORIC DISTRICT ORDINANCE TO ENLARGE THE MORRISON AVENUE LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

WHEREAS, it is the intent of the Historic District Ordinance to protect, enhance and preserve the City's cultural and historical resources; and,

WHEREAS, historic districts safeguard these resources and offer the best protection for the community's unique character through preservation of its representative built environment; and,

WHEREAS, historic districts create strong economic benefits for the community, through an increase in property values, neighborhood stability, quality property reinvestment, and tourist appeal; and

WHEREAS, historic districts integrate the City's goals for Smart Growth and a sustainable green economy, by promoting reinvestment in the existing building stock, reducing material waste, and capitalizing on our rich architectural heritage; and

WHEREAS, a survey was recently completed of 204 Morrison Avenue which is a significant unprotected historic property in the City; and

WHEREAS, extensive outreach has been undertaken and documented to owners of properties proposed for designation, now,

NOW THEREFORE, be it hereby ordained by the Board of Aldermen, in session assembled, that the property listed below is approved as a Map Amendment to the Historic District Ordinance, Sections 7-26 of Chapter 7, Article II, of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Somerville in accordance with Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40C.

<u>Local Historic District (LHD) Name</u>	<u>Property Address</u>	<u>Map-Block-Lot</u>
Morrison Avenue LHD	204Morrison Avenue	20-A-7

Approved by the Board of Aldermen;

President