



## CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

**Joseph A. Curtatone**  
Mayor

July 7, 2011

Honorable Board of Aldermen  
City Hall  
93 Highland Avenue  
Somerville, MA 02143

Re: Final Report with Recommendations for Expansion of Somerville's Local Historic Districts –  
**Group E**

Dear Honorable Aldermen,

Based upon a favorable vote (7-0) at our meeting tonight, the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (SHPC) is pleased to submit for review and consideration its Final Report for the fifth round of properties recommended as additions to the City's map of Local Historic Districts (LHDs). These eighteen properties, known as Group E, are representative of the City's older structures built from 1874-1890, a time of notable growth during the prosperous times following the Panic of 1873. A favorable vote on all of the properties would create four (4) new local historic districts (LHDs) by adding seventeen (17) properties to these Districts, to be known as the College Avenue Corridor of Faith, Hinckley-Magoun, Winter Hill, and Teele Square LHDs, as well as expand one (1) existing district, now known as the East Somerville LHD. These properties would join the over three hundred and fifty LHDs previously adopted by the City in 1985, 1989, 2003, and more recently in 2010.

Our recommendations are based upon extensive surveying of sections of the City, in-depth research and documentation of each individual property by a professional team of architectural historians, and a series of informational activities from June 2006 to February 2007 to inform owners that their properties were proposed for local designation. Since then, to ensure that every owner was fully aware of the designation, OSPCD staff has undertaken another series of outreach activities over the past twenty-five months. The details of that outreach process is described in an OSPCD Staff Report to the Mayor, dated April 22, 2010, which is included in Tab 3 of your notebook entitled "Expansion of Somerville's Local Historic Districts 2009 - 2010."

In addition, the SHPC recently sponsored a public hearing, jointly with your Legislative Matters Committee, on June 7, 2011 in the Aldermanic Chambers of City Hall. Committee Chairman Taylor gave introductory remarks about the purpose of the public hearing and SHPC Chairman Dick Bauer welcomed all and asked Commission members to introduce themselves. Economic Development Director Rob May gave a PowerPoint presentation about the designation process and the proposed properties. Following the presentation Chairman Taylor asked if there were any questions for Rob May from the public and determined that no members of the public were still present. Three owners had signed in, but left shortly thereafter once they noted their positions to the Staff and on the acknowledgement forms -- Mr. William Uronis, resident owner of 80 Hinckley Street was in favor of designation, and Mr. Alaa Ramadan, and his brother and co-owner, Mr. Amr Ramadan, of 45 Prescott Street, were not in favor of designation of their property at 282 Lowell Street. None of these owners stayed for the PowerPoint presentation.

Chairman Taylor asked if any of the Aldermen present had any questions. Alderman Connolly wondered about the other churches on College Avenue and if they would be designated as part of the Corridor of Faith LHD. Rob May responded that there were other churches on the street that were proposed for designation within this district, but that since the buildings are being considered in chronological order of their date of construction, they would be presented in a later group.

Alderman Connolly also took exception to Mr. May's statement that the fabric of the Hinckley-Magoun neighborhood would be destroyed by the extension of the Green Line to Lowell Street. He asserted that the planning team associated with each Green Line station will prevent the loss of the area's character as had been the case in the Davis Square area following the opening of the Red Line. Mr. May responded that some neighborhoods are less well organized than was true for the Davis Square Task Force, so the Green Line has more potential to adversely affect the historic fabric of the Hinckley-Magoun neighborhood. Alderman Connolly replied that participation in the Green Line Extension meetings demonstrated otherwise.

Alderman Taylor asked if St. Catherine's Church was part of any upcoming grouping as well as St. Joseph's Church. Mr. May responded that St. Catherine's Church was certainly significant, but since it is not located within a CDBG-eligible of the City, it was difficult to find funding to fully survey such a large structure. He said it must be possible to find a way to survey it and he will do this by the end of the year. He noted that St. Joseph's Church had been designated historic as part of the last group of properties in March.

In response to the slide in the PowerPoint of the religious statues at St. Polycarp's irretrievably damaged by the new congregation residing in the church building, Alderman White commented that this was because they found the use of such iconography to be abhorrent to their own faith. He therefore inquired about what the SHPC thought should be the proper protocol in such a situation. Mr. May explained that the applicant should work with the Commission to determine the best solution, which would include documenting, sensitively removing, and preserving the offensive architectural element for possible future use. He pointed out that in this particular case, the statues were not simply removed, but essentially destroyed while still attached above the church's entry.

Alderman Taylor then asked if de-designation of the property is still possible, and Mr. May answered yes, and the process was the same as it is to designate a building as a local historic district.

Since the Aldermen had no further questions, Chairman Taylor opened the public hearing to those members who wished to speak in favor of the proposed designations. Since there were none, he closed that portion and opened it to those people who were opposed or who had questions. Since there were none, he closed that portion of the public hearing.

SHPC Chairman Dick Bauer stated that he had some additional comments. For the record he wanted it known that many applicants request changes to their historic properties, and the Commission reviews and often approves alterations. When changes are necessary, the SHPC particularly looks for compromises that offer reversibility so that architectural elements can be preserved for the future, often when there is a different owner.

Vice Chairman Abby Freedman wished to point out that there are important differences between the neighborhoods of Hinckley-Magoun and Davis Square. Before the Red Line, Davis Square had both a significant commercial component as well as architecturally elaborate houses, while in contrast, the Hinckley-Magoun neighborhood is highly residential and is primarily comprised of very modest, small workers' houses, that are located very close to each other. The narrow streets and homes of the area are more vulnerable to change because people often do not perceive their value. The labor history of this neighborhood, however, is a significant part of the City's development, and therefore it is especially important to preserve at least some of the area's workers' housing for its historical representation.

Chairman Taylor closed the public hearing, and stated that the record would remain open until Friday, June 10, 2011. As had been the case for previous groupings he noted that owners not in favor of designation will be put aside to enable other Aldermen time to discuss the matter with the owners individually.

Both before and after the close of the public comment period, the following written communication was forwarded to Brandon Wilson, as staff to the SHPC:

- 1) The City Clerk received eleven (11) forms, known as a "Position Statement for a Local Historic District Designation," that he sent on behalf of the Board of Aldermen to every owner whose property was proposed for LHD in Group E. In sum, two (2) owners were not in favor: Ramona Berry, owner/resident of 23 Henderson St. and Amr Ramadan, owner of 282 Lowell St. with no reasons given in writing, but both have verbally noted opposition to any additional restrictions being placed on their properties; and nine (9) were in favor of designation: Sean Walsh (Unit #1), Michael McCall (Unit #2), and Krista Kranyak (Unit #3) of 63 Adams St., Joseph P. Lynch of 10 Henderson St., Anthony Adam of 13 Henderson St., Christine Carilli of 16 Hinckley St, William Uronis of 80 Hinckley St., and Brian McHugh, as the Father representing 2 properties, both St. Ann's Church and Rectory at 399 and 401 Medford St.

In addition, the public hearing notices sent by the Commission staff as certified mail, receipt return requested were returned by the U.S. Post Office for 6 properties (63 Adams St. (Unit 1 & 2), 16 Lincoln St., and 13, 21, and 23 Henderson St were “unclaimed).

It is also noted that in keeping with the process set forth in the Somerville Historic Districts Ordinance of 1985 for establishment of new or expanded LHDs, the Planning Board had the Group E properties on their agenda at their regularly scheduled meeting on June 9, 2011. Following a discussion about the proposed designations, focusing on properties without owner consent and due deliberation, the Board voted 2-1 (with Jim Kirylo opposed) to recommend approval of the proposed map amendments, with the added advisory that “the Board of Aldermen should carefully investigate the individual circumstances surrounding cases where the property owner is opposed to having their properties designated as part of the LHD.”

In addition, both the staff and members of the Massachusetts Historical Commission have reviewed the Commission’s report and findings, and they have stated that they were extremely impressed by the magnitude, thoroughness, and quality of our efforts to date, and they look forward to local adoption of our recommendations.

As the City’s volunteer Preservation Commission, we find that the proposed Group E map amendments fulfill the original goals of Somerville’s Historic District Ordinance adopted in 1985. The overall purpose of the legislation is to make Somerville a more attractive and desirable place to live and work. We firmly believe that designating Somerville’s historically and architecturally significant properties as local historic districts, will result not only in their preservation and reinvestment over time, but also in greater public pride in the City and investment in its future well-being.

The Commission sincerely hopes that your Honorable Board will act favorably on this Group E map amendment package, and will thereby ensure protection of seventeen representative examples of the City’s cultural and historical resources that are otherwise endangered.

Sincerely,



Dick Bauer  
Chairman

Cc: Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone  
Rob May, Economic Development Director, OSPCD  
J. Brandon Wilson, Executive Director, SHPC