



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

Office of the Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Joseph A. Curtatone, Mayor

FROM: Monica R. Lamboy, Executive Director

DATE: November 9, 2010

SUBJECT: Ordinance amending the Local Historic District Map to create three (3) new districts (Thurston-Walnut, Pearl, and 9 Brastow) and add six (6) properties to these districts, and to add five (5) properties to the existing districts of Central-Atherton-Spring-Summer (CASS), Florence-Myrtle, Flint, and Prospect Hill (Group D).

The Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) respectfully requests that you forward to the Board of Aldermen (BOA) eleven (11) properties recommended for inclusion as Local Historic Districts (LHDs) in conformance with the City's Historic Districts Ordinance of 1985 as amended, for their review and approval. These properties date from 1865-1873 and are being informally called "Group D." The attached ordinance will amend the Historic Districts Map to create three new LHDs (Thurston-Walnut, Pearl, and 9 Brastow) and to expand the existing (or previously proposed) districts of Central-Atherton-Spring-Summer (CASS), Florence-Myrtle, Flint, and Prospect Hill. Six (6) of the properties are recommended for addition to the three new districts, and five (5) properties are recommended to be added to the existing (or previously proposed) districts of CASS (1 property), Florence-Myrtle (2 properties), Flint (1 property), and Prospect Hill (1 property). Ten of the properties are recommended to be incorporated into multi-building districts and one property will be in a single-building district until additional properties are added through the ongoing LHD expansion process¹.

It is anticipated that the Legislative Matters Committee of the Board of Aldermen will hold a

¹ Additional buildings will be added throughout the ongoing expansion process and at a future date, OSPCD staff will submit a separate ordinance that will transfer properties in several of Somerville's existing single building districts into the multi-building districts that are being created throughout this process.

joint public hearing with the Historic Preservation Commission to consider these map amendments to the ordinance.

Introduction

OSPCD submitted a Final Report from the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (SHPC) incorporating its findings and recommendations to the BOA in June 2007. Since that time, the BOA and members of its Legislative Matters Committee have met with the SHPC and staff of the OSPCD on numerous occasions. Each time the Board has raised a series of questions requiring further research and response from Staff. The most recent request was to ensure that all owners of properties proposed for designation as Local Historic Districts (LHDs) indicate that they have been informed about the designation and understand its provisions.

To efficiently perform the outreach and facilitate the review process, OSPCD has broken down the designation recommendations into smaller groupings of roughly fifteen to twenty properties, based upon their year of construction. Five different time periods, each with two groupings of properties, have been identified, starting with pre-Civil War properties and ending with those built in the mid-twentieth century. Extensive outreach to owners in the second two groupings (Groups C and D: 1865-1873) began in June of 2009. The outreach process and outcome for the fourth grouping, Group D, are summarized in the next section.

Outreach to Property Owners to Date

Prior to submitting a Final Report with Recommendations to the BOA in June 2007, the SHPC undertook a series of informational activities to inform owners that their properties were proposed for local designation. These activities from June 2006 to February 2007 included:

- a package of materials was sent to owners about the LHD Project, the significance of their specific property, and an invitation to one of a series of scheduled public meetings;
- the City's consultant, Edward Gordon, contacted owners by telephone regarding the package, the upcoming meeting schedule, and any questions;
- ten (10) informational meetings were sponsored in seven (7) different neighborhoods regarding the Project goals and the specific properties, and to answer any questions or concerns;
- a second packet of information was sent to owners seeking their feedback and interest in being designated;
- a public hearing notice and an explanatory letter was sent to all owners by certified mail, return receipt requested; and,
- a public hearing was sponsored at City Hall to solicit testimony from owners and the wider community.

In response to the Board of Aldermen's request additional confirmation be given that every owner was fully aware of the designation, OSPCD staff has undertaken another series of outreach activities. This effort encompassed:

- drafting a brief report that highlights the time period in which a particular property was

constructed;

- preparing an **Acknowledgement Card** (Card) indicating an owner's receipt of the LHD materials and their understanding of the LHD designation by a certain date;
- updating the mailing list for all of the first group of owners, based upon the most current Assessor Department records; and,
- sending the property owners an information packet, documented by a Certificate of Mailing receipt from the U.S. Post Office. The information packet included the historic period report, the Acknowledgement Card (self-addressed and stamped (SASE) for ease of return), a Frequently Asked Questions hand-out, as well as other explanatory materials.

Any owners who responded on their Acknowledgement Card that they did **not** "fully understand what LHD designation means for my property" were personally contacted by OSPCD staff to remedy this. If an owner did not return a signed Acknowledgement Card, they were sent, documented by a Certificate of Mailing by the U.S. Post Office, **a second packet**, with an updated cover letter and another copy of the Acknowledgement Card (also in a SASE format) to be returned within a one week time frame.

If an owner once again did not respond, a **"Third and Final Notice"** flyer and another Acknowledgement Card with a dated return deadline were directly dropped off during early evening hours to their house if they resided in the property, or elsewhere in Somerville. If the mailing address of the owner was outside the City, the Notice and Card were sent to them.

(See Tab 12 for the Sample Outreach Packet, Acknowledgement Cards, and the Third and Final Notice flyers).

Review of Properties Group D: Somerville Growth During Post Civil War Prosperity (1865-1873)

Between 1865 and 1873 Somerville enjoyed a brief period of prosperity following the Civil War and before the onset of a severe economic downturn nation-wide, known as the "Panic of 1873." During this nearly decade-long period of relative affluence, the community matured in many ways. New businesses located in Union Square, as well as the first Roman Catholic Church, St. Joseph's, and new residential areas were developed in East Somerville, Prospect Hill, Spring Hill, and Davis Square. Somerville evolved from a town to a city when it incorporated in 1872, and the population grew commensurately, jumping from 1,013 in 1842 when it became independent from Charlestown, to 8,025 by 1860, and then nearly doubled again over the next decade, reaching 14,685 by 1870.

The buoyant economy was tied to several major industries at this time. These industries included the meat-packing and brick-making. The community's prosperity also led to the creation of public parks, such as Central Park atop Central Hill in 1870, the seat of the new city government, and Broadway Park (now Foss Park) in 1874.

Group D includes eleven (11) properties built between 1865 and 1873. The properties are located in five separate areas of Somerville and provide direct physical evidence of housing that was constructed back in the mid-19th century, just after the end of the Civil War. The primary architectural styles represented in this group are Italianate and Mansard, with a sprinkling of Second Empire properties included. Several of the districts will be further expanded upon by later groupings, still to be proposed. (see Attachment I for a history of the properties and time period).

In this Group D, the three new districts are proposed to be known as:

- 1) **Thurston-Walnut LHD** (50 Sargent Avenue, 237 and 193 School Street);
- 2) **Pearl Street LHD** (70 and 94 Pearl Street); and
- 3) **9 Brastow Street LHD** (9 Brastow Street);

In addition four existing (or previously proposed) LHDs are to be expanded in Group D:

- 1) **Central-Atherton-Spring-Summer (CASS) LHD** (21-23 Elm Place);
- 2) **Florence-Myrtle LHD** (75 Florence Street, 37-39 Myrtle Street);
- 3) **Flint LHD** (47 Franklin Street); and
- 4) **Prospect Hill LHD** (61 Putnam Street)

Summary of Responses for Group D:

Owners of all eleven (11) properties have either returned the Response Card or spoken with OSPCD staff. All have indicated that they understand the Local Historic District program; none have indicated either on their cards or verbally that they do not wish to be designated. (See Attachment III for details.) (See Attachment II for the property-specific Survey Forms).

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Aldermen adopt the attached Ordinance amending the City of Somerville Historic District Ordinance #2003-1 to:

1. Create three new districts and add properties to those districts as identified below:
 - **Thurston-Walnut LHD** (50 Sargent Ave., 237 and 193 School Street);
 - **Pearl Street LHD** (70 and 94 Pearl Street);
 - **9 Brastow St.LHD** (9 Brastow Street), as mapping amendments; and,
2. Expand four existing (or previously proposed) LHDs known as the:
 - **Central-Atherton-Spring-Summer (CASS) LHD** (21-23 Elm Place);
 - **Florence-Myrtle LHD** (75 Florence St., 37-39 Myrtle Street);
 - **Flint LHD** (47 Franklin Street); and
 - **Prospect Hill LHD** (61 Putnam Street) as a mapping amendment; and
3. Authorize OSPCD staff to file and/or record a historic district designation form for each property at the Middlesex South District Registry of Deeds and/or Division of the Land Court Department.

List of Attachments

The following material is intended to be inserted in Tab 4 of the binders.

- I. Narrative of Historic Time Period (1865-1873)
- II. LHD Survey Form Bs for Group D (1865-1873) Properties
- III. Table of Group D (1865-1873) Outreach and Responses
- IV. Ordinance Amending the Local Historic District Map (Group D)

Other Items Previously Distributed

- I. Letter from former Chair of the Historic Preservation Commission, Michael Payne (Tab 11)
- II. Property Owner Outreach Packet (cover letters, narrative of historic time period, Frequently Asked Questions, Flow Chart/Steps to Apply for Certificate, Acknowledgement Cards) (Tab 12)
- III. Third and Final Notice Flyers (Tab 12)