



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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November 30, 2018

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Charles Sullivan

Re: Landmark Evaluation: George E. Bridges house, 74 Oxford Street (1893)

An application to demolish the house at 74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street was received on June 27, 2018. On July 12 the Commission found the house to be significant and preferably preserved in the context of the proposed replacement project; the applicant, 74 Oxford Street, LLC., intended to clear the site and construct four new detached structures containing five dwelling units. Subsequently the applicant developed plans to expand the existing building for multiple dwelling units, but these require zoning relief and, consequently, community support, which has not yet been forthcoming.



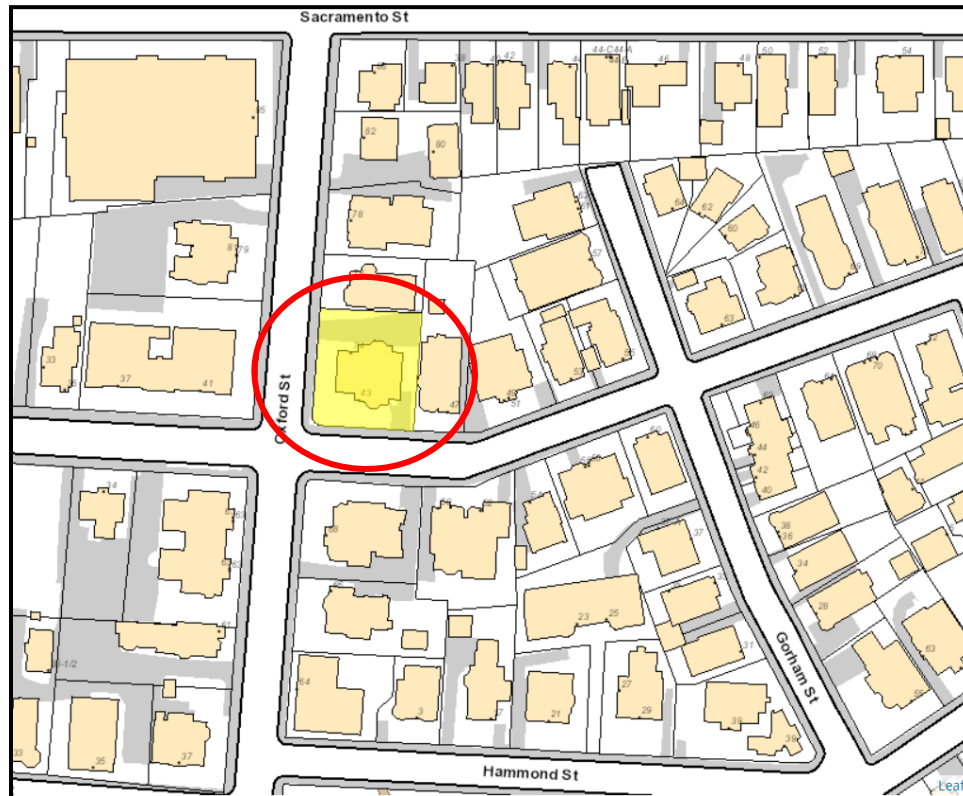
74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street. July 2018.

CHC photo

Description

The George E. Bridges house at 74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street is a large 2½-story, two-family Queen Anne style building with a gable roof built in 1893. The plan is symmetrical around a central party wall, with cross-gables and two dormers on each side and two projecting bays under a large gable facing Oxford Street. Most of the exterior is concealed by white vinyl siding installed

in 1964, but the original brackets supporting the roof overhang, the porch columns, and the back-door entrance canopies are still visible. The window sash, protected by aluminum storm windows, appear to be original, as are all the exterior doors. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The foundation is brick over ledgerstone. The house is set back from the corner with generous lawns on both frontages. Driveways north and south of the house offer parking for multiple cars. The Assessors rate the overall condition of the building as “fair.”



74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street.

Cambridge GIS, Assessor's map

The house was built (and still presents) as a large two-family structure, divided down the middle with entrances on the left and right sides, but it was altered at some point to contain the owner's unit and an apartment on the south side and ten rooms for rent on the north side. According to the assessors it has a total living area of 5,584 sf (about 2,000 sf. on each of the first two floors and 1,500 on the third), and now contains ten apartments.

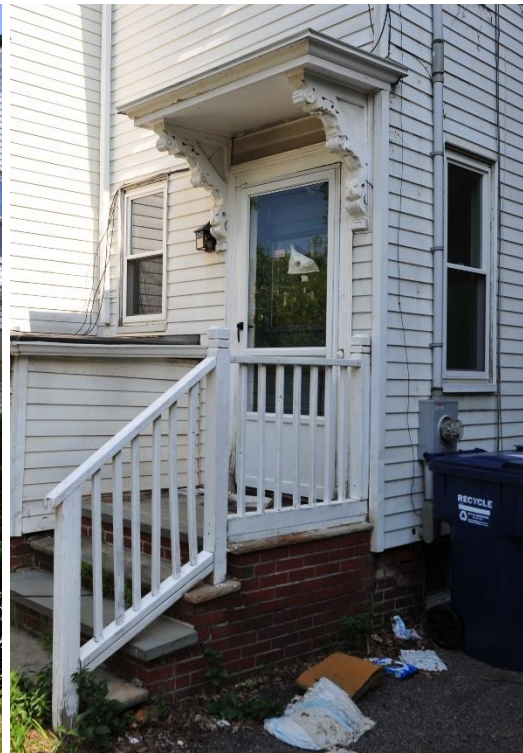
Significance

For the reasons stated in the staff memo of July 5, 2018 the George E. Bridges house is an architecturally significant and highly prominent structure on the former Palfrey estate. This part of Cambridge is distinctive for the consistency of its residential architecture, as it was almost entirely built up in less than a decade. The neighborhood has seen few demolitions in the past several decades, and except for some recent infill remains substantially intact as it was developed in the late 19th century.



74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street, 1965

CHC photo



Front door, 74 Oxford Street, and back door, 43 Wendell Street, 2018

CHC

Landmark Criteria and Goals

Landmarks are enacted by the City Council upon recommendation of the Historical Commission. The Commission commences a landmark designation study process by its own initiative or by voting to accept a petition of ten registered voters.

The criteria provided in the ordinance outlines eligible properties as:

any property within the city being or containing a place, structure, feature, or object which it determines to be either (1) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic, or social history of the City or the Commonwealth or (2) historically or architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures... (2.78.180.A)

The purpose of landmark designation is described in the ordinance, which was enacted to,

preserve, conserve and protect the beauty and heritage of the City and to improve the quality of its environment through identification, conservation and maintenance of neighborhoods, sites and structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City; to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose; to foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge and appreciation of such neighborhoods, areas, or structures; and by furthering these purposes to promote the public welfare by making the city a more desirable place in which to live and work. (2.78.140)

Relationship to Criteria

The Bridges house meets criterion (1) for its associations with the economic and social history of Cambridge, and criterion (2) as “architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures.”

Staff Recommendations

The Bridges house is a significant Queen Anne house on a prominent corner in the Agassiz neighborhood. In this case, replacement with contemporary structures would have a substantial adverse effect on the character of the neighborhood.

While the developer has prepared plans to renovate the house for continued residential use there is no certainty that this can be accomplished. I recommend that the Commission initiate a landmark designation study to protect the house for a further twelve months. During this period any proposed alterations will require a Certificate of Appropriateness. Permanent preservation of the building in some manner is warranted by its significance and architectural prominence.

cc: William Senné