



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

831 Massachusetts Avenue, 2nd Fl., Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139
Telephone: 617 349 4683 TTY: 617 349 6112 Fax: 617-349-6165
E-mail: histcomm@cambridgema.gov URL: <http://www.cambridgema.gov/Historic>



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March 29, 2019

To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner
Re: Landmark Evaluation: Murphy House, 2 Chetwynd Road (1928)

An application to demolish the structure at 2 Chetwynd Road was received on October 4, 2018. On November 1, 2018 the Commission found the house to be significant and preferably preserved in the context of the proposed replacement project. The applicant, Mahmood Firouzbakht, appeared at Commission meetings on February 7, 2019, but the Commission did not find the revised design acceptable and declined to terminate the demolition delay.

The Commission’s practice is to hold a hearing in the fifth month of the delay period to evaluate the potential of a property for landmark designation. This hearing marks the fifth month of the delay, which will run out on May 1.

Description

The Murphy House is a 1½-story transitional cottage house with a low-pitched side gable roof, constructed in 1928. A shed dormer containing three windows is centered over the home at the front elevation. A center-right entrance comprises a 12-light front door with a



2 Chetwynd Road. Cambridge GIS, Assessor’s map, October 2018.

fixed awning above. The property once had a full-width front porch which was later enclosed with ganged 2/2 windows along the entire front elevation. Three fluted columns have been retained and frame the enclosed porch, with one at each end and one centered to the left of the front door. All other windows on the property appear to have 6/1 wood sash, most with aluminum storm windows installed over them. There is a single 8-lite window at the west (corner side) elevation.

The original siding was covered in 1964 with aluminum siding. The house sits upon a raised concrete block foundation with a set of three brick steps to the door. A low chain-link perimeter fence follows the lot line along the side elevation along Newell Street where it ends in a chain-link gate. A driveway is located to the north (behind) the house with access off Newell Street.

The neighboring properties on Chetwynd Road are all similar 1½-story transitional cottages constructed by the same developer, Porter Realty Trust. Behind 2 Chetwynd, a larger late-Craftman/Dutch Colonial at 25 Newell, also built by the Porter Realty Trust, fronts Newell Street and was built in 1928.



2 Chetwynd Rd. center, with 4 Chetwynd Rd. at right and Newell Street at left. October 2018. CHC photo.



2 Chetwynd Road in 1970s. Photograph from survey file.

The land where Chetwynd Road currently sits was previously owned by Albert H. Hews, a prominent pottery maker and until the time of his death the largest producer of florist-ware and red earthenware (flowerpots) in the country. Mr. Hews died in 1903 at his home in Weston, survived by his wife, Mary Cook Hews. Mrs. Hews passed away in 1925. The property was likely sold off and purchased by the Porter Realty Trust. Soon after, Porter Realty created the subdivision of Chetwynd Road as well as constructing many new homes along Newell Street and the southern side of Walden Street.

Chetwynd Road was laid out as a dead-end street and named by the Porter Realty Trust in 1928 with even numbered addresses on the north side of the street. The street was originally laid out as a private way for all eight properties and later approved as a public way a year later by the City of Cambridge. All eight properties were owned and built by Porter Realty Trust in 1928 and sold off the following year.

The Porter Realty Trust first appears in 1924 when it purchased the Knowles Estate after the passing of Mrs. Sarah Knowles in 1923. The estate purchase included two four-family properties as well as a vacant lot. The group, comprised of two sets of brothers, included: Simon W. Markel, Edward Markel, George E. Rudnick, and Julius A. Rudnick, all of Roxbury. They later expanded in 1927 with the purchase of the Potter Block in Porter Square, which they demolished and constructed the Porter Theater, at 1994 Massachusetts Avenue, from plans by architect George Nelson Jacobs of Boston. The corporation had offices in the building. The Porter Realty Corporation was a prominent developer in Cambridge between 1924 and 1939, who often purchased properties and renovated units for sale or created small subdivisions with speculative housing, much like Chetwynd Road.

The property at 2 Chetwynd Road was purchased in 1929 by David C. Murphy and his wife, Mary. David was a World War I veteran and later worked as a member of the Cambridge

Fire Department at Ladder #1. Shortly after moving into their new home, they would begin growing their family and had five children. David Murphy later died in 1966 leaving behind his wife and children. The home remained in the Murphy family even after Mary Murphy's passing in 1968 when it was then granted to their children. According to an abutter on Chetwynd Street the home was in the family from its construction in 1928 until 2017, when Rita Murphy (Fisher) who lived in the home passed away.

The owner proposes to demolish the house and construct two detached single-family houses with off-street parking. The latest design proposal includes a front house of similar style and siting to the existing.

Significance

The house was found significant for its associations with the Albert H. Hews company and in the context of the predominantly pre-WWII residential neighborhood of Chetwynd Road, which features eight nearly identical homes by the same developer, Porter Realty Trust.

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 staff does not consider that the Murphy house meets criterion (1) for important associations “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.” The property could be considered to meet criterion (2) as architecturally significant in terms of its period and style within the context of the group of eight similar cottages on Chetwynd Road by the Porter Realty Trust in 1928.

Staff Recommendations

The Murphy House is a modest example of residential construction between the world wars. Its primary significance derives from its context as one of eight nearly identical houses built in the same year and sited together on Chetwynd Road.

While the Murphy House was found to be significant for the purposes of the demolition delay ordinance, it does not rise to the level of individual significance warranting designation as a Cambridge landmark. I recommend that the Commission take no action to initiate a designation study.

cc: Mahmood Firouzbakht