



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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January 5, 2025

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Eric Hill, Survey Director, Cambridge Historical Commission

Re: Landmark Evaluation of 84 Magazine Street

On September 15, 2025, the Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC) staff received a letter from Martha and Tom Sieniewicz, owners of 84 Magazine Street in Cambridge, who wrote to ask that the CHC initiate a landmark study for their home. Martha and Tom wrote, “In 2005, we bought the house and renovated it gingerly, including a “recapitation” of its long-missing mansard roof and tower. Having since lived in and learned about the building for 20 years, we’ve come to see several ways that it serves as an asset to the neighborhood and the city, and we believe it deserves consideration as a landmark.”

Built in 1867 for Samuel R. Leonard, a manufacturer, the house is an example of the Second Empire style of architecture, with its mansard roof, bracketed cornice, and window mouldings. The large residence was renovated in 1890s by later owner, John Hopewell Jr., a manufacturer and mill agent. Mr. Hopewell renovated the interiors and constructed the side addition, “piazza” and the three-stage tower at the façade.

In the early 20th century, the house was licensed as a lying-in hospital by owner, Annie E. Radford, who was later affiliated with the Charlesgate Hospital on Memorial Drive. Later in the 20th century, the property was owned by members of the Samourian family, who emigrated from Armenia and settled in Cambridge. The house suffered a major fire in 1939, which resulted in the removal of the mansard roof and tower above the second floor for decades until the present owners restored the property in 2005-2006 based on archival documentation.

The house occupies a 7,500 square foot lot at the corner of Magazine and Erie streets. The zoning is Residence C-1, a multi-family housing district, which was amended in February 2025. Current C-1 zoning allows for four-stories (45 feet) as-of-right without the need for a special permit, with the ability to go up to six-stories (74 feet) on lots



84 Magazine Street, 10-2025

larger than 5,000 square feet, so long as 20% of the floor area is dedicated to affordable housing. The zoning requires a minimum 10-foot front yard setback and a minimum 5-foot setback for side and rear yards for residential use.

The effect of initiating a landmark designation study would be to establish the Commission's jurisdiction over the property for up to one year while a report is prepared about its history and suitability for permanent designation. At the conclusion of the study, the Commission would hold a public hearing to consider whether to recommend designation to the City Council. If the Council orders the designation, the property would remain under the Commission's jurisdiction to review and approve any publicly visible alterations, construction or demolition on the site.

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 house at 84 Magazine Street (1867) is significant as a restored Second Empire style residence in Cambridgeport that contributes to the predominantly 19th-century architecture and stylistically diverse streetscape of Magazine Street.

Staff contends that the house at 84 Magazine Street meets criterion (1) for its important associations "with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic, or social history of the City or the Commonwealth," and criterion (2) as architecturally significant in terms of its period and style within the context of the surrounding Cambridgeport neighborhood, which largely developed in the mid-late 19th century.

Staff Recommendations

Staff recommends that the Commission hear public testimony from the owners and members of the public before deciding whether to initiate a landmark designation study.

cc: Martha and Tom Sieniewicz