



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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



Bruce A. Irving, *Chair*, Charles M. Sullivan, *Executive Director*
William Barry, Robert G. Crocker, Chandra Harrington, William B. King, Jo M. Solet, Susannah Barton Tobin, *Members*
Joseph V. Ferrara, Kyle Sheffield, *Alternates*

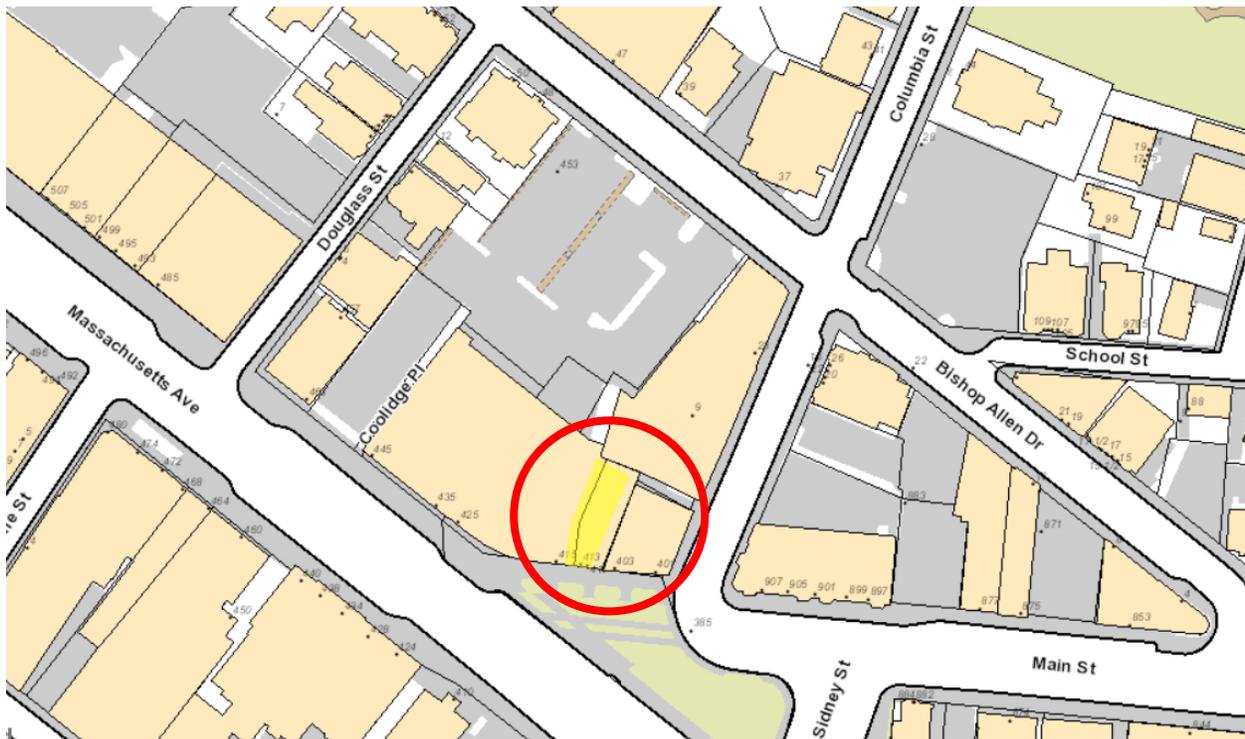
June 27, 2017

To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Charles Sullivan
Re: D-1456: 411 Massachusetts Avenue, Lafayette Square Building

An application to demolish and rebuild a three-story mixed use building at 411 Massachusetts Avenue was received on June 12, 2017. The applicant, Twining Properties, was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for July 6.

Site Description and Current Conditions

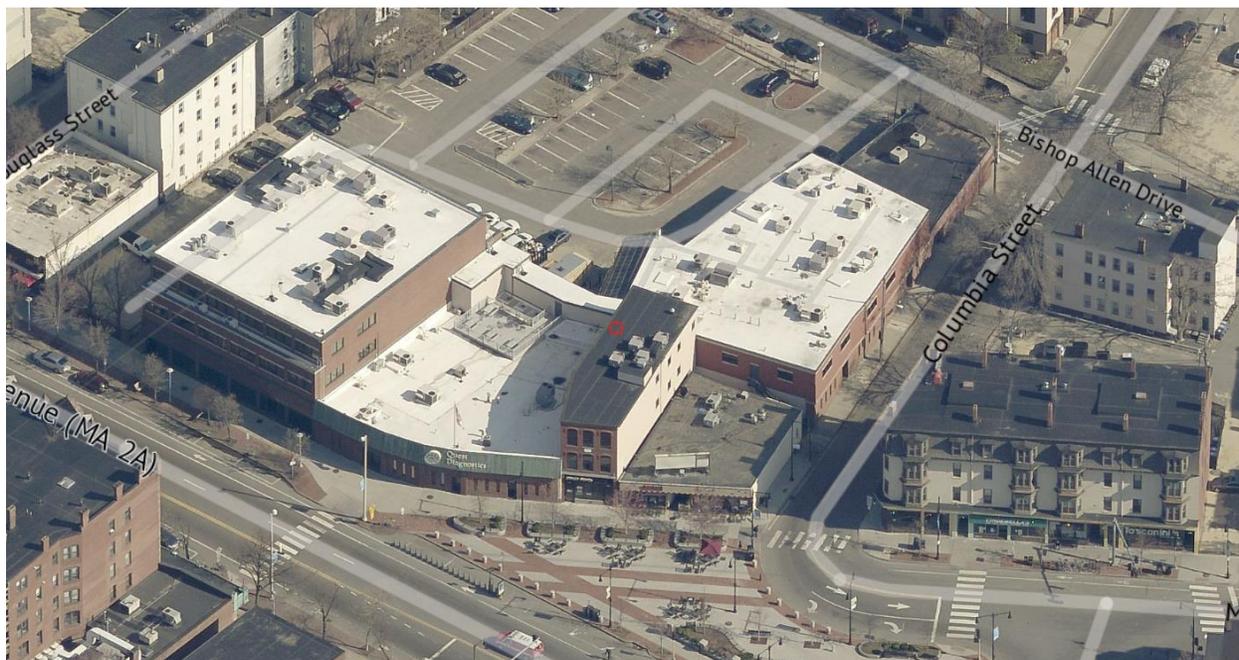
The Lafayette Square Building at 411 Massachusetts Avenue is located on the north side of the avenue at the intersection of Main Street. The lot (map 91, parcel 53) contains 2,024 square feet, but is part of a much larger development parcel involving several lots to the west and north totaling about 39,000 square feet. The zoning is Business B, modified by the Central Square Overlay District. The assessed value of the property is \$1.5 million, of which \$1.045 million represents the building.



Cambridge GIS, 2017

The development involving 411 Massachusetts Avenue is known as Mass+Main. The primary site, which includes the Lafayette Square Building, has frontage on Massachusetts Avenue, Columbia Street, Bishop Allen Drive, and Municipal Parking Lot #6 (but does not include the building on the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Columbia Street). Twining acquired the majority of the property from Dr. J. R. Fennell in 2012; his business, Quest Diagnostics, relocated at the end of 2015. The site contains several other buildings, all of which I have determined to be “not significant” under the Demolition Delay Ordinance. These are:

415-429 Massachusetts Avenue	1925, altered 1977
431-441 Massachusetts Avenue	1938, changed to three stories 1999
9 Columbia Street	1957; altered 1974
15 Columbia Street	1925; altered 1974
17-19 Columbia Street	1911; altered 1974
21-29 Columbia Street	1926



Cambridge GIS/CONNECTExplorer, 2014

The Mass+Main project will consist of three buildings on two separate sites. A tower on Massachusetts Avenue and a six-story building on Columbia Street will contain 285 apartments. A separate property on Bishop Allen Drive (now a parking lot) will contain 23 units; 20% of the 308 units will be affordable or reserved for middle-income tenants. The Massachusetts Avenue frontage and a passageway leading to the municipal parking lot will be lined with retail spaces. The entire project will contain 307,000 square feet of mixed uses.



Twining Properties received zoning approval in May 2015 and design approval in January 2017. Twining initially planned to renovate 411 Massachusetts Avenue in place, but a confluence of factors, including the unique features of the site, the characteristics and condition of the building itself, and the strong desire of all parties to promote retail activities along the passageway west of the building led the developer to propose razing the structure and rebuilding the façade with its original masonry.

411 Massachusetts Avenue

The Lafayette Square Building is a three-story brick structure erected in 1887. No architect is associated with the design, but the smooth brick façade with projecting segmental arches over the windows, a corbelled cornice, and granite sills displays the characteristic features of the Italianate Style. Brick piers that descend to the sidewalk frame a modern storefront with granite veneer trim. A marble plaque denoting its location on Lafayette Square is mounted in the center of the façade. The east, west, and north party walls have never had more than minimal fenestration. Originally comprised of common brick, they were covered with stucco-like EIFS (Exterior Insulation and Finish System, commonly sold as Dryvit) in 1997.



The original owner of the building was William A. Taylor, an undertaker who lived in an apartment upstairs; his business occupied the entire ground floor. After Taylor's death in 1911 the storefront was occupied by a restaurant and then by a market and package store until the property was acquired by Quest Pharmaceuticals and remodeled in 1997. The storefront and windows date from that project, as does a rear addition and the synthetic stucco that covers the party walls.



Lafayette Square, ca. 1948

Planning Board Collection, CHC

A unique condition affecting the Lafayette Square Building is that the front façade is directly supported by the reinforced concrete Red Line tunnel. The engineers who determined the alignment of the Cambridge Subway in 1909 eased the curvature at Lafayette Square by undercutting its façade; the split granite pillar that now supports the structure is visible in the basement.

Retail storefronts are important feature of the urban design plan for the Mass+Main project. The scheme favored by all parties envisioned inserting storefronts into the west elevation of the Lafayette Square building. However, a structural analysis indicates that this is will not be possible without extensive bracing. Furthermore, the passageway must be excavated for a new storm sewer, a project which will involve jacking a pipe under the subway tunnel.

Recommendation

The Lafayette Square Building has survived as a dignified representation of the aspirations of a 19th century businessman. It was designated a contributing building in the Central Square National Register District in 1990, and was further identified as significant in the C2 process a few years ago. The significance of the building derives from the integrity of its façade and its prominent position in a setting of undistinguished low-rise structures.

The only significant feature of this building is its second and third story façade. Given the unique circumstances outlined above, I recommend that the Lafayette Square Building be found not preferably preserved in the context of the proposed project, and that staff be delegated authority to approve the final design of the storefronts and the details of the masonry restoration using the original materials to the extent possible.

Cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, ISD
Suzannah Bigolin, CDD
Mark Barer, Twining Properties