



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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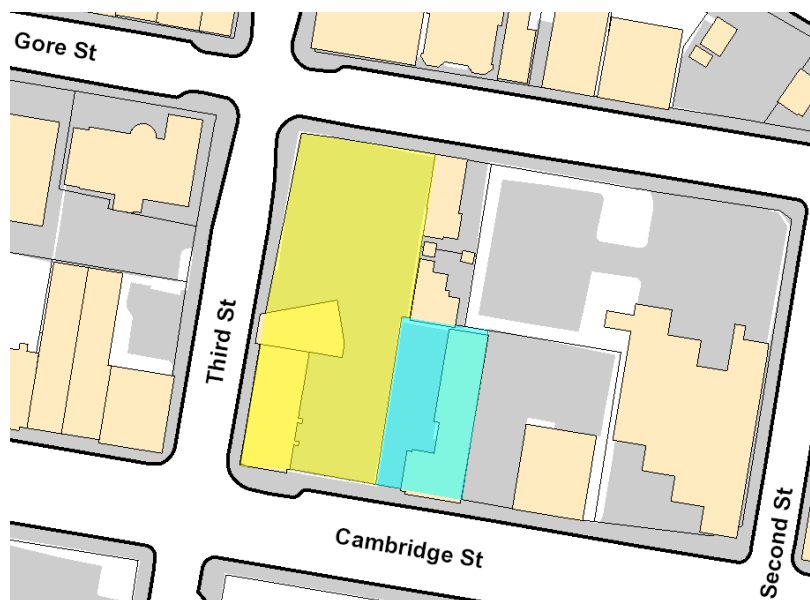
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November 28, 2016

To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Charles Sullivan
Re: 207 and 227 Cambridge Street, Evaluation for Landmark Designation Study

Background

Applications to demolish the mixed use building at 207 Cambridge Street and the former bank building at 227 Cambridge Street were received on January 11, 2016. The applicant was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for February 4 but continued twice to April 7 at the request of the applicant. The buildings were then found significant and preferably preserved.



207 Cambridge Street (blue) and 227 Cambridge Street (yellow); Cambridge GIS, 2016

The Commission's practice is to hold a public hearing in the fifth month of a six-month demolition delay to consider whether to initiate a landmark designation study; with various continuances that have been granted at the request of the applicant, the fifth month hearing now falls on December 1. If the Commission initiates the study the protection it provides will commence immediately and remain in effect for up to twelve months while the commission considers the designation and prepares a recommendation to the City Council.

Coincidentally, on November 23, 2016, the Commission received petitions requesting the initiation of landmark designation studies of the buildings at 207 and 227 Cambridge Street. We have not yet received confirmation that the petitions contain the required signatures of ten registered voters.

Finally, the proponents have submitted a new design that razes 207 Cambridge Street and preserves 227 in conjunction with a multi-story residential project. They ask that the Commission find 207 no longer preferably preserved in the context of this proposal.

William Gould house and bakery, 207 Cambridge Street

This three-story mixed use building sits directly opposite the Middlesex County South Registry of Deeds. It has a low hip roof, large frieze band, and wide eaves. The fenestration is divided into three symmetrical bays on the upper two floors and the ground floor is finished with a modern brick storefront. An enclosed stair tower has been added along the west elevation. At the rear is a 3-story ell measuring 20' square. The building is covered with asbestos shingle siding, but an 1875 stereopticon photo depicts the original Italianate detailing including quoins, flanking chimneys, shutters, window trim, and window hoods. The masonry wall on the east side served as a fire wall for this building and the former building at 203 Cambridge Street (a 4-story brick commercial building built in 1889 and demolished 1976).



207 Cambridge Street, 2016 and ca. 1875



CHC



207 Cambridge Street rear and west side. CHC photo, 2016

207 Cambridge Street was sided with asbestos shingles in 1943 and the eastern portion of the hipped roof was raised 1963. The building is in average condition but its exterior character has been diluted by the siding, replacement windows, and brick storefront. Because of the demolition of the buildings on either side it stands alone in a sea of pavement.

George Fowle built 207 Cambridge Street in 1857 for baker William Gould as both a house and a bakery. The property was sold and leased to a succession of bakers who both

lived and worked at the property, including Ezra T. McIntire, Frank M. Doyle, S. H. Mitchell, James Tominy, and Antonio Goncalves. As bakery operations grew, so did the building, with the commercial bakery at the rear of the site. S.H. Mitchell built an addition in 1895. Remarkably, the building remained in its original use as a dwelling and bakery for a hundred years. Goncalves appears to have been the last baker there, and after he retired the addition was used as an auto garage and storage until it was demolished and rebuilt as a 5-bay garage in 1971. From the 1938 to the 1960s, the property was the location of Vito Maida's Italian meat and provisions store, Vito & Sons. After the Maidas's store closed, the commercial space was leased for office use by an insurance company and most recently a constable.

Lechmere National Bank, 227 Cambridge Street

This one story, 30' high cast stone block building has frontage of 27 feet on Cambridge Street and 71 feet on Third Street. The bank entry is flanked by monumental Doric columns and pilasters. The base course and door trim are polished Deer Isle granite. A large three part wood transom is centered over the doors. The classical temple design continues on the west side facing Third Street with four full height divided light windows providing light to the bank lobby. The east wall, once a party wall with another bank building, is windowless. A projecting cornice with a dentil band is topped by a two-course paneled parapet. The bank was designed by architect Thomas M. James and built for Lechmere National Bank in 1917-18. James also designed the East Cambridge Savings Bank at 292 Cambridge Street in 1931.

Originally furnished in mahogany and marble, the interior was remodeled in 1941. An addition constructed on the rear (north) wall in 1961 serves as the entrance from the parking lot.

The bank is in average condition but water damage is evident on the west side at the parapet and cornice. The cast stone, called composite granite in the contemporary newspaper descriptions, has weathered to show more of its aggregate than was probably evident when new.



227 Cambridge Street, Lechmere National Bank (1917-18, by Thomas M. James, arch.) Most recently occupied by Citizens Bank.

Excerpts from *East Cambridge* (Revised Edition, 1988) by Susan E. Maycock.

Commercial building in East Cambridge are relatively modest in comparison with its civic structures. Its population was too small, and downtown Boston too close, for the area to develop a significant business district. Of the commercial buildings along Cambridge Street, only the banks exploited the architectural potential of their sites.

In the 1850s, two banks were founded in quick succession. The Lechmere Bank, chartered in 1853, occupied a new building on the southwest corner of Cambridge and Second streets. The following year, the East Cambridge Savings Bank was incorporated and occupied rooms in the Lechmere Bank building.

That two banks existed where there had been none may seem curious, but they served different purposes and different clienteles. The Lechmere Bank was a profit-making commercial institution that made business loans to its customers, while the savings bank was a nonprofit institution that invested its depositors' money in order to pay them interest.

In 1865, the Lechmere Bank was reorganized as the Lechmere National Bank under the National Bank Act of 1864, which created a banking system whereby commercial banks were incorporated under charters granted by the federal government. The idea was to provide a uniform national currency; under the old system, each bank had issued its own notes. Savings banks, on the other hand, were chartered by the commonwealth to encourage thrift among people of modest means.

In 1895, when Middlesex County acquired the site for the present Registry of Deeds, the [Lechmere] bank was moved to the southeast corner of the same intersection and turned so its original Cambridge Street façade faced Second Street. It was demolished in 1964.

The Lechmere Bank moved to 337 Cambridge Street in 1895, when its original building was taken by the county, and in 1904 moved to 221 Cambridge Street, the site of the Cambridge National Bank, which had gone out of business that year. In 1917, the bank hired the Boston architect Thomas M. James to design a new building on the adjoining lot at 225 Cambridge Street.

James provided a structure of cast stone in imitation of white limestone, with monumental Doric columns. This Roman temple is the very image of conservative dignity that banks on almost every Main Street sought to emulate in the 1920. In 1936, Lechmere merged with the National Bank of Malden and the Everett Bank & Trust to form the Middlesex County National Bank, which in turn evolved into BayBank/Middlesex.

Not to be outdone, the East Cambridge Savings Bank hired James in 1931 to design a new headquarters on the site of its Neoclassical building, diagonally across the street from the Lechmere Bank. This building was far more original than James' earlier work. A granite cube pierced by arched windows on three sides houses the main banking room...The building greatly benefited from James' collaboration with the New York sculptor Paul Fjelde, who designed the elaborate exterior carving as well as the paired bronze doors.

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 William Gould house and bakery at 207 Cambridge Street meets criterion (1) for its associations with the economic and social history of East Cambridge. It also meets criterion (2) as an architecturally significant and rare surviving example of the Italianate Style applied to a commercial building.

The Lechmere National Bank Building at 227 Cambridge Street meets criterion (1) for its associations with the economic and social history of Cambridge. It also meets criterion (2) as being architecturally significant as the work of bank architect Thomas M. James.

Staff Recommendations

For the reasons stated, the staff believes that both buildings are eligible for landmark designation. However, there may be strong public interest in housing development at this site.

The Commission first needs to determine whether the public interest in the revised project outweighs the public interest in preserving both 207 and 227 Cambridge Street for the remainder of the six-month delay. Note that only 207 is currently at risk; 227 is proposed be restored and incorporated into the new project.

- If the Commission finds that 207 Cambridge Street is no longer preferably preserved in the context of the new development proposal, then it should initiate a landmark study for 227 Cambridge Street to protect it during construction and beyond.
- If the Commission decides that both 207 and 227 Cambridge Street should remain preferably preserved in the context of the new project, then it should decide whether to protect them both by initiating a landmark designation study.

No further action should be necessary on the citizen petitions.

cc: James Rafferty, Esq.