



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

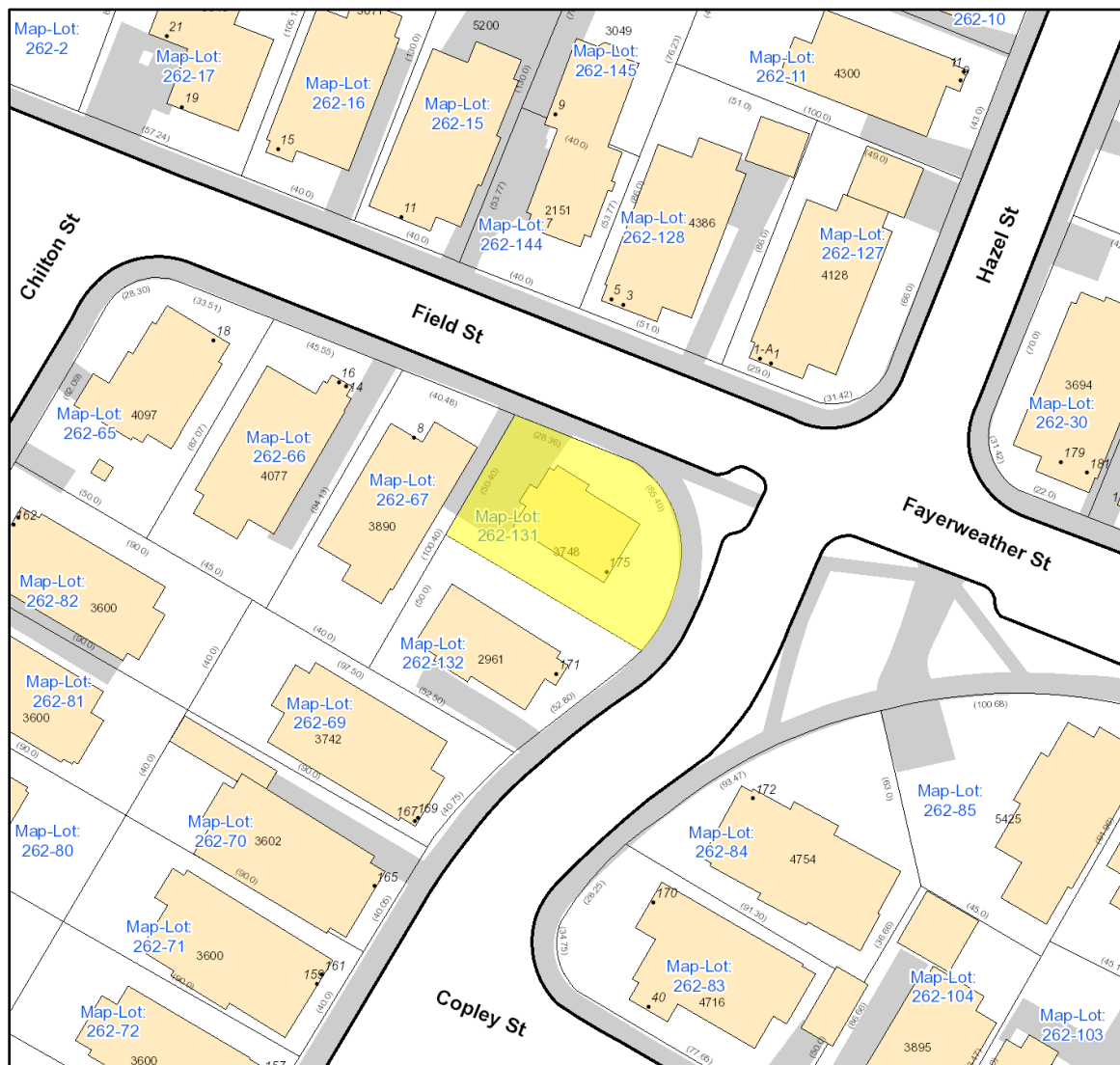
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Date: September 29, 2017
To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Sarah L. Burks, Preservation Planner
Re: D-1468: 175 Fayerweather Street, Dunbar-Smith House (1930)

An application for demolition of the house at 175 Fayerweather Street was received on September 12, 2017. The owner, Lawrence R. Smith was notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for October 5, 2017.



175 Fayerweather St. (highlighted in yellow).

Cambridge GIS, Sept. 2017

Site

The structure is located on the west side of Fayerweather Street, at the intersection of Field and Hazel streets. The corner is located on the north end of Fayerweather Street where the street curves east to meet Walden Street. The 1½-story frame house sits on a concrete block foundation. The 2017 assessed value for the land and building is \$749,600. The structure is sited on a 3,747 square-foot lot in a Residence B zoning district. The zoning allows one and two-family construction with an FAR of 0.5 and a height limit of 35 feet. A driveway is located at the rear of the property, accessed from Field Street.

The owner is a longtime resident of the neighborhood; his parents purchased the property in 1955. Mr. Smith's proposal is to demolish and rebuild the house, using modular construction, on a slightly larger footprint (extending the house on the south/left side by 1.6' and by 4.2' to the west/rear). He also intends to extend the projecting bay on the north side and to remove the large pine tree on the south side of the property.



Architectural Description

The house at 175 Fayerweather Street is a 1½-story Bungalow on a rusticated concrete block (cast stone) foundation. The front plane of the side gable roof extends out to cover the front porch, a design feature common to the Bungalow house form. A shed dormer also projects from the front roof plane.



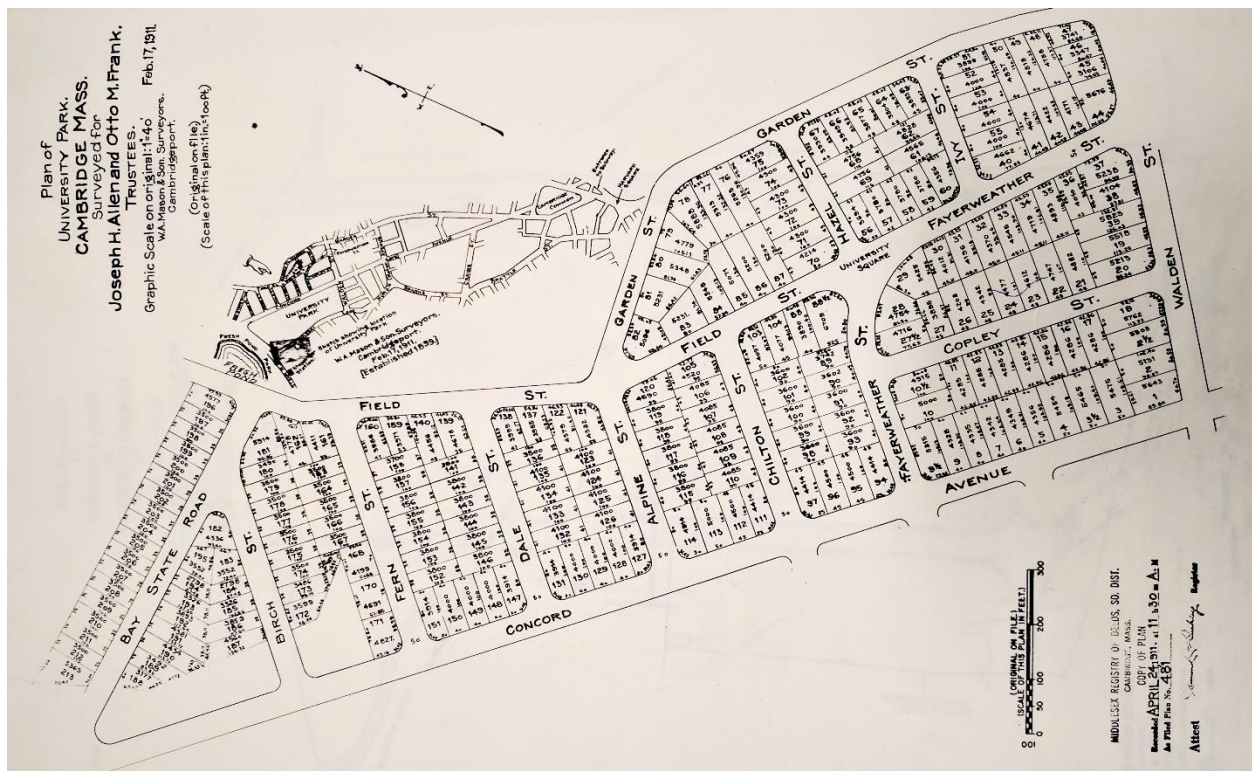
Many of the original double-hung sash windows have been replaced with other types including casement, jalousie, and picture, but there are a few original 6-over-1 windows remaining. The original wood shingles of the house were covered or replaced with asbestos shingles in the mid twentieth century. The current condition of the structure is average with some deferred maintenance of the painted wood elements.

History

Fayerweather Street is named for Thomas Fayerweather, a Revolutionary-era land owner. His estate at 175 Brattle Street extended north to Vassal Lane. The first section of Fayerweather Street was laid out in 1847 from Brattle Street to Vassal Lane. A second section of the street was laid out in 1896 from Concord Avenue to Walden Street. The two sections were not joined (Vassal Lane to Concord Avenue) until 1911.

In the 1890s, the Huron Avenue streetcar line brought new development interest to the Huron Avenue neighborhood, which was built up around the turn of the century with Queen Anne two-family houses and Colonial Revival triple-deckers. But the area along either side of Concord Avenue, between Vassal Lane on the south and Garden Street on the north, did not see widespread development until after World War I.

Vassal Lane had long marked the boundary between the residential neighborhoods north of Brattle Street and the large brickyards of North Cambridge. The property at 175 Fayerweather Street was part of a larger parcel of land owned by the Bay State Brick Company (later the New England Brick Company). The twenty acre area was improved for residential development by the city with the agreement that the brick company would cease its clay excavation operations there. The original subdivision, "Plan of New Streets at Clay Land District No. Cambridge," was surveyed in 1896. The city laid out and named the streets, installed sewers, and built sidewalks—clearing the way for private development.



Plan of University Park Cambridge Mass., Feb. 17, 1911.

Joseph H. Allen and Otto M. Frank purchased the large site and had a new survey done and filed their subdivision plan (pictured above) titled, "Plan of University Park Cambridge Mass." University Park began to be marketed heavily for new house construction. The opening of the new subway station in Harvard Square was prominently touted to their potential buyers, with the claim of being able to travel to Park Street station in Boston in 13 minutes. The intersection of Fayerweather, Field, and Hazel streets was named University Square.

The blocks closest to Walden Street sold first, while the blocks west of Fayerweather Street remained largely vacant until after 1925. Most of the houses in the neighborhood are Colonial Revival duplexes but a few three-families and singles are mixed in.

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Advertisement for the University Park Land Co., *Cambridge Chronicle*, Feb. 6, 1911.



Concord Avenue at Chilton Street, looking west, in 1920. A clay pit can be seen in the distance on the left.

The New England Brick Co. retained ownership of the double lot at 171 and 175 Fayerweather Street but it was not developed until 1930 when the Porter Realty Trust pulled building permits for the two twin Bungalow homes. Each cost \$3000 to build. 175 Fayerweather Street was purchased by an African American couple, Lewis E. Dunbar and his wife Idella L. Dunbar. Lewis was a veteran of the Spanish-American War and was later worked as a cook at the Cambridge catering business of Fred Churchill; Idella was a nurse. Lewis was an active member of the Cambridge Elks and founded Pocahontas Lodge (later renamed the Massasoit Lodge).



The first black family said to have moved to Fayerweather Street were the Moodys who moved to #187 in 1928. Brothers Roland and Paul Moody were Tuskegee Airmen in World War II. University Square was renamed in 1948 for Roland W. Moody, who had died at an airfield in Italy in 1945. Paul survived the war and remained at 187 Fayerweather Street where he raised his own family. Though we haven't found evidence that University Park was marketed specifically to middle class blacks, it did become one of several historically-black neighborhoods in north and west Cambridge.

Nathaniel R. and Maude A. Smith purchased 175 Fayerweather Street from the Dunbars in 1955 after having lived at two other addresses in the neighborhood including 159 Fayerweather Street and 270 Garden Street. Nathaniel was a clerk for the United States Post Office and an employee of the Harvard University Law Library. He was the Area Coordinator for the NAACP. Maude Smith worked at home. They are both pictured in the Cambridge Chronicle presenting a membership certificate to then District Attorney, John J. Droney.



Cambridge Chronicle, 31 May 1962 caption, "District Attorney John J. Droney renews his membership in the NAACP. Left to right: Mortimer M. Jackson, Droney, Mrs. Nathaniel R. Smith and Nathaniel R. Smith, Cambridge NAACP Area Coordinator."

Significance and Recommendation

The house at 175 Fayerweather Street is significant for its architecture as a classic 1½ story Bungalow, a relatively rare house type in Cambridge, but one of two at this location on Fayerweather Street. The house is also significant for its associations with the broad economic history of Cambridge as part of the University Park subdivision as well as for its associations with the broad social and cultural history of the city for its relationship to the Dunbar and Smith families. It is the staff recommendation that the structure be found significant for these reasons.

The house is in average condition and could be rehabilitated. The applicant will make his case for why he proposed to demolish and rebuild the home rather than renovating it. That presentation, as well as any public testimony should be heard before making any further determinations.

cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, Inspectional Services Commissioner
Lawrence R. Smith, owner