



Town of Reading
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Reading, MA 01867

West Street Historic District Commission
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November 5, 2014

Summer Ave Local Historic District **Summary Sheet**

West Street Historic District Commission (Study Committee)
WSH@ci.reading.ma.us 781-942-6612 (Reading Community Services)

Chairman:
Everett Blodgett eblodg-wshd-350@comcast.net 781-944-2957

Members:
Virginia Adams
Ilene Bornstein
Priscilla Poehler

Date of Public Hearing / Summer Ave Local Historic District:
October 27, 2014

Date of Town Meeting:
November 10, 2014

Total Number of Properties Included in Proposed Local Historic District:
25

Introduction

In Massachusetts, a Local Historic District ("LHD") is a way for a city or town to protect its distinct historic neighborhoods from needless destruction or insensitive alteration. A Local Historic District offers the strongest form of protection to our most prized historic resources, but, is also somewhat limited in its scope. Only alterations of exterior architectural features that are visible from a public way are subject to review by a Local Historic District Commission, and, additionally, there are features which are exempt from review.

Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 40C, provides the framework for establishing LHDs in the Commonwealth's cities and towns, and over 120 municipalities in Massachusetts have established one or more Local Historic Districts in their communities. A Local Historic District is different from a National Register District. Listing on the National Register provides formal recognition of a property's significance, but does not place conditions on alterations made by a property owner. A Local Historic District, however, does provide a regulatory review process for changes to exterior architectural features visible from a public way.

Nearly 10 years ago, the Town of Reading adopted a Local Historic District bylaw and established its first LHD, the West Street Local Historic District. With the bylaw framework in place, it was expected that, in time, other LHDs would be established to benefit and protect the unique character of additional neighborhoods. While there are a number of areas and neighborhoods to be studied and considered as potential Local Historic Districts in Reading, the subject of this report is the proposed creation of a Summer Avenue Local Historic District.

Methodology

In accordance with the State Law (MGL Ch. 40C, S. 3), an existing Local Historic District Commission shall act as the study committee to create a new LHD. The West Street Historic District Commission is, therefore, responsible for the investigation, report and hearing for the proposed new Summer Avenue Local Historic District. The Town's 2005 Master Plan calls on the Historical Commission to, "protect buildings of historical significance and establish Local Historic Districts where appropriate, as part of the value the Town puts into its architectural heritage and character." Portions of Summer Avenue and Woburn Street, each having a National Register District or Multiple Resource Area, have long been candidates to become Local Historic Districts. Endangered residential properties on Summer Avenue are the specific impetus which propelled the study and review at this time for the proposed area. Like many communities in the Boston region, Reading is susceptible to teardowns, due to its convenient proximity to Routes 93 and 95, as well as the lack of open land available for development; like many communities, it is also vulnerable to state and federal regulations which often override local zoning. The potential for loss or destruction under these conditions is persistent and growing, and it is important for the community to take control of the protection of its own resources from external forces.

While Reading prides itself on its heritage and substantial stock of historic structures and places, a finding of the 2005 Master Plan states, "The character and identity of the community, preserved up to today, is potentially threatened by changes occurring within the existing fabric; changes driven by forces outside the realm of the Town's influence and sustained by the regional housing crisis. The human-friendly balance among

building size, lot size and natural elements that exists throughout the Town is put to test by factors external to Reading, thus threatening the sense of distinctiveness maintained throughout the years." In order, then, to protect some of our most storied and valuable homes, it would seem that selective regulation is warranted to ensure the greater protection of the neighborhood, as a whole, and especially from the threat of commercial development in a residential neighborhood.

Of the 25 properties proposed to be included in the Summer Avenue LHD, 10 of them are on the Town's Historical and Architectural Inventory, and 5 are recognized as National Register properties.

According to a preliminary survey, the vast majority of the property owners in the proposed Summer Avenue LHD are in favor of the district and, in fact, in many ways are the catalyst for its creation.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission, at their meeting on October 8, 2014, voted to encourage "the Town of Reading to establish the Summer Avenue Local Historic District."

The Public Hearing, which is required prior to the creation of the District, was held on October 27, 2014. Over 120 citizens attended the meeting and overwhelming supported the establishment of the Historic District.

At the November 3, 2014 meeting of the Community Planning and Development Commission a motion was made and passed unanimously to applaud the Historic District Study Committee for their efforts toward establishing the Summer Avenue Local Historic District and recommend adoption of the District to Town Meeting.

The Town Meeting vote required to create the District will take place on November 10, 2014.

Significance

In its earliest years, from settlement in 1639, Reading was an agrarian village. Later, as farming waned, home industry grew, and eventually Reading moved into a number of flourishing industries, including the manufacture of shoes, clocks, organ pipes, furniture, cabinets, and neckties. In 1806, the Andover-Medford Turnpike bisected downtown Reading, and by the middle of the 19th century, the railroad from Boston came through Reading, as well. These two changes contributed to creating the bedroom community that Reading is today, 12 miles north of Boston. Summer Avenue was among the first streets and neighborhoods where homes were built by the affluent merchants and businessmen, who commuted from Boston to Reading.

This particular stretch of Summer Avenue, boasts a dozen or more of Reading's finest historic homes, dating from 1807 to 1900, and slightly beyond. While the contiguous tree-lined streetscape with significant set-backs lends a visual sense of the past, it also continues to offer a peaceful residential setting in the present, which, with proper attention to preservation, will also carry on into the future.

Individual properties, which contribute to the history of the district, include:



Kemp Place (1853), Reading's finest example of Italianate architecture, 186 Summer Avenue

Dewey Place (1853), a Greek Revival with Italianate features, 176 Summer Avenue



Wisteria Lodge (1873), a classic Second Empire w/fish-scale slate mansard roof, 146 Summer Avenue



Father Kemp's Place (1878), a remodeled Second Empire, now an English Revival, 199 Summer Avenue



Edgar Hunt House (1887), an elegant Shingle-style Queen Anne, 189 Summer Avenue



Justification of the Boundaries

The Study Committee's investigation and discussion of the potential District boundaries determined that its southern gateway would be the border of the Woburn Street National Register District, and to the north, would capture the 1873 Wisteria Lodge, while incorporating the concentration of National Register properties and the fine and varied examples of 19th century architecture found among the once popular homes of Reading's affluent merchants and commuters. A current threat to the neighborhood has given urgency to the move to protect all of these resources.

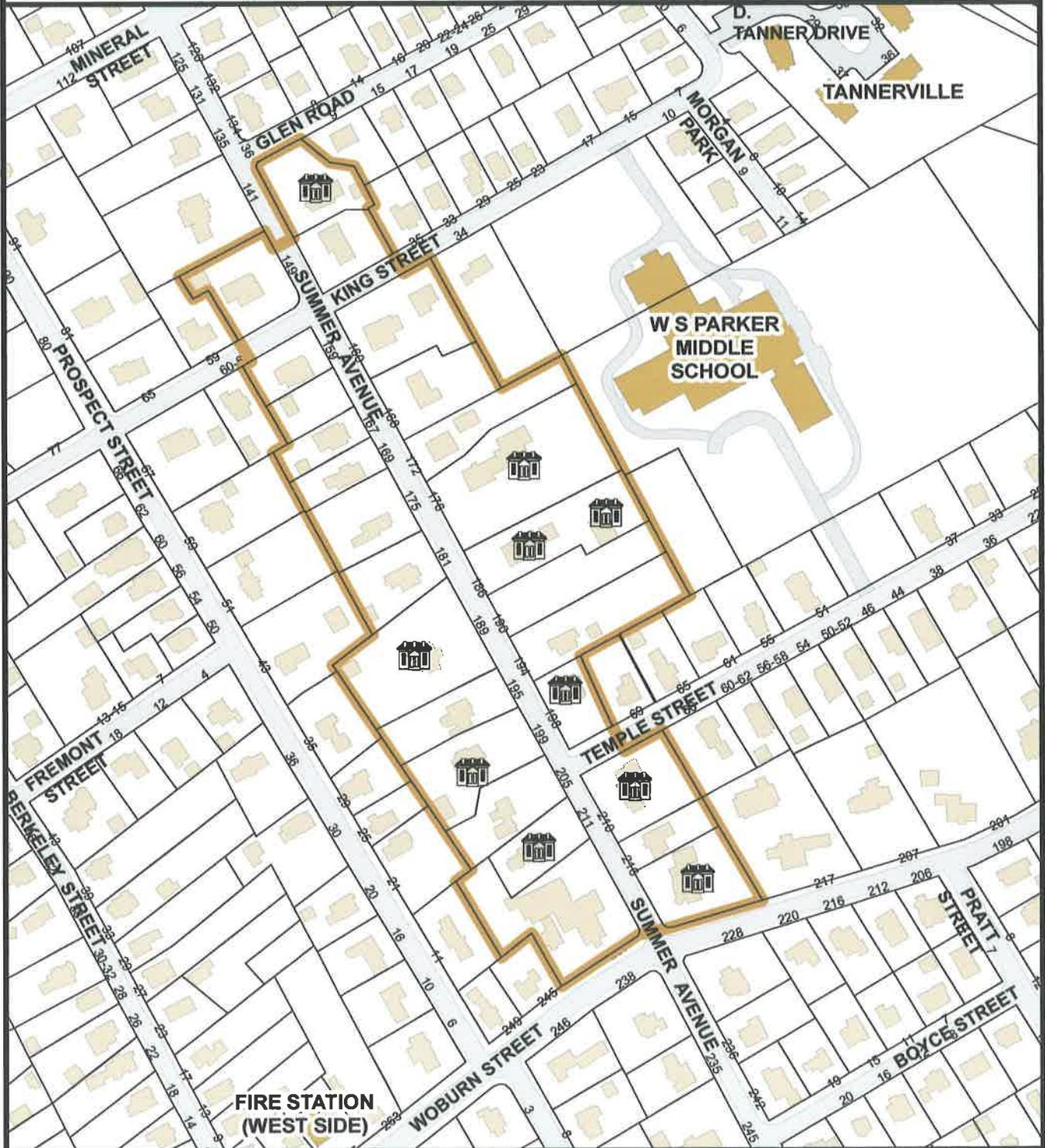
Options and Recommendations for the Bylaw

The Town of Reading adopted a Local Historic District Bylaw (Gen. Bylaw, Article 7.3) in 2005, and currently administers the West Street Local Historic District. The Summer Avenue Local Historic District will be similarly administered under the bylaw.

Attachments:

- ◆ Map of the Summer Avenue Local Historic District
- ◆ Property Index of the 25 properties in the proposed District
- ◆ Digital Images of the District

SUMMER AVENUE LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT



Legend



Local Historic District



Historic Inventory Property

Map by Town of Reading, 11/10/14
Parcel data current as of 1/1/14.
Building footprints from 2008 aerial
photos. Historic inventory properties
from Reading Historical Commission.

0 50 100 200
Feet

