



City of Medford

HISTORICAL COMMISSION &
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

City Hall – Room 308
85 George P. Hassett Drive
Medford, Massachusetts 02155

Via Electronic Mail and Fax

September 13, 2022

Adam L. Hurtubise, City Clerk
Medford City Hall
85 George P. Hassett Drive
Medford, MA 02155
(781) 605-4735

Re: Determination of Significance – 16 Foster Court (MDF.112)

Dear Sir,

The Medford Historical Commission (the “Commission”) has received an application concerning the proposed demolition of the dwelling house located at 16 Foster Court, Medford, MA. The application was filed at the Commission’s regular meeting on Monday, September 12, 2022. A determination of significance exists for this property. Pursuant to Section 48-78(d) of the Revised Ordinances of the City of Medford, a public meeting was held on Monday, March 11, 2019, at 7 PM in room 201 of Medford City Hall to determine if the aforementioned property was to be found to be *significant* under Medford’s Demolition Delay Ordinance.

As set forth in Section 48-78, a significant building is any structure, or a portion thereof, which is not within a local historic district subject to regulation under the provisions of MGLA c. 40C, but which:

1. Has been listed in or is the subject of a pending application for listing in the National Register of Historic Places; or
2. Has been listed in the Massachusetts Register of Historic Places; or
3. Was built within 75 years or older and which is determined by the commission to be a significant building as provided by subsection 48-78(d) either because:
 - a. It is importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social history of the city or the commonwealth; or
 - b. It is historically or architecturally important in terms of period, style, method of building construction, or association with an important architect or builder, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings.

At its March 11, 2022 meeting, the Commission made the determination that 16 Foster Court is a significant building under Section 48-78 of the Demolition Delay ordinance. The Commission’s determination (passed by a 5-0 vote), was based on the documentation and research contained in the attached Massachusetts Historical Commission (‘MHC’) form B prepared by John Clemson, the Commission’s consultant in architectural history. The Commission also reviewed associated MHC area forms and an expanded neighborhood narrative for the area of East Medford in which the premises is located. The facts supporting the findings are as follows:

1. 16 Foster Court is a rare surviving example of a domestic dwelling from the early nineteenth century. Its construction date between 1804 and 1813 puts this property in a small grouping of similar structures. Neil Larson, an architectural historian who worked with the Commission, indicated in his City of Medford Community Wide Survey Plan that resources such as 16 Foster Court are uncommon and diminishing. As a result, the Commission views efforts to preserve such resources to be a high priority.

2. 16 Foster Court retains an acceptable degree of integrity. Character-defining elements from the time it was first built include its Cape Cod form, use of a typical floor plan clustered around a central hearth, and the presence of material elements such as heavy timber framing, board walls, fireboxes, and some original window and door locations. While the structure (like all buildings) has changed over time, evidence of its earliest features remains. Its renovation over time does not obscure 16 Foster Court's original design and style and later modifications, including the division of the building into two units, the addition of dormers, the application of an Eastlake hood on the front door and the addition of composite siding, are now considered historic as well. Removal of select features during a restoration of 16 Foster Court may reveal evidence of the development of the building, demonstrating the structure is worthy of retention.

3. 16 Foster Court preserves links to the working landscape of 19th Century East Medford. It is located in a residential enclave closely associated with the industrial activity on the banks of the Mystic River in the well-documented Old Ship Street local (MDF.E), National Register (MDF.F) ,and Washington Square (MDF.A) areas. From 1803 to 1871, East Medford's productive shipyards turned out 568 world-renowned clipper ships that set the standard for wooden sailing vessels. Each was handcrafted by scores of workers who lived in the dense community extending eastward from Medford Square in which 16 Foster Court remains standing. It was constructed concurrently with the earliest activity in the area, and several of its owners can be linked to this prosperous time of Medford shipbuilding.

4. 16 Foster Court's social history directly correlates with the broad patterns of the development of East Medford. Following the establishment of the first shipyard by Thatcher Magoun, developers purchased and divided what had been farmland to house shipyard craftsmen. Holt and Wheelwright purchased a three-acre parcel from the Hall Family, of rum distilling fame, to be divided into multiple house lots, on one of which 16 Foster Court was erected by a speculative developer. The structure was later owned by Lincoln Damon, a shipwright from the south shore. A later owner was Joshua T. Foster, whose yard launched the last clipper ship.

5. 16 Foster Court has strong associations with the locally prominent Cutter and Sprague families. Rebecca Cutter, the widow of William Cutter, a Revolutionary War veteran and distillery house foreman for the Halls, purchased the building to be used as her residence. Mrs. Carter occupied half the building and rented the other half to tenants, possibly family. Upon her death, 16 Foster Court came into possession of the Widow Cutter's namesake daughter, Rebecca Cutter, who was married to the prominent shipbuilder Isaac Sprague (who, in partnership with Galen James, was the third master craftsman to establish a yard on the Mystic River) and lived nearby at 314 Riverside Avenue (MDF.11) in a fashionable Greek Revival home.

6. 16 Foster Court's association with the Medford shipbuilding industry places this building within state and national historical currents. Beginning in the nineteenth century, Massachusetts entered a golden age of sailing ship production. Its Atlantic ports were among the busiest in the world, served by fast merchant ships. Medford became one of several prestigious locations for the creation of these storied vessels. 16 Foster Court remains a tangible link to Medford's shipbuilding days.

Based on the information available to it, the Commission has found 16 Foster Court to be historically significant under Section 48-78(d) under criteria a and b set forth in the definition of "Significant building" in Section 48-77 of the Demolition Delay Ordinance, as it has important associations with more than one historic persons and events of the City of Medford, and the broad architectural and social history of the City and Commonwealth. It is architecturally important in terms of period and style both by itself and in the context of buildings in the area of East Medford in which it was erected, as well as in terms of the method of building construction by itself. These factors, viewed in combination, provide ample support for a finding of significance.

In accordance with section 48-78 (e) of the Revised Ordinances of the City of Medford, **the Medford Historical Commission will hold a public hearing on Monday, October 3, 2022 at 7pm via Zoom** to determine if the demolition of 16 Foster Court would be detrimental to the historical, cultural, or architectural heritage or resources of the City of Medford. Within 21 days from the close of the meeting on October 3, the Commission will issue a formal written determination as to whether 16 Foster Court should be "preferably preserved" and thus the demolition delay provided for in Section 48-78(h) of the Revised Ordinances.

Additional information regarding the meeting, including an online link, will be filed with the legal notice and upcoming agenda which will be submitted as required by open meeting rules and regulations.

Any questions regarding this determination and the hearing to be conducted on October 3, 2022 may be directed to the Chair of the Historical Commission at HistoricalCommission@Medford-MA.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer M. Keenan" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jennifer M. Keenan
Chair, Medford Historical Commission

CC: Applicants of Record
Building Department/Building Commissioner