



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
**KATJANA BALLANTYNE**  
**MAYOR**

THOMAS F. GALLIGANI, JR.  
ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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**STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE**  
**STAFF REPORT**

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**Site:** 627 Somerville Ave

**Case:** HPC.DMO 2022.34

**Applicant:** Mai Luo

**Owner:** 635 Somerville Avenue LLC

**Legal Ad:** The Applicant seeks to demolish a principal structure constructed a minimum of 75 years ago.

**HPC Meeting Date:** October 18, 2022

*Right, top: Left elevation*

*Right, bottom: Rear elevation*

*Bottom: Front elevation*



The purpose of a staff report is to provide the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) with additional information and professional assessments regarding properties that are proposed for demolition. These assessments are based on the criteria allowed for consideration by the HPC in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (DRO). A Staff Report is not a determination/decision, nor does it constitute authorization in any form.

## I. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

**Historical Context:** 627 Somerville Ave is a two-story commercial structure. Somerville Avenue is dominated by one- and two-story commercial structures.

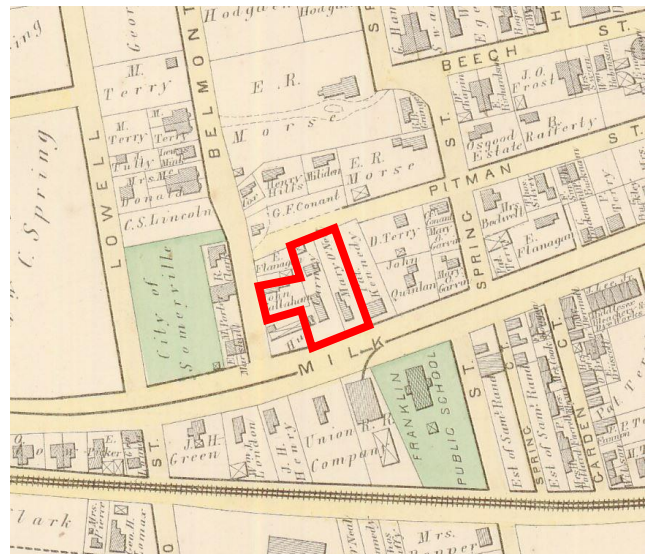
Somerville Ave was originally known as Charlestown Lane, later Milk Row, and eventually Somerville Avenue. The name Milk Row derives from the use of this route by Middlesex County dairymen to transport milk from Middlesex County farms to Boston. Milk Row, throughout the 19th century, was a main thoroughfare from Union Square to Porter Square in Cambridge. From Washington Street and Union Square, this route initially connected with present-day Elm Street, and ran north to Medford. Milk Row was the site of Somerville's earliest industries. The Middlesex Bleachery and Dye Works which began operation in 1821 was located at Bleachery Row and Milk Row. The American Tube Works was situated at Park and Somerville Avenue in 1858. In 1842 the Fitchburg Railroad ran its tracks South of Milk Row, with a passenger station at Kent Street. The earlier (1835) Boston and Lowell had a station at the corner of Washington and Somerville Avenues.

The early industries of the Middlesex Dye and Bleachery Company (1801) and the American Tube Works (1852) established the development of the area and by the 1870s the farming land had been converted to manufacturing and food processing establishments. With this substantial industrial growth came the need for workers' housing.

While Somerville Avenue was sparsely developed in 1852, by the mid to late 19th century, this corridor is substantially subdivided and moderately developed.

Commercial and residential growth related to Union Square is historically tied to the expansion of the railroad service, beginning in 1835 with the opening of the first passenger railroad station on Washington Street. As Union Square continued to grow and expand, development continued to fill empty land toward the west down the Somerville Avenue corridor.

The first map to show a building on this property is the 1874 Hopkins map. At that time, the property was platted into more lots than exist today, and each lot was owned by a different person. "Mary O'Neil" owned the right-most lot that faced both Milk and Pitman Streets. "Hugh Carney" owned a reverse-L shaped lot that faced Milk, Belmont, and Pitman Streets. The last lot that makes up the present-day property was owned by "John Callahan"; this lot faced Belmont St. The buildings that existed at that



1874 Hopkins map, plate J



This is a historical map of Somerville, Massachusetts, showing the area around the intersection of Spring Street and Elm Street. A red rectangle highlights a specific lot on the corner of Spring Street and Elm Street. The map includes labels for various streets such as Franklin Street, Spring Street, Elm Street, and Belmont Street. It also shows the locations of several churches, including the First Church and the Second Church. The map is titled "City of Somerville" and "George Allen".

*1884 Hopkins map, plate 9*

This is a detailed street map of the Belmont and Somerville areas in Boston, Massachusetts. The map shows a grid of streets including Franklin School, Mary A. Chase, and various residential streets. A red outline highlights a specific property located at the intersection of Belmont and Somerville. The map includes street names, lot numbers, and building footprints.

**Streets:**

- Belmont:** Runs horizontally across the top of the map.
- Somerville:** Runs vertically along the left side of the map.
- Franklin School:** A large yellow building footprint on the left side.
- Mary A. Chase:** A street running horizontally below Franklin School.
- Spring:** A street running horizontally across the middle of the map.
- Beach:** A street running vertically on the right side of the map.
- Harvard:** A street running horizontally at the bottom of the map.

**Highlighted Property:**

A red outline highlights a specific property located at the intersection of Belmont and Somerville. The property is labeled with the number 17 and the name "L. Roger Woodson".

**Other Labels:**

- 17:** A circled number indicating the lot number of the highlighted property.
- L. Roger Woodson:** The name of the owner of the highlighted property.
- Franklin School:** A large yellow building footprint on the left side.
- Mary A. Chase:** A street running horizontally below Franklin School.
- Spring:** A street running horizontally across the middle of the map.
- Beach:** A street running vertically on the right side of the map.
- Harvard:** A street running horizontally at the bottom of the map.

*1895 Bromley map, plate 4*

[illegible]

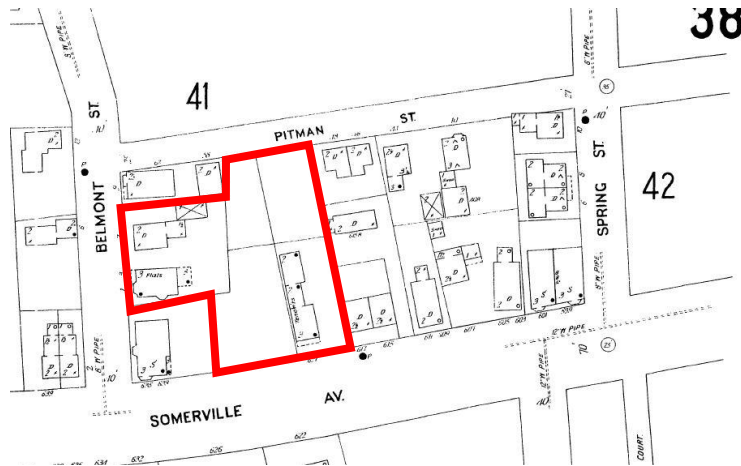
1900 Federal Census for 619, 621, and 621a Somerville

<sup>1</sup> This property has also applied for demolition under the address 635 Somerville Ave (HPC.DMO 2022.35).

Settlement list	5-103-150	Dubek Ella	Head	M	F	1899	22	10	2	1	Maine	Maine	Maine			Seamstress	yes	yes	yes	R	H	
		Susie M	Daughter	M	F	1899	28	5			Maine	Maine	Maine			Seamstress	yes	yes	yes			
		Ronan May	Boarder	M	F	1895	4	5			Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts									
	5-103-151	Boyd Almer	Head	M	M	1891	28	11	2		New York	New York	New York			Clerk	yes	yes	yes	R	H	
		Sarah A	Wife	M	F	1870	30	11	2	1	Massachusetts	Ireland	Ireland				yes	yes	yes			
		Elizabeth M	Daughter	M	F	1899	11	5			Massachusetts	New York	Ireland			At school	yes	yes	yes			
	5-103-152	Alameda Antoni	Head	M	M	1882	40	30	Y		Portugal	Portugal	Portugal	1891	19	41	Carpenter	no	no	no	R	H
		Mary C	Wife	M	F	1862	39	11	4	0	Portugal	Portugal	Portugal	1892	12			no	no	no		

1900 Federal Census for 5 Belmont St

Between 1898 and 1920, there are records of at least 110 separate individuals living on this property with occupations including fireman, mill hand, motorman, jeweler, seamstress, chocolate dipper, janitor, and clerk. The addresses associated with this property during that time include 5, 5a, and 7 Belmont St; 50 and 50A Pitman St; and 619, 621, and 621A Somerville Ave.



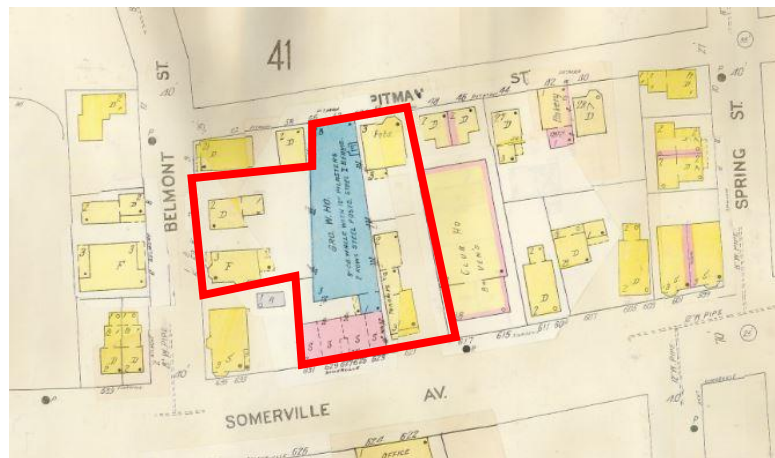
1900 Sanborn map, plate 38

Between 1900 and 1920, at least two new buildings were built: one wood structure that is addressed as 50-50A Pitman St, and one brick and concrete structure that is addressed as both 52-56 Pitman St, and 625-631 Somerville Ave. **This latter building is the focus of the remainder of the report, as the other buildings that existed on this lot in the early 1900s have since been demolished**

The building constructed at 625-631 Somerville Ave is composed of two main sections: the front section is composed of four storefronts

constructed of brick and listed as being two stories tall; the building has five addresses assigned to it along Somerville Ave, and the middle address of 627 is associated with a much smaller subsection than the other four addresses which may indicate that it was an entry way to a second-floor unit rather than being a ground-floor storefront. Behind this brick portion is a concrete warehouse that dominates the remainder of the lot. The roofs of both portions of the building were made of non-combustible materials.

It is not until 1927 that we find clear records of anyone living at 625-631 Somerville Ave: a 1927 City Directory lists Carmine and Antonette Carbone as living at 627 Somerville Ave and working at a grocery store at 623 Somerville Ave. The 1930 federal census also lists the family of Carmine and Antoinette Carbone as owning 627 Somerville Ave. Carmine both lived and ran his own business in this building, as he is listed as being a proprietor in the wholesale grocery industry, and a son (Joseph G) and daughter (Rachel J) of his both also work in wholesale grocery (as a salesman and bookkeeper, respectively). The census records for this family are shown below.



1925 Sanborn map, plate 38



*1930 Federal Census for 627 Somerville Ave*

In 1930 we also have a record of the Galli family (parents Andrew S and Lorraine, and daughters Mary A, and Pauline), Margaret Cunard, and the Bussolati family (parents Guglielmo and Rosie, and son Louis) living at 621 Somerville Ave. 621 Somerville Ave is a separate building from 623-631 Somerville Ave: it was a wood-framed three-story residential structure on the neighboring lot. All three households rented their living space; Andrew Galli was a self-employed window dresser, Margaret Cunard was a chambermaid in a college dorm, and Louis and Guglielmo Bussolati were laborers in the concrete construction industry. It is not clear based on historical maps whether or not this building is the same as the one that exists there today, but it seems unlikely based on the fact that the existing building in this approximate location is attached to 623-631 Somerville Ave, and the 1925 Sanborn map shows the two buildings as having some separation between them.

1930 Federal Census for 621 Somerville Ave

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## II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION



1955 USGS Aerial Image of the Boston area. Accessed from <http://www.bostonplans.org/3d-data-maps/historical-maps/the-boston-atlas/aerial-photos>



2022 Google Maps

The wood structures facing Belmont St were likely demolished sometime between 1925 and 1955, as a USGS aerial image from 1955 appears to show a single large structure in that location, likely the brick structure that exists there today. Please see the section immediately below which discusses location, design, materials, and any alterations as the same information would be written here, just in longer form.

*The National Park Service identifies historic integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance. A property should possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent or contain the values and qualities for which it is judged significant; therefore, the following is an identification and evaluation of these qualities and alterations as they affect the ability of the subject property to convey significance.*

The period of relevance for the building starts between 1900 and 1925.

- a. Location: The building appears to be in its original location.
- b. Design: Two story, flat roofed, brick commercial building with decorative brick detailing and a stone inset that reads “627”. Brick façade with mainly running bond design segmented in to four sections on the first floor by columns of bricks arranged in stack bonds. The columns of stack bond bricks have soldier course brick detailing. Between the first and second floor are two rows of soldier course bricks that run the length of the front façade. The two rows of soldier course bricks are replicated between the second-floor windows and the roofline. Four doors lead into the building through the front façade, three of which appear to be vinyl or aluminum. One door is wood with window insert containing 2/2 muntin pattern. Doors are elevated slightly off the ground. Fenestration of the front elevation includes five horizontal sash windows on the first floor; and on the second floor includes one horizontal sash window, two windows containing a fixed center window with one horizontal sash window on either side, a single one-over-one double sash window, and four one-over-one sash window. Second story windows all have a row of soldier course bricks and stone keystones above the window. Fenestration on the rear includes one-over-one double hung sash windows. Running bond brick on the rear elevation with metal staircase leading to a second-floor entrance.

- c. **Materials:** Brick building. Left and rear façades are painted. Staircase at rear is metal. All doors and windows are wood or fiberglass/vinyl. Roof is likely rubber or asphalt. Granite or concrete curb at base of front façade.
- d. **Alterations:** A two-story addition has been added to the right side of the building: first story addition is masonry with a vertical rolling garage door; second story addition is vinyl- or aluminum-clad with horizontal sliding casement windows. All doors and windows have been replaced but are in their original locations. On rear façade, evidence of some window openings shifting or being closed entirely. Left façade has clear evidence of four windows on the second floor being bricked over (three are single width, one is double width) and currently has no windows.
- e. **Evaluation of Integrity of 627 Somerville Ave:** Based on the observations of the building and a study of the historic maps, it is Staff's position that the building retains the integrity of its original form, with additions. The original massing of the brick building remains, and the modifications to the front façade and additions to the side and possibly rear façade do not obscure the building to a significant extent.

### III. **FINDINGS**

*For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either (i) importantly associated with people, events, or history and/or (ii) historically or architecturally significant. The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) must make these findings. The portions of the Demolition Review Ordinance (DRO) related to these findings are included below:*

#### **A. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION**

*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 of Massachusetts.*

##### **Residential Structure**

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the STRUCTURE at 627 Somerville Ave meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 627 Somerville Ave does or does not meet the threshold for historic significance under finding "a".

#### **B. HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

*The findings for historical and/or architectural significance of a historic property address the period, style, method of building construction and association with a reputed architect or builder of the subject property, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures, and therefore it is in the public interest to be preserved or rehabilitated rather than to be demolished.*

**Residential Structure**

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the STRUCTURE at 627 Somerville Ave meets any of the criteria stated above.

2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 627 Somerville Ave does or does not meet the threshold for historic significance under finding “b”.

If the HPC makes the above finding, the HPC must state their reasons why they take this position.

**IV. VOTE**

1. When bringing the matter to a vote, the HPC must include the reasons why the STRUCTURE at 627 Somerville Ave is or is not “historically significant”.