



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

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ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 234 Willow Avenue (**GARAGE ONLY**)

Case: HPC.DMO 2022.28

Applicant: Joseph Fodera

Owner: Joseph & Melaney Fodera

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

HPC Meeting Date: October 6, 2022

Top: Front elevation

Bottom, left: Left elevation

Bottom, middle: Rear elevation

Bottom, right: Right elevation



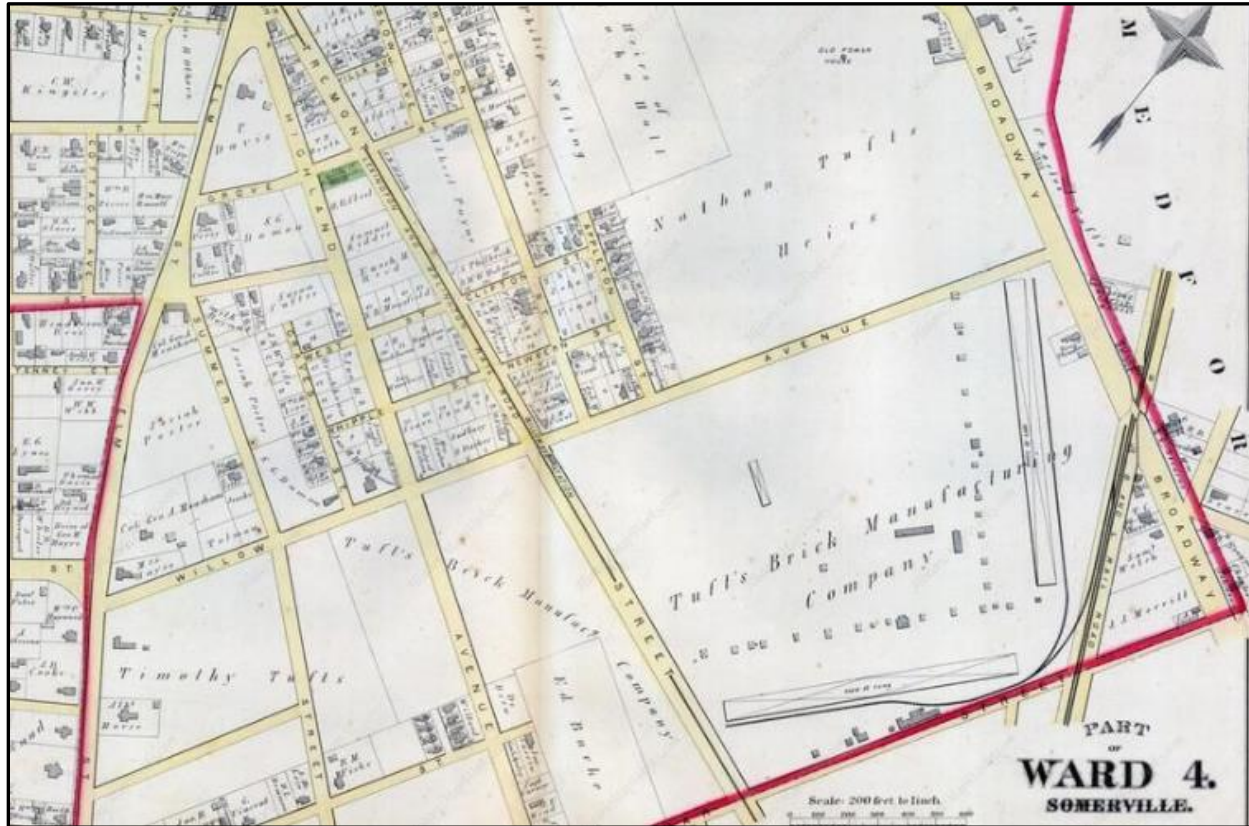
The purpose of a staff report is to provide the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) with additional information and professional assessments regarding properties that are proposed for demolition. These assessments are based on the criteria allowed for consideration by the HPC in accordance with the 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: The **garage** at 234 Willow Avenue is a one-story wood framed commercial structure. It is on the same lot as the two-family house that faces Willow Avenue. This portion of Willow Avenue is dominated by two-and-one-half (2 ½) to three (3) story residential detached houses. Characteristically, houses in this area are fairly uniform gambrel or gable-roofed Colonial Revival two-to-three family structures, often with decorative oriels or turned millwork.

234 Willow Avenue is located within close proximity of Ball Square within the Powder House neighborhood. The Powder House neighborhood consists largely of late 19th century residential structures, a small 20th century commercial area, Ball Square, and three small industrial areas located along the B&M (Arlington & Lexington line) railroad tracks, which were laid out to Davis Square in 1870. Ball Square is located along Broadway at the junction of Boston Avenue in the Powder House section of Somerville. The Square is a linear commercial zone whose architectural appearance was developed in the early 20th century. Willow Avenue and Josephine Avenue are side streets comprised of two- and three-family structures. Commercial structures are found at the end of these streets where they terminate on the south side of Broadway.

In the 1600s, the Powder House area was part of the “Stinted Common”, an area set aside by Charlestown (Somerville was part of Charlestown at the time) for cattle grazing. Though part of the Common, the Powder House area was generally not well-suited to grazing due to swampy, poorly drained terrain. Farmers were the earliest residents of the Powder House area. By 1800, the Tufts family of Tufts University owned much of the land in the Powder House area. Among other investments in the area, the Tufts family created a large brickyard. Many members of the Tufts family continued to own significant amounts of acreage in the Powder House area throughout the 19th century, as seen on multiple historic maps.



Above: 1874 Hopkins Map, Plate 44 & 45, Ball Square, approximately the site of 234 Willow Avenue

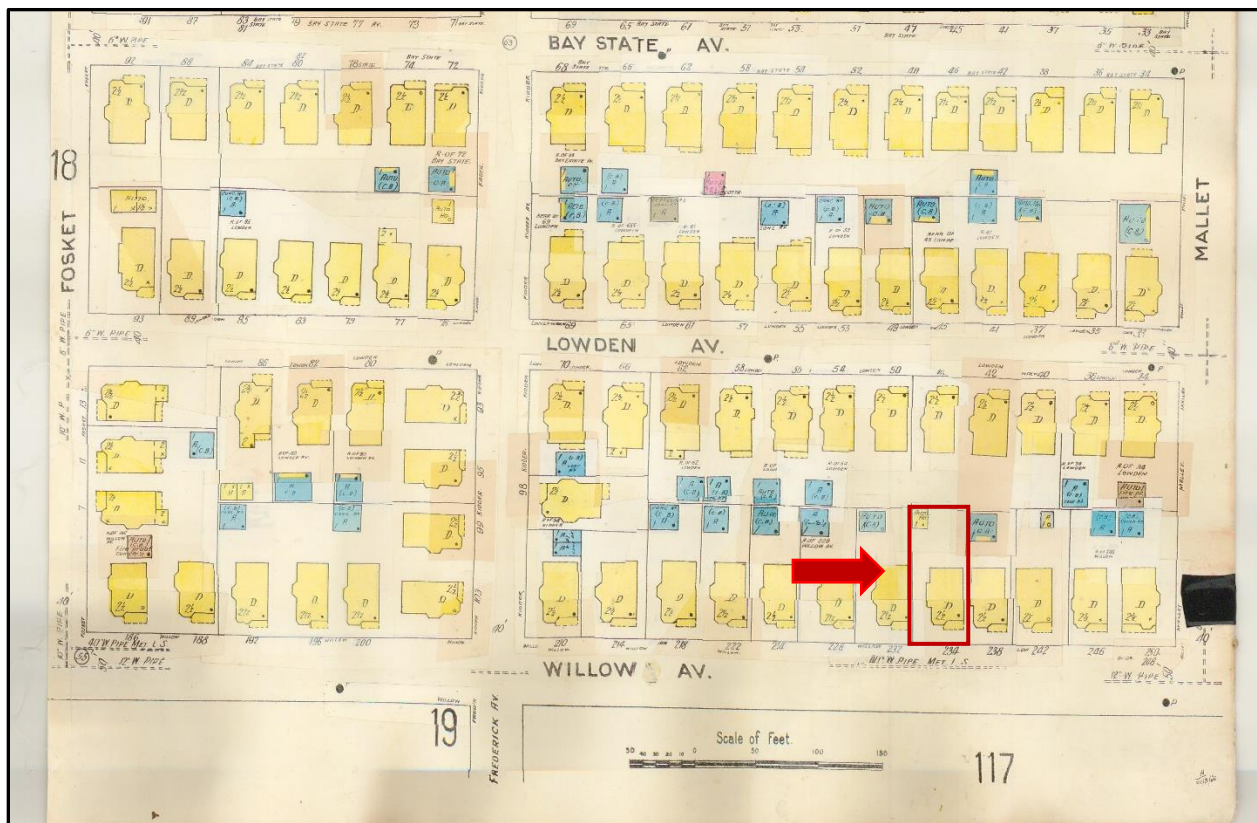
By the mid-1800s, a railway connecting the Boston and Lowell lines was built in the Powder House area. The post-Civil War era saw the western portion of Powder House very gradually experience residential growth as an effect of the development occurring in nearby Davis Square. Generally, the residential growth in this portion of West Somerville was slow to occur. In the early 1870s, for example, 50 acres of former brickyard land around the current Willow Avenue area was platted into 482 residential building lots. Streets were proposed and named and the developer, Samuel Wolcott, initially planned for small, closely built residences to be constructed. Over the next 25 years, the street plats, names, and building plans would change numerous times; however, no building would occur during this 25-year interval.



Above: 1895 Bromley Map, Plate 19, Ball Square, approximately the site of 234 Willow Avenue

In 1883, the Ball Square area, with its close proximity to rail transportation, became the site of a footwear inner sole factory established by John Ball. Ball owned the property on Broadway between Josephine and Rogers Streets, and lived next to his factory, which operated from 1883 through 1902. In 1911, the Ball Square block was built on the site of the factory, giving the square its name.

In 1891, the Tufts family platted out a large subdivision on land owned by the family since 1836. One-and-two family homes began to be constructed in the area around 1901. Most of the buildings in Ball Square date from around 1910 through 1930 and were constructed to serve the growing residential area nearby.



Above: 1925 Sanborn Map, Plate 116, Ball Square, approximately the site of 234 Willow Avenue

234 Willow Avenue – Garage

The 1925 Sanborn Map shows the development of the lots in Ball Square. This map also shows that these lots were developed together as they have nearly identical layouts - a main residential structure with a front bay and porch, a side bay, and a rear porch. Many also include a rear structure, likely garages. The map labels the rear structures in this region as having automobile uses. Between 1900 and 1925 Somerville saw an increase in automobiles and it is likely that the subdivision was designed with automobile amenities in mind. Notably, around this time, several garages and auto-shops were being constructed on southern Broadway. It is during this time that the garage on 234 Willow Avenue was likely constructed as part of the Tufts family subdivision.

The garage on 234 Willow Avenue was built in 1907 based on the first listed inhabitants in the City Directories. The first owner of the land that the garage at 234 Willow Avenue sits on was W. Arthur. Staff cannot locate further information on the first owner. William E. Gillette, who worked in the carriage stock

Right: 1912 Somerville Directory

Massachusetts, U.S., City Directories	
Somerville > 1912 > City Information	
225	Alonzo F Johnson
227	Joseph Quincy
227	Henry G Mitchell
228	Edward H Parker
228	Maurice E Curtis
231	David C Smith
231	Benjamin Daniels
232	Joseph P Churchill
232	Thomas H Merritt
233	Mrs Affie W Chalmers
233	Mrs Harriet A Garrity
233	John W Spence
234	James F Cowick
234	William E Gillette
237	John H Jordan
237	Walter W Callow
238	Henry A Oliver
238	Walter T Cunningham
241	Clarence N Woodworth
241	Grant L Chandler
241	Mrs May Harlow
242	Clifford J Luxton
242	George H Webster

bus shipping industry, owned the garage at 234 Willow Avenue and resided at the subject property from 1910 to 1912 with his wife, Ruth A. Gillette.

Name	Year(s) of Residency	Occupation	Relationship
W Arthur	1907	n/a	n/a
William E. Gillete	1910-1912	Shipper	Married
Ruth A. Gillete	1910-1912	Housewife	Married
James F. Cowick	1912-1940	Stokebroker	Married
Dehlia A. Cowick	1912-1940	Housewife	Married
Gertrude Cowick	1912-1940	n/a	Single
Marion Cowick	1912-1940	n/a	Single

Above: Resident Table from 1907-1940 at 234 Willow Avenue

James F. Cowick, a stockbroker, appears on the City Directories under 234 Willow Avenue from 1912 to 1940. He lived there with his wife, Dehlia A Cowick, and his two (2) daughters, Gertrude Cowick and Marion Cowick.

The 1925 Sanborn Map shows that the garages on 234 Willow Avenue and 242 Willow Avenue as the only two (2) accessory structures that are not composed of the hollow concrete or cement block material. These two garages are, instead, wood-framed. The 1933-1958 Sanborn Map illustrates that the rear structure on 242 Willow Avenue has been demolished, leaving the garage on 234 Willow Avenue as the only wood framed garage structure remaining. The 1933-1958 Sanborn Map also shows that the garage structure remains as it was built on-site.

Below: 1933-1958 Sanborn Map, Plate 230, Ball Square, approximately the site of 234 Willow Avenue





The photo above was taken of Willow Ave from where it intersects with Broadway.

II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

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.

1. 234 Willow Avenue - Garage

The period of relevance for the house starts from 1907 to 1925.

- a. Location: It is likely that this structure is in its original location and was built on-site.
- b. Design: The garage is a hip-roofed, wood-framed structure with one doored vehicle bay located on the front elevation. The right and left elevations have a quadruple ganged window. Each individual window within the grouping has four true divided lite panes. The rear elevation has double ganged window. Each individual window in the grouping has four true divided lite panes. Thick wood cornice
- c. Materials:
Foundation: Concrete parging over brick
Windows: Wood

Entry: Wooden sectional roll-up garage door

Siding: Wood shakes

Roof: Asphalt Shingles

- d. Alterations: Though the garage bay opening appear to be in its original location, the door itself is a replacement.
- e. Evaluation of Integrity of 234 Willow Avenue: 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, massing and roof shape.

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.

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the GARAGE ONLY at 234 Willow Avenue meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the GARAGE ONLY at 234 Willow Avenue 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.

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the GARAGE ONLY at 234 Willow Avenue meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the GARAGE ONLY at 234 Willow Avenue 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 GARAGE ONLY at 234 Willow Avenue is or is not “historically significant”.