



**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:** 53 Chester Street

**Case:** HPC.DMO 2023.01

**Applicant:** G2 Par Somerville, LLC

**Owner:** Same as Applicant

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

**HPC Meeting Date:** March 07, 2023

*Top: Front elevation*

*Bottom, left: Left elevation*

*Bottom, middle: Rear elevation*

*Bottom, right: Right elevation*



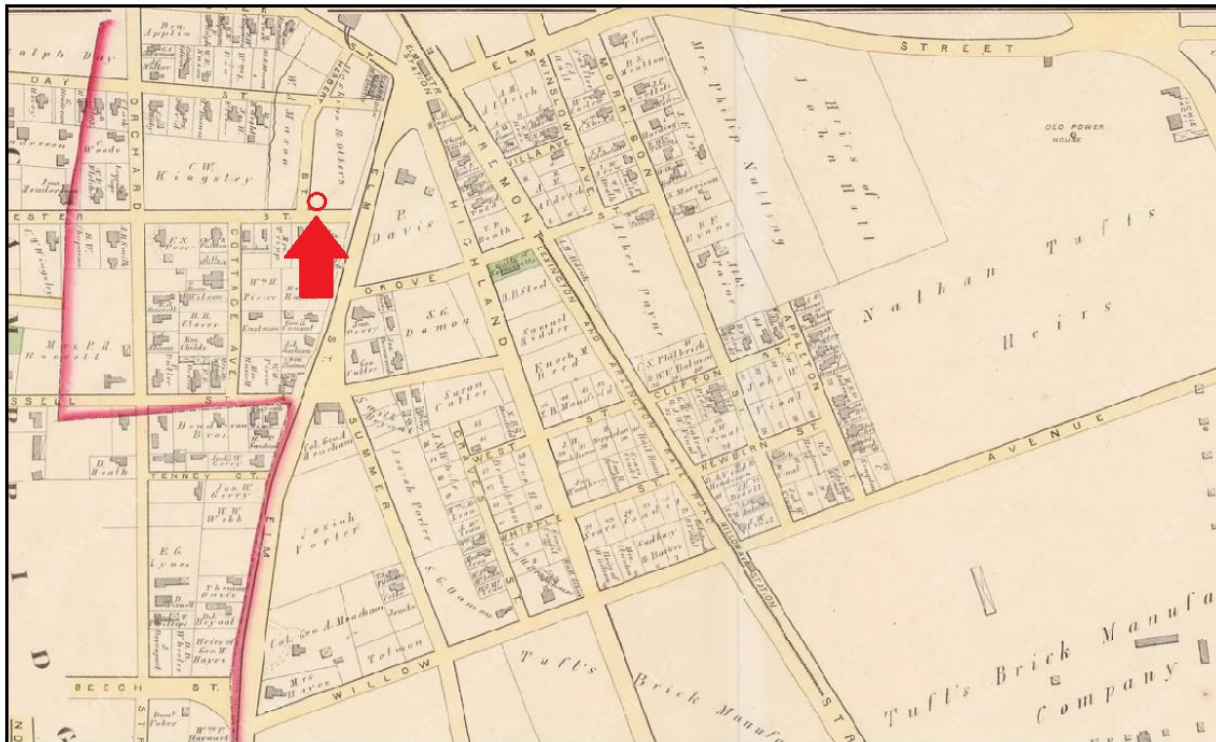
The purpose of a staff report is to provide the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) with additional information and professional assessments regarding properties that are proposed for demolition. These assessments are based on the criteria allowed for consideration by the HPC in accordance with the 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:** 53 Chester Street is a 2.8 story building located adjacent to Davis Square. Chester Street is largely dominated by a mix of two and a half residential structures and one to three story commercial structures.

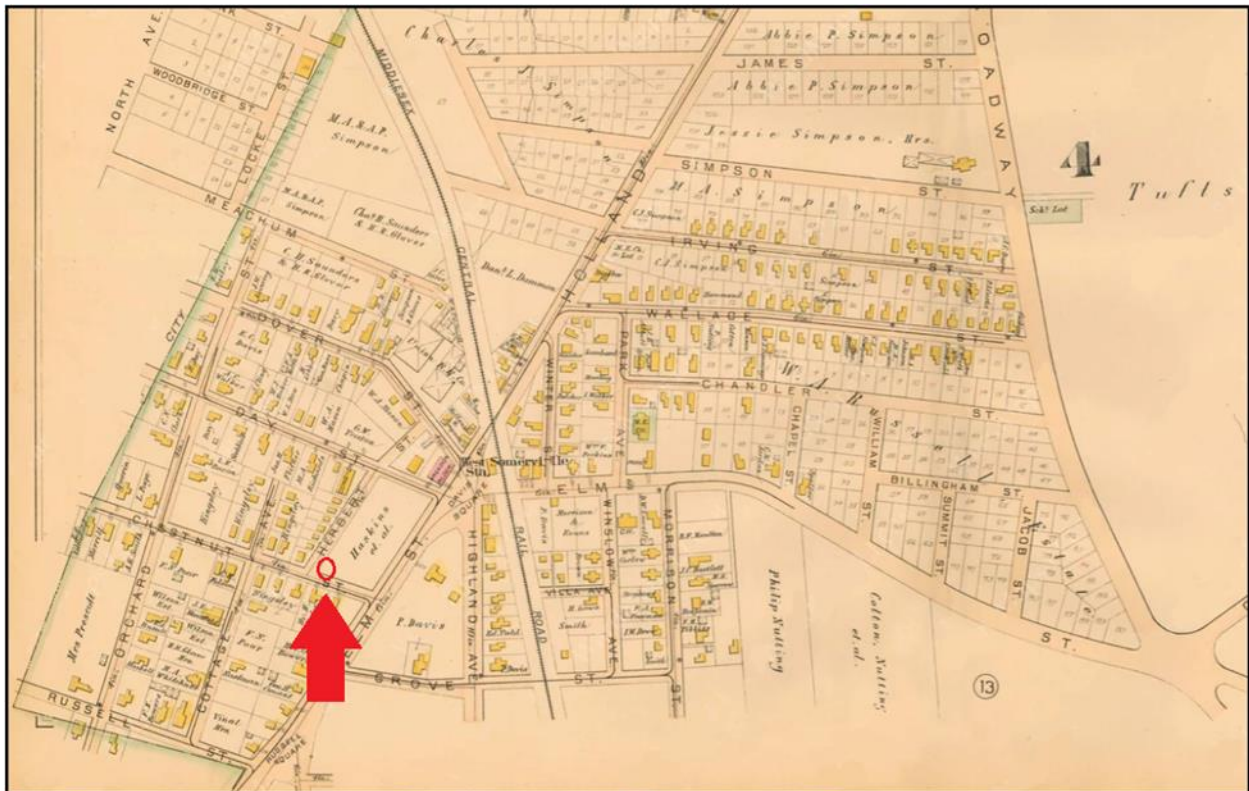
Chester Street provides a physical link documenting the Davis Square area's rapid post-Civil War development. Along with commerce came residential development with particularly noteworthy mansard houses built between Davis Square and the Somerville/Cambridge line bordering Places such as Day, Orchard and Meacham Road as well as Chester Place. Prior to the Civil War, development of the Davis Square area lagged despite the introduction of the Fitchburg Railroad to nearby Porter Square, Cambridge in 1843, and the horse railway along Massachusetts Avenue between Harvard Square and Arlington in 1856-1857. The lots on Chester Place existed on paper as early as 1855 as part of the Chester W. Kingsley subdivision. Kingsley, as Cambridge's Water Commissioner, apparently had the "inside track" on land in northwest Cambridge and western Somerville that was ripe for development.

Development of the area south of Davis Square did not occur in earnest until after the Civil War. Transportation developments during and after the Civil War paved the way for Davis Square's late 1860s and early 1870s growth. Ensuring the Davis Square area's long-term prosperity were the extensions of existing rail lines, including those of the Somerville Horse Railway (1863) and the Lexington and Arlington branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad (1870-1871).



Above: 1874, Plate K Hopkins Map, indicating location of Charles W Kingsley's property holdings

Plate K of the 1874 Hopkins Map shows that the land currently occupied by 53 Chester Street was owned by 'Haskins & Others' and is part of a larger lot under 'Haskins & Others' ownership. Haskins & Others would own and develop 53 Chester Street and the neighboring lots from the 1870s through at least 1884, as that name is listed as the owner on the Hopkins maps through 1884. Under their ownership the land was not platted and no construction occurred. Staff was unable to find any further information on the owner.

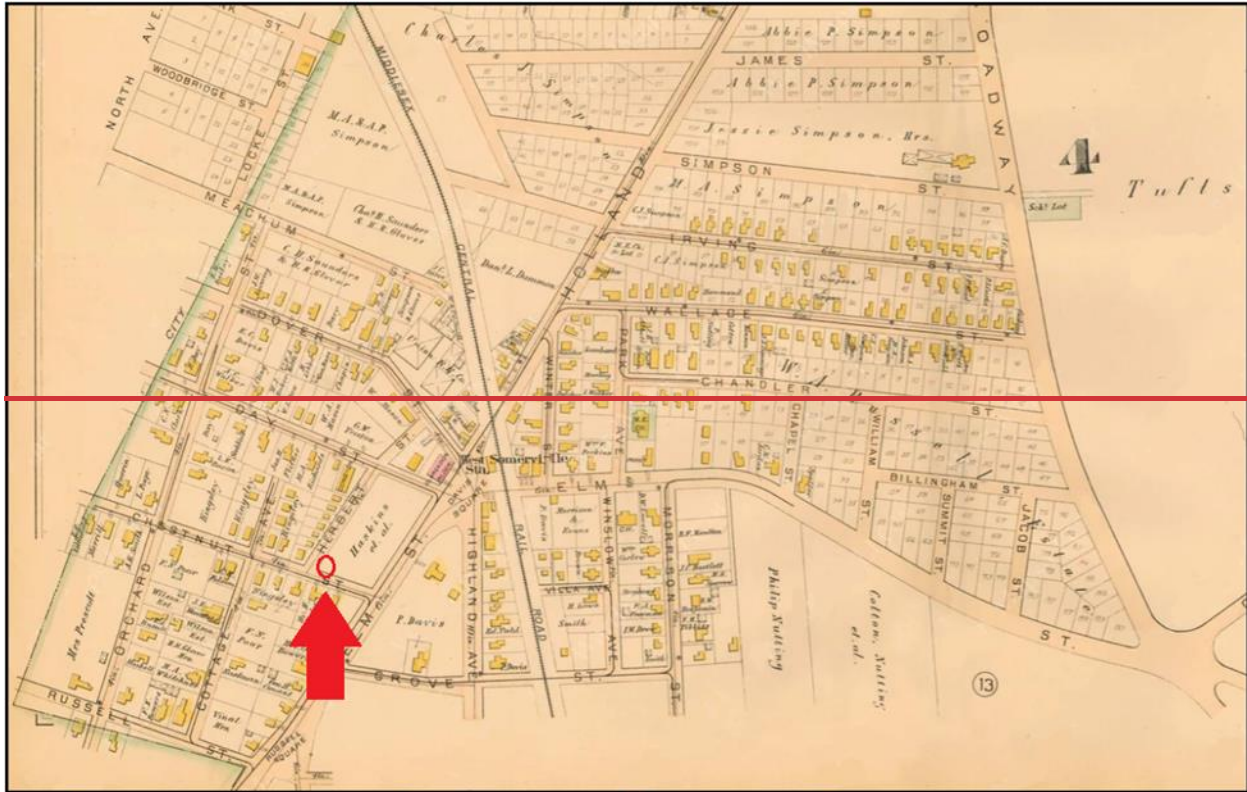


Above: 1884 Hopkins Map, Plate K, specifying location of 53 Chester Street.

The growth of Somerville's transportation between 1870 and 1880 and the subsequent commercial expansion is evident in the 1874 and 1884 Hopkins Maps. The 1884 Hopkins Map depicts the growth of residential development in reaction to the commercial growth surrounding Davis Square. The railroad, coupled with streetcars, made Somerville a desirable location for speculators and residents.

The next listed owner is 'Miranda L Scitmere/Scitmore' in 1895. It is also in the 1895 Bromley Map that we first see the land formerly owned by Haskins & Others has been platted, and the properties along Chester Street have been developed. Its construction coincides with the continued development of residential properties around Davis Square. The City Directories list tenants residing at the property beginning in 1896. Miranda Scitmere/Scitmore is not a listed resident and so was likely an absentee landlord. The tenants consisted mainly of single men and women that rented there from one year to four years. Based on this information it is likely that the property was a rental property operated under Miranda Scitmere/Scitmore. Interestingly, a large number of renters worked in local schools including Hodgkins High School, Lincoln School, and Highland School.





In 1904, George W Smallwood moved in to 53 Chester Street. The Somerville City Directories list Smallwood as owning the property from 1904 to 1915 with his first wife, Ellen, and daughter, Florence. George Smallwood is also listed as operating his business out of 53 Chester. He worked as a physician–astrologist and the founder of the Aquarian Movement. A Boston Globe article on Smallwood and the Aquarian Movement described it as; “teach[ing] the spiritual side of planet influence...It is purposed to restore the ancient and divine science to its glory of the past ages.”

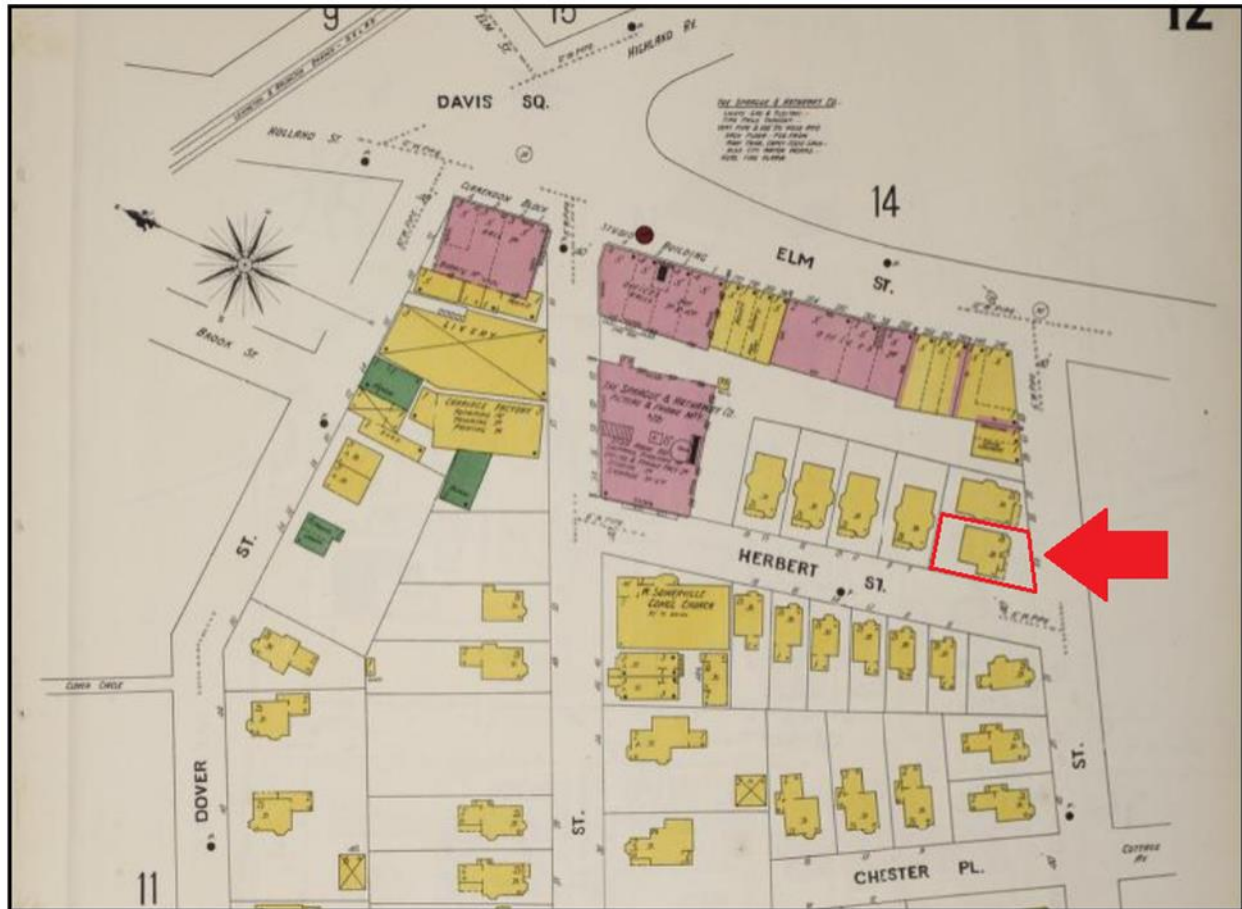
*Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, March 10, 1918*

*Above: Photo from The Boston Globe, March 10, 1918*



*Above: 1895 Bromley Map, Plate 18, specifying location of 53 Chester Street.*

In 1924, James T. Dervan and his wife Emma purchased the property with their four children and lived there until 1940. During this time entries for other residents at the property largely stopped indicating that they bought the house as a family home and not as a rental property.



*Left: 1900 Sanborn Map, Sheet 12, specifying the location of 53 Chester Street.*

The 1900 Sanborn Map shows that commercial buildings have finally been constructed behind 53 Chester along Elm Street depicting the continued commercial growth of Davis Square.

Further research resulted in the following information on the tenants or owners over the decades at 53 Chester Street. The names that have been found show the property was inhabited by working-class individuals. A list of all residents is provided on the next page.

(Continued on next page.)



Name	Year(s) of Residency	Occupation	Relationship	Residency Type
Codding, Bernard L	1897	Artist		Rms
Dervan, Anna M	1940		Daughter of James T Dervan	R
Dervan, Barabara F	1929 - 1940	Stenographer/Clerk	Daughter of James T Dervan	R
Dervan, Emma L	1924 - 1940		Wife of James T Devan	H
Dervan, James T	1924 - 1940	Conductor	Head of Household	H
Dervan, Louis W	1924 - 1940	Student, Clerk, Steward	Son of James T Dervan	Res
Dervan, Louise G	1924 - 1925	Clerk @ 248 Elm		Res
Dervan, Marie E	1924 - 1929	Accountant	Family member of James T Dervan	Res
Farrow, Benjamin F	1900	Carpenter		B
Flectner/Flecmer, Louis	1927			
Flectner/Flecmer, Louisa G	1927 - 1929		Widow of Louis	H
Friend, Gertrude	1896 - 1897	Teacher @ Highland School		B
Friend, Mary E	1897		Widow of Judson E	H
Hall, Alice S	1899	Teacher @ W.H. Hodgkins School		Rms
Hayward, Alice L	1896	Teacher @ Highland School		Rms
Hodgdon, Elizabeth	1896	Principal @ Lincoln School		Rms
Howard, Charles W	1901	Brakeman		Rms
Jepson, Mabel A	1896 - 1897	Teacher @ Highland School		B
Kavanaugh, Dorothy	1940	Clerk @ WPA		R
McFarland, Harry	1899	Clerk		H
McFarland, Viola G	1898 - 1899	Dressmaker		B
Moore, Emma	1897			H
Morey, Clara	1898			B
Norton, George W	1899	Student		B
Nourse, Bertha	1898 - 1900	Copyist @ Reg of Deeds, E.C.		B
Scidmore, Miranda L	1898 - 1900			H
Smallwood, Ellen A	1914	Teacher @ High School		Bds
Smallwood, Florence G	1915 - 1920		Daughter of George Smallwood	Bds
Smallwood, George W	1904 - 1915	Physician	Father of Florence Smallwood	H
Stroup, Charles C	1897	Student		B
Stubbs, Laura K	1898	Nurse		
Temple, Agnes N	1901		Widow	H
Temple, Edward H	1901	Draughtsman		B
Walsworth, Rosmore	1900	Student		B
Winslow, Alice M	1898 - 1900	Teacher @ W.H. Hodgkins School		B
Young, Charles W	1896	Artist @ 58 Day		Rms

## II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

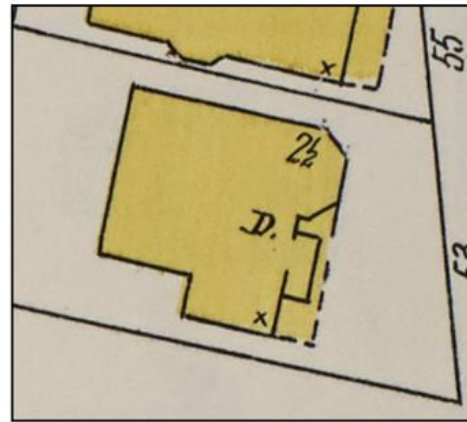
Please see the section immediately below which discusses location, design, materials, and any alterations as the same information would be written here, just in longer form.

*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.*

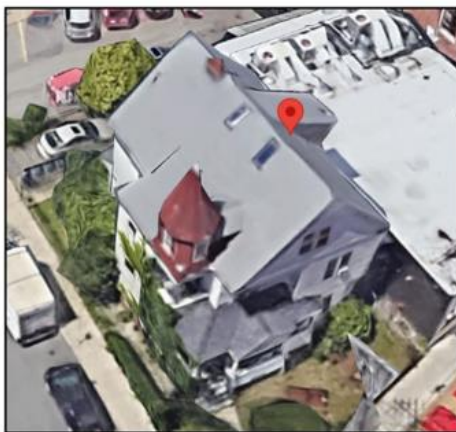
Comparing the historic map with satellite images of the current property we can determine the degree to which the structure has been altered.



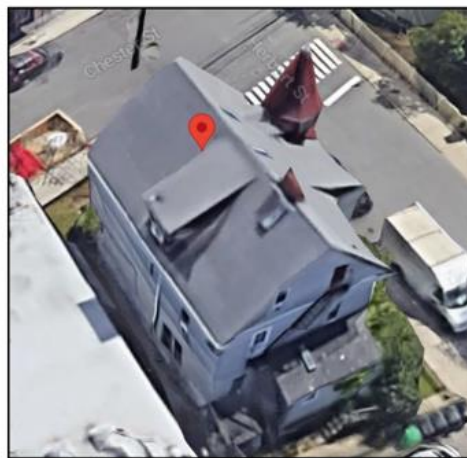
Above: Fig 1



Above: Fig 2



Above: Fig 3



Above: Fig 4

Fig 1: 1895 Bromley Map, close-up of 53 Chester St

- A bay on the right of front elevation
- Projection on left side of front elevation, likely a portico or enclosed entrance
- Ell on left elevation
- Projection from mid rear elevation
- An addition on the left and rear elevations has been constructed.

Fig 2: 1900 Sanborn Map, close-up of 53 Chester St

- A porch connecting the left elevation and the bay

Fig 3 & 4: Satellite image of 53 Chester St

- One-story lean-to added to the rear
- Front elevation altered so that second floor project to be equal to the edge of the bay
- Shed dormer on left elevation has been added
- Right ell has had a roof line alteration to make the roof look to incorporate with the roof slope
- Octagonal tower on the left elevation



## 1. **53 Chester Street**

The period of relevance for the property starts c.1895

- a. Location: It is likely that the structure is in its original location and was built on-site. Although the tower may have been repurposed from a different building and rebuilt on the structure.
- b. Design: The primary structure is 2.8 stories, gable ended with deep eaves, wood framed, with asphalt shingles; wood clapboard, the second floor of the front entrance extends over an altered bay on the right side, second floor was likely extended obscuring the bay's original depth and size; front entrance is on the left side with wood door, porch with hipped portico detailing projecting from center, this hipped portico projection was likely added at the same time as the second floor was extended; wood steps leading to the front porch; on the left elevation is an ell, the front of the ell on the second floor was opened in to a porch, this is likely a later alteration, above the ell is an eight sided tower with asphalt shingling on its side and roof, this tower was likely added at the same time the second floor and porch were altered, the tower may have been repurposed from another structure and rebuilt on 53 Chester; on the rear is a one-story lean-to, likely a later addition, with a wood porch leading to an entrance, a metal stairway leads to entry doors on the second and top floors, on the right elevation windows were likely enclosed on the front half of the elevation, shed dormer on the roof; fenestration consists of one one-over-one, double-hung, replacement sash windows on the front elevation, on the left elevation fenestration consists of a stained glass window on the first floor of the ell, two square windows with two vertical muntins each, and one one-over-one double-hung sash window towards the rear, the rear fenestration consists of one two-over two square fixed window and three one-over-one double-hung sash windows; fenestration on the right elevation consists of one one-over-one, double-hung, replacement sash windows, tower consists of square multi-pane windows, one each on four of the eight sides.
- c. Materials: Wood clapboard; wood front door; aluminum or wood doors on rear; aluminum and wood windows; brick chimney stack; asphalt shingle siding on tower; wood porch; wood ramp; asphalt shingle roof; concrete or concrete with brick parging foundation.
- d. Alterations: Hipped portico projection of front porch; extension of the second-floor front façade; shed dormer; enclosure of windows on right elevation; metal stairways on rear; wood porch on rear; replacement windows and doors; rear lean-to; conversion of second floor of the ell into a porch; and the addition of the tower.
- e. Evaluation of Integrity of 53 Chester Street Based on the observations of the building and a study of the historic maps, it is Staff's position that the building does not retain the integrity of its original form. Alterations and additions have occurred to this structure which obscure original architectural details. While the main massing toward the rear is likely intact the massing along the front half of the building has been largely altered.

### **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 STRUCTURE at 53 Chester Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 53 Chester Street 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 STRUCTURE at 53 Chester Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 53 Chester Street 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 53 Chester Street is or is not “historically significant”.