



**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

---

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

---

**Site:** 36 Hancock Street

**Case:** HPC.DMO 2023.04

**Applicant:** Zachary John Jackowski, Trustee  
Of Zachary John Jackowski 2022  
Land Trust

**Owner:** Same as Applicant

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

**HPC Meeting Date:** March 21, 2023

*Top: Front elevation*

*Bottom, left: Left elevation*

*Bottom, middle: Right elevation*

*Bottom, right: Rear elevation*



*\*Note: Applicant is proposing to relocate the subject building on the same lot. Per the Demolition Review Ordinance's definition of demolition, moving a building 75 years or older is considered demolition and requires demolition review.\**

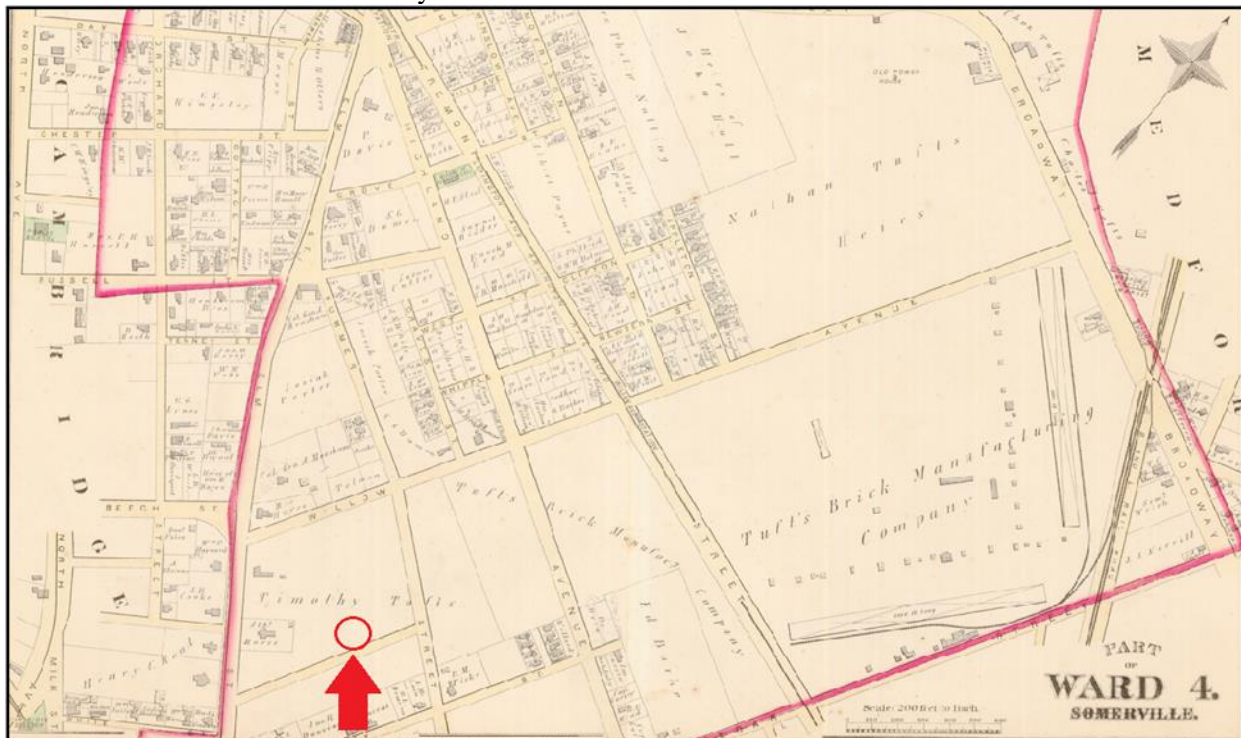
The purpose of a staff report is to provide the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) with additional information and professional assessments regarding properties that are proposed for demolition. These assessments are based on the criteria allowed for consideration by the HPC in accordance with the 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:** 36 Hancock Street is a two and ½ story building located within the Spring Hill neighborhood. Hancock Street is largely dominated by two ½ and three-story residential structures.

Once divided into large agricultural tracts for Charlestown residents, Spring Hill evolved into a prime residential neighborhood of Somerville from the mid-1800s. Its topography lent itself to well-drained soil for agriculture and to fine vistas for the residential subdivisions that began with George Brastow's 1843 rectilinear plan for 72 house lots on Spring Hill. Except for early farmhouses and the first Greek Revival double houses, the first houses built in the Spring Hill subdivisions were substantial single-family homes built on ample lots. By the 1870s, with the expansion of the industries on Milk Row (now Somerville Avenue), and the horsecar and later the streetcar on Summer Street from Union to Davis Square came the expanded development of this area with smaller single - family worker's housing and attached rowhouses and larger tenements, built near the bottom of the hill on small court or terrace streets.

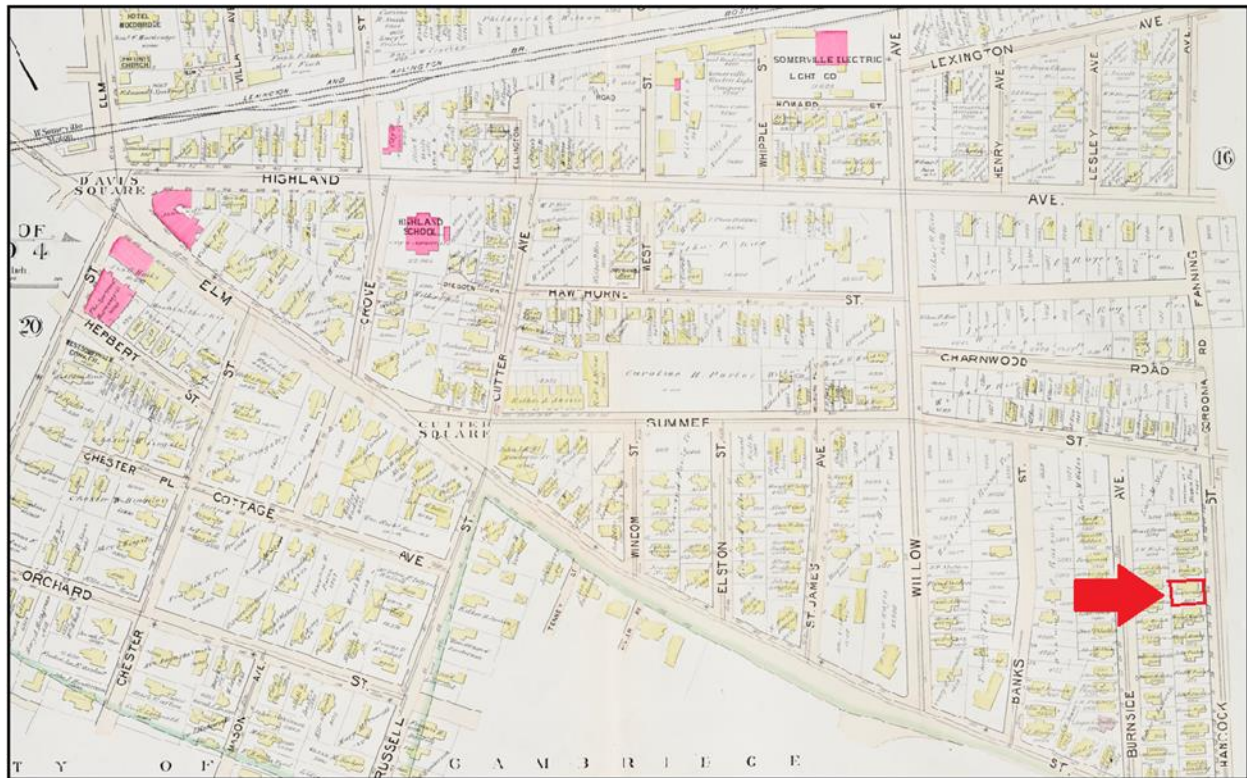
One of the last sections of Spring Hill to develop was the Tufts brickyard and farm property. The streets of Banks, Burnside and Hancock were carved out of the Tufts homestead in the 1890s, and the construction of two and three family houses soon followed.



Above: 1874, Plate K, Hopkins Map, specifying location of 36 Hancock Street.



Plate K of the 1874 and 1884 Hopkins Maps show that most of the undeveloped land belonged to Timothy Tufts. The surrounding land was largely owned by the Tufts Family and their businesses. The land where 36 Hancock currently sits, was part of a large tract of unplatted, undeveloped land, much like the surrounding area.



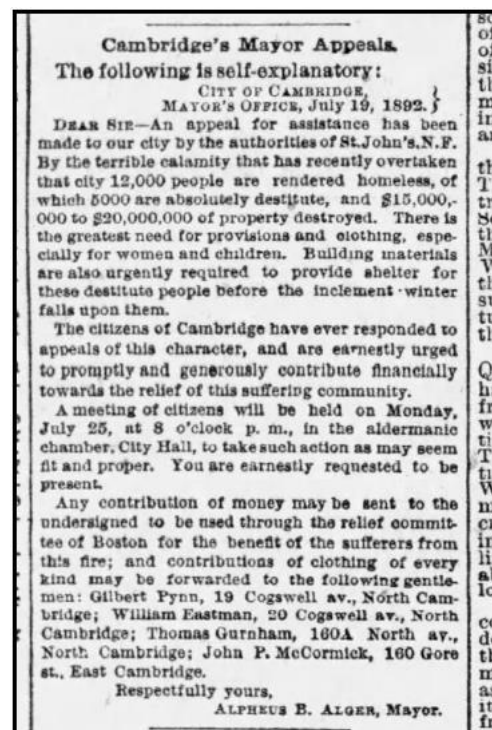
*Above: 1895 Bromley Map, Plate 18, specifying location of 36 Hancock Street.*

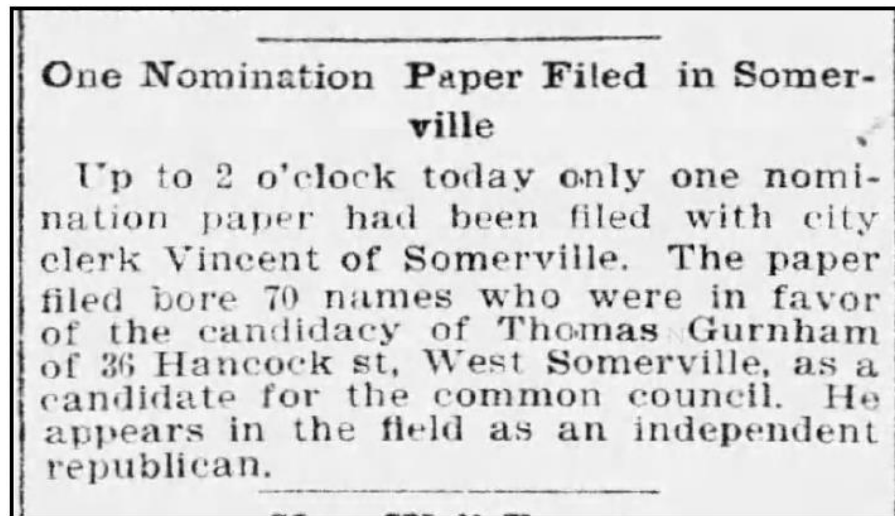
*Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, May 04, 1903*

By 1895 the lots previously owned by the Tufts Family had been subdivided, sold and developed. Included in this was 36 Hancock St which is depicted as constructed in the 1895 Bromley Map.

The owner listed on the 1895 Bromley Map was 'Thos Gurnham'. This is Thomas Gurnham, the first owner of the property who worked as a newsdealer in Cambridge. Thomas is listed as living and owning the property in the Somerville City Directories beginning in 1895 through 1922. Thomas Gurnham immigrated from England with his family before buying the property. He originally lived in Cambridge before moving to Somerville. The cause for the move appears to be a fire in 1892 that destroyed a large part of Cambridge. Thomas and Gilbert Pynn, who also lives at 36 Hancock St with the Gurnham Family, are listed as part of the relief committee of whom charitable donations can be sent to help the relief fund for those affected by the Cambridge fire.

*Right: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, July 23, 1892*





*Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, November 19, 1895*

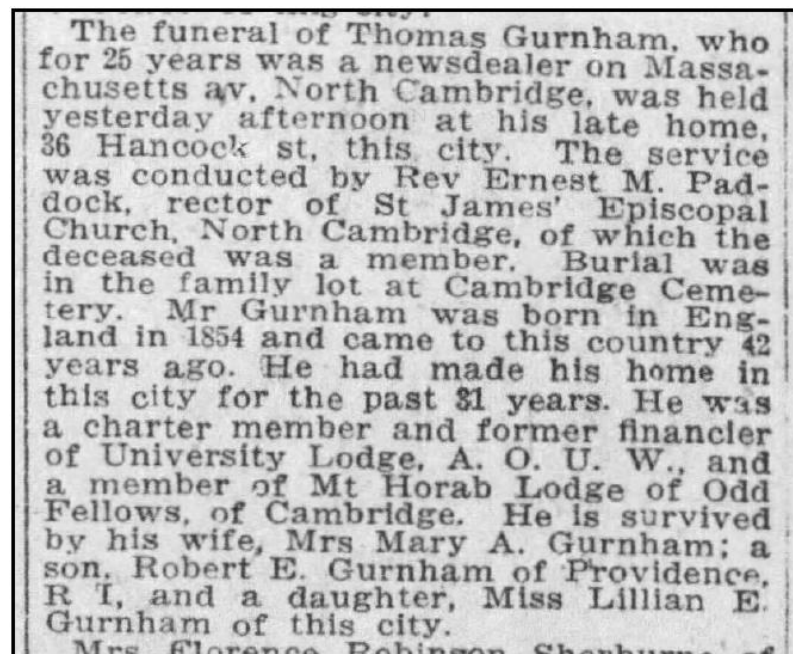
That they were trusted to distribute these funds indicates the two gentlemen were trusted members of the community.

In 1899, living at 36 Hancock St, Thomas Gurnham applied to be an Alderman as an independent republican; however, he ultimately lost and was not elected to the Council.

As someone active in their community, he was also a charter member of the University Lodge and a member of Mt Horab Lodge of Odd Fellows of Cambridge. These organizations were fraternal charitable organizations. During the 1800s and early 1900s, Freemasonry and fraternal organizations in general, grew dramatically within the United States. This growth was a reaction to the lack of social services provided by the government.

In 1922, Thomas Gurnham passed away, at which time the property is left to his family. They likely sold it somewhere between 1924 (the last City Directory listing a Gurnham Family member living there) and 1925 (when a different family is listed as the owners).

By 1925 the Gurnham family had added an addition to the rear of the property and a front porch. Interestingly, looking at the 1895 Bromley and 1925 Sanborn maps we can see that a number of the neighboring properties also added front porches within this same time.



*Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, October 19, 1922*

(Continued on next page.)



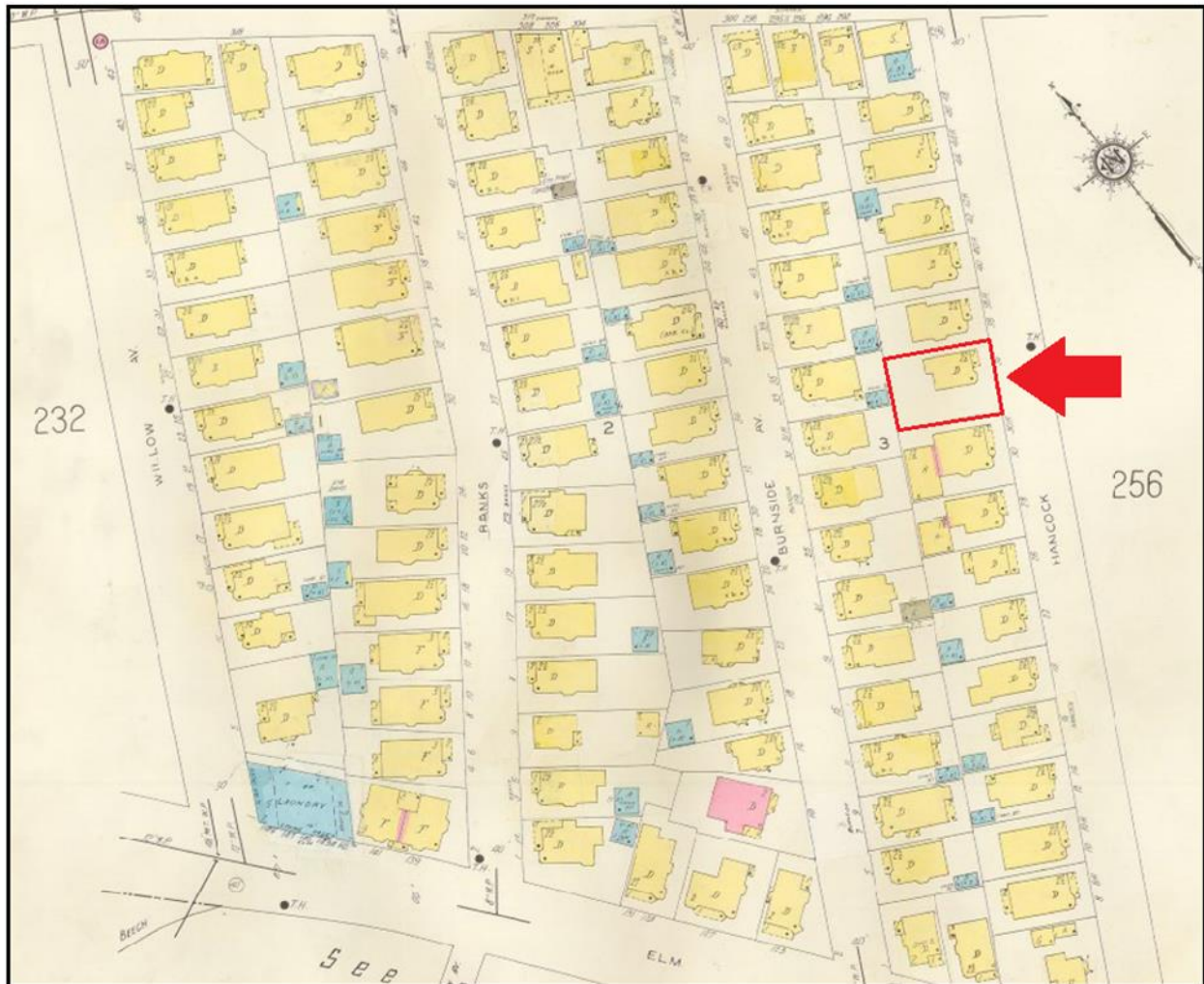
*Above: 1925 Sanborn Map, Sheet 23, specifying the location of 36 Hancock Street.*

Charles Ellis is the next listed owner of the property in the City Directories. He, his wife Ursula, and their three children live at the property from 1925 to 1933. Charles worked as a janitor and his children worked in various fields as clerks. To make additional money they rented out rooms to the Hayward Family.

After the Ellis Family records indicate that Ralph Scott is the next owner. Ralph lived at the property with his wife Mary, three adult children; Frank, Raymond, and Alma, and two lodgers; John C Pelham and Donald P Meister. The only date Staff could find of their time owning or living at 36 Hancock was 1940. No additional dates were found in the Somerville City Directories and Census records.

(Continued on next page.)





*Above: 1938-1959 Sanborn Map, Vol 2 Sheet 255, specifying the location of 36 Hancock Street.*

By the 1938 – 1959 Sanborn Map we can see that a rear ell was added to the property.

Further research resulted in the following information on the tenants over the decades at 36 Hancock Street. The names that have been found show the property was inhabited by students after 1924. A list of all residents is provided on the next page.

(Continued on next page.)

Name	Year(s) of Residency	Occupation	Relationship	Residency Type
Down(es), Isabelle M	1924		Boarder of Thomas & Mary Gurnham	Res
Down(es), Julia M	1924	Nurse	Boarder of Thomas & Mary Gurnham	H
Ellis, Charles H	1925 - 1933	Janitor	Head of Household	H
Ellis, Eric B	1929 - 1933	Clerk	Son of Charles H & Ursula Ellis	R
Ellis, John A	1925 - 1933	Clerk - Fish Industry, Wireworker	Unkown	R
Ellis, Nelson I	1925 - 1933	Clerk, Elevator Operator	Son of Charles H & Ursula Ellis	R
Ellis, Ronald D	1929 - 1933	Clerk	Son of Charles H & Ursula Ellis	R
Ellis, Ursula	1925 - 1933		Wife of Charles H	H
Evans, William	1910 - 1913	Night Foreman	Lodger of Thomas & Mary Gurnham	Bds
Galvin, Thomas F	1940	Furniture Mover	Head of Household	B
Gurnham, Ferederick G	1908 - 1909	Bookkeeper	Unknown	B
Gurnham, Lillian E	1918 - 1920	Stenographer	Daughter of Thomas & Mary Gurnham	Bds
Gurnham, Lottie	1900 - 1910		Daughter-in-law of Thomas & Mary Gurnham	
Gurnham, Marion E	1895 - 1920		Daughter of Thomas & Mary Gurnham	
Gurnham, Mary A	1895 - 1922		Wife of Thomas Gurnham	
Gurnham, Robert E	1900 - 1910	Packer, Confectioner, Sales	Son of Thomas & Mary Gurnham	B
Gurnham, Robert Jr	1910		Grandson of Thomas & Mary Gurnham	
Gurnham, Thomas	1895 - 1922	Periodicals @ N Cambridge, Painter	Head of Household	H
Hayward, Frank	1930		Lodger of Charles & Ursula Ellis	
Hayward, Frank Jr	1930		Lodger of Charles & Ursula Ellis	
Hayward, Margaret	1930		Lodger of Charles & Ursula Ellis	
Hubley, Elizabeth E	1918 - 1920		Boarder of Thomas & Mary Gurnham	Bds
Phelam, John G	1940	Blacksmith	Lodger of Ralph Scott	
Pynn, Gilbert	1898	Cornice Maker		H
Meister, Donald P	1940		Lodger of Ralph Scott	
Scott, Alma J	1940	Student	Daughter of Ralph & Mary Scott	R
Scott, Frank H	1940	Salesman @ Cambridge	Son of Ralph & Mary Scott	
Scott, Lillian B	1940		Wife of Raymond Scott	
Scott, Mary	1940		Wife of Ralph Scott	
Scott, Ralph	1940	Retired	Head of household	H
Scott, Raymond L	1940	Masseur	Husband of Lillian Scott	

## II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

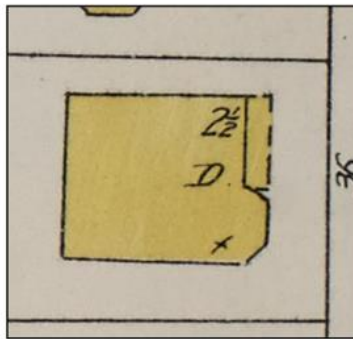
Please see the section immediately below which discusses location, design, materials, and any alterations as the same information would be written here, just in longer form.

*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.*

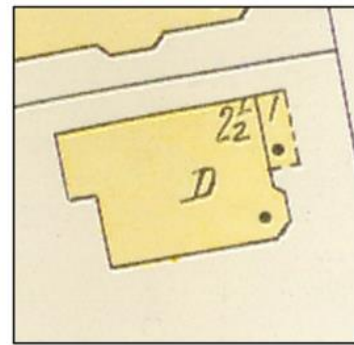
Comparing the historic map with satellite images of the current property we can determine the degree to which the structure has been altered.



Above: Fig 1



Above: Fig 2



Above: Fig 3



Above: Fig 4



Above: Fig 5

Fig 1: 1895 Hopkins Map, close-up of 36 Hancock St

- The 1884 Map is the first time the current structure is shown. It is a plain square building with a projection towards the right of the rear and a bay on the front left elevation.

Fig 2: 1925 Bromley Map, close-up of 36 Hancock St

- An addition has been added to the right rear projection creating an even rear elevation.
- A porch has been added from the edge of the bay to the edge of the right side.

Fig 3: 1938-1959 Sanborn Map, close-up of 36 Hancock St

- The porch appears deeper than in the 1925 Sanborn Map, this may represent the porch's enlargement or a discrepancy in the drawing.
- An addition has been added to the right side of the rear.

Fig 4 &amp; 5: Satellite image of 36 Hancock Street

- Front porch has been enclosed.
- Later addition with porch added to rear gabled ell.
- Metal stairwell added to the left elevation to access top floor.

## 1. **36 Hancock Street**

The period of relevance for the property starts c.1895

- Location: The structure is in the original location and was built on-site.
- Design: The primary structure is two and ½ stories, wood framed, gable roof parallel to the street; brick chimney; vinyl clapboard; gabled wall dormer on front elevation above two-story bay; enclosed porch entryway; on the left elevation is a late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> century iron spiral stair to top floor; on the rear elevation is a gable ended ell on right side



of rear elevation, one-story, later addition on left of rear; one-story later addition on rear ell with sliding glass doors with later rooftop porch; wood porch to left of later rear addition; fenestration consists of one one-over-one, double-hung, replacement sash windows; on the right elevation fenestration consists of one-over-one double hung sash windows and fixed square windows; on basement level fenestration appears to be fixed or pivot windows.

- c. **Materials:** Vinyl clapboard; replacement front door; wood porches and steps; brick steps on front; metal stairwell; brick chimney stack; asphalt shingle roof; brick foundation.
- d. **Alterations:** Rooftop porch; rear porch, the one-story rear-most addition; replacement windows and doors; asphalt shingles; wall dormer; one-story addition on the left rear.
- e. **Evaluation of Integrity of 36 Hancock Street** Based on the observations of the building and a study of the historic maps, it is Staff's position that the building largely retains the integrity of its original form. Alterations have occurred to this structure that do obscure original architectural details; the original massing mostly intact.

### **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 36 Hancock Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 36 Hancock 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 36 Hancock Street meets any of the criteria stated above.

2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 36 Hancock 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 36 Hancock Street is or is not “historically significant”.