



**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

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

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**Site:** 236 Pearl Street

**Case:** HPC.DMO 2023.02

**Applicant:** Barros Properties LLC

**Owner:** Goodpitch, LLC

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

**HPC Meeting Date:** May 2, 2023

*Top: Front elevation*

*Bottom, left: Left elevation*

*Bottom, middle: Right elevation*

*Bottom, right: Rear 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:** 236 Pearl Street is a one-story commercial building located within the Winter Hill neighborhood. Pearl Street consists of a mixture of two ½ and three-story residential structures and a mix of commercial buildings.

The Boston and Lowell railroad bisected East Somerville in 1835, with a Washington Street station constructed near Joy Street. The passenger station of the Boston and Main Railroad extension was opened at the eastern edge of East Somerville in 1842, near Sullivan Square, and the resulting compact residential building pattern was partially attributable to the opening of the station. At least two land speculators laid out streets near the station. The narrow house lots were intended for sale to the businessmen who commuted daily between Somerville and Boston or Charlestown. In 1845, Charles Pierce laid out 69 lots between Pearl, Perkins, Franklin, and Pinckney Streets. A plan of the Pierce land by surveyors Felton and Parker noted that the new residential area was only "1090 feet from the depot," trumpeting the easy connection to the station. This early subdivision activity was all concentrated between the Charlestown line and Cross Street; farther west, the farmland between Cross and Walnut was generally unbuilt until after the Civil War. Many new streets, however, were speculatively entered in plan books, but not built up until a decade or more later.



Above: 1874, Plate H, Hopkins Map, specifying the approximate location of 236 Pearl Street.

Charles E. Gilman, who served as town clerk and later city clerk between 1842 and 1886, was one of the major landholders in the area prior to the subdivision of large tracts for residential development. The 1874 Hopkins Map shows him as the owner of the land that later became 236 Pearl Street.

After 1846 many of the new residents of East Somerville, particularly those along Mt. Pleasant, Mt. Vernon and Pearl Streets, were Boston businessmen. However, new Somerville industries attracted laborers, and in the 1860s and 1870s the factories adjacent to Washington Street spawned numerous blocks of workers' houses. The greatest period of residential development occurred between 1875 and 1885, as apartment rows and two-family tenements were constructed throughout the area by speculators. Among the subdivisions intended for workers' houses was that platted by Charles Tufts in 1873. Ruby, Eglantine, Jasper and Pearl Streets were laid out, but Pearl and Jasper were the only streets built up. Houses on these carefully named streets were of the standard 2 ½ story, gable-roofed variety favored for cheap, quick construction.



Above: 1895, Plate 2, Bromley Map, specifying current location (blue) and 1895 location (red) of 236 Pearl Street.

The 1895 Bromley Map is the earliest map depicting a structure at 236 Pearl Street. This original structure was a residential property built by 1890 as the first listed homeowners in the Somerville City Directory are Elizabeth and John Waugh. Interestingly the Bromley Map lists 'Eliza Waugh' as the owner and not her husband despite him being alive in 1895. This is an anomaly for a time when men were property owners. Few married women of this period were considered property owners in their own right. During the Waugh's ownership, they rented out rooms at 236 Pearl to a number of individuals as a secondary form of income. Records show that the Waughs lived at 236 Pearl between 1890 and 1920 (John passed a year earlier in 1919).

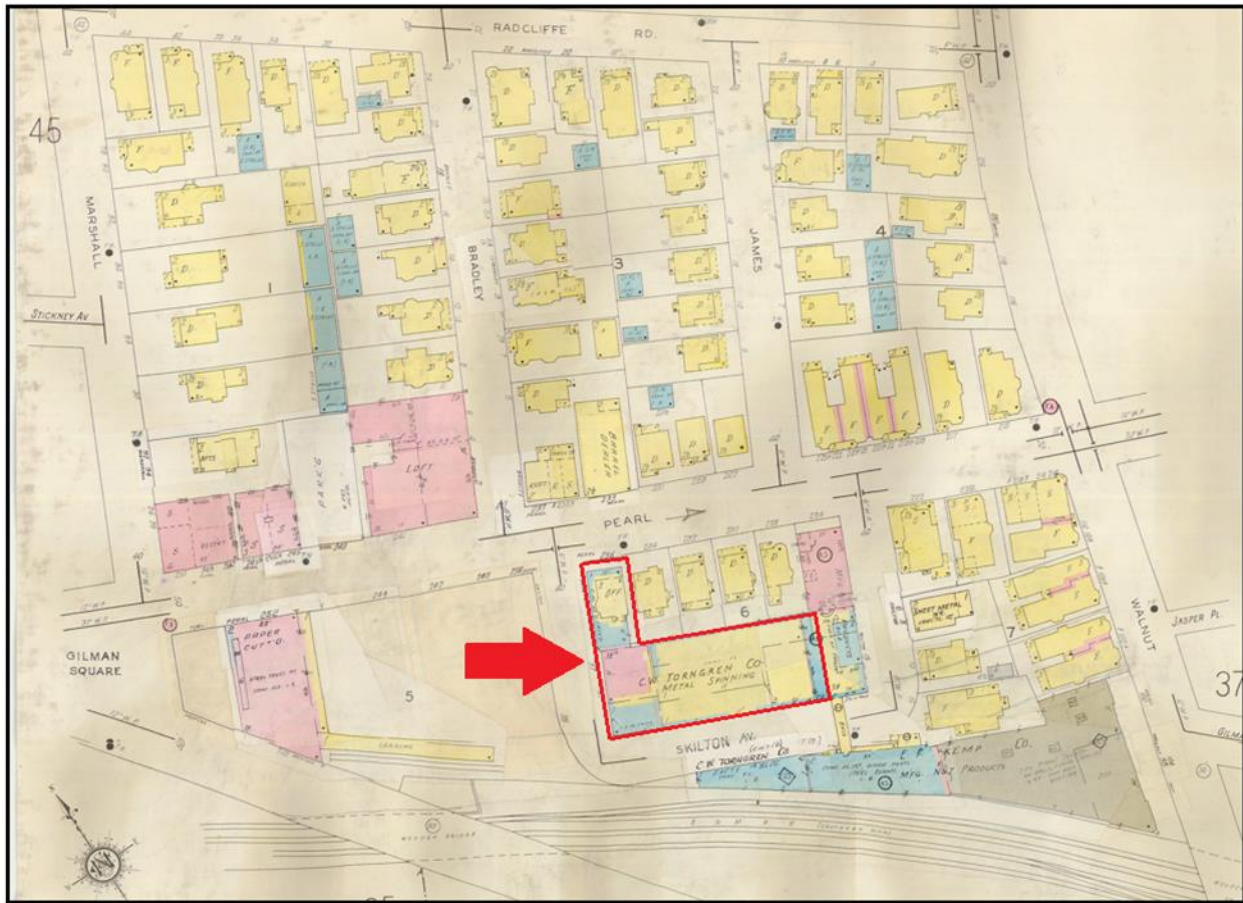


*Above: 1900 Sanborn Map, Sheet 85, specifying current location (blue) and 1900 location (red) of 236 Pearl Street.*

In 1924 the Rowland Family moved into 236 Pearl St. The Somerville City Directories listed them as renting and boarding at the property which indicates that they were not the owners, and that an absentee landlord owned the property during their time at 236 Pearl. The Rowland Family lived at the property until 1927.

236 Pearl is then purchased by Patrick T Coneey in 1929. Patrick lived there with his wife, Ellen and Joseph A. Coneey and Alice Conney, Staff could not verify the nature of the relationship of Alice and Joseph to Patrick and Ellen, but they were likely their children.

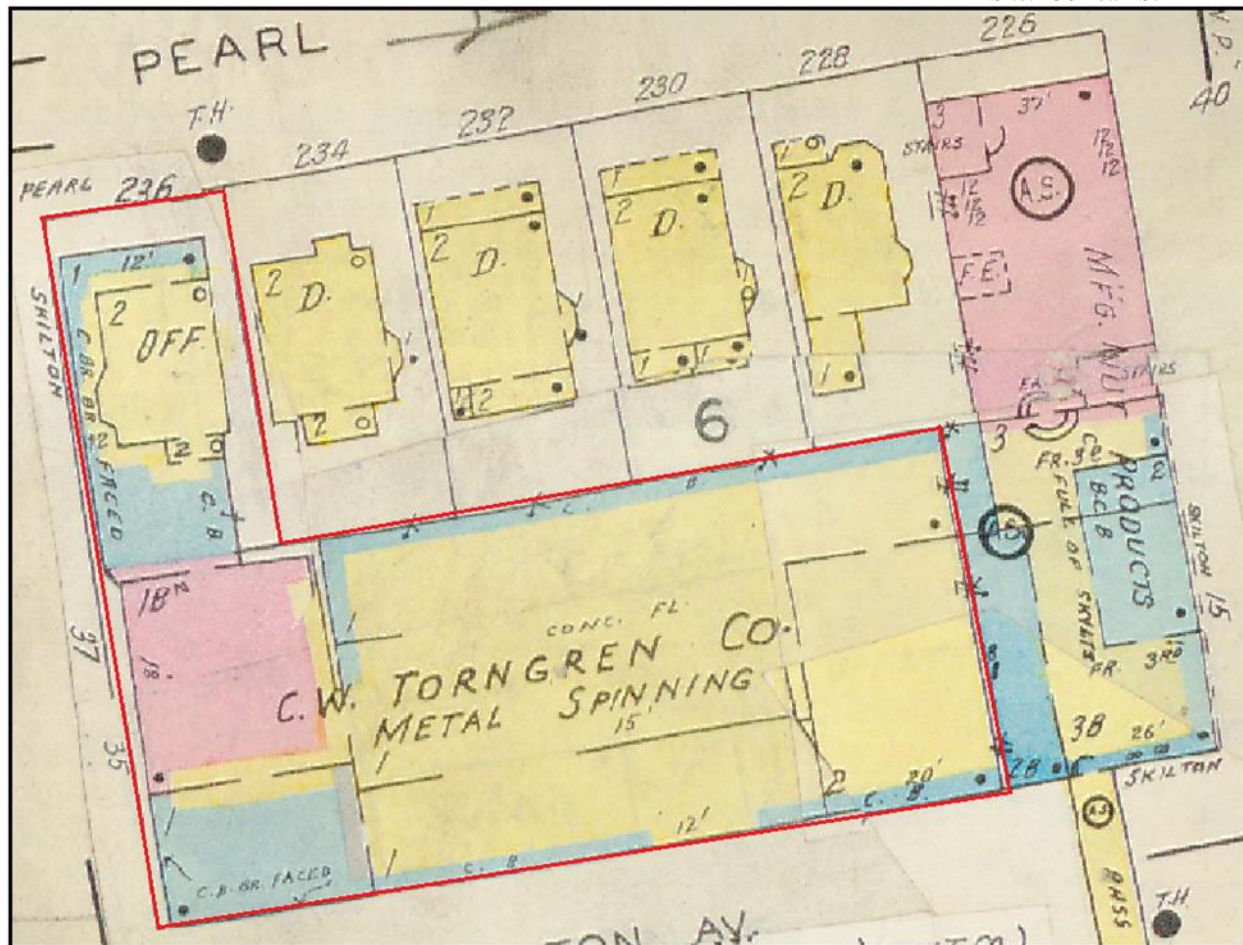
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*Above: 1934 Sanborn Map, Sheet 36, specifying the location of 236 Pearl Street.*

The 1934 Sanborn Map shows that the residential wood structure at 236 Pearl Street has been subsumed into a commercial structure that includes the original 236 Pearl Street lot and an additional four lots behind 236 Pearl along Skilton Ave. Interestingly, the map shows that along with the wood residential structure at 236 Pearl, a large wooden structure that had been constructed on the four lots along Skilton Ave had also been incorporated into the larger structure. The map makes clear that these wood buildings were not demolished to build the commercial structure but incorporated into the larger building.

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*Above: Close up 236 Pearl St from 1934 Sanborn Map, Sheet 36*

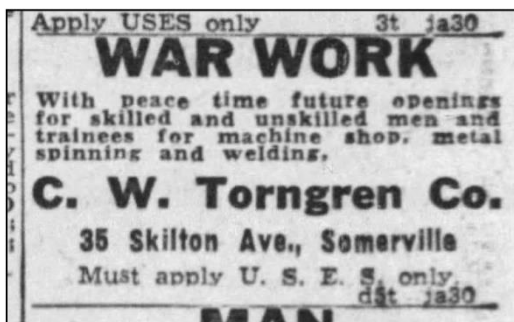
The use of yellow on a Sanborn Map indicates a wood frame building. Blue, depending on the additional abbreviations, means concrete block. In this instance the blue with the abbreviation; ‘C Br Br Faced’ indicates ‘mixed construction of concrete block and brick with one wall faced with 4” brick’. In the instance of this building determining the material of the pink portion is slightly harder as the pink designation in Sanborn keys can have several corresponding meanings. Likely it indicates this portion is made of tile or incorporates brick and/or stone.

	Drive or passage way.
	Stable.
	Auto. House or private garage.
	Solid brick with interior walls of C.B. or C.B. and brick mixed.
	Mixed construction of C.B. and brick with one wall of solid brick.
	Mixed construction of C.B. and brick with one wall faced with 4" brick.
	Mixed construction of C.B. and brick throughout.

	Brick building with frame side. (DIVIDED BY FRAME PARTITION)
	Brick veneered building.
	" and frame building.
	Frame building, brick lined.
	" " metal clad.
	Frame building.
	Frame building covered with asbestos.

*Above: Portions of the Sanborn Map Key, Library of Congress*

Furthermore, we know that the original wood structure at 236 Pearl is being used as an office in 1934 based on the 'OFF' placed on the building in the 1934 Sanborn Map and is still two stories in height. At the same time, the C.W. Torngren Company owned and operated at least the portion of the building along Skilton Avenue if not the entirety of the new structure (including 236 Pearl). The Torngren Company was a metal working company. Advertisements placed in the Boston Globe during World War II indicate that they supported the war effort. Prior to WWII factories such as Torngren would have made metal for commercial use such as automobiles, appliances, etc. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor President Franklin D Roosevelt ordered such factories to be converted to help the war effort. Metal factories such as Torngren would be converted into producing materials to help American soldiers such as metal for guns, tanks, ships, etc. After WWII had finished, Torngren also made an effort to support American veterans by making a point to advertise for veterans in their job advertisements.

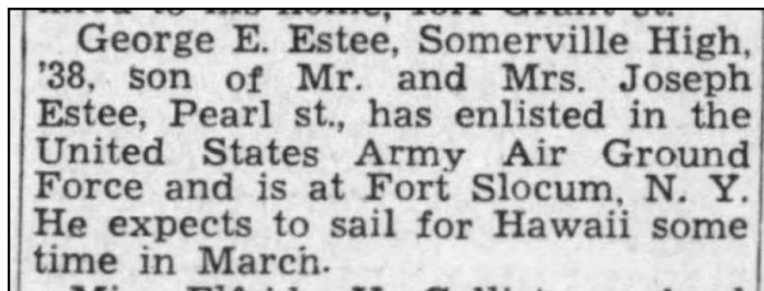


*Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, January 31, 1945*



*Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, May 03, 1945*

By 1940, 236 Pearl St is still being operated, to some degree, as a residence given that the City Directories list Joseph Estee Sr, a chauffeur, and his wife Marion and their ten children living at 236 Pearl in 1940 through 1941. Likely they used the second floor of the wood structure at 236 Pearl Street. It is with the Estee Family we can further see the effect of WWII reflected in 236 Pearl. While C.W. Torngren worked to supply metal for the war effort, George Estee, son of Joseph and Marion, joined the war effort in 1941.



*Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, Feb 26, 1941*

Sometime after 1941 236 Pearl is renovated and the second floor of the residential wood building is removed. It is unclear how much of that original wood structure remains as part of today's structure. It is worth noting that along the left, right, and rear elevations are portions of the walls that are wood clapboard. These locations appear to align with where the wood buildings were part of the exterior walls of 236 Pearl in the 1934 Sanborn Map.

Further research resulted in the following information on the tenants over the decades at 236 Pearl Street. The names that have been found show the property was inhabited by a variety of working-class individuals. A list of all residents is provided below.

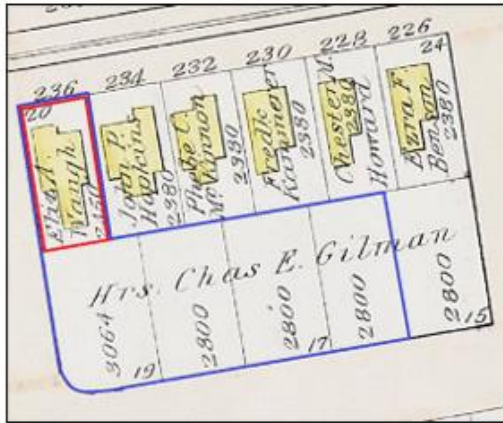
Name	Year(s) of Residency	Occupation	Relationship	Residency Type
Barnes, Helen M	1933		Wife of Walter J Barnes	
Barnes, Walter J	1933	Chef	Husband of Helen M Barnes	
Bartlett, R.	1901	Clerk		Rms
Coneey, Alice	1929			H
Coneey, Ellen A	1929		Wife of Patrick T Coneey	Rms
Coneey, Joseph A	1929	Plaster		Rms
Coneey, Patrick T	1929	Plaster	Head of Household/ Husband of Ellen A Coneey	H
Estee, Albert	1940 - 1941		Son of Joseph & Marion Estee	R
Estee, George	1940 - 1941		Son of Joseph & Marion Estee	R
Estee, Gerald	1940 - 1941		Son of Joseph & Marion Estee	R
Estee, John	1940 - 1941		Son of Joseph & Marion Estee	R
Estee, Joseph Sr	1940 - 1941	Chauffeur	Head of Household/ Husband of Marion Estee	H
Estee, Joseph Jr	1940 - 1941	Employee FNS	Son of Joseph & Marion Estee	R
Estee, Marcon	1940 - 1941	Student	Daughter of Joseph & Marion Estee	R
Estee, Marion	1940 - 1941		Wife of Joseph Estee Sr	H
Estee, Richard	1940 - 1941		Son of Joseph & Marion Estee	R
Estee, Robert	1940 - 1941		Son of Joseph & Marion Estee	R
Estee, Virginia	1940 - 1941		Daughter of Joseph & Marion Estee	R
Estee, Walter	1940 - 1941		Son of Joseph & Marion Estee	R
Everett, Osgood Stevens	1917 - 1918	Shipper @ Eureka Cordial Co		
Flibotte, Horace	1904	Clerk		Rms
Goucher, Harry L	1907	Ice Cream Maker		Rms
Martin, Harry	1899	Train Dispatcher - Union Station		Rms
Minot, Ellen Mrs	1904 - 1912		Widow of Joseph Minot	Rms
Morgan, William	1897 - 1898	Salesman		Rms
Rodenizer, Willis E	1897	Clerk		Bds
Rowland, Albert	1908 - 1911	Box maker	Unkown	B
Rowland, Elliott T	1924 - 1927	Chauffeur	Son of Minnie Rowland	Res
Rowland, Minnie M	1924 - 1927		Head of Household	B
Rowland, Raleigh N	1924 - 1927	Chauffeur	Son of Minnie Rowland	Res
Rowland, Ralph W	1924 - 1927	Painter	Unkown	Res
Rowland, Sumner C	1924 - 1925	Shipper	Son of Minnie Rowland	Res
Strout, Freeman G	1905	Hostler		B
Turnball, Mae T	1933		Wife of Thompson M Turnball	
Turnball, Thompson, M	1933	Electrician	Husband of Mae T Turnball	
Waugh, Elizabeth A	1890 - 1920		Wife of John H Waugh	
Waugh, John H	1890 - 1919	Clerk	Husband of Elizabeth A Waugh	
Whittemore, Everett	1894 - 1895	Bookkeeper		Rms

## II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

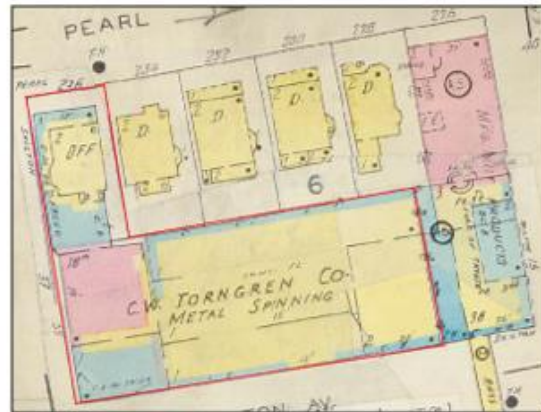
Please see the section immediately below which discusses location, design, materials, and any alterations as the same information would be written here, just in longer form.

*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: 1900 Sanborn Map, close-up of 236 Pearl Street

- 236 Pearl was a single lot; what is 236 Pearl today included a lot with a wood framed structure and four vacant lots along Skilton Ave.
- Original wood framed building had a projection from the mass on the right side of front elevation and a projection on the center rear.

Fig 2: 1934 Sanborn Map, close-up of 236 Pearl Street

- The wood building at 236 Pearl has been subsumed in a concrete and brick one story commercial building.
- The wood building is indicated as an office.
- The larger building that is today's 236 Pearl appears to have encased the wood structure on Pearl St as well as a brick structure and a large wood structure on Skilton Ave.
- Sanborn map indicates that the exterior of the building is mixed construction of C.B. and brick with one wall of solid brick.

Fig 3 &amp; 4: Satellite image of 236 Pearl Street

- Satellite image shows the varying rooflines indicating the remnants of buildings subsumed into the larger structure.

### 1. **236 Pearl Street**

The period of relevance for the property starts c.1890 - 1934

- Location: The structure is in the original location and was built on-site.
- Design: The structure is a one-story, masonry structure with brick facade, flat roof; standing seam metal exterior along top portion of building; fenestration on front elevation includes one large picture window to the right and a glass entry door to the left; on right elevation fenestration includes one-over-one double-hung sash windows; entry door towards rear of right elevation; garage door on right elevation towards rear; enclosed window opening at basement level on right elevation; mixture of wood clapboard and stone façade; enclosed windows on rear elevation; mixture of wood clapboard and stone façade along rear; rear garage door; mixture of brick and wood clapboard on right elevation; enclosed window or door on right elevation ; brick chimney stack.
- Materials: Wood clapboard; brick exterior walls; aluminum siding; aluminum and glass doors; brick chimney stack; aluminum or vinyl windows.
- Alterations: Enclosed windows and door; standing seam metal siding; replacement windows and doors.
- Evaluation of Integrity of 236 Pearl 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 1934 form and likely retains portions of earlier structures. Alterations have occurred to the current structure that obscure original architectural details; the original massing remains largely 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 236 Pearl Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 236 Pearl 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 236 Pearl Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 236 Pearl 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 236 Pearl Street is or is not “historically significant”.