



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

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 38 Laurel Street

Case: HPC.DMO 2021.26

Applicant: Shang Yang

Owner: Same as Applicant

Legal Ad: *Demolish principal structure.*

HPC Meeting Date: October 19, 2021

Top: Front elevation

Bottom, left: Left elevation

Bottom, middle: Rear elevation

Bottom, Right: Right elevation

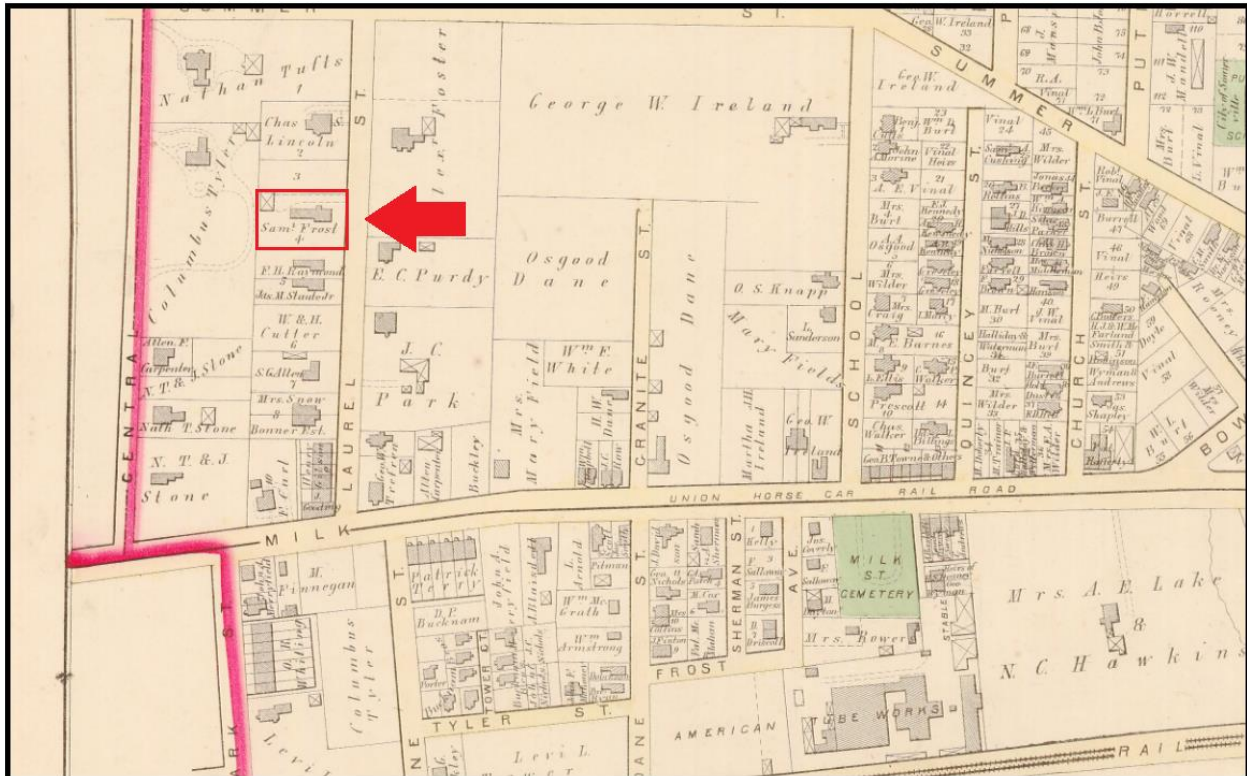


I. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Historical Context: 38 Laurel is a two-and-a-half story residential structure. Laurel Street is dominated by triple-deckers and two and half story residential houses. 38 Laurel is located within the Spring Hill Neighborhood.

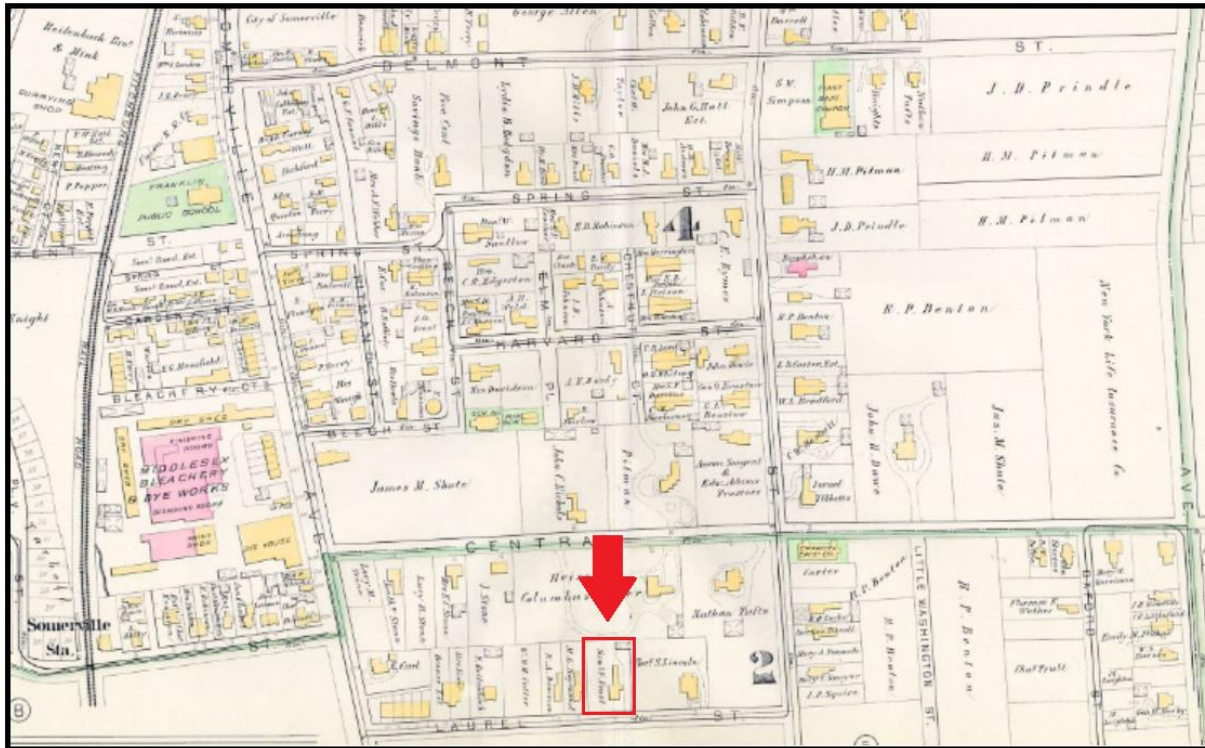
Once divided into large agricultural tracts for Charlestown residents, Spring Hill evolved into a prime residential neighborhood of Somerville in the mid-1800s. Many of the first houses built in Spring Hill subdivisions were substantial single-family homes on large lots. By the 1870s there was an expansion of the industries on Milk Row (now Somerville Avenue) and increased traffic from horsecars and streetcars on Summer Street from Union to Davis Square. This caused the expanded development of the area with smaller single- and two-family workers' housing, attached rowhouses and some multi-family housing.

Laurel Street was laid out in 1848 by George Brastow, owner of large amounts of land in Somerville and responsible for much of the Spring Hill subdivision. Development of Laurel Street took place after the Civil War when residential construction grew dramatically.



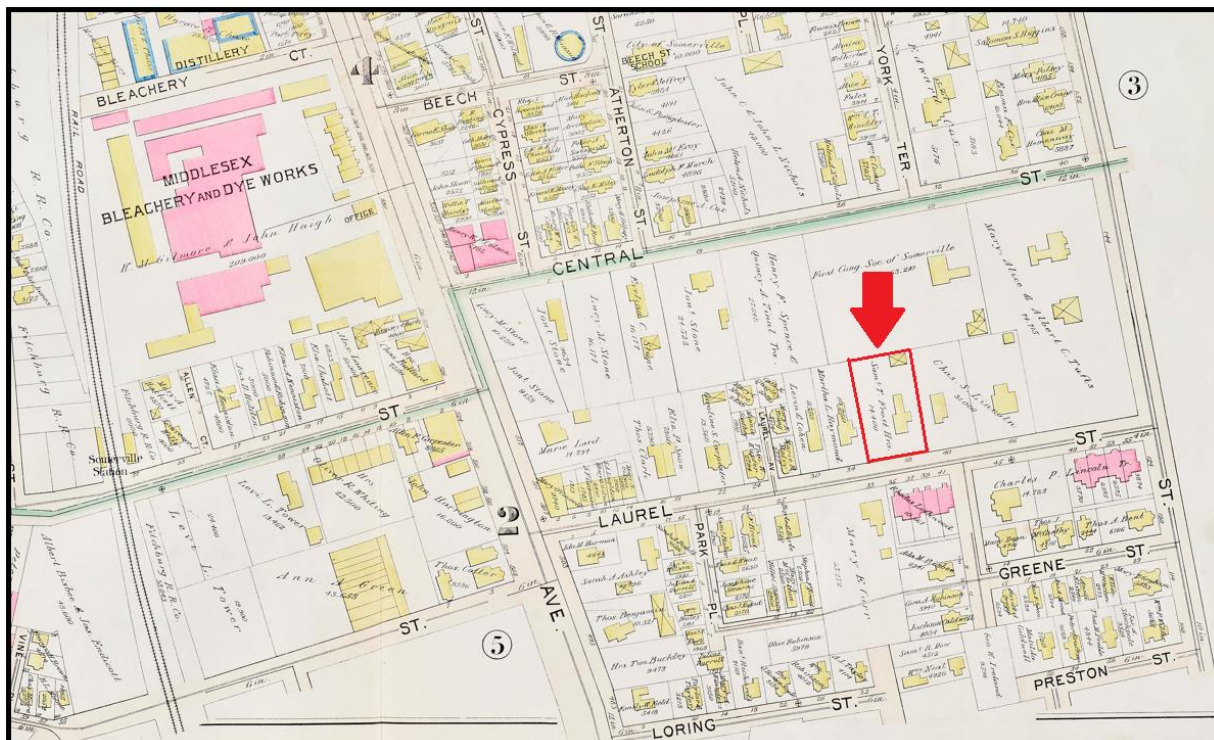
Above: 1874 Hopkins Map, Plate 20&21, with arrow indicating location of 38 Laurel St

The 1874 Hopkins Map shows large plots on Laurel and Central Street. In comparison, the lots in the Ward 2 industrial area are small with residences that were meant as worker's housing for those individuals working in the nearby industries. This is likely indicative of a wealth disparity between the residents of Laurel Street and the working class that lived only blocks away who serviced the nearby industries.

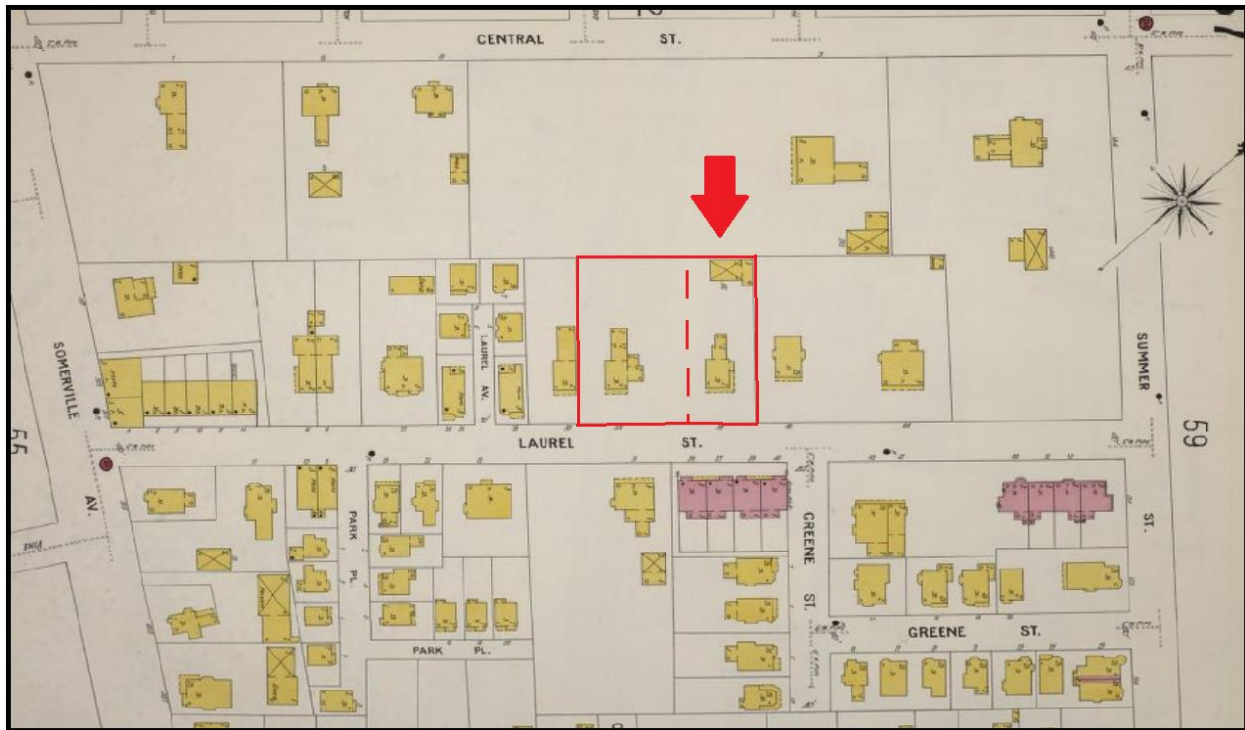


Above: 1884 Hopkins Map, Plate 9, with arrow indicating location of 38 Laurel Street

By 1884, minimal change has occurred to the area along Laurel and Central Streets. By 1895, a few of the lots along Laurel St have been subdivided, but the block still consists mostly of larger plots with bigger residential structures than the surrounding area made up of worker housing.



Above: 1895 Bromley Map, Plate 4, with arrow indicating the location of 38 Laurel Street



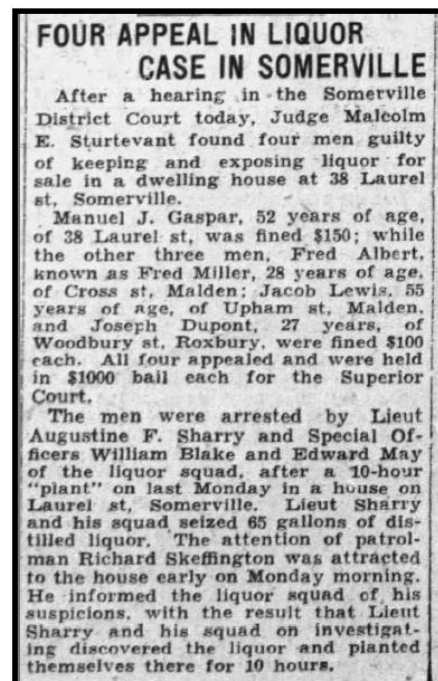
Above: 1900 Sanborn Map, Plate 57, with arrow indicating location of 38 Laurel Street

The first listed owner for 38 Laurel St is Samuel T Frost. Samuel Frost's family were significant landowners along Somerville Avenue and Laurel Street and into Cambridge. Samuel donated the Somerville Avenue Cemetery to the City of Somerville. He was the Treasurer of the Eliot School Association, and one of the founders of the Unitarian Church on Highland Ave. He later became a deacon of the Unitarian Church before his death.

Samuel Frost's daughter, Martha L Frost married Francis Raymond who was the director of the Market National Bank for 22 years and was elected as the Ward 2 State Representative to the MA Legislature (1888, 1889, and 1890). Later, Francis Raymond would go on to be a Senator in Massachusetts in 1891 and 1892, and a member of the Governor's Council in 1895 and 1896.

Oliver E. Howe, who lived at 38 Laurel St between 1907 and 1908, worked as the head bookkeeper and paymaster for Rice & Hutchins, a shoe manufacturer. Like Samuel Frost, Olive Howe was involved in the community. Howe was a member of the Odd Fellows' Relief Association for 39 Years. Howe would move to Marlboro where he would join the Star of Hope Rebekah Lodge and become the Director of the Marlboro Cooperative Bank.

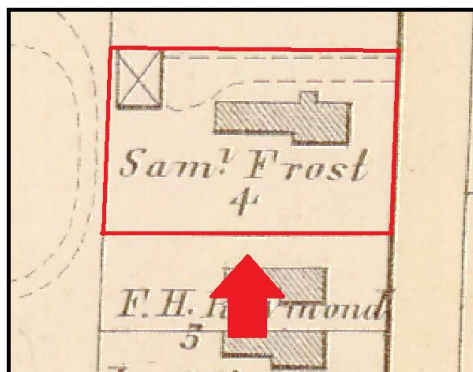
Right: The Boston Globe, May 1, 1933



Another resident at 38 Laurel was Manuel J. Gaspar who lived at the residence with his family between 1929 and 1933. Gaspar, along with three others, sold liquor out of the second floor of the building during Prohibition. Between 1919 and 1933, the sale and consumption of liquor was illegal in the United States under the 18th Amendment. Manual was arrested for illegally storing and selling liquor in 1933 and fined in April of 1933. The United States would later appeal the 18th Amendment in December of 1933.

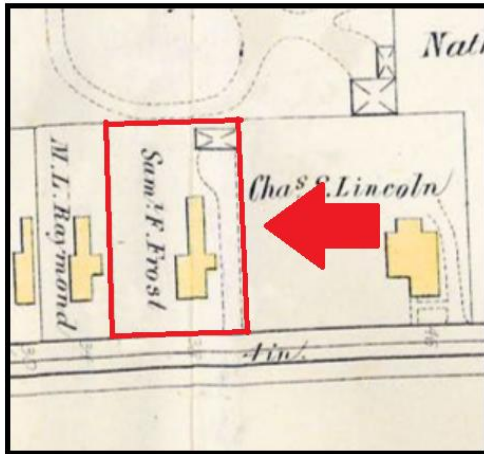
A list of all residents for 38 Laurel Street and their professions is provided below.

Name	Year(s) of Residency	Occupation
Donahue, Nora Mrs.	1924-1927	
Donahue, Timothy	1925-1927	Carpenter
Frost, George W	1884-1920	Clerk, Salesman
Frost, Samuel T	1874-1895	
Frost, Sarah	1890-1896	
Garland, Caroline	1913-1918	Housekeeper
Gaspar, Francis J	1933	Baker
Gaspar, Joseph	1933	Cabinetmaker
Gaspar, Manuel	1929-1933	Brass Finisher
Gaspar, Manuel Jr	1929-1933	Brass Finisher
Gaspar, Marie	1929-1933	
Hagerty, Catherine	1940	
Hagerty, Thomas	1940	Painter
Howe, Olive E	1907-1908	
James, Anna M	1924	
McDougall, Bessie	1940	
McDougall, Daniel	1940	Operator



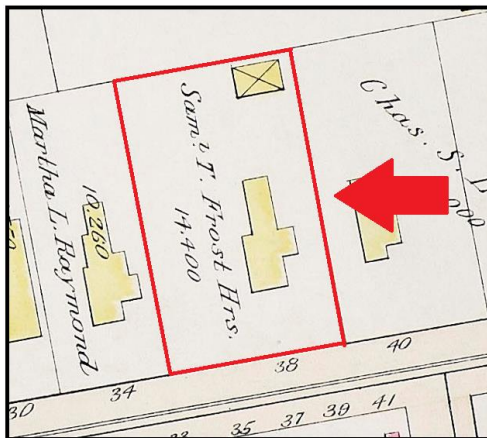
A close-up of the 1874 Hopkins Map shows the original structure to have either an ell or bay extending on the right side of the property. A barn/stable or carriage house is located in the rear.

Left: Close-up of 1874 Hopkins Map



The 1884 Hopkins Map shows no notable change to the footprint of the structure.

Left: Close-up of 1874 Hopkins Map



The 1895 Bromley Map shows no notable change to the footprint of the structure.

Left: Close-up of 1895 Bromley Map



A 2020 satellite image of 38 Laurel St shows that the bay or ell on the right side of the structure has either been incorporated into additions that leveled the right side of the building or, less likely, the bay or ell was removed. Looking at the front elevation of the building it appears that the portion to the right of the door and the edge of the dormer are part of these later additions.

Left: 2020 Satellite Image

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. 38 Laurel Street

The period of relevance for the property starts c.1874-1933

- a. Location: It is likely that this structure is in its original location and was built on-site.
- b. Design: The house is a front-facing gable roofed, wood-framed residential building with The property contains a second story porch and first story porch with an enclosed porch to the right. Two dormers on either side of the Gable roof.
 - Front Elevation
 - Asymmetric entryway, with 20th century glass and aluminum door entering to a partially enclosed porch. A portion of the front porch remains open.
 - Concrete steps from landing to pavement buttressed by ornamental concrete plinths
 - Foundation is not visible in photos provided, but obscured by wood lattice
 - Fenestration consists of one-over-one, single or double-hung windows with simple surround on the first and third floor. Second floor consists of one one-over-one, single or double-hung windows with sills and aprons
 - Decorative paired brackets on gabled roof eave
 - Porch on second-floor with railing and square columns
 - Right Elevation
 - Fenestration consists of double and single one-over-one, single or double-hung windows with simple surround on all floors.
 - Glass and aluminum door with concrete steps.
 - The right elevation presents shows that the main massing of the building has been extended to the right, enclosing a previously-open porch (evidenced by the remaining eave line) above which has been added a flat-roofed second story. A long, shed dormer appears on the right gable. A flat-roofed extension protrudes from the dormer. (See page 1 of this report for imagery.)
 - Left Elevation
 - Fenestration consists of one-over-one, single or double-hung windows with detailed surround and apron.
 - Deep roof eave with doubled brackets

- Dormer with four windows
- Rear Elevation
 - Fenestration consists of one-over-one, single or double-hung windows with detailed surround.
 - Flat roof with shallow eave

c. Materials:

- Foundation: Not visible in photos provided; screened by wood lattice on front elevation
- Windows: Aluminum or vinyl
- Entry door: modern. Aluminum (maybe fiberglass) with window
- Siding: Wood shingle
- Steps: concrete
- Roof: gable with two dormers, flat roof in rear, right, and over the front second-story porch

d. Alterations: A two-story addition was placed on the right front of the building, with partial enclosure of the original bottom porch. A second two-story addition was placed on the right rear. Modern replacement doors. Replacement windows.

e. Evaluation of Integrity of 38 Laurel 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 integrity of its original form. Later additions and alteration have occurred to this structure which obscures some of the original details and architectural design.

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 RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE at 38 Laurel Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE at 38 Laurel 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.

Residential Structure

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE at 38 Laurel Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE at 38 Laurel 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 RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE at 38 Laurel Street is or is not “historically significant” and must adopt them as findings