



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

PLANNING DIVISION
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 36 Munroe Street

Case: HP23-000010

Applicant: Jilong Liu

Owner: 36 Munroe Street LLC

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

HPC Meeting Date: April 2, 2024



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: 36 Munroe St is a two and 3/4 story building located within the Prospect Hill neighborhood. This side of Munroe Street is largely dominated by two and half story residential structures.

The Prospect Hill area is bounded by School Street at the west, Somerville Avenue and Washington Street at the south, and McGrath Highway and Medford Street at the north and east. Prospect Hill, a glacial drumlin, is situated at the northeast and is the area's most prominent topographical feature.

Prospect Hill, one of the most prosperous residential neighborhoods, evolved throughout the late 19th century. Prior to that it was an agricultural community of farms. Large tracts of land were purchased by real estate investors and well-to-do merchants in the mid-1800s. Subdivisions were created and the area became suburbanized by the late 19th century.

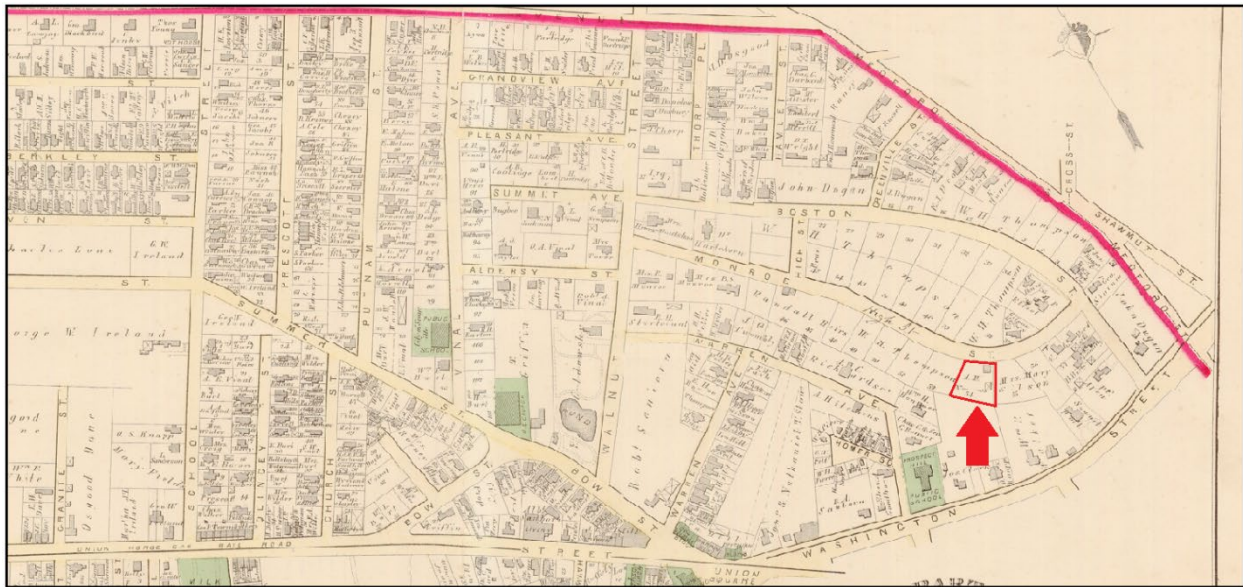
Prospect Hill, like nearby Spring Hill, soon became a desirable site for the construction of businessmen's homes. The first home builders were men such as Robert Aldersey Vinal, son of a Somerville settler, and Edwin Munroe, both Boston grain dealers. Munroe Street is named for Edwin Munroe, a grain merchant. In the 1840s they built modest Greek Revival houses. On Prospect Hill, the house of provision dealer Louville Niles at 45 Walnut and the adjacent house at 97 Munroe (also built by Niles) display the Queen Anne hallmarks of the period: turrets, oriels, and lavish use of patterned shingles and stained glass. Portions of Winter Hill, Spring Hill, and Prospect Hill were built up with several hundred similar Queen Anne houses, housing a well-to-do class of businessmen and professionals.

Other well-to-do merchants and real estate speculators purchased large tracts of farmland on the southern slopes of Prospect and Spring Hills. They subdivided these tracts in anticipation of sales to other businessmen who commuted to Charlestown or Boston. In 1852, ten years after Somerville became a separate town, however, Prospect Hill was generally unoccupied. Only one new major street had been added since the construction of Medford Street in 1813. This was the circle around Prospect Hill laid out in 1842 consisting of Boston and Munroe Streets. The most substantial growth came after the Civil War:

“Mssrs. Hill, Walker, and Abbot and E.M. Bacon have recently purchased a large tract of land near Union Square, formerly the old Vinal Estate, which the owners have laid out into handsome house lots of convenient moderate size ... these are now being brought into the market and will prove very desirable for building sites. The location of this property is close to Boston and the facilities so great for reaching it, direct from the city, frequently throughout the day and evening that there can be no doubt that these house lots will come

into quick request. Through the center of this land a fine wide avenue has been laid out running from Union Square to Prospect Hill to be called Warren Avenue. The locality selected by these gentlemen enable them to offer some of the most eligible and sightly lots in the town for sale ... for the businessman in Boston no pleasanter or handier residence can be found...."

Somerville Journal, December 3, 1870

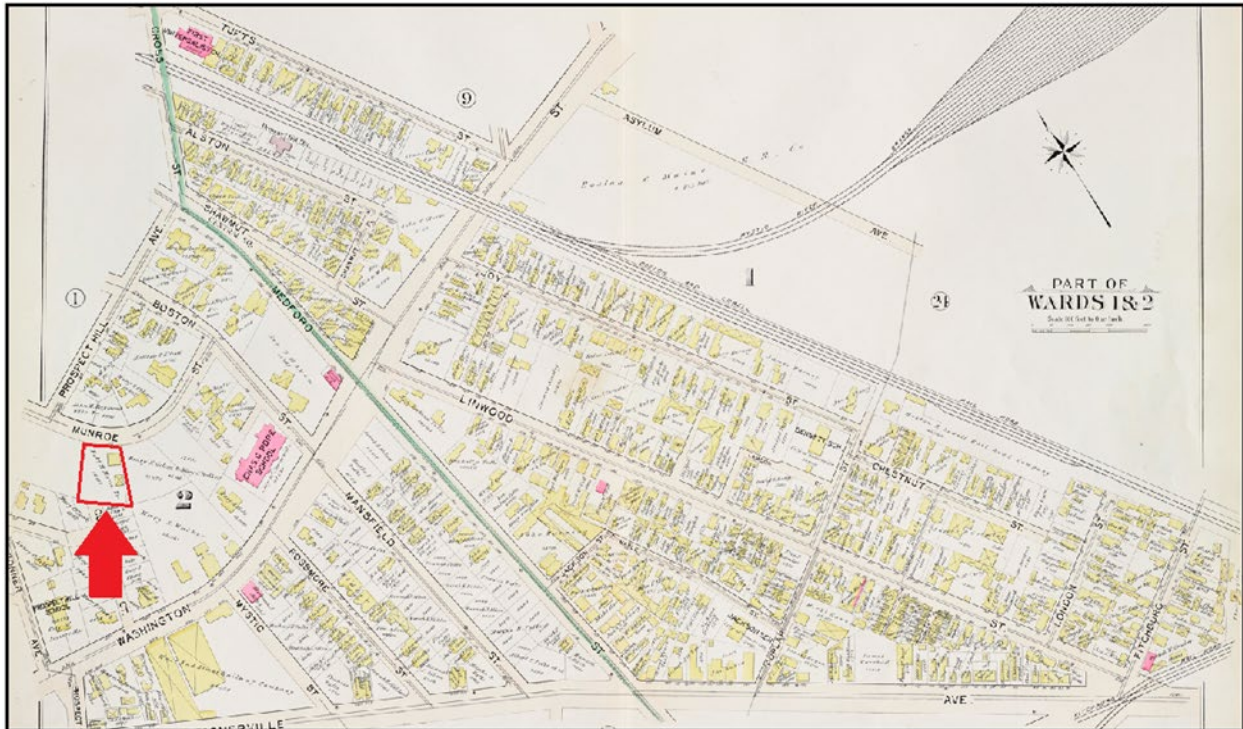


Above: 1874, Plate D, Hopkins Map, indicating the approximate location of 36 Munroe.

It was this expected property boom that was the catalyst for the development of the lot at 36 Munroe St. Importantly, prior to 1925 36 Munroe Street was listed as 22 Munroe Street. It is not until the 1925 Sanborn Map that we see the property listed as '36 Munroe St'. The 1874 Hopkins Map shows that the structure was already on site with another auxiliary structure to the rear. It also lists the owner as *A.M. Norcross*. Staff were unable to locate a person by this name living in Somerville during this time. We also were unable to locate any residents listed at the site in 1874. It is unclear if the records are just missing or if the building was vacant during this time. The 1874 Hopkins Map also shows that the lots along Munroe and Boston Streets have all been subdivided; however, 22 Munroe (now 36 Munroe) is one of the few that had been developed.

In 1895 the Bromley Map states that the owner of the lot was *Robert M Morse*. Staff was again unable to find records of this individual living within Somerville at this time. Nor does the record list anyone living on site in 1895.

The first known resident of 36 Munroe St was Mary Emma Green, who is listed in the City Directories as bedding there from 1896 to 1900. Between 1900 and 1905 multiple unrelated individuals are listed as residing at 36 Munroe. From the number of residents, it is likely that the property was run as a boarding house during this time. The use of the property as a boarding house coincides with the development evident on the 1895 Bromley and 1900 Sanborn Maps. There was a large population boom in East Somerville at this time which required subsequent housing.



Above: 1895 Bromley Map, Plate 8 indicating the approximate location of 382 36 Munroe.

In 1905, Thomas E Scanlan, an Irish immigrant, buys the property and moves in with his family; wife, Mary A, and children; Edward T, James C, Thomas F, Katherine M, Mary E, and Francis. Thomas E Scanlan owned a pump station for the Pennsylvania Oil Company in East Somerville, a business he would pass down to his son and his grandson after that. Sadly, Thomas' youngest son, Francis, died in a fire at that pump station at the age of 19.

BURNS FATAL TO FRANCIS SCANLAN

Gasoline Explodes at East Somerville

Francis V. Scanlan, aged 19, of 36 Munroe st. Somerville, died at the Somerville Hospital last night of burns sustained just before noon yesterday, when gasoline exploded in a pump house of the Pennsylvania Oil Company station at East Somerville.

The boy, whose father, Thomas E. Scanlan, owns the station, was in the building at the time of the explosion. He ran from the pump house to the office, where his father tried to extinguish his burning clothing. Another son, James, helped put out the flames.

Fire Chief S. M. Rich believes the explosion was caused by a spark from the motor in the pump house.

William Graves of Charlestown, an employe, was severely burned while trying to extinguish the flames.

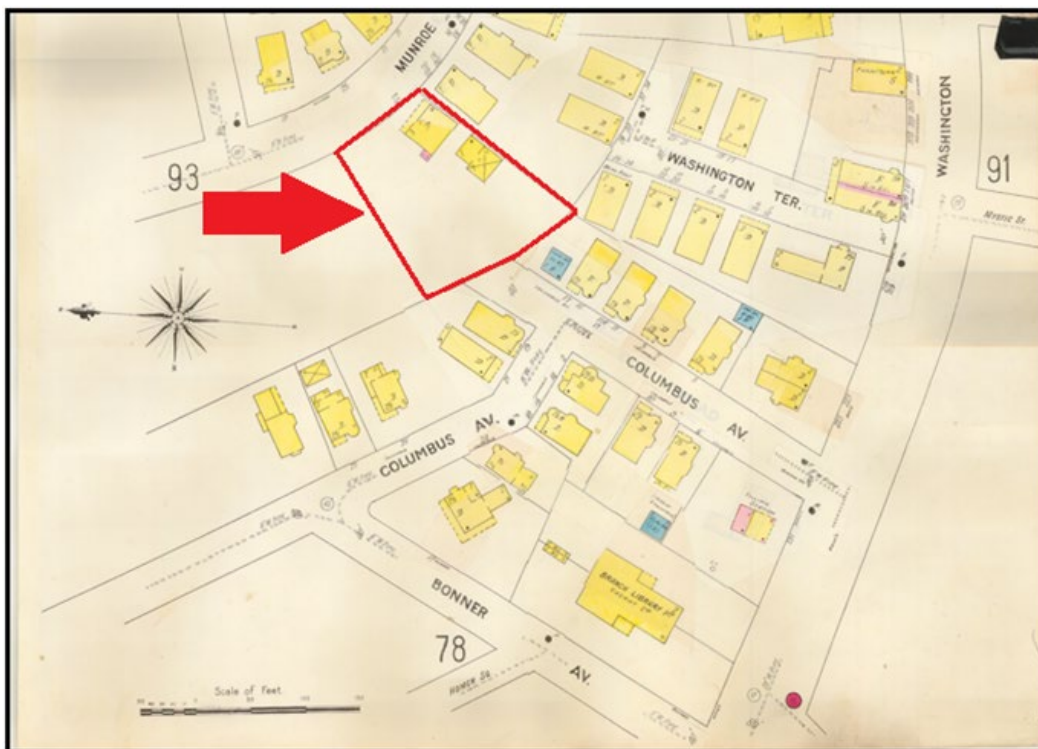
Scanlan was born in Somerville and was graduated from the Somerville High School in 1923. He was attending Boston College.

He leaves his parents, four brothers, Edward, Arthur, James and Thomas, and two sisters, Catherine and Mary Alice. The funeral will take place from St Joseph's Church Monday afternoon.

Right: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, August 13, 1927



Above: 1900 Sanborn Map, Sheet 92, specifying the location of 36 Munroe.



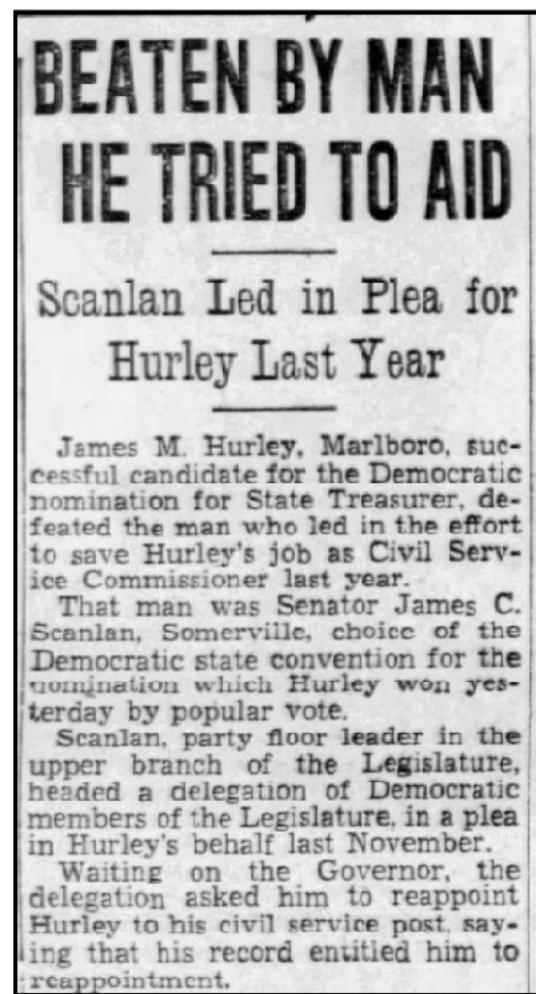
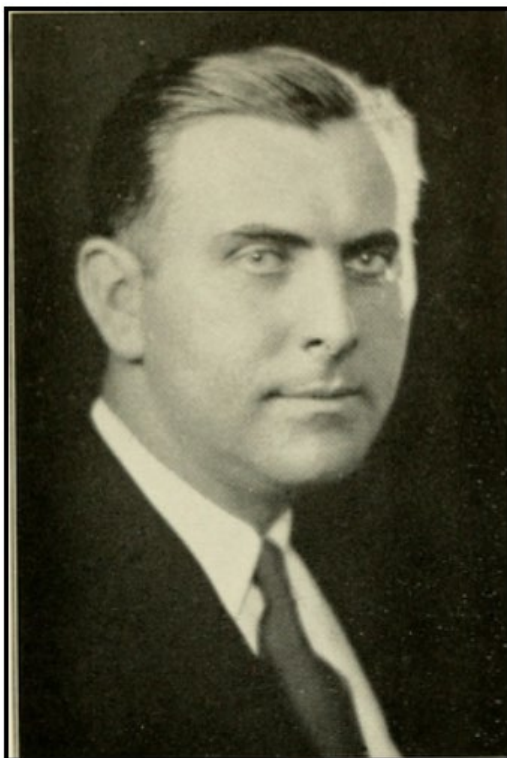
Above: 1925 Sanborn Map, Sheet 92, specifying the location of 36 Munroe.

The property is transferred on to Thomas' oldest son, James C Scanlan, who is listed as owning the property in the 1930 census. James then lives at the property with his wife, Mary W Scanlan, and their children; Mary A, James W, and Priscilla. During this time, James' parents continue to

live at the property but no longer own it. Thomas E Scanlan lives at the property until his death in 1939.

James C Scanlan, like his father, worked for the Pennsylvania Oil Co for a time. He was also very active in his community and local politics. He was elected to the Somerville School Committee from 1925 to 1930, before being elected to the Massachusetts Senate in 1931, where he served until 1936. During his time there he acted as the Democratic Party floor leader in the Senate. James was also part of multiple local organizations, such as the Elks, K. of C., Kiwanis, and the American Legion. These were charitable organizations. During the 1800s and early 1900s, Freemasonry, fraternal organizations, and women's charitable organizations in general, grew dramatically within the United States. This growth was a reaction to the lack of social services provided by the government. Masonic Lodges and fraternal organizations founded hospitals, orphanages, and homes for women and the elderly.

By 1940 James Scanlan moves to 222 Clifton St where he lives until his death in 1945. His mother and sister are listed as still living at 36 Munroe in the 1940 Census along with his cousin.



Above: Photo from

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/archive/6/62/20210226083853%211935_James_Scanlan_senator_Massachusetts.png

Right: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, Sept 16, 1936



Above: 1938-1959 Sanborn Map, Sheet 2, specifying the location of 36 Munroe

A list of all residents is provided below.

Name	Year(s) of Residency	Occupation	Relationship	Residency Type
Brittain, John	1902	Lawyer		Rms
Conlan, George T	1913-1915	Salesman		B
Damon, Ralph	1901-1902	Clerk, Auditor's Dept B & M		B
Davis, M.N.	1902	Electrician		B
Giles, R Thomas	1904	Plumber		B
Gilkey, Andrew	1901	Watchman		Bds
Green, Mary Emma	1896-1900	Compositor		Bds
Kimball, Mary E	1900-1902	Widow		H
Lamphear, Grace E	1900-1901	Kindergarten Teacher		H
North, Charles H	1900-1901	Produce		H
Pond, Robert W	1901-1904	Superintendent Sewerage at Arlington		B
Scanlan, Edward T	1905-1912	Bookkeeper	Son of Edward T Scanlan	H
Scanlan, Francis	1908-1927	Student	Son of Edward T Scanlan	Rms
Scanlan, James C	1905-1927	Student, Pennsylvania Oil Co, Senator	Husband to Mary E, Son of Thomas E Scanlan	Rms
Scanlan, Katherine	1905-1927	Teacher NJHS	Daughter of Mary A and Thomas E Scanlan	Res
Scanlan, Mary A	1905-1940	Teacher	Married to Thomas E Scanlan	H
Scanlan, Mary Alice	1927-1940		Daughter of Thomas E and Mary A Scanlan	B
Scanlan, Mary E	1926-1940		Wife of James C Scanlan	B
Scanlan, Patrick J	1905-1915	Carrier WSP in Cambridge	Dson of Thomas E and Mary A Scanlan	H
Scanlan, Priscilla	1929-1939		Daughter of James C and Mary E Scanlan	B
Scanlan, Thomas E	1905-1939	Fruit, Pennsylvania Oil Co	Married to Mary A Scanlan	H
Scanlan, Thomas F	1905-1924	Student, Wool	Son of Thomas E and Mary A Scanlan	Bds, Res
Snow, Harriet E	1901-1902	Widow		B
Tanner, Oscar H	1904	Machinist		Rms
Whipple, Francis B	1900	New England Ind Bureau		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.

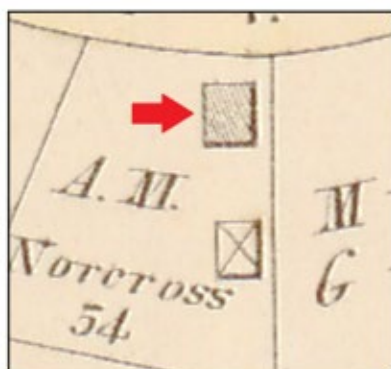
The National Park Service identifies historic integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance. A property should possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent or contain the values and qualities for which it is judged significant; therefore, the following is an identification and evaluation of these qualities and alterations as they affect the ability of the subject property to convey significance.

The Applicant stated the property was hit by lightning and subsequently doused by storm water and Firehose water on Aug 23, 2020. Since then, the property has stood boarded up and vacant with all utilities cut. The Applicant stated that there are two large holes in the roof which have been leaking over the last three years. The Applicant further claims that the water and fire damage caused significant mold growth, which further compromised the structure of the property and that they believe it unsafe to work on and that a full demolition would be the safer option. The photos below depict the current state of the interior.

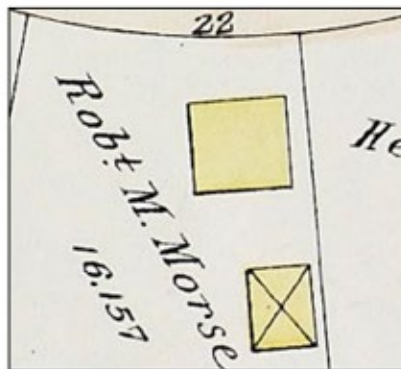




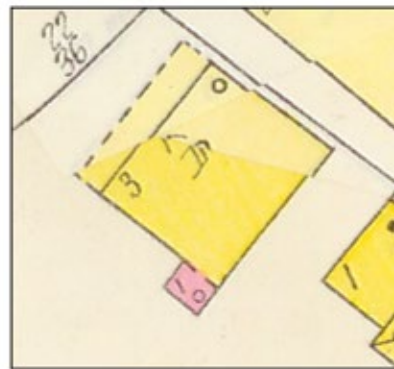
Comparing the historic map with satellite images of the current property we can determine the degree to which the structure has been altered.



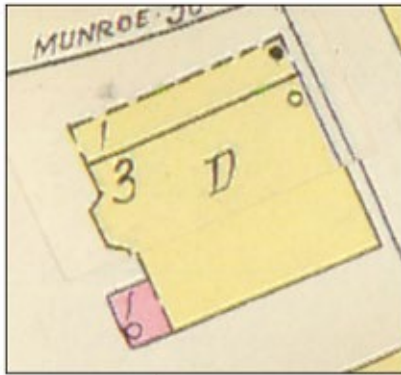
Above: Fig 1



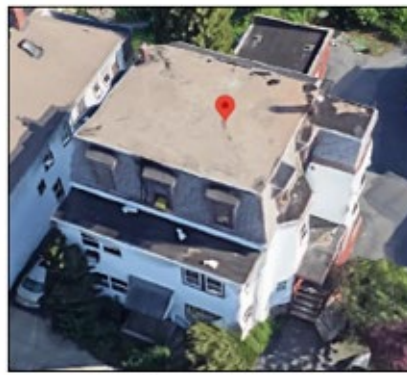
Above: Fig 2



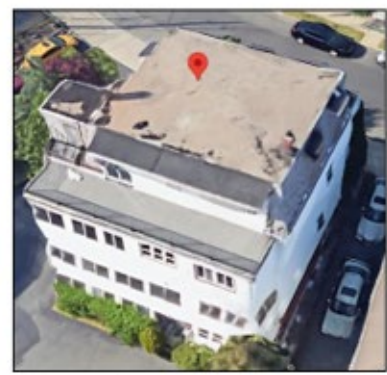
Above: Fig 3



Above: Fig 4



Above: Fig 5



Above: Fig 6

Fig 1: 1874 Hopkins Map, close-up of 36 Munroe St

- Rectangular structure
- Separate structure in rear, likely a barn or carriage house

Fig 2: 1895 Bromley Map, close-up of 36 Munroe St

- Rectangular structure
- Separate structure in rear, likely a barn or carriage house

Fig 3: 1900 Sanborn Map, close-up of 36 Munroe St

- Wood-frame, rectangular structure
- Three stories for main portion of the structure
- Porch that runs the width of the front elevation
- Brick one story section on left elevation towards the rear, likely a stoop or some form of access

Fig 4: 1938-1959 Sanborn Map, close-up of 36 Munroe St

- Bay has been added on the left elevation

Fig 5: 2024 Satellite Image of 36 Munroe St

- Enclosed, two story porch on front elevation with small portico entrance
- Dormers on all sides of mansard roof
- Ell on left elevation

Fig 6: 2024 Satellite Image of 36 Munroe St

- Three story rear addition that runs the length of the rear

1. **36 Munroe St**

The period of relevance for the property starts c.1874

- Location: The structure is likely in the original location and built on-site.
- Design: The primary structure is a 2 ³/₄ stories, wood framed, mansard roofed structure; recently added curved brick steps with concrete tread lead to a brick and concrete entrance portico with mid-to-late 20th century iron railings and columns; entryway is in a enclosed porch that was expanded to two stories; front elevation fenestration includes modern one-over-one, double-hung sash windows and six-over-one, double-hung sash windows; three dormers along mansard roof with windows; right elevation has two dormer windows along mansard roof; right elevation fenestration includes double-hung, one-over-one sash windows; there appears to be an entry towards the front of this elevation leading to the bottom floor; rear elevation shows modern addition with roof deck in rear and modern railings; rear fenestration includes horizontal sash windows, and one-over-one, double-

hung sash windows; rear entryway at ground floor with modern aluminum or wood doors; left elevation includes the bay depicted in the 1938-1959 Sanborn Map, but alterations have transformed the base to a covered entryway with brick and concrete steps and landing with mid-to-late 20th century iron railings; three-story recent addition next to this towards the rear; dormer on the mansard roof; fenestration for the left elevation includes horizontal sash windows, casement windows, and one-over-one, double-hung sash windows.

- c. Materials: Vinyl clapboard; aluminum or vinyl windows; wood or aluminum doors; concrete and brick porch steps; metal railing; metal railings on rear deck; wood porch; brick foundation
- d. Alterations: Front porch was enclosed and increased to two-stories; replacement windows and doors, concrete and brick stairs and portico on front elevation, addition on the rear; addition on the left elevation; and conversion of base of the bay to an entryway.
- e. Evaluation of Integrity of 36 Munroe St: 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. Large scale alterations have occurred to this structure that obscure the original form and architectural details; the original massing minimally resembles the original massing.

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 Munroe St meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 36 Munroe St 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 Munroe St meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 36 Munroe St 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 Munroe St is or is not “historically significant”.