



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

Thomas Galligani
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 21 Avon Street

Case: HP25-000080 & HP25-000081

Applicant: Law Office of Michael LaRosa LLC-
Michael LaRosa

Owner: Joseph A. Ferro, Trustee of 21 Avon
Street Realty Trust

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



Front Elevation of the Home & Barn at 21 Avon St.

HPC Meeting Date: November 18th, 2025

The purpose of this 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. IMAGES OF PROPERTY / AREA

Context Map:

Properties marked with ★ are a similar architectural style & form as the subject property.



*Italianate
Style:*
27 Avon St.

*Subject
Property:*
21 Avon St.

Somerville
City Hall

*Italianate
Style:*
5 Avon St.

Somerville
High School

Photos of the subject property:



Above: Front elevation



Above: Rear elevation



Above: Front/ right elevation

Details:



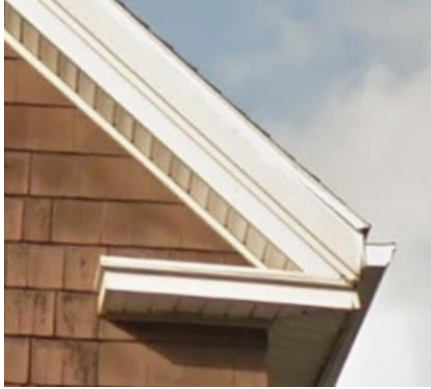
Above: ~~Spindles~~, Spindles dentals, cornice molding above front porch



Above: Tuscan column on left side of front porch



Above: 2 photos of the Tuscan column on right side of front porch



Above: Boxed cornice on eave of 21 Avon House



Above: Boxed cornice on eave of 21 Avon Barn

The images below are of neighboring properties and are provided for comparison. These structures were built during the same time period as the subject property and are in the same architectural style. These structures are of the Italianate style (front-facing gabled roofs, moderate to widely overhanging eaves boxed without brackets, single-story entry porches, bay windows). These front-facing gabled, Italianate dwellings are common throughout the neighborhood. A majority of these structures were present by the time of the 1874 Hopkins map, shown later in this memo.



Above: 5 Avon St.



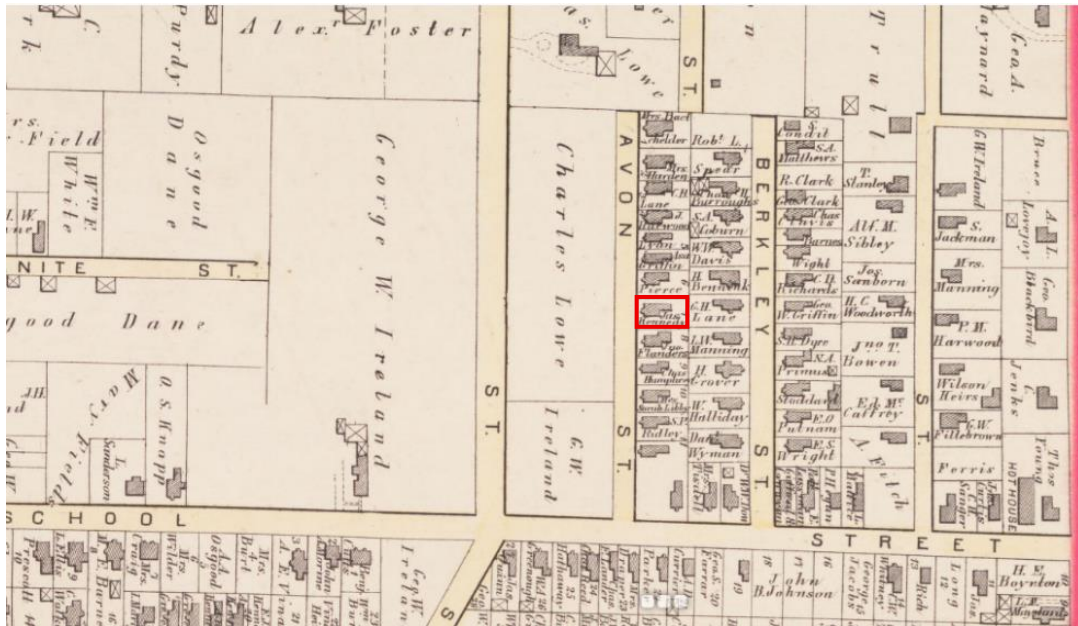
Above: 27 Avon St.

Below are other neighboring properties of a similar style to the subject property, but with heavily altered facades. Few homes on Avon Street have their original façade form or Italianate details. Many have infilled porches, replaced materials, and front additions.



Above: 41 to 51 Avon St.

II. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



Above: 1874 Hopkins Map of 21 Avon St.

Historical Context:

21 Avon Street is a residential structure constructed between 1870 and 1874. The barn at the rear of the property was built after the home between 1884 and 1895. The subject property is located in the Spring Hill Neighborhood, west of Somerville High School and Somerville City Hall.

21 Avon Street is one of many Italianate style homes, predominately built between 1840 to 1885, in the neighborhood. The front-gabled rectangular form was popularized by the Greek Revival style between 1825 and 1860. Front-gabled roof, Italianate dwellings are about 10% of surviving examples of the Italianate style. This style became common on narrow lots in dense residential areas and is an integral part of Somerville's residential streetscapes.

Following Somerville being incorporated as a city in 1872, dense residential neighborhoods began developing throughout the city. In the mid to late-1800s, Spring Hill went from largely being open pasture and farmland, to developing residential neighborhoods, as shown in the above referenced 1874 Hopkins Map.

According to the 1884 Hopkins map, the area to the east of the subject property began to expand residential development, and the area to the west of the subject property had been subdivided into smaller lots for future residential development. By this time, the amount of farmland had reduced significantly to make way for dense residential development and the growing city.



Above: 1884 Hopkins Map of 21 Avon St.

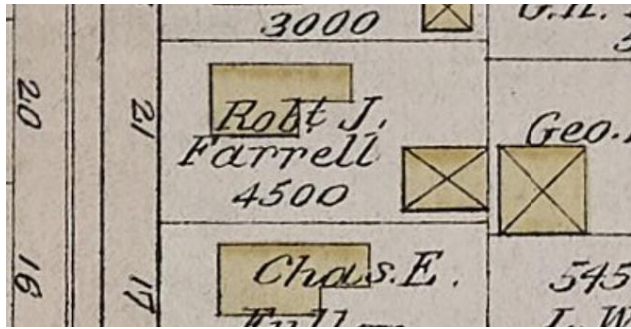
The 1884 Hopkins map shows the presence of several barns, carriage houses, and stables in the neighborhood. The barn at 21 Avon was built sometime between 1885 and 1895, according to historic maps. This barn was likely built by John Kennedy, an early resident and owner of the property. John Kennedy was born in 1834 in Maine. He was married to Eliza A. Kennedy, a housekeeper, who was born in Maine in 1830.

According to the *American Civil War Research Database*, John Kennedy was enlisted as a Private in the Union army on August 12th, 1862, during the Civil War. He was imprisoned on August 19, 1864, in Virginia. Kennedy remained a Prisoner of War until February 22nd, 1865. At one point during his service, he was promoted to Sergeant and his enlistment ended May 15, 1865. He was a member of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), a fraternal organization for Union Civil War veterans, from 1866 to 1947.

Kennedy utilized the barn at 21 Avon St. for his black smithing, heel making, and carriage smithing business. John and Eliza Kennedy lived at 21 Avon Street from 1880 to 1894, according to Federal Census and Somerville City Directory records.

Below: 1890 Somerville City Directory

Kennedy John, heel maker, h. 21 Avon
Kennedy John, laborer, Am. Tube Works, h. 128 Beacon
Kennedy John, molder, h. Franklin ave.
KENNEDY JOHN, plasterer, rear 306 Somerville
ave., h. 31 Church (see p. 680)



Above: 1895 Hopkins Map of 21 Avon St.

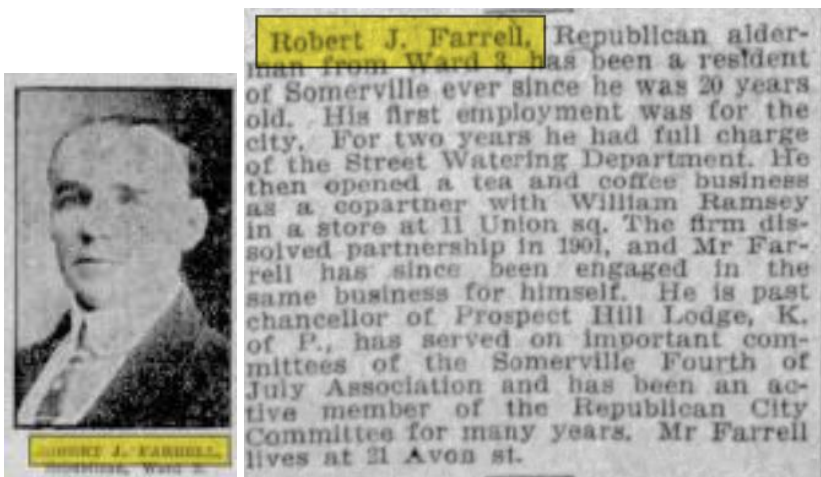
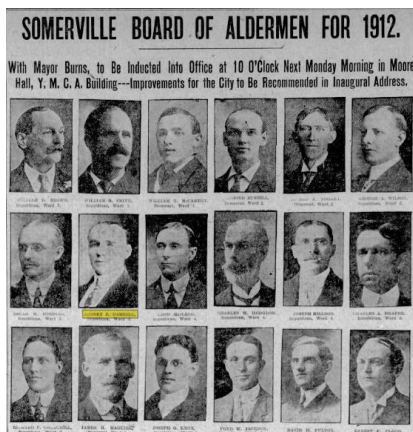
Robert J. Farrell's was the owner of 21 Avon St. beginning in 1895. Robert J. Farrell immigrated in 1886 from Northern Ireland and worked as a tea dealer, according to the 1900 Federal Census. He lived at 21 Avon St. with his wife, Susan Farrell, and their three children: Ellen E. Farrell, Robert W. Farrell, Florence M. Farrell, and their servant Cassie Dunlop. According to the 1910 Census Edward D. Farrell, a family member who immigrated from Ireland in 1904, was a boarder at 21 Avon living with the family.

Line	Name	Relationship	Age	Sex	Color	Birthplace	Married	Single	Widowed	Divorced	Married	Single	Widowed	Divorced
13	Robert J. Farrell	Head	40	M	Irish									
14	Susan Farrell	Wife	37	F	Irish									
15	Ellen E. Farrell	Daughter	17	F	Irish									
16	Robert W. Farrell	Son	15	M	Irish									
17	Florence M. Farrell	Daughter	9	F	Irish									
18	Edward D. Farrell	Boarder	35	M	Irish									

Above: 1900 Federal Census

Robert J. Farrell was a business owner and a Ward 3 Alderman in Somerville. He owned a tea and coffee business at 11 Union Square, was the chancellor of the Prospect Hill Lodge, was a member of the Somerville Fourth of July Association, and a member of the Republican City Committee.

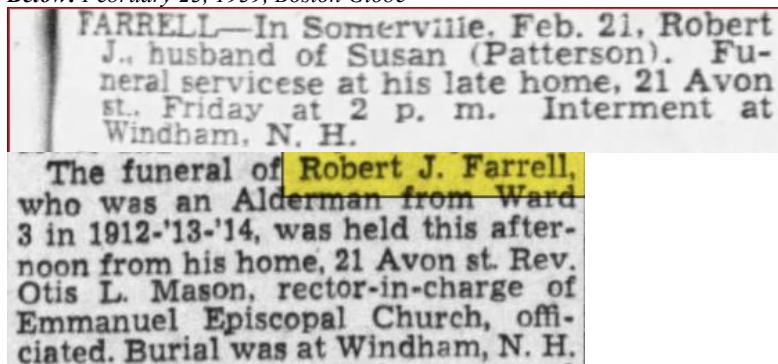
Below: December 29, 1911, Boston Globe



According to census data, Susan Farrell, Robert J. Farrell, and Robert W. Farrell were living at 21 Avon in 1920. Ellen and Florence Farrell had married and moved out of the home. As of 1920, Robert J. Farrell's occupation is listed as a business owner in the tea and coffee industry, and Robert W. Farrell's occupation is listed as an inspector for a rubber corporation.

By 1930, only Susan and Robert J. Farrell are the only documented residents of 21 Avon St. and the value of the home is listed as \$9,000. Robert J. Farrell died in 1939 and passed the home down to his son, Robert W. Farrell.

Below: February 23, 1939, Boston Globe



In the 1940 Census, Robert W. Farrell was listed as the owner of the home, and the home value is listed at \$2350, indicating effects of the Great Depression. At this time, Farrell's household at 21 Avon St. included his Mother Susan Farrell, his wife, Mildred M. Farrell, and their two daughters Mildred E. Farrell and Ruth M Farrell. In 1940, Robert Farrell's listed occupation was listed as being self employed as a gas station attendant.

Members of the Farrell family were residents/owners at 21 Avon St from approximately 1895 to 1984. According to Census data, deed research, and city directories, 21 Avon St. was owned and/or occupied by members of the Farrell family for almost 100 years.

Name	Residency Year(s)	Occupation	Relationship	Type
John Kennedy	1874 – 1895	Blacksmith	Head of Household	Owner
Eliza A. Kennedy	1874-1895	Housekeeper	Wife/ Head of Household	Owner
Susan Farrell	1895-1944	None	Wife/ Head of Household	Owner
Robert J. Farrell	1895- 1939	Tea Dealer	Head of Household	Owner
Cassie Dunlop	1900- unknown	Servant	Employee	Servant
Ellen E. Farrell	1895-1920	child	Daughter	N/A
Florence M Farrell	1895-1920	child	Daughter	N/A
Edward D. Farrell	1904- 1910	Carver	Relative	Boarder
Robert W. Farrell	1895- 1965	Foreman for a rubber corp.	Son/ Head of Household	Renter
Mildred M. Farrell	1930- 1978	Housekeeper	Wife/ Head of Household	Renter
Mildred E. Farrell	Owner 1978-1984 Resident on and off :1930-1984	N/A	Daughter/ Head of Household	Owner
Ruth M. Farrell	Owner 1978-1984 Resident on and off :1930-1984	N/A	Daughter/ Head of household	Owner

The subject property was passed from Mildred M. Farrell to her daughters Mildred E. Farrell and Ruth M. Farrell. They owned the property until it was sold in 1984.

III. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

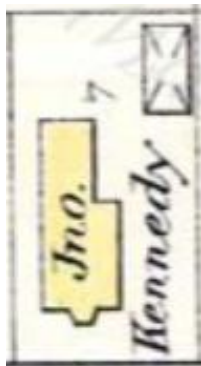
Please see the section below which discusses location, design, materials and any alterations as the same information would be written here, just in longer form.

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.

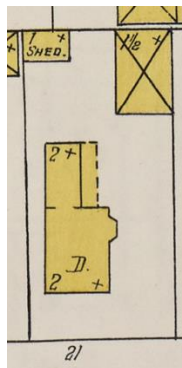
Comparing the historic map with satellite images of the current property we can determine the degree to which the structure has been altered.



Above: 1874 Hopkins



Above: 1884 Hopkins



Above: 1900 Sandborn



Above: 2024 Aerial

1874 Hopkins Map

- Original footprint of the structure.

1884 Hopkins Map

- Barn shown in rear of the property.

1900 Sandborn Fire Insurance Map

- Addition to the right-rear.

Satellite image of the property

- 1900 addition clear

21 Avon Street (House)

The period of relevance for the subject property starts between 1870 and 1874. The house is an Italianate, 2 ½-story, front-gabled roof structure, with shingled siding and an asymmetrical facade.

a. Location: The house is in its original location and was likely built on-site.

Design: 21 Avon Street is an Italianate style, 2 ½-story gable-fronted structure with one subservient rear addition and a porch along the first floor of the front façade. Main massing presents a heavy eave with minor irregularities and projections.

Front Elevation

First Story:

- front porch with hipped roof, cornice with dental molding and spindrals
- Tuscan columns on either sides of front porch
- bay window on right side and 2 front doors on the left

Second Story:

- three fixed double-paned windows
- wide eave overhang, boxed without brackets
- front gabled roof with a steep pitch

Right Elevation

First Story:

- asymmetrical
- bay window; double hung windows
- rear addition with double-hung windows

Second Story:

- bay window with gabled roof dormer
- double hung windows
- wide eave overhang

Left Elevation

First Story:

- one double-hung window
- shed roof on first floor-portion of protruding addition

Second Story:

- one double-hung window
- 1-panel fixed picture window
- rear addition protrudes out with a shed-style dormer
- wide eave overhang

Rear Elevation

First Story:

- horizontal sliding window on right side
- cellar access with a shed roof
- shed roof beneath second-story porch above addition

Second Story:

- wide eave overhang, boxed without brackets
- second-story porch on left side of addition

b. Materials:

- *Main massing:* Wood Shingle siding over wood frame; wooden shingles on eaves; wood front doors; wood spindlers and dental molding; vinyl/aluminum windows; asphalt shingles on roof; brick and cement foundation

c. Alterations: There has been a 2 two-story addition, constructed prior to 1900. A small rear porch was added to the second story of that addition. Doors and windows appear to have been replaced. The shingles appear to have been replaced or repaired. Portions of the Tuscan columns supporting the first story front porch have been partially covered with wood and shingles. It is likely porch balusters have been covered/ replaced by this similar material mimicking the siding/ shingles that cover the structure.

21 Avon Street (Barn)

The period of relevance for the barn on the subject property starts between 1884 and 1895. The barn is a front-gabled roof structure, an asymmetrical façade, and vertical wood siding.

a. Location: The barn is in its original location and was likely built on-site.

Design: The barn at 21 Avon Street is a front gabled roof structure, with a single picture window on the front, and a moderate eave overhang, boxed without brackets.

b. Materials:

Main massing: Vertical wood siding; vinyl/aluminum window; asphalt shingles on roof; cement foundation

c. Alterations:

A former carriage/ automobile entrance on the façade has been covered and exterior materials have likely been altered several times. Windows/doors have likely been replaced.

Evaluation of Integrity of 21 Avon 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 and later forms and massing. While some alterations have occurred to this structure it retains a high degree of integrity of original and later architectural elements. The barn at the property also retains its original form and massing but does not possess a high degree of integrity of original and later architectural elements.

IV. 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

- . The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the PRINCIPAL STRUCTURE at 21 Avon Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
- . The HPC must specifically state why the PRINCIPAL STRUCTURE at 21 Avon Street does or does not meet the threshold for historic significance under finding "A".

Accessory Structure (barn)

- . The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the ACCESSORY STRUCTURE at 21 Avon Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
- . The HPC must specifically state why the ACCESSORY STRUCTURE at 21 Avon 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 PRINCIPAL STRUCTURE at 21 Avon Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the PRINCIPAL STRUCTURE at 21 Avon Street does 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.

Accessory Structure (Barn)

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the ACCESSORY STRUCTURE at 21 Avon Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the ACCESSORY STRUCTURE at 21 Avon Street does 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.

V. VOTE

1. When bringing the matter to a vote, the HPC must include the reasons why the PRINCIPAL STRUCTURE at 21 Avon Street is or is not "historically significant".
2. When bringing the matter to a vote, the HPC must include the reasons why the ACCESSORY STRUCTURE at 21 Avon Street is or is not "historically significant".