



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

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 54 Highland Avenue

Case: HP26-000015

Applicant: Niranjn Gawli

Owner: 54 Highland Ave LLC.

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

HPC Meeting Date: May 5th, 2026

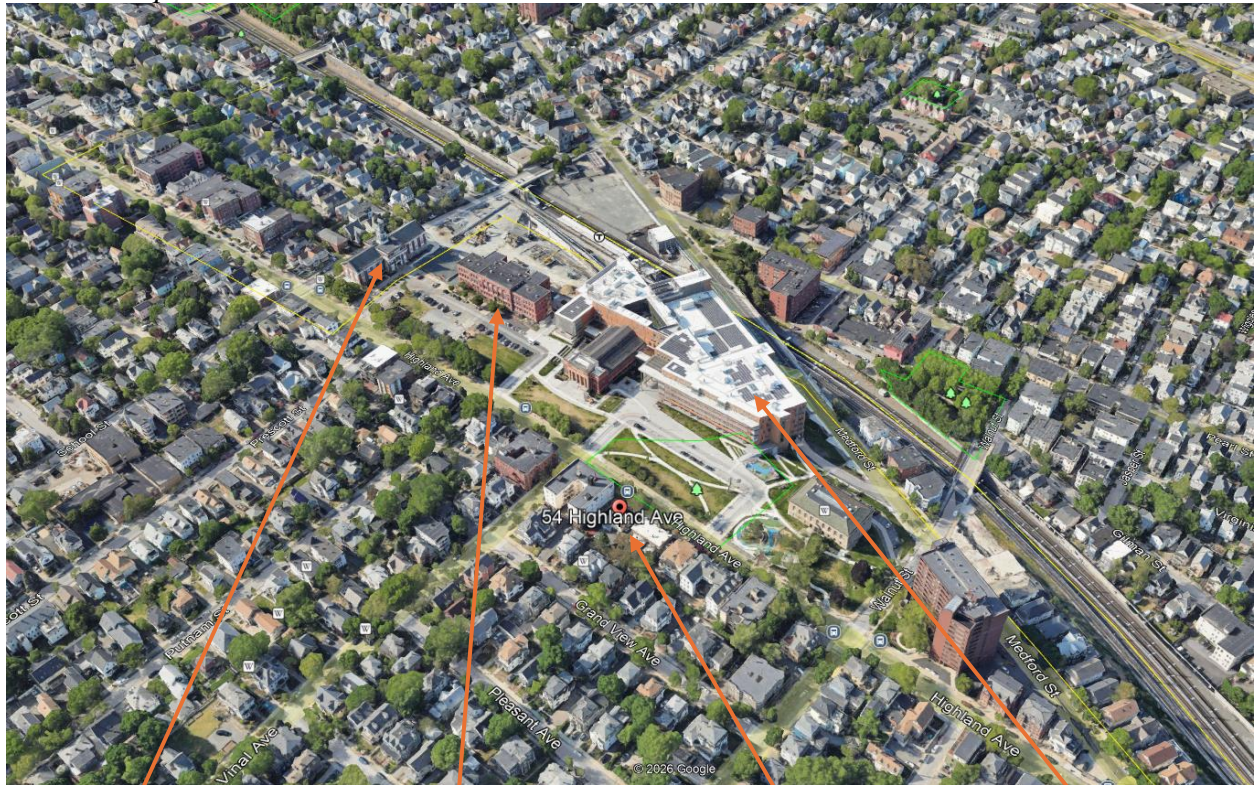


Front Elevation of 54 Highland Ave

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:



Somerville City Hall

Old Somerville High School Building

*Subject Property:
54 Highland Ave*

Somerville Highschool

Photos of the Subject Property:



Front Elevation of 54 Highland Ave



Left Side Elevation of 54 Highland Ave



Right side Elevation of 54 Highland Ave



Rear Elevation of 54 Highland Ave

II. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Historical Context:



1938 Sandborn Fire Insurance Map

54 Highland Avenue is a single-family Colonial Revival home in the Central Hill neighborhood of Somerville and was built between 1900 and 1938. This style was popularized in Massachusetts from 1915 to 1935. This structure is on a larger lot than neighboring properties and now a minority compared to denser, multifamily forms found in Somerville. For Highland Avenue specifically, houses like this represent a transitional period between Somerville’s Victorian expansion and its later urban densification.

Following Somerville being incorporated as a city in 1872, railroads expanded, prompting dense development throughout Somerville. Central Hill was chosen as the town’s civic center as the site of the town’s first public park, Central Hill Park and the 1852 Greek Revival High School. 54 Highland is directly across Highland Avenue from this City’s civic center near Somerville High School and City Hall.

The first time the structure at 54 Highland Avenue is shown on historic maps is on the 1938 Sandborn Fire Insurance Map shown above.

Prior to the home’s construction, Louis H. W. Vaupel et. Ux., sold the property to Sullivan Niles, J. Harris Niles and Louville V. Niles according to a deed dated October 13, 1903. The property was then released by said Sullivan Niles and Louville V. Niles to J. Harris Niles according to a deed dated September 1, 1907. The property was then sold to Joseph Goodman and Nathaniel Golden. In 1915, Joseph Goodman married Rose Aleda Golden.

According to the 1930 Federal Census, Joseph Goodman was a Jewish immigrant born in Lithuania in 1885. Goodman immigrated to the United States in 1900 and worked in real estate. 54 Highland was likely purchased by Goodman as an investment property. Goodman and his family are never listed in census data as residents of 54 Highland Avenue.



Above: September 15, 1915, Boston Globe marriage announcement for Joseph Goodman and Rose Aleda Golden

Joseph Goodman and Nathaniel Golden created the Raylee Trust in 1932, which in part included the property at 54 Highland Avenue. Nathaniel Golden, business partner and in-law of Joseph Goodman, was a lawyer who graduated from Harvard Law School in 1919. The Declaration of Trust stated that in the occurrence that the Trustees die, the property would be passed to Joseph Goodman’s wife, Rose G. Goodman. Once both Joseph Goodman and Rose Goodman were both deceased, the trust would be the property of their sons Theodore, Lee, and Ray Goodman.

Lee Goodman WWII draft card

The Goodmans are likely who are responsible for the construction of the building at 54 Highland Avenue and the property stayed in the family and their trust from 1907 to 1949.

In 1949, Frank Ciampa purchased the property from the Trustees of the Raylee Trust under Declaration of Trust dated June 20, 1932. The property belonged to the Ciampa family for over 40 years until it was sold in 1991.

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.

54 Highland Avenue

The period of relevance for the subject property starts between 1900 and 1938. The building is a 2-story, residential building, with Colonial and Georgian Revival style features.

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

Design: 54 Highland Avenue is a Colonial/ Georgian Revival style structure with a side gabled roof with a shallow pitch and symmetrical façade.

Front Elevation

First Story:

- Raised foundation
- Projecting centered main entranceway with a semi-circular fanlight (lunette window) above the door
- Classical frontispiece surround with a pedimented gable hood, simple pilaster trim
- Shuttered, symmetrical, multi-pane windows with slight bay projection

Second Story:

- Two evenly spaced, wide multi-sash windows, double hung, with shutters
- Minimal cornice projection
- Boxed eave with slight overhang
- Dental detailing beneath projecting side cross- gable

Right Elevation

First Story:

- Raised foundation
- Two evenly spaced rectangular, double hung sash windows

Second Story:

- Centered upper gable double-hung sash window
- Projecting side cross- gable
- Boxed eaves
- Moderate roof pitch

Left Elevation

First Story:

- Secondary entranceway
- Raised foundation
- Small porch with shed-style roof, slender square posts, small stoop, and balustrade railing
- Small rectangular double-hung window near side entrance with shutters

Second Story:

- Small rectangular double-hung window centered beneath eave
- Projecting side cross-gable
- Boxed eaves
- Moderate roof pitch

Rear Elevation

First Story:

- Raised foundation
- Porch on left side with sliding glass door entrance
- Asymmetrical fenestration
- Basement window and entrance

Second Story:

- Large, grouped window assembly
- Broad multi-pane sash windows
- Minimal cornice projection
- Boxed eave with slight overhang

b. Materials:

Main massing: Wood clapboard or shingle siding; decorative wood shutters; asphalt shingles on roof; wood front door; vinyl or aluminum sash windows; concrete foundation; wood balusters and porch construction

c. Alterations:

Exterior cladding and shingles were likely repaired over time. All windows appear to have been replaced with vinyl or aluminum sash windows.

Evaluation of Integrity of 54 Highland Avenue:

Based on the observations of the building and a study of the historic maps, it is Staff's position that the building retains the integrity of its forms, massing, architectural detail, and materials.

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.

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the PRINCIPAL STRUCTURE at 54 Highland Ave meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the PRINCIPAL STRUCTURE at 54 Highland Ave 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 PRINCIPAL STRUCTURE at 54 Highland Ave meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the PRINCIPAL STRUCTURE at 54 Highland Ave 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 54 Highland Avenue is or is not "historically significant".