



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

TOM GALLIGANI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 60 Medford

Case: HP26-000037

Applicant: Paul O'Connell- Well Built Construction Inc.

Owner: P&P Carroll Realty Trust

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

HPC Meeting Date: July 21, 2026

Top: Front elevation

Bottom, left: Left elevation

Bottom, middle: Rear elevation

Bottom, right: Right elevation



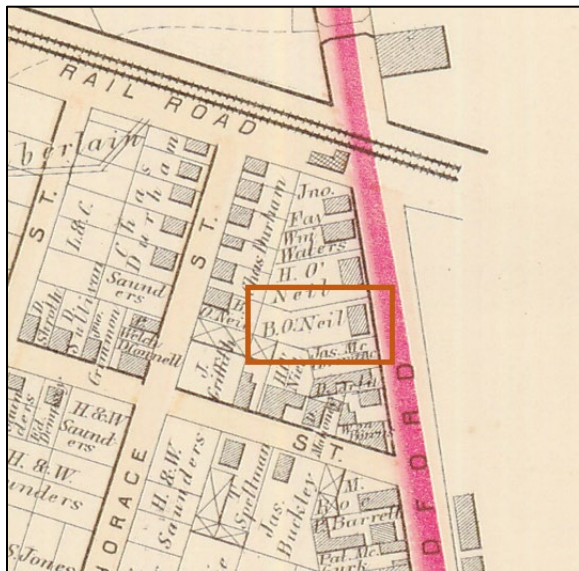
The purpose of a staff report is to provide the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) with additional information and professional assessments regarding properties that are proposed for demolition. These assessments are based on the criteria allowed for consideration by the HPC in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (DRO). A Staff Report is not a determination/decision, nor does it constitute authorization in any form.

I. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

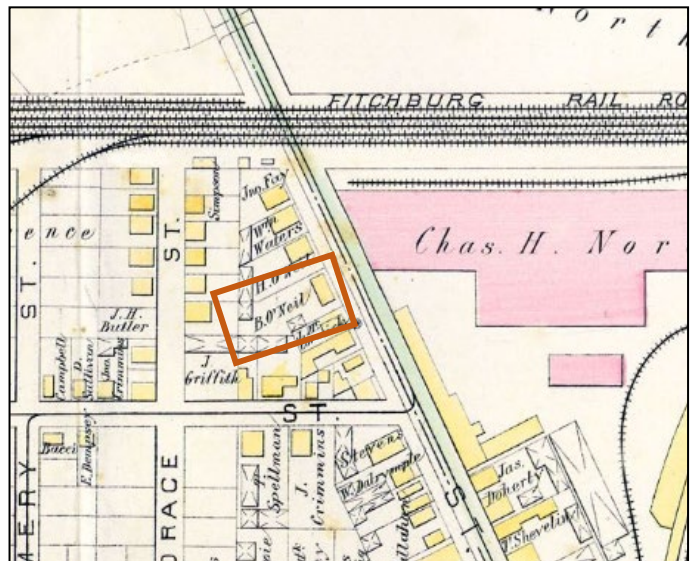
Historical Context: 60 Medford Street is one-story commercial-use building located along Medford Street on the border between the Cobble Hill and Inner Belt neighborhoods.

This area of Somerville between the Cobble Hill and Inner Belt neighborhoods has historically been an industrial zone of Somerville. During the late 1800s a key industry in Somerville was meatpacking, with Somerville as the third largest slaughtering city in the United States by 1898. In “Beyond the Neck”, the housing built in this area in the late 1800s was described as the “poor class of houses” (Zellie, 1982).

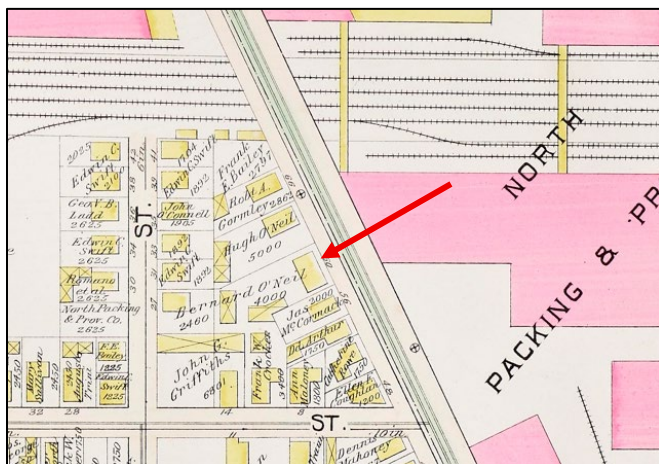
This parcel first appears on the 1874 Hopkins maps, with a residential building owned by B. O’Neil. The 1884 Hopkins map presents the same residential building along the Medford frontage and includes the addition of two barn/stable buildings added onto the parcel. The 1895 Bromley map shows the full name of the owner as Bernard O’Neil and shows the same residential building with the two barn/stable buildings in the rear.



1874 Hopkins



1884 Hopkins



1895 Bromley

Bernard O'Neil immigrated to the United States from Ireland in 1853. Sometime between his arrival and the appearance of the property on the 1874 Hopkins Map, he and his family settled at 60 Medford Street. The O'Neil family's immigration reflects the broader pattern of Irish migration to the Boston area during the mid 19th century, largely driven by the Irish Potato Famine.

By the early 20th century, the residential building at 60 Medford Street appears to have been operating as a boarding house that primarily housed Italian immigrants. Starting in the 1860s, there was a large influx of Italian immigrants that settled in the Boston area. As a result, tenement housing was a common use of residential buildings during the early 1900s to support the thousands of working-class Italian immigrants that moved to Massachusetts. Newspaper accounts provide evidence of this use at 60 Medford, including a 1906 article describing a stabbing at the property and a 1914 article reporting a mysterious explosion at the boarding house. The 1914 article estimated the damage to the residential building at approximately \$2,000 (roughly \$66,000 in present day). According to the 1914 article Bernard O'Neil was still the owner of this parcel at the time.

Percoco's Condition is Precarious.

Mysterious Stabbing Affair in Somerville.

Police Looking for One Pennacchio.

A serious stabbing affair surrounded by somewhat mysterious circumstances occurred shortly after 6 last evening in an Italian boarding house, 60 Medford st., Somerville, in which the victim was Cesare Percoco, 24 years old, and the alleged assailant Salvatore Pennacchio, aged 35.

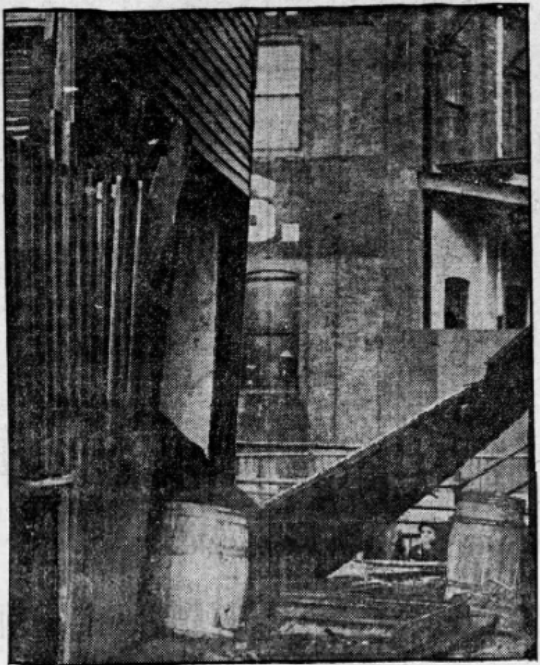
Percoco is at the Cambridge relief hospital in a precarious condition, suffering from a knife wound over the heart which penetrated the left lung, several thrusts around the right shoulder and neck and many cuts in the head and face. Pennacchio is at large.

Owing to the victim's weakened condition when the police attempted to interview him at his bedside in the hospital it was impossible to obtain details of the stabbing.

The Boston Globe- March 5, 1906

HOUSE WRECKED BY GAS.

Mysterious Somerville Explosion Burns Lodger's Face.



RESULT OF GAS EXPLOSION IN TENEMENT HOUSE IN SOMERVILLE.

An explosion of gas in a vacant tenement of a four-family wooden house of two and a half stories at 58 and 60 Medford st., Somerville, shortly after 2 o'clock yesterday afternoon, hurled a man several feet to the street, blew out the rear wall and part of a side wall, and so badly wrecked the building that the three other tenements were made uninhabitable.

Reports that the explosion was the work of enemies of some of the 15 men who lodged in the three occupied tenements all of whom are employed by the North Packing & Provision Company, greatly excited people living in the vicinity.

No one was in the house, but at the moment of the explosion Vincenzo Lescese, a lodger at 58, was about to enter the front door. The explosion blew him to the middle of the street and the flames burned off his eyebrows and a portion of his hair and scorched his face and throat. He was sent to the hospital.

The smoke gave rise to the belief that the house was burning and an alarm was sent from box 21.

The firemen found a long tongue of flame shooting from the end of a gas pipe in the kitchen of the vacant tenement.

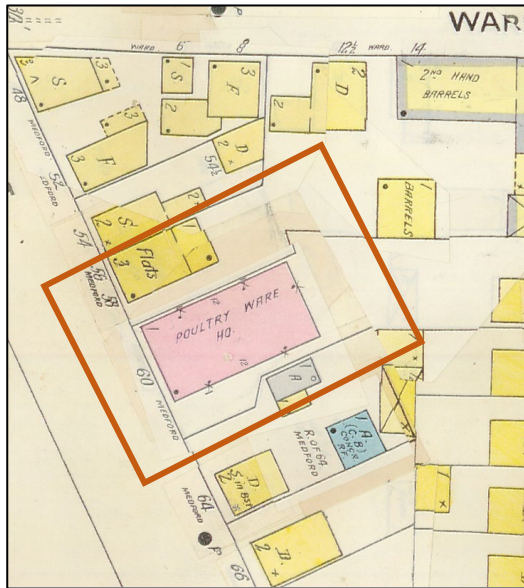
Besides demolishing parts of the walls, sections were rent from beams and joists on the second floor. Every window in the house was shattered and plastering was torn from ceilings and interior walls in all the rooms. Windows in other houses were wrecked.

Only men occupied the house, which is owned by Bernard O'Neil. Joseph Fusco rented the tenement at number 58, over the vacant one, and the other tenements were rented by Baptiste Pennacchio and Vincenzo Ventura.

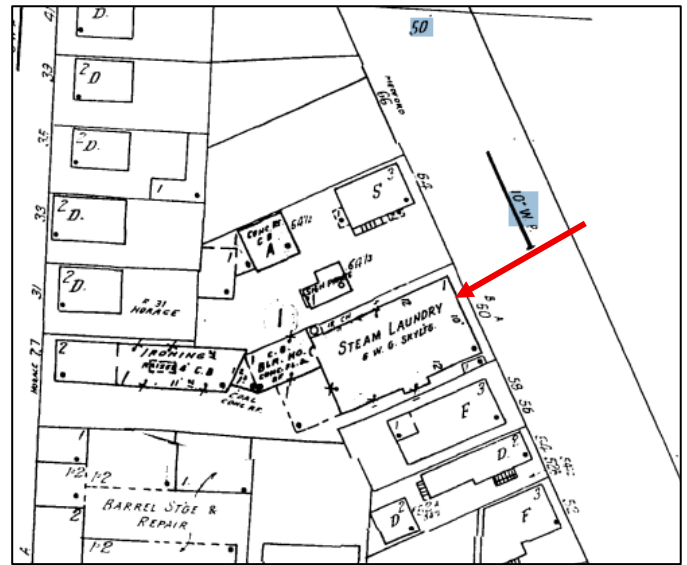
Fire Chief Rich, Lieut. Carter and patrolman Cameron were told that 15 minutes before the explosion neighbors saw a strange man leaving the house, carrying a wrench. Although the house is piped for gas none of the tenements is equipped with gas fixtures. It is believed someone unscrewed the cap on the pipe in the kitchen of the vacant tenement and allowing the house to fill with gas. How the gas was ignited is not known.

The property damage is estimated at \$200. All the tenants were compelled to move out their effects.

The Boston Globe- February 3, 1914



1925 Sanborn



1933 Sanborn

Evidence suggests that the current commercial building that replaced the residential building on the parcel may have been constructed after the 1914 explosion. Although the Somerville Assessor's database lists the building construction date as 1900, assessor records often are imprecise. This plus the 1914 newspaper article that identifies the structure at 60 Medford as a residential building further indicates that the present commercial building was likely built sometime after 1914. Further support for this interpretation comes from the 1925 Sanborn maps which identify a "poultry ware ho[use]" on the parcel. The 1933 Sanborn maps label the commercial building use as "steam laundry" at the site along with a rear concrete addition. It is unclear who the owner of the parcel was during this time period.

In the early 1900s, this area of the Cobble Hill neighborhood continued to industrialize, as many commercial buildings replaced residential buildings as seen at 60 Medford Street. By the late 19th century, Cobble Hill itself had been leveled to accommodate the expanding industrial hub of Somerville, with much of the land converted to railyards, slaughterhouses, and other large-scale industrial uses. The building's use as a poultry warehouse and steam laundry reflects this broader industrial transformation, which was heavily shaped by the meat packing industry, railroad expansion, and the working-class growth. This parcel of land would likely have been heavily impacted as part of the proposed 1948 Inner Belt Expressway that ultimately was never built but contributed to the naming of the "Inner Belt" neighborhood in Somerville.

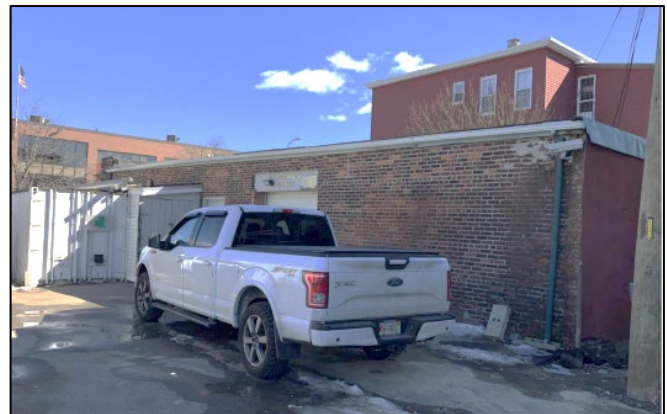
There is little information regarding commercial use following the 1933 Sanborn maps. The building was purchased in 1994 by the current owners P & P Carroll Realty Trust. At some point the commercial building became the site of the Carroll Sons Inc roofing business, noted as an over 50-year-old family owned and operated business. The building has been vacant since 2020.

On May 18, 2021, 60 Medford Street was presented to the Historical Preservation Commission for historical significance and at the time was found to be not historically significant. According to the Somerville Demolition Review Ordinance, if the applicant does not demolish the structure within three years, then the applicant must present to the HPC again to redetermine historical significance. Since 2021, the evidence of the original residential housing use as a boarding house and 1914 explosion as well as the commercial building use as a poultry warehouse and steam laundry have been added to the historical context to the parcel and building.

II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Please see the section immediately below which discusses location, design, materials, and any alterations as the same information would be been 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.



Top Left: front elevation of building
Top Right: left elevation of building
Bottom Left: right elevation of building
Bottom Right: rear elevation of building

1. **60 Medford Street**

The period of relevance for the structure starts c.1900-1920

- a. Location: This structure is in its original location. The building was constructed on-site sometime between 1900-1920, likely after 1914.
- b. Design: The building is a one-story commercial building constructed primary of brick with no discernable high-style architectural design, commonly associated with small scale commercial and storage buildings of the early 20th century.
 - Front Elevation
 - Flat roof with elevated bordering walls
 - Street facing brick commercial storefront
 - Two large storefront-sized window openings on front faced and center entry door, currently boarded up
 - Running bond brickwork with soldier course above each window opening. Concrete cornice line below roofline.
 - Right Elevation
 - Brick façade with side entries and doors. Running bond brickwork below roofline.
 - Left Elevation
 - Brick façade. Running bond brickwork below roofline.
 - Rear Elevation
 - Painted concrete
- c. Materials:
 - Foundation: likely concrete or brick foundation
 - Exterior walls: brick and painted concrete
 - Windows: boarded up not discernible
 - Entry door: boarded up not discernible
 - Roof: Rubber roof
 - Side doors: aluminum
 - Trim: concrete cornice line
- d. Alterations: There appears to be a rear addition to the primary structure. There is some parging of brickwork, storefront windows and door fronting Medford have been boarded up. Despite these changes, the building retains its original one-story massing and general commercial form.
- e. Evaluation of Integrity of 60 Medford Street: Based on the observations of the building and a study of historic maps, it is Staff's position that the building retains sufficient integrity of original form and design. The building has been altered, including a rear addition and materials for windows and doors, but retains its original location, massing, scale, and commercial form.

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 STRUCTURE at 60 Medford Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 60 Medford 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 STRUCTURE at 60 Medford Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 60 Medford 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.

IV. VOTE

1. When bringing the matter to a vote, the HPC must include the reasons why the STRUCTURE at 60 Medford Street is or is not “historically significant”.