



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

GEORGE J. PROAKIS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 599 Somerville Avenue

Case: HPC.DMO 2021.21

Applicant: 599 Somerville Ventures, LLC
c/o Rafi Properties

Owner: Same as applicant

Legal Ad: *Demolish principal structure.*

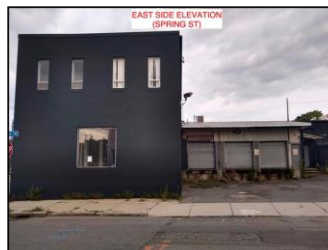
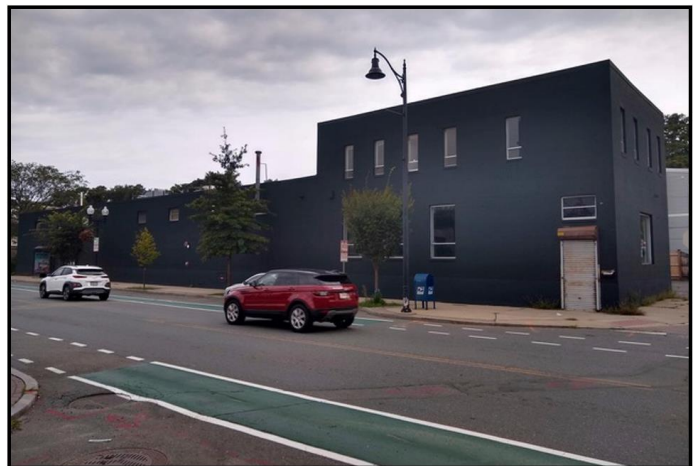
HPC Meeting Date: October 19, 2021

Top: Front elevation

Middle: Rear elevation

Bottom, left Right elevation

Bottom, right: Left elevation



I. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Historical Context: 599 Somerville Avenue is a two-story commercial structure. Somerville Avenue is dominated by one- and two-story commercial structures.

Somerville Ave was originally known as Charlestown Lane, later Milk Row, and eventually Somerville Avenue. The name Milk Row derives from the use of this route by Middlesex County dairymen to transport milk from Middlesex County farms to Boston. Milk Row, throughout the 19th century, was a main thoroughfare from Union Square to Porter Square in Cambridge. From Washington Street and Union Square, this route initially connected with present-day Elm Street, and ran north to Medford. Milk Row was the site of Somerville's earliest industries. The Middlesex Bleachery and Dye Works which began operation in 1821 was located at Bleachery Row and Milk Row. The American Tube Works was situated at Park and Somerville Avenue in 1858. In 1842 the Fitchburg Railroad ran its tracks South of Milk Row, with a passenger station at Kent Street. The earlier (1835) Boston and Lowell had a station at the corner of Washington and Somerville Avenues.

The early industries of the Middlesex Dye and Bleachery Company (1801) and the American Tube Works (1852) established the development of the area and by the 1870s the farming land had been converted to manufacturing and food processing establishments. With this substantial industrial growth came the need for workers' housing.

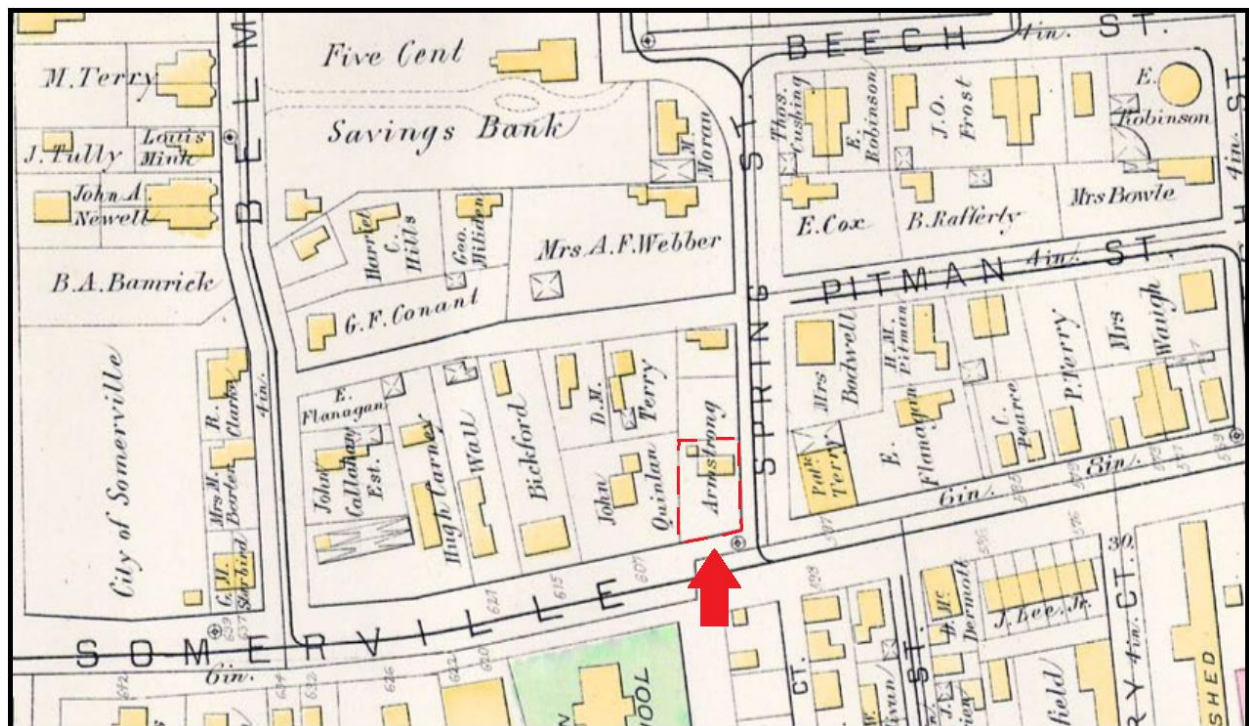
While Somerville Avenue was sparsely developed in 1852, by the mid to late 19th century, this corridor is substantially subdivided and moderately developed. Commercial and residential growth related to Union Square is historically tied to the expansion of the railroad service, beginning in 1835 with the opening of the first passenger railroad station on Washington Street. As Union Square continued to grow and expand, development continued to fill empty land toward the west down the Somerville Avenue corridor.

599 Somerville Avenue as it exists now was constructed roughly around 1926 and consisted of commercial space on the ground floor and residential either on the ground or the upper floor. The location now known as 599 Somerville has had a structure on site under that address since at least 1874, as shown in the 1874 Hopkins Map. The property in 1874 had a residential house with a detached barn or stable. In 1874, 599 Somerville Ave was owned by Mary O'Garvin. Further information on the owner has not been discovered.

(Continued on next page)

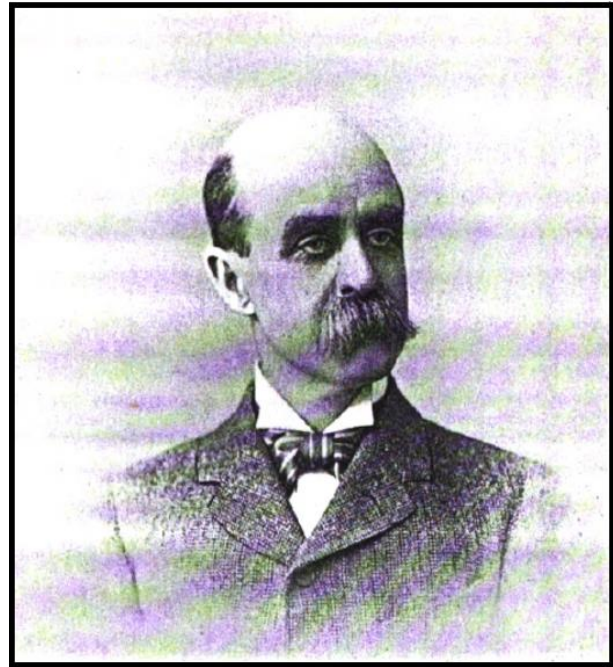


Above: 1874 Hopkins Map, Plate 40&41, with arrow indicating 599 Somerville Avenue

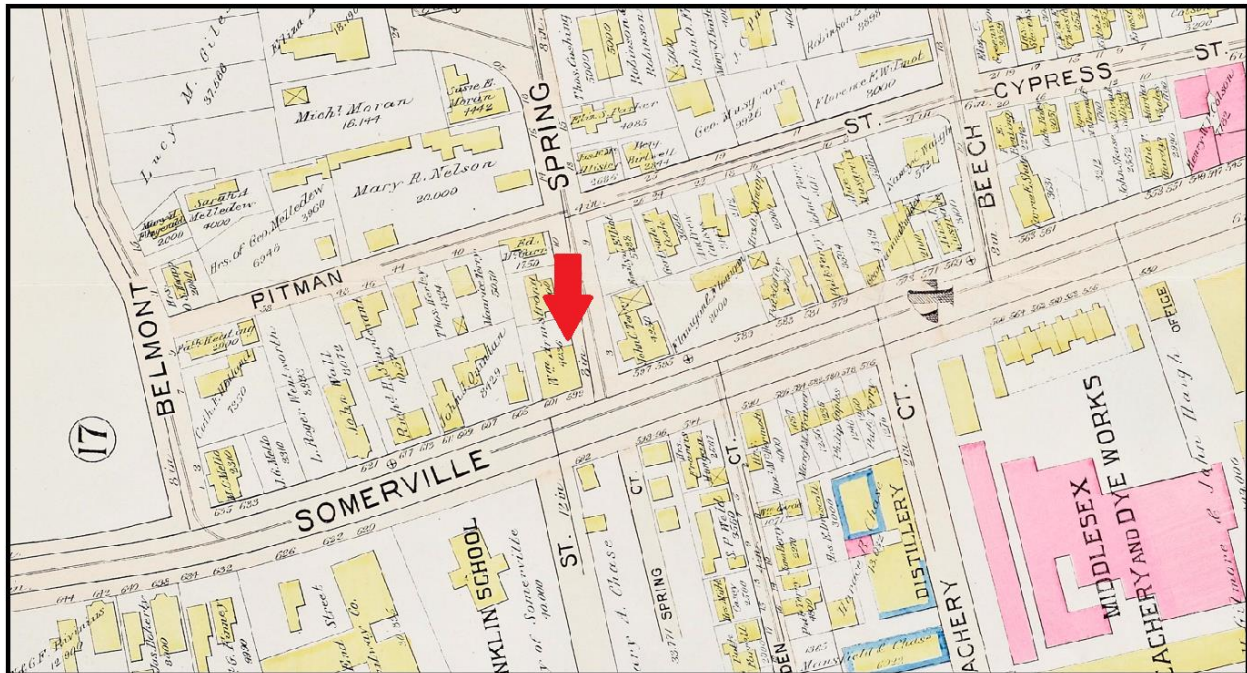


Above: 1884 Hopkins Map, Plate 9, with arrow indicating location of 599 Somerville Ave

In 1884, 599 Somerville Ave and the lot to the north are now owned by William Armstrong. He is also the listed owner in 1895. William Armstrong was active in his local community, acting as Vice President of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)



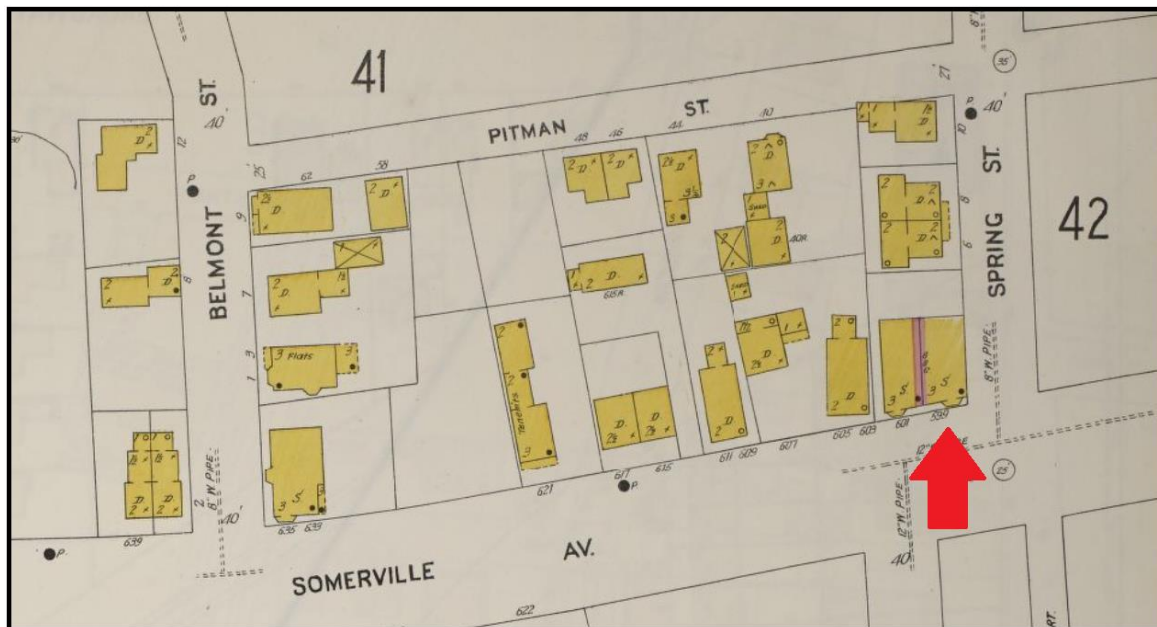
Right: Image of William Armstrong



Above: 1895 Bromley Map, Plate 4, with arrow indicating 599 Somerville Avenue

It is in the 1895 Bromley map that we can see that the house and detached barn or garage have been removed and replaced with a new structure. The structure is divided between two addresses: 599 Somerville Ave and 601 Somerville Ave. This was likely residential housing meant to house the workers of the nearby industries. Also evident in the 1895 Bromley Map is the continued transformation of the area from residential to commercial. Here we see the Middlesex Bleachery and Dye Works as well as the Distillery.

The 1900 Sanborn map shows the same structure with a dividing wall and each address with a bay at the front.



Above: 1900 Sanborn Map, Plate 38, with arrow indicating location of 599 Somerville Avenue

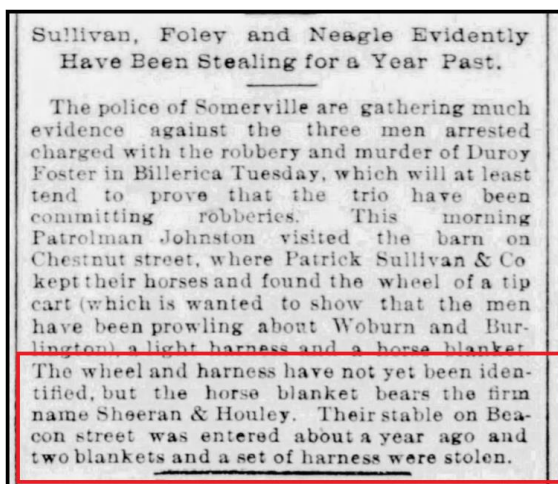
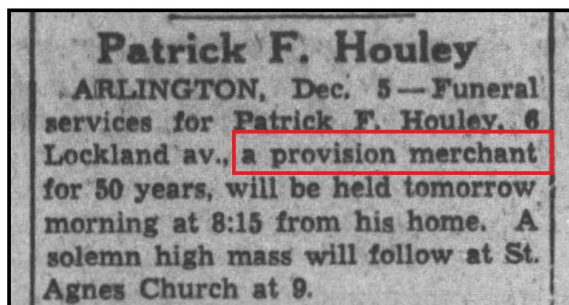
It isn't until 1891 that the Somerville City Directories first begin to list businesses onsite. Starting in 1892 the City Directories list residents living at 599 ½ Somerville Ave. This address is not listed on any of the Hopkins, Bromley or Sanborn maps, nor do these maps depict a secondary structure other than 601 Somerville Ave. If 599 Somerville Ave operated as a commercial space and a residential space, it could be referring to the residential space as the 599 ½ Somerville Ave.

The first listed business for 599 Somerville is Sheeran and Houley in 1891. It was owned by Patrick F Houley and John J Sheeran. The business appears to be a provision store and may have catered more specifically for wagon and carriages based on specific mentions of the business in articles and advertisements in the Boston Globe.

The City Directories have the business at 599 Somerville through 1892. They also list a Provisions business at 599 Somerville through 1894, this may be in reference to Sheeran and Houley, as we know they were a provisions company and moved to a new location at Beacon Street in 1894.

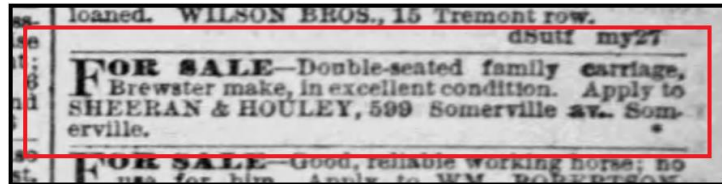
Right, top: Boston Globe, June 26, 1891

Right, bottom: Boston Globe, Dec 5, 1949

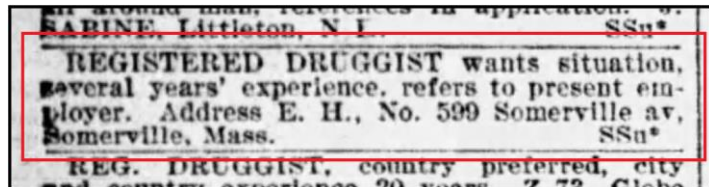


After Sheeran and Houley a series of drug retail businesses occupy 599 Somerville Ave. And the property is listed in the Directories under the sections for 'Druggist' or 'Apothecaries'.

As mentioned prior, the site also had a residential component listed under 599 ½ Somerville. This appears to have often been rented by the proprietors or employees of the drug retail businesses at 599 Somerville.

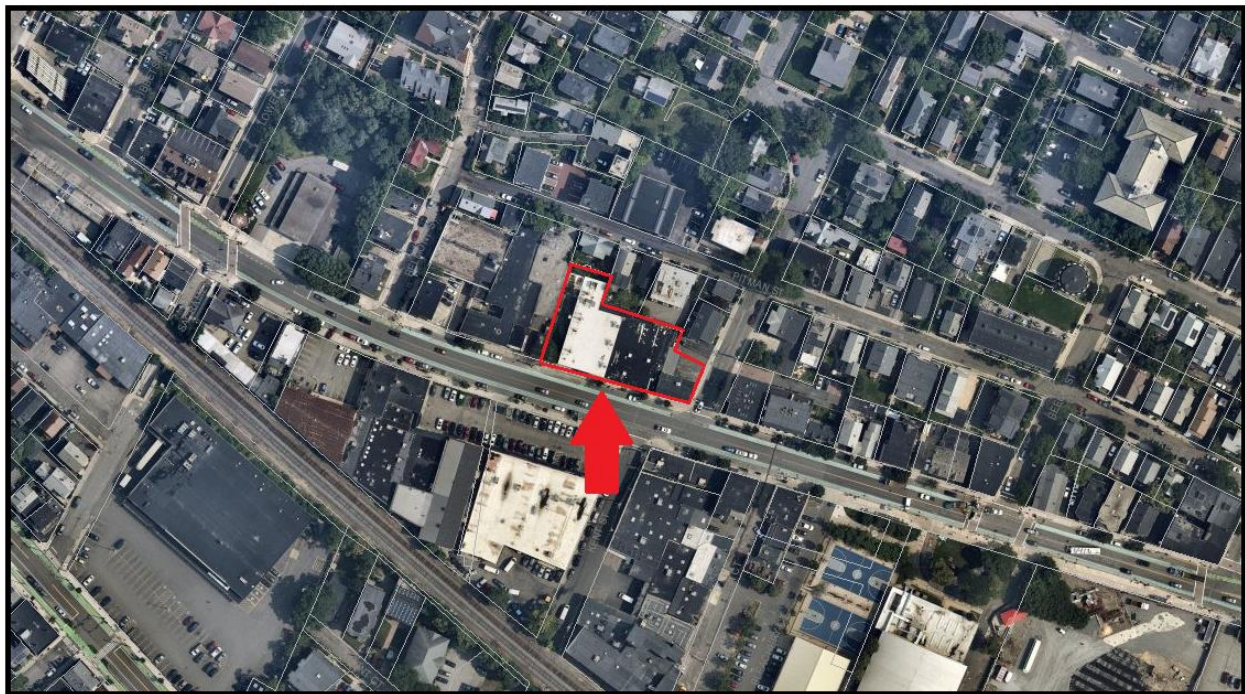


Above: Boston Globe, Sept 15, 1894



Above: Boston Globe, April 4, 1896

Sometime in the early 20th Century the structure spanning 599 Somerville Ave and 601 Somerville Avenue is either demolished or significantly altered. The current structure at 599 Somerville is a two-story brick structure that extends to a one-story structure to the left. This one-story extension now exists where 603-611 Somerville Avenue were previously located.



Above: 2020 satellite image with arrow indicating current size of 599 Somerville Avenue

A list of all occupants for 599 Somerville Ave and their professions are provided below.

599 Somerville Ave		
Name	Year(s) of Occupancy	Occupation/Business
Gondolfe, Victor	1927-1940	Druggist, Retail
Houley, Patrick F	1891-1892	Sheeran & Houley
Linnahan, William	1916-1925	Druggist
Provisions	1892-1894	
Re, Humbert	1905	Clerk at 599 Somerville Ave
Sheeran, John J	1891-1892	Sheeran & Houley
Thompson, J.F	1897-1915	Druggist, Apothecary

599 1/2 Somerville Ave		
Name	Year(s) of Residency	Occupation
Brown, Fred	1894-1895	Car Driver
Bouchie, Arthur J	1920-1927	Piano Maker
Bouchie, Evelyn E	1927	Clerk
Bouchie, Laura M	1920-1927	
Cloonan, Annie	1897	Dressmaker
Fulton, Charles J	1907-1909	Drug Clerk
Fulton, Elizabeth A	1924-1929	
Fulton, David	1912-1929	Laborer
Fulton, David H	1907-1915	Teacher, Lawyer
Howley, Thomas	1900	Electrician
Ingraham, Charles B	1893-1894	Clerk
Ingraham, George B	1893-1894	Real Estate Agent
Lennon, Joseph	1894-1895	Night Baggage Master at Union Station
Scipione, Vincent	1933	
Sheeran, Patrick	1891-1892	Clerk
Thompson, J.F.	1898-1911	Druggist

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.

599 Somerville Avenue

The period of relevance for the structure is c.1920-1940

- a. Location: It is likely that this structure is in its original location and was built on-site.
- b. Design: The business is a flat roof, brick commercial building with two stories on the corner of Somerville Ave and Spring St and one-story farther along Somerville Ave.
 - Front Elevation
 - Two-story portion of building contains five single pane windows on the second floor and three on the first floor. One awning or single-hung window above doorway.
 - Metal roll-up door
 - Seven awning or casement windows run the length of the one-story portion of the structure near the roof line
 - Right Elevation
 - Fenestration consists of one single pane, fixed window on the first floor of the two-story portion of the building, and four single pane, fixed windows on the second floor.
 - Recessed to the right of this is a loading dock of the building
 - Loading dock contains three loading bay openings with metal awning
 - Loading bays have metal roll up garage doors
 - Left Elevation
 - No architectural details
 - Rear Elevation
 - Three wood or metal doors
 - Industrial vent
- c. Materials:
 - Foundation: Concrete
 - Windows: Aluminum or vinyl
 - Entry door: modern. Aluminum
 - Siding: Brick
 - Roof: Flat
- d. Alterations: Alterations are difficult to determine as the historic maps do not show the extant structure. Windows and masonry openings have likely been altered as they are not appropriate nor expected for an early-20th century brick commercial building.
- e. Evaluation of Integrity of 599 Somerville Avenue Based on the observations of the building and a study of the historic maps, it is Staff's position that the building likely retains integrity of its original form and massing. Alterations have occurred to this structure which obscures 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 COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE at 599 Somerville Avenue meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE at 599 Somerville Avenue 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 COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE at 599 Somerville Avenue meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE at 599 Somerville Avenue 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 COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE at 599 Somerville Avenue is or is not “historically significant”.