



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 - *Revised*

Site: 24 Webster Avenue

Case: HPC.DMO 2020-19

Applicant: The 24 Webster Building Trust

Owner: same as applicant

Proposal: *Demolish principal structure.*

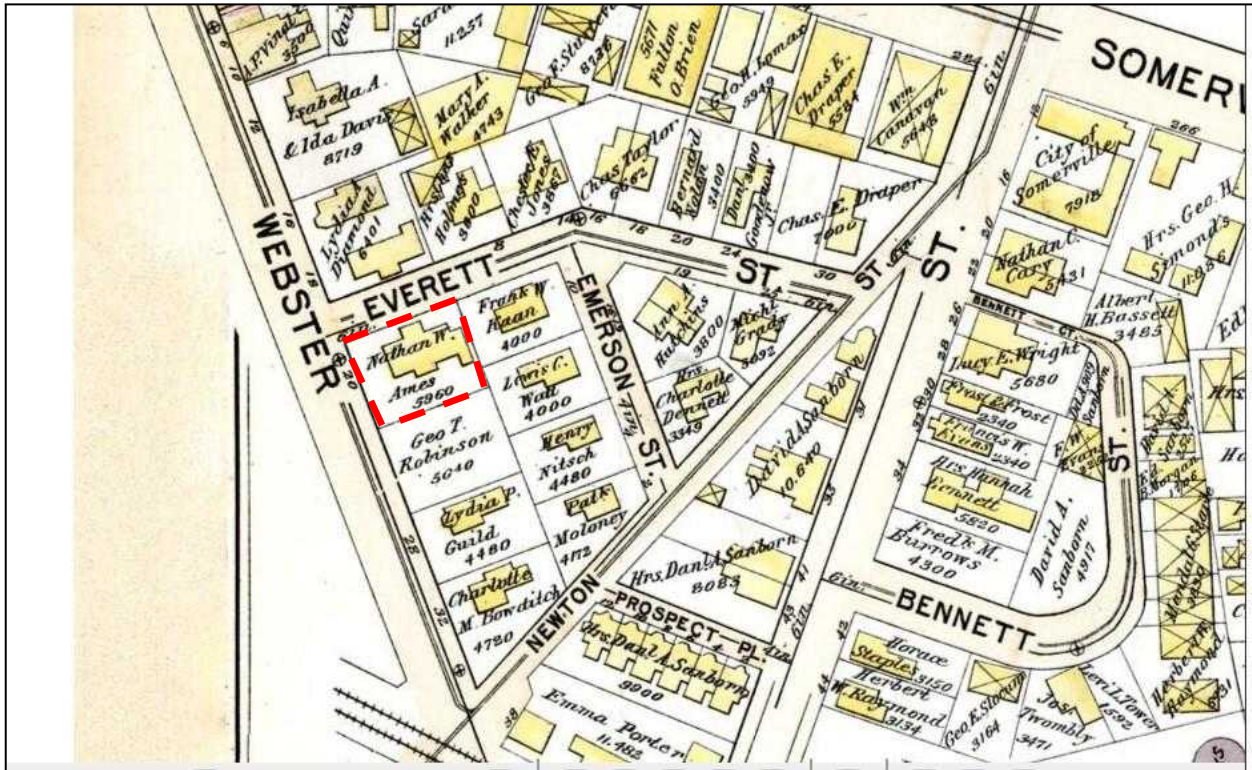
HPC Meeting Date: August 26, 2020



The attached Form B indicates that a building was on this site as early as 1874 and owned by N. Ames. The earlier building on this site was a wood-framed building, as noted by the yellow color used to indicate such. At the time, the land and building were owned by a N.W. Ames. However, the shape and location of the building on the lot do not point to this being the same building that is the subject of the demolition application request.

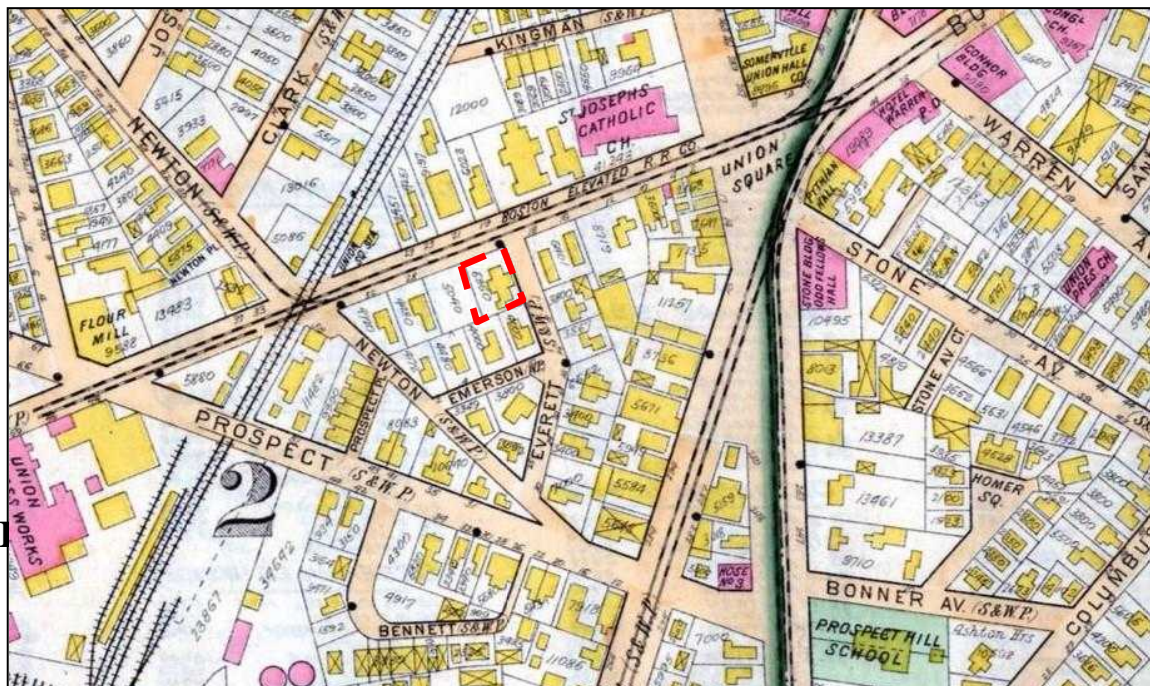
This is a historical street map of a portion of Boston, Massachusetts. The map shows a grid of streets including Everett St., Emerson St., and Prospect St. Numerous property lots are depicted, many with owner names written on them. A red dashed line highlights a specific lot on Everett St., labeled 'N.W. Amb's'. Other notable owners include 'G.F. Robinson', 'J.F. Guthrie', 'S.T. Colran', 'D.A. Starnborn', 'E. Porter', 'Heirs of Clark Bennett', and 'Levi L. Towne'. The map is oriented with North at the top.

The next available historic map is the 1895 Bromley map with Plate 007 showing the subject property. The property is still owned by the same individual, but now we know that their first name is “Nathan”. The building extant at the time retains the same configuration and orientation as seen on the 1884 Hopkins map.



Above: 1895 Bromley map, Plate 007.

As with the other maps above, the 1900 Stadly map, plate 013, shown below, depicts the same structure on the subject parcel.



Further research into Digital Commonwealth photo archives shows that the earlier building has been removed and the building recognized today as 24 Webster has been built in its stead. The historic photo blow depicts how 24 Webster Avenue appeared in 1911 as one looks down Webster and toward Union Square.

24 Webster Avenue is the flat-roofed building in the center of the photo. The building form, style, and cornice are clearly reminiscent of what is seen today. The pyramidal-form monitors on the roof, decorated cornice, the low, crenelated parapet and all of the windows are no longer extant today. According to the Form B, this building was at (The church itself can be seen across the street to the left, still in possession of its steeple.)

The 2 ½-story gable building in the left foreground and the 3-story, flat-roofed building on Everett that appears just beyond 24 Webster, are the same buildings that currently exist in these same locations, though their exterior fenestrations have been altered from their more decorated earlier incarnations.

It should be noted that the attached Form B states that this building was constructed in 1921 and that map research showed residential structures on the property through at least 1915. However, photographic evidence shows that the current building existed on this site as of 1911.

Due to the discrepancies in the evidence, the build date of this structure should be considered 1900-1921.

According to the Form B, the building housed the St. Joseph's Girls' Parochial School Annex for primary grades. St. Joseph's Church sold of this building in 1965.



II. HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

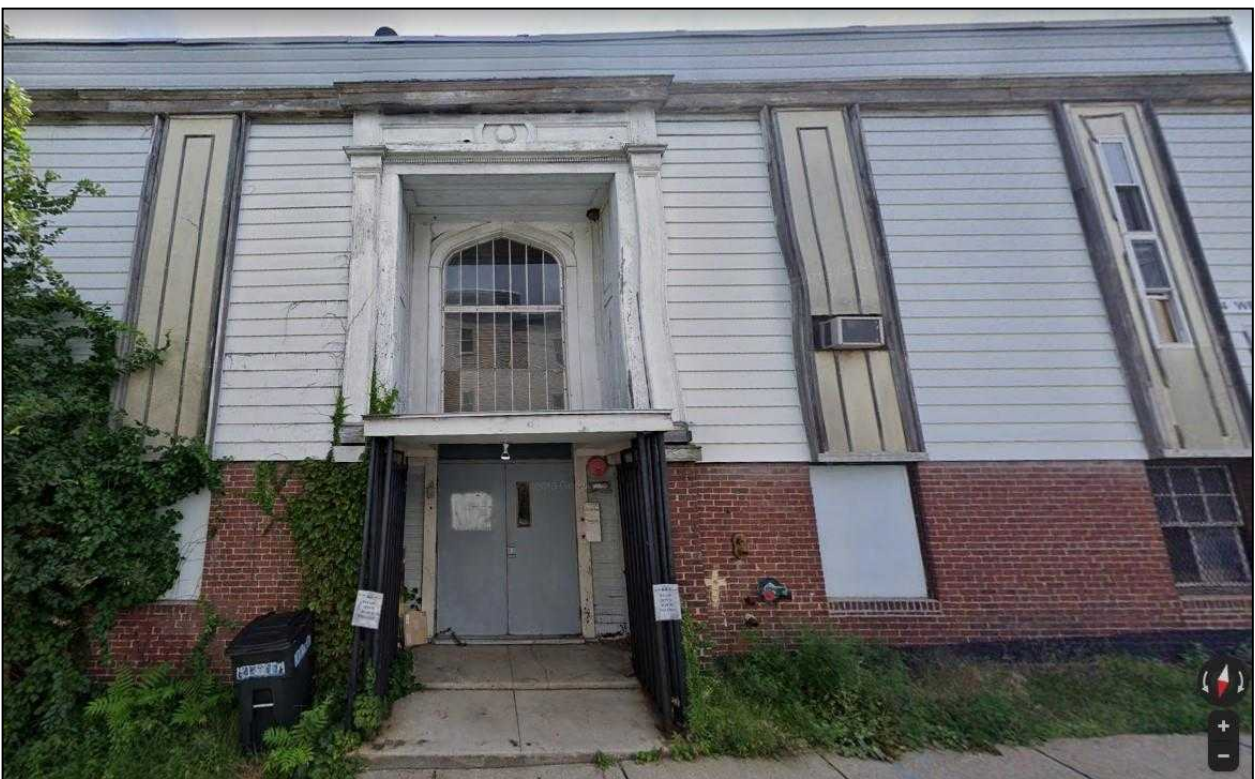
The Webster Avenue façade of the building has lost all of its original windows (see 1911 photo above) and window openings. Instead, narrow, wood faux panels extend from the remains of the cornice to the top of the brick foundation in most cases. The brick foundation itself is set in a running bond. Grilled basement-level windows can be found set in the foundation façade beneath most of the faux panels. The faux panels themselves are quite flat in their presentation, though some present a vertical course of small, rectangular lites. A door and egress stairs are also present on this elevation. The original cornice details have been removed and the crenelated parapet is no longer seen. The building is sided with aluminum siding. The remnants of the cornice line remain wood.



Above: Webster Avenue elevation of subject building.

The Everett Street elevation presents industrial metal entry doors at the street level. This elevation is differentiated from other elevations principally by the inset window and wood surround on the second level above the metal entry doors. Above these doors is a large, inset, Turkish-style window surrounded by a stylized Classical Revival wood surround. The Turkish-style window is consistent with the exoticism that crept into popular architecture in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Turkish, Moorish, Persian, and Egyptian motifs were included in some buildings of this time period

The Classical Revival surround was another highly popular architectural motif of this period. In the case of 24 Webster Avenue, the pilasters with Doric capitals and ogee moulded shaft, dentils between the capitals, decorated frieze, and beveled inset paneling all exude the Classical Revival style.



Above: Everett Street elevation. Inset Turkish-style window surrounded by Classical Revival elements.

At the back of the building (facing Newton Street), the original windows seen in the historic photo have been removed. The side elevation of the building visible from a portion of Everett Street presents late 20th-century windows.

Integrity

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 relevant period for this building begins 1900-1921.

- a. Location: The structure is in its original location.
- b. Design: Rectangular form, two-story, flat-roofed building. Simplified parapet. Cornice present. Stylized Classical Revival surround to inset Turkish-style window (period Exoticism). Running bond on brick foundation.
- c. Materials: Wood frame; brick foundation; aluminum siding; rubber membrane roof; metal main entry doors; wood side stairs; side door appears to be wood; wood cornice; wood faux panels on Everett and Webster Avenue elevations; wood Classical Revival inset window surround.
- d. Alterations: Crenellations to parapet not observed; cornice decorations removed. Original windows removed and original window openings closed/covered. What appear to have been pyramidal-form rooftop monitors have also been removed. Original entry doors removed. Building skinned in aluminum siding. It is unclear what or if any original wood siding remains underneath due to the removal/closing of the original windows.

Evaluation of Integrity: While the building retains overall integrity of form, as noted in the “Alterations” discussion above, a significant number of key architectural components and details have been lost. The Everett Street elevation Turkish-style window with Classical Revival surround and the wood cornice line, remain.

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 (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B, i-ii). 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

2003-05, Section 2.17.B, i

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 building at 24 Webster Avenue meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the building at 24 Webster Avenue does or does not meet the threshold for historic significance under finding “i”.

B. HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

2003-05, Section 2.17.B, ii

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 building at 24 Webster Avenue meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the building at 24 Webster Avenue does or does not meet the threshold for historic significance under finding “ii”.

IV. VOTE

When bringing the matter to a vote, the HPC must include the reasons why the building at 24 Webster Avenue is or is not “historically significant” based on their assessment of the building and the data presented.

Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

Scanned Record Cover Page

Inventory No:	SMV.1457
Historic Name:	Saint Joseph's Girls' Roman Catholic Church Parochial School Annex
Common Name:	
Address:	24 Webster Ave
City/Town:	Somerville
Village/Neighborhood:	Ward Two - Cobble Hill; Union Square
Local No:	
Year Constructed:	1921
Architect(s):	
Architectural Style(s):	Colonial Revival
Use(s):	Parochial School; Furniture Factory; Warehouse; Other Manufacturing; Carpenter Shop
Significance:	Architecture; Education; Industry; Religion
Area(s):	
Designation(s):	
Building Materials(s):	Roof: Tar, Built-up Wall: Aluminum Siding; Brick; Wood; Metal, Undetermined Foundation: Brick



The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) has converted this paper record to digital format as part of ongoing projects to scan records of the Inventory of Historic Assets of the Commonwealth and National Register of Historic Places nominations for Massachusetts. Efforts are ongoing and not all inventory or National Register records related to this resource may be available in digital format at this time.

The MACRIS database and scanned files are highly dynamic; new information is added daily and both database records and related scanned files may be updated as new information is incorporated into MHC files. Users should note that there may be a considerable lag time between the receipt of new or updated records by MHC and the appearance of related information in MACRIS. Users should also note that not all source materials for the MACRIS database are made available as scanned images. Users may consult the records, files and maps available in MHC's public research area at its offices at the State Archives Building, 220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, open M-F, 9-5.

Users of this digital material acknowledge that they have read and understood the MACRIS Information and Disclaimer (<http://mhc-macris.net/macrisdisclaimer.htm>)

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc

This file was accessed on: Saturday, September 12, 2020 at 6:07: PM

FORM B – BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Photograph



Locus Map



Recorded by: V. Adams, G. Pineo, C. Barry, M. Andrade;
PAL

Organization: City of Somerville, OSPCD, Planning
Division

Date: May 2016

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

82-G-1

Boston
North

SMV.1457

Town/City: Somerville

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): Union Square

Address: 24 Webster Avenue

Historic Name: St. Joseph's Girls' Parochial School Annex

Uses: Present: Other Manufacturing

Original: Parochial School

Date of Construction: 1921

Source: Leccese 1980

Style/Form: No style, Colonial Revival

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: Brick

Wall/Trim: Aluminum siding and brick

Roof: Tar and gravel

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures: None

Major Alterations (*with dates*): Aluminum siding added and cornice altered, mid-20th century; windows replaced and entrances altered in the late 20th century.

Condition: Fair

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 0.24

Setting: The building faces northwest toward Everett Street, on the east side of Webster Avenue. It is within a densely developed urban neighborhood, and is surrounded by residential and ecclesiastical buildings.

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INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

SOMERVILLE

24 Webster Avenue

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

SMV.1457

☒ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

24 Webster Avenue occupies a rectangular lot at the southeast corner of Webster Avenue and Everett Street. The property consists of a former parochial school annex which has been converted for mixed commercial and industrial use. The building was constructed in 1921, and first appears on the 1933–1934 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. The east and south sides of the property are enclosed with chain-link fence.

The St. Joseph's Girls' Parochial School Annex (SMV.1457) at 24 Webster Avenue is a northwest-facing, two-story, rectangular building, seated on a brick foundation. The Colonial Revival-style building has a flat roof with a deteriorated wood cornice. The main entrance of the building is centered in the northwest elevation, and consists of a recessed pair of steel double doors, sheltered by a flat-roof entrance porch, supported by plain metal posts. Above the entrance, set into a paneled wood recess is a simple ogee window with vertical metal bars. The recess is surrounded by engaged pilasters supporting an elaborate transom with a dentiled cornice. Simple, brick, engaged pilasters surround the entrance at the first story. Fenestration consists of one-over-one, double-hung, late-20th century, vinyl replacement sash on the northeast and northwest elevations, six-over-six and four-over-four double-hung wood sash on the first story of the northeast elevation, horizontally sliding windows in the second story of the northeast elevation, and plywood infill in the south elevation. The roof is clad with tar and gravel, and the walls are clad with aluminum siding and brick. The northwest and southwest elevations have evenly-spaced vertical pillars with wood surrounds. The first three pillars on the northeast elevation, and the first pillar on the northwest elevation each have a pair of vertically stacked, narrow, one-over-one windows. A secondary entrance, accessed by a run of wooden stairs, is in the southern bay of the southwest elevation, and consists of a simple wood door with simple surround. In the mid-20th century, the building was clad with aluminum siding; the cornice was likely altered at the same time. In the late 20th century, the entrances were altered and some of the windows were replaced.

The building at 24 Webster Avenue was once associated with the St. Joseph's Parochial Girls' School (15 Webster Street, SMV.1454), on the west side of Webster Avenue, but is now privately owned.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Union Square is the oldest and largest commercial area in Somerville, and its growth is tied to the residential and commercial growth of the City. Since the 17th century, the area has been the site of commercial establishments serving travelers and tradespeople. Transportation improvements in the early part of the 19th century enabled further development in the area to support the rapidly growing population. Following the Civil War, local entrepreneurs established lucrative businesses in the Square and constructed numerous ambitious buildings. By the early 20th century, Union Square was a critical hub for automobile traffic, and it continued to develop commercially, adding auto-related enterprises to the mix. Today Union Square is one of two major commercial centers in Somerville, along with Davis Square, consisting primarily of locally owned restaurants, shops, and professional offices.

The property at 24 Webster Avenue first appears on the 1874 Hopkins Map as the residence of Nathaniel W. Ames, a teamster. City Directories indicate that the property was designated 20 Webster Avenue during Ames' occupation. The property continued to be occupied by residential buildings until at least 1915 (Greenough 1884, 1885, 1890, 1900, 1905, 1910, 1915; Hopkins 1874).

The current building at 24 Webster Avenue was constructed in 1921 across the street from 15 Webster Avenue, to provide more space for the St. Joseph's Church girls' parochial school. Following its completion, the girls' primary school moved into the building, and the girls' high school moved into 15 Webster Avenue. In June 1965, the parish divested itself of the building, which was sold to Robert M. Hayes. Today, the building is used as warehouse and workshop space, occupied by builders and furniture makers (Lecesse 1980; Somerville Assessor 2016).

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

SOMERVILLE

24 Webster Avenue

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

SMV.1457

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INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

SOMERVILLE

24 Webster Avenue

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s)	Form No.
	SMV.1457

PHOTOGRAPHS



Photo 2. Northwest and northeast elevations, looking southwest.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

SOMERVILLE

24 Webster Avenue

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

SMV.1457

National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

- ☐ Individually eligible ☒ Eligible **only** in a historic district
- ☒ Contributing to a potential historic district ☐ Potential historic district

Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D

Criteria Considerations: ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Statement of Significance by Virginia Adams and Gretchen Pineo, PAL May 2016

The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.

The St. Joseph's Girls' Parochial School Annex, 24 Webster Avenue, is a contributing resource to the potential St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church Historic District, which is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Religion for its association with St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church (SMV.1254). St. Joseph's Church was recommended eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A and C in 2005 as the first Roman Catholic church in Somerville and as a noteworthy example of Victorian Gothic ecclesiastical architecture. St. Joseph's Church was constructed between 1871 and 1874, and was designed by architect James Murphy, who designed numerous other churches in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.

The school annex at 24 Webster Avenue, constructed in 1921, was built to provide additional classroom space for the girls' school, which was held in a converted Methodist Episcopalian church which was constructed by 1874. The school was run by the Sisters of Notre Dame, who lived in a convent sited between the main school building and the church. After the construction of the Annex, the girls' primary school moved from the school at 15 Webster Avenue to 24 Webster Avenue, and the girls' high school moved into the former primary school. In June 1965, St. Joseph's parish divested themselves of the building, which today is used as warehouse and workshop space, occupied by builders and furniture makers.

The school was part of a larger church complex which, at one time, encompassed nine buildings – St. Joseph's Church, a boys' school, a girls' school, a rectory, a convent for the Sisters of Notre Dame, a home for the Xaverian brothers, a school annex, and two social buildings. The buildings were constructed between 1871 and 1963, and represent an effort by the Church to accommodate all potential needs of their parishioners. Today, six buildings which were constructed by the Archdiocese of Boston are extant; four continue to be owned by the church. The six extant buildings are St. Joseph's Church (13 Webster Avenue, 1871–1874, SMV.1254), the rectory (William Burt House, ca. 1870, SMV.424), St. Joseph's Girls' Parochial School (15 Webster Avenue, 1963, SMV.1454), St. Joseph's Parochial School Annex (24 Webster Avenue, 1921, SMV.1457), St. Joseph's Boys' Parochial School (268 Washington Street, 1893, SMV.425), and Sisters of Notre Dame Convent (270 Washington Street, 1963). The Annex was sold into private ownership in 1965, and the boys' school was sold to the City of Somerville in 1978. The girls' school replaced the original school and convent, and the convent at 270 Washington Street replaced the Xaverian brothers' home. The school is now occupied by a public charter school, and the convent is used as an office building by Catholic Charities.