



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

831 Massachusetts Avenue, 2nd Fl., Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

Telephone: 617 349 4683 TTY: 617 349 6112 Fax: 617-349-6165

E-mail: histcomm@cambridgema.gov URL: <http://www.cambridgema.gov/Historic>



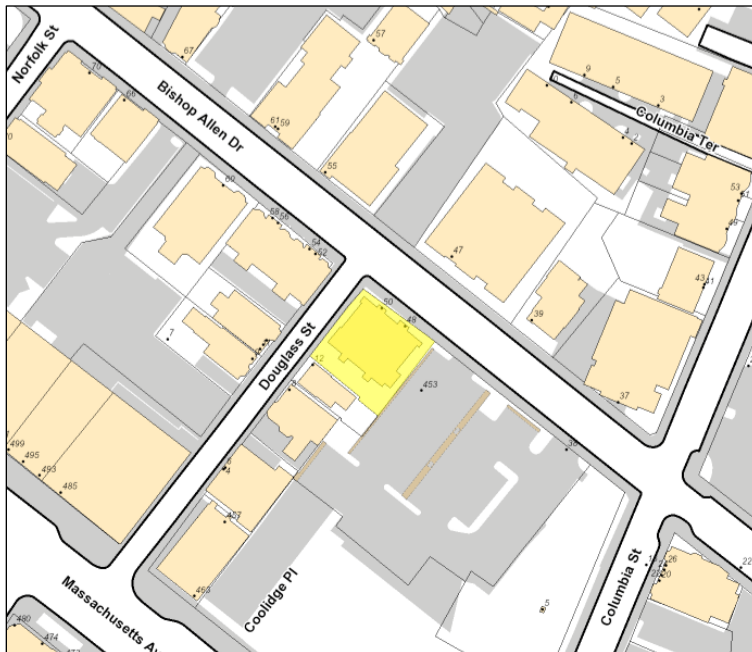
Bruce A. Irving, *Chair*; Susannah Barton Tobin, *Vice Chair*; Charles Sullivan, *Executive Director*
William G. Barry, Jr., Robert G. Crocker, Joseph V. Ferrara, Chandra Harrington, Jo M. Solet, *Members*
Gavin W. Kleespies, Paula A. Paris, Kyle Sheffield, *Alternates*

Date: October 2, 2019
To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner
Re: D-1538: Bennink Rowhouses, 50 Bishop Allen Drive (1868)

An application to demolish the building at 50 Bishop Allen Drive was made on September 17, 2019. The applicant, Stu-Lin Family Trust, was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for October 3, 2019.

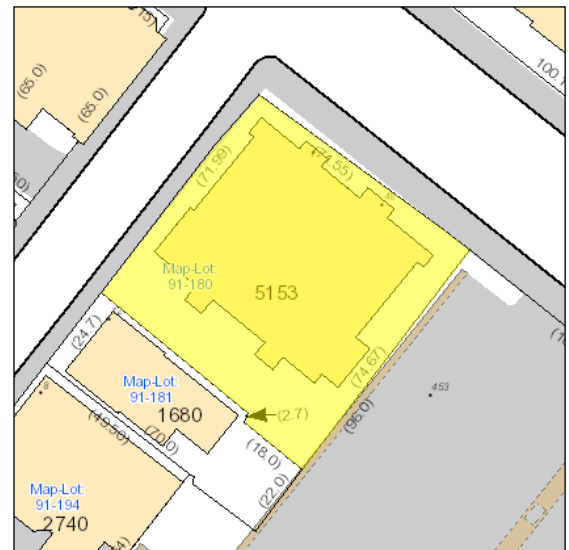
Site

The Bennink Rowhouses are located on the southeast corner of Bishop Allen Drive and Douglass Street. The building is sited on a 5,153 square foot lot in a Business B zoning district. This district supports businesses, general retail uses, offices, and multi-family residential. The FAR limit is 2.75 for business, retail, and office uses and 3.0 for multi-family residential use. The height limit in this district is 80 feet. The assessed value of the land and existing building, according to the online assessor's property database, is \$1,982,600 (Map 91/Parcel 180).



50 Bishop Allen Dr.

Cambridge GIS, 2019



Detail view

The front wall of this three-story apartment building is set back 8 feet from the sidewalk along Bishop Allen Drive and less than 7 feet from the sidewalk on Douglass Street. The one-story ells on the south side of the building are approximately 13 feet from the rear property line. The building abuts a two-family house at 12 Douglass Street and a public parking lot on Bishop Allen Drive to the east. The parking lot is currently being used for construction staging for the new three building mixed-use development known as Market Central (previously called Mass + Main).

The applicant proposes to demolish the building and construct a new seven-story residence on the lot. Plans have been distributed to the members of the Commission.



50 Bishop Allen Drive

CHC staff photo, 10/2/19

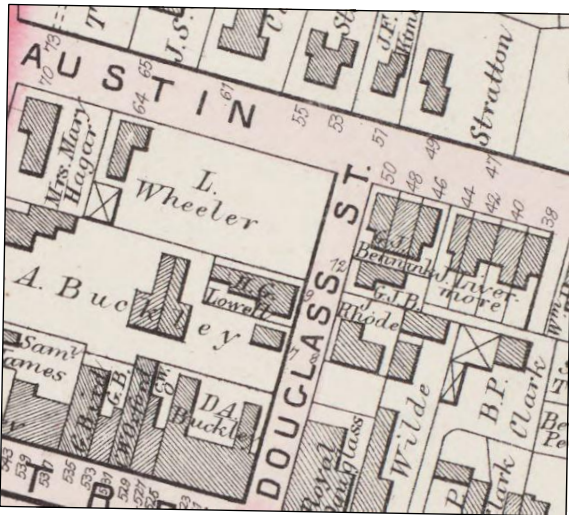


50 Bishop Allen Drive (at right)

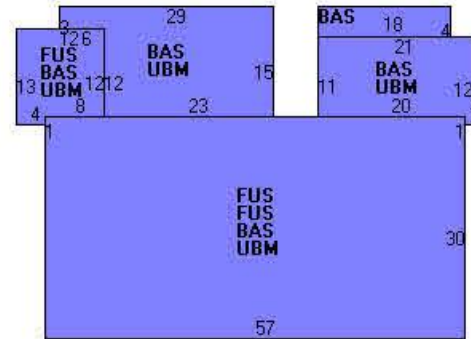
CHC staff photo, 10/2/19

Architectural Description

The existing apartment building was originally constructed as three attached row houses at 46, 48, and 50 Austin Street (the former name for Bishop Allen Drive). Each dwelling was constructed with a one-story ell at the rear. The original lot configuration also included the dwelling at 12 Douglass Street, but that was later subdivided and sold separately. A fourth unit was introduced as 44½ Austin Street by 1908.



46-50 Austin St., 1873 Hopkins Atlas, G. J. Bennink, owner.



Assessor's sketch of existing building footprint.



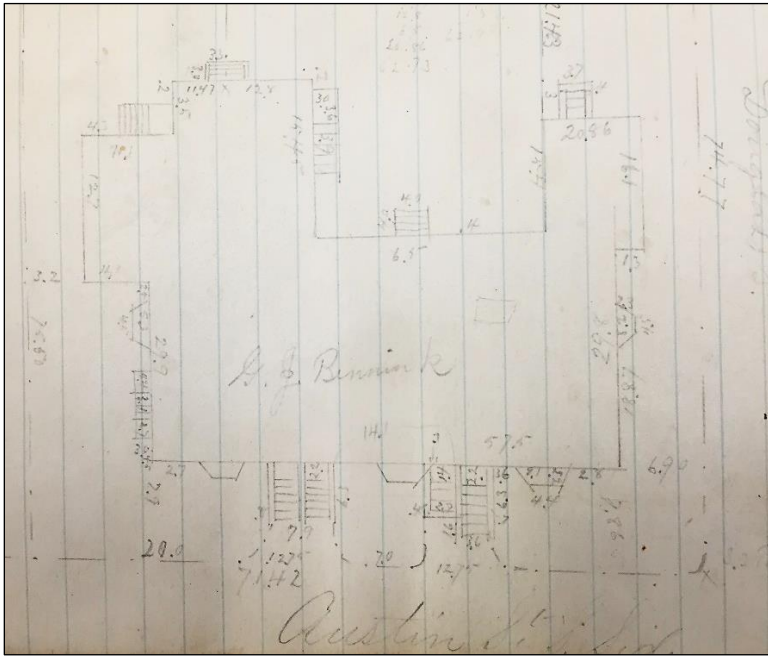
50 Bishop Allen Drive

CHC staff photo, 10/2/19

The walls are clad with cedar shingles, but the original material would have been clapboards. The shed roof is disguised by a cornice on three sides. The front elevation is ornamented with a dentils and

paired brackets at the eave. The majority of the windows are double-hung 1-over-1 sash with some awning and fixed windows on the sides and rear walls.

The original design of the building was in the Italianate style, with three-sided bay windows on the front and sides, 2-over-2 double hung sash windows, and the remaining decorative cornice. The building was remodeled in a more modern aesthetic in 1959 by Eva Rothman, owner and George Rothman, builder. These changes are still present today, including the removal of projecting bay windows, reduction in the number of front entrance doors to two, the addition of flat-roofed entry hoods, concrete steps, and flat stock window and door trim. At some point, maybe also in 1959, the walls were clad with cedar shingles and the brick foundation was parged with concrete. On the rear elevation, fire escapes were added for egress.



House Book 11, Page 20

August 17, 1875



50 Bishop Allen Drive

CHC staff photo, 10/2/19

A house of similar scale was built the same year at 22-32 Cogswell Avenue.



22-32 Cogswell Avenue

Assessor's photo

History

The opening of the West Boston Bridge in 1793 introduced a new transportation option from Old Cambridge and points west to Boston. Formerly occupied by only four homesteads, Cambridgeport started to grow soon after the opening of the bridge. Main Street was built along a causeway to the bridge from Pelham's Island and Lafayette Square (where the earliest development in Cambridgeport took place). Taverns and stores were the first structures built along Main Street. The commercial nature of the street continued through the nineteenth century, as it was a busy thoroughfare between Boston and Harvard Square.

Austin Street was laid out in 1803 and named for Jonathan Loring Austin, a Revolutionary-era patriot and politician. The street was renamed in about 1980 for Bishop Richard Allen, the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) denomination. Saint Paul's AME Church is nearby at 86 Bishop Allen Drive. The block between Columbia and Douglass Street was not developed until the second half of the nineteenth century. John Livermore constructed a row of houses at 38-44 Austin Street in 1865. Two houses were built at the corner of Columbia Street (#30 and #34-36) in 1866 on lots that Livermore sold to Benjamin Clark and W. J. Marvin. Livermore then sold the lot at the corner of Douglass Street to Samuel M. Davis in 1866, who in turn sold it to Gerrit J. Bennink in 1868. Bennink constructed 46-50 Austin Street and the side hall house at 12 Douglass Street that year.

Gerrit Jan Bennink moved with his family from Holland to Cambridge in the 1840s. He worked as a carpenter and house builder, constructing between thirty and fifty buildings between 1852-1894. He was a member of the Prospect Street Congregational Church. His wife, Maatje Bennink died in 1863 but they had raised a family of two sons and a daughter. Bennink remarried Isabelle Bigelow Burns, a widow. They resided at 50 Austin Street and rented out the other units. One of Bennink's sons, Cornelius Gerrit Henry Bennink, fought in the Civil War, returned to Cambridge and worked at the Cambridgeport Diary Company and also built houses. He went on to be president of the Cambridge Common Council. He moved to California in 1895. Bennink sold the building to George W. Gale and

William Wood in 1877. Isabelle Bennink died in 1892 at age 92. Gerrit moved with his son to California, where he died in 1907.

Subsequent owners of the building included Lucy A. and Reuben H. Kaulback, carpenter; Jeanette H. Isen; Rose Nissenbaum; the Claroth Realty Trust, Stu-Lin Realty Trust and now the Stu-Lin Family Trust, owner since 1986.

Significance and Recommendation

I recommend that the building at 50 Bishop Allen Drive be found significant for its associations with Gerrit Jan Bennink, builder, and the development of this neighborhood in the 1860s. Though remodeled extensively in the mid-twentieth century, the building retains its original massing and some of its original ornament, most notably at the cornice. The Commission should hear testimony from the applicants and neighbors and review the plans for demolition and new construction before making a further determination.

cc: Stuart Rothman, Stu-Lin Family Trust
Sean Hope
Jai Khalsa