



## CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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URL: <https://www.cambridgema.gov/historic>



Chandra Harrington, *Chair*; Elizabeth Lyster, *Vice Chair*; Charles Sullivan, *Executive Director*  
Joseph V. Ferrara, Gavin W. Kleespies, Paula A. Paris, Kyle Sheffield, Yuting Zhang, *Members*  
Florrie Darwin, Scott Kyle, Michael Rogove, *Alternates*

November 25, 2025

To: Members and Alternates of the Historical Commission

From: Charles Sullivan, Executive Director

Re: Case D-1774: 37-39 Essex Street. Demolish double house (1845).

An application to raze the house at 37-39 Essex Street was received on October 14, 2025. The owner, Barry S. Cyrus, Trustee of the Amelia Taylor Pour-Over Trust, was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for December 6, 2025.<sup>1</sup>



37-39 Essex Street

CHC photo

### Current Conditions

The house occupies a 6,611 square-foot lot (90/175) on the west side of Essex Street, between Bishop Allen Drive and Harvard Street. This lot measures approximately 50 feet wide at the street (subject to a right-of-way shared with the north side abutter) and 130 feet deep. The house is a 2½-story frame building with a front facing gable roof on a granite foundation, with 3,452 sf of living area. The assessed value of the land and building, according to the Assessors' database, is \$1,486,000. The house is rated in fair condition but appears to have been well maintained. In its

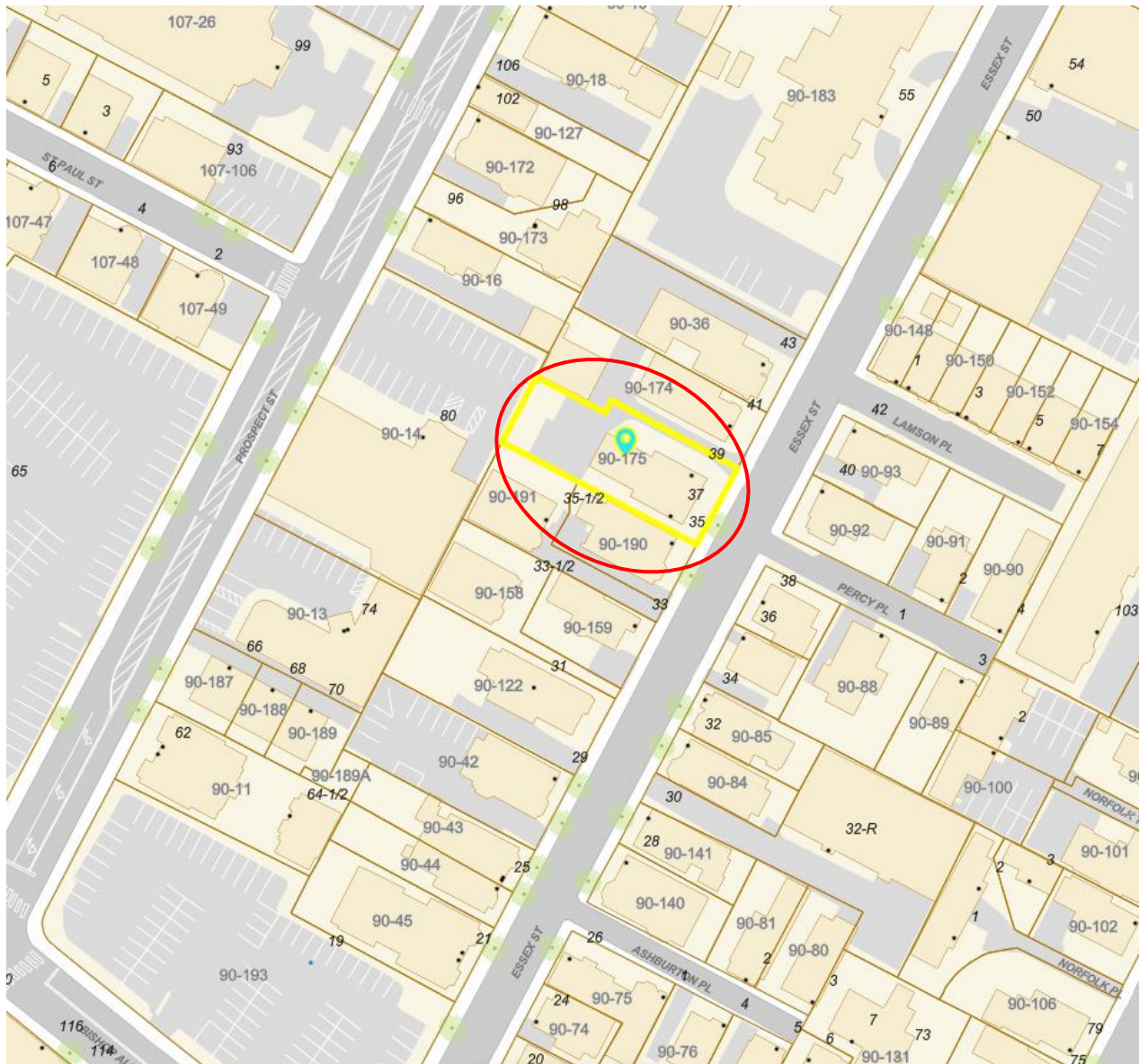
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<sup>1</sup> A pour-over trust jointly owned property and accounts. Spouses serve as co-trustees of the trust and manage the property and accounts.



existing location on the lot, the house has non-conforming south side setback. The height is approximately 30 feet.

The zoning is Residence C-1, a multi-family housing district, which was amended in February 2025. Current C-1 zoning allows for four-stories (45 feet) as-of-right without the need for a special permit, with the ability to go up to six-stories (74 feet) on lots larger than 5,000 square feet, so long as 20% of the residential units or unit square footage in the building are inclusionary (income-restricted affordable housing). The zoning requires a minimum 10-foot front yard setback and a minimum 5-foot setback for side and rear yards for residential use. There is no requirement for number of units.



37-39 Essex Street

Cambridge GIS

The applicant proposes to clear the site and construct a three-story zoning-compliant building with nine units. Two units and six parking spaces would share the basement, which would be accessed by a ramp from Essex Street. Plans for the proposed project have been distributed to the commission.



## Description

The double house at 37-39 Essex Street was constructed in 1845 in the Greek Revival style. The main stylistic features are the closed pediment at the gable end facing the street, heavy entablature, pilasters (hidden under the asphalt siding), and well-developed symmetrical entrance surrounds on each side. The main block of the house measures 30 feet across and 34 feet deep with an ell measuring 29' x 20'. The windows are recent vinyl replacements. The front doors are also replacements, but of an earlier period.

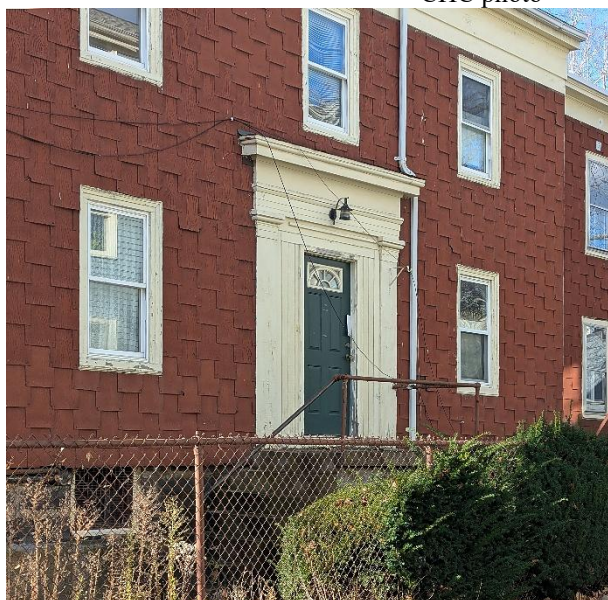


37-39 Essex Street

CHC photo



37 and 39 Essex Street entrances



CHC photo





37-39 Essex Street, Cambridge

NearMap.com

### History

Essex Street belongs in what may be termed the second generation of development in Cambridgeport. The first was centered in the Lower Port, east of Norfolk Street and closer to the West Boston (Longfellow) Bridge. In the original division of Cambridgeport an eleven-acre tract bounded by Norfolk, Harvard, Prospect and Austin (now Bishop Allen) Streets was set aside for the town almshouse, a three-story brick building on northeast corner of the tract built in 1818. By the time this institution burned in 1836 property values had risen and the town commissioned surveyor James Hayward to lay out Essex Street and subdivide the property into house lots, reserving the northeast corner for a town hall.

In October 1836 the town held an auction. John Dudley, a housewright, bought two 130' deep lots that are now 37-39 and 41 Essex Street. Perhaps because of economic conditions he held them for several years before building a house at 41 that he sold to Alexander Jennings in 1843 and building the house at 37-39 Essex on his own account in 1845. Essex Street was extended to Massachusetts Avenue in 1850.



41 Essex Street (1843, John Dudley, housewright), before renovations  
CHC photo, 1965

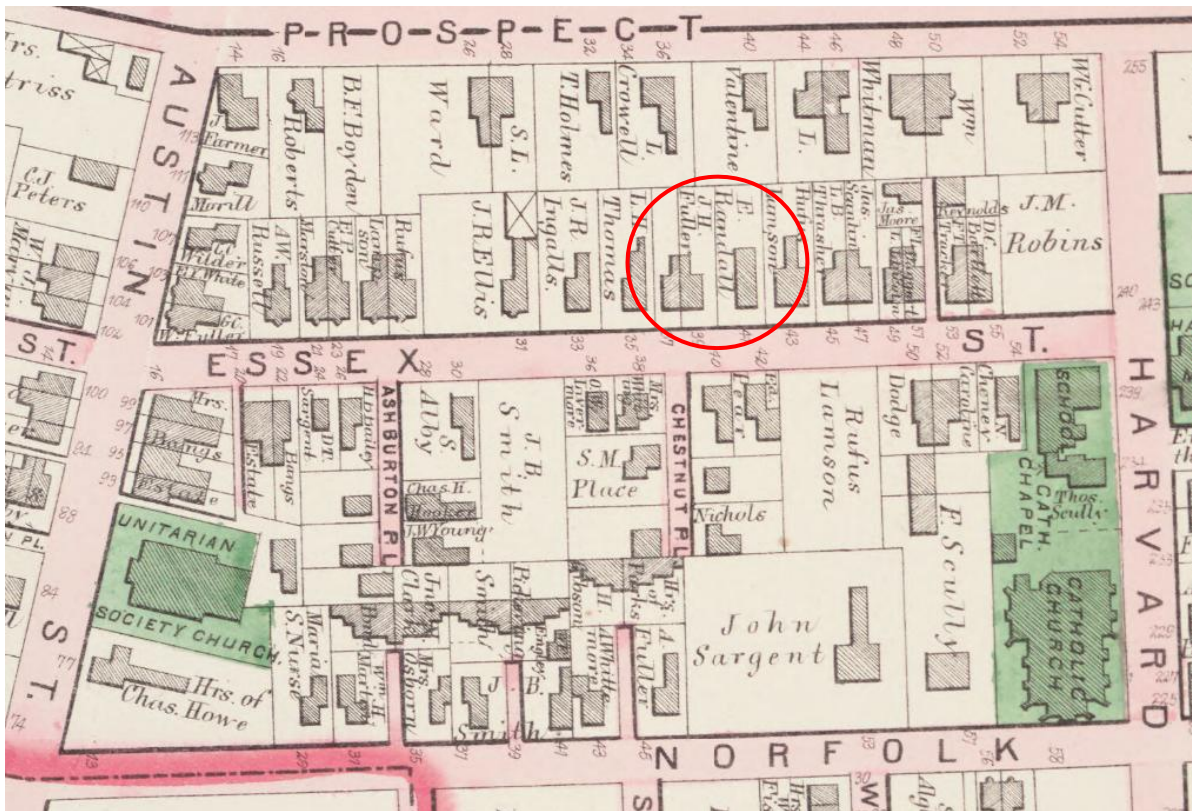
By 1854 almost the entire west side of the street was filled with ten houses, while the east side, which had been subdivided into larger parcels, remained vacant. The lots on this side were much deeper, 150' rather than 130', and owners struggled with the awkward depth. Several, notably land speculator Rufus Lamson, developed houses on very small lots on short dead-end courts such as Ashburton Place and Lamson Place.





Earliest development of Essex Street

1854 Map of Cambridge



Intermediate stage of development. 37-39 and 41 Essex circled.

1873 Atlas of Cambridge



While the east side of Essex filled up haphazardly with houses of several different vernacular styles, the west side retained its Greek Revival character until the 1890s, when the three-decker movement began to flower. Some original houses were moved to the rear while others were replaced entirely. Houses built between 1860 and 1900 now predominate. Only identifiable three Greek Revivals remain out of the original ten: 31, 33, and 37-39 Essex. With the exception of the 1962 John F. Kennedy Apartments and John Dudley's 41 Essex Street, which was entirely rebuilt in recent times, the most recent building on Essex Street was erected in 1894.



Essex Street in 1942, showing 37-39 (behind the tree) with original trim details

Engineering Dept. photo, CHC



Essex Street in 2025

CHC photo

The historical record of the John Dudley house is not extensive. The two sides have always been owned in common, and for most part the house was an investment property held for rental. An auction notice in 1894 described it as “each house [side] has eight rooms and rents readily to well-paying tenants.” Among the most prominent of these was William C. Mellsop, a baker and Civil War veteran who died in 1921. Later in the 1920s the tenants were mostly working-class mechanics, factory operatives, and tradespeople. The owner for many decades during this period, John Wilkes Hammond, an attorney, city solicitor, and associate justice of the Supreme Judicial Court, lived elsewhere. Pasquale Tammaro, a paper box maker, acquired the property in the 1930s and had the asphalt siding applied in 1946. In 1971 his widow Dorothy sold the property to Owen and Amelia Taylor. The Taylors, an extended family with roots in Barbados, owned the property until April 2025.

By JOHN R. FAIRBAIRN, Auctioneer.  
Office 436 Cambridge Street, East Cambridge.

## Valuable Real Estate

FOR INVESTMENT AND IMPROVEMENT  
AT AUCTION,

On Winsor St. and on Essex St., Camb'port,  
**Saturday, Oct. 19, 1895,**  
At 3 and 4 o'clock P. M.,  
On the premises hereinafter described.

At 3 o'clock, will be sold the estate No. 259 Winsor street, consisting of large house of 12 rooms, arranged for two families, and about 11,500 feet of land. Good chance for improvement.

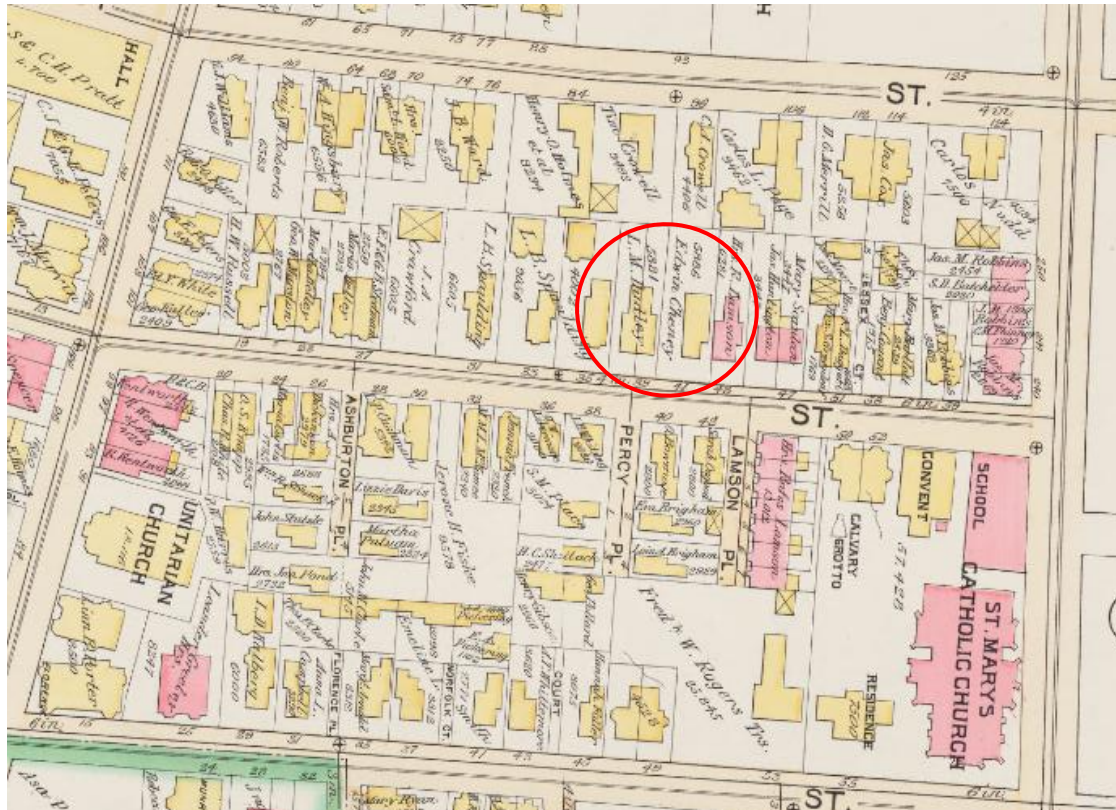
At 4 o'clock will be sold the valuable double house Nos. 37 and 39 ~~Essex~~ street, Cambridgeport, each house has 8 rooms and rents readily at all times to good paying tenants. The lot of land contains 5,881 feet and the neighborhood is first class in every particular. The sale is made for the purpose of settling an estate, and will be positive to the highest bidder.

A deposit of \$200 will be required of the purchaser, on each lot, at time and place of sale.

Sale rain or shine, Saturday, Oct. 19, Winsor street, at 3; Essex street at 4 o'clock P. M.

Cambridge Chronicle, Oct. 13, 1894





Essex Street fully developed

1894 Atlas of Cambridge

### Significance and Recommendation

The John Dudley House is a characteristic double Greek Revival design from a formative period in Cambridge's history. It is significant as one of the few remaining houses associated with the first phase of development of Essex Street in the mid-1840s. The house retains original architectural features and appears to have potential for renovation in conjunction with removal of the ell and construction of a separate building in the rear.

I recommend that the Commission find the John Dudley house significant for the reasons stated and review the proposed plans for development before making a further determination.

cc: Peter McLaughlin, ISD Commissioner