



## CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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November 25, 2025

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Eric Hill, Survey Director, Cambridge Historical Commission

Re: D-1775: 24R Winter Street, Thomas Leighton Jr. House (1838)

An application to demolish the house at 24R Winter Street was received on October 22, 2025, following a notice of violation by the Cambridge Inspectional Services Department. The owners, William and Lauren Gibson, were notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for December 4, 2025.

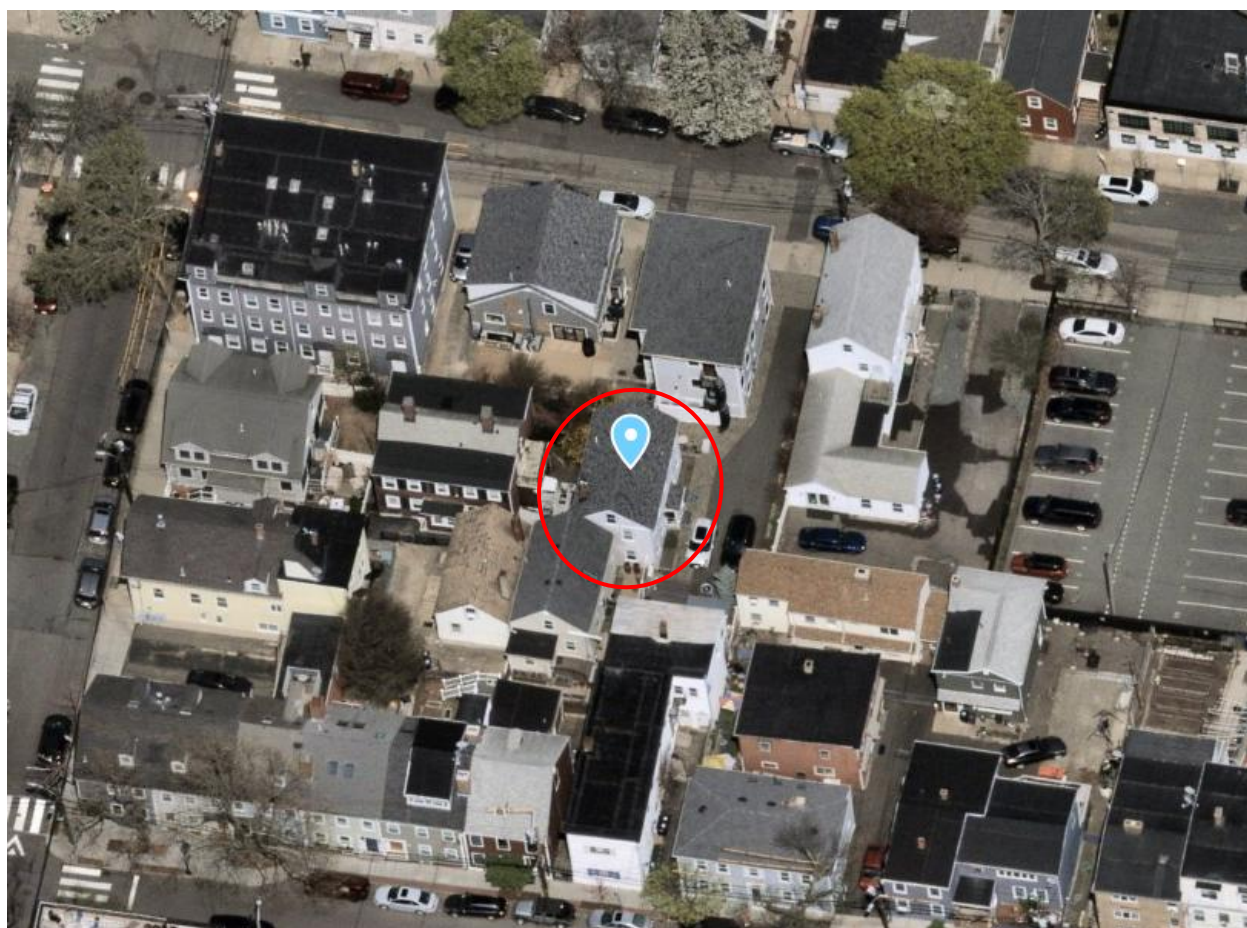


*24R Winter Street before demolition and in November 2025. Viewed from within the property.  
Images from Zillow and CHC*





*24R Winter Street, City of Cambridge GIS*



*24R Winter Street, April 2025*

## Site

The Thomas Leighton, Jr. House site is located on the south side of Winter Street between Sci-arappa Street and Msgr. O'Brien Highway. The Leighton House sits toward the south end of the lot that is 46 feet wide and 127 feet deep. Constructed in 1838, this 2½-story, single-family house is situated on a 5,195 square foot lot. The residence is a condominium on a shared lot with two additional buildings: 24 Winter Street, a three-story townhouse constructed in 2018; and 26-28 Winter Street, a historic double-house built in 1845.

The property is located within a C-1 residential zoning district, which allows single to multi-family dwellings with a four-story, 45-foot height limit for residential uses. The minimum front yard setback for C-1 zone is 10-feet, and the minimum side and rear yard setbacks are 5-feet.

The Leighton house was a contributing building in the Winter Street National Register District.

## Condition

The Thomas Leighton, Jr. House today retains little original fabric following work that began following the issuance of a permit on June 4, 2025. The building addition/alteration permit included a gut renovation of the existing structure with a new, third floor addition on the main block of the house and a two-story addition to the front of the house. During construction, nearly all the interior framing, floors and three of the four exterior walls were removed. This work exceeded the scope of the alteration permit. The Cambridge Inspectional Services Department issued a Stop Work Order on the property on October 17, 2025, and required that the applicant apply for a retroactive demolition permit. The requirement for a demolition permit triggered Cambridge Historical Commission through the Demolition Delay ordinance.



*24R Winter Street, primary façade, November 2025.*

*CHC*



On February 27, 2016, the Cambridge Historical Commission reviewed the demolition of a two-story ell on the north side of the Thomas Leighton, Jr. House (D-1389), and voted to find that the ell was significant but not preferably preserved in the context of the new structure fronting Winter Street.

### Description

The Thomas Leighton, Jr. house was constructed in 1838. It was a center-entrance, five-bay, 2½-story Federal period house with a side-gable roof. The house originally had a two-story ell that was removed in 2017. The main block of the house measures approximately 18' wide by 34' deep.

The Leighton house is a late example of a vernacular, Federal-period worker's cottage with a side-facing center-hall plan. These houses originated in the 18th century and were constructed in East Cambridge from the 1820s until about 1840. Exterior details were very simple, with narrow corner boards, shallow eaves, and no projecting cornices on the gable ends. Following a 2018 renovation, the Leighton House was covered in vinyl siding and had replacement windows with a new, projecting center entry. It retained its original form

None of these features remain following the issuance of a building permit in 2025 and the subsequent demolition of a majority of the historic structure and framing, which caused the retroactive requirement for a demolition permit.



*24R Winter Street, 1980. Former ell in foreground.*

*CHC*



*24R Winter Street, 2012. Former ell at right.*

*Real estate listing*



*24R Winter Street, following 2018 renovation.*

*CHC*

### History

East Cambridge originated as a speculative real estate development at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A grid of streets was laid out on the salt-marsh island known as Lechmere's Point, and residential construction began near the top of the hill along Otis and Thorndike Streets. Early in-



dustrial developed along the Miller's River, and the marshes to the south and west remained undeveloped until after the Civil War. Residential streets close to the factories, like Winter Street, filled with workers cottages, while managers and professionals lived on Otis and Thorndike streets.



*Winter Street seen from the corner of Msgr. O'Brien Highway, 1925. The gabled house left of the telephone pole is the Thomas Leighton Sr. house at 22 Winter Street.*



*Winter Street west of Sciarappa, ca. 1950*

CHC

Much of the development of East Cambridge was undertaken by corporations and trusts, rather than individuals. Andrew Craigie, the speculator who conceived of East Cambridge and who secretly purchased much of the Lechmere estate, organized the Lechmere Point Corporation as a means of attracting other investors. The expense of filling large tracts of marsh land and building streets and utilities was beyond the resources of most individuals, and companies such as the Canal Bridge Corporation and the Cambridge Wharf Company undertook these projects with varying success in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The New England Glass Works, founded in 1818, was East Cambridge's most important industry for more than fifty years. Master glassmaker Thomas Leighton was brought from England in 1826 to become superintendent.

"When he decided to build a house he chose Winter Street and put up a characteristic two-and-a-half story worker's cottage [at 22 Winter].

"Leighton, a gifted manager as well as an excellent chemist and craftsman, was able to guide the company through a steady expansion to maintain its prominent position in American glassmaking. He also made a heavy personal investment in the company and in East Cambridge. He lived near the factory at 22 Winter Street with his wife and eleven children, brought most of his sons into the business as glassworkers (and two as superintendents), and adopted an infant born in East Cambridge as his son." (Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge: *East Cambridge*, p.177)



*Thomas Leighton Sr. house, 22 Winter Street, c. 1870*

*CHC*

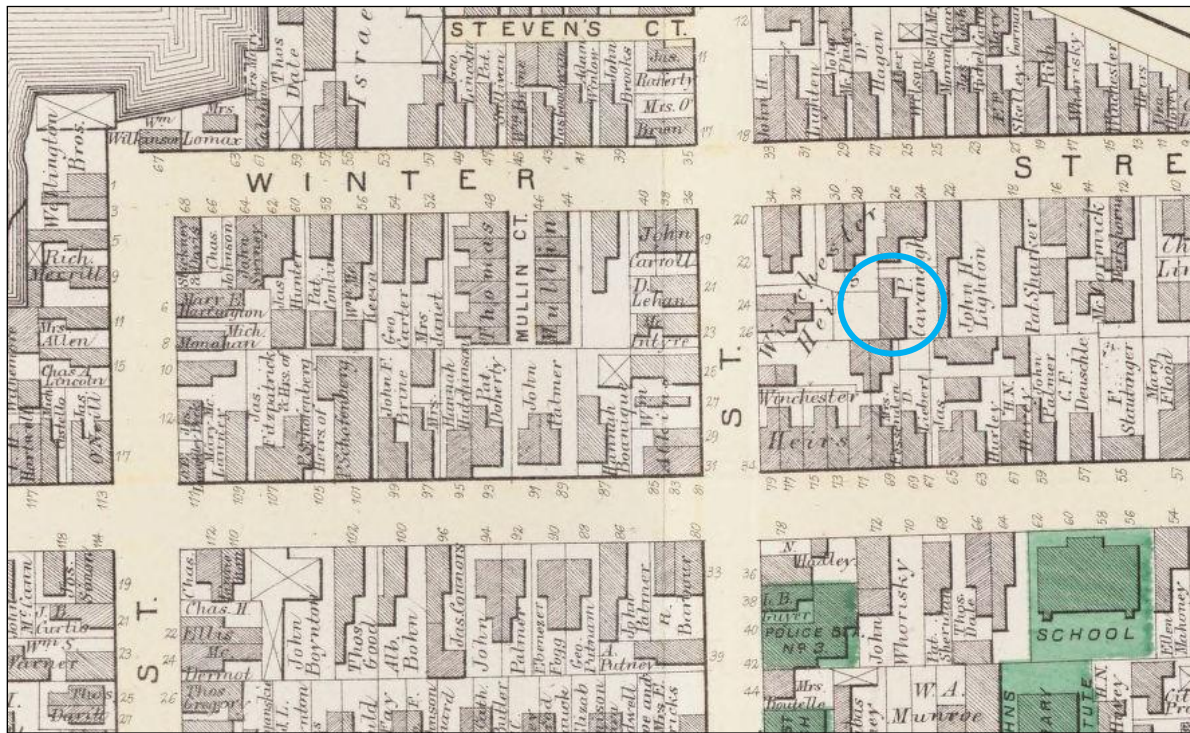
Leighton served as superintendent until his death in 1849 and was succeeded by his son Henry, who continued in the same position until 1858. Thomas Leighton's son John, who also became superintendent, inherited both 22 and 24R Winter Street and lived there with his wife Jane until he died in 1879. She survived him and continued living at 22 Winter Street. The family sold the property after her death in 1889.

Thomas Leighton Sr. acquired the lot next door to his house at 22 Winter Street in 1835 and sold it to his son Thomas Leighton Jr. in 1838. Thomas was assessed at the end of the year for an unfinished house that was a smaller copy of his father's. The house was built at the back of the lot



so that another house could be built in front of it. That house, 26 Winter Street, appears on an 1854 map of Cambridge, but it was demolished in 1946, and little is known of its appearance.

John Leighton sold both 24 and 26 Winter to Patrick Cavanaugh, a laborer, about 1870. The house at 24 passed to Thomas Quinn, a letter carrier, about 1877, and then to Antonio Carbone, a machine operator, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Carbone family remained in possession at least through the 1960s.



*1873 Hopkins Atlas of Cambridge, 24R Winter Street circled.*



*Thomas Leighton house, 22 Winter Street, 2016. Thomas Leighton Jr. House not visible.*





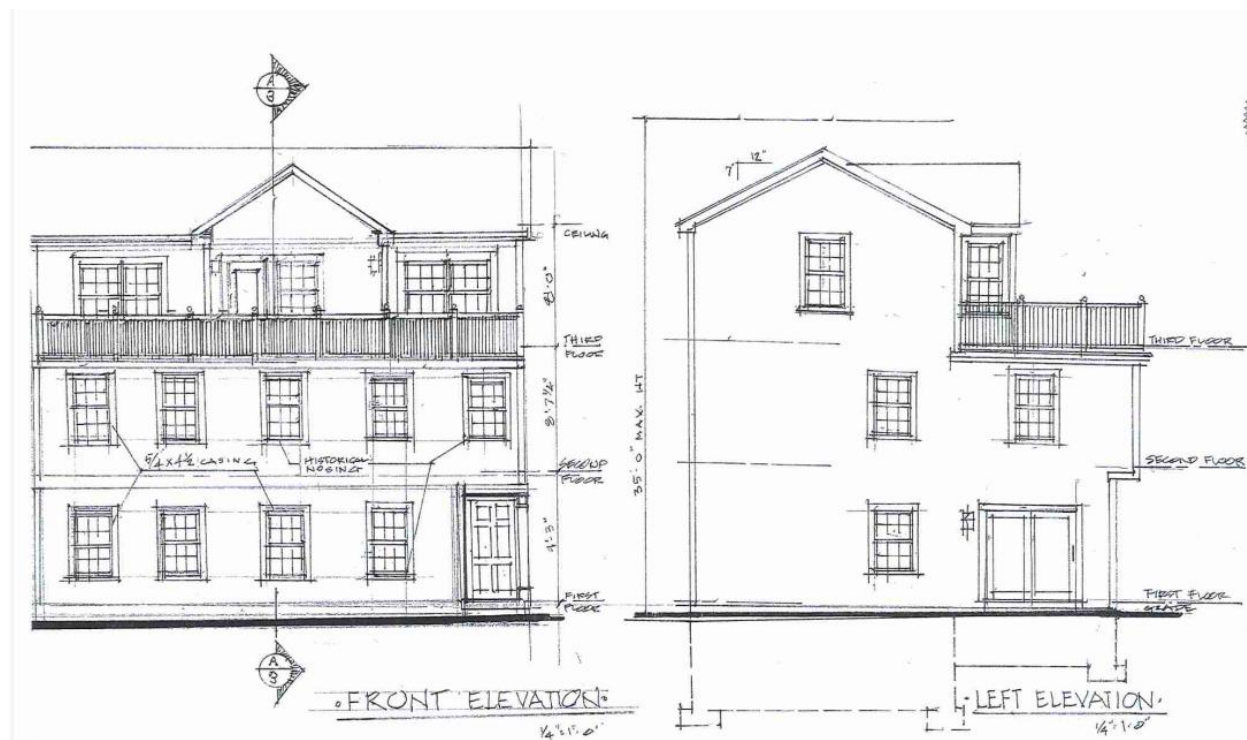
*24R Winter Street (right) and 69r Gore Street (left), November 2025.*



*View of 24R Winter Street, between 24 and 28-30 Winter Street, November 2025*

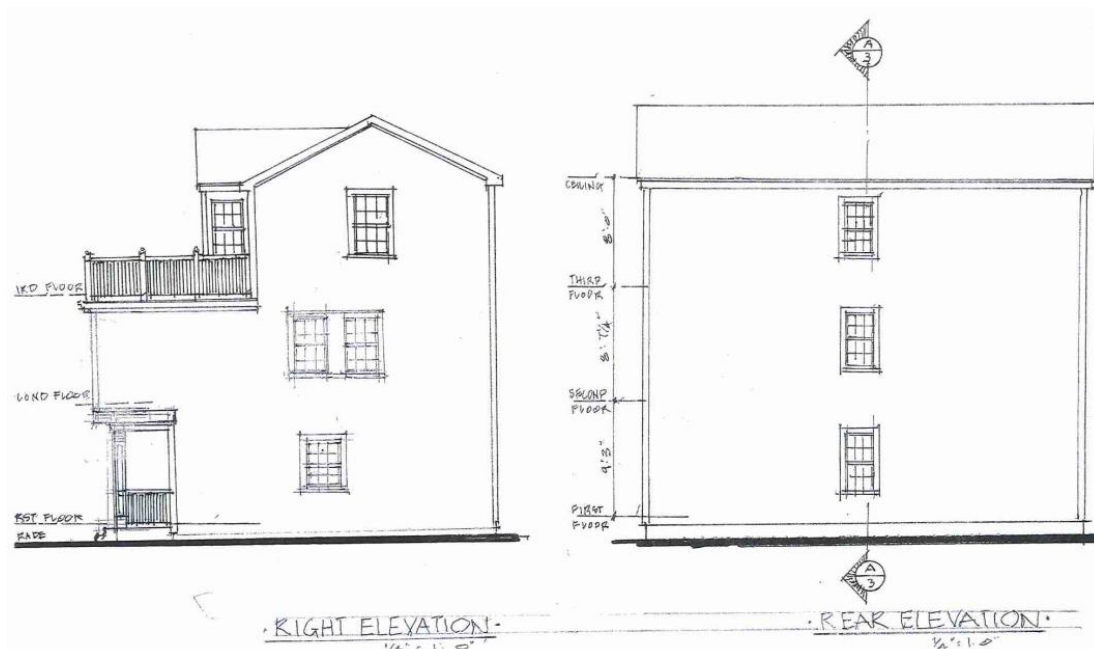


*View of 24R Winter Street, between 22 and 24 Winter Street, November 2025*



*Permitted plans for proposed renovations to 24R Winter Street, showing Front and Left (South) elevations.*





*Permitted plans for proposed renovations to 24R Winter Street, showing Rear and Right (north) elevations.*



*Applicant submitted rendering of proposed façade, 24R Winter Street.*

### Significance and Recommendation

The Thomas Leighton Jr. House at 24R Winter Street is automatically significant for the purposes of the demolition permit review ordinance as a contributing building within the Winter Street National Register District. Before the present project began it also had significance as a

representative example of an early nineteenth-century Federal period residence in East Cambridge and for its associations with the family of Thomas Leighton and his descendants.

The demolition delay ordinance, Cambridge Municipal Code, Ch. 2.78, Article II, requires CHC review of applications to demolish buildings fifty or more years old (2.78.090.A). Demolition is defined in the ordinance, Section 2.78.080.G, as "the act of pulling down, destroying, removing or razing a building or commencing the work of total or substantial destruction with the intent of completing the same." The Inspectional Services Department further defines demolition as the removal of 25% or more of a structure.

The enforcement clause of the demolition delay ordinance requires that "no building permit shall be issued with respect to any premises upon which a building fifty years or more old has been voluntarily demolished otherwise than pursuant to a demolition permit granted after compliance with the provisions of this article for a period of two years after the date of the completion of such demolition" (2.78.120.B).

The Commission has no authority to modify the provisions of this ordinance, but in some past cases of unauthorized demolition, it has voted that a significant structure is no longer preferably preserved with respect to the proposed project. Such an action does not obviate the facts of the case but allows projects to proceed after other city permits are granted.

As the former structure at 24R Winter Street was automatically significant as a contributing building within the Winter Street National Register District, the Commission must now examine the plans for the replacement structure and decide whether it will be in the public interest to find the structure "preferably preserved" in the context of the presently planned replacement structure.

- If the Commission finds the significant former structure "not preferably preserved," the stop-work order will be lifted and work may continue.
- If the Commission finds the significant former structure "preferably preserved", the stop work order will remain in effect until October 17, 2027.

Staff contends that no public purpose would be served by a finding that the significant former structure is "preferably preserved". The resource that was destroyed was not prominently visible from any public way, so the loss does not meaningfully detract from the historic character of the area. A finding that the significant former structure was not "preferably preserved" would leave the owners subject to the penalties imposed by the Inspectional Services Department and the constraints of the zoning code.

cc: Peter McLaughlin, Inspectional Services Department Commissioner  
Lauren and William Gibson, Owners