



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>



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June 5, 2018

To: Members of the Historical Commission

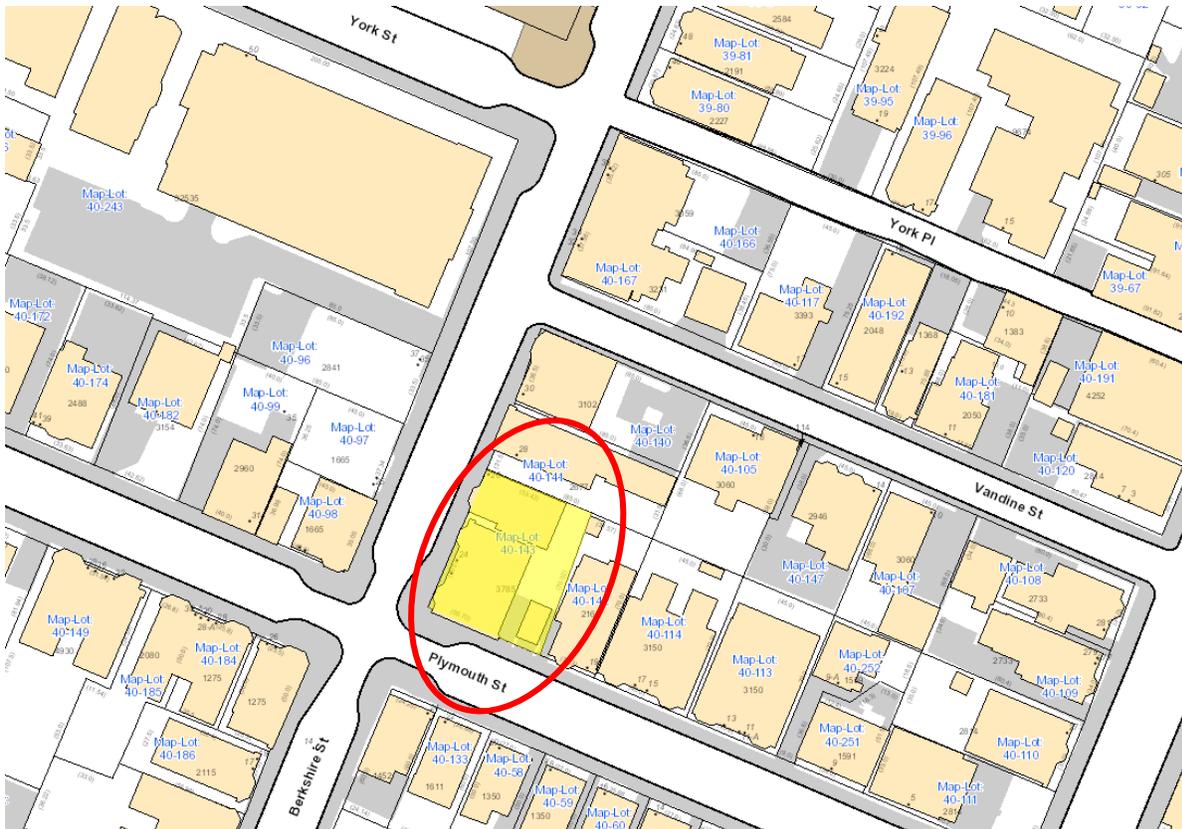
From: Charles Sullivan

Re: Case D-1487: 22-24 Berkshire Street
Case D-1488: 26 Berkshire Street

An application to demolish the structures at 22-24 and 26 Berkshire Street was received on May 24, 2018. The applicant, Joao DeAndrade Bairos, was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for June 7.

Site

The structures, two two-story dwellings, are located on one parcel on the east side of Berkshire Street at the corner of Plymouth Street.



22-24 and 26 Berkshire Street.

Cambridge GIS, Assessor's map

The two buildings are located on a 3,784 square-foot lot in a Residence C-1 district. This is a multi-family residential district, which permits an FAR of .75 and has a height limit of 35 feet. The assessed value of the property, according to the online assessor's property database, is \$1,232,800, with \$247,500 attributable to the buildings (Map 40/Parcel 143). The assessors rate 22-24, a four-family house, as in "poor" condition, and 26, a two-family, as "very poor." A one-car garage built in 1925 is not considered significant for the purposes of demolition review.

The neighboring properties include a mixture of 2½ story gable-roofed houses and three-deckers developed between 1875 and 1910. The densely developed Wellington-Harrington neighborhood suffered a devastating fire on December 3, 2016. The ten-alarm blaze resulted in 18 damaged buildings, and over 150 displaced residents, but no loss of life. An investigation pinpointed the start of the fire to discarded smoking materials at the house next door to the former St. Patrick's Church at 35-37 Berkshire Street, which was under renovation at the time. Three buildings across the street (25-27 and 35-37 Berkshire Street and 35 Plymouth Street) were destroyed and ordered removed as hazards to public safety. The adjoining houses at 28 and 30 Plymouth were so heavily damaged as to have lost their potentially significant status under the demolition ordinance. Because of damage to their foundations, in June 2017 ISD condemned 22-24 and 26 Plymouth for human occupancy but did not order them demolished. An assessment by architect Arthur Choo found extensive mold in the drywall.



22-24 Berkshire Street post-fire.

Assessing Dept. photo



26 Berkshire Street post-fire

Assessing Dept. photo



Berkshire Street neighborhood in 2014

Cambridge GIS



Berkshire Street neighborhood post-fire

Google Maps

Description

The buildings at 22-24 and 26 Berkshire Street are two-story structures with brick foundations and flat roofs built in 1885 and 1890. The original clapboards are covered by wood shingles. Windows and doors were replaced not long before the fire. Although built five years apart, they exhibit the same Queen Anne-style cornice brackets. The newer building, 22-24, has Queen Anne brackets supporting the roof over the entrance; the newer house has anachronistic Italianate brackets in this location. Otherwise the houses appear identical. Most of these details are present on the adjacent 19 Plymouth Street, which the same owner and builder put up in 1887.

The owner proposes to demolish the houses and construct a three-story, six-family building with three garage spaces.

History

The densely-developed Wellington-Harrington neighborhood between Cambridge Street and Hampshire streets, west of the Grand Junction Railroad, developed quickly after 1875 and was essentially built out by 1910. After the Civil War the 30-acre Binney tract between Webster Avenue and the railroad was occupied only by the Cambridge Rolling Mill, an iron-processing plant. By 1873 the lower part near Hampshire Street had been platted with streets, but construction had barely begun. Development closely followed the expansion of heavy industry around Kendall Square and the Broad Canal, and among the first to go up were twelve closely-spaced 2½-story houses along Plymouth Street and Berkshire Place in 1875. By 1885 building technology had evolved to the point that flat roofs were practical for the first time. This led to the development of the three-decker, a hugely popular method of housing Cambridge's burgeoning working class and

immigrant families. The two-story houses at 22-24 and 26 Berkshire Street were among the first in the neighborhood to embrace this new technology, but most if not all later houses had three stories. The City acquired about 15 acres of the Binney Tract for a public park in 1892. By the time St. Peter's Church was constructed in 1909 the neighborhood was essentially complete. The extreme density of the area made fire a major concern, and was a major impetus for city regulations on setbacks, firewalls, and eventually zoning in 1924.



Berkshire Street neighborhood in 1873 and 1900

Thomas Ryan, the builder, could not always be positively distinguished from others of the same name, but the 1887 directory for 22 Berkshire Street lists him as a foreman of sectionmen (track laborers) for the Boston & Albany R.R. Ryan, who had previously lived at 29 Seventh Street in East Cambridge, died in 1896 in a railroad accident in Newton. Thomas Ryan is credited with several other houses in the vicinity of Berkshire Street, including 47 Webster Avenue (1864), 10 Union Street (1887), and 19 Plymouth Street (1887), but only 22-24 and 26 Berkshire Street and 19 Plymouth Street can be directly attributed to the man who lived at 22 Berkshire in 1887.

Ryan's heirs retained the property at least through 1916. In 1925 Manuel Furtado, an employee of Barbour Stockwell & Co., purchased 22-24 and 26 Berkshire Street and built the garage on Plymouth Street; 19 Plymouth was sold separately. Mr. Furtado, a native of St. Michael, in the Azores, died in 1968.

Significance and Recommendation

I recommend that the buildings at 22-24 and 26 Berkshire Street be found significant as examples of the Queen Anne style applied to early flat-roofed multifamily buildings, and for their associations with the social and economic development of the Wellington-Harrington neighborhood.

The Commission should hear testimony from the applicants and neighbors and review the plans for replacement construction before making a further determination.

cc: Joao DeAndrade Bairos, c/o Jason A. Panos, Esq.