

# **MORRISON AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT**

## **FINAL REPORT**

**Prepared by  
Somerville Historic Preservation Commission**

**July 7, 2010**

**Final Report  
on  
Morrison Avenue Historic District  
  
Somerville, Massachusetts**

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July 2010

# **Map Amendment to the Somerville Historic District Ordinance Creating a Morrison Avenue Historic District**

## **Final Report**

### **Introduction**

A local historic district is an area officially designated by the City that “contains one or more parcels or lots of land, or one or more buildings or structures on one or more parcels or lots of land.” Since 1985 Somerville has been a pioneer in the creation of single-building districts. This is because our surveying efforts have discovered that many of the City’s most architecturally and historically significant sites are scattered throughout the community, rather than clustered in a few discrete areas. Over the past decade, however, a renewed effort has been made to survey additional properties, and consolidate these with existing single-building districts in the immediate area. This Preliminary Study Report proposes to do exactly that, enlarge two existing single-building districts by adding a third property and re-name the district to encompass all three properties.

Local Historic Districts were first established in Massachusetts in 1955, and since then have been created in over 215 communities throughout the State. All of the communities adjacent to Somerville’s borders, and most within the Boston Metropolitan Area, have locally designated historic properties due to their many perceived benefits.

In Somerville, local historic districts have multiple benefits. Based upon case studies and research projects in the Boston area, as well as the nation as a whole, it has been found that historic designation often improves property values and stabilizes neighborhoods. In part, this is because the designation protects owners from wide and sometimes wild fluctuations in the marketplace. It also gives confidence to the owner that their investment will not be undermined by inappropriate alterations either to their own house over time or to their neighbors’. Historic designation of a group of properties can help protect a neighborhood against inappropriate development, preserving the character of its architecture and its quality of life. The presence of designated Local Historic Districts also appeals to and assures potential buyers that the attractive qualities of a neighborhood will be protected over the longer term.

On a community-wide scale historic districts create a sense of place and preserve architecture that attracts new homebuyers, as well as businesses, jobs, and tourist dollars. Designated historic areas encourage public and private investment, and reinforce citizens’ perception that they live in a city that cares about itself and its residents. Historic designation encourages thoughtful, well-planned building design and site development. The inventory form that underlies the creation of historic districts provides invaluable information about the significant role that Somerville played in the development and growth of the region, as well as the founding of our nation. This research helps schools, libraries, and other resource centers to develop educational material that promote local pride and participation.

In sum, the designation of local historic districts preserves and protects the historical attributes of older architecture in the City, inspires greater investment in the community, and promotes widespread appreciation of local history that in turn increases civic pride.

# Final Report for Morrison Avenue Historic District

## Methodology

The architectural and historical development of Somerville has been well researched and presented in a book entitled **Beyond the Neck: The Architecture and Development of Somerville, Massachusetts**. This book of 159 pages was written in 1982 and updated in 1990 by Carole Zellie of Landscape Research under the auspices of the City of Somerville. Other excellent sources for historical data about the City can be found in the MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report for Somerville (1980), the Somerville Multiple Resource Area (MRA) Nomination Form to the National Register of Historic Places (1984), and three lengthy “Final Reports” prepared by the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission in 1985, 1989, and 2007, for establishing new or expanded local historic districts in Somerville. All of these materials are on file and available for review at the offices of the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission at Somerville City Hall, as well as the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

This Final Report builds upon what has been presented in these other research documents and explains the rationale for designating one additional property (**221 Morrison Avenue (SMV.1337)**) in an area that includes two existing single-building districts (**#197 (SMV.153)** and **#222 Morrison Avenue (SMV.341)**) and renames the consolidated district as the “Morrison Avenue Local Historic District.”

The primary impetus for this expanded district is a request from the owners of 221 Morrison Avenue to have their property designated as a local historic district. They would like to be eligible as the first “Historic Bed and Breakfast” in Somerville. This past summer, in June 2009, the City amended its Zoning Ordinance to create an incentive for preserving some of the larger and historic properties within its borders.

The amendment incorporated a new “Historic Bed and Breakfast” category within the Table of Uses. This provision allowed an owner to provide more than the previously capped maximum of three (3) rooms in an owner-occupied dwelling. Under the amendment, a “Historic Bed and Breakfast” can: a) contain up to nine (9) rooms for rent; b) be run by an operator whose principal residence was the facility, rather than by the property owner only; and c) only incur façade changes and/or alterations that conform to the guidelines and approval of the Historic Preservation Commission. Since this amendment only applies to buildings already designated as part of a Local Historic District (LHD), it gives historic property owners the opportunity to generate new income from the additional rooms that they are allowed to lease in their structure. This income in turn can help owners maintain, and in some cases, restore the architectural integrity of their house or accessory structure. The new provision also creates an economically feasible alternative to the common course of subdividing large historic properties into smaller and smaller units of ownership, such as condominiums, which can result in schizophrenic facades reflecting the divergent tastes of multiple owners.

The owners of the subject property at **221 Morrison Avenue** are the first ones to seek approval from the City for this type of Historic Bed and Breakfast. The owners and their architect have met with both zoning and preservation planning staff and expressed their long-standing desire to expand their current lodging business, as well as to continue restoring their home, bringing it closer to its original charm and character. They have lived in the house for many years, and have been gradually making changes to the structure, including rebuilding the front porch, to bring it more in line with its original configuration. They wish to continue this work, and their input was instrumental in the development of this recent amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.

## Final Report for Morrison Avenue Historic District

### Methodology (continued)

The owners of **221 Morrison Avenue** retained architectural historian, Edward W. Gordon to research and document the architectural and historical significance of their house. Based upon his recent comprehensive surveying of Somerville for a much larger City project, Mr. Gordon was very familiar with the architectural history and development of the area. He used a variety of sources; including deed investigation, City directories, and oral history to determine the significance of the property and to complete the attached Form B survey (**SMV.1337**).

Acting as the Local Historic District Study Committee the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (SHPC) reviewed the survey form at their regularly scheduled monthly meeting on November 17, 2009, and discussed at length the owners' designation request at their December 15, 2009 monthly meeting. The Commission believed that designation of this property will help address its loss of historic integrity over the years because it will enable the owners to gain additional rooms to lease, derive income to continue restoring the original character, and also give them the benefit of technical review and advice from Commission members and staff to ensure that they make historically appropriate alterations. By a unanimous vote of (7-0) the SHPC recommended that the property be incorporated within a multiple building district encompassing the two very nearby properties at **#197** and **#222 Morrison Avenue**. They asked that the Preliminary Study Report be prepared and submitted in accordance with M.G.L. Chapter 40(C) and the City's Historic District Ordinance to the Somerville Planning Board and to the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) for their respective consideration and recommendations.

The staff at the MHC has determined that the Preliminary Study Report was complete. After a minimum of sixty (60) days elapsed since the submission, the Somerville HPC held a public hearing on the Report. The Commission gave due notice at least fourteen (14) days prior to the date of the hearing to all owners of property in the proposed district as they appear on the most recent real estate tax list of the Board of Assessors. In accordance with the City's Historic District Ordinance the public hearing notice was sent to these owners by certified mail, postage prepaid, return receipt requested, and the notice was also given to the City Clerk and posted at City Hall. The notice indicated that the Study Report was available for review at City Hall.

Following the public hearing the Commission prepared a "Final Report" incorporating comments and recommendations received at the public hearing, from the Planning Board, and the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The Somerville HPC, through the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, submitted the Final Report as amended to the Mayor and the Somerville Board of Aldermen, accompanied by a map showing the proposed expansion of the local historic district, and the language necessary to adopt the district map. The Final Report will ultimately be sent to the Massachusetts Historical Commission for their files.

# Final Report for Morrison Avenue Historic District

## Significance

Davis Square is a well-preserved early twentieth century commercial district. It is currently a thriving center of mixed uses, incorporating many commercial businesses, restaurants, offices, entertainment venues, and houses. Its earliest phase of notable residential development, a suburban building boom, occurred from 1865-1873. It happened largely in anticipation of and the subsequent introduction of the Lexington and Arlington Branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad to the area in 1870-1871. The new streetcar and train service into Davis Square provided the impetus for Nathaniel Morrison to plat acreage for a development just to the north of Davis Square, off Elm Street (now College Avenue) in the late 1860s and early 1870s. This area was developed in 1870 by George Emerson, a pickle manufacturer who purchased the land from Morrison.

Morrison Avenue, likely named after the original landowner, was one of the first streets developed in this area, and it connected the western parts of Somerville, now known as the Davis and Powderhouse neighborhoods, with the Tufts brickyards, located several blocks to the east. The street displays a range of architectural styles typically built in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, including Italianate, Gothic Revival, Mansard and Queen Anne style residences. Historically, the house at **221 Morrison Avenue** is associated with the development patterns that occurred in Davis Square following the construction of the train station. Most of the area's inhabitants commuted to jobs in Boston.

Architecturally, the house is a key component of the immediate late nineteenth century streetscape of residential wood-frame houses. It retains many of the features that define its style and period, such as the roof return eaves, saw-cut brackets, and polygonal bays found on an Italianate wood-frame structure. Its newly rebuilt porch is sympathetic to that style. The architectural significance of the house was overlooked during earlier surveying work, likely due to its vinyl siding encapsulation. The current owners and their architect believe that the original clapboards are still intact under the current vinyl sheathing, and that a sufficient amount of the original clapboard, shingles and other details remain under the siding, so that they can be fully repaired or replicated.

Although **221 Morrison Avenue (SMV.1337)** has undergone many alterations, especially in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more recent changes, such as the re-constructed front porch, have brought the building more in line with its original configuration. The Somerville Historic Preservation Commission would like to see this trend continue, and believe that designating this building as part of a Local Historic District would advance this goal. It would allow the owners to become a "Historic Bed and Breakfast," enabling them to add a couple more rooms to let and increase the rental income available to continue their restoration work. It would also ensure that any new changes or additions to the building would be subject to the review and approval of the Commission and therefore be compatible with the historic integrity of the architectural style, as well as the overall historic character of the surrounding streetscape.

## Final Report for Morrison Avenue Historic District

### Justification of the Boundaries

There are currently two single-building Local Historic District buildings situated on Morrison Avenue. These are # **197**, the Nathaniel Morrison House, dated *circa* 1880, designated in 1985 (**SMV.153**), and # **222**, the William Shedd House, dated 1873, and designated in 1989 (**SMV.341**).

The house at **197 Morrison Avenue** is perhaps Somerville's best example of the picturesque Gothic Revival Style. It has many original features, including a lancet gable window, cusped bargeboards, and a floor length façade window. Together with the house at 201 Morrison Avenue it shares a ridge above Morrison Avenue, making it set far back from the street. It is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. (See the Appendices for its Form B).

The house at **222 Morrison Avenue** is a well-conserved, one and a half story Mansard cottage, which is one of the best local examples of the modest housing built in the Morrison Avenue area in the 1870's. It still retains its clapboard siding, patterned slate roof, paired door entrance, paired brackets on the bay, and pedimented dormers. (See the Appendices for its Form B).

Architectural historian Mr. Gordon believes that the subject property, **221 Morrison Avenue (SMV.1337)** is also eligible to be part of a larger National Register District as a contributing building. Rather than simply establish another single-building district at **221 Morrison Avenue**, the Commission finds that it would be more appropriate to add this building to the map, and consolidate these three buildings into one small multi-building district following the lot lines of each property. As a group these structures are representative of typical architectural styles developed in this area during the period of 1860's and 1870's, with #**197** as a Gothic Revival, #**221** as an Italianate, and #**222** as a Mansard cottage. Together they form a fairly unified and intact nucleus that can be further expanded into an even larger district at a later date, once additional surveying can be undertaken.

This upper end of Morrison Avenue, off of College Avenue and just north of the center of Davis Square, is the oldest section of the street. Both the Commission and Mr. Gordon believe that there are many other properties on both sides of the street which have great architectural merit. It is believed that these buildings are quite eligible for "historic designation" and could be appropriately integrated within a much larger Morrison Avenue LHD once surveying funds or staff is available to undertake the work. These additional buildings therefore are not included within the boundaries at this time simply because their architectural and historical significance to the district have not yet been documented.

# Final Report for Morrison Avenue Historic District

## Recommendations

Somerville previously adopted a local historic district ordinance known as Ordinance No. 1985-2 Historic District Ordinance of the City of Somerville. Its intent is to govern all local historic districts in Somerville including the establishment of new districts and the enlargement or reduction of existing districts. Each district is defined by a map also adopted as part of the Ordinance. The Somerville Historic Preservation Commission proposes that the Board of Aldermen adopt a map amendment to create an enlarged local historic district. There are no recommendations to change the existing ordinance that governs the establishment, enlargement or reduction of a district and district commission, the procedures for review of applications, the criteria for determinations, and the exclusions from review. The existing ordinance is included in the Appendices.

Based upon its review of the Form B for **221 Morrison Avenue** (SMV.1337) and a discussion about its contribution to the Morrison Avenue streetscape, the Commission sees many reasons to **recommend amendment of the Somerville Historic District map to create an enlarged Morrison Avenue LHD**. This LHD incorporate the property at **221 Morrison Avenue**, as well as the two nearby and currently single-building districts known as the Nathaniel Morrison House at **197 Morrison Avenue** and the William Shedd House at **222 Morrison Avenue**. The designation will enable the owners to become a “Historic Bed and Breakfast,” that will serve a valuable public purpose in this neighborhood, and serve as a model for other owners of large older houses with challenging economic viability. The designation may provide additional income to the owners, encouraging them to continue property restoration work, while enabling the Commission to oversee future alterations and ensure their historic ‘appropriateness.’ The expanded LHD will also continue the positive trend of creating more multi-building districts in the City, and especially on a street that is worthy of additional surveying and designations.





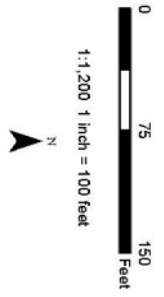
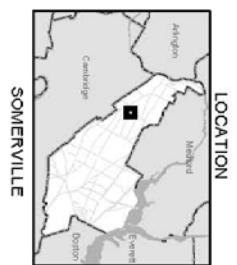
# Map Amendment to the Somerville Historic District Ordinance Creating a Morrison Avenue Historic District



## CITY OF SOMERVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT EXPANSION PROJECT

### Morrison Avenue Expansion Project

-  221 Morrison Avenue
-  Existing LHD Properties proposed for inclusion in the Morrison Ave LHD



Mayer Joseph A. Curtstone  
Office of Strategic Planning and  
Community Development  
Mapping Prepared by City of Somerville

## Final Report for Morrison Avenue Historic District

### Property Index

The index is a list of the parcels and resources within the proposed Morrison Avenue Local Historic District. Information included on the property index is as follows:

INV. = the MHC inventory or MACRIS number for the resource. SMV = Somerville's Inventory number.

M-B-L = the Map Section, Block and Lot number found on the City of Somerville's Assessor maps.

ADDRESS = the street address number, and the name of the street on which a resource is located.

STYLE = the architectural style that is most prevalent in the design of a resource.

HISTORIC NAME = the first known owner or name that is historically associated with a property.

YEAR = the approximate date or year in which a resource was constructed.

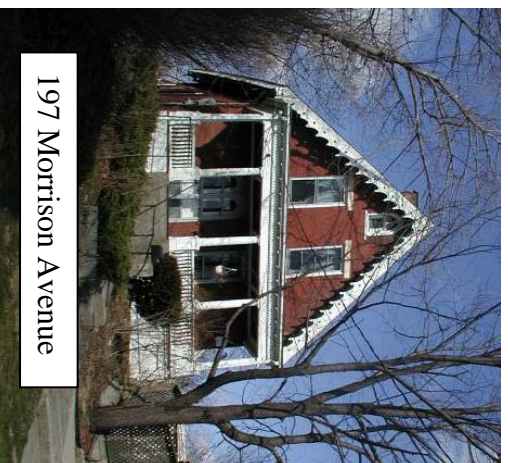
STATUS: NR = National Register designation, as listed:

MRA = Multiple Resource Area

IND = Individual

LHD = Local Historic District designation previously established

<b>MHC Form #</b>	<b>M-B-L</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Style</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Historic Name</b>	<b>Historic Status</b>
SMV. 341	20-A-3	222 Morrison Ave.	Mansard	1873	William C Shedd House	LHD
SMV. 153	20-B-38	197 Morrison Ave.	Gothic Revival	1860	Nathaniel Morrison House	NRMRA, NRIND, LHD
SMV. 1337	20-B-44	221 Morrison Ave.	Italianate	1870	Warren-Sparrow House	LHD (proposed)
+++++						



197 Morrison Avenue



221 Morrison Avenue



222 Morrison Avenue

# **MORRISON AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT**

## **FINAL REPORT**

## **APPENDICES**

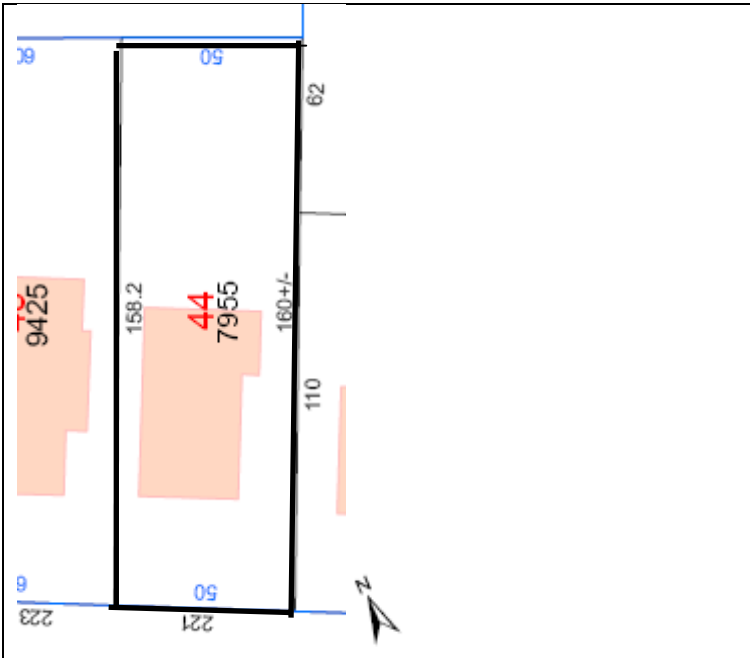
**Prepared by  
Somerville Historic Preservation Commission**

**July 7, 2010**

# FORM B – BUILDING

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

## Photograph



**Recorded by:** Edward W. Gordon  
**Organization:** Private Consultant  
**Date** (month / year): 10/16/09

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

20/B/44

Boston-  
North

SMV.1337

**Town:** Somerville, MA

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

**Address:** 221 Morrison Avenue

**Historic Name:** Warren-Sparrow House

**Uses:** Present: Bed & Breakfast

Original: Single-family residence

**Date of Construction:** 1870

**Source:** Middlesex County Deeds

**Style/Form:** Italianate/L-shaped

**Architect/Builder:** Undetermined

### Exterior Material:

Foundation: Brick (and concrete at northeast corner of rear ell).

Wall/Trim: Aluminum & wood

Roof: Asphalt shingles

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:** N/A

**Major Alterations** (*with dates*): Front porch constructed in 1998 with period appearance; back porch roof built in 2001; Rear ell expanded eastward ca. mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Condition:** Good

**Moved:** no | X | yes | | **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Acreage:** 7,955 Square feet

**Setting:** Key component in streetscape of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Italianate, Mansard and Queen Anne houses. Main façade is set back 30 feet from the street and overlooks a garden.

# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

[SOMERVILLE]

[221 MORRISON AVENUE]

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

SMV.1337

\_\_\_ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

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

*Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.*

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

*Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

Built in 1870, 221 Morrison Avenue is an Italianate wood frame house that is set back thirty feet from Morrison Avenue facing a white picket fence-enclosed garden. Possessing an L-shaped form, this end gable house is a key component within its immediate streetscape of late nineteenth century wood frame residences. An asphalt-paved driveway extends from the street northward along its eastern elevation to a deep, well-landscaped back yard. An unpaved cul-de-sac referred to in the property's early deeds as a lane defines the northern edge of the property. Separating #221 from the house next door to the west is a narrow strip of level, grass-covered land.

Composed of a main block and a rear ell, this house, with its plethora of projecting structural components, is of primary interest because it anticipates the more emphatic asymmetrical massing characteristic of the Queen Anne style; an architectural mode that came to the fore in Somerville during the 1880s. With the noteworthy exception of the east wall of the original rear ell (now the west wall of an enclosed porch), this house's wood clapboard sheathing is covered by c.1950s or 1960s aluminum siding. According to the present owner, the original clapboards are still intact under the vinyl siding of the remaining elevations.

Measuring three-bays-by-two-bays, the main block rises two stories from a low brick foundation to an asphalt shingle-sheathed gable roof which exhibits return eaves accented by typically Italianate paired saw-cut brackets. The western half of the main block's principal facade exhibits a front door that opens on to a small porch while the eastern half is dominated by a polygonal bay. Both the front porch and the polygonal bay share a common roof that extends in an unbroken expanse from one to the other. Rising from the porch roof is a square oriel that is enclosed by a pedimented gable roof.

Returning to a consideration of the front porch it should be noted that it acquired its present appearance in 1998. Possessing a nineteenth century design sensibility, this porch does not represent a recreation of the original. The front porch does, however, possess a nineteenth century appearance that is compatible with this house and neighboring late nineteenth century residences. When the present owners purchased the house in 1996 all that remained of the original porch were its bracketed entablature and flat roof. At that time, the porch consisted of mid twentieth century concrete steps and a platform that supported modern iron railings and posts. The concrete steps and platform were retained while wooden railings, turned posts and spandrel brackets replaced the modern iron elements. Opening on to the front porch is a four-panel replacement front door of undetermined vintage. Still intact, however, and of considerable design interest, are the front door's enframements that consist of flanking "sidelights", pilasters and cornice-headed entablature. The narrow "sidelights" apparently never contained glass. Instead, each narrow recess contains solid vertical panels set off by raised molded surrounds. The lower panel rises to approximately one third of the height of the door and is surmounted by a second, taller panel that terminates at the entablature.

In fact, the front door's solid wooden sidelights represent a later phase in the evolution of a type of entrance enframing that rose to the fore around 1800 as one of the principal identifying Federal style characteristics (combined with surmounting fanlights). Sidelight-flanked front doors are among the most enduring design features of American domestic architecture being utilized for most of the nineteenth and early nineteenth century architectural styles. The early sidelights were created to contain glass set in wooden or leaded sash. Glazed vertical openings flanking a front door permitted additional light into entrance halls that might otherwise be devoid of natural light. During the second quarter of the nineteenth century sidelights were frequently designed to accommodate solid wooden panels as well as glass. By the 1830s, the lower third of a sidelight frequently contained solid wood panels while the remaining, upper two thirds contained glass secured by multi-pane wooden sash. As gas lighting became more widely available after 1850, finding ways to maximize the amount of natural light filtering into entrance halls became less of a priority and as a result sidelights containing solid wooden panels for their entire length, rather than glass, became more typical.



# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

[SOMERVILLE]

[221 MORRISON AVENUE]

## MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

SMV.1337

Completing the flanking entrance enframements are narrow wooden pilasters that are unadorned and rely upon proportion and smooth surfaces for visual interest. The front door is surmounted by a molded cornice headed entablature accented with a course of small saw cut brackets.

Resting atop the entrance porch's flat roof is a square oriel that is enclosed by a pedimented gable. A standard size window pierces the oriel's main façade while each side wall exhibits a narrow window. In evidence to the right of the oriel are two standard size windows. In general, all of this house's windows contain 1/1 double-hung modern metal replacement sash. The main facade culminates in a gable with bracketed return eaves and a standard size attic window.

The main block's east wall, at the first story, exhibits a standard size window and a polygonal bay with bracketed roof eaves. In evidence at the second story are a standard size window and a double window. Continuing northward, the main block intersects with the narrow south wall of the flat-roofed rear ell. The original configuration of the rear or kitchen ell was narrower. At an undermined date the ell was expanded eastward atop a concrete foundation to accommodate a three-season porch on each floor. Retaining its original clapboards as well as entrance and window enframements, this porch's west wall is the original east wall of the rear ell. Judging by the fir tongue and groove wooden flooring of the first and second story rooms created by the ell's enlargement, these new spaces (now used as a workroom and guest room) date to no later than the 1950s. When the ell was enlarged, a south wall measuring the equivalent a single bay was extended beyond the main block's east wall. The first story of the ell's east elevation exhibits four standard size windows while the second story displays a small window and a standard size window.

Overlooking the patio and garden of the backyard, the eastern half of the north elevation is sheltered by a shed porch roof that was constructed in 1998. This roof is supported by diagonal bracing and enlivened by a small gable. The porch roof's small gable corresponds with the back or workroom door. The wooden steps that ascend to the work room door were built in August, 2009. To the left of this door are two standard size windows. The original north wall of the rear ell begins to the right of the back door. Here, a narrow projecting shed contains stairs that descend from a door to the cellar. A roof that is contiguous with the back porch's roof slope encloses this stairway's shed. To the right of the cellar door is a standard size window. At the second story are a standard size window and a small window. Rising above the rear ell's flat roof is the main block's north gable.

Considered from north to south, 221 Morrison Avenue's west wall is pierced by a small window. To the right of this window is a one story box bay which is enclosed by a flat roof with bracketed eaves. A double window pierces the box bay's west wall. At the west elevation's second story is a standard size window that is located just to the right of the box bay's roof.

221 Morrison Avenue's interior retains a few original features such as the main stairway's newel post, railings and balusters. Several stair treads that appear to be original to 1870 are still intact above the first floor. Although no original doors survive on the first floor, two original four panel doors are still in evidence at the second floor.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.*

Built in 1870, 221 Morrison Avenue dates from the Davis Square area's earliest phase of comprehensive residential development (1865-1873). This nearly decade-long period of prosperity had its roots in the accelerated industrialization that occurred during the Civil War. The prosperity of the war and post-war years ended with the economic downturn called the Panic of 1873. Built while the regional and national economy was still strong, 221 Morrison Avenue owes its existence to a major transportation improvement: the introduction of the Lexington and Arlington Branch of the Boston & Maine Railroad to Davis Square in 1870-1871. The introduction of the railroad to West Somerville disrupted the centuries old routines of agrarian life in West Somerville, triggering commercial and residential construction around and near the crossroads formed by Elm Street, College Avenue and Highland Avenue. This crossroads was officially named Davis Square in 1883 in honor of major area landowner and grain dealer Person Davis. The segment of Elm Street between Davis and Powderhouse Squares (later part of College Avenue) became the focus of the religious life of the West Somerville community with houses of worship being constructed between the 1870s and the 1920s. After the Civil War, several real estate developers were poised to take advantage of the Davis Square area's potential as the major focus for the commercial and residential life of the community. Among these developers was Nathaniel Morrison.

*Continuation sheet 2*

# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

[SOMERVILLE]

[221 MORRISON AVENUE]

## MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

SMV.1337

The beginnings of 221 Morrison Avenue lie in a deed of June 14, 1869 that documents Nathaniel Morrison's purchase of part of the Henry C. Rand estate. The Rand family had been farmers in Cambridge and Somerville for generations. Rands had settled in Charlestown as early as the mid seventeenth century. Several local real estate speculators were poised to take advantage of the sale of several farms and estates, including Nathaniel Morrison, the original owner of this house's lot. He was apparently well aware of the railroad's imminent arrival to the area and the impact it would have on the development of the Davis Square area. Morrison purchased the 244-acre tract from the Henry C. Rand estate in June of 1869. Morrison, himself, became directly linked to the railroad when he became Depot Master of the Elm Street Railroad Station in 1872.

Morrison evidently purchased the Rand estate with the intention of opening the tract to residential development. After purchasing Henry C. Rand's 244 acres, he proceeded to carve out 221 Morrison Avenue's lot, set out Morrison Avenue and presumably had other lots delineated within his recently purchased acreage. A thorough search of Middlesex County deeds and plan books did not, however, locate a surveyor's subdivision plan commissioned by Morrison. Six months after Morrison purchased the Rand estate, he sold #221's lot to Jacob F. Emerson on December 1, 1869 for \$3,066. Emerson proceeded to have the house built during the first half of 1870.

In 1870, Jacob F. Emerson is listed as a farmer whose house was on Broadway, near the Willow Bridge in a part of Somerville later known as Ball Square. Best evidence indicates that Emerson never lived in this house but was familiar with the area because, in addition to farming, he earned his livelihood from the management of a nearby factory. Emerson operated a tin can manufactory and fruit canning business in which the canning of tomatoes seems to have been his specialty. The tomatoes that he canned may have been grown on his farm. He rented a wooden factory building from Nathan Tufts Jr., a structure that was located within Powder House Farm, an area located just to the south of the old Powderhouse in Nathan Tufts Park.

The possibility remains that Jacob Emerson was related to George Emerson who manufactured pickles. Like Jacob F. Emerson, he too, conducted a manufactory in a wooden structure that he rented from Nathan Tufts Jr. George Emerson operated this pickle factory from 1874 until it was destroyed by fire in 1890. This factory was located on the north side of the Powderhouse a few yards from Broadway. Somerville business directories do not indicate that George and Jacob Emerson were partners in a single Tufts-owned factory.

The Morrison/Emerson deed of December 1, 1870 stipulates that "no building shall be erected thereon within thirty feet of the proposed street." The stipulation regarding the thirty foot set back from the "proposed street" (later Morrison Avenue) as well as the fact that the lot, itself, contained a rather generous 7,500 square feet, indicates that Morrison expected to have a substantial and costly house built on this lot. The thirty foot set back remains in place to this day, which along with the identical set backs of its neighboring houses provides an attractive, park-like foreground for the post Civil War houses of western Morrison Avenue. Unfortunately, the ample front yards of Morrison Avenue houses were not duplicated to any great degree elsewhere in densely built-up Somerville. The Morrison/Emerson deed mentions that buildings could be erected on the 150 feet of land located between Elm Street (later College Avenue) and 221 Morrison Avenue's lot.

Jacob F. Emerson hired an unidentified contractor to build 221 Morrison Avenue between December and June of 1870. A building is first mentioned on this lot in a deed of June 27, 1870. At that time, Emerson entered into a \$2500 mortgage with J. Winsor Newton. Winsor was an engraver who worked on Washington Street in Boston. Interestingly, both Winsor and Morrison seem to have boarded at the Carpenter Gothic house that still stands at 197 Morrison Avenue. Half hidden on a steep ridge, this brick house was built c.1860 and was accessed from College Avenue via an unpaved lane that is mentioned in early deeds as the northern boundary of 221 Morrison Avenue's lot. 197 Morrison Avenue is referred to as "C. E. Joyce's, Morrison, opposite Grove." Jacob F. Emerson owned 221 Morrison Avenue from the end of June until December 22, 1870. At that time he sold the house to Alby J. Warren who was a mason. The possibility remains the Warren may have been responsible for the construction of this house's brick basement. Following the brief residency of Alby J. Warren (1870-1874), Henry Joel Sparrow became the first long-term owner /occupant of the house, as he lived here for fifteen years.

Henry Joel Sparrow was a salesman who commuted to an office at 75 Court Street in Boston's financial district. Sparrow lived at #221 between 1875 and 1890. In 1890, the Sparrow years at 221 Morrison Avenue came to an end as the house was sold for \$2,200 to Elizabeth M. Clark, wife of Samuel Clark of Somerville. In 1890, Samuel Clark's work is listed as "butter and cheese, Lakeman Market, Boston." By 1895, Clark is listed as a produce dealer at the same market. The Clarks lived at 221 Morrison Avenue until November 30, 1895 when their daughter Margaret E. Clark. "single woman", sold the house to Elizabeth P. Beckley, wife of Henry Beckley for "one dollar and other valuable considerations."

**INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET**

[SOMERVILLE]

[221 MORRISON AVENUE]

**MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

SMV.1337

Henry F. Beckley was a salesman who settled in West Somerville around 1890. At that time, he is listed at 808 Broadway and by 1894 lived on Francesca Avenue. In 1897, the Beckleys are listed at 83 Morrison (later 221) with their son (?) Warren, who was a traveling salesman. Henry F. Beckley commuted to an office at 9 Blackstone Street in Boston. The Beckley's daughter, Alice, married Thomas B. Maddison, a Boston-based salesman. The Maddisons lived with the Beckleys beginning in 1900. By 1910, the Maddison's son Thomas M. Maddison lived here with his parents and grandmother. Thomas M.'s employment is listed as "janitor, 109 Kingston Street, Boston." Henry F. Beckley died c.1908 and his widow Elizabeth P. Beckley owned this house until July 1921. At that time the house passed to Alice Beckley Maddison. By 1930, Thomas B. Maddison's occupation is listed as "furs."

The nearly half-century long ownership of the Beckley-Maddisons ended in May of 1945 when Alice Beckley Madison, widow, sold 221 Morrison Avenue to Harriet L. and Arnold M. Ayer. Thomas B. Maddison died in 1944 at the age 70 and the house was sold to the Ayers who had previously lived at 53 Chandler Street in the Davis Square area. The deed mentions that the Ayers had been tenants of Mrs. Maddison. The Maddison/Ayer deed mentions that the house is conveyed with "all furnaces, heaters, ranges, mantles, gas and electric light fixtures, screens, screen doors, awnings and all other fixtures of whatever kind and nature at present contained in said building". Mr. Ayer was 60 years old when he purchased this house and was employed as a shipper at an unspecified company.

The Ayers family owned the house until 1960. By the following year, Arthur F. and Irene Hughes are listed at this address. Mr. Hughes was a teacher in the Somerville public schools. By 1980 Mr. Hughes was the principal of the John F. Kennedy Elementary School at Elm and Cherry Streets in Somerville. At that time, in addition to Arthur F. and Irene Hughes, their three daughters, Irene B., Margaret and Sarah lived here. Irene B. Hughes is listed as a nurse. In 1996, the house was sold to Ron and Linde Dynneson. Since 2001, they have operated 221 Morrison Avenue as a bed and breakfast called The Morrison House.

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*Somerville City Directories*: 1869-70 to 1985.

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INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

[SOMERVILLE]

[221 MORRISON AVENUE]

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s)    Form No.

	SMV.1337
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South primary and east secondary facades



South, primary facade



INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

[SOMERVILLE]

[221 MORRISON AVENUE]

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s)    Form No.

	SMV.1337
--	----------



South primary facade



West secondary facade



INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

[SOMERVILLE]

[221 MORRISON AVENUE]

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s)    Form No.

	SMV.1337
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Detail of main entry with replicated  
sawn wood brackets.



East secondary façade.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

[SOMERVILLE]

[221 MORRISON AVENUE]

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s)    Form No.

	SMV.1337
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Roof line showing paired sawn wood brackets.



Detail of bay window with original sawn wood brackets



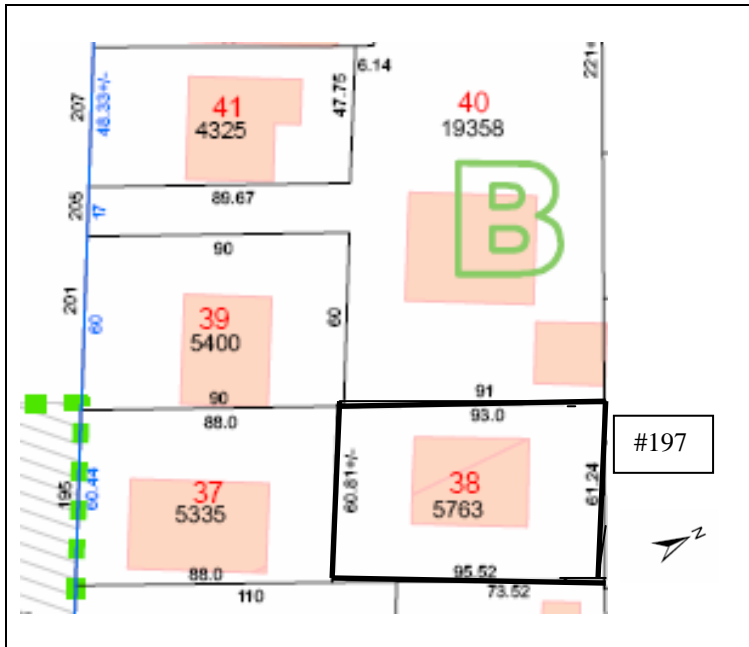
## FORM B – BUILDING

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

### Photograph



### Topographic or Assessor's Map



**Recorded by:** Carole Zellie/Harriet White (1980-84)  
Gretchen Schuler (1988);\* with updates by Kristi Chase (2010)

**Organization:** Landscape Research (1980); Somerville Historic Preservation Commission.

**Date (month / year):** 1980;1988; 2010

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

20-B-38

Boston  
North

SMV.153

**Town:** Somerville

**Place:** (*neighborhood or village*)  
Powderhouse

**Address:** 197 Morrison Avenue

**Historic Name:** Nathaniel Morrison House

**Uses:** Present: Residential

Original: Residential

**Date of Construction:** ca. 1860; more likely 1880 as not on 1874 Hopkins Map\*

**Source:** Stylistic Analysis

**Style/Form:** Gothic Revival

**Architect/Builder:** Unknown

**Exterior Material:**

Foundation: Brick

Wall/Trim: brick/masonry

Roof: gable/hip w asphalt shingle

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**

**Major Alterations** (*with dates*):

Sides portion of wrap-around porch removed

**Condition:** Good

**Moved:** no | X | yes | | **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Acreage:** 5,763 SF

**Setting:** Set far back from Morrison Ave. on a ridge. Near College Avenue, residential neighborhood, and church properties.

# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

[SOMERVILLE]

[197 MORRISON AVENUE]

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

SMV. 153

\_\_\_ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

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

*Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.*

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

*Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

Somerville's best example of the picturesque Gothic Revival Style. This 1-1/2 story, two-bay house of brick construction has a full width doric porch. The double door entrance has upper panels of segmental-arched glazing. Original features include the lancet gable window, cusped bargeboards, and a floor-length façade window.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.*

This house and the one at 201 Morrison Ave., next door, share a ridge above Morrison Avenue, set back from the street. Many lots have later houses constructed on their former front lawns. The houses on the ridge somewhat pre-date the speculative development of Morrison Avenue, which occurred in the 1870's.



Circa 1940s photo from Frances Croy, owner from 1968-2001.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Hopkins, G.M. Atlas of the City of Somerville, 1874.

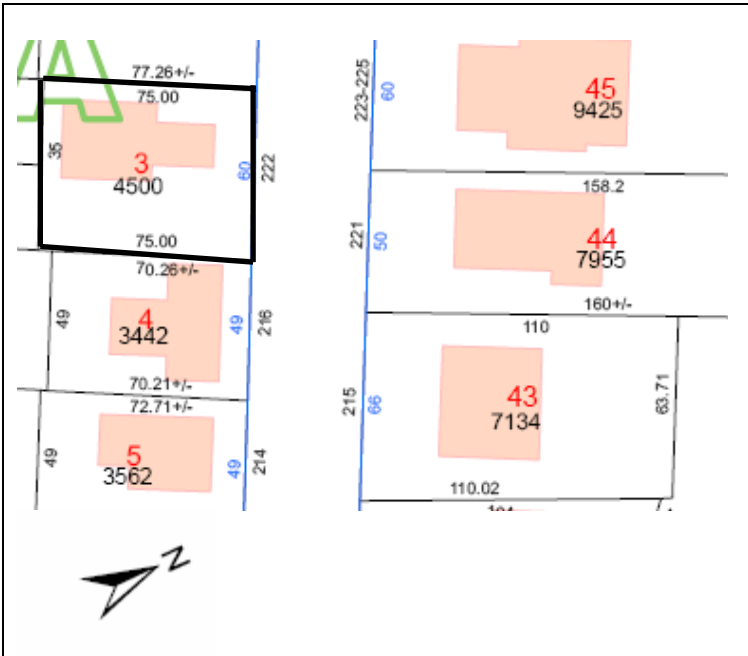
## FORM B – BUILDING

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

### Photograph



### Topographic or Assessor's Map



**Recorded by:** Carole Zellie /Gretchen Schuler

**Organization:** Somerville Historic Preservation Commission

**Date (month / year):** 1980/1988

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

20-A-3

Boston  
North

SMV.341

**Town:** Somerville

**Place:** (*neighborhood or village*)  
Powderhouse

**Address:** 222 Morrison Avenue

**Historic Name:** William C. Shedd House

**Uses:** Present: Residential

Original: Residential

**Date of Construction:** 1873

**Source:** Maps, Directories

**Style/Form:** Mansard/L-Shaped

**Architect/Builder:** Unknown

**Exterior Material:**

Foundation: Brick

Wall/Trim: Clapboard

Roof: Asphalt 3-tab shingle

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**

**Major Alterations** (*with dates*):

**Condition:** Good

**Moved:** no | X | yes | | **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Acreage:** 4500 SF

**Setting:** South side of Morrison. Near College Avenue, residential neighborhood, near church properties.

# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

[SOMERVILLE]

[222 MORRISON AVENUE]

## MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

SMV. 341

\_\_\_ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

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

*Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.*

### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

*Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

This well conserved one and one-half story Mansard cottage is one of the best local examples of the modest housing built in the Morrison Avenue area in the 1870s. The dwelling, built on a brick foundation, retains its clapboard siding, patterned slate roof, paired door entrance, paired brackets on the one-story polygonal bay, and the pedimented dormers. The plan is asymmetrical and the entrance porch is within the L of the plan. The ell is incorporated into the mansard roof.

### HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.*

Located on the western end of Morrison Avenue near College Avenue (formerly Elm Street), the Mansard cottage is representative of the style and scale house built in the area in the 1860s and 1870s. Morrison Avenue has one of the first streets developed and connected the western parts of Somerville, Davis Square and Poudhouse with the Tufts Brickyards, located several blocks east of this location. This area was also close to rail and later street car transportation.

The first resident William C. Shedd lived here from 1873 and was a clerk at Jordan Marsh in Boston.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

1. Atlas of Middlesex County, Somerville: 1874 ("Wm. C. Shedd"), 1884 (no name), 1895.
2. City Directories, 1870s-1890s.
3. Registry of Deeds, Middlesex County: Book. Page

8/85





**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
**JOSEPH A. CURTATONE**  
**MAYOR**

*HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION*

**SOMERVILLE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION/STUDY COMMITTEE**

**Regular Members**

Dick Bauer, Chairman - Lawyer  
 Michael Payne, AIA, - Architect  
 Thomas DeYoung, - Real Estate Broker  
 Barbara Mangum - Architectural Historian  
 Ryan Falvey - City Planner  
 Abby Freedman, V. Chairman - Citizen Member (HD)  
 Eric Parkes – Architect (HD)

**Alternate Members**

D.J. Chagnon - Landscape Architect  
 Brad Stearns - Contractor  
 Derick Snare – Architect (HD)  
 O. Susan Fontano – Citizen Member  
 Kevin Allen – Architectural Historian  
 Sarah Degutis – Architect

**Contact Information**

J. Brandon Wilson, Executive Director  
 Historic Preservation Commission  
 City Hall - 93 Highland Avenue  
 Somerville, MA 02143

Dick Bauer, Chairman  
 Historic Preservation Commission  
 58 Berkeley Street  
 Somerville, MA 02143



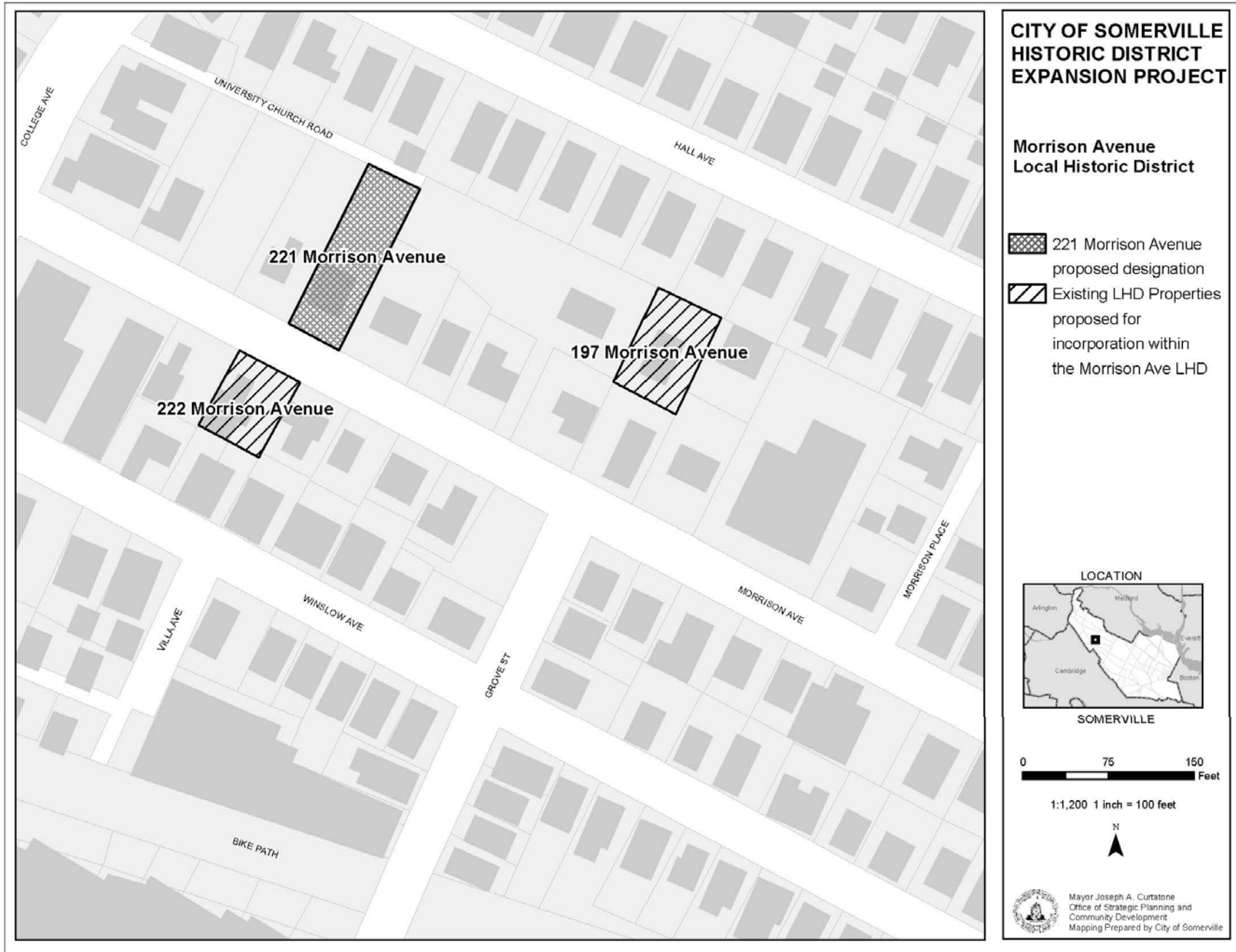
CITY HALL • 93 HIGHLAND AVENUE • SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS 02143  
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[www.somervillema.gov](http://www.somervillema.gov)



## **SHPC Record of Actions on Map Amendment to Historic District Ordinance**

<u>Action</u>	<u>Date</u>
SHPC Staff receive e-mail request from owners of 221 Morrison Avenue seeking information on the process for historic designation.	7/28/09
SHPC Staff recommends owners contact PreservationMass for a list of architectural historians.	7/29/09
SHPC receives a completed Form B from Edward W. Gordon, architectural historian.	10/26/09
SHPC discusses survey at regularly scheduled meeting and votes (7-0) for Staff to draft Study Report recommending designation.	11/17/09
SHPC reviews draft of Preliminary Study Report at regularly scheduled meeting and votes (7-0) to expand the district, now encompassing 2 existing LHD buildings, and adding 221 Morrison Avenue.	12/15/09
SHPC submits Preliminary Study Report to the Somerville Planning Board and to the Massachusetts Historical Commission for a determination of "Completeness" and their advisory review.	3/29/10
SHPC receives letter from MHC indicating that submission of Preliminary Study Report is considered "complete" and that required public hearing can be held no sooner than 60 days.	4/5/10
SHPC receives letter from MHC acknowledging their vote on April 14, 2010 to encourage establishment of proposed Morrison Avenue Historic District, and to investigate enlarging the district to protect additional properties.	4/29/10
SHPC contacts three affected property owners regarding MHC positive recommendation and next steps for designation.	4/29/10
SHPC sends public hearing notice 14 days in advance by certified mail, postage prepaid, return receipt requested, to 3 owners included in proposed district, and posts notice with City Clerk and City website.	6/23/10
SHPC sponsors public hearing, discusses comments, and votes (? - ?) to approve proposed new Morrison Avenue LHD and submit recommendations in Final Report to BOA for their next scheduled meeting.	7/6/10

# Map Amendment to the Somerville Historic District Ordinance Creating a Morrison Avenue Historic District





## CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

### PLANNING BOARD

JOSEPH A. CURTATONE, MAYOR

#### STAFF

GEORGE PROAKIS, *PLANNING DIRECTOR*  
CHRISTOPHER DI IORIO, *SENIOR PLANNER*  
LORI MASSA, *PLANNER*  
DAWN PEREIRA, *ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT*  
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JOSEPH FAVALORO  
JAMES KIRYLO  
MICHAEL A. CAPUANO, ESQ.  
DANA LEWINTER (*ALT.*)

May 7, 2010

Somerville Historic Preservation Commission  
City Hall  
93 Highland Avenue  
Somerville, MA 02143

Re: **Proposed Local Historic District (LHD) Designation - Morrison Avenue**

Dear Members of the Historic Preservation Commission:

In keeping with its lawful responsibilities, the Planning Board submits to your Commission its recommendation to designate the Morrison Avenue District as a LHD.

On May 6, 2010, at 6:00 p.m. the Planning Board held a public meeting at City Hall. At this meeting the Board discussed the proposed Local Historic District designations and following due consideration, the Planning Board voted (5-0, with Kevin Prior absent), to recommend **APPROVAL** of the Morrison Avenue District.

#### **OVERVIEW**

OSPCD's Economic Development Division, which includes Historic Preservation Staff, is proposing an amendment to the Local Historic District map, which is the culmination of four and a half years work done by the City's volunteer Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and OSPCD Staff. The Morrison Avenue district is being proposed by the owners of the property in order to utilize the recently adopted Historic Bed and Breakfast ordinance.

### **PLANNING BOARD DISCUSSION**

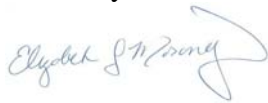
The Board opened deliberations:

Discussion centered on the specific benefits of designating this property, and the opportunity to develop the property under the new Bed and Breakfast Regulations.

### **PLANNING BOARD RECOMMENDATION**

Joseph Favaloro made a motion to recommend **APPROVAL** of the **MORRISON AVENUE DISTRICT**, Michael Capuano seconded the motion, which carried 5-0, with Kevin Prior absent.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Moroney", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Elizabeth Moroney  
Acting Chairman



**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**  
William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth  
Massachusetts Historical Commission

April 26, 2010

Ms. Brandon Wilson, Executive Director  
Somerville Historic Preservation Commission  
93 Highland Avenue  
Somerville, MA 02143

RE: Morrison Avenue Historic District Study Report

Dear Ms. Wilson:

I am pleased to inform you that the Massachusetts Historical Commission voted on April 14, 2010 to acknowledge receipt of the Preliminary Study Report for the Morrison Avenue Historic District Study Report and provide the following advisory recommendations and comments:

The Massachusetts Historical Commission encourages the city of Somerville to establish the Morrison Avenue Historic District.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission encourages the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission to investigate enlarging the district to protect additional properties.

I wish you the best of luck in your local historic district endeavors. If you have any questions or if I can be of any assistance, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Skelly", written over a horizontal line.

Christopher C. Skelly  
Director of Local Government Programs