



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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September 2, 2022

To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Charles Sullivan, Executive Director
Re: Case D-1619: 12 Lake View Ave., by Jefferson M. Case and Elizabeth Green Case. Retroactive application to demolish house (1846).

During June and July 2022, the Coolidge-Peabody-Forbes house at 12 Lake View Avenue built by Josiah Coolidge in 1846 was demolished in the course of a project intended to renovate the structure.

CHC staff notified the Inspectional Services Department, which issued a stop-work order on June 23. The owners, Jefferson M. Case and Elizabeth Green Case, requested a hearing of the Historical Commission to request relief from the two-year construction moratorium that is provided in the enforcement clause of the demolition delay ordinance. A public hearing was advertised for August 4, 2022, but at the request of the owners was continued to September 8, 2022.



12 Lake View Avenue, with 197 Brattle Street at left

Google Street View, Nov. 2020

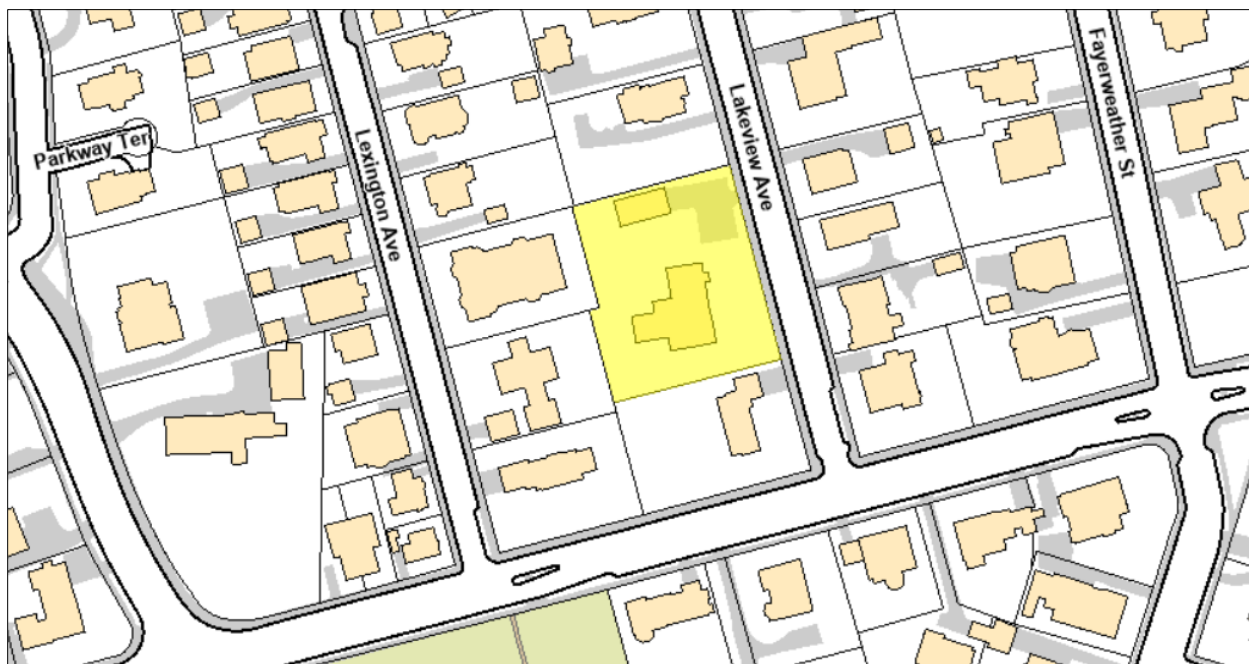


12 Lake View Avenue

CHC photo, 1967

The Coolidge-Peabody-Forbes house occupied a 30,236 square foot (0.69 acre) lot with 190' of frontage on the west side of Lake View Avenue (235/80). The lot is in a single-family residential A-1 district, Cambridge's most restrictive, with a height limit of 35', an allowable FAR of 0.5, and a minimum of 6,000 s.f. per dwelling unit.

The house is described by the assessors as having 17 rooms (including 6 bedrooms and seven baths) occupying 9,341 square feet of living area on 2.75 floors. The condition of the house was rated Very Good/Excellent and the assessed property value in 2022 was \$13,205,400. The house alone was assessed at \$7,800,200. The property last changed hands in 2018 for \$15,100,000.



12 Lake View Avenue (highlighted in yellow) and environs

Cambridge GIS

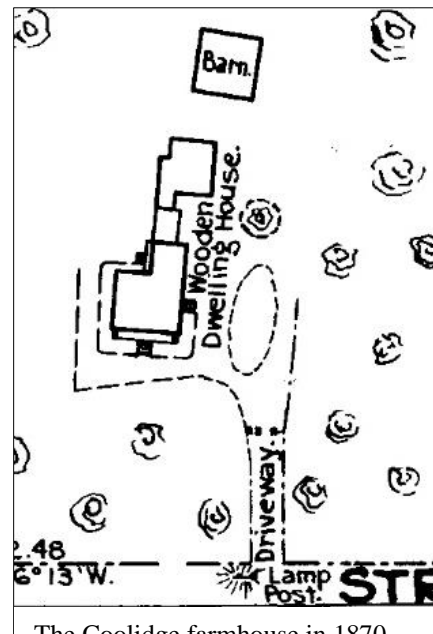
Description

The structure as originally constructed by Josiah Coolidge was a 2½-story connected farmhouse oriented with its main façade facing Brattle Street and gable end facing Lake View Avenue. An ell and stable projected from the northeast (rear) corner of the house, with a barn sited a few feet away. The five-bay center-hall plan was executed in the Greek Revival style with broad pedimented gables, deeply-paneled pilasters, clapboard siding, and symmetrically placed 6-over-6 double-hung windows. The body of the house was 41' wide and 35' deep, making it one of Cambridge's larger dwellings built in this style and period. Subsequent alterations enlarged the ell and extended the east elevation, but the original body of the house remained essentially unchanged until it was demolished in June 2022.

Successive owners began to alter and enlarge the Coolidge house in the 1890s. Metals dealer Reuben Richards connected the stable to the house in 1891 and expanded the ell in 1893.

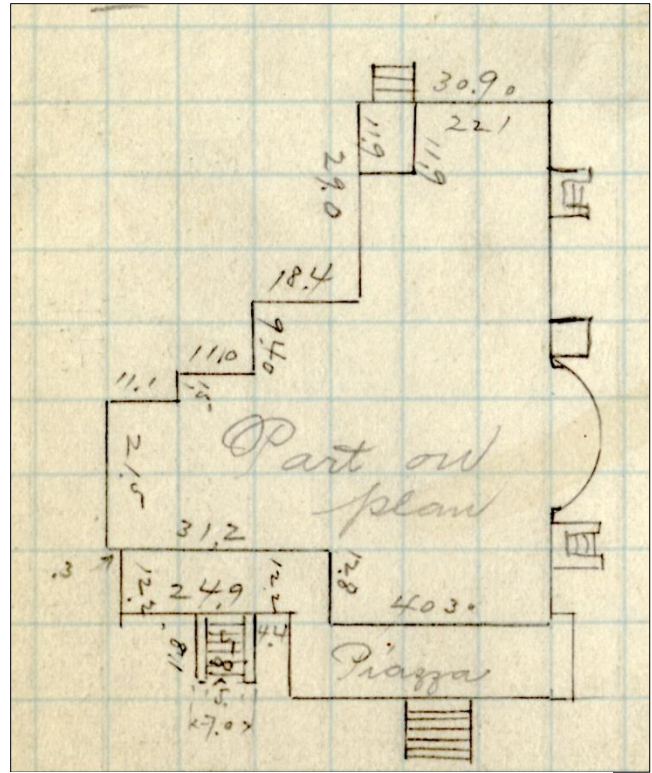
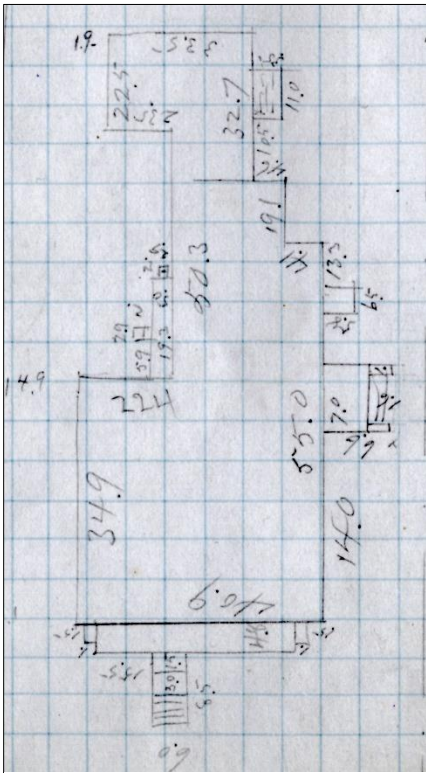
Dr. Charles Peabody and his wife renovated the house in 1894 and in 1899 retained Cambridge architect John A. Hasty to expand the ell and relocate the stable to the back corner of the lot. In 1908 the Peabodys had architect Allen W. Jackson (a neighbor across Brattle Street) design an extension on the west elevation and a circular bay window on the east elevation that may have replaced a side entrance. Jackson also replaced what may have been a full-width portico facing Brattle Street with a pair of Doric columns supporting a Neo-Classical portico over the entrance and a 12' deep piazza across the entire front of the house; a duplicate portico appeared on the east side of the ell. The triangular gable that probably lit an attic billiard room, an indispensable feature of gentlemen's homes in this period, may also have been added at this time. The next owner, J. Malcolm Forbes, renovated the house again in 1937 and remodeled the stable with an office and study. Arthur D. Bond Jr. renovated still another time in 1966, and so on.

While the exterior of the house retained its early 20th century appearance until it was demolished, Commission staff reported in 1968 that the interior had been "totally changed." An examination of interior photos published in 2018 showed that little if any of the original Greek Revival interior remained.¹



The Coolidge farmhouse in 1870
(Detail of plan on page 5).

¹ See https://www.zillow.com/homedetails/12-Lake-View-Ave-Cambridge-MA-02138/56439851_zpid/



Surveyed footprints of 12 Lake View Avenue in 1877 and 1909.
 Cambridge City Engineer, Surveyor's House Books. Not to scale; measurements in tenths of a foot.



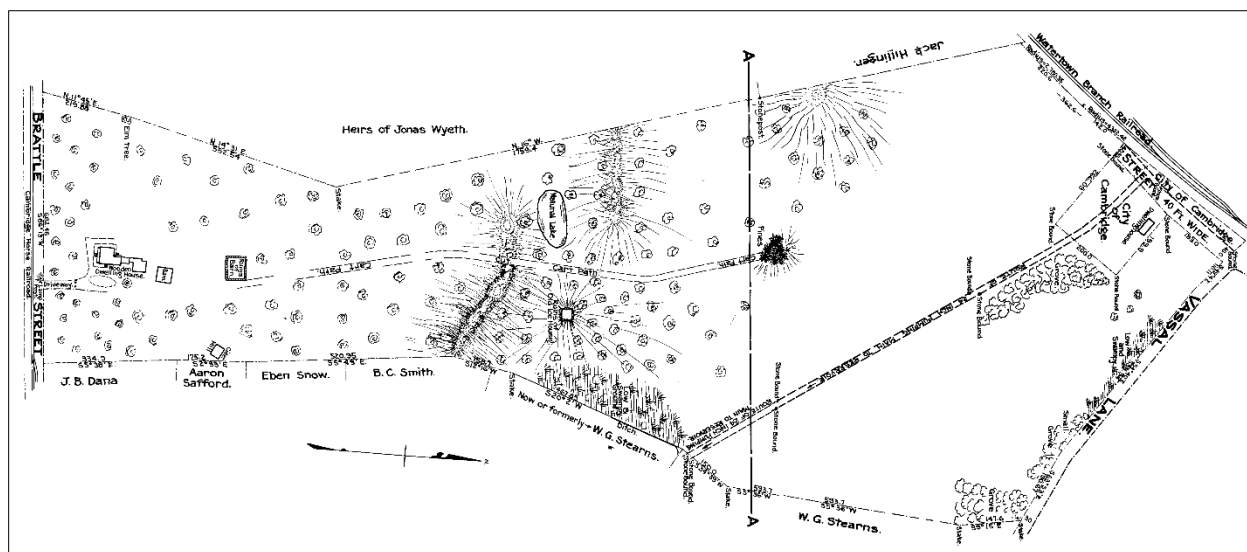
12 Lake View Avenue, 1970, showing piazza and west extension of 1909.

B. Orr photo, CHC.

History

The Coolidge family's roots in this vicinity extended back to the early settlement of Watertown. When Cambridge annexed the east end of Watertown in 1724 the extended Coolidge family found itself spread over both towns.

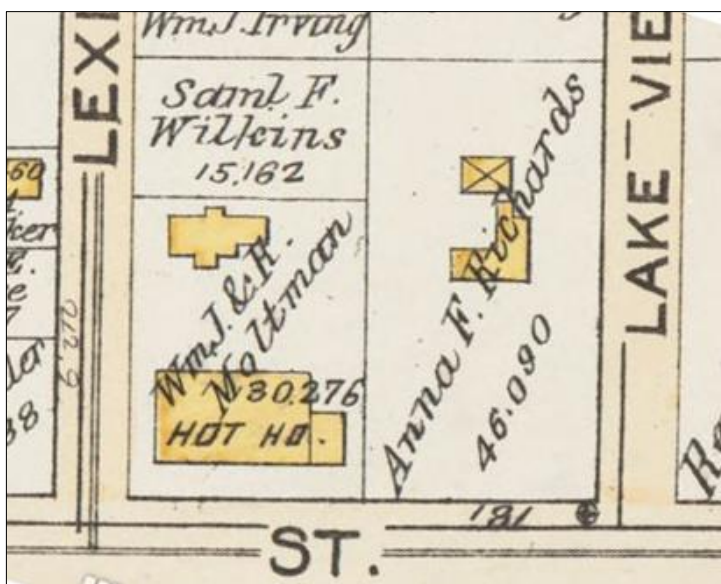
Coolidge ownership predated the mid-18th century establishment of the Thomas Oliver estate (now Elmwood), and when Vice President Elbridge Gerry's executors settled his estate in 1816 a substantial part of it was acquired by Joshua Coolidge. In 1846-47 Joshua's son Josiah (1787-1874), a veteran of the War of 1812 and a member of the first Common Council of the new City of Cambridge, took over the property, which extended from Brattle Street to Fresh Pond, and built a house, stable and icehouse at what is now 12 Lake View Avenue. The extent of the 45-acre farm and the importance of the house in the landscape was documented by a survey made in 1870 when Coolidge put the property on the market, but most of Coolidge's agricultural operations took place on more fertile ground near the Charles River.



The Coolidge farm in 1870; north is at the right.

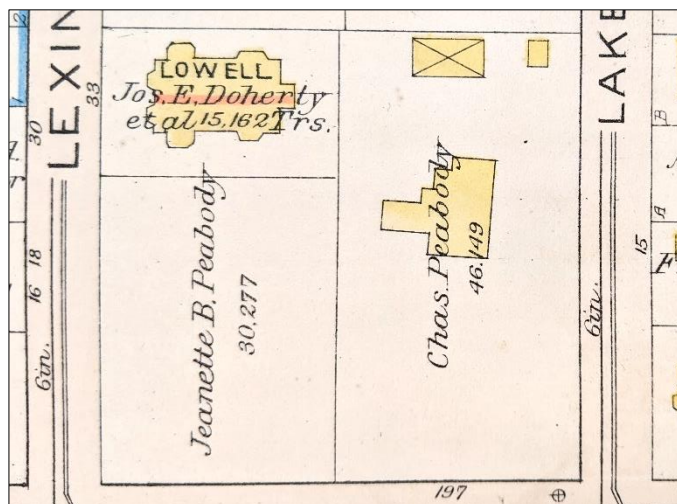
Middlesex County Registry of Deeds, Plan Book 19-B: 62

The Boston developers who purchased the property from Josiah Coolidge laid out 35 house lots along Lake View and Lexington Avenues. The subdivision was not initially successful, and the developers retained the Coolidge house until their heirs sold it with 46,000 square feet of land to Boston metals dealer Reuben Richards in 1886. The Richards family made some minor alterations to the house before they sold it in 1895 and moved to a new house at 182 Brattle Street designed for them by William Ralph Emerson.



12 Lake View Avenue as owned by Reuben Richards. G.W. Bromley, Atlas of Cambridge, 1984

The new owner of 12 Lake View Avenue, archeologist Charles Peabody (1868-1939), made significant discoveries in the Native American mounds in the Mississippi Valley before becoming curator of European archeology at Harvard's Peabody Museum. A grand-nephew of George Peabody (1795-1869), the financier and philanthropist after whom many museums and institutions were named, Dr. Peabody was married to Jeanette Belo, an heir of Texas newspaperman Albert Belo. Dr. Peabody transferred the property to his wife in 1926 and apparently lived in Paris from 1921 until his death in 1939, but Mrs. Peabody remained socially active in Boston even after selling 12 Lake View in 1937.



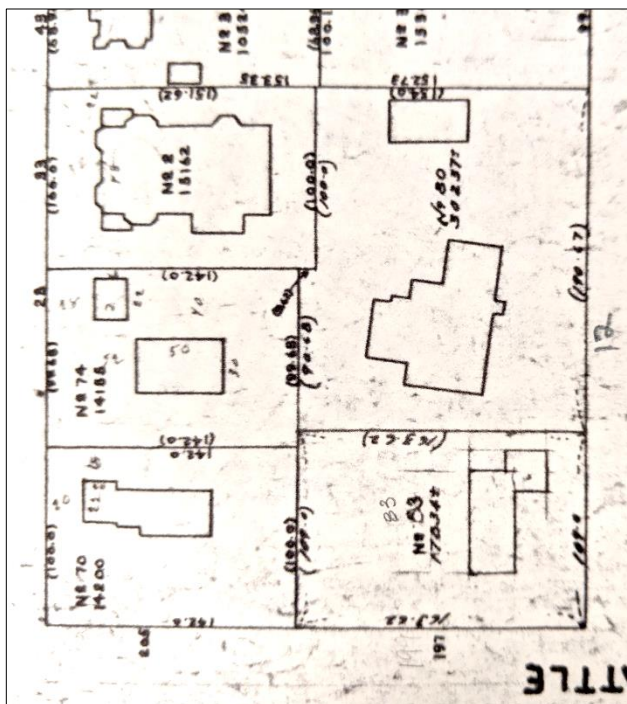
12 Lake View Avenue and surroundings, 1916.
G. W. Bromley Atlas of Cambridge

the apparent intention of building on it, but after razing a greenhouse and relocating the house to Huron Avenue she conveyed the vacant lot to her daughter in 1906.

Ethel Amory subdivided the Lexington Avenue lot and sold off the pieces in 1948 and 1950; the houses at 205 Brattle Street and 23 Lexington Avenue, both built in 1954, now occupy this parcel. In 1965 Mrs. Amory divided the house lot and sold the 17,800 square foot Brattle Street corner to Cambridge architect Hugh Stubbins, who built the present house at 197 Brattle for his own use. A few months later she sold the Coolidge house and the remaining 30,200 square foot lot to Boston investment manager Arthur Bond and his wife Molly. The Bonds sold it to Stephen and Rosemarie Johnson in 2003, and the Johnsons sold it to the present owners in 2018. These later owners also renovated from time to time, but until 2022 the Coolidge farmhouse survived substantially intact.

J. Malcolm Forbes, the last owner of the Coolidge house known to have made major alterations, was a member of the Forbes family of Milton. A psychologist and instructor at Simmons and Harvard, he drowned off Naushon Island in 1941. His widow Edith married Copley Amory Jr., and the Forbeses remained at 12 Lake View Avenue until shortly after his death in 1964.

By 1901 the Coolidge-Peabody-Forbes property included the 46,000 square foot lot at the corner of Brattle and Lake View and a 30,000 square foot lot at the corner of Lexington Avenue that had been occupied by a commercial florist. Jeanette Peabody's mother acquired this property with



12 Lake View Avenue and surroundings in 1958
Cambridge Assessors' Map 235



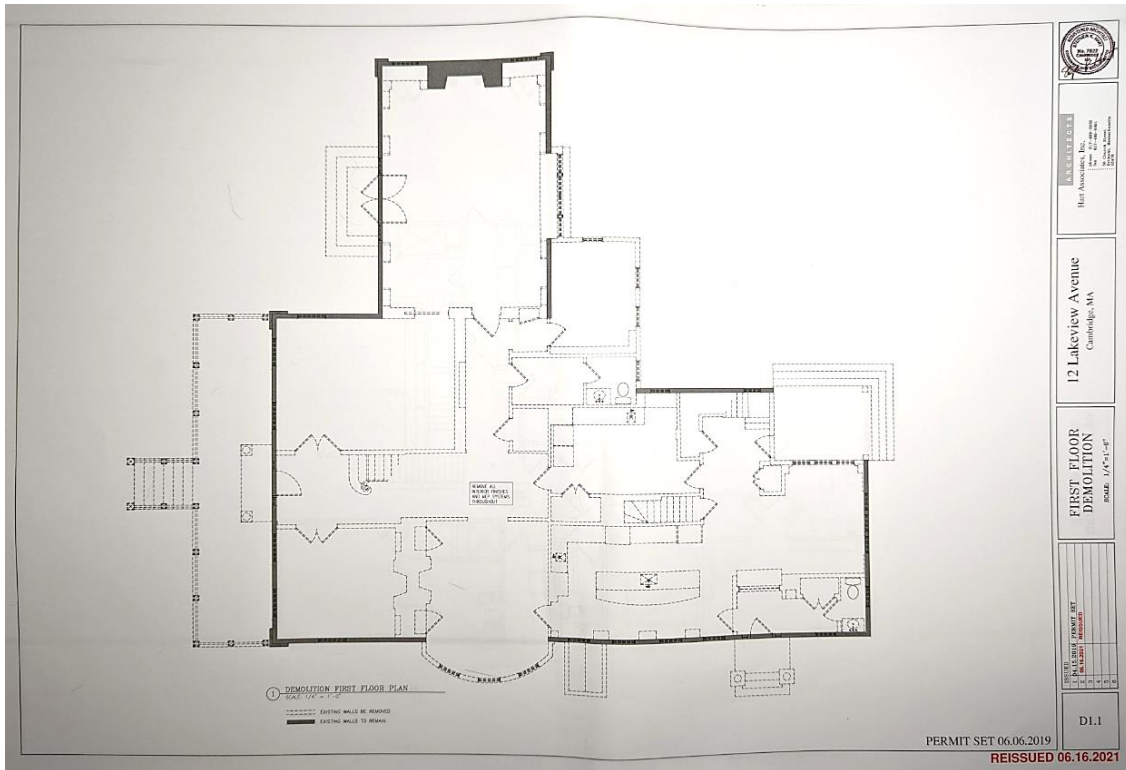
12 Lake View Avenue, 2017

Nearmap image

Recent Events

The current owners purchased the house in 2018 and lived there for two years before deciding to renovate. They retained Hart Associates as architects and Thoughtforms Corporation as the general contractor. On February 20, 2021 Thoughtforms filed an application for a building permit that described the project scope as “Main House - New Foundation, update exterior shell - roof siding window and door, gut and redo interior. Modify porches and decks. Carriage House - update interior finishes only.” The estimated cost of the project was \$9,000,000. Inspectional Services and other city departments completed the required reviews and ISD issued building permit #108905 on July 1.

The final plans for the project (titled “Reissued Permit Set,” dated June 16, 2021) described the extent of proposed demolition. Sheets D1.1 through D1.3 indicated the “existing walls to remain.” The foundation was to be replaced in its entirety and all interior finishes were to be removed. The contractor was cautioned to “Carefully protect all finished surfaces to remain. All existing exterior surfaces on all exterior walls to remain and be protected” (Sheet D1.0, note 7.)



First floor demolition plan, June 16, 2022. Heavy lines indicate walls to remain

The exterior demolition plans show the intended removal of all the windows, the porches, porch overhangs, and a bay window. Porch columns and foundation stones are to be saved for reuse. Exterior finishes are not called out for replacement.



Exterior demolition plan, June 16, 2022

The interior plans demonstrate that intent of the project was to reorient the house away from Brattle Street toward Lake View Avenue. To accomplish this the front door would be relocated from its original place at the center of the south façade to the northeast corner of the main block

of the house, replacing the 1907 bay window, and the main staircase relocated to face the new entrance. The interior layout would be completely reconfigured, necessitating the relocation of numerous windows. A new Greek Revival style porch would be added to the east elevation, an existing porch at the southwest corner would be enclosed, and a new enclosed porch would be created on the west side of the south façade. Five new dormers would be created on the ell. Building sections indicate new floor framing and detail exterior walls to remain (Sheets A3.1-A3.3). Framing plans contain details of modifications and attachments to existing stud walls (Sheets S1.01-1.03, S3.01-3.02).



Proposed South Elevation, June 16, 2022



Proposed west elevation, June 16, 2022

Construction began in the summer of 2021. Contractors removed the ground floor windows and all the interior finishes. The window openings were boarded up, interior bracing was installed, and the house was lifted five feet off its foundation. The old foundation was demolished, and the new foundation was carefully laid out to accommodate the irregular footprint of the original house. This process was described in a 12-minute podcast by Matt Risinger that was released on May 6, 2022.² The site superintendent, Greg Blass of Thoughtforms, described the “very careful survey of ... existing conditions [to accommodate] existing framing that had the potential for being absorbed into the new frame ... we went through three or four different iterations of the foundation in order to ... give us a square building” (transcript, 7:30-7:48 and 8:10-8:32). After a discussion of traditional framing practices, the narrator concludes, “fun ... to see a smart builder take this really old building and bring it to modern standards but also still make it look like an old building on the outside” (11:09-11:20).



12 Lake View Avenue lowered on its new foundation, with original framing and exterior still in place, Spring 2022. Screenshot, The Bridge podcast.

The next phase of construction began in late spring 2022 soon after house was placed back on its foundation. At this point the builder gradually removed and replaced every stick of framing and exterior trim with new material until over 95% of the original house had been destroyed.

² The Bridge, available on YouTube by searching for “Lift an Entire House” or at <https://apple.co.32AOwgU>.



12 Lake View Avenue after removal of nearly all original material, June 22, 2022

CHC staff photo

On Sunday, June 19, a citizen informed the Executive Director that the house appeared to have been entirely demolished. Upon confirming this observation the Director informed the ISD Commissioner of the situation and reported the following conversation with project manager Kevin O'Connor:

- The historic house was intact until they set it down on the new foundation several weeks ago.
- The architectural plans dictated replacement of so many elements that it was difficult to preserve any of the structure.
- He interpreted ISD's demolition permit rule (that removal of 25% or more of a structure requires a demolition permit) to mean that as long as they did not remove more than 25% at any one time they could sequentially replace the entire structure.³

CHC and ISD staff met onsite with the project team on June 22, and on June 23 ISD issued a stop-work order based on the finding that the builder had "exceeded the scope of the building permit, which was for renovation only," a violation of Section 105.6 of the Massachusetts State Building Code. ISD also found that the project was "in violation of City Code 2.78.180.B, which applies to buildings that have been 'voluntarily demolished otherwise than pursuant to a demolition permit.'" The site was secured over the next few days and has remained inactive since.

³ Charles Sullivan to Ranjit Singanayagam, June 21, 2022.

Provisions of the Ordinance

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).

Recommendations

In the present case voluntary demolition of a building more than fifty years old occurred with a building permit intended to renovate the house, and the penalty described in the ordinance is in effect.

The Commission has no authority to modify the provisions of the ordinance, but on some past occasions 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.

In one case, 13-15 Kinnaird Street (2015), the owner agreed to abandon the proposed project in favor of a restoration of the main block of the house, which was built in 1855. The Commission concluded that, in the context of the revised plan, a) that it was not in the public interest to continue the moratorium; b) that the building was significant but not preferably preserved; and c) delegated approval of construction details to the staff. The project was then allowed to proceed.

In October 2018 the 1844 Isaiah Bailey house at 120 Magazine Street was substantially demolished in the course of a project intended to rehabilitate the structure. In that case the builder attempting to execute the framing plans failed to retain sufficient original framing and ordered the remaining structure removed before it could collapse. On December 6, 2018 the Commission made the following findings:

- that an unauthorized demolition had occurred;
- that the required penalty was a two-year moratorium on construction;
- that requiring the construction site to remain idle for two years was not in the public interest;
- that the building in its prior state was significant;
- that the significant building was not preferably preserved in the context of the replacement design.

Construction was then allowed to proceed.

With regard to 12 Lake View Avenue, the Commission must first consider whether the former structure should be considered retroactively "significant" under the provisions of the ordinance.⁴

⁴ L. "Significant building" means any building within the City which is in whole or in part fifty years or more old and:

- If the Commission finds the former structure to be “not significant,” the current proceedings will be resolved. ISD will be authorized to lift the stop-work order and construction will be allowed to proceed as originally planned.
- If the Commission finds the former structure to be “significant” as defined in the ordinance it must then examine the plans for the replacement structure and decide whether it would be in the public interest to find the former 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.
 - If the Commission finds the significant former structure “preferably preserved” the stop-work order remain will remain in effect until June 22, 2024.

Based on the Kinnaird Street precedent, in making the latter determination the Commission may consider whether such mitigation as reconstruction of the earlier design (as seen in the 1967 photos) or some other design modifications would be in the public interest.

cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, ISD
James J. Rafferty, Esq.

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1. Which is within any historic district; or
 2. Which is listed on, or is within an area listed on, the National Register of Historic Places, or which is the subject of a pending application for listing on the National Register; or
 3. Which is or has been designated by the Commission to be a significant building after a finding by the Commission that a building either:
 - a. Is importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth, or
 - b. Is historically or architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of building construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings. (2.78.080)