



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: January 28, 2025
To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Eric Hill, Survey Director
Re: Case D-1720: Partial demolition of 38-40 Banks Street (Murphy House, 1892); relocation of 48 Banks Street (Blevins House, 1862); and demolition of 54-56 Banks Street (Daly Three-Decker, 1892)

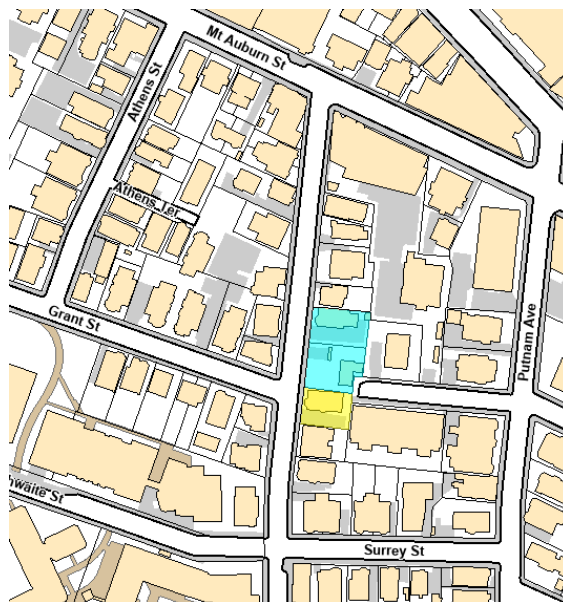
In December 2023 and January 2024 the Historical Commission held a hearing under the Demolition Delay Ordinance (Ch. 2.78, Art. II) on a proposal by Lubavitch of Cambridge, Inc. to demolish a portion of 38-40 Banks Street and relocate 48 Banks Street in conjunction with construction of a new building. The hearing concluded with a finding that the existing buildings were significant but not preferably preserved in the context of the proposed replacement project. After the Board of Zoning Appeal denied the requested relief the applicants initiated court proceedings that are still underway.

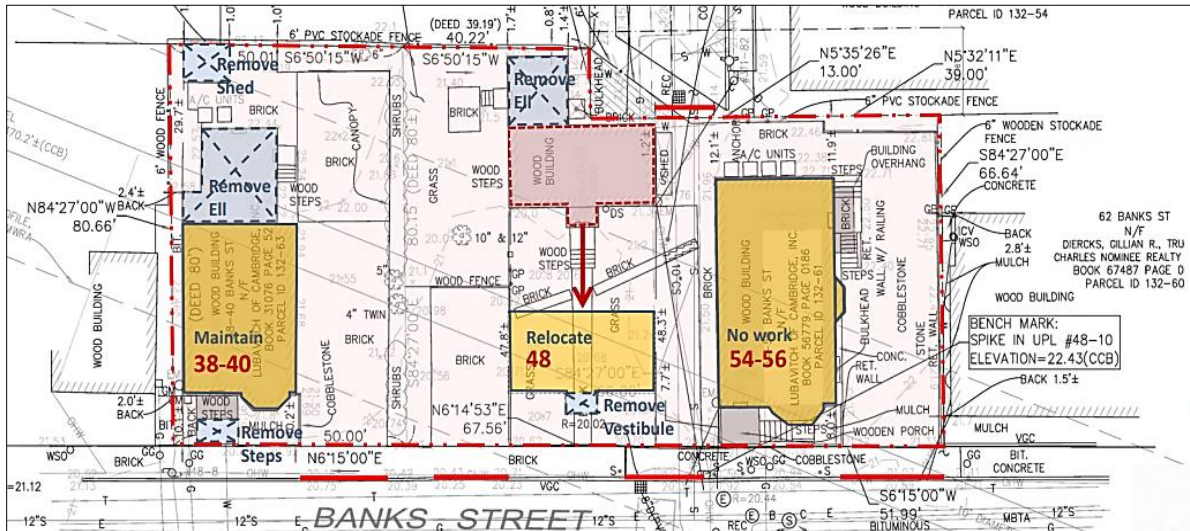
The current application by Lubavitch of Cambridge comprises a larger project that entails the partial demolition of 38-40 Banks, the complete demolition of the three-decker at 54-56 Banks Street, and the relocation of 48 Banks to the 54-56 Banks site. The new building would connect 38-40 Banks and the relocated 48 Banks in somewhat the same manner as before.

Site

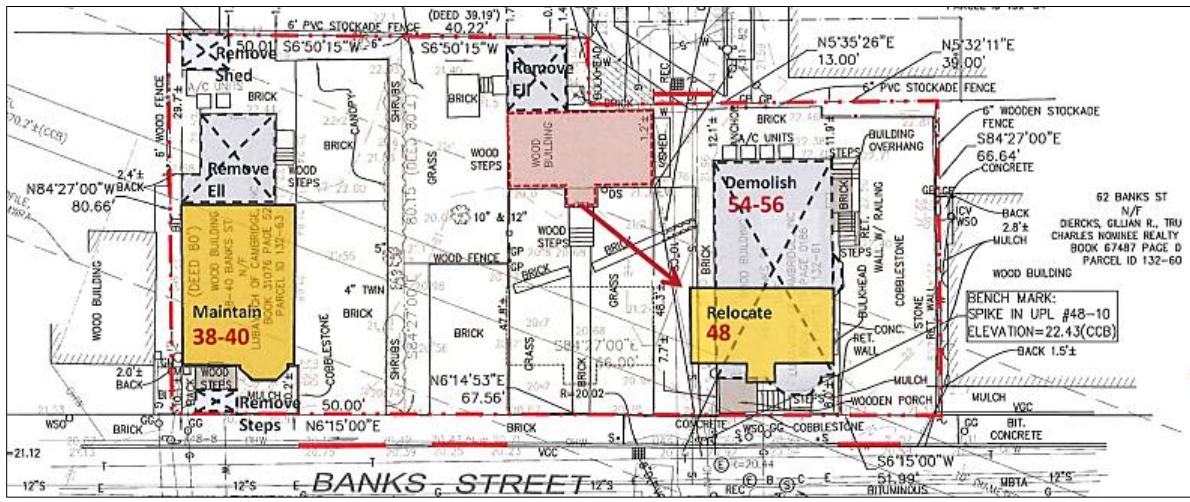
The houses at 38-40, 48, and 54-56 Banks Street are located on the east side of the street, mid-block between Mount Auburn and Surrey streets. The lots at 38-40 Banks Street (Map 132, Lot 63), 48 Banks Street (132/62) and 54-56 Banks Street (132/61) combined would constitute a roughly 12,100 square-foot lot. The total assessed value of the three lots, including land and buildings, is \$5,534,700. The site is in a residential section, surrounded by low-rise multi-family dwellings, in a Residence C-1 zoning district.

Assessors map of 38-40 and 48 Banks Street (highlighted in blue) with 54-56 Banks Street building (highlighted in yellow).





Originally approved demolition and relocation plan for 38-56 Banks Street. Plan by Bruner/Cott Architects.



Currently proposed demolition and relocation plan for 38-56 Banks Street. Plan by Bruner/Cott Architects.



38-56 Banks Street, facing east. CHC Photo 01-2025.

Architectural Description and Condition

38-40 Banks Street (Determined Significant in December 2023)

The house at 38-40 Banks Street is a well-preserved Queen Anne style two-family residence. The side hall dwelling is built atop a raised brick foundation with a setback off Banks Street similar to most others on the block. The gable roof with its gable facing the street is covered in asphalt shingles. A shed dormer extends off the north-facing slope of the roof. The house is clad with wood clapboards and shingle siding, with clapboards at the first and second floors and shingles at the gable-end and a band between the first- and second-floor windows. The historic two-door entrance was altered to a single-door with sidelights in a 2000s renovation. The projecting portico is supported by two Tuscan columns. A two-story octagonal bay is located on the main façade. All windows are replacements with one-over-one or single-paned windows at the bay. An original two-story rear ell with a flat roof extends off the rear. An adjoining undeveloped lot is presently used for outdoor event space and parking.



38-40 Banks Street

48 Banks Street (Determined Significant in December 2023)

The house at 48 Banks Street is a well-preserved example of a vernacular, mid-19th-century workers cottage. The two-story, three-bay house is located directly on the rear lot line on a low brick foundation. The façade faces Banks Street with its gable running parallel to the street, providing views of the decorative, tri-colored slate roof laid in a diamond pattern. Two brick chimneys remain. Replacement clapboards and trim cover the



48 Banks Street siting.

original trim details. An enclosed, projecting center-entry bay is accessed by wooden stairs. All windows appear to have been replaced, including the shallow projecting “greenhouse” window to the left of the front door. A two-story ell extends off the northeast half of the rear elevation.

A 2003 permit saw the replacement of the siding and gutters with downspouts running down the middle of the façade. The front yard is minimally landscaped beyond a narrow brick walkway flanked on both sides by a mulched lawn.

54-56 Banks Street



54-56 Banks Street, CHC photo 01-2025.

The three-decker at 54-56 Banks Street is a typical example of the building type, altered with a 21st-century exterior renovation. The building was originally constructed in 1892 as a three-family residence and was converted into a single-family home by the present owners as part of the 2007 renovation. The building sits atop a raised foundation with a new, pedimented portico framing the entrance supported by square posts. An octagonal bay extends from the basement to the cornice and has been paneled by applied stickwork and vertical panels. Windows in the bay above the front door are diminutive and feature some small decorative panels above. Windows on the

north (side) elevation have been aligned with interior programming. The entire building is covered with cement-board siding and trim and all windows and doors have been replaced.

History

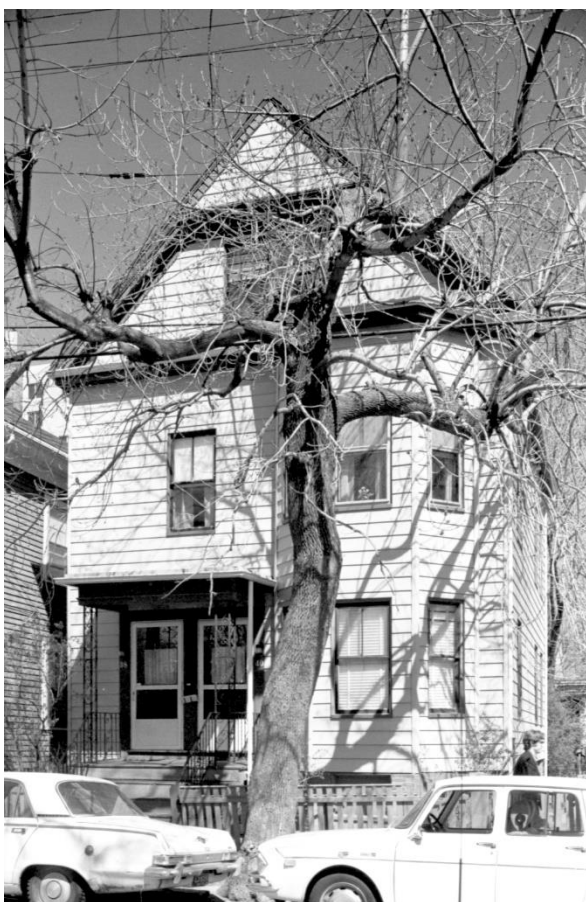
The neighborhood around Banks Street (once called the Lower Marsh, now Kerry's Corner), originated as the pre-Revolutionary estate of William Phipps. Phipps' house was located, facing the river, where St Paul's Church (1914) stands today. The property was acquired in 1773 by William Winthrop, a son of the Harvard mathematics professor, James Winthrop.

William Winthrop was a merchant and ship owner who operated a wharf and dairy farm on the land in front of his house until his death in 1825. Although the farm was first subdivided in 1839, disputes among the heirs delayed development and the property was reassembled in 1855 by James Brown, a partner in the publishing firm of Little, Brown & Company. After Brown's untimely death in 1855, his trustees adopted a subdivision plan with awkwardly shaped lots. This factor, in combination with the adjacent marshes that harbored malarial mosquitoes and the

occasional flooding of the Charles River, meant that the Winthrop farm would be developed for working-class housing or industrial development.

Development in the area began slowly in 1856. Several small houses and sheds would be built and sold or rented to laborers, most of which were recent Irish immigrants in this period. On the high ground along Mount Auburn Street, the houses were more elaborate and were occupied by prosperous tradesmen and storekeepers. The neighborhood remained largely working-class through the mid-20th century; all while Harvard's expansion was sweeping into the area. Strong neighborhood opposition restricted Harvard's eastward expansion after Leverett Towers were built in the early 1960s. In 2007, eight two- and three-story houses, more in keeping with the neighborhood character, were built for Harvard affiliates on Grant Street and the west side of Banks Street, on lots created for expansion in the 1960s.

38-40 Banks Street: The lot at 38-40 Banks Street was sold by Nathan G. Gooch to Dennis Murphy on April 2, 1889 (Book 1900, Page 452). Three years later, in April 1892, Dennis Murphy received a permit to erect a wooden dwelling (24x34) with Edward J. Cogan listed as the builder. 38-40 Banks Street was built as a duplex. In the 1900 Federal Census, Dennis Murphy, a coachman born in Ireland is listed as residing here with his family. Dennis worked as a driver for wealthy clients, including for Alvin F. Sortwell, the twenty-sixth mayor of Cambridge. Along with Dennis, his wife Margaret, twin 17-year-old daughters Catherine and Mary, and two sons, Daniel and John, all lived at #38 Banks Street. At #40 Banks Street, three generations of Crombie women resided together, Ann Crombie (aged 74) lived here with her daughter, Sarah, and granddaughter, Mary Mullen. By 1910, Dennis Murphy's niece and nephew, Christina and Cornelius (aged 24 and 26 respectively), were residing at #38 Banks Street. At #40 Banks Street, Francis Mahar, a clerk at an express company married Catherine Murphy and resided here with his wife and daughter Eileen.



38-40 Banks Street, CHC Survey photo, 1965.

Throughout the 20th century, the property at 38-40 Banks Street remained in the Murphy and Mahar families. Mary A. Murphy, daughter of Dennis Murphy owned 38 Banks Street until her death in December 1976. Eileen Mahar, the daughter of Francis Mahar and Catherine (Murphy) Mahar, owned Banks Street until her death in 1995. Eileen was born in Cambridge and earned a bachelor's degree from Boston University in 1929, completing graduate studies at the University of Dublin and Harvard-Radcliffe Extension School. She taught Business at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School for 45 years until her retirement. The two-family house at 38-40 Banks Street

was then owned in its entirety by Robert D. Murphy, who sold it in 1995 to Halcott G. Grant, Jr. In 2000, the property was again sold to Hirsch and Elka Zarchi, who granted the building to Lubavitch of Cambridge, Inc., a non-profit for \$1.

48 Banks Street:

The house at 48 Banks Street was built in 1862 for owner John Blevins (1829-1871). John was born in Armagh, Ireland and immigrated to Boston in 1857. In Boston, he married Mary Halpin (1831-1913) and settled in Cambridge. He first shows up in city directories living on Foster Street in 1860 and his profession is listed as a “slater”. By 1863, he is listed as residing in the house, which was originally constructed on the west side of Banks Street, at the corner of Crane Street (renamed Grant Street in 1874).

The house was relocated in 1866 to the SW corner of Mount Auburn and Banks streets as seen in the 1873 Hopkins Map. It is probable that at this time, John slated his roof with decorative diamond patterns to advertise his workmanship. The 1870 Federal Census lists John living at the house on Mount Auburn Street (now 48 Banks



1873 Hopkins Atlas showing approximate original location of 48 Banks Street (orange), second location (red) and present location (green).



48 Banks Street, CHC photo 1965.

Street) with his wife Mary, four sons: William, John, Arthur, and James, and daughter Margaret. John Blevins died in 1871, aged 42. Mary sold the property on Mt. Auburn Street in 1874 and relocated the family to Chalk Street. In 1880, the Census lists Mary as keeping house while three of her children worked outside the home: William at a soap factory, John at a printing office, and Margaret as a bookbinder. John would later follow in his late father's footsteps and work as a prominent roof slater, working on Cambridge schools, firehouses, and residences.

The Blevins House was sold by Mary Blevins to Jane Wilson in 1874. By the 1880s, as land values along Mount Auburn Street increased due to commercial development, Joseph Lerner purchased the corner lot at Banks Street, renting the house for a few years until he sought to redevelop the lot. In 1892, he hired William P. and J.R. Richards, architects, to design a wooden student dormitory on the site (now 12 Mount Auburn St). He had the former Blevins House relocated by 1893 to newly platted house lots on the east side of Banks Street by Joshua G. Gooch. The Blevins House was moved to 48 Banks Street and positioned at the extreme rear of the lot, possibly with the opportunity to build another structure at the street, though this never occurred. 48 Banks Street was purchased by Mary Agnes (Hooley) Sullivan, a widow, in 1893. Mary died in 1907, and the property was bought and sold several times in the following decades. In 1926, owner Helen Gardner received a permit to build a two-car garage in the front yard. The garage was demolished in 1989. During the Great Depression, the Cambridge Savings Bank took possession of the property and sold it in 1935 to Ethel C. Daley.

54-56 Banks Street:

The three-decker at 54-56 Banks Street was built in 1892 for Daniel W. Daly, an electrotype finisher, as an investment property. The building was constructed by John A. McIsaac, a builder who is credited with the construction of over 150 Cambridge buildings. Daniel W. Daly rented the units to three families. Early residents included Carl Stahleker, an assistant librarian at Harvard College, and Daniel E. Shea, driver of the hose wagon for Engine No.1 for the Cambridge Fire Department. No images could be found to document the original appearance of the building.

Mr. Daly sold the property in 1904 to Michael O'Sullivan, who purchased the three-family dwelling as an investment. He continued to rent out units in the building. After decades of successive ownership, the present owners purchased the property in 2006. In 2007, the owners received a permit for a "full renovation" of the property, converting it from a three-family residence to a single-family home. Kent Duckham Architects designed the renovation.



54-56 Banks Street, CHC survey image, 1965.

Significance and Recommendation

In December 2023 the Commission determined that the houses at 38-40 and 48 Banks Street were significant historically for their connections with the development of the former Phipps farm for working-class Irish families and significant architecturally as well-preserved Queen Anne and Italianate vernacular homes.

CHC staff contends that the house at 54-56 Banks Street is also significant for its connections with the development of the Kerry's Corner neighborhood. While extensively altered, the building contributes to the diverse streetscape of nineteenth-century housing built by and for Irish immigrants.

The Commission should hear testimony from the applicant and neighbors and review the plans for selective demolition, relocation, and new construction before a) confirming the significance of 38-40 and 48 Banks Street; b) making a determination as to the significance of 54-56 Banks Street; and c) determining whether or not 38-40, 48, and/or 54-56 Banks Street are to be found preferably preserved in the context of the current design proposal.

cc:

Lubavitch of Cambridge, Inc.
Peter McLaughlin, Cambridge Inspectional Services
Jason Jewhurst, Bruner/Cott Architects