



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

831 Massachusetts Avenue, 2nd Fl., Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

Telephone: 617 349 4683 Fax: 617 349 3116 TTY: 617 349 6112

E-mail: histcomm@cambridgema.gov URL: <http://www.cambridgema.gov/Historic>

Bruce A. Irving, *Chair*, Susannah Barton Tobin, *Vice Chair*, Charles M. Sullivan, *Executive Director*

William G. Barry, Jr., Robert G. Crocker, Joseph V. Ferrara, Chandra Harrington, Jo M. Solet, *Members*

Gavin W. Kleespies, Paula A. Paris, Kyle Sheffield, *Alternates*

November 1, 2024

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Eric Hill, Survey Director, Cambridge Historical Commission

Re: D-1709: Brown-Burns House, 24 Newell Street (1931)

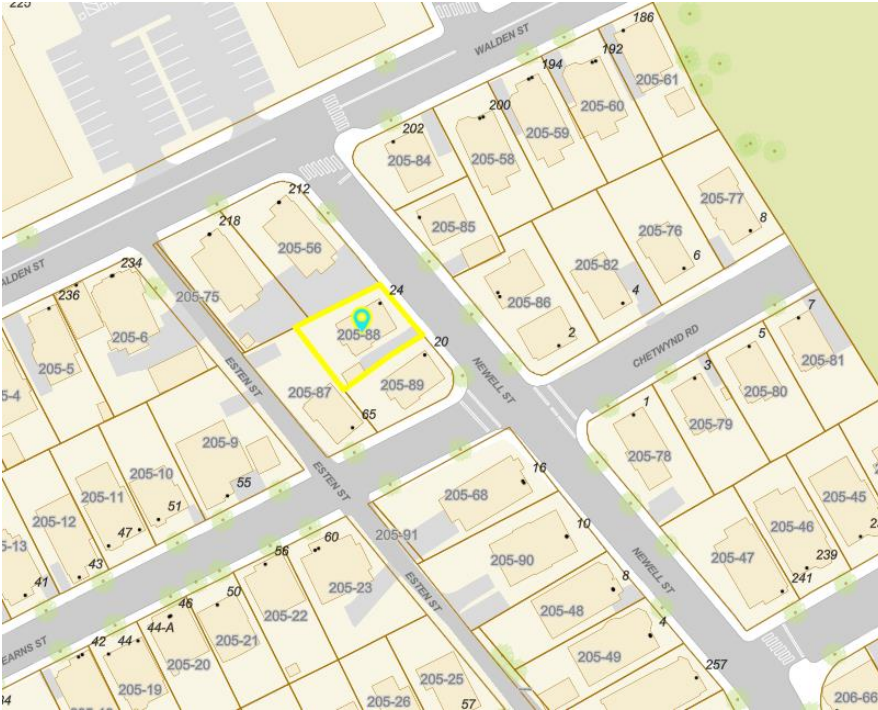
An application to demolish the residence at 24 Newell Street was received on October 15, 2024. The applicant, 24 Newell Street LLC., was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for November 7, 2024.



24 Newell Street, 10-2024

Site

24 Newell Street is located at the northern end of Newell Street in Neighborhood Nine. The lot is on the west side of Newell Street, mid-block between Stearns Street to the south and Walden Street to the north. The surrounding area is predominantly comprised of single- and multi-family housing on modest lots.



Cambridge AxisGIS map showing location of 24 Newell Street and its surroundings, 2024.

The house is sited on a 2,931 square foot lot in a Residential C-1 district. This is a multi-family residential district, which permits an FAR of .75 and has a height limit of 35 feet. 24 Newell Street has an FAR of 0.387 and a height of 24'-4". The assessed value of the land and building is \$977,600 (Map 205/Parcel 88).

The neighboring properties on Newell Street and

Chetwynd Road are largely like 24 Newell Street, being 1½-story cottages constructed by the same developer, Porter Realty Trust. The surrounding area has seen a number of teardowns in the past decade, including 2 Chetwynd Road (2018), 58-60 Stearns Street (2019), and 10-12 Newell Street (2000).

At 2 Chetwynd Road, a developer applied for demolition of a 1928 residence and proposed two three-story residences on the site. On November 1, 2018, the Cambridge Historical Commission found the house significant and preferably preserved in the context of the proposed project. The applicant returned to the Commission in February 2019 with a modified design, but the Commission declined to terminate the demolition delay. In the fifth month of the delay, in the course of an evaluation of the property for a potential landmark designation, the Commission approved a different replacement proposal and allowed the project to move forward. The approved project consists of a new, two-story residence fronting Chetwynd Road that is consistent with the street's housing typology, and at its rear, a three-story single-family residence fronting Newell Street. The final revised proposal was generally satisfactory to the neighborhood and commission as it preserved the streetscape on Chetwynd Road.

While the case at 2 Chetwynd Road shares similarities with the present demolition application for 24 Newell Street, it is notable that the lot of 2 Chetwynd Road at 4,756 square feet allowed for two, detached structures on the site, while 24 Newell Street at 2,931 square feet, allows for just one building.

The owner proposes to demolish the 1931 single-family house at 24 Newell Street and erect a new, three-story single-family residence on the site. The project appears to be as-of-right and would not require a variance or special permit.

Architectural Description

The residence at 24 Newell Street is a 1 ½-story bungalow with a low-sloping side gable roof with centered shed dormer on the street-facing slope. The roof extends over a full-length front porch, which was enclosed in 1991. The house sits upon a slightly raised concrete block foundation. The front door is slightly off-center and is accessed by a brick stair with stone treads and metal railings. The first-floor façade, including the front door and bay window, dates to the 1991 renovation.



24 Newell Street, 10-2024.

All original six-over-one windows have been replaced with one-over-one windows. An oversized one-story rear deck extends off the rear of the house and fills much of the rear yard. Little original fabric remains of the 1931 building beyond its form and roofline. A detached shed is located at the end of the driveway off the south side of the residence.



24 Newell Street before 1991 renovations. CHC Survey image 06-1972.

24 Newell Street is one of almost a dozen near-identical 1½-story bungalows on Newell Street, Chetwynd Road, and Stearns Street developed by the Porter Realty Trust between 1928 and 1931. It is possible that these houses are kit-houses ordered and assembled on-site, but no further information could be gleaned from permit or other sources to substantiate this. To date, only one of these bungalows has been demolished (2 Chetwynd, 2018) and replaced by a new structure. Many of these residences have seen varying levels of renovations and alterations, and all have had their porches enclosed.



20 Newell Street (left) and 24 Newell Street (right) both built in 1931 by Porter Realty Trust. Photo 10-2024.



2-8 Chetwynd Road, across from 24 Newell Street, 10-2024.

History

The 1842 extension of the Charlestown Branch Railroad from the Miller's River to Fresh Pond opened North Cambridge for the brick and ice industries and for suburban development. The area that is now traversed by upper Raymond Street was rich in clay deposits; most of the north slope of Avon Hill between Raymond and Sherman Streets, including today's Raymond Street Park, was originally mined by local brick makers, like the New England Brick Company, and by A. H. Hews & Co., which made clay flowerpots.

Throughout the years, many brick manufacturers were created, disbanded and consolidated in Northwest Cambridge and by the First World War, much of the industry was located around the clay land along Sherman Street. From the late 1840s through the early 1900s, many colonial farms of Northwest Cambridge were partitioned for residential subdivisions. Since most farms in Northwest Cambridge were about ten acres or less, the subdivisions

were smaller than in other parts of the city. At the time, maximum use of land was key in arrangement of streets and lots and the straight edge was the principal tool, with an emphasis on identical lots. Typically, lot size was the driving factor in type and cost of the home built upon it, with smaller lots catering to workers and larger lots for more affluent buyers.

The land where 24 Newell Street currently sits was previously owned by Albert H. Hews, a prominent pottery maker and until the time of his death the largest producer of florist-ware and red earthenware in the country. Mr. Hews died in 1903 at his home in Weston, but was survived by his wife, Mary Cook Hews, who passed away in 1925. Their land holdings here were purchased and surveyed by the Porter Realty Trust, who began developing the land here with modest housing built on speculation. The Trust extended Newell Street north, connecting it to Walden Street, extended Stearns Street east connecting it to Newell Street, and laid out Chetwynd Road, a small dead-end street.

Chetwynd Road was developed first in 1928, as an eight-lot development of identical houses by the Porter Realty Trust who were listed in permits as the owner, architect and builder. By 1931, the developers would build 20 and 24 Newell Street and 65 Stearns Street, all with the same design.



Plan of Land by W. A. Mason & Son Co., September 13, 1927, showing new streets and house lots for development. North is towards the bottom of the image.

The Porter Realty Trust was active in Cambridge between 1924 and 1939, and often purchased properties and renovated units for sale or created small subdivisions with speculative housing, much like what is seen at Newell Street and Chetwynd Road. The group comprised of two sets of brothers, Simon W. and Edward Markel and George E. and Julius A. Rudnick, all of Roxbury. In 1927 they purchased the Potter Block in Porter Square, which they demolished to construct the Porter Theater at 1994 Massachusetts Avenue. The Trust had offices in this building.

The house at 24 Newell Street was purchased by Irma L. and Thomas D. Brown who raised two daughters here, Frances and Elizabeth. Thomas was appointed to the Cambridge Police Department in 1936 and served as a domestic relations officer for the CPD and later as President of the Cambridge Police Association. Thomas and Irma Capen Brown divorced and he married Mary A. Burns, who had children from her first marriage. The Browns moved to Williams Street and rented the house on Newell Street to students. Officer Brown passed away in 1965, and the property was inherited by his stepson, Francis J. "Frank" Burns.



Patrolman Thomas D. Brown photographed for story in Boston Globe, September 14, 1938.

Francis J. Burns (1942-2007) was also a patrolman with the Cambridge Police Department. He attended local schools and remained on the force for decades. Detective Burns was shot five times during a domestic disturbance call at Roosevelt Towers in 1983 and returned to work soon after. He died in 2007 and the property on Newell Street was inherited by his daughter, Laura Burns. The present owners acquired the property in October 2024.

Significance and Recommendation

I recommend that the building at 24 Newell Street be found significant for its associations with multiple generations of the Cambridge Police Department and in the context of the inter-war residential neighborhood developed by the Porter Realty Trust, which features eleven nearly identical homes on Chetwynd Road, Stearns and Newell streets. The Commission should hear testimony from the applicants and neighbors and review the plans for replacement construction before making a further determination.

cc: 24 Newell Street, LLC., Mike Tokatlyan
KDI Architecture, Evan Stellman
Peter McLaughlin, Commissioner, Cambridge Inspectional Services Department