

STAFF REPORT

Town of Wellesley - Planning Department

Application: DR-2019-70 – 31 Elm Street – Preservation Determination
Subject Property: 31 Elm Street (Assessor's Parcel ID # 63-24)
Applicant: Fred & Adriane Shilmover
Property Owner: Fred & Adriane Shilmover
Date: Report prepared 1/7/2020 for 1/14/2020 Historical Commission Meeting
Staff Contact: Dana Marks, Planner
Staff Recommendation: **Preferably Preserved**

APPLICATION OVERVIEW

On December 13, 2019, the Applicant submitted applications for Eligibility Notice and Preservation Determination indicating the intent to demolish, in its entirety, a building located on the property and used as a dwelling. An Eligibility Notice was issued on December 16, 2019 determining the subject building to be an Eligible Building. The Historical Commission will hold a public hearing on the application for a Preservation Determination on January 14, 2020.

DESCRIPTION

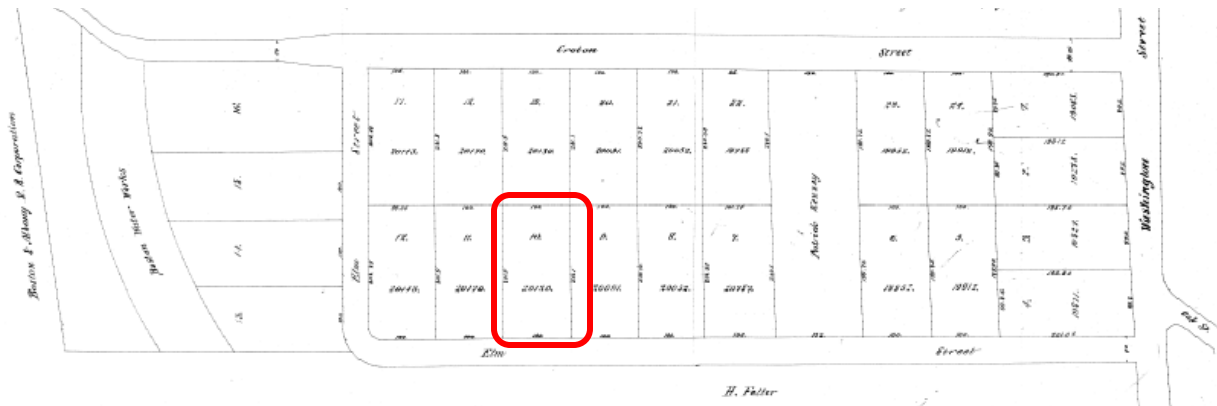
In consideration of the application for a full/complete demolition and in determining whether or not the dwelling should be deemed Preferably Preserved, it was determined that the original dwelling was constructed no later than 1904, when John A. McLeod and William W. McLeod granted to Mary J. McLeod "a certain parcel of land with the buildings thereon situated in that part of said WELLESLEY known as Wellesley Hills," (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 980, Page 418) indicating a building was present on the property at that time. This source proves that the dwelling at 31 Elm Street is indeed Eligible and subject to a Preservation Determination pursuant to Article 46C of the Wellesley Town Bylaws.

The dwelling at 31 Elm Street is a three-story structure with a side gabled roof built in the Stick Style, a subcategory of Victorian houses characterized by front-facing roof gables on a steeply pitched roof, decorative trusses, and overhanging eaves with exposed rafter ends among other elements. It is clad in blue wood clapboard siding with an asphalt shingle roof. The gable front end of the house features bracketed eaves, decorative stick work in the gable end, and a trussed dormer balcony on the east elevation towards the driveway.



Image via Google Maps.

The property is part of “The Plain,” which encompasses parts of Croton, Pine, and Elm Streets, which includes a range of architectural styles and was rapidly developed from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Certain houses, including 31 Elm Street, predate this era of rapid growth and were developed earlier by William S. Hills and Charles Darrow.¹ Hills and Darrow’s subdivision was drawn in July 1875 and can be seen in the plan below.



31 Elm Street is shown as Lot 10. Plan No. 1 showing House Lots in Grantville owned by W.S. Hills & Chas. Darrow (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, end of Vol. 474).

Hills and Darrow sold Lot 10 to Hugh McLeod in 1875 and provided restrictions on the type of house that could be built, setbacks from the street, and cost (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 474, Page 110). A dwelling is present on the 1897 *Atlas of the Town of Wellesley* at 31 Elm Street, which was during the McLeod family ownership.

¹ MACRIS No. WEL.M, “The Plain – Croton, Pine and Elm Streets,” May 1990.



Detail of Plate 2, Atlas of the Town of Wellesley (1897).

Brothers John A. and William W. McLeod transferred their shares of the property to their sister, Mary J. McLeod, in 1904, making her the sole owner (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 980, Page 418). Before then, the McLeod siblings owned the land in common after the death of their father Hugh. John was quite involved in town life and an ardent supporter of outdoor activity, including laying out the first golf course in Wellesley, which is now the site of the Belvedere neighborhood.² William ran a large grocery business in Wellesley Hills Square, and was the Chairman of the Republican Town Committee.³ He was the first president of the Wellesley Co-operative Bank starting from when it was organized in 1911 until his death in 1922.⁴

In 1917 Mary J. McLeod sold the property to Wilhelmina L. Graves (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 1375, Page 301). Wilhelmina was married to Dr. S. Monroe Graves, who was the Superintendent of Schools from 1914-1939.⁵ Dr. Graves was also a faculty member of Wellesley College for a number of years before devoting himself to Wellesley's public schools full-time in 1918.⁶ After Dr. Graves suddenly passed away in 1943, his obituary described, "During his many years of service many new schools were built and new methods of instruction were introduced to maintain the high standing of our educational system... As a member of various Wellesley organizations he did much for the enrichment of the community and its citizens."⁷

Wilhelmina L. Graves sold the property to Clarence F. and Virginia P. Knudson in 1944 (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 2502, Page 230). Clarence was a violinist in the

² "JOHN A. McLEOD," *Wellesley Townsman*, March 4, 1917, page 3.

³ "MR. WILLIAM W. McLEOD," *Wellesley Townsman*, December 8, 1911, page 20.

⁴ Gamaliel Bradford, "WILLIAM W. McLEOD DIES AFTER LONG ILLNESS," *Wellesley Townsman*, October 13, 1922, page 1.

⁵ "Hills Local," *Wellesley Townsman*, November 11, 1940, page 7.

⁶ Sydney M. Williams, "SUPERINTENDENT GRAVES EMPLOYED FOR FULL TIME," *Wellesley Townsman*, May 31, 1918, page 6.

⁷ "A LIFE OF SERVICE," *Wellesley Townsman*, December 23, 1943, page 2.

Boston Symphony Orchestra.⁸ Virginia graduated from Framingham State Teachers College in 1928.⁹ In 1959 the Knudsons sold the property to Ferdinand and Frances Lee Heinmets (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 3748, page 256). The property stayed within the Heinmets family until 2019 when the current owners acquired the property in July (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 36945, Page 397).

PRESERVATION DETERMINATION STANDARDS

In consideration of a Preservation Determination for the building, the Historical Commission is to determine whether or not the building should be Preferably Preserved, a term defined as when a building, “the demolition of which that is proposed...would be detrimental to the historical or architectural heritage of the Town because such Building is (i) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the Town, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or the United States of America, (ii) historically or architecturally important by reason of period, style, method of building construction or association with a particular architect or builder, either by itself or in the context of a group of Buildings, or (iii) located within one hundred fifty (150) feet of the boundary line of any federal or local historic district and contextually similar to the Buildings located in the adjacent federal or local historic district.”

If the Commission determines that the Building should be Preferably Preserved, then no Demolition Permit with respect to such Building shall be issued until twelve (12) months after the date of the Preservation. Following such a determination, the Applicant may request a reduction in the length of the delay period through the Waiver Process.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff is of the opinion that the subject building at 31 Elm Street **is** (i) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the Town, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or the United States of America, **is** (ii) historically or architecturally important by reason of period, style, method of building construction or association with a particular architect or builder, either by itself or in the context of a group of Buildings, and **is not** (iii) located within one hundred fifty (150) feet of the boundary line of any federal or local historic district and contextually similar to the Buildings located in the adjacent federal or local historic district.

With respect to standard (i), 31 Elm Street represents the era of early development in this area of the Town that demonstrates a long chain of progress starting in the 1870s and 1880s, and therefore is associated with the architectural history of the Town.

With respect to standard (ii), 31 Elm Street is a unique example of Victorian architecture – specifically the Stick Style – which is interspersed throughout the neighborhood.

Therefore, based upon the above, **Staff is of the opinion that the demolition of the subject building would be detrimental to the historical or architectural heritage of the Town and thus Staff recommends that the building should be deemed Preferably Preserved.**

⁸ Roland Pease, “music in the air,” *Wellesley Townsman*, June 22, 1950, page 2.

⁹ “Neighborhood News,” *Wellesley Townsman*, April 4, 1957, page 26.