



## STAFF REPORT

### Town of Wellesley - Planning Department

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Application: DR-2020-53 – 46 River Ridge – Preservation Determination  
Subject Property: 46 River Ridge (Assessor's Parcel ID # 21-35)  
Applicant: Thomas & Irene Peluso  
Property Owner: Thomas & Irene Peluso  
Date: Report prepared 1/8/21 for 1/11/21 Historical Commission Meeting  
Staff Contact: Dana Marks, Planner  
Staff Recommendation: **Not Preferably Preserved**

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#### APPLICATION OVERVIEW

On December 2, 2020, the Applicants submitted applications for Eligibility Notice and Preservation Determination along with plans of proposed work that includes partial demolition and an addition at 46 River Ridge. Planning Department Staff determined that the proposed work would affect more than 50% of the total existing exterior surface of the dwelling, therefore qualifying as a Demolition under Article 46C. An Eligibility Notice was issued on December 8, 2020 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 11, 2021.

#### DESCRIPTION

In consideration of the application for a partial demolition and in determining whether or not the dwelling should be deemed Preferably Preserved, it was determined that the original dwelling was built no later than 1893, when it was reported that Frank Curry owned a dwelling and 18,900 sq. ft. of land on River Ridge in the 1893 Annual Town Report. This source proves that the dwelling at 46 River Ridge is indeed Eligible and subject to a Preservation Determination pursuant to Article 46C of the Wellesley Town Bylaws.

The building at 46 River Ridge stands two and a half stories tall under a front gable roof. A farmer's porch spans the main front façade with an entry door situated on the right side. The subject building is situated in the Cedar Street – River Ridge Area of Town. This area “comprises the largest extant collection of houses directly associated with Wellesley's late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century industrial focus at Lower Falls.”<sup>1</sup> Originally dedicated to a farming lifestyle, this area of town developed to account for industrial development at Lower Falls, and a number of residences were constructed to house millworkers.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Cedar Street – River Ridge Area,” MACRIS Form WEL.H, May 1990.

<sup>2</sup> “Cedar Street – River Ridge Area,” MACRIS Form WEL.H, May 1990.



Image via Historical Commission Plaque Profile, June 2015.

A large number of lots in the area were developed by Joseph E. Fiske through his 1888 subdivision for River Ridge. Fiske, of Civil War and Wellesley incorporation fame, sold Lot 27 to Frank Curry in 1892 (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 686, Page 333). Curry proceeded to build a house on the lot, as indicated above in the 1893 Annual Town Report.



46 River Ridge is situated on Lot 27, outlined in red. “Plan for Joseph E. Fiske RIVER RIDGE, WELLESLEY,” via Norfolk County Registry of Deeds.

While Curry owned this property for a number of years, house occupation was undertaken by a rotating cast of residents. As reported in the *Wellesley Townsman*:

“Mr. and Mrs. Charles Donahue have moved to River Ridge Street, in the house owned by Mr. Frank Curry.” (May 1, 1916)

“Mr. Robert Downey and family are now occupying the house on River Ridge Street, owned by Mr. Frank Curry.” (December 1, 1916)

“Little Mary Elizabeth Curry, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Curry of 46 River Ridge Street, gave a party last Friday at her home to several of her little friends in honor of her birthday.” (July 21, 1922)

“Thomas Curry of 46 River Ridge returned to his duties at the Wellesley Post Office on Thursday after a three weeks’ vacation.” (August 10, 1928)

“The following Wellesley men were inducted into the military service of the United States and left for camp... Camillus N. Hoffman, 46 River Ridge street...” (April 2, 1942)

Frank Curry, the patriarch of a large family, was born in Ireland in 1868 and resided on Walnut Street throughout his time living in Town. He worked for the Town in the Tree Department since its inception until the time of his death.<sup>3</sup> His two daughters (Jane and Mary) and five sons (James, Thomas, Joseph, Phillip and John) all lived locally.<sup>4</sup> In 1946, the children and widow of Frank Curry transferred the property to Edwin J. and Sarah M. Donahue (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 2615, Page 459).

One of ten children from a large Irish family, Edwin Donahue worked for the Town in various capacities and was a Town Meeting Member.<sup>5</sup> He resided in Wellesley throughout his entire life. He worked for the Fire Department from May 1934 through October 1948, when he transferred to the Water Department.<sup>6</sup> Sarah Donahue was born in Nova Scotia and was a resident of Town for 48 years.<sup>7</sup>

John L. Donahue, one of Edwin & Sarah’s sons, was a 1957 graduate of Wellesley High School and served with the U.S. Marine Corps in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>8</sup> John resided in Natick with his wife Patricia and was employed by the Lower Falls Wine Company.<sup>9</sup> After the deaths of his parents and acting as the Executor of the Will of Sarah M. Donahue, John transferred the property to himself and his wife in 1977 (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 5422, Page 108 and Book 5520, Page 295).

John and Patricia transferred the property to Skip and Stacie E. Williams in 1996 (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 11308, Page 161). The Williams’ were responsible for the construction of a 9’x12’ extension to an existing deck in 1997 (Building Permit No. 30218).

Mark G. Finneran and Pamela Jane Laster (a/k/a Pamela Jane Finneran) acquired the property in 2001 (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 15129, Page 281). The Finnerans transferred the

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<sup>3</sup> “FRANK CURRY,” *Wellesley Townsman*, March 23, 1934, page 6.

<sup>4</sup> Frank’s youngest son, John, was killed in an accident at the Newton Lower Falls Garage in 1925. “LOWER FALLS YOUTH KILLED AT GARAGE,” *Wellesley Townsman*, February 6, 1925, page 1 & 4.

<sup>5</sup> “Daniel Donahue,” *Wellesley Townsman*, February 3, 1933, page 8; Women Voters Present Information of Candidates For Town Meeting Member,” *Wellesley Townsman*, March 3, 1955, page 5; “Town Meeting Member Vacancies Filled,” *Wellesley Townsman*, June 19, 1958, page 5.

<sup>6</sup> “Edwin J. Donahue,” *Wellesley Townsman*, August 2, 1962, page 19.

<sup>7</sup> “Sarah Donahue,” *Wellesley Townsman*, February 24, 1977, page 13.

<sup>8</sup> “Miss Urlass Is Bride Of Mr. Donahue,” *Wellesley Townsman*, January 7, 1960, page 4.

<sup>9</sup> “Mrs. Daniel Donahue,” *Wellesley Townsman*, November 19, 1964, page 14.

property to Benjamin and Myriam Spiegel in 2011 (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 28676, Page 555). In August 2020 the current property owners acquired 46 River Ridge (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 38282, Page 302) and are seeking a Preservation Determination for a partial Demolition.

As a partial Demolition, the Applicants have submitted architectural drawings and renderings proposing an extensive addition to the existing structure with a garage underneath on the right side. The proposed addition will build up new usable space to the rear and right. It will reconfigure the front entry and incorporate one new front gable set back from the original with a side cross gable feature.



*Rendering of proposed partial demolition and addition via Application Materials.*

The front porch will reach extend beyond the existing front façade to make a new front entry towards the new center of the house. The windows on the existing structure will be reconfigured to be symmetrically placed, and the same or similar window types will be installed throughout the addition.

## **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 Determination. 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 46 River Ridge **is not** (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 not** (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 (ii), houses along River Ridge and the nearby section of Cedar Street had a high concentration of vernacular style houses including 46 River Ridge, however the integrity of the neighborhood is no longer intact due to a number of additions and new construction.

With respect to standard (iii), no federal or local historic district is nearby, however 46 River Ridge is directly adjacent to a Water Supply Protection District.

Therefore, based upon the above, **Staff recommends that the building not be deemed Preferably Preserved based on the scope of work identified in the submitted plans.** Staff recommends that action by the Historical Commission concluding the same be based on the submitted plans, therefore requiring any alterations to the scope similarly affecting 50% or more of the existing exterior of the dwelling be reviewed as a new application prior to the issuance of permits from the Building Department.