



PLANNING DIRECTOR  
TABITHA HARKIN

## CITY OF NEW BEDFORD DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING

133 William Street • Room 303 • New Bedford, MA 02740  
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### HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** New Bedford City Council

**FROM:** New Bedford Historical Commission

**DATE:** September 17, 2021

**RE:** **BUILDING DEMOLITION REVIEW**  
**94 Clark Street (Map 84 Lot 134)**  
**Circa 1911 three story wood framed residence-partial demolition: Porches**

In accordance with the requirements of the New Bedford City Code, Article XI, Section 2-157 Demolition of Buildings, the New Bedford Historical Commission [NBHC] has examined the structure located at the above-captioned site in order to determine its historical significance and whether it is in the public interest to preserve such structures.

The NBHC reviewed the application for demolition at its September 13, 2021 meeting, and hereby forwards its findings and recommendation in this matter to the New Bedford City Council:

- The building is associated with the architectural, cultural and social history of the city, as it is a prime example of a middle-class tenement, the iconic building archetype built to house the immigrant groups who came to New Bedford for employment in the textile industry.
- The building is architecturally significant as it embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Colonial Revival style with details such as patterned shingles, wide cornices, tapered columns and the use of monumental center porticos capped by a triangular pediment. The porches dominate the front facade and are a defining feature of the building.
- The City's Demolition Ordinance promotes the public welfare by making the City a more attractive and desirable place in which to live and work by preserving and protecting significant buildings, structures, streetscapes and neighborhoods. The loss of tenement porches has been widespread and often results in an unattractive, blank building that no longer contributes to a neighborhood, and may assist in the neighborhoods' visual, physical, and social decline.
- If a demolition permit is granted, the Commission has sought that the current small porch windows be replaced with more appropriately sized windows.

**In light of these findings, the New Bedford Historical Commission has determined that the building at 94 Clark Street is Historically Significant and a Preferably Preserved Historic Building or Structure.**

cc. Kevin Lima, Property Owner  
Department of Inspectional Service

Enc: Historical Commission Staff Report



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## STAFF REPORT

NEW BEDFORD HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEETING

September 13, 2021

**CASE # 2021.17: DEMOLITION REVIEW**

94 Clark St (Map 84 Lot 134)

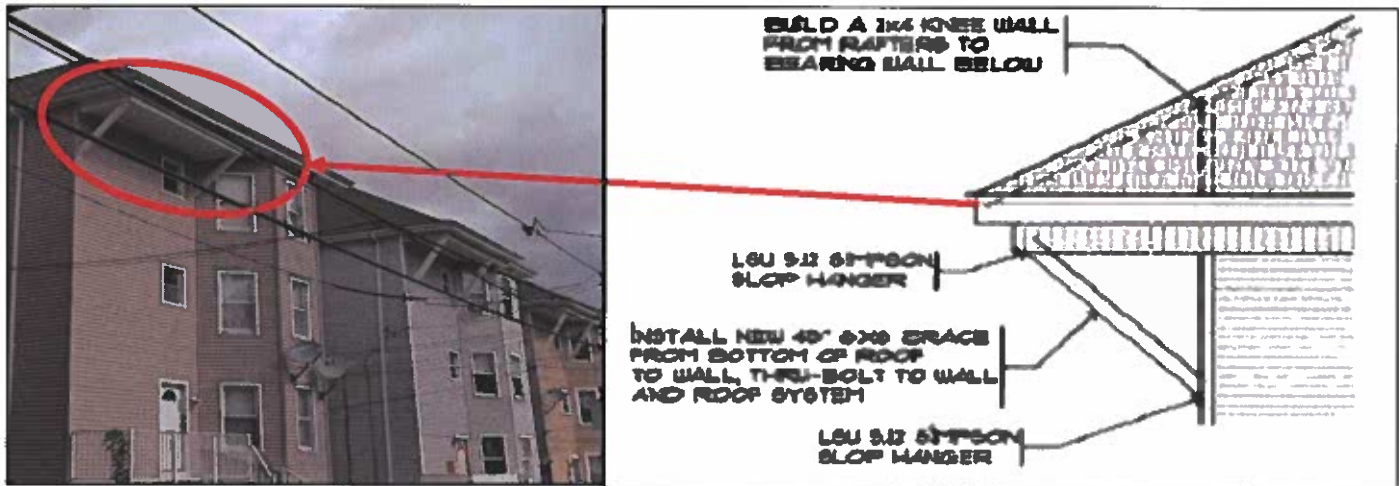
**OWNER/** Kevin Lima

**APPLICANT:** 34 Kevin Drive  
Dartmouth, MA 02747



94 Clark Street

**OVERVIEW:** The owner purchased this property in March 2020 as an investment property with the intent for it to be non-owner occupied. The owner is seeking to remove the front porches and support the center gable overhang with brackets.



**EXISTING CONDITIONS:** Repairs to the building have taken place, and at some point, the original doors accessing the upper porches were removed. Currently, very small, out of scale windows exist in the location where the porch doors were once located. The building is having vinyl siding applied to its exterior facades over the existing shingles.

**STATEMENT OF REASON FOR PROPOSED DEMOLITION:** The property owner does not wish to maintain the porches, as there is no access to them, and is concerned with "kids trying to climb them". An engineer's structural assessment of the porch structure was not submitted by the applicant.

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT:** New Bedford's economy transitioned from whaling to textiles in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the early textile mills constructed worker housing conveniently located adjacent to the mills and eventually the city's streets were filled with tenement



Application of vinyl siding



housing for the English, French-Canadians, Portuguese and other immigrant groups who came to New Bedford for employment. The tenement at 94 Clark Street was constructed in 1911, the same year that famed photographer Lewis Hine visited the city photographing children on the neighborhood streets, in the textile mills in which they labored, and within their three-decker homes.

By 1911, New Bedford had a population of 104,000 and its 67 textile mills led the nation in the manufacturing of fine cotton goods. This economic growth resulted in an enormous population increase (300% between the years 1880-1910) which also resulted in a pattern of housing settlement that is clearly evident to this day. A dominant presence in the neighborhoods across New Bedford, the three-family or triple-decker is the region's and city's iconic multi-family housing type.

Author Kingston Heath spent considerable time in New Bedford gathering research for his book, *The Patina of Place*, which documents the City's early 19<sup>th</sup> century immigrant population, the tenement style housing, and how it became part of the identity of the City. Heath notes that the emphasis of the front porch as the principal decorative feature was not only a result of social and stylistic constructs, but also by the recognition that due to the narrow, vertical buildings, compressed along the streetscapes, that only their front facades would be visible.

Many of the tenements were originally occupied by tradesman and their families who rented to others; however, it is a misnomer to believe that the tenements were a cheaply constructed building type to house immigrant families. Just as single family homes ranged from modest cottages to large mansions, the tenements were distinguished for various classes by location, exterior ornament, and interior amenities.

The property at 94 Clark Street would be classified as a middle-class tenement constructed in the Colonial Revival style with details such as patterned shingles, wide cornices, tapered columns and the use of monumental center porticos capped by a triangular pediment. The porches dominate the front facade and are a defining feature of the building.

## 94 Clark Street Locus Map



**STATEMENT OF APPLICABLE GUIDELINES:** *Sec. 2-157. Demolition Delay of Buildings and Structures-Purpose:* The purpose of Sections 2-157 through 2-157.9 is preserving and protecting significant buildings and structures within New Bedford, which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, economic, political or social history of the City and limiting the detrimental effect of demolition on the character of the City. Through Sections 2-157 through 2-157.9, owners of Preferably Preserved Historic Buildings and Structures are encouraged to seek out alternative options that will preserve, rehabilitate or restore such buildings, and residents of the City are alerted to impending demolitions of significant buildings.

By preserving and protecting significant buildings, structures, streetscapes and neighborhoods, this Ordinance promotes the public welfare by making the City a more attractive and desirable place in which to live and work. To achieve these purposes, the New Bedford Historical Commission is authorized to advise the City Council with respect to demolition permit applications. The issuance of demolition permits is regulated as provided by this Ordinance.

The provisions of the Demolition Delay Ordinance shall apply only to any building or structure that, in whole or in part, was built seventy-five (75) or more years prior to the date of the application for the demolition permit, and is:

- A building or structure listed or eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or within an area listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or on the State Register of Historic Places;
- A building or structure importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, economic, political or social history of the city, or;
- A building or structure which is historically or architecturally significant in terms of period style, method of building construction or association with a significant architect or builder either by itself or as a part of a group of buildings, or;
- A building or structure located within one hundred fifty (150) feet of a federal, state or local historic district boundary.

**FOR BOARD MEMBER CONSIDERATION:**

Although the proposal for the property is not a full demolition, the city's Demolition Delay Ordinance applies due to *Sec. 2-157.1.*, which sets forth the definition for "demolition".

**"Demolition"** The intentional act of substantially pulling down, destroying, defacing, removing or razing a building or structure or commencing the work of total, substantial or partial destruction with the intent of completing same. In addition to complete demolition of a building, the following actions shall require a demolition permit:

1. Removal of a roof for the purpose of raising the overall height of a roof; rebuilding the roof to a different pitch; or adding another story to a building.
2. Removal of one or more exterior wall(s) or partition(s) of a building.
3. Gutting of a building's interior to the point where exterior features (windows, etc.) are impacted.
4. Removal of more than 25% of a structure's overall gross square footage as determined by the Department of Inspectional Services.
5. The lifting and relocating of a building on its existing site or to another site.
6. Altering a building's key-character defining features, making it non-eligible to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** The property at 94 Clark Street is representative of the building boom which took place during the height of the city's textile industry and it has a direct association with the immigrant populations which first inhabited the tenements. These tenement style buildings continue to be a valuable component of the City's housing stock as they provide essential affordable housing opportunities in a density that also supports sustainability.

New Bedford has a unique history and distinctive architecture which sets it apart from Anywhere, USA. Protecting and preserving the City's iconic architecture brings pride to its residents, draws visitors and provides the opportunity to attract appropriate economic investment.

The City's housing has been negatively impacted from speculative investments by outsiders. The subject property is a clear example, as over the last two decades, the property has transferred ownership five times, purchased exclusively by outside investors, including the present owner. Nearly all of the dwellings in this neighborhood were constructed in the tenement archetype with many suffering from lack of maintenance, inappropriate alterations, and particularly the loss of front porches.

Entrances and porches are often the focus of historic buildings, particularly the tenement style building. With their functional and decorative features (such as doors, steps, balustrades, columns, pilasters, and pediments), they can be extremely important in defining the historic character of a building.

The loss of a building's character defining features, such as integral porches, often results in a soulless building – an uninviting and unattractive, blank building that no longer contributes to a neighborhood, and may assist in the neighborhoods' visual, physical, and social decline.

Staff recommends that the subject building's porches be retained.



65 Reynolds Street was the "twin" to 94 Clark Street. Recent applied vinyl siding with retention of porches



106-114 Clark Street properties with removal of porches