



September 10, 2026

Dear Inspectional Services Department:

I am writing on behalf of the Bellevue Hill Improvement Association (BHIA) regarding 19 Cowing Street in West Roxbury. Direct abutters and other nearby residents have raised continuing concerns regarding occupancy, construction, physical conditions and activities at the property and report having sought assistance over an extended period through Boston 311, ISD and numerous other City offices and agencies.

A direct abutter reports prior outreach to the Mayor's Office/City of Boston, Mayor's Office of Housing, Boston Housing Authority, Boston Public Health Commission, Boston Police/community police at District E-5, and City building/inspection personnel. Neighbors separately report discussing the property with West Roxbury neighborhood liaison Ben Tayag and local police. Residents also report that ISD personnel have visited the property but have not always obtained access when occupants did not answer.

Given the cumulative history and the unresolved questions summarized below, BHIA respectfully requests a coordinated review through ISD's Investigation and Enforcement Team rather than another isolated response to an individual 311 complaint. BHIA is not asking the City to presume that any resident report constitutes a violation. We are asking the appropriate City professionals to determine what is legally authorized, what conditions and uses presently exist, and whether they comply with applicable requirements.

Occupancy and Permitting Questions

Available City records create an important unresolved question concerning the property's legal occupancy of record and its present configuration and use.

An ISD record from 1986 states "Legal Occupancy of record: TWO FAMILY," and a 1991 ISD record again identifies the property as a "TWO FAMILY DWELLING." Boston plumbing and gas permits issued in 2019 and 2020 continued to identify the occupancy as "1-2FAM."

The current Boston Assessing record, however, now identifies the property's land use as "Three-Fam Dwelling" and records three full eat-in kitchens, seven bedrooms and three full bathrooms, with a living area of approximately 3,578 square feet. This current Assessing classification is also consistent with the property's July 2022 MLS marketing as a "3 Family." That listing described a third floor containing two bedrooms, living room, kitchen and bathroom facilities and stated that gas cooking hookups existed on all three floors. The 2022 MLS record is evidence of how the property was marketed; it does not itself establish lawful occupancy.

Our review has not yet identified the City record establishing when or by what authorization the property's legal occupancy changed from two-family to three-family, if such a change was approved. We therefore ask ISD to identify the property's current legal occupancy of record and the permit, Certificate/Record of Occupancy, Zoning Board of Appeal relief or other City authorization establishing that occupancy.

Residents additionally report residential arrangements and use that raise questions about whether the property's present configuration and occupancy are limited to and consistent

with the authorized dwelling units and approved residential areas. Residents report residential use of the third-floor/attic area by multiple individuals. Neighbors report speaking with a person identifying herself as an occupant of that area who stated that at least three people live there, that she does not know the other individuals, and characterized the arrangement as boarding.

Boston 311 records from 2024–2026 also contain repeated allegations concerning third-floor/attic or “loft” occupancy, possible basement occupancy, rooming/boarding arrangements and overcrowding. These reports do not establish unlawful occupancy. They do, however, make it important to determine what areas and number of dwelling units are legally approved for residential use and whether the property's current configuration and occupancy conform to that approval.

A separate permitting question remains unresolved. Boston 311 case #101005708722 was closed by ISD with the notation “Noted. Isd building permit issued.” We have been unable to identify the permit referenced in that response, its approved scope, associated plans, inspection history or final status.

Current Conditions Reported by Residents

Residents report continuing construction and exterior/deck alterations; electrical wiring and alterations they believe warrant professional inspection; recurring automobile detailing, mechanical and oil-change activity involving vehicles they believe do not belong to occupants; substantial quantities of large packaged materials reportedly stored in the garage and transferred from the property to visiting commercial trucks; unusually large recurring weekly refuse volumes and continuing rodent concerns; and young children regularly present at the property while construction activity is occurring.

BHIA does not characterize these reported conditions as established code or zoning violations. We ask the City to determine the actual conditions and uses at the property and whether applicable permits, inspections, licenses or other authorizations are required and have been obtained.

The sanitation concerns are particularly relevant because prior Boston 311 cases document City findings of loose trash/debris and dog feces and state that the property was placed under abatement for rodent activity. We ask that current sanitation and rodent compliance, including the status of prior abatement, be included in the review.

Requested Coordinated Review

BHIA respectfully requests that the Investigation and Enforcement Team coordinate review by Building, Housing and Electrical personnel, together with Environmental Sanitation/Auto Shop Licensing and any other City division or agency ISD determines appropriate.

Specifically, we ask the City to determine:

- the property's current legal occupancy of record and the City record establishing the authorized number of dwelling units and uses, including when and by what authorization any change from two-family to three-family occupancy occurred;
- whether the current Boston Assessing classification as a “Three-Fam Dwelling” corresponds to the property's legally authorized occupancy and approved configuration;
- whether the property's present residential configuration and use, including the third-floor/attic and any basement residential use, are consistent with the authorized number of dwelling units, approved occupancy, plans and permits;

- whether reported construction, exterior/deck work and electrical alterations were appropriately permitted, inspected and completed in compliance with applicable requirements;
- the permit referenced in Boston 311 case #101005708722, including its number, approved scope, plans, inspection history and final status;
- whether reported garage activity, including automotive work and storage or transfer of packaged merchandise or inventory to commercial trucks, constitutes an authorized use of the property;
- whether current trash, sanitation and rodent conditions comply with applicable requirements and whether prior abatement has been completed and remains in compliance; and
- whether the reported presence of young children should be taken into consideration in evaluating the building, electrical and other life-safety conditions at the property.

If access necessary for a meaningful inspection cannot be obtained voluntarily, we ask ISD to determine what appropriate lawful inspection or enforcement procedure should be pursued so that the underlying health and safety questions can be resolved.

We would also appreciate ISD's guidance as to whether the history of repeated complaints, prior City enforcement and abatement, difficulty obtaining access, and unresolved occupancy, building and safety questions warrants review through Boston's Problem Properties Task Force or another coordinated City mechanism.

BHIA's objective is not to make determinations that properly belong to City inspectors or to target the individuals residing at the property. The number of people reportedly residing there makes it particularly important to establish that occupied spaces are legally authorized and that the building's construction, electrical systems, means of egress and other conditions are safe.

BHIA has compiled the underlying property research, relevant Boston 311 case numbers, current Boston Assessing information, photographs and other supporting documentation and can provide those materials upon request. We would appreciate confirmation that this request has been referred for coordinated review, identification of the appropriate City/ISD contact responsible for the matter, and information regarding next steps.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Antonina Guarino

President

Bellevue Hill Improvement Association