

Public Comment on Planning Board Site Plan Review Item “D” 94 Langdon Street/98 Cornwall Street

From: David Rheume, P. E.

81 Langdon Street

To: Planning Board Chair Rick Chellman and Planning Board Members

Request:

I am an abutter to the three-home development that is being proposed to be built on merged lots for 94 Langdon Street (Lot 139-8) and 98 Cornwall Street (Lot 139-1). I request that the Board carefully consider requiring modifications to the proposed driveway access and building layout, specifically changing access for Dwelling Unit 2 and Dwelling Unit 3 to be from Cornwall Street, and requiring the Dwelling Unit 1 to be oriented in alignment with, while maintaining driveway access to, Langdon Street. This concern is related to Site Plan Review Regulations Section 2.9 Evaluation Criteria numbers 2, 8, 11 and 16.

Background:

For full disclosure, I serve on the Zoning Board of Adjustment and my wife, City Counselor Beth Moreau, serves as the City Council Representative to the Planning Board.

An excerpt from the developer’s application to Planning Board is shown on page 4. It depicts the planned layout for the three single-family dwelling units, as well as the proposed common driveway that exits onto Langdon Street. It also illustrates that proposed Dwelling Unit 1 is oriented at a right angle to Langdon Street. The common driveway near Dwelling Unit 2 and Dwelling Unit 3 features a curve and vehicle turnout that almost connect to Cornwall Street.

On March 9th, 2026, abutters of 94 Langdon Street who reside or own property at 81, 82, 91 and 101 Langdon Street met with Shawna Sammis of Chinburg and Alex Monastiero of The Gove Group, who explained the project and requested feedback. The project presentation essentially showed the layout that has been provided to TAC. While the abutters, including myself, are in overall support of the project, we did express concerns that all three dwelling units would be accessed via a common driveway exiting onto Langdon Street that would be almost directly across from the driveway at 91 Langdon Street. We also expressed concerns that the orientation of Dwelling Unit 1 would not face Langdon Street, driven in part by this shared driveway. We were informed by the developer’s representatives that the single driveway was chosen because they believed access was not possible to Cornwall Street as the portion of the street north of McDonough Street was not an “accepted” city street.

On March 17th 2026, representatives for the developer appeared before the Zoning Board of Adjustment to obtain a variance in support of the project. That variance was granted. As an abutter, I recused from participating in the application, but, as allowed by the Zoning Board Rules and Regulations, I spoke “To” the application and reiterated concerns with the proposed driveway access being solely on Langdon Street.

On April 7th, 2026 representatives for the developer appeared before the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). In response to questions from TAC members prompted by public input, including input from myself, the representatives again stated that they had originally planned to have access to Cornwall Street for dwelling units closest to that street but decided against this based off a determination from a review by their legal counsel and the “Town Legal Department” that Cornwall Street was a “paper” street that cannot serve as a right-of-way to their lot. It was also stated by a TAC member that the shared driveway will need to be classified as a “Private Way”.

Status of Cornwall Street North of McDonough Street:

Per my discussion with staff from the Portsmouth Legal Department following the public testimony of the developer’s representatives at TAC, there is no record or indication that the legal department ever reviewed or made a determination on the status of the portion of Cornwall Street that is situated north of McDonough Street. Prompted by my discussion, legal staff has generously taken on trying to make a determination on the legal status of this portion of Cornwall Street as time has allowed. While that review is not yet complete, there are strong indications that the City maintains full legal rights to Cornwall Street, including for underground utilities that exist. If such a determination were made, the developer would be free to return to their initial plan.

Independently, I have performed research of several historical maps that would seem to strongly indicate that Cornwall Street has long been viewed as extending to at least to the boundary of Lot 139-1 (“98 Cornwall Street”), and likely farther. Maps from 1850, 1871, 1876, 1892 and 1920 are provided on pages 5 through 9. The 1876 map is particularly illustrative as it depicts property boundaries which include two lots with homes (“J. H. Thompson” and “Wiggin”) that could only be accessed if Cornwall Street existed north of McDonough Street. The 1920 Sanborn Map also depicts property boundaries and shows one lot with a structure and one without that similarly require access to Cornwall Street. This map also shows how older lots had likely been merged and reconfigured to support the Portsmouth Ice and Coal Co., Inc., forming the present lots that are under development.

Additionally, circa 2020, a Neighborhood Pilot Parking Program was proposed and ultimately implemented. In both the 2019 and 2021 proposals for action by the City Council, the maps used to depict the affected streets included Cornwall Street north of McDonough Street, as shown by the map on page 10.

Cornwall Street is similar to other streets in the neighborhood that end in a dead end north of McDonough Street, including Cabot Street and Rock Street. Brewster Street and Langdon Street were similarly configured prior to 2017 when, as part of the agreement to create lots and homes on the east side of Langdon Street, Chinburg turned a portion of the property over to the City to allow a connector road (informally called “Railroad Street”) to be created between the two dead end streets.

Alternative Driveway Configuration:

The apparent vehicle turnaround shown on the applicant’s site plan could be reconfigured to be an ingress from Cornwall Street along the 48 feet of frontage that Lot 139-1 has along the east side of the street. This would leave room at the end of Cornwall Street for snow accumulation due to street plowing in the winter.

Elimination of the common driveway leading to Langdon Street could allow for a home to be positioned parallel to the street with a driveway having two parking locations in front of a two-car garage, mirroring the current configuration of the homes at 81, 82, 91 and 101 Langdon Street. It should still be possible to include a walking path from Dwelling Unit 2 and Dwelling Unit 3 across Condominium-owned land adjacent to Dwelling Unit 1 to allow pedestrian access for those two units to Langdon Street, facilitating easy walking access to Rock Street Park.

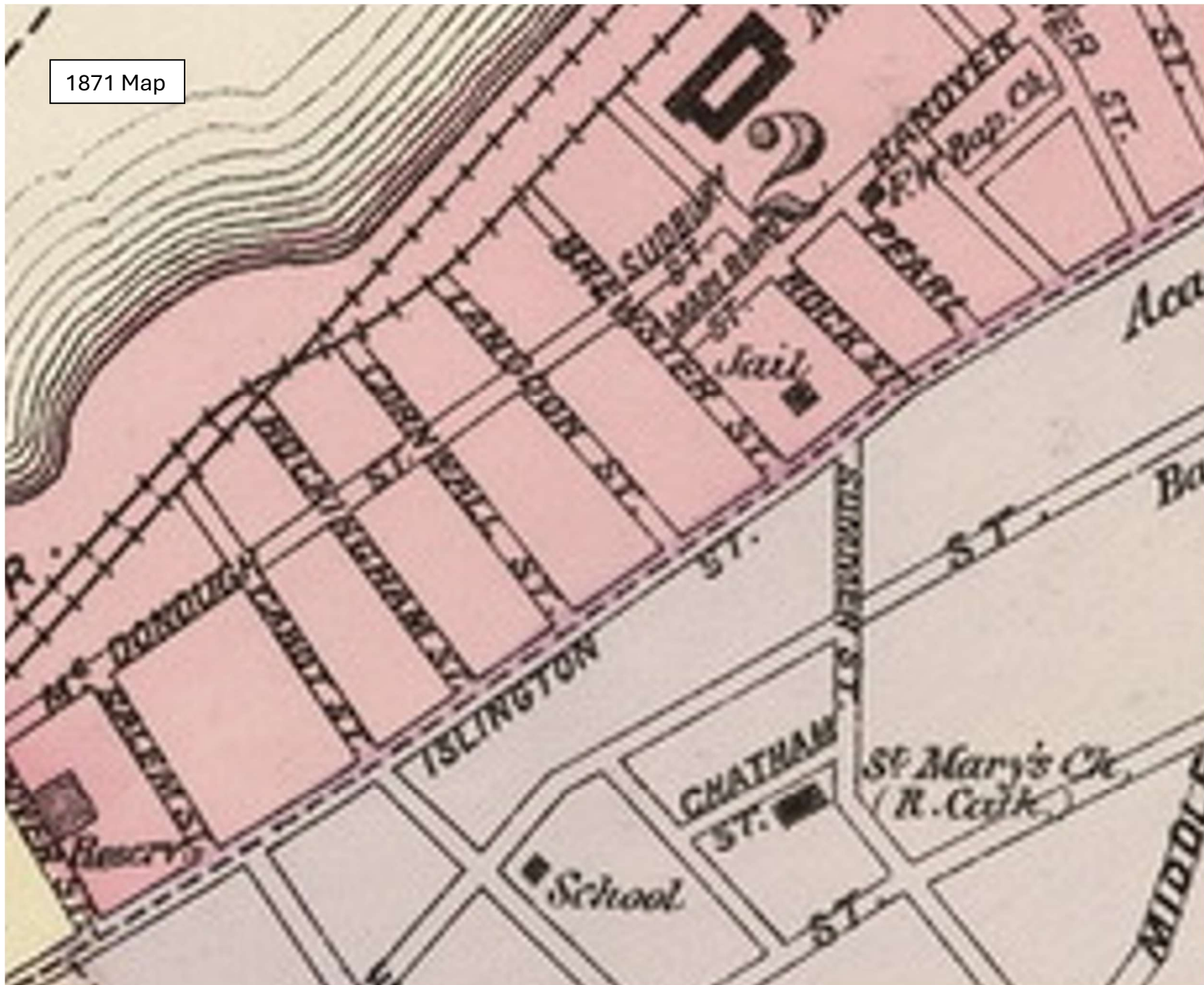
Potential Benefits to the Recommended Reconfiguration:

- Improved emergency vehicle access to Dwelling Unit 2 and Dwelling Unit 3
- Increase in greenspace on the condominium lot
- Reorientation of Dwelling Unit 1 to be in conformance with the dominant streetscape of Langdon Street
- Reduction in vehicles entering and exiting onto the narrow portion of Langdon Street, immediately across from the existing driveway at 91 Langdon Street
- Allowing Dwelling Unit 2 and Dwelling Unit 3 to have Cornwall Street addresses more consistent with their location and aiding in 911/emergency vehicle response

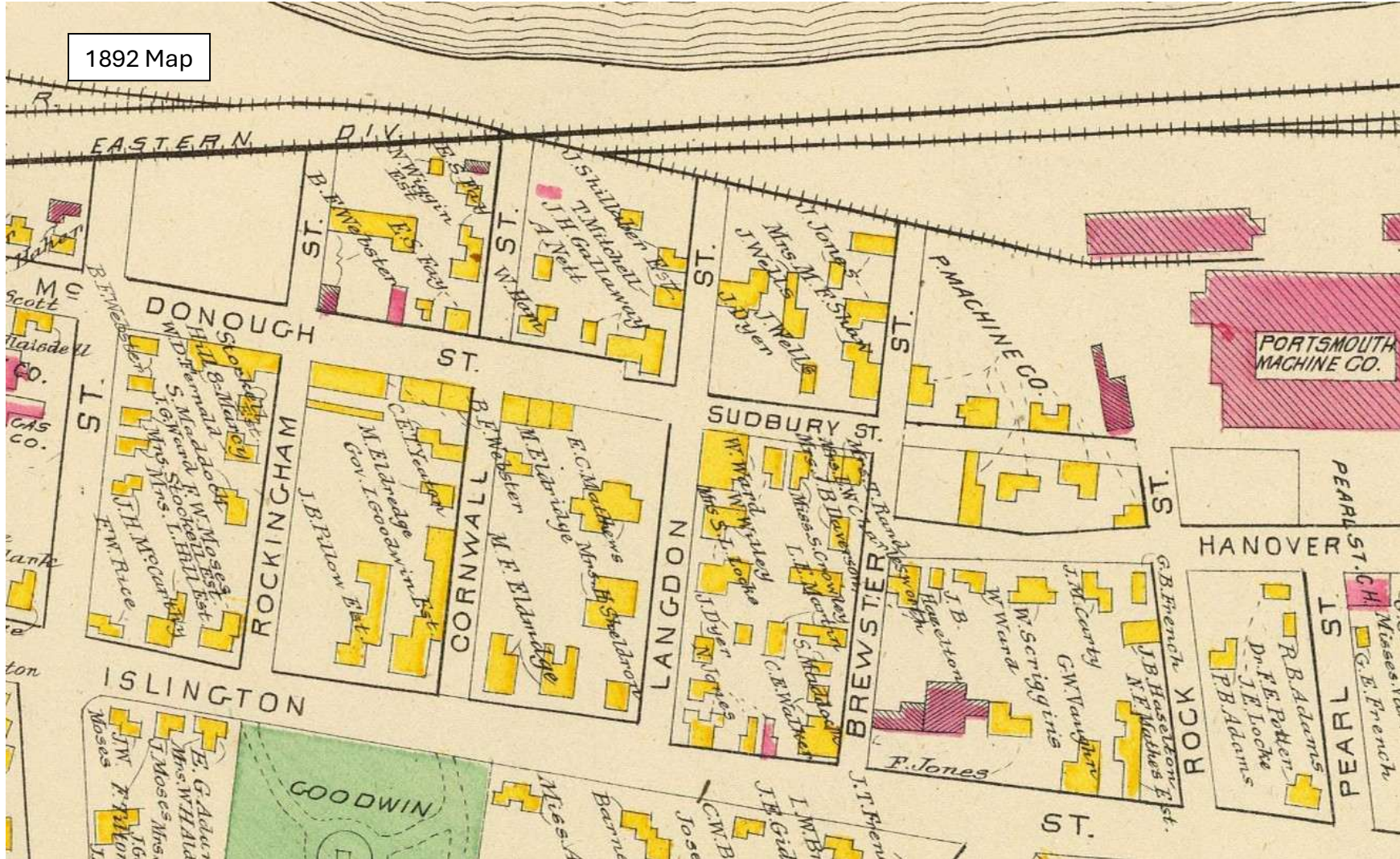
1850 Map



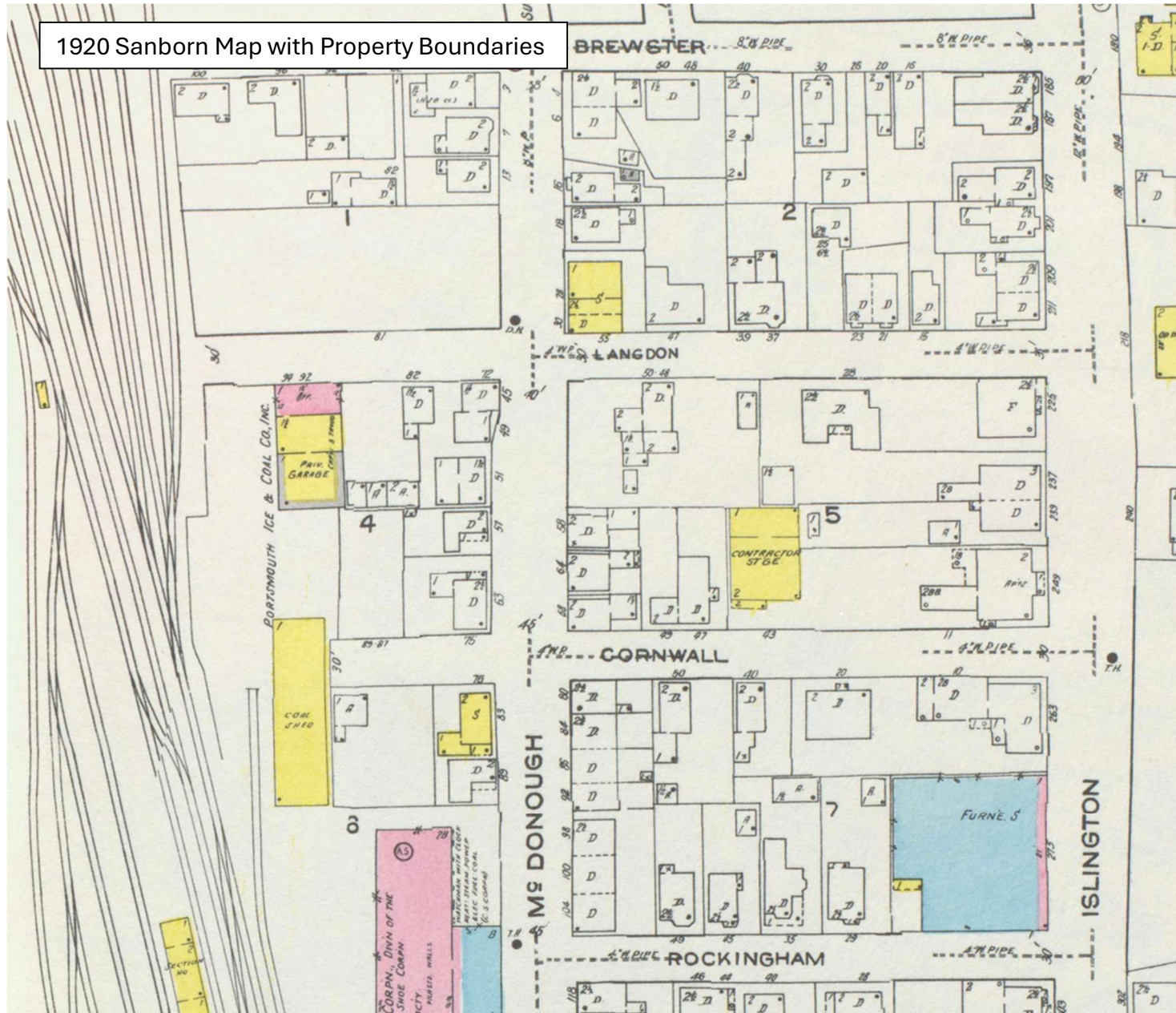
1871 Map



1892 Map



1920 Sanborn Map with Property Boundaries



Map of the 2021 Neighborhood Pilot Parking Program

(Red arrow identifies that portion of Cornwall Street north of McDonough Street was identified by City Staff as being part of the program.)

