

FORM B – BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Photograph



Locus Map (north is up)



Recorded by: John D. Clemson

Organization: Medford Historical Commission

Date (month / year): April 2022

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

7-02-17

Boston
North

Town/City: Medford

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): Wellington

Address: 4068 Mystic Valley Parkway

Historic Name: WEEI Radio Transmission Station

Uses: Present: industrial

Original: industrial

Date of Construction: 1936

Source: Building Inspector, newspaper accounts

Style/Form: Art Moderne/ rectangular block, complex

Architect/Builder: WEEI Broadcasting Corp., builder

Exterior Material:

Foundation: poured concrete

Wall/Trim: stucco/ stucco

Roof: not visible

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures: two tethered radio antennae (see aerial figure)

Major Alterations (with dates): Window enclosure, recent decades.

Condition: fair

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 18 acres

Setting: Dense mix of 20th century and commercial uses abutting parkway and municipal park to the south.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MEDFORD

4068 MYSTIC VALLEY PARKWAY

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--

☒ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

The WEEI Radio Transmission Station, dedicated in 1937, is a distinctive and rare example of Art Moderne architecture in both Medford and the Boston region. The building is a two-story, flat-roofed block sited at an angle to its Mystic Valley Parkway frontage. The façade of the building is formed in a broad curve and the radiating side wings extend rearward beyond the main block in two symmetrical, single-story extensions. The two-story main body is approximately 24 feet square and the wings extend about 14 feet to either side. The assessor's footprint suggests the left (west) wing has been expanded within the originally open rear court. The building is entered through two domestic doors placed symmetrically at either end of the bowed façade.

Original descriptions of the building provided in newspaper coverage from its dedication, quoted extensively below in the narrative, indicate the bowed façade originally housed a large glass-block window opening that has since been enclosed. However the surviving entry sequence and fenestration pattern, including two fixed-sash windows placed against the rear corners, combined with a flat, slab-like cornice detail, speak to the building's original modernist styling. Original wood doors appear to survive in each entrance. Evidence of original fenestration and finishes likely survive beneath later coverings to support a restoration of this striking example of its styling.

The building is sited close to its narrow frontage on the north side of Mystic Valley Parkway facing south. The property fills extensive wetlands behind that encompass 18 acres and is entirely surrounded by high chain-link fencing topped by barbed wire. This acreage was purposely retained by the owners to house two steel aerial antennas centered on each half of the marsh that date to ca. 1982, replacing earlier, shorter towers. Descriptions included in the narrative below establish that this site was carefully chosen because its flat topography and the salt marsh occupied by it were thought to enhance radio broadcasts at the time of its 1936 construction. The layout of the property can be observed on a plan and aerial image reproduced below.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

WEEI Radio initiated broadcasting in August of 1924 and its call letters referenced its original owner, the Edison Electric Illuminating Company of Boston, founded in 1885. It is therefore among the earliest radio broadcasters established in Massachusetts. Edison Electric Illuminating was one of many regional firms licensed by Edison Electric Light Company to provide power plants and grids to power electric lighting to customers. Newspaper coverage of WEEI's 1924 founding identified the stations management, who included editors "Bob" Emery, Charles Burton and Lewis S. Whitcomb, all of whom had editorial experience in Boston's newspaper industry. Emery's secretary, Miss Marjorie Drew, was also recognized in this coverage. "It is the aim of the officials of WEEI to make the station individual and original...It is intended to make the station outstanding in the broadcasting field." The station was originally located in the Edison Building at 39 Boylston Street, Boston (BOS.2246).¹

In July of 1936 WEEI announced the opening of a new building to house "transmitting apparatus" at

marsh land north of Wellington Bridge in Medford, where a 1½-story V-shaped building of modernistic design will be constructed. Extensive use of translucent glass brick will be employed on the front and curved apex facing the Gen. Lawrence Highway, according to plans filed at Medford City Hall...Within the building, which will be of steel and brick, a mezzanine promenade will provide the visiting public with a view of the radio transmitter room. The site will be extensively landscaped and the entire setting flood-lighted. Two steel towers in the rear of the building, 740 feet apart, are to be the last word in modern antenna construction. In a survey of WEEI's facilities, the technicians of the Columbia Broadcasting System, the new lessees, recommended removal of the

¹ *Boston Daily Globe*, Aug. 2, 1924, p. 3, "To Have New Broadcaster, Edison to Open 500-Watt Station Early Next Month;" see also BOS.1650, 42-48 Chauncy Street, Boston, Boston Edison Substation.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MEDFORD

4068 MYSTIC VALLEY PARKWAY

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--

transmitting apparatus to the Mystic Valley, a salt-water marsh, according to the experts, being an ideal location for transmitting apparatus of the type now being installed.²

Newspaper coverage of the station's dedication included the following description:

The new transmitter was designed by Western Electric engineers and is the last word in engineering simplicity and efficiency. Not only is the new transmitter the latest in mechanical skill, but it is housed in a building of the finest in modernistic development. It resembles a Hollywood motion picture studio and can be seen for many miles because of its location. The transmitter house is built on the Parkway at the edge of the Medford marshes, occupying a flat parcel of land stretching out for miles over the swampland... There is every convenience for the operators in the transmitter building. In addition to the main transmitter room, there are several other smaller rooms on the ground floor. On the second floor there are sleeping quarters for two operators and an emergency dining room, with all the furnishings and necessary equipment. Radio listeners are invited to inspect the new building and see the new transmitter in actual operation.³

The actual dedication a week later was attended by Medford Mayor John J. Irwin, a representative of Governor Charles F. Hurley and CBS officials Mefford R. Runyon, John K. Karol and J. Kelley Smith. At the dedication Mayor Irwin claimed Medford as the birthplace of broadcasting "in this country," citing the Tufts College experimental station IXE at Medford Hillside ca. 1919. The initial broadcast during the dedication of the subject building included an interview with Eunice Randall, who "holds the distinction of being the first woman radio announcer in the country; holder of an amateur license, she managed the Tufts College experimental station in 1919," on-site interviews with the pilot of a plane in flight with the station's flight announcer Bob Freeman, a train engineer, "interspersed with music in the Nye Mayhew manner direct from the main dining room of the Hotel Statler."⁴ Despite these extensive descriptions of the building and accounts of its dedication, an architect was not identified and there is no reference to the building in the Massachusetts State Archive's Massachusetts Department of Public Safety collections.

WEEI regularly published their schedule in the *Boston Globe* and likely elsewhere. A sampling of the station's programming during 1936 included a revue from "Swing, Harlem, Swing," sung by Ethel Waters, and an interview with Theodore Dreiser on the program, "Heinz Magazine on the Air."

Building permits indicate the station's broadcast towers were replaced in 1982. Permits regarding alterations to the building, including covering the glass-block façade, have not been located. WEEI remains an active broadcaster in the Boston area but its transmitter is currently located in Peabody, suggesting the subject station has been abandoned. The property is currently in the ownership of a limited liability corporation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Maps and atlases:

- 1855 H.F. Walling. "Map of Medford...."
- 1875 F. W. Beers, *County Atlas of Middlesex, Massachusetts*.
- 1880 O. H. Bailey [Bird's Eye View of] Medford.
- 1889 Geo. H. Walker & Co., *Atlas of Middlesex County, Massachusetts*.
- 1898 Geo. W. Stadly & Co., *Atlas of the City of Medford....*
- 1900 Geo. W. Stadly & Co., *Atlas of Middlesex County, Massachusetts, Volume 1*.
- 1892, 1897, 1903, 1910, 1936, 1936-1950 Sanborn Insurance Atlases.

Ancestry.com: see footnotes

Charles Brooks and James M. Usher, *History of the Town of Medford, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, From its First Settlement in 1630 to 1855; Revised, Enlarged and Brought Down to 1885* (Rand, Avery & Co., 1886)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, Mar. 28, 1937, p. B, "Dedicate New WEEI Transmitter Apr. 3, 5000-Watt Equipment Latest in Engineering Design."

⁴ Ibid, Apr. 4, 1937, p. B31, "New WEEI Transmitter is Dedicated at Medford, State, City Officials, Radio Experts Attend Opening of 5000-Watt Broadcasting Unit."

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MEDFORD

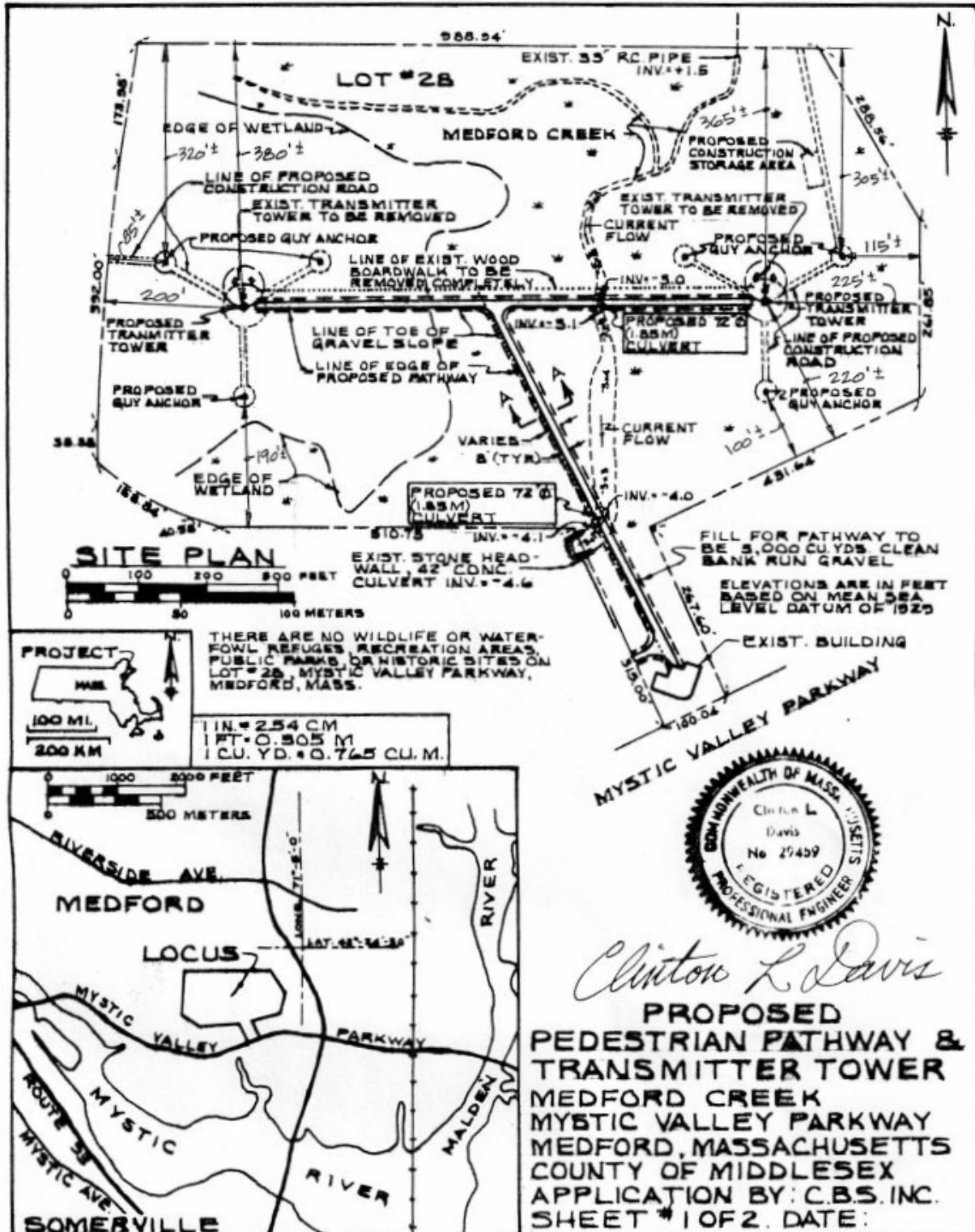
4068 MYSTIC VALLEY PARKWAY

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

Middlesex County South Registry of Deeds, in notes as MCSRD book:page.



Medford Building Department site plan depicting the parcel with locations of the building and antennas.

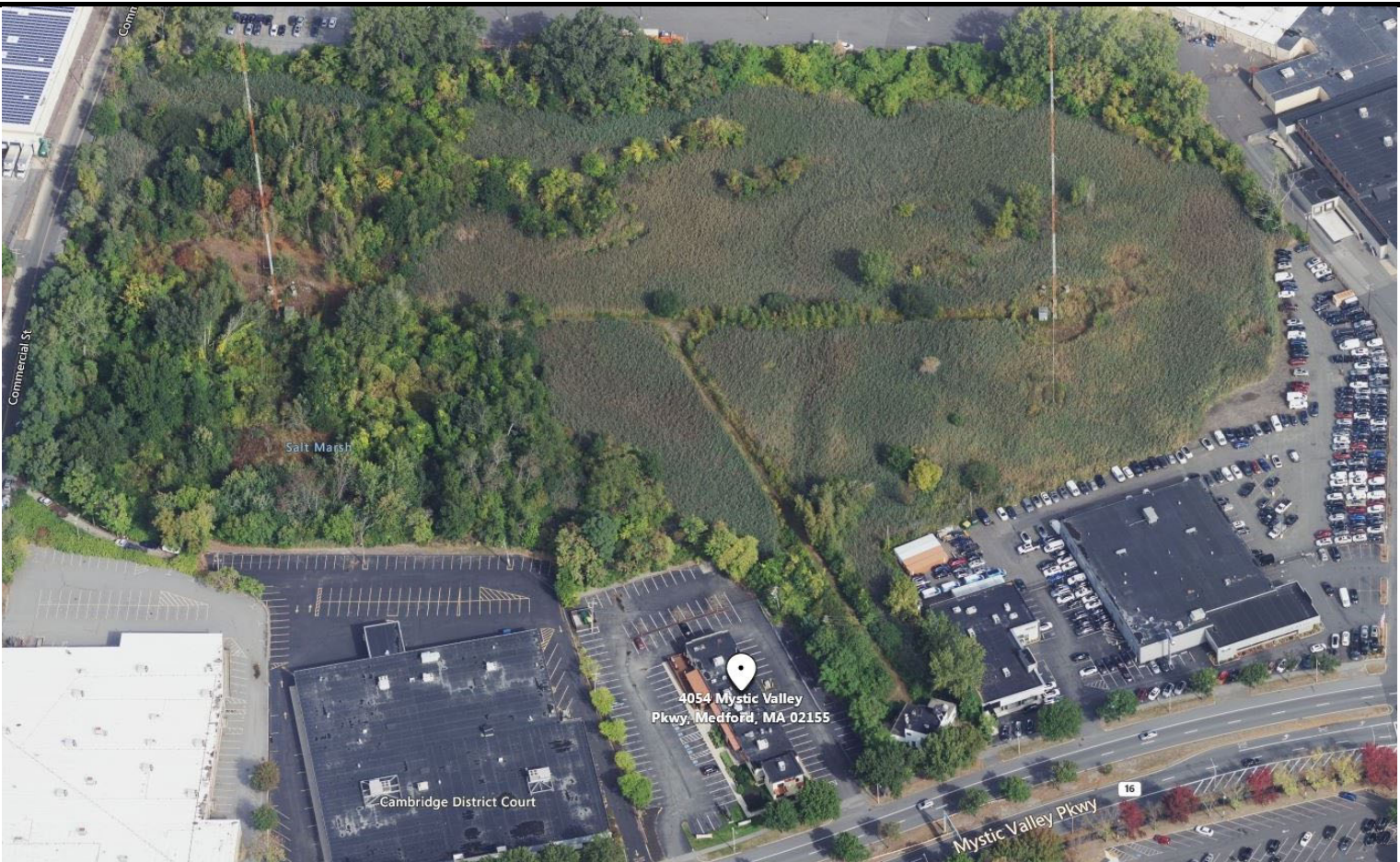
INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MEDFORD 4068 MYSTIC VALLEY PARKWAY

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--



Bing screen capture (4/2022) depicting the broadcasting antennae, left and right center, north is up.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MEDFORD

4068 MYSTIC VALLEY PARKWAY

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--



View from W showing west-facing elevation



View from E showing east-facing elevation.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MEDFORD

4068 MYSTIC VALLEY PARKWAY

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--

[If appropriate, cut and paste the text below into an inventory form's last continuation sheet.]

National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

- ☒ Individually eligible ☐ Eligible **only** in a historic district
- ☐ Contributing to a potential historic district ☐ Potential historic district

Criteria: ☒ **A** ☐ **B** ☒ **C** ☐ **D**

Criteria Considerations: ☐ **A** ☐ **B** ☐ **C** ☐ **D** ☐ **E** ☐ **F** ☐ **G**

Statement of Significance by John D. Clemson

The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.

The WEEI Radio Transmission Station, 4068 Mystic Valley Parkway, built 1936, would be eligible for individual National Register listing under criterion A for its associations with the early history of radio broadcasting in Boston and under criterion C as a distinctive and rare example of Art Moderne styling in the Boston region. The building appears to retain integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. Areas of significance would include architecture, commerce, communications, engineering and industry.