



City officials probe cause of facade collapse in Allston; high winds could have played role



PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Building facades collapsed onto the sidewalk on Harvard Avenue in Allston, causing injuries.

By [Matt Rocheleau](#) and [Emily Sweeney](#)

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Susanne Maher watched from her car in horror as the facade of a single-story building in Allston [collapsed](#) onto the sidewalk Sunday afternoon.

Maher, a nurse practitioner from Needham, rushed toward the rubble on busy Harvard Avenue to find a woman trapped under heavy chunks of masonry. With the help of her friend and a passerby, Maher helped pull the woman free and tended to her until first responders arrived.

“It was terrible,” Maher recalled Monday. “I’m so worried about her.”

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Maher said the woman was badly injured, sustaining multiple lacerations on her head. She said she couldn't feel her legs, and that her right hand had been crushed. She remained conscious and responsive until EMTs arrived.

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A man who was with the woman was also injured, Maher said.

“He had some blood on his arm but he was just so concerned about her he ignored it,” she said. “The sad part was that he was saying she was a pianist. He kept asking if she’s going to be able to play again. He was clearly heartbroken.”

Officials did not provide information about the woman’s medical condition.

Boston Inspectional Services Commissioner William Christopher Jr. said the weather could have played a role in the collapse, which happened around 3 p.m. in front of the Common Ground restaurant. The strong winds that hit the area on Saturday, along with freeze-thaw cycles, could have put stress on the exterior masonry, he said.

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“I think it’s safe to say that they were contributing factors,” Christopher said.

Christopher said he expects to receive a report from a structural engineer in the next day or two that will shed light on what caused the collapse. Christopher said the building is older than he initially believed, and has permits dating back to the 1900s that are being reviewed.

The collapse caused approximately \$500,000 in damage, officials said. Damage was limited to the exterior, and the building itself remains structurally sound, Christopher said.

After the debris is cleared from the sidewalk, crews will need to do additional demolition work.

“Then the owner is going to have to decide how they’re going to repair this,” he said.

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Christopher said the city requires facades to be inspected on buildings that are 70 feet or taller every five years. For smaller buildings, it’s up to the owners to inspect their properties and make repairs when needed.

“Make sure you do maintenance on your buildings,” Christopher said. “Go out and take a look at things.” Maher said she had a direct view of the facade as she drove by. The facade fell “from left to right,” she said.

“It was out of the blue,” she said. “It was shocking.”

On Monday, large blocks of masonry remained on the sidewalk as men in yellow construction vests surveyed the damage. Businesses adjacent to the Common Ground were closed.

Michael Gonzalves, 50, stopped by to take a photo of the damage to show his wife. He lives nearby and has gone to the Common Ground. When he heard about the collapse on the news, he couldn’t believe it.

“I walk by there every day,” he said. “I was shocked.”

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter

[@mrochele](https://twitter.com/mrochele) Emily Sweeney can be reached at esweeney@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter

[@emilysweeney](https://twitter.com/emilysweeney).

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