

East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation
District Study Committee

East Cambridge Planning Team Presentation

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Cambridge Historical Commission
May 25, 2022

What's a neighborhood conservation district?

Neighborhood Conservation Districts are established to protect architecturally and historically distinctive areas of special concern.

The City Council has designated four NCDs since 1983: Mid Cambridge, Half Crown-Marsh, Avon Hill, and Harvard Square. A different commission administers each district.

NCD commissions are empowered to approve new construction, demolition, and certain alterations that are visible from a public way, according to guidelines and jurisdiction that are tailored to local conditions.

The establishment of an NCD recognizes the particular design and architectural qualities of neighborhoods and encourages their protection and maintenance for the benefit of the entire city.

The boundaries and jurisdiction of a potential East Cambridge NCD will emerge from the current study. The decision to enact an NCD in East Cambridge will rest in the Cambridge City Council.

How does a conservation district differ from an historic district?

Historic districts regulate every publicly visible feature of existing and proposed buildings, including color; the goal is to preserve buildings and exterior features throughout the district.

Neighborhood conservation districts (NCDs) are tailored to meet the particular needs of each neighborhood; the goal is to conserve significant buildings and features.

Regulations are designed to protect the most important buildings and architectural features, while allowing most alterations to proceed without review.

NCDs are governed by a commission of neighborhood residents and property owners appointed by the City Manager.

What is the National Register of Historic Places?

The National Register of Historic Places is a list of buildings, sites, structures, and districts that are important in American history, culture, architecture, or archaeology. This federal designation is administered by the Secretary of the Interior through the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

Listing on the National Register recognizes the importance of the site to the community, state, or nation. The National Register is used as a planning tool by federal, state, and local agencies regarding projects that are funded or permitted by the state or federal governments.

National Register listing in no way limits changes to the property unless the project involves federal or state funding, licenses, or permits.

Cambridge has approximately 2,500 National Register-listed properties.

East Cambridge Study Area Boundaries

In 2019, a petition of registered voters requested that the Commission initiate a neighborhood conservation district designation study of the East Cambridge neighborhood, approximately bounded by Monsignor O'Brien Highway, Cambridge Street, Second Street, Bent Street, B & A Railroad, and Gold Star Mothers Park.

These boundaries were confirmed by a majority vote on February 17, 2021.

Members of the East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Study Committee

- **Ronald Creamer Jr.:** Property owner
- **William Dines:** Neighborhood resident and property owner
- **Francesca Gordini:** Neighborhood resident and tenant
- **Valerie Reece:** Neighborhood resident and property owner
- **Gavin Kleespies:** Cambridge Historical Commission representative
- **Paula Paris:** Cambridge Historical Commission representative
- **Kyle Sheffield:** Cambridge Historical Commission representative

Timeline of the East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Study

- July 2019: Cambridge Historical Commission hearing to consider whether to accept the petition and initiate a study. Continued with desire for more neighborhood outreach by petitioning group.
- October 2019: ECNCD Study initiated.
- December 2019: Study Committee appointed by City Manager.
- January 2020: ECNCD Study Committee begins meeting monthly.
- March 2020: All public meetings halted due to Covid-19 pandemic.
- September 2020: Cambridge Historical Commission voted to extend study 12-months.
- January 2021: ECNCD Study Committee resumes meeting virtually.
- September 2021: Official study period terminates, ending temporary CHC jurisdiction.
- April 2022: Study committee votes to approve Preliminary Report.

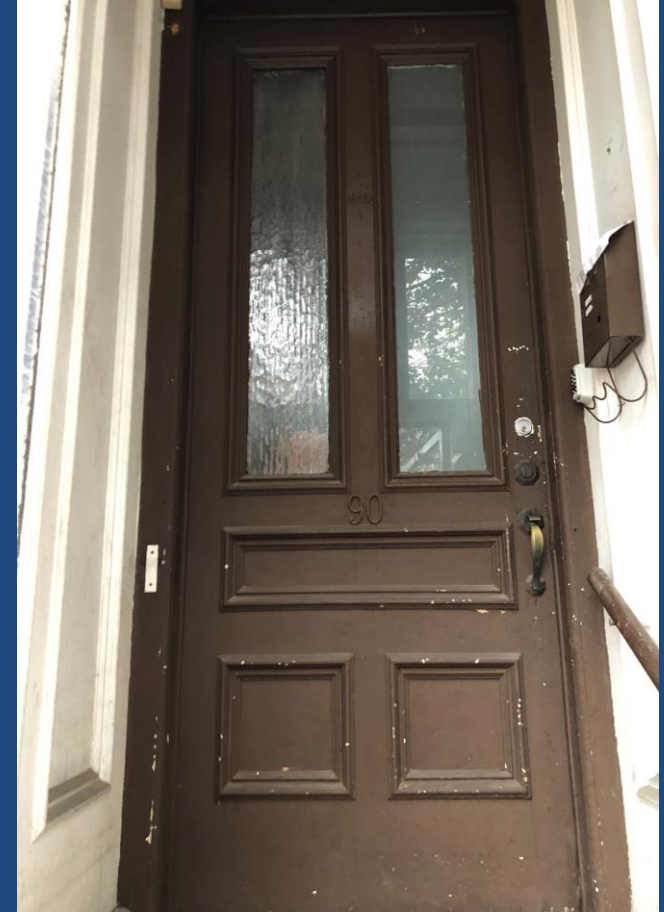
Projects reviewed under ECNCD Study Period: 90 Thorndike Street (NR)

Renovate brick rowhouse: replace windows, repoint brick, restore brownstone detailing, remove storm door and transom, restore front door and side paneling, and replace front wooden steps in kind.



90 Thorndike Street: Conditions and Documentation

- Central of five brick rowhouses with brownstone trim built in 1867
- Replacement windows, brownstone flaking, aluminum storm door and transom, rotten wood stairs at walk-up
- Original door and vestibule paneling remained

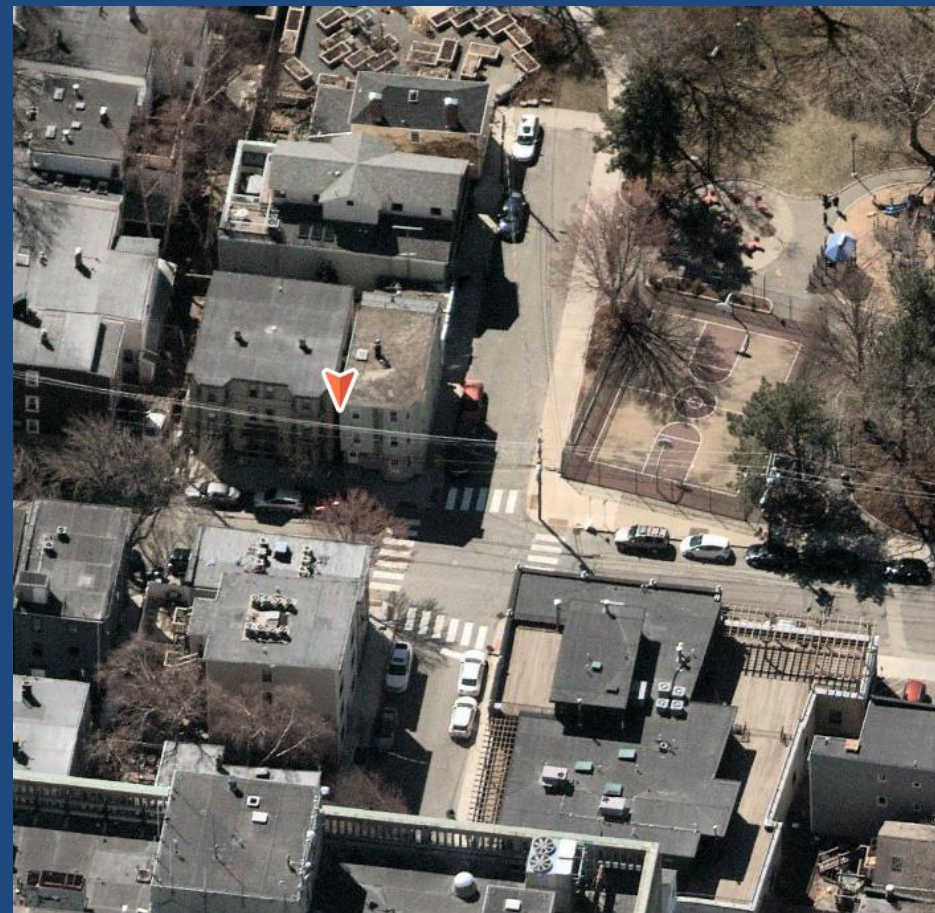


90 Thorndike Street: Proposal and Result

- Developer renovation of single-family house
 - Wanted to replace door and paneling, one-over-one replacement windows.
 - After site visit and discussion, updated plans to restore door (replacing glass panels) and wood paneling, two-over-two windows as original



Projects reviewed under ECNCD Study Period: 66 Hurley Street
Replace windows, doors, siding and trim; enlarge and add new windows; reinstall decorative features.



66 Hurley Street:

Conditions and Documentation

- Built 1892 as two-story home, converted to three-decker in 1907. Property includes 1920 block garage.
- Clad in later siding and perma-stone, rear porches enclosed.
- No historic photos of building.
- When siding removed, original panel detail uncovered, examples of historically appropriate brackets found nearby.



92 Spring Street: Proposal and Result

- Gut renovation, retaining the detached 1920s garage, desire to modernize space and more windows facing city park. Keeping as three units.
- Staff explained that much of original fabric gone, but evidence of brackets and preservation of bays and modernizing side and rear would provide “win-win”.
- Winner of 2022 Cambridge Preservation Award.



Projects reviewed under ECNCD Study Period: 152 Charles Street

Renovate existing house, demolish garages, and construct new dwelling unit.



152 Charles Street:

Conditions and Documentation

- Built 1846 as vernacular Federal/Greek Revival house with 1928 multi-bay garage at rear of lot
- Clad in later siding but largely maintained original fenestration
- Obvious redevelopment opportunity for rear of lot. Staff explained modern would be recommended to distinguish old vs. new as it would read like an addition to the 1840s home.



152 Charles Street: Proposal and Result

- Demolition of 1928 garages and new attached unit at rear of lot.
- Originally proposed inset roof deck within gable roof of 1840s home and to add .
- After public meeting, developer decided to simplify façade, remove inset roof deck, gable roof second unit and relocate unit 2 entrance to rear.
- Not yet complete as of May 2022.



Study Committee Decisions: Overall Goal Statement

“The East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District is an instrument of cohesiveness that aims to protect not only the historically significant architecture but also the dynamic social fabric of a diverse community. As a collective voice of the neighborhood, the goal of the District is to conserve the character, variety and scale of the district's streetscapes and architecture and to enhance the livability, vitality, and socio-economic diversity of the district for its residents and the public at large. The East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission will seek to conserve significant structures and features where they exist while encouraging architectural diversity and individualized alterations that respect the vibrant and eclectic character of the neighborhood. The Commission will seek to maintain the present diversity of development and open space patterns (including green canopies where possible) and building scales. It will acknowledge the growing demand for housing in the community at large by accommodating greater density where appropriate and by preserving the existing housing stock of the neighborhood where possible.”

Study Committee Decisions: Secondary Goals 1-5

Secondary goals are intended to provide general guidance to the NCD commission in a wide variety of situations. They are not intended to be applied to every project; they are statements of policy, not prescriptive measures that must be applied equally in each situation. In making decisions, commissioners may debate how a project meets or violates individual goal, and which should be cited in approving or denying applications for Certificates of Appropriateness.

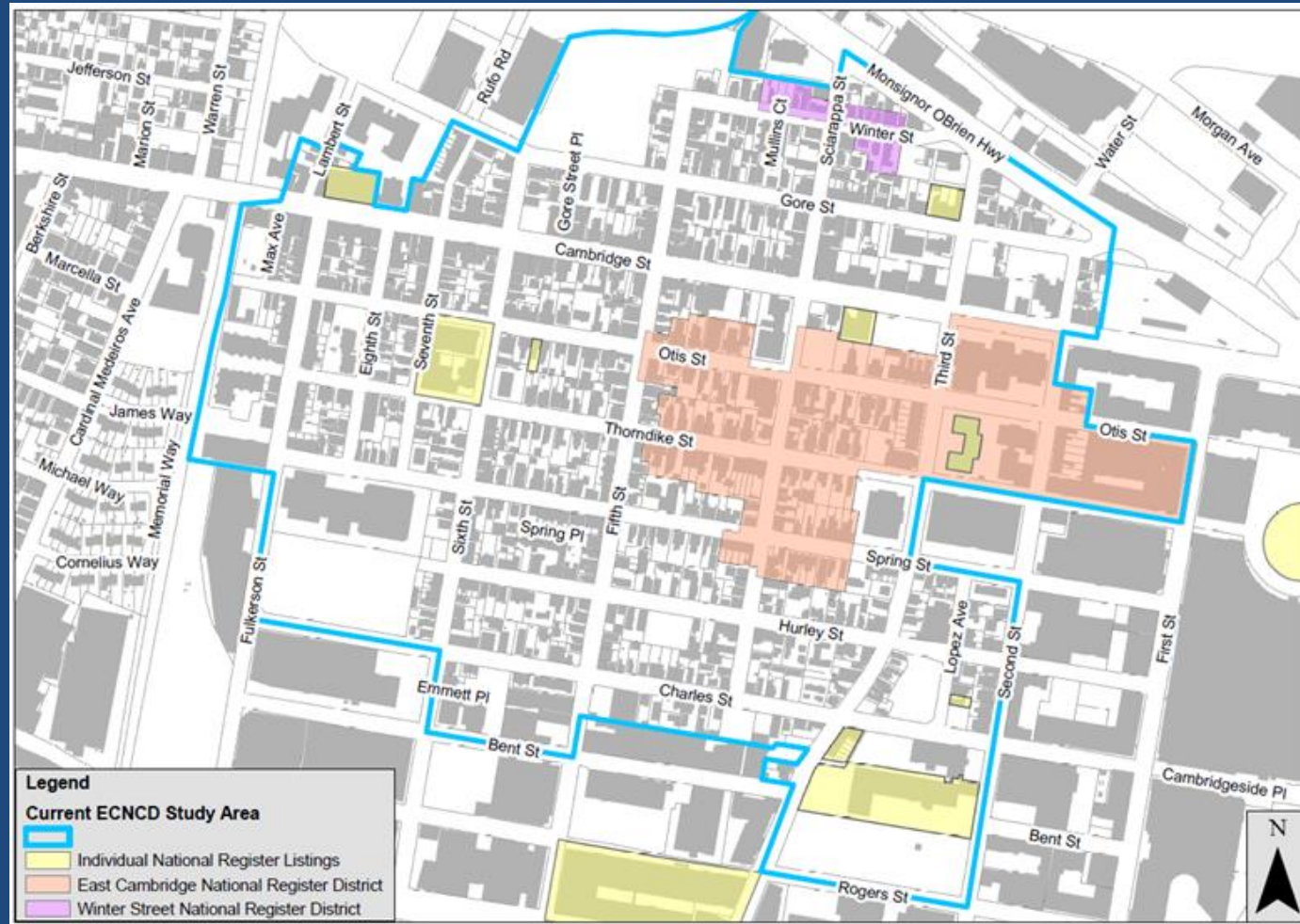
1. Conserve the diverse architectural character of the district by retaining historic structures, including 19th century workers' houses and buildings that reflect the diverse social fabric characteristic of the neighborhood. Protect significant civic and institutional buildings.
2. Allow for architectural diversity and individualized alterations while respecting the traditional housing stock of the neighborhood.
3. Retain significant architectural features, including but not limited to roof pitches, historical architectural elements, and traditional solid vs void configurations.
4. Support additional housing construction and density when appropriate, based on the nature and size of the lot and its surroundings.
5. Encourage contemporary design that respects surrounding context yet differentiates itself as belonging to the present day.

Study Committee Decisions: Secondary Goals 6-10

6. Revitalize the commercial environment of Cambridge Street by preserving or restoring architecturally significant building fabric. Where such fabric no longer exists, support creative, appropriately-scaled contemporary designs for remodeled storefronts and in new construction. Maintain consistent height of storefronts to match existing average heights and proportions.
7. Protect significant buildings on Cambridge Street while supporting construction on open lots and underdeveloped sites as allowed by zoning.
8. Encourage trees and greenery (especially vines and pergolas, typical of the history of the neighborhood) to enhance landscape amenities and limit new impervious paving to mitigate negative climate impacts on the neighborhood. Encourage preservation of stone retaining walls as well as historic lighting fixtures. Encourage provision of public amenities such as accessible brick pavers on reconstructed sidewalks as well as benches and street trees.
9. Encourage low fences to protect public views of houses and through yards, while permitting flexibility to enhance privacy and minimize the adverse visual effect of trash containers and mechanical equipment.
10. Consider applicable goals adopted by the City Council, including but not limited to the need to increase access to affordable housing for all income groups, support the sustainable use of energy, and strengthen the city's capacity for climate resilience.

Study Committee Decisions: ECNCD Jurisdiction National Register properties

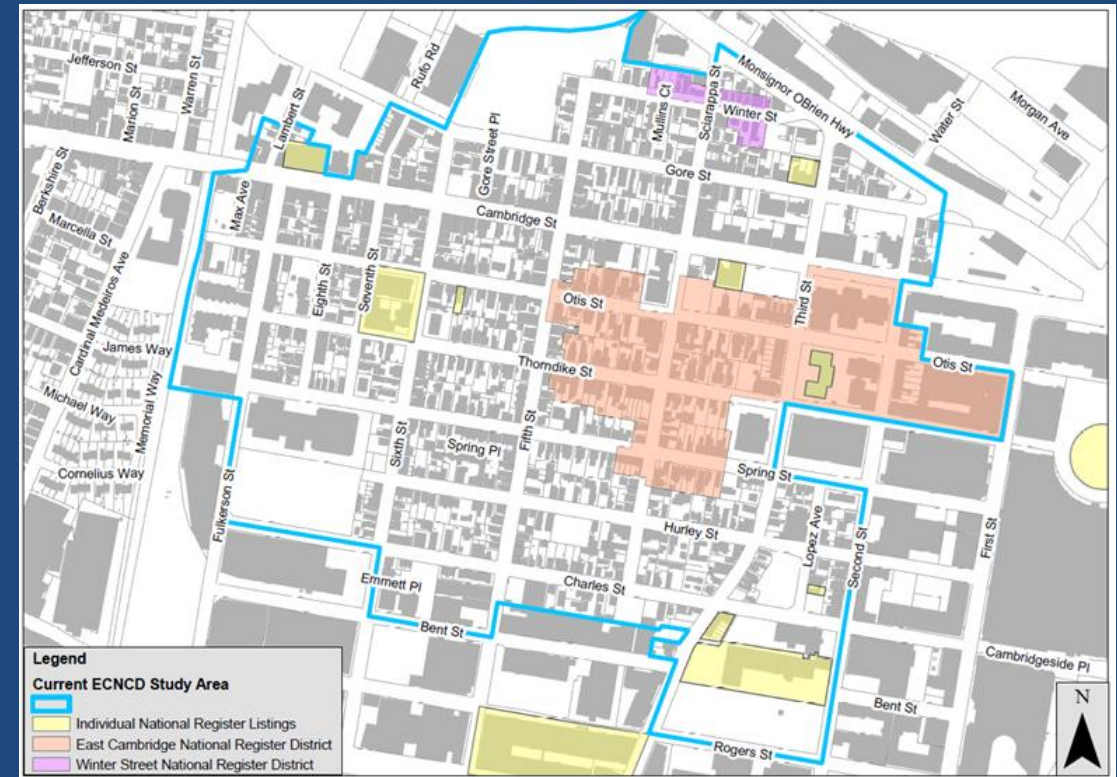
For properties on the National Register of Historic Places, all new construction and demolition, as well as publicly-visible alterations that do not qualify for an exemption, will be subject to binding review by the NCD Commission.



Study Committee Decisions: ECNCD Jurisdiction Non-National Register properties

For properties that are not on the National Register, there will be binding review by the NCD Commission for all new construction and demolition and non-binding review of the following categories of non-exempt alterations:

- A. The application of exterior wall coverings such as artificial siding, stucco, or paint to masonry structures.
- B. Removal of exterior materials down to the sheathing if the removal results in changes to the appearance of cornices, fascia, soffits, bays, porches, door or window hoods, corner boards, window or door casings, or any other protruding decorative element.
- C. Changes to roof form, shape or height, including addition of dormers
- D. Replacement of a slate roof with other material
- E. Changes to door and window sizes and locations, except basement windows and exempted storefront alterations



Study Committee Decisions: ECNCD Jurisdiction Chart

Public hearing required for these actions;
results may be binding or non-binding:

	Hearing Required	National Register	Non-National Register
	Demolition	Binding Review	Binding Review
	New Construction	Binding Review	Binding Review
	Alterations including:		
A	New siding or paint on exterior masonry	Binding Review	Non-Binding Review
B	Removal of significant original features	Binding Review	Non-Binding Review
C	Change roof form, shape or height; new dormers	Binding Review	Non-Binding Review
D	Replacement of slate roof with other material	Binding Review	Non-Binding Review
E	Change door or window locations or sizes	Binding Review	Non-Binding Review

Study Committee Decisions: ECNCD Jurisdiction Chart

No public hearing or Commission approval needed for these

	Exempt or CHC Staff Review		
1	Maintenance	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
2	Interior alterations	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
3	Exterior alterations not publicly visible	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
4	Exterior color	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
5	Landscaping with plant materials and raised beds	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
6	Reconstruction after fire or natural disaster	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
7	New siding that preserves significant features	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
8	Exterior alterations that preserve significant features	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
9	Signs, temporary structures, rec equipment, etc.	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
10	Terraces, walks, driveways, sidewalks at grade	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
11	Storm windows, window air conditioners, light fixtures, antennae, trellises, etc.	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
12	Replacement windows per guidelines	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
13	Foundation openings	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
14	Furnace vents not on a main façade	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
15	HVAC equipment behind the main façade	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
16	Solar panels and skylights flat to the roof	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
17	Replacement roofing material (except on old slate roofs)	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
18	Synthetic materials per guidelines	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
19	EV charging stations	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
20	Fences <4' in front and <6' behind front wall plane	Exempt from review	Exempt from review
21	Storefront alterations that reveal original features	CHC staff review	CHC staff review
22	Storefront alterations that preserve original features	CHC staff review	CHC staff review
23	Signs per code	Exempt from review	Exempt from review

90 Thorndike Street: Review of National Register Building under proposed jurisdiction

- Owner proposed to replace front door and paneling (significant features of a National Register property subject to a public hearing).
- After CHC staff site visit, owner updated plans to restore door (replacing glass panels) and wood paneling, eliminating need for public hearing and binding review.
- Permit issued: Certificate of Non-Applicability
- Under proposed jurisdiction, outcome would be the same.



66 Hurley Street: Review of non-National Register building under proposed jurisdiction

- Gut renovation, retaining the detached 1920s garage, desire to modernize space and more windows facing city park. Keeping as three units.
- CHC issued Certificate of Appropriateness under guidelines then in effect.
- Under proposed jurisdiction, change of window location would trigger a public hearing with a non-binding review.



152 Charles Street: Review of non-National Register building under proposed jurisdiction

- Demolition of 1928 garages and construction of new attached unit at rear of lot.
- Originally proposed inset roof deck within gable roof of 1840s house.
- After a public hearing, the developer decided to simplify the façade, remove inset roof deck, and relocate unit 2 entrance to rear.
- CHC issued Certificate of Appropriateness under guidelines then in effect.
- Under proposed jurisdiction, new construction and demolition of garage and/or house would trigger a public hearing with a binding review.



Neighborhood Outreach

Presentations to East Cambridge Planning Team and other venues

“Office Hours” with CHC Staff in neighborhood parks

Preliminary Report

- Posted on CHC website
- Available by mail upon request

“Postcard poll”

- Summary and pre-paid postcard sent 1st class mail to all property owners.
- Summary and pre-paid postcard sent 1st class mail to all registered voters and respondents to the latest city census.

Neighborhood Outreach – Walking Tours

- ✓ Saturday, May 14, 11:00 AM Half Crown-Marsh NCD Eric Hill and Jim Van Sickle
- Saturday, June 4 , 11:00 AM East Cambridge history and architecture Susan Maycock
Meet at Centanni Park
- Saturday, June 11, 11:00 AM East Cambridge conservation & development Eric Hill and Charlie Sullivan
Meet at Gold Star Mothers Park
- Thursday, June 16, 6:00 East Cambridge conservation & development Eric Hill and Charlie Sullivan
Meet at Toomey Park
- Saturday, June 25, 11:00 Office hours at Centanni Park Eric Hill and Charlie Sullivan
- Monday, June 27, 6:00 Office hours at Toomey Park Eric Hill and Charlie Sullivan
- Thursday, June 30, 12:00 Office hours at O’Connell Branch Eric Hill and Charlie Sullivan

Future Directions for the Study Committee

Tentative Schedule

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|----------------|---|
| May-June: | Neighborhood outreach and poll |
| June 15, 2022: | ECNCD Meeting with update on neighborhood outreach |
| July 20, 2022: | Review outreach results, amend Preliminary Report as necessary, and formulate recommendation to Historical Commission |
| Fall 2022: | Cambridge Historical Commission public hearing |

Questions?