



Community Meeting

25 Lowell Street

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01.

Introduction



Introduction to the Project

- Last winter, the City Council requested that the City-owned 25 Lowell Street property be evaluated as part of the Disposition Ordinance.
- The Disposition Ordinance outlines the process required to transfer the rights of City property either through sale or lease.
- This process ensures that City property can best serve our community, that fair market value is received for private use, and that property is transferred through an open process without favoritism.
- The City Manager's Office and Capital Building Projects Department are leading this process, in close coordination with the Community Development Department and the Historical Commission.

02.

Property History & Overview

Property Overview

- City-owned property, designed by Cambridge architect James Fogerty and built in 1883. Used by Cambridge schools until 1979.
- Leased to the New School of Music since 1980.
 - Original lease terms expired in 1990, operating on a tenancy at will basis since.
- Currently occupied by the New School of Music and Cambridge Art Association.

5,898

Gross Building Area (sq ft)

1883

Effective Year Built

2

Number of Stories

12,224

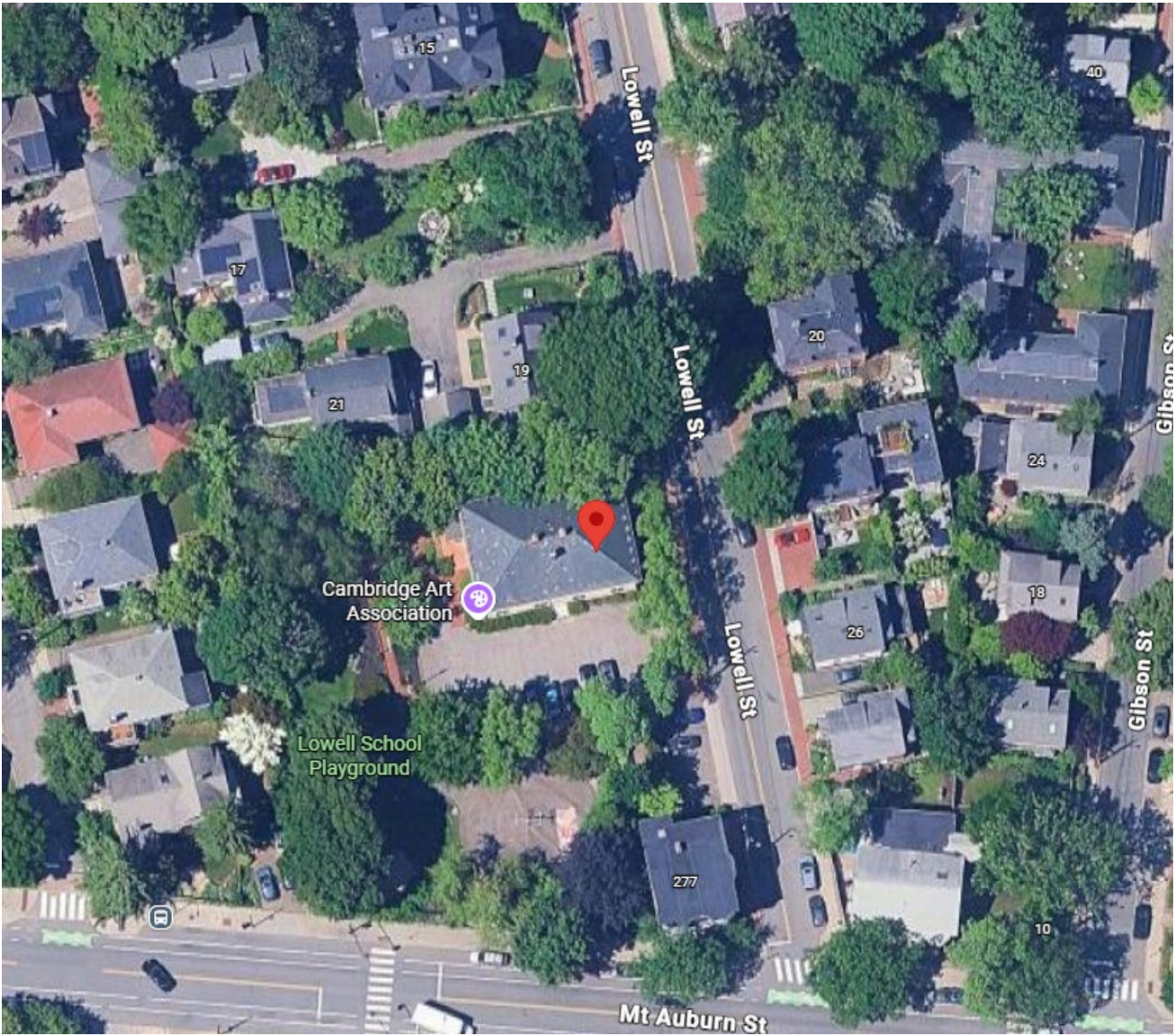
Site Area (sq ft)

C-1

Zoning District

Education

Current Use



Property History

- Originally **designed as a school in 1883** and was the last of dozens of wood frame neighborhood elementary schools that were built by the Town and City of Cambridge beginning in the 18th century.
- The building has been **continuously used as a school** since its construction.
 - Used by Cambridge Public Schools (CPS) as the Lowell School 1883-1979 and by the New School of Music from 1980-present.
- Listed on the **National Register of Historic Places** and located in the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District.
- The **New School of Music** has been an important community partner, providing art and music education for almost 50 years in this space.



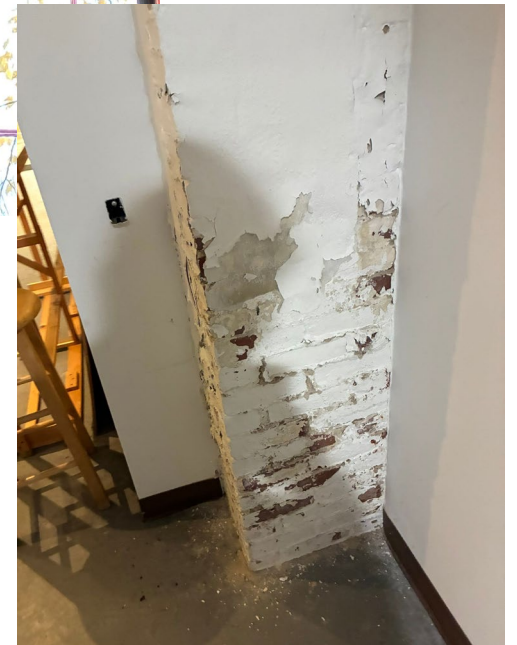
Building Improvements and Modernization

Under the terms of the current lease, the New School of Music has maintained the building since moving in, however, the lack of a long-term lease has limited their ability to secure grant funding to support more significant improvements.

Due to its age, the building is in need of various repairs and improvements, particularly related to current ADA standards. These include:

- New elevator/lift from first to second floor
- Bathroom renovations
- Railing and landing retrofits
- Aging roof and soffit replacement
- Foundation repairs to address water penetration
- Window and trim replacement

A new long-term lease agreement would allow and require the new tenant to invest in the building.



03.

Disposition & Community Process

Disposition and Community Process

What does the disposition process involve?

The municipal code outlines the requirements the City needs to meet before selling or leasing City-owned property:

1. **Community meeting**
2. **Preparation of a report** evaluating alternative uses for the property
3. **Planning Board hearing** on the report
4. **Recommendations by both the City Manager and Planning Board** to the City Council for the lease or sale of the property, in response to the report
5. **City Council public hearing and vote** to allow the disposition of the property
6. **A public procurement process**, pursuant to G.L. c.30B

Alternative Use Evaluation



Alt. use 1:

Develop affordable housing



Alt. use 2:

Sell to outside organization

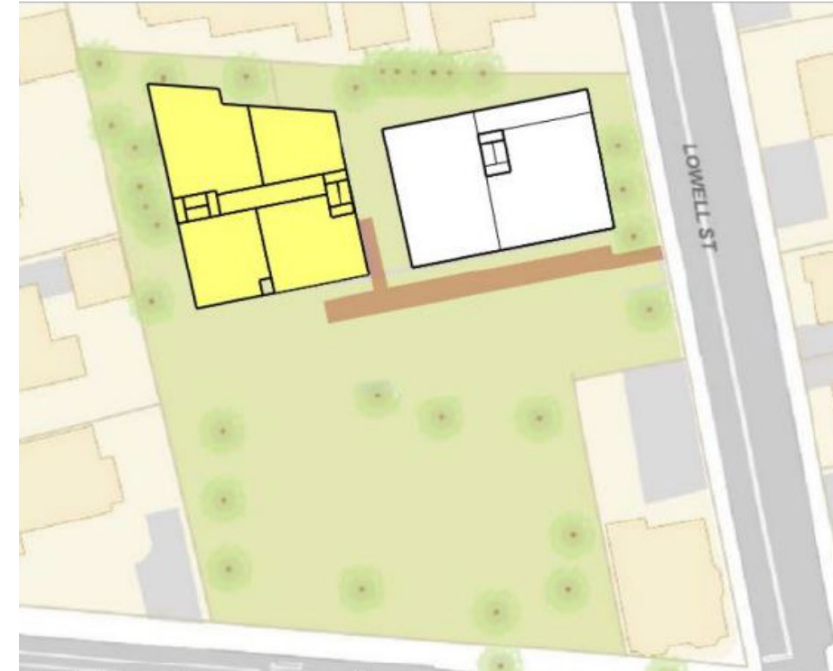


Alt. use 3:

Maintain City ownership and lease to outside organization

Alternative Use 1: Develop Affordable Housing

- Renovate historic building and add infill housing in rear. Potential for around 20 units in a neighborhood with limited affordable housing
- Well-situated next to a park, near major bus lines and Mt. Auburn Hospital
- Maintains equal or greater amount of space for park and creates improved access to the park from Lowell Street
- Limited lot size
- **Requires Article 97 process** to address changes to park land



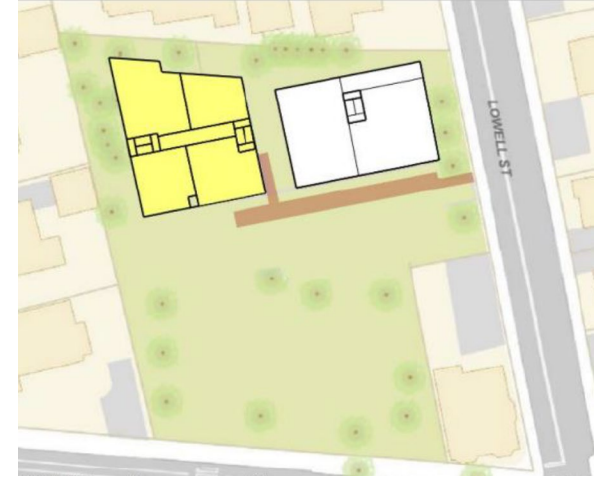
Article 97: State requirements for changes to protected park land

Article 97 is a MA constitutional amendment passed in 1972 that:

- Protects dedicated open space through deed, grant restriction, etc.
- Ensures land or easements subject to Article 97 shall not be used for other purposes or disposed of without a vote of the State Legislature

Article 97 requires:

- Identification and dedication of replacement land
- City Council pass Home Rule Petition to send request to State Legislature. Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) reviews package before forwarding to Legislature where it needs a 2/3 majority to pass



Alternative Use 2: Sell to Outside Organization

- Maintains park in current configuration
- The City would have no financial liability moving forward
- The City could specify that the property be used for specific types of purposes, but would no longer control the property
- City would lose valuable land that could be used for a variety of community needs



Alternative Use 3: Maintain City Ownership and Lease to Outside Organization



- Minimum changes to current use
- City continues to own the property
- Maintains park in current configuration
- Procurement process can set criteria for a tenant that supports public benefit, non-profit, community-oriented work focusing on culture and arts
- New lease would support the tenant in making longer term investments and reduce the financial exposure to the City

Feedback

December 8, 2025

City Council Regular Meeting



- Ms. Candice Driver, Executive Director of the Cambridge Arts Association, spoke to the program's representation of 700 members, over 50 programs, and 20 exhibitions across three galleries, all free and open to the public.
- Ms. Ingrid Schorr, member of the Board of Directors of the Cambridge Arts Association, voiced support of the Association's access and equity to the arts, along with its presence in the greater Cambridge community.
- City Council committed to continuing conversations about the future use of the site.

April 6, 2026

City Council Roundtable/Working Meeting



- City Council members expressed a strong desire to maintain ownership of City property, especially when considering long-term needs of the community.
- Councillors also voiced strong support for continuing to use the building to support arts and culture. Important to have spaces for arts and culture throughout the community.
- Councillors expressed strong desire for affordable housing, but supported other locations where you could build substantially more housing in the neighborhood, for example the Larch Road BB&N site.

Recommended Path Forward

Based on feedback and our analysis, the City proposes to move forward with the disposition process, with the recommendation and goal of **maintaining ownership of the property and establishing a new lease with an outside organization with increased maintenance commitments.**

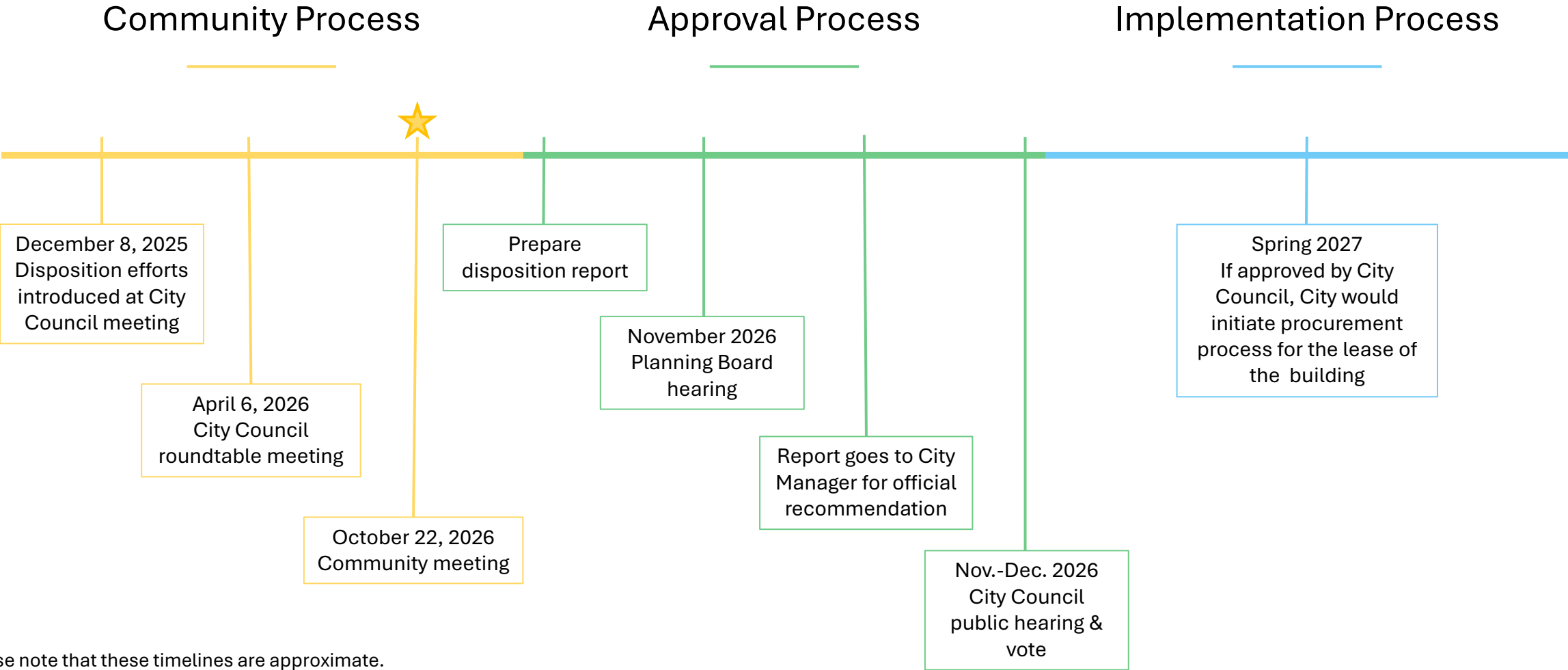
This proposal emphasizes public ownership, compliance with procurement requirements, preservation of the existing park, and the continuation of educational community benefits through the arts and cultural services the building provides.

Before moving forward in this process, **we want to hear from you!** Since this is a community space, your thoughts and opinions are essential to help us best serve this neighborhood and beyond.

04.

Next Steps

Next Steps



*Please note that these timelines are approximate.

05.

Questions & Feedback

Thank you!

Stay updated on this project:



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With further questions or comments, contact:

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