

CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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May 1, 2026

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner
 Charles Sullivan, Executive Director

Re: Landmark Evaluation of 9 Wyman Road

On April 13, 2026, Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC) staff received a petition signed by 35 people requesting that the Historical Commission initiate a landmark designation study of the property at 9 Wyman Road in Cambridge. The petition was accompanied by an analysis of the history and architecture of the property in the context of the Wyman Road subdivision authored by three Wellesley College professors, Drs. Elizabeth Oliver, Alice Friedman and Kathryn O'Rourke (attached). The Election Commission confirmed the signatures, and staff scheduled a public hearing for the Historical Commission meeting on May 7.



9 Wyman Road.

Realtor.com property description accessed on May 1, 2026.

Circumstances of the Petition

On February 10, 2025, the City Council adopted an amendment to the zoning code that allowed multi-family development in all residential districts. In May 2025 the Executive Director received a query regarding the significance of 9 Wyman Road with regard to the city's Demolition Review Ordinance, Ch. 2.78, Art. II of the City Code.

The Cambridge Historical Commission's jurisdiction over demolition permits was established by an ordinance adopted by the City Council in 1978 (now Ch. 2.78, Art. II of the City Code). Applications to demolish buildings over fifty years old are reviewed by the Executive Director of the CHC. If the Director makes an initial determination that a building is significant, as defined by the Ordinance, the application is scheduled for a hearing before the Historical Commission. If the Commission concurs with the Director's initial determination of significance, it examines the proposed replacement project and discusses whether the public interest, broadly defined, favors immediate construction of the project or a delay of demolition for up to twelve months.

The City Council vested this authority in the CHC because of the Commission's comprehensive knowledge of Cambridge's built environment. The Commission initiated the Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge in 1964. Under the direction of Dr. Bainbridge Bunting, architectural historians surveyed all 13,000± buildings in Cambridge and produced a series of five neighborhood architectural histories that were distributed by the MIT Press between 1965 and 1977. In 2016 the Press published *Building Old Cambridge: Architecture and Development*, of which Mr. Sullivan was co-author. With these resources, CHC staff are well-qualified to evaluate the significance of buildings throughout the city.

The criteria for determining significance in the context of a proposed demolition are found in Ch. 2.78.080:

- L. "Significant building" means any building within the City which is in whole or in part fifty years or more old and:
1. Which is within any historic district; or
 2. Which is listed on, or is within an area listed on, the National Register of Historic Places, or which is the subject of a pending application for listing on the National Register; or
 3. Which is or has been designated by the Commission to be a significant building after a finding by the Commission that a building either:
 - a. Is importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth, or
 - b. Is historically or architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of building construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings.

The ordinance offers automatic significance in only two circumstances, location in an historic district or listing on the National Register and otherwise requires an evaluation of the building's particular characteristics. The provisions of 2.78.080.L.3 echo the criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Applying them to a determination of significance at the national, state, local and neighborhood level is an exercise in judgement that the Commission has been making since 1978.

On May 9, 2025, the Executive Director responded that "I do not consider the building at 9 Wyman Road, constructed in 1927, to be significant for the purposes of the demolition delay ordinance. We will sign off on a permit application when it appears in the system." He added, "This advisory communication reflects

the current state of historical research. Assessments of significance can change with the passage of time. A formal determination of significance will be made when we receive an application for a demolition permit through ISD's on-line permitting system." As of today, no such application has been submitted so a formal determination of significance has not been made.

In December 2025 the Community Development Department received an application for a staff advisory consultation for a proposed six story residential apartment building consisting of 56 dwelling units at 9 Wyman Road. A staff review in February requested minor modifications, but found the building generally conforms to the legal requirements.



9 Wyman Road (January 30, 2026)



Anderson Porter Design

Description

The house at 9 Wyman Road occupies a 7,089 square foot lot at the end of a small cul-de-sac near the corner of Huron Avenue and Sparks Street. The lot is in a Residence C-1 multi-family zoning district. Current C-1 zoning allows for four-stories (45 feet) as-of-right. On lots larger than 5,000 square feet, construction can be six-stories (74 feet) if 20 percent of the square footage in the building is dedicated to affordable housing. The zoning requires a minimum 5-10 feet for the front yard setback and at least 5-foot setbacks at the sides and rear.

Built in 1927 by architect-developers William Duguid and George Martin, 9 Wyman Road has an eclectic design with First Period American (Post Medieval English) stylistic features such as the steeply pitched intersecting gabled roofs, shingle cladding, small, multi-paned windows and vertical-board door with decorative iron braces. The cross-gabled L-shaped plan makes good use of the irregularly shaped lot, which narrows toward the Wyman Road. The modest proportions of the house visible from Wyman Road have a quiet cottage feeling compared to the side and rear elevations, which take advantage of the sloping grade to accommodate a basement garage and driveway oriented toward Huron Avenue. The rear (west) elevation features a shed dormer and a back door accessed by a long staircase.



9 Wyman Road in 1956

Dudley & Borland Collection, CHC

Scottish engineer and architect William Duguid and his wife Mary worked for the American Friends Service Committee building housing for war victims in France during World War I before moving to Cambridge in 1920 and remodeling an old barn on Dunstable Road in 1922. William set up an architectural firm in 1925 with real estate professional George R. Martin, who died in 1928 at 32. Their practice specialized in the Colonial Revival style and produced a number of small, high-quality period houses in Cambridge from 1926 through 1939, both on commission from clients and in subdivisions where the firm built houses on spec. Cambridge commissions for the firm included several houses on Gray Gardens East and West, Fayerweather Street, Shady Hill, and Old Dee Road as well as in Larchwood, while their subdivisions included plots on Dunstable Road, Wyman Road, Farrar Street, Foster Street, Kirkland Street, and Scott Street. The firm's best-known commission is the Friends Meeting House on Longfellow Park (1937).

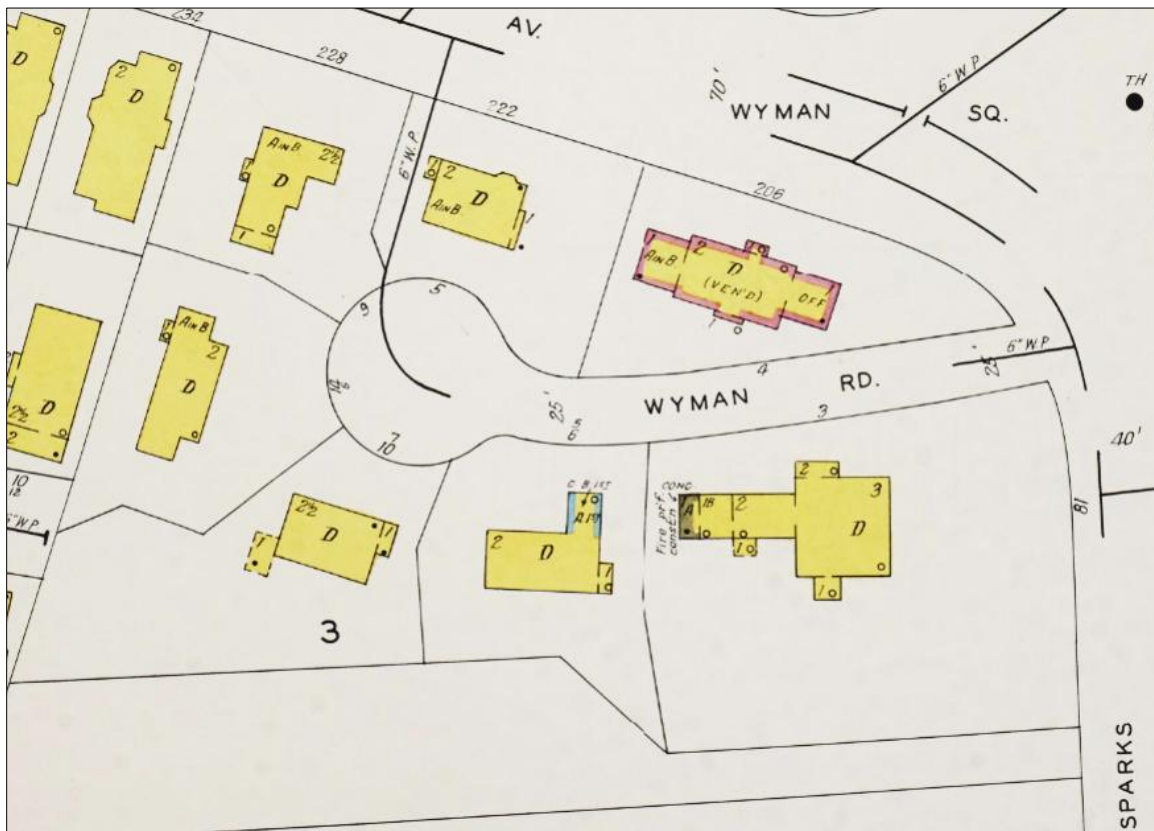
Mary Duguid, who had studied history at Wellesley College (class of 1914), took up the study of interior design at the Cambridge School of Architecture in 1930. With her sense of history and design, William's technical knowledge, and their combined social conscience, the firm was well suited to meet the needs of the small-house market of the 1920s.

The Wyman Road subdivision was Duguid & Martin's first enterprise. The partners acquired a two-acre property at the corner of Sparks Street and Huron Avenue with a house at 85 Sparks Street built in 1878 for Dr. Morrill Wyman. His daughter, Anna Morrill Wyman Walcott, occupied the home until her death at age 86 in 1925. Duguid & Martin subdivided the estate with six additional house lots north and west of the Wyman-Walcott house. The plan by Donald J. Reardon shows the six lots accessed from a shared private way (Wyman Road).

Three of the four houses Duguid & Martin designed on Wyman Road (5, 9, 10, and 14) were built on spec. The building permit for 9 Wyman Road was issued in January 1927 with an estimated construction cost of \$14,000. Upon completion in September of that year, Duguid & Martin sold the property to Charles H. Hawes (Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, Bk. 5140, p.9). Hawes was the assistant director of the Museum of Fine Arts. He was married to Harriet Boyd Hawes, with whom he had two children. Harriet Boyd Hawes taught Ancient Art at Wellesley College while living in Cambridge, but she is mostly known as an early female archaeologist. She led a large excavation in Kavousi, Crete in 1900 and continued to be active in the field. The Hawes family left Cambridge for Washington, D. C. in 1936.



Plan of Land in Cambridge Surveyed for W. M. Duguid and G. R. Martin by Donald M. Reardon 12 Aug. 1926.



Sanborn Map Co., 1930

Library of Congress



14 Wyman Road (1927, Duguid & Martin)



10 Dunstable Road (1927, Duguid & Martin)



R-L: 5 Wyman Road (1926), 9 Wyman Road (1927) and 14 Wyman Road (1927), all by Duguid & Martin CHC 2026



L-R 5 Wyman Road, 9 Wyman Road, and 234 Huron Avenue

CHC, 2026

Landmark Criteria and Goals

Landmarks are enacted by majority vote of the City Council upon recommendation of the Historical Commission. The Commission commences a landmark designation study process by its own initiative or by voting to accept a petition of thirty registered voters. The effect of initiating a landmark designation study would be to establish the Commission's jurisdiction over the property for up to one year while a study is made of its suitability for permanent protection. At the conclusion of the study the Commission holds a public hearing to consider the findings of the landmark report and determine whether to recommend designation to the City Council. If the Council enacts the designation, the property remains under Commission jurisdiction, and no publicly visible alteration or construction could take place on the premises without the prior issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Nonapplicability, of Hardship.

The criteria provided in the ordinance outlines eligible properties as:

any property within the City being or containing a place, structure, feature or object which it determines to be either (1) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth or (2) historically or architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures... (2.78.180.A)

The purpose of landmark designation is described in the ordinance, which was enacted to,

to preserve, conserve and protect the beauty and heritage of the City; to improve the quality of its built environment through identification, conservation and maintenance of neighborhoods, areas, sites and structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic, racial, or social history of the City; to foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge and appreciation of such neighborhoods, areas or structures; to welcome a diverse set of residents and broaden appreciation for individuals with marginalized identities who have shaped Cambridge's history; and by furthering these purposes in balance with other City priorities such as affordable housing construction, environmental sustainability, and accessibility to promote the public welfare by making the City a more attractive, desirable, affordable, diverse, equitable, accessible, and inclusive place in which to live and work. (2.78.140)

Discussion

The petitioners' architectural and historical evaluation makes a case for landmark eligibility under criterion two as a unique example, for Cambridge, of an inter-war period Storybook-style house and planned landscape.

Staff contends that the house, while eclectic in its design precedents, lacks the exaggerated forms and materials typical of the Storybook aesthetic that is more commonly seen on the west coast in cities like Los Angeles. Instead, the house demonstrates some aspects of Late Medieval architecture but has few distinguishing features that contribute to its significance.

Duguid & Martin were prolific 'promoting architects' in the 1920s and 30s, designing mostly middle-class houses for individual clients but also building houses on spec in subdivisions they developed on Dunstable Road, Farrar Street, Foster Street, and Scott Street. Three of the four houses Duguid & Martin designed on Wyman Road, including #9, were built on spec. Architecturally, most of #9's interest derives from the L-

shaped plan and multiple gables. Stylistically, it is an outlier among the forty Cambridge houses the firm designed between 1922 and 1939. It is a modest example of its type and undistinguished in its placement at the end of a heavily landscaped cul de sac where it cannot contribute to the streetscape of Huron Avenue.

Relationship to Criteria

The house has undeniable associations with historical trends and features and an inherent level of significance in the context of the Wyman Road subdivision. The question before the Commission is whether the building should be considered for landmark designation “in balance with other City priorities such as affordable housing construction, environmental sustainability, and accessibility.”

Staff Recommendations

Staff recommends that the Commission decline to accept the petition and the request to initiate a landmark designation study.

cc: Dr. Liza Oliver, lead petitioner
Michael Strauss, Strauss Law Group
Patrick Barrett, Esq. o/b/o 9 Wyman Rd LLC, property owner