

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

January 8, 2026 – Meeting conducted online via Zoom Webinar (830 0612 2206) - 6:00 P.M.

Present: Chandra Harrington, Chair; Liz Lyster, Vice Chair; Joseph Ferrara, Paula Paris, Kyle Sheffield, Members; Florrie Darwin, Scott Kyle, Michael Rogove, Alternate Members

Absent: Yuting Zhang, Gavin Kleespies, Members

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, Executive Director, Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner; Allison Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Public present: See attached list.

This meeting was held online with remote participation pursuant to Ch. 2 of the Acts of 2023. The public was able to participate online via the Zoom webinar platform.

With a quorum present, Chair Harrington called the meeting to order at 6:07 P.M. She re-viewed the online meeting instructions and public hearing procedures, noting that public questions and comments would be combined and limited to two minutes. She dispensed with the consent agenda procedure.

Determination of Procedure: Alterations to Designated Property

Case 5382 (Amendment): Austin Hall, 1515 Mass. Ave., by President & Fellows of Harvard College. Alter certificate to include roof restoration and replica gutter.

Architect Jonathan Austin, of Austin Architects, presented a comprehensive proposal for full roof replacement and restoration at Austin Hall, an H.H. Richardson building constructed in 1883–84. The key reason for the project was slate deterioration due to age. It also presented the opportunity to restore lost architectural details visible in early design drawings and 19th-century photographs

Mr. Austin presented his analysis of archival drawings and early photographs:

- Early design drawings showed a clay tile roof, similar to Sever Hall.
- Photographs from the 1880s revealed that slate was installed instead, likely for cost-savings, but that elaborate copper ridge details were constructed to imitate the profile of clay tile.
- Historic photographs showed original decorative gutter scrolls, removed mid-20th century.
- Harvard proposed fully restoring these details.

Mr. Austin went on to describe the construction process which would include,

- Salvage up to 25% of original Black Monson slate
- Supplement with North Country Black slate (closest match)
- Replace copper valleys, flashings, gutters
- Rebuild copper finials and ridge cresting
- Install copper snow buttons to replace snow rails
- Restore eyebrow dormers and turret
- Remove non-historic skylight

Mr. Austin displayed an image of a mockup of the copper gutter.

Ms. Harrington called for questions from the commissioners.

The commissioners asked about slate salvage, new slate specifications and sourcing, interpretation of the historic drawings, finials, snow buttons, and project phasing.

Ms. Harrington opened the public questions and comments period.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street praised the attention paid to historical detail. She asked about the interpretation of an archival gutter sketch showing dentils and bracket details. Mr. Austin provided clarity.

Ms. Harrington closed the public comment period.

Mr. Kyle moved to approve the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work as presented. Mr. Rogove seconded the motion. Mr. Ferrara confirmed he would not vote because he had arrived after the hearing had started. The motion passed 6-0 in a roll call vote. (Lyster, Paris, Sheffield, Harrington, Kyle and Rogove voted in the affirmative).

Public Hearing: Appeal of Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD) Commission Decision

Appeal of Case MC-7293: 60 Ellery St., by petition of 11 registered voters. Consider the petitioners' appeal and record of the MC NCDC case.

The Commission heard an appeal filed by the Ellery Square Owners Association regarding the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD) Commission's approval of demolition and new construction at 60 Ellery Street. The appeal had been submitted on behalf of the Association by attorneys Seth Barnett and Adam Kurth of Marcus, Errico, Emmer & Brooks.

Mr. Sullivan explained that the Historical Commission's charge was limited to whether due process was followed, whether the NCD commission had acted arbitrarily or capriciously and whether the NCD commission had acted within its legal authority. He explained that this was not a de novo proceeding or a design review hearing.

Attorney Barnett argued that:

- Recent Cambridge zoning allowing multifamily housing does not eliminate the NCD commission's jurisdiction to review demolition and does not mandate demolition be approved.
- The NCD commission failed to evaluate whether demolition was necessary.
- The existing building was in good condition, recently renovated, and occupied until recently.
- No substantial hardship was presented by the applicants; therefore, demolition was unjustified.
- The NCD commission focused on improving the appearance of the proposed replacement building, rather than evaluating whether demolition was warranted.
- The NCD commission treated demolition as a foregone conclusion.
- Another project on the same street, 84–86 Ellery, underwent rigorous review of demolition alternatives, and the NCD commission required partial preservation—demonstrating inconsistency.
- The long-standing easement held by the Ellery Square Owners Association was inadequately considered by the commission.
 - He described procedural concerns including that there had been commissioner turnover between hearings of the case, and the certificate was issued before the commission's Architects Committee completed its final review.

Mr. Barnett requested that the Historical Commission either overturn the decision or remand the case.

[Ms. Darwin arrived].

Mr. Sullivan addressed each claim:

- Enforcement of private property easements was outside the NCD commission’s jurisdiction.
- The criteria for reviewing demolition in the district were guidelines, not directives.
- No hardship claim was submitted, so no evaluation could be made on the question of hardship.
- The procedures of the Demolition Review Ordinance do not apply within NCDs.
- Sufficient evidence was considered: NCD commission held five meetings over eight hours; it considered the building’s history and design issues thoroughly.
- The NCD commission acted within its legal authority.
- With regard to due process, proper notice was provided; the Mullen Rule was properly applied for commissioner participation.

Ms. Harrington called for questions from the Historical Commission.

The commissioners asked about the applicability of zoning-related considerations, whether the NCD commission had adequately considered the building’s condition, the status of the Architects Committee review of construction details, whether the process followed had been consistent with other cases, and whether the issuance of the certificate issuance had been premature. Mr. Sullivan answered it had not.

Ms. Harrington opened the public questions and comments period.

Marie Soccoccio of 55 Otis Street stated that the Council’s goals were not written into the ordinance. The NCD failed to analyze the historical/architectural value. She urged caution about easement issues.

Cary Saunders of 9 Ellery Square noted that the prior tenants had been evicted and indicated the building was significant for the fact that people had been living there.

Brendan Hickey of 54 Concord Avenue warned against *de novo* review, stated that the appellant’s easement argument was out of scope, and expressed concern that the Architects Committee discussed matters outside of its jurisdiction such as the colors of building materials.

James Stathis of 4 Ellery Square noted inconsistency with the NCD commission’s decision at 84–86 Ellery Street and argued that the NCD should have required an analysis of demolition alternatives.

Nancy Seidman of Cleveland Street argued that the NCD commission had applied different standards to similar projects. She requested that the case be remanded to the NCD commission.

Attorney Michael Ford, representing the owner/applicant for 60 Ellery Street, affirmed that due process had occurred and that the stated evidence supports the NCD decision. He introduced architect Evan Stellman if the Historical Commission had any questions for him.

Ms. Harrington closed the public comment period.

The Historical Commissioners deliberated over the case. The discussion included,

- Acknowledgment of the residents’ unease about changes to their neighborhood
- Recognition of broader impacts of zoning changes
- Need to remain within strict limits of appeal review
- Understanding that easements and zoning issues are not within CHC authority
- Agreement that the NCD followed proper process

Mr. Ferrara made a motion to deny the appeal and uphold the decision of the Mid Cambridge NCD commission, based on the Historical Commission finding that due process had been followed by the NCD

commission, that there had been sufficient evidence presented and considered with which the NCD commission had made its decision to approve the project and that the actions of the NCD commission had not been arbitrary or capricious. The motion was seconded by Ms. Harrington.

Ms. Lyster supported the motion but felt it was important to point out that the appeal was a result of the public's frustrations with the new zoning's impacts on their lives and properties.

Attorney Adam Kurth, for the petitioners, noted that the petitioners had incurred costs to appeal. He again argued that the demolition should not be allowed because the applicant had not presented a hardship and the commission had failed to consider any hardship or lack thereof.

Ms. Darwin agreed with Ms. Lyster's remarks and Mr. Sullivan's description of the job of the Historical Commission in the appeal. She indicated she would not vote since she had missed the beginning of the case.

Mr. Sheffield indicated that the commission could not change the current zoning, but the public could pursue other means of expressing their thoughts on the zoning.

The motion passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Lyster, Paris, Sheffield, Harrington, Kyle and Rogove voted in the affirmative). Ms. Harrington called for a brief recess. She reconvened the meeting at 8:20 P.M.

Preservation Grants

Case IPG 26-9: 42 Brattle St., by the Cambridge Center for Adult Education. \$13,900 requested.

Mr. Sullivan presented the grant application for restoration of the 1889 front vestibule on the historic 1727 William Brattle house. The vestibule exhibited significant deterioration due to moisture infiltration at the joint where the wood meets masonry landing, severe paint buildup requiring stripping to bare wood, water damage to architectural woodwork. He noted that the accessibility ramp was also being reconstructed. He recommended a grant of \$13,900, which would have to be matched by the applicant.

Ms. Paris moved to approve the grant, as described. The motion was seconded by Mr. Rogove and Ms. Harrington designated Ms. Darwin and Mr. Rogove to vote. The motion passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Lyster, Paris, Sheffield, Harrington, Darwin and Rogove voted in the affirmative).

Preservation Awards Deliberations

Mr. Sullivan presented 18 nominations for 2026 Preservation Awards. He said the discussion was preliminary but encouraged the Commission to narrow the field. The Commission eliminated a couple of projects and identified some that they were unsure about. Mr. Sullivan said three volunteers were also suggested for recognition.

Minutes

The Commission considered the draft minutes of March 5, 2026. Ms. Darwin moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Ms. Lyster seconded. Ms. Harrington designated Ms. Darwin and Mr. Kyle to vote. The motion passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Lyster, Paris, Sheffield, Harrington, Darwin and Kyle).

Mr. Sheffield moved to adjourn. Mr. Kyle seconded the motion, which passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Lyster, Paris, Sheffield, Harrington, Kyle and Rogove). The meeting adjourned at 9:32 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks

Sarah L. Burks, Preservation Planner

Note: This draft was generated with the assistance of Microsoft Co-Pilot Generative AI and re-viewed and edited by CHC staff for accuracy and form.

Members of the Public Present on April 9, 2026

Cynthia LaBonte	Austin Architects
Alexandra Offiong	Harvard Planning & Design
Gene O'Connor	Harvard Law School
Jonathan Austin	Austin Architects
Adam Kurth	Marcus, Errico, Emmer & Brooks
Seth Barnett	Marcus, Errico, Emmer & Brooks
Suzanne Hamner	3 Ellery Square
Samuel Letellier-Duchesne	54 Ellery St, #3
Lacey McCafferty	108 Bickerton
Richard Goldmann	98 Ellery St
Evan Stellman	KDI, 17 Ivaloo St Somerville, Mass.
Debra Shapiro	404A Broadway
Marie Saccoccio	55 Otis St
Michael Ford	28 State Street, Suite 802, Boston, Mass. 02109
Adelaide Roger	2770 Harvard Yard Mail Center
Mike Tokatlyan	358 Athen Street Boston MA 02127
James Stathis	4 Ellery Square
Steve Jerome	2 Mt. Auburn St.
Marc Levy	3 Potter Park, #1
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St
Nancy Seidman	9 Cleveland St
Jeff Ravelo	222 Putnam Ave.
Catiana JP	Harvard st
Miks Karklins	219 Concord Ave
Councillor Cathie Zusy	202 Hamilton St.
Cary Saunders	9 Ellery Square
John Hawkinson	
Elena Saporta	102 Ellery St
Stavros Macrakis	61 Ellery Street
Lauren Budd	44 Dana Street
Carol Lynn Alpert	95 Cushing Street
Brendan Hickey	54 Concord Avenue
Justin Saif	Cambridge

Note: See <https://www.cambridgema.gov/historic/permitsApplications/projectplansandstaffreports> for a link to the Zoom meeting recording.