

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

June 18, 2026 – Meeting conducted online via Zoom Webinar (86322301565) - 6:00 P.M.

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

Absent: Gavin Kleespies, Paula Paris, Kyle Sheffield, Members

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, Executive Director; Eric Hill, Survey Director; Barbara Cahill, Historic Marker Project Manager

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 reviewed 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.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Property

Case 5414: Winthrop Square Park, by City of Cambridge. Install new historic markers

Mr. Sullivan introduced the project, reviewing the interpretive panels intended for public installation. He noted:

- The panels had been reproduced in 11x17 format for review, but actual installation panels would be significantly larger and easily readable.
- The project had roots in past Bicentennial “history stations,” which, though often text-heavy, continued to attract engaged readers. The project was intended to present an Indigenous perspective on the early Colonial period.
- The Commission aims for a 12th-grade reading level, prioritizing detail and continuous narrative.
- The content was authored by Elizabeth Solomon, a tribal elder and historian from the Massachusetts Tribe, ensuring an Indigenous perspective not filtered through traditional Euro-American historical frameworks.

Barbara Cahill, Historic Marker Project Manager, indicated that key sentences would be called out to help casual readers identify important information quickly. She noted that the full text would also appear on the website for broader access.

Ms. Harrington asked about additional resources for deeper historical exploration, and staff confirmed that such resources would be provided. She called for questions of fact or comments from the public.

Suzanne Blier of 5 Fuller Place praised the visual design as “absolutely stunning,” expressing gratitude to those involved. She suggested that translations into other languages on the website would expand access. She also noted that the Concord Museum offered exemplary Indigenous and early colonial interpretation and lamented that Cambridge still lacked a dedicated history museum.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street said the heavy text and flowing shapes made it difficult to process. She asked whether this new shape was becoming standard for markers. Staff replied that this shape was unique to this project and was developed collaboratively with the Indigenous historian and the designer to break away from rigid rectangular signage. Ms. Meyer said she supported the Indigenous perspective but wished the information were more reader friendly. Mr. Sullivan said he would look into providing an audio narration. Ms. Meyer affirmed this could help readers who struggle with dense text.

James Williamson of Churchill Avenue said he supported the installation but raised concerns about placement. He noted the text lacked reference to intertribal conflict or King Philip's War. He advised placing the installation near the existing marker. Park space is limited and should not become visually cluttered.

Ms. Harrington closed the public comment period.

Commissioners noted their appreciation for the expanded historical narrative. The suggestions from the public about multilingual translation and audio narration were valuable. The project appeared near-final and had been years in development.

Ms. Darwin moved to approve the certificate of appropriateness, delegating final approval of design details, adding audio, and web content to staff. Mr. Rogove seconded the motion, which was approved 7-0 in a rollcall vote. (Ferrara, Lyster, Zhang, Harrington, Darwin, Kyle, Rogove) The Commission thanked the staff and asked that appreciation be conveyed to the tribal historian.

Public Hearings: Demolition Review

Case D-1826: 178-180 Elm St., NC, by Charles Zammuto agent for Mario Bussolati Estate. Demolish double house (1892).

Survey Director Eric Hill summarized the staff report and shared slides of the property. He described the two and a half story, symmetrical Queen Anne style double house (now six units), with two conical-roofed corner towers and original two over one windows still present in some locations. The exterior was covered in siding installed over earlier asphalt shingles. A historic stable, also dating from the 1890s, was determined by staff to be not significant for the purposes of the demolition review ordinance.

Mr. Hill said the house was built in 1893 for Robert and William Clark, provisions dealers. It was converted into six apartments during the Depression era. Long-term owner Mario Bussolati lived there until 2024. He noted the presence of two adjacent three-deckers with similar Queen Anne style elements: turrets, bays, decorative paneling. He recommended finding the building significant based on its architectural qualities in the Queen Anne style and for its contribution to a rare cluster of turreted late 19th century multifamily structures on Elm Street.

Ms. Harrington called for questions of fact or comments from the public attendees.

Ms. Blier emphasized the importance of preserving larger multi-unit buildings that historically served middle-income households. She argued that such buildings are essential to Cambridge's housing mix.

Ms. Meyer agreed the building was significant "as it stands," especially given the depth of the lot.

Ilan Levy of Spring Street encouraged evaluation of the structure's urban landscape value, emphasizing the importance of maintaining continuity and historical identity.

Charles Zammuto, representing the property owners, stated that there was extensive rodent and structural damage and most windows had been replaced. He said the siding covered significant wood deterioration and argued that the building's condition should be considered.

Ms. Lyster made a motion to find the existing building significant as defined in the ordinance and for the reasons provided in the staff report. Ms. Darwin seconded, and the motion passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Lyster, Zhang, Harrington, Darwin, Kyle, Rogove) The meeting then moved to consideration of the proposed replacement project.

Architect Vera Xie presented for the project team. She described:

- high visibility at the corner of Elm Street and Miller Avenue
- goal of reinterpreting, not imitating, the historic house
- conforming zoning setbacks (10 feet on streets, 5 feet side/rear).
- organizing green space more intentionally
- materials including painted wood cladding and bronze colored metal panels for a balance of contextual and contemporary
- cues from neighborhood elements like bays and vertical windows
- massing at four stories with 16 two-bedroom condo units (20% affordable)
- under-building parking, bicycle storage, and recessed entrances
- Juliet balconies on some façades

Commissioners asked about the design including:

- whether additions to the existing structure were explored
- materials, window proportions, and contextual compatibility
- garage entrance location and feasibility
- height relative to adjacent three-deckers

Ms. Zhang was questioned about the architectural compatibility and massing articulation of the proposal, noting it felt like “an extrusion” and lacked the nuanced variety of the Queen Anne original.

Ms. Lyster commended the applicant's willingness to engage, the inclusion of deed-restricted affordable units, and sensitivity to zoning constraints.

Ms. Harrington called for questions of fact or comments from the public attendees.

Marylou Dymsky of 10 Miller Avenue expressed her opinion that the building would loom over the street and worsen traffic on the narrow side street.

Ms. Blier suggested retaining the historic front and building rectilinear massing behind it; asked why that option was dismissed.

Ms. Meyer said the renderings were insufficient and the building lacked coherence with neighboring structures.

Eric Von Hippel of 72 Sixth Street said the box-like design resembled many new developments and diminished neighborhood identity.

Mr. Levy said the proposal violated multi-family zoning design guidelines for neighborhood compatibility.

The applicant presented additional perspective views and described attempts to unify the new design with the varied architectural languages in the area.

Ms. Harrington closed the public comment period.

Ms. Zhang asked for further study of the massing, materials, design, and potential for re-use of the existing building. She did not consider the proposed design to be preferable to the existing building. Ms. Lyster complemented the applicants' constructive approach and openness for further conversation.

Commissioners discussed whether to vote on preferably preserved status or request a continuance and allow revisions. The owner representative Charles Zammuto consented to a continuance in order to revise the design and consult with CHC staff and the Community Development Department.

Ms. Darwin moved to continue the hearing to a future date with the consent of the applicants. Ms. Zhang seconded the motion, which passed 6-0-1 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Lyster, Zhang, Harrington, Darwin, Kyle voting in the affirmative and Rogove abstaining).

Case D-1827: 146 Spring St., by Wei Zhang. Substantial demolition of house (1847).

Mr. Hill showed slides of the property and summarized the staff report. The house was built circa 1847 as a Greek Revival worker's cottage with a recessed side hall entry, classical entablature and gable roof. The vinyl and asbestos siding conceals earlier materials, but the original architectural form remains legible. The house was part of a significant row of 1840s–1850s Greek Revival houses on Spring Street—a preserved East Cambridge streetscape. He recommended that the existing building be found of significant as an early (1847) extant Greek Revival residence in East Cambridge that contributes to the Spring Street streetscape of mid-19th century wood-frame dwellings.

Ms. Harrington called for questions of fact or comments from the public attendees.

Ms. Blier indicated that East Cambridge workers cottages were historically important and increasingly rare given development pressures from nearby Kendall Square.

Mr. Levy said the house was integral to a cohesive and unique architectural streetscape.

Mr. von Hippel said newer modernist buildings had eroded the neighborhood's identity; this house remains one of the few intact historic pieces.

Mark Kahn of 150 Spring Steet said there should be a better balance of preservation and demolition. He was concerned that the unique character of East Cambridge was being lost and the new construction was not sensitive to the neighborhood.

Ms. Darwin moved to find the existing building to be significant as defined in the ordinance and for the reasons presented in the staff report. Ms. Lyster seconded the motion which passed 6-0-1. (Ferrara, Lyster, Zhang, Harrington, Darwin, Kyle voting in the affirmative and Rogove abstaining).

Property owner Wei Zhang noted that his architect had been in attendance but had to leave due to the lateness of the hour. He shared photographs of the existing building. Mr. Hill projected the design drawings on the screen and Mr. Zhang described the proposed replacement design. The roof and rear ell would be demolished. A new third and fourth story would be constructed with an entrance on the long side facing the

driveway. The existing rear building, which staff had determined was not significant, would also be extended upward to four stories.

Commissioners asked for further details in the drawings including materials which were listed on the plans but were not rendered, and details of the windows, entry and cornice. They requested that elevations show the neighboring buildings and that the applicant provide renderings of the existing and proposed from at least two viewpoints.

Ms. Zhang requested that existing but removed elements of the building be indicated on the elevations with dashed lines.

Mr. Zhang said the project was zoning compliant and passed stormwater requirements.

Mr. Kyle said the example on Thorndike Street that retained the gable roof but raised the overall height of the building was an approach worth considering here.

Ms. Harrington called for questions of fact and comments from public.

Mr. Levy argued that adding a gable roof to a four-story mass would be putting lipstick on a pig. He urged preservation of the existing building.

Mr. von Hippel flagged inaccuracies in the application; it was not owner occupied.

Deborah Fawcett, attorney for Mr. Levy, warned that replacing the structure with a tall faceless form would negatively impact the street. Many similar workers cottages in the neighborhood had been altered in a way that still retained the human scale of the buildings.

Ms. Blier said an increase of two stories would destroy the nature of the street. She encouraged the preservation of the front house and construction at the rear of the lot.

Ms. Harrington closed the public comment period.

Ms. Zhang said the existing gable could be articulated on the façade while still adding the addition above. Different siding could be used on the addition.

Ms. Lyster moved to find the existing building preferably preserved in the context of the current proposal. She encouraged the applicant and his architect to consult with staff about the revised design before returning. Ms. Darwin seconded the motion which passed 6-1. (Ferrara, Lyster, Zhang, Harrington, Darwin, Kyle voting in the affirmative and Rogove in the negative).

With no remaining business, a motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Y. Zhang and seconded by Ms. Darwin. The motion passed unanimously in a roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 9:45 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 reviewed and edited by CHC staff for accuracy and form.

Members of the Public Present on June 18, 2026

Debbie	Zammuto	375 Main St, Everett, MA 02149
John	Driscoll	Somerville, MA
		Vina Design, 425 Park Ave, Worcester, MA
John	Le	01610
Charles	Zammuto	375 Main St, Everett, MA 02149
Regina	Mitarachi	164 Elm St #2
Rebecca	Herrmann	180 Elm St.
Betty	Saccoccio	55 Otis St
Luke	Smith	8 Sharon Dr, CT
Marilee	Meyer	10 Dana St, 404
John	Hawkinson	—
Eric	von Hippel	72 6th St
Deborah	Fawcett	35 Norris St
Greg	Zammuto	30 Ramshead Rd
Marylou	Dymski	10 Miller Ave
James	Williamson	30 Churchill Ave
Vera	Xie	142 Bigelow St
Marc	Levy	3 Potter Pk, #1
Ilan	Levy	148 Spring St
Suzanne	Blier	5 Fuller Pl
Cathie	Zusy	202 Hamilton St.
Chris	Maltas	12 Miller Ave.
Lucy	Patton	333 Walden St
Mark	Kon	5 Ashton Pl.
Heather	Hoffman	213 Hurley St

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