

CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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May 29, 2026

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Charles Sullivan, Executive Director

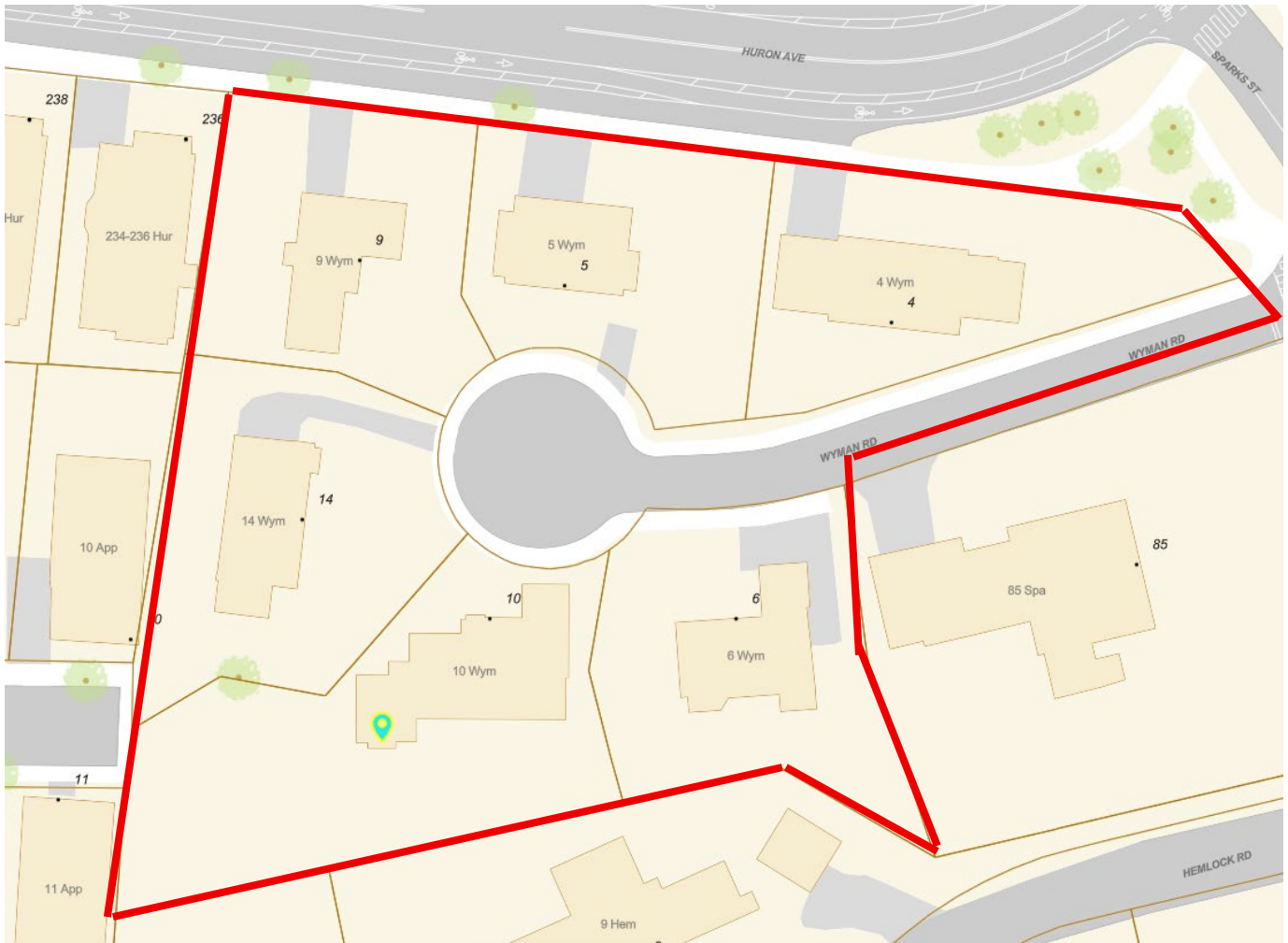
Re: Wyman Road NCD Petition

On May 6, 2026, Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC) staff received a petition said to have been signed by 260 people requesting that the Historical Commission initiate a neighborhood conservation district study of the six properties comprising the Wyman Road subdivision. The petition was accompanied by an analysis of the history and architecture of the properties authored by Professor Liza Oliver in consultation with Professors Alice Friedman and Kathryn O'Rourke, of or formerly at Wellesley College (attached). The Election Commission confirmed the required number of signatures, and staff scheduled a public hearing for the Historical Commission meeting on June 4.



Wyman Road, with Huron Avenue at top and Sparks Street at left

NearMap.com, April 9, 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. On May 9, the 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."

The property subsequently changed hands, and 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 2026 requested minor modifications, but found the building generally conformed to legal requirements.



9 Wyman Road, proposed design (January 30, 2026)



Anderson Porter Design

On April 13, 2026, 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. The Election Commission confirmed the signatures, and staff scheduled a hearing for the next Historical Commission meeting.

On May 4, 2026, an application to demolish 9 Wyman Road appeared in the online permitting portal of the Inspectional Services Department. CHC staff have five days to make a determination of significance once an application has been received.

On May 7 the Historical Commission conducted a public hearing on the landmark designation petition under the provisions of Section 2.78.280 of the City Code. After extensive public testimony and discussion, the Commission voted unanimously to deny the petition. On May 8, the Executive Director directed CHC staff to sign off on the demolition permit application, indicating that he did not consider the building significant for the purposes of the demolition permit review ordinance. As of May 29, the demolition permit application was still undergoing review by other city departments.

Description

As reported in the CHC staff evaluation memo of May 1, 2026, the Wyman Road subdivision was developed by the Cambridge firm of Duguid & Martin:

“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 1937 Friends Meeting House on Longfellow Park

“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. Wyman’s 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).”



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

One distinctive feature of the Wyman Road subdivision has important implications for a potential conservation district. An NCD commission or the Historical Commission can exercise jurisdiction only over features visible from a public way. Wyman Road itself is a private way. Sparks Street and Huron Avenue offer only limited views of the rear elevations of 4, 5, and 9 Wyman, and few or no views of 6, 10, and 14.



View of Wyman Road from Sparks Street (left) and Huron Avenue (right)

Google Streetview, 2020

The six houses on Wyman Road were constructed in 1926 and 1927. Duguid & Martin designed four, three of which they built on spec. Two were designed by other architects on lots Duguid & Martin sold to their clients. Three of the houses – 5, 10, and 14 – are clapboarded Colonials with a similar appearance, while two – 6 and 9 – are minimally detailed compositions with intersecting gables and First Period American features. Taken as a whole, the Wyman Road houses present as pleasing but not exceptional mixture of early 20th century revival designs seen in large numbers elsewhere in Cambridge and adjacent suburbs.



Sanborn Map Co., 1930

Library of Congress

Wyman Rd Address	Date	Architect	Client	Exterior Material	Style
4	1927	Harvey Hurd	Stephen Biddle	Brick veneer	Georgian Revival
5	1926	Duguid & Martin	Spec	Clapboards	Colonial Revival
6	1927	Strickland Blodget & Law	Lawrence Eustis	Shingled	1 st Period American
9	1927	Duguid & Martin	Spec	Shingled	1 st Period American
10	1926	Duguid & Martin	Otto Straub	Clapboard	Colonial Revival
14	1927	Duguid & Martin	Spec	Clapboard	Colonial Revival



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



4 Wyman Road (1927, Harvey Hurd, architect)



5 Wyman Road (1926, Duguid & Martin)



6 Wyman Road (1926, Strickland Blodget & Law)



9 Wyman Road (1927, Duguid & Martin)



10 Wyman Road (1926, Duguid & Martin)



14 Wyman Road (1927, Duguid & Martin)



L-R Publicly visible facades of 5 Wyman Road and 9 Wyman Road

CHC, 2026

Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD) Study Procedure

NCDs and landmarks are enacted under the same article of the City Code, Ch. 2.78 Art. III, by majority vote of the City Council upon recommendation of the Historical Commission, but with significant differences in procedure. The Commission can commence an NCD study process on its own initiative or by voting to accept a petition of 100 registered voters, compared to 30 to initiate a landmark study. While the effect of initiating a landmark designation study is to establish interim jurisdiction over the property for up to one year, there is no such provision for NCD studies. The jurisdiction of an NCD does not take effect until it has been enacted by the City Council.

Unlike landmark designation studies, NCD studies are conducted by a committee appointed by the City Manager and supported by CHC staff:

In the case of a neighborhood conservation district, preparation of the report shall be directed by a study committee consisting of three members or alternates of the Historical Commission and six persons appointed by the City Manager who shall by reason of experience or education have demonstrable knowledge and concern for improvement, conservation, and enhancement of the district, and whose composition represents the diversity of the neighborhood itself in terms of age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and property ownership or tenancy. (2.78.180.C)

Significantly, appointment of a study committee requires the prior approval of the City Council:

In the event the Historical Commission requests the appointment of a study committee, the approval of the formation of such committee shall be by order of the City Council. (2.78.180.D)

The scope of the study includes a determination of the district boundaries, the features and activities to be subject to NCD jurisdiction, and whether the district should be administered by an independent commission or the Historical Commission itself. At the conclusion of the study the Commission will hold a public hearing to consider the findings of the NCD study report and determine whether to recommend designation to the City Council. If the Council enacts the designation, no publicly visible alteration or construction of regulated features may take place in the district without the prior issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Nonapplicability, of Hardship.

NCD Criteria and Goals

The purpose of 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)

The ordinance defines eligible districts as:

... any area within the City containing places and structures which it determines are of importance to the architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City, and which considered together cause such area to constitute a distinctive neighborhood or to have a distinctive character in terms of its exterior features ... (2.78.180.A)

Relationship to Criteria

The petitioners' analysis describes the architectural qualities and historical associations of the six houses that comprise the subdivision, but do not make a strong case for its character as a distinctive neighborhood in the context of West Cambridge.

As we noted with regard to the landmark petition for 9 Wyman Road, "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." While Wyman Road certainly contributes to the "architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City" it does not do so to an important degree. With only six houses secluded on a heavily wooded cul de sac, it too small to "constitute a distinctive neighborhood." Most significantly, most of the houses are not publicly visible and thus not capable of utilizing the protect afforded by a neighborhood conservation district.

The question before the Commission is whether Wyman Road should be considered for designation "in balance with other City priorities such as affordable housing construction, environmental sustainability, and accessibility." While the proposed multifamily project at 9 Wyman Road will have a deleterious effect on its immediate surroundings, the remedy lies in improving the zoning code rather than imposing a designation on an obscure cul-de-sac that could not take effect for at least a year and could not be effectively administered due to its lack of public visibility.

Staff Recommendations

Staff recommends that the Commission decline to accept the petition and the request to initiate a neighborhood conservation district study for Wyman Road.

cc: Dr. Liza Oliver, lead petitioner

Patrick Barrett, Esq. o/b/o 9 Wyman Rd LLC, property owner