

## Half Crown-Marsh NCD Commission Review Worksheet

**Case:** CHC 4570

**Hearing:** June 3, 2021

**Address:** 159 Charles Street (ECNCD Study)

This worksheet provides a summary of the Specific Objectives and Principles, the General Criteria, and the Exemptions of the City Council order establishing the Half Crown-Marsh NCD that the Commission should consider in making a determination whether or not to issue a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship, or Non-Applicability in this case. The determination must be made in a public meeting after a hearing open to questions and testimony by members of the public. (However, the staff may issue a Certificate of Non-Applicability on behalf of the commission if it determines that the case involves only changes to architectural features not visible from a public way or that are exempt from Commission review under the order.)

The Commission “shall not consider interior arrangements or architectural features not subject to public view” and “shall not make any recommendation or requirement except for the purpose of preventing developments incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance or the distinctive character of the . . . neighborhood conservation district.” (Ch. 2.78.220, A. and B.)

### **Section III, B. General Criteria**

“Applications shall be considered in terms of the impact of the proposed new construction, demolition or alteration on the District as a whole, and in addition with regard to the following factors:

- the architectural and historical significance of the structures on the site, if any;
- the physical characteristics of the site, including but not limited to existing vegetation and topography; and
- the potential adverse effects of the proposed construction, demolition, or alteration on the surrounding properties, and on the immediate streetscape.”

### **Application may contain issues relevant to these aspects of Section III, A. Specific Objectives and Principles:**

- Conserve the historic architectural character of the Neighborhood, including the modest character that typifies the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup>-century workers’ and suburban housing of the Neighborhood, and the overall simplicity of its traditional wood-frame vernacular architecture, as well as the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century apartment houses where they exist.
- Conserve the historic development patterns of the Neighborhood, including its dense network of short, through-block streets, courts, back streets, and ways.
- Conserve views through yards and between houses to maintain the pattern of visual layering that characterizes streetscapes in the Neighborhood while respecting the residential privacy of individual properties.
- Allow for architectural diversity and individualized alterations while respecting the traditional small scale of the housing stock.
- Encourage the planting of trees and greenery to enhance the landscape amenities of the Neighborhood.
- Encourage low fences to define the street edge while protecting views of houses and through yards, and also while permitting flexibility to minimize the adverse visual effect of trash containers, air compressors, transformers and other fixtures whose location may not otherwise be practically screened from public view.
- Consider traffic impacts of proposed development as they may affect traditional street patterns and pedestrian activity.
- Discourage the construction of parking lots as a principal use.

### **Application may contain issues exempted as per Section V, Exemptions:**

“The authority of the Commission shall not extend to the following categories of structures or exterior architectural features, and such structures or features may be constructed or altered without review by the Commission:

- Terraces, walks, driveways, sidewalks and similar structures substantially at grade level, provided, however, that they are not to be used for parking between the street and either the principal front wall plane of a building or the principal front and side wall planes of a building that occupies a corner property.
- Walls and fences four feet high or less as measured from the grade of the sidewalk or the surface of the ground immediately below the wall or fence, whichever grade is lower.
- Storm doors and windows, screens, window air conditioners, trelliswork and similar appurtenances.
- Flat skylights or solar collectors parallel to and in close contact with the plane of the roof provided that all new and existing skylights and collectors are not larger than one-third of the area of the roof plane in which they are installed.
- Intake and exhaust vents of less than one square foot in area provided that no more than two such vents are installed on an elevation of a one-to-three family house or within a 20-foot horizontal section of an elevation of a rowhouse, apartment, retail or commercial structure.
- Permanent exterior lighting provided that it is installed in a manner that will prevent direct light from shining onto any adjacent property.
- Chimney caps provided they are installed in a manner that will allow their removal without altering the structure or appearance of the chimney.”

**Date of Construction: 1871**

**Architect/Builder (if known): Unknown**

**The home at 159 Charles Street was built in 1871 behind the 155-157 Charles Street house at the street (1858). The home was an improvement to the property a year after Thomas Fox, the owner, submitted a petition to the City of Cambridge for a common sewer on Charles Street “between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> streets”. The home at 159 Charles Street is a typical example of mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century workers housing constructed in the southern periphery of East Cambridge.**

**The home was constructed on a raised brick basement and was built prior to zoning in Cambridge, and appears to touch two properties (north and west) on adjacent lots. Little architectural integrity remains of the home after alterations including reconfigured openings, a porch, and replacement windows and siding. The eastern half of the front façade of the home is visible from Charles Street via a pathway between 153 and 155-157 Charles Street.**

**The new owner is proposing a complete renovation of the rear home, which includes raising the roof roughly 3’-0” and adding a large shed dormer at the front and rear slopes. New fenestration is proposed on the visible façade of the home, including a reconstructed bay window at the first floor. A balcony is proposed above the main entry porch, which is not visible from the street.**

**Staff recommends approval of the project as it is minimally visible from a public way, maintains minimal architectural integrity, and the proposed alterations “Allow for architectural diversity and individualized alterations while respecting the traditional small scale of the housing stock”.**

**Staff Initials: EH**

**Date: 01/07/2021**