



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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November 15, 2023

To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager

From: Charles Sullivan, Executive Director
Cambridge Historical Commission

Re: East Cambridge NCD Study Committee Final Report

I am submitting the Final Report of the East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Study Committee with the request of the Cambridge Historical Commission that it be transmitted to the City Council for their consideration.

The Cambridge Historical Commission voted in September 2019 to initiate a study of the East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District in response to citizen concerns about rapid development and inappropriate renovations of significant buildings in the study area.

The City Manager appointed the East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Study Committee in January 2020. The committee met monthly from January to March 2020 and resumed meeting remotely in January 2021. Attendees, who included many interested parties and members of the public, discussed the goals and guidelines that would be suited to an East Cambridge NCD and the application of those goals and guidelines to matters of demolition, new construction, and alterations. A draft *Preliminary Report* was adopted by the Study Committee on April 20, 2022 and released for public comment.

On September 20, 2022 the Study Committee reviewed the results of public outreach activities and voted to proceed with the recommendations for jurisdiction and boundaries proposed in the draft report. After further revisions to reflect the diversity of opinion about the desirability of the measure, the Study Committee voted on October 19, 2022 to transmit the report with a positive recommendation to the Cambridge Historical Commission and the Cambridge Planning Board.

The Cambridge Planning Board met on November 22nd, 2022 to consider the Preliminary Report and made the following suggestions in support of the proposed district:

- A) That projects proposed under the Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) provisions of the Zoning Code should be subject to non-binding review by the proposed NCD commission;
- B) That the southern boundary of the proposed district could be adjusted to eliminate the properties facing Bent Street; and

C) That guidelines be adopted for the regulation of business properties on Cambridge Street.

On December 1, 2022 the Historical Commission held a public hearing to review the motivation, goals, and history of the study in the context of Ch. 2.78 Article III, the enabling ordinance for neighborhood conservation districts. After public testimony and comments, the Commission voted to adopt suggestions A and B of the Planning Board, to accept the report as modified, and to transmit a Final Report to the City Manager and City Clerk with a recommendation for City Council designation by adoption of the proposed Order.

Law Department review of the draft designation Order establishing the proposed district concluded in February 2023. The revised Order (included in the Final Report as Appendix A) reflected the advice of the Law Department necessary to conform to the ordinance then in effect. Meanwhile, a citizens' petition seeking amendments to the enabling ordinance that had originally been filed in May 2021 was reintroduced in February 2022. The Ordinance Committee began holding hearings on the petition in March 2023, and CHC staff withheld the East Cambridge NCD Final Report until the conclusion of the ordinance amendment proceedings so the proposed Order could be harmonized with the amended ordinance.

On the recommendation of the Ordinance Committee, the City Council passed the amended ordinance to a second reading on August 7, amended it on September 18, and ordained it on October 2, 2023. Several of the amendments affect the recommendations of the Study Committee and the Historical Commission for the proposed East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District, but only one, the provision for expanded commission membership, requires amending the proposed Order:

- NCD commission membership was expanded with new qualifications.
- NCD commissions must consider City Council goals in considering applications for certificates.
- ADA compliance, accessibility, climate resiliency, and renewable energy features are now subject to advisory (non-binding) review.
- Commissions may no longer consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of new construction or additions.
- Commissions may no longer impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by the zoning ordinance in the case of new construction or additions.
- NCD commissions may have no jurisdiction over Affordable Housing Overlay projects or projects with a majority of units permanently reserved for households at or below 100% of Area Median Income

The attached Final Report remains substantially as adopted by the Historical Commission in December 2022. The Summary and Recommended Actions section has been brought up to date and includes a proposed *Order Establishing the District* that reflects both the Law Department comments of February 2023 and the recent amendments to Ch. 2.70, Art. III adopted in October 2023. This Order (which begins on page v of the report) may be adopted by a simple majority vote.

Attachment: *Final Report of the East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Study Committee, December 20, 2022, Revised November 15, 2023*