

IV. Guidelines for Demolition, Construction, and Alterations

Chapter 2.78, Article III, Section 220 of the City Code describes the factors to be considered by Neighborhood Conservation District commissions:

A. In passing upon matters before it, the ... Neighborhood Conservation District commission shall consider, among other things, the historic and architectural value and significance of the site or structure, the general design, arrangement, texture and material of the features involved, and the relation of such features to similar features of structures in the surrounding area. In the case of new construction or additions to existing structures a commission shall consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the structure both in relation to the land area upon which the structure is situated and to structures in the vicinity, and a Commission may in appropriate cases impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by applicable provision of the zoning ordinance. A Commission shall not consider interior arrangements or architectural features not subject to public view.

In making its determinations, the East Cambridge NCD Commission will also operate under goals and guidelines designed by the Study Committee to protect historic resources while encouraging the architectural diversity that characterizes the neighborhood. Guidelines that are clear, detailed, and easy to apply will help maintain consistent interpretation of urban design and historic preservation priorities for East Cambridge.

All applications will be reviewed by Cambridge Historical Commission staff for compliance with the guidelines, and the staff will actively engage the applicant in discussions about the objectives and nature of the project. The staff will advise the applicant throughout the application process and will coordinate reviews by an East Cambridge NCD Commission.

The following guidelines for new construction, demolition, and alterations expand upon the language of the Ordinance to provide additional guidance for administration of an East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District.

A. General Factors to be Considered

Applications shall be considered in terms of the main goal statement and the secondary goals of the District, and in addition with regard to the following factors:

- the architectural and historical significance of the structures on the site
- 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.

B. Design Guidelines for New Construction, Additions, Demolition, Alterations and Accessibility

In addition to the General Criteria set forth above, and consistent with the Goals and Secondary Goals of the District, the Commission shall base its decisions on the following specific factors when considering applications for appropriateness or hardship.

1. New Construction and Additions

The East Cambridge NCD Commission will begin its review of a new construction project or addition with an analysis of the historic significance and architectural value of the premises and its immediate surroundings. New construction that accommodates older structures on or adjacent to the site will be encouraged. Construction that incorporates significant major portions of older structures may be acceptable; however, use of isolated historic architectural elements will be discouraged. Demolition involving retention of facades to allow replacement of historic structures with new construction ("facadectomies") will be discouraged unless the supporting historic fabric is found to be unsalvageable.

In reviewing new construction or additions to existing buildings, the Commission "shall consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the structure both in relation to the land area upon which the structure is situated and to structures in the vicinity."¹ Review of new buildings will be guided by considerations such as the appropriateness of the structure's height, scale, mass, proportions, orientation, and lot coverage; the vertical and horizontal emphasis, rhythm of openings, transparency, texture, and materials of the publicly-visible facades; sunlight and shadow effects; relationship to public open space; and landscaping.

Neighborhood conservation district commissions "may in appropriate cases impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by the applicable provision of the zoning ordinance."² Implementing such a measure could result in a reduction of the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) allowed by zoning. The appropriate circumstances for imposing dimensional and set-back reductions could include a wide disparity of scale and density between the proposed project and its surroundings, or a situation in which the proposed project would destroy or diminish the historical resources of the site.

Review of the design of proposed infill construction or substantial additions to existing structures consider compatibility of the proposed construction with its surroundings, and the following elements of the proposal should be among those considered:

- site layout
- provisions for parking
- volume and dimensions of the structure
- visibility of the structure from a public way
- provision for open space and landscaping
- the scale and massing of the structure in relation to its surroundings

a. New Construction:

New construction in the East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District should seek to relate to the particular streetscape on which is located, in building height, mass, scale, and siting. New construction should not replicate buildings of past eras and should be distinguished as the time of its design and construction. While new construction should appear more contemporary, it should also aim to take cues from historic characteristics of structures nearby including roof pitch and style, exterior materials or patterns, and solid-to-void ratio.

¹ Ch. 2.78.220.A.

² Ch. 2.78.220.A.

b. Additions:

Additions should aim to be subordinate in height, massing, and design to the structure where they are attached. Depending on the circumstances, an addition can be designed match the existing structure through a continuation of form, features, and materials; or an addition can be differentiated from, but complement, the existing building through the choice of materials, fenestration, or other design features.

2. Demolition

Although the City's demolition delay ordinance does not apply in neighborhood conservation districts, demolition will be similarly defined as "the act of pulling down, destroying, removing or razing a structure or commencing the work of total or substantial destruction with the intent of completing the same".³ The Cambridge Inspectional Services Commissioner requires a demolition permit when more than 25% of a structure will be removed. Work of this sort will be reviewed under the following demolition guidelines, while the removal of building components will be reviewed as alterations.

The purpose of reviewing demolition within a neighborhood conservation district is to preserve significant buildings and the diversity of building ages, styles, and forms that help to define the historical character of the district. Other benefits include the opportunity to review the significance of individual buildings in the context of specific development proposals, to consider creative re-use possibilities, and to encourage the care and maintenance of the building stock.

The East Cambridge NCD Commission will issue a Certificate of Appropriateness to an applicant seeking to demolish a structure if the project, including both the demolished and the replacement buildings, is determined to be "appropriate for or compatible with the preservation or protection of the . . . district."⁴ Approval of demolition will be dependent on a finding by the NCD Commission that a) the demolition of the structure will not adversely impact the district, subdistrict, or abutting properties in the sense described in secondary goal #1, and b) the replacement project meets the purposes of the neighborhood conservation district with respect to secondary goals #2, 4, 5, and 7, where these are applicable. Buildings that are individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places or that are contributing structures in National Register districts are strong candidates for preservation. However, all applications will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and the NCD Commission will not necessarily protect all such structures from demolition.

In evaluating an application to demolish a structure, the Commission should consider the following factors:

- the architectural and historical significance of the structure of which any portion is to be demolished

³ City Code, section 2.78.080.F. Demolition is categorized in Chapter 40C as an "alteration;" moving a building categorized as "construction."

⁴ Chapter 40C, Section 10a. This language is incorporated by reference in the Neighborhood Neighborhood Conservation District and Landmark Ordinance, Ch. 2.78.170.

- the physical condition of the structure and its subsoil conditions and practical restoration or repair alternatives to demolition that might be available using modern techniques and materials
- the location of the structure in relation to adjacent uses and surrounding context
- the design of any proposed replacement structure
- the extent to which the proposed project advances the broad interests of the community, such as for provision of affordable housing or services to the public
- the financial costs of renovation compared with new construction; and
- if made, a claim of substantial or other hardship.

3. Alterations to Existing Buildings

The goals of the district favor retention and repair, rather than replacement, of original or significant exterior fabric. Review of proposed alterations to an existing structure (including alterations that may constitute or involve new construction or demolition, in which case factors described in the preceding paragraphs may also apply), and of all other features not exempted from review, should be made with regard to the following additional factors:

- the extent to which the integrity of the original design has been retained or previously diminished
- the consistency of the proposed alteration with the character, scale, massing, and detailing of surrounding properties; and
- the proximity of adjacent surrounding structures.

a. Roofs

Each period and style of architecture has distinctive roof forms, slope, and materials that are a primary feature of the buildings. The intent of the roof standards is to retain the original and later contributing roofs, in form and materials, in the District. Changes to the roof form or slope, or the raising of a roof shall be reviewed by the Commission.

- Original or later contributing roofing materials, elements, features, details, and ornamentation should be retained.
- Many properties in the District have lost their original roof materials and elements. Replacement of non-historic roofing materials or replacement with a more historically appropriate material can be approved by staff.

b. Windows and Entrances

The intent of the window and door standards is to conserve the District's original or later contributing windows, doors and entryways in configuration, material, and detail. Windows and doors are a primary focus for architectural ornament and are an essential element of the proportional relationship of building facades.

- Historic window configurations and solid-to-void ratios should be retained on visible facades.
- New openings on primary facades are discouraged and should be subject to the review and approval of the Commission.

- Unless restoring to historical conditions, changes to the size or location of openings is discouraged and should be subject to the review and approval of the Commission.
- Original or later contributing windows, elements, features (functional and decorative), details and ornamentation, including glass, sash, sills, lintels, trim, frames, and shutters, should be repaired, rather than replaced.
- Window repair is preferred to replacement on National Register properties.
- The Commission encourages the replacement of windows with those that match the original material and pattern. Clad windows and simulated divided lights may be permitted. Replacement windows for properties that have already lost their original windows should meet the standards for window replacement. Appropriate replacement windows can be approved by staff.
- Glass should not be inappropriately tinted or reflective-coated.
- Original or later contributing projecting windows such as oriels, bays and dormers should not be removed.

Changes in the size or location of doors and doorways, including transoms, sidelights, pilasters, entablatures etc. shall be subject to District Commission review and approval.

- Original entrance designs and arrangement of door openings should be retained.
- Original or later contributing entrance materials, elements, details, and features (functional and decorative) should be retained.
- Before the Commission will consider door and door surround or entrance replacement, the possibility of repair should be investigated by the staff.
- When replacement is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence. If using the same material is not technically or economically feasible, then compatible materials may be considered.
- When original doors, door surrounds, and/or entrances have been lost, the Commission encourages the replacement of these features with elements historically appropriate for the period and style of the property. If documentary evidence of the original condition of the doors, door surrounds and entrances for the property is unavailable, the design of the replacement elements should be based on similar properties in the District.
- Storm windows and doors are exempt from review. It is recommended that storm windows and doors are low-profile and provide a full view of the underlying features. Half screens rather than full screens are required.

c. Building Materials- Structural and Ornamental

1. Masonry (includes brick, stone, terra cotta, concrete, stucco, and mortar)
 - Original or later contributing masonry materials, elements, features (functional and decorative), details and ornamentation, such as brick facades, cornices, pediments, chimneys, foundations, decorative detail, etc., should be retained.

- When replacement of materials or elements is necessary, they should be based on physical or documentary evidence. If using the same material is not technically or economically feasible, then compatible substitute materials may be considered.
 - Repointing mortar should duplicate the original in composition, color, texture, joint size, and profile. Mortar that is harder than the material it is binding will cause masonry to deteriorate. Masonry restoration of properties on the National Register shall be subject to review and approval of the staff.
 - Masonry, with the possible exception of extant concrete masonry units and stucco, should not be painted unless there is documentary evidence that this treatment was used on the property historically. If approved, the proposed color should approximate the original masonry or original paint color in appearance.
2. Wood (includes siding, columns, cornices, brackets, balustrades, etc.)
- Original or later contributing wood materials, elements, features (functional and decorative), details and ornamentation, such as clapboards, shingles, columns, cornices, brackets, balustrades, etc., should be retained.
 - Replacement of materials or elements should be based on physical or documentary evidence. If using the same material is not technically or economically feasible, then compatible substitute materials may be considered. New applications of vinyl siding that replace or obscure original materials should not be allowed.
 - Many properties in the neighborhood have been clad in alternate materials, such as vinyl, aluminum, asphalt, or asbestos siding. When replacing siding, exploratory work should be undertaken to see if the underlying siding and trim can be restored. Replacement of siding in-kind or replacement with a more appropriate material or design can be approved by staff.
 - It is recommended that paint colors be chosen with consideration of the architectural period and style of the house. The Commission has no jurisdiction over exterior paint but is available to advise on appropriate colors.
3. Metalwork (including iron fences, railings, balconies, and roof cresting)
- Original ironwork materials, elements, features (functional and decorative), details and ornamentation should be retained.
 - Deteriorated or missing ironwork materials, elements, features (functional and decorative), details and ornamentation should be replaced if necessary with material and elements that match the original in material, color, texture, size, shape profile, configuration, and detail of installation.
 - If using the same material is not technically or economically feasible, then compatible substitute materials may be considered.
 - New balconies should not be permitted on primary facades.

- The installation of security grilles may be allowed subject to the review and approval of the Commission.

d. Landscape and Mechanical Features

The NCD commission has no jurisdiction over plant materials but may consider landscape plans in the context of new construction projects.

- Adding or removing of plantings or other vegetation is not reviewed by the Commission. Removal of mature trees may fall under the jurisdiction of other city departments.
- New impervious paving in front yards should not be undertaken.
- Original stone walls reflecting historic changes in grade should be retained.
- New fences or walls should be no higher than 4'-0' between the street and the front wall of the building and 6'-0" behind the front wall of the building.
- Mechanical equipment, such as compressor units, should not be installed in a front or corner side yard except under special circumstances, such as existing building locations or site conditions that make it necessary. Whenever practicable, such equipment should be located in a non-visible location at the rear or on a roof. The Commission encourages vegetation or features such as a lattice to obscure unsightly mechanical systems.

e. Accessibility

Prompt approval of appropriate means of providing handicapped access to a property shall be a high priority for the District.

A three-step approach is recommended to identify and implement accessibility modifications that will protect the integrity and historic character of the property:

- Review the historical significance of the property and identify character defining features.
- Assess the property's existing and required level of accessibility.
- Evaluate accessibility options within a preservation context.

Because of the complex nature of accessibility, the Commission will review proposals on a case by case basis. The Commission recommends consulting with the following document, which is available from the Commission office: [National Park Service, Preservation Brief 32: "Making Historic Properties Accessible" by Thomas C. Jester and Sharon C. Park, AIA.](#)