

Half Crown-Marsh NCD Decennial Review Public Meeting

Cambridge Historical Commission

09/12/24

Agenda

- Why a Decennial Review?
- Half Crown and Marsh NCD Background
- Jurisdiction of HCM Commission
- Summary of Cases 2014-2024
- Sample Projects
- Demographics of Neighborhood
- Questions, Comments & Discussion on Report

Why a Decennial Review?

- Recent amendments to Article 2.78 of the Municipal Code, the enabling ordinance which governs the Neighborhood Conservation Districts, has required routine decennial reviews of all said districts.
- The 10-year report will include a study of neighborhood demographics, a summary of the activities of the NCD over the previous decade, and guidance on recommended changes to the boundaries, guidelines, and/or procedures of the NCD, if there are any.

Other Recent Changes to HCM Commission













Other Revisions to Chapter 2.78 Include:

1. Expanded membership of NCD Commissions
 - a. Now seven members + three alternates
2. Majority Affordable Housing Review Authority
 - a. “Of housing that either is developed under the Affordable Housing Overlay, as defined in Section 11.207 of the Zoning Ordinance, or has a majority of units permanently reserved for households at or below 100% of Area Median Income” is now advisory only.
 - i. To date, no cases for majority affordable units have been applied for within HCM District.

Other Recent Changes to HCM Commission

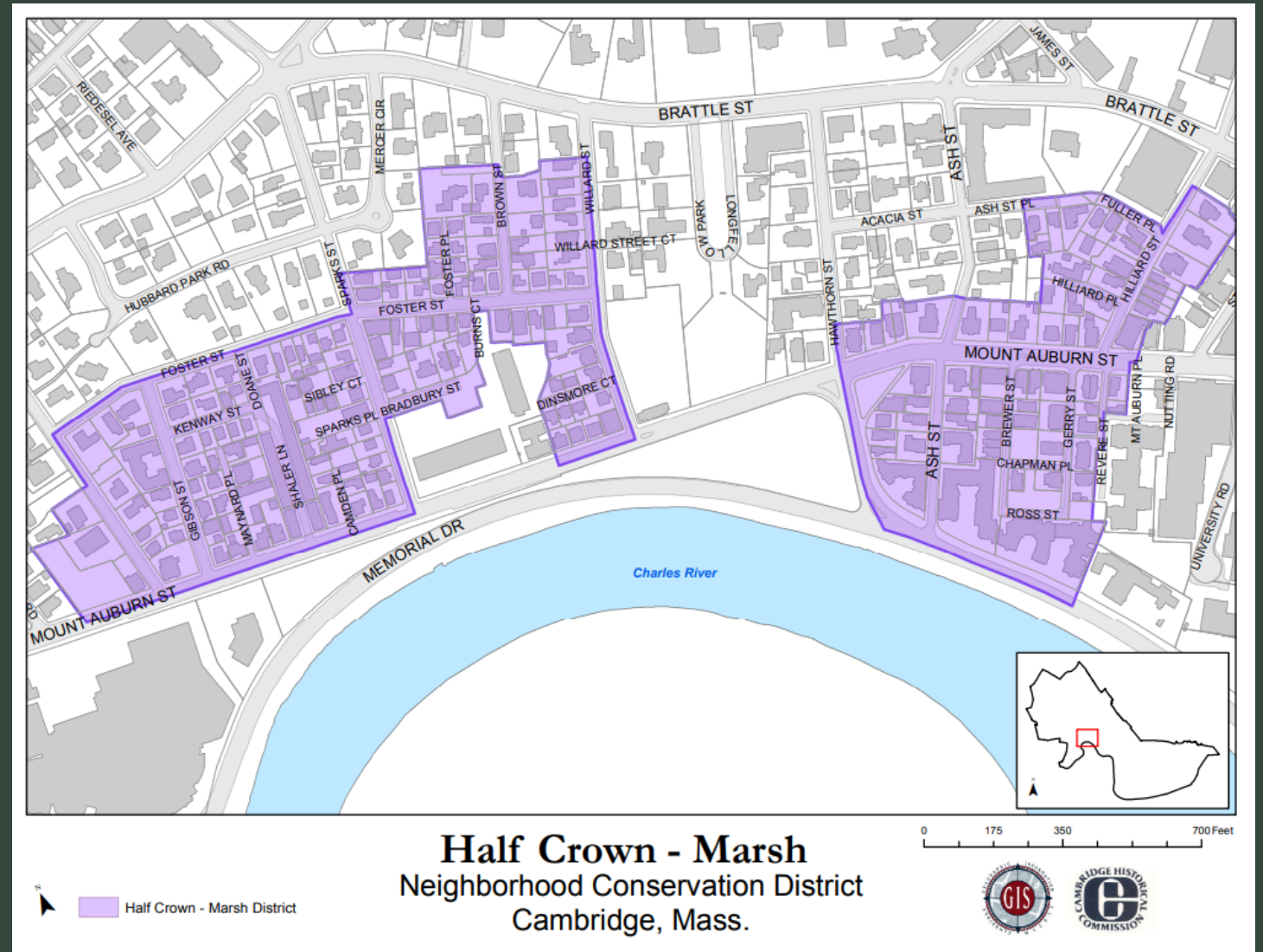
Other Revisions to Chapter 2.78 Include:

3. Review Authority in New Construction & Additions
 - a. NCD Commissions shall not consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of new construction or additions to existing buildings
 - b. NCD Commissions shall not impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by zoning.
4. Projects Aligning with City Council Goals
 - a. The NCD Commission shall also consider community goals as may from time to time be expressed by the City Council.

ICON	GOAL
	1. Increase access to affordable housing for all income groups.
	2. Ensure that Cambridge offers economic and educational opportunity to all.
	3. Deepen our commitment to sustainable use of energy and strengthen our capacity for resilience.
	4. Expand and deepen community engagement.
	5. Develop more proactive, inclusive, and transparent city planning process.
	6. Make it easy to move safely through the City, especially by sustainable modes of transportation.
	7. Increase opportunities for all residents to enjoy the City's open spaces.
	8. Ensure that Cambridge remains an Innovation Hub that integrates businesses of all sizes into a thriving ecosystem.
	9. Improve Council's capacity to collaborate more effectively, make better decisions, and increase its accountability to the public.
	10. Ensure City's budget allocates resources responsibly and responsively.
	11. Ensure Public Safety efforts reflect current and emerging challenges and opportunities in a way that incorporates Cambridge's core values.
	12. Eliminate bias within the City workplace and wider community.

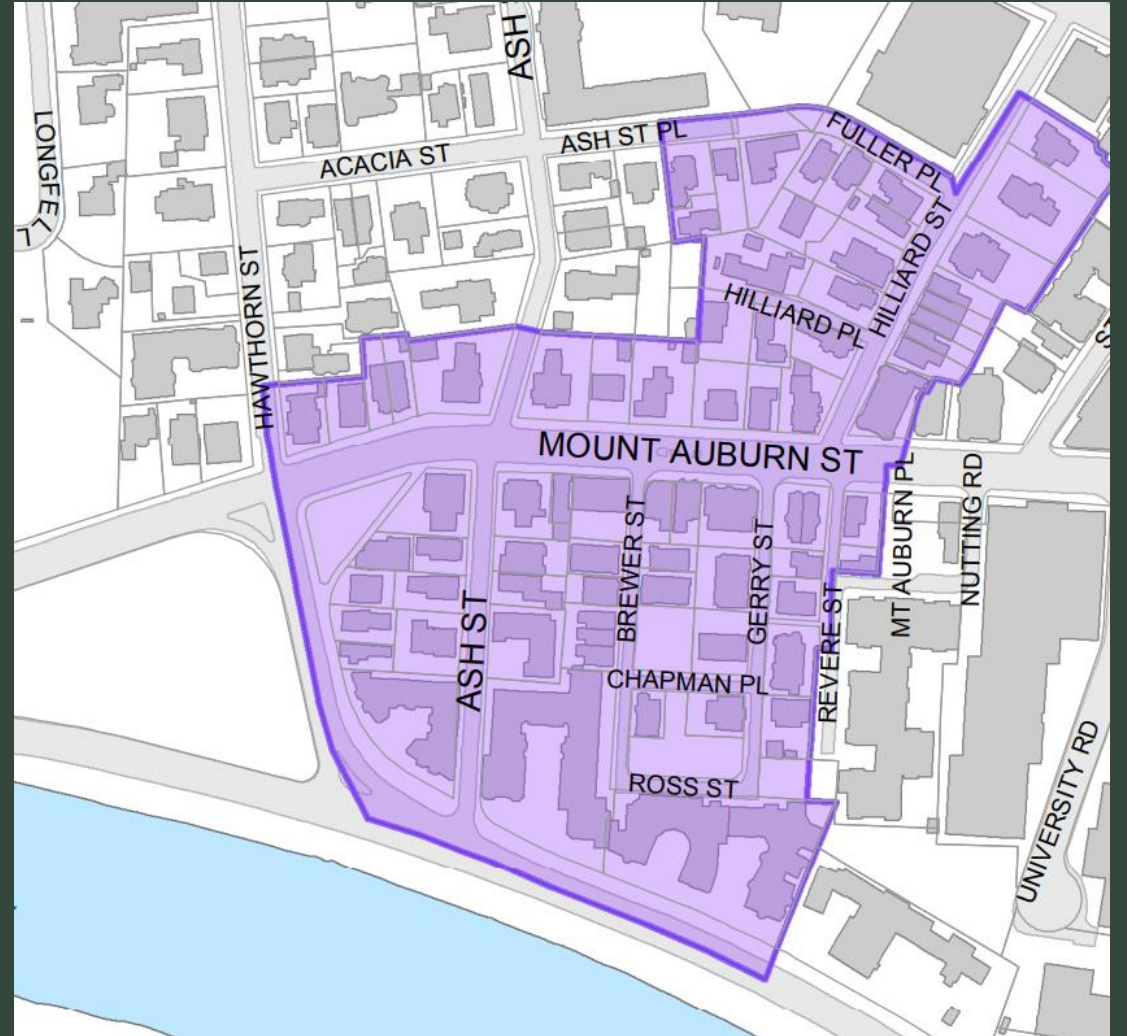
Current City Council Goals

Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Map



Half Crown District

- Approximately 75 properties
- Residential buildings ranging from Single-family homes to large apartment buildings
 - Commercial properties on Mt. Auburn Street
- District was authorized in 1984
 - Concerns over commercial development/encroachment of Harvard Square into residential area.



Half Crown District



Model of 1970s proposal for
18-story Holiday Inn



1980s redesign of site for
University Place and
University Green

Half Crown District



1978



2021

Half Crown District



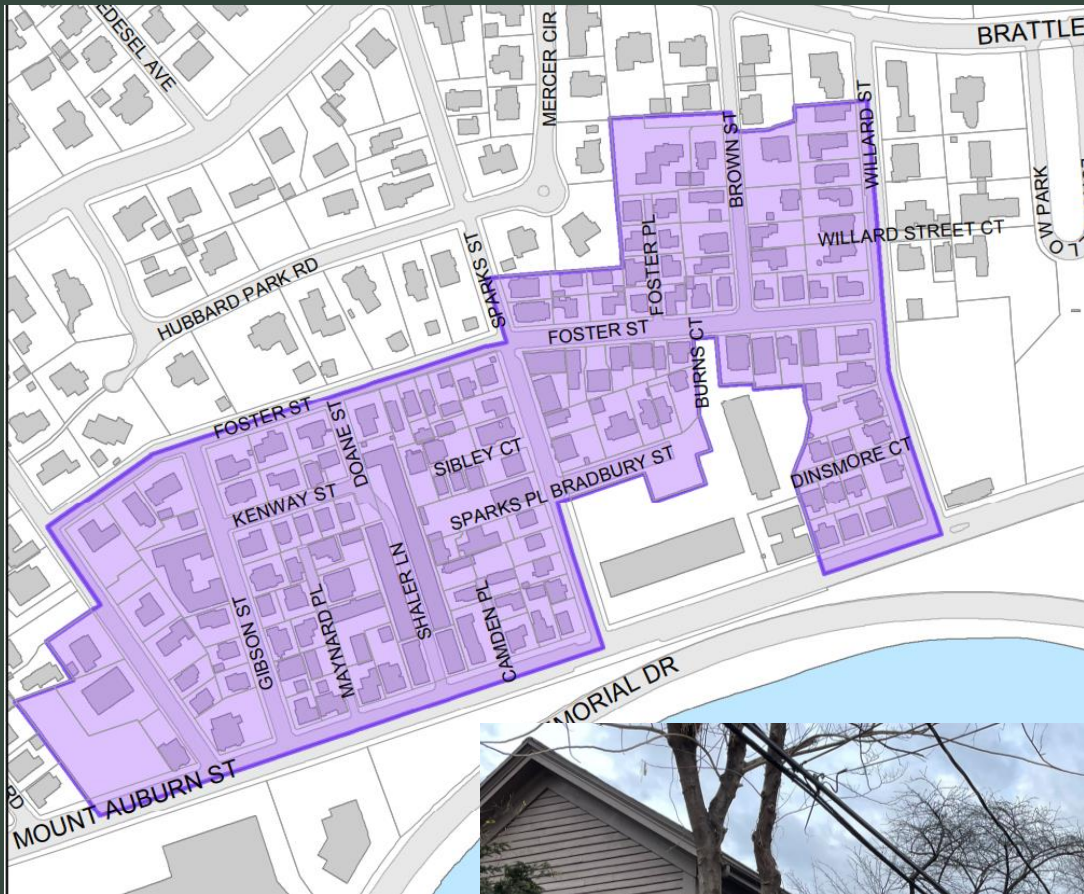
5 Revere Street, 1969



Boston Globe Image, 1982



5 Revere Street, 2024



Marsh District

- Approximately 147 properties
- Almost entirely wood-frame, residential houses
- Area has large collection of worker's cottages built mid-19th century
- District was authorized in 2000
 - Concerns over filing of four demolition permit applications of neighborhood houses over a 1 1/2-year period in late 1990s.



Marsh District



1968

- 5 Sparks Street
 - Architect/owner in 1998 sought to demolish 1870 Second Empire house.
 - Demolition Delay only jurisdiction at time.
 - Trend of demolition cases in Marsh neighborhood due to gentrification.

Marsh District



1998 proposal
for new
residence

- 5 Sparks Street
 - Proposal was for 3+story single-family house with "Hoot" roof.
 - CHC found house significant and "preferably preserved" delaying demolition for 6 months.
 - After hearing, the architect/developer sold the property to a couple who proposed a restoration of the house.



2004

Marsh District



- Aluminum siding removed, clapboards restored, new entry tower constructed, new slate roof added.
- Owners restored house with guidance of CHC staff and Marsh Commission.
- Given a Cambridge Preservation Award in 2006.

Half Crown-Marsh NCD



- The small size of the Half Crown neighborhood and lower number of cases made it difficult to recruit commissioners and maintain a consistent level of governance.
- Combined Half Crown & Marsh NCDs in 2007 following a consolidation study.
- Both areas now are governed by same guidelines and commission.
- Due to current zoning and density of lots, cases largely consist of renovations to existing structures.

Jurisdiction of Half Crown-Marsh NCD

HCM Commission Reviews:

Applications for permits for exterior work that is visible from a public way.

- Including:
 - New Construction
 - Demolition
 - Alterations
 - Major renovations
 - Additions
 - Dormers
 - Window replacements

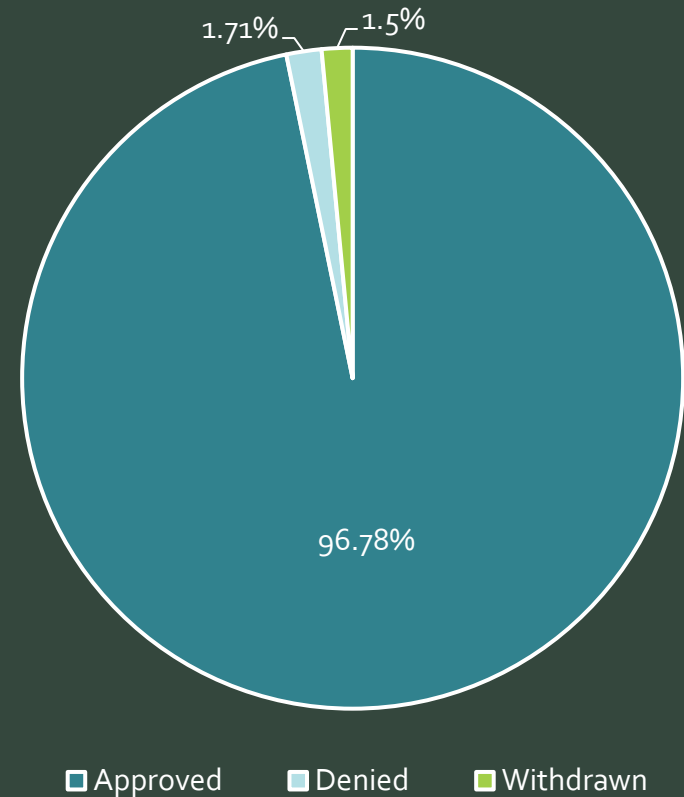
HCM Commission does NOT Review:

- Building use
- Paint colors
- Interior renovations
- Work not visible from public way
- Replacement in-kind
- Landscaping/hardscaping
- Fences and walls less than 4'-0"
- and more

Summary of Cases: 2013-2024

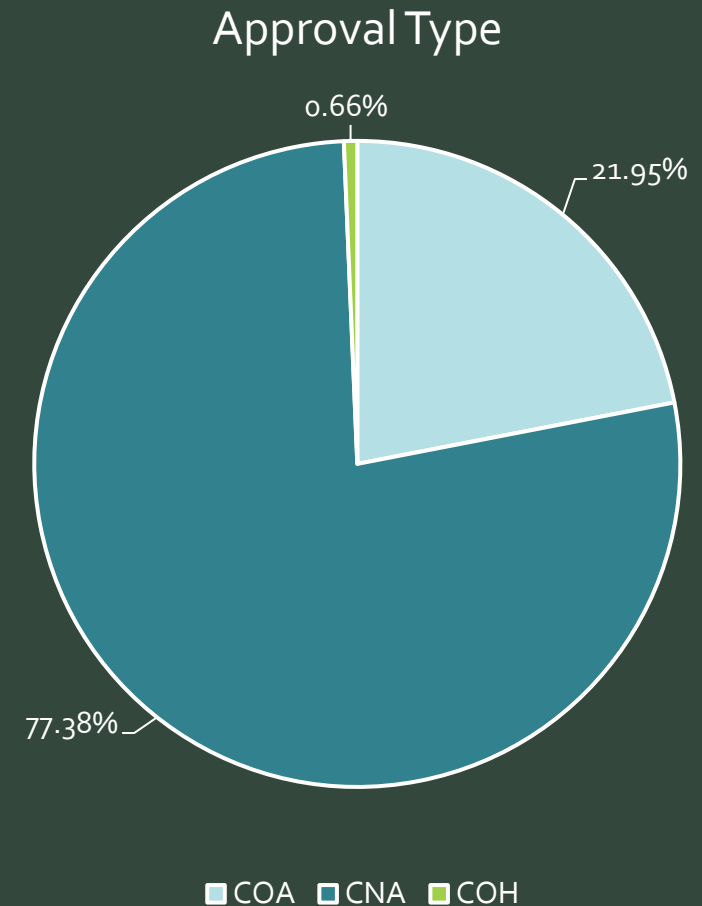
- Since January 1, 2013, the HCM Commission and/or CHC Staff have reviewed 466 applications.
- These applications are broken down into:
 - Approvals- 451
 - Certificate of Appropriateness
 - Certificate of Non-Applicability
 - Certificate of Hardship
 - Denials- 8 (half for 6'+ fences at front yards)
 - Withdrawals- 7

HCM Cases Reviewed 2013-2024



Summary of Cases: 2013-2024

- Approvals- 451
 - Certificate of Appropriateness- 99
 - Commission review
 - Certificate of Non-Applicability- 349
 - Staff-level administrative review
 - Certificate of Hardship- 3
 - May be issued when failure to approve an otherwise inappropriate project would involve substantial hardship to the applicant financial or otherwise.
 - Loss from fire/rebuild
 - HVAC in front yard due to lot conditions
 - Lack of quorum



Sample Project: 31-33 Willard Street

- Project Date: 2013-2014
- Proposal called for renovation/restoration of house.
- Original house (1870) was obscured by later vinyl siding and alterations.
- Largely approved following consultations with staff.



31-33 Willard Street,
1984

Sample Project: 31-33 Willard Street



2011



2020

Sample Project: 19 Brown Street

- Project Date: 2019
- Renovation of vernacular 1886 worker's cottage.
- Owners sought new entry "mudroom" and new windows at façade for additional light into rooms.
- Approved.



Sample Project: 19 Brown Street



Sample Project: 137 Mt. Auburn Street

- Project Date: 2016-2017
- Proposal called for demolition of existing residence and construction of new a two-family house.
- Original house (1889) was significantly altered, loss of architectural integrity.
- Commission considers the significance of the existing structure and the appropriateness of the proposed replacement.



137 Mt. Auburn Street, as existing in 2016

Sample Project: 137 Mt. Auburn Street

- Without NCD, proponent would not need design review.
- Design likely follows maximum return-on-investment.
- Due to Neighborhood Conservation District, owner met with staff to discuss goals and guidelines of HCM to shape the proposal.



Example of typical contemporary housing in Cambridge without design review

Sample Project: 137 Mt. Auburn Street



137 Mt. Auburn Street, architect's proposal

- Context with surrounding streetscape.
- Architectural features of 19th century housing in district.
- Modern interpretation of historical forms.
 - Roof pitch
 - Bay windows
 - Front porches
 - Double-hung windows
- Approved.

Sample Project: 137 Mt. Auburn Street



137 Mt. Auburn Street, as approved

Sample Project: 7-9 Gibson Street

- Project Date: 2016
- Proposal requested restoration of front addition to porches, a new Mansard roof with bracketed cornice, and altered window openings.



7-9 Gibson Street, existing conditions, 2016

Sample Project: 7-9 Gibson Street

- Commission was generally supportive of proposed porch renovation and alteration of windows on side elevation.
- Change in style from Queen Anne to Second Empire was deemed inappropriate in context of district goals and guidelines.
- Roof change – Denied.
- Windows and porch alterations- approved later.



7-9 Gibson Street, original proposal.

Sample Project: 7-9 Gibson Street



7-9 Gibson Street, proposals for accessory structure



7-9 Gibson Street, as completed

2024

Half Crown-Marsh Demographics

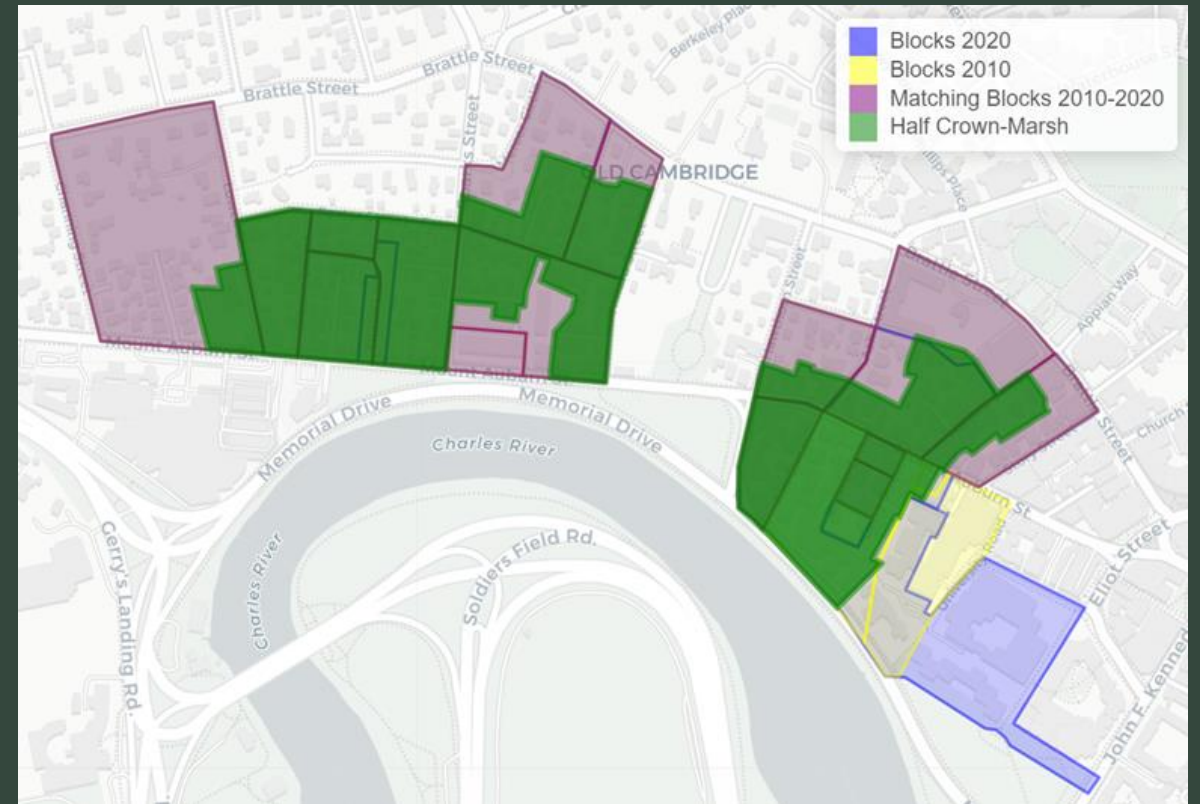
- Decennial Review also requests
 - "Information about any demographic changes or other major changes that occurred within the district over the previous decade."
- Cambridge Community Development Department (CDD) staff assisted with analyzing data from two sources:
 - Census Blocks
 - Assessing Data



12-20 Hilliard Street

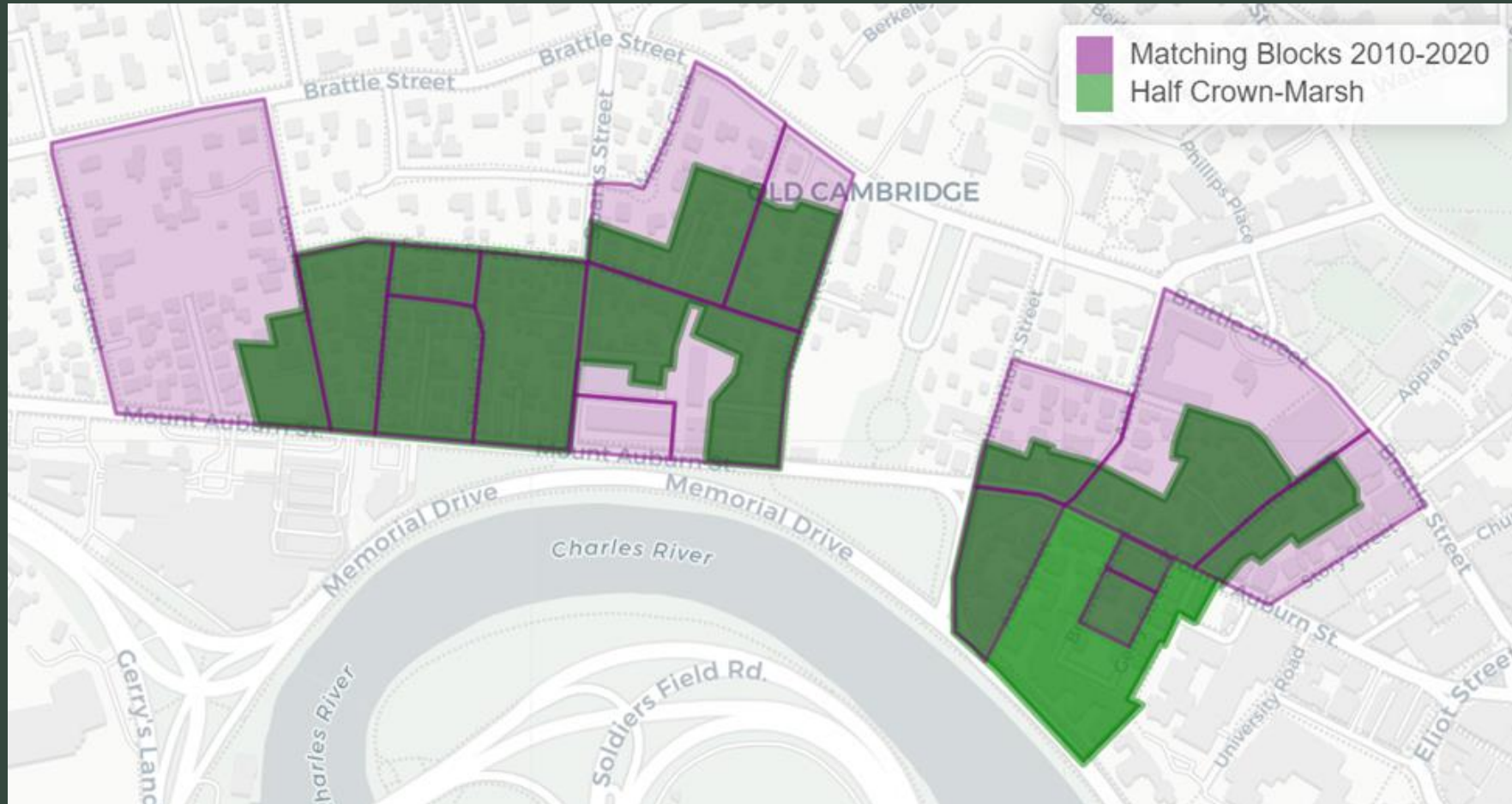
HCM District Demographics: Census

- HCM district is small, and its boundaries do not follow Census geography lines.
 - Challenges for detailed demographic analysis via Census Block data.
 - CDD Demographics study excludes a couple Blocks on the southeast side that do overlap with the NCD but also include some larger buildings that are not part of the NCD and could skew the results.



Census Blocks that intersect the NCD

HCM District Demographics: Census



Census Blocks used for analysis

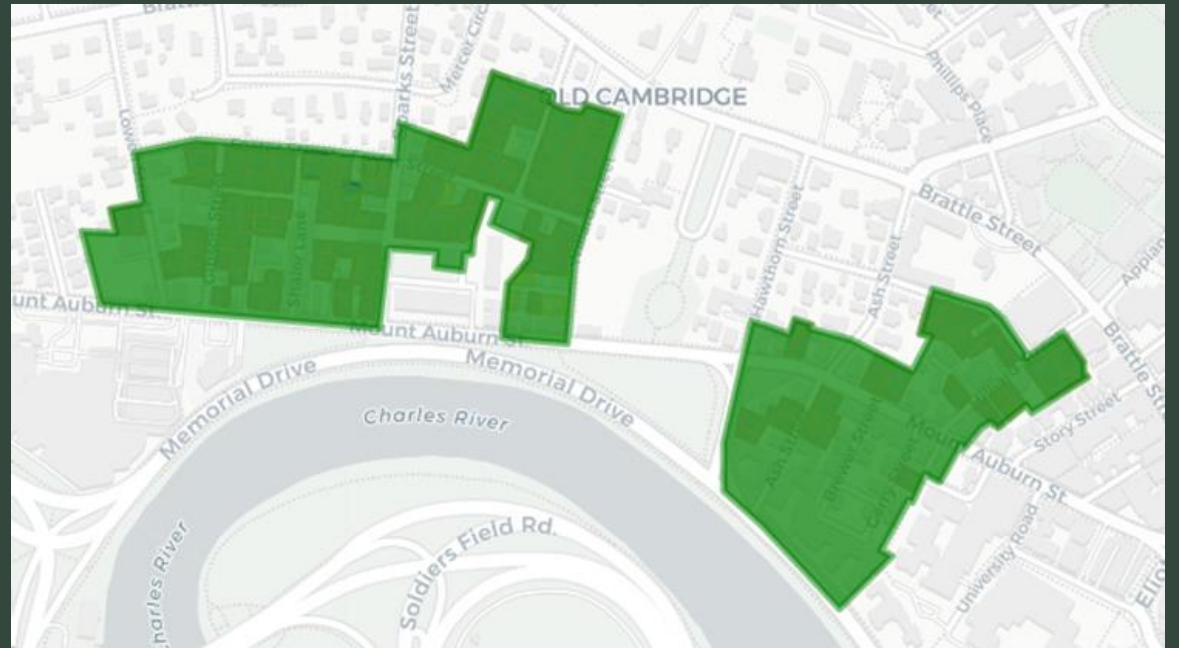
HCM District Demographics: Census

Statistic	Census 2010	Census 2020
Housing Units	633	714
Occupied Housing Units	568	610
Renter Occupied	249	289
Owner Occupied	319	321
Population	1,073	1,239
Population Under 18	125	139
Population 65+	283	379
White Alone Population	999	982
Black or African American Alone Population	43	36
Asian Alone Population	114	133
Hispanic Population	62	66

“Given the small study area and the unknown influence of data privacy measures, we cannot draw strong conclusions from the Census data. The relatively large change in housing units is more likely to be due to inclusion of one or more apartment buildings in 2020 that were not included in 2010, or due to these buildings being “relocated” for data privacy purposes.”

HCM District Demographics: Assessing Data

- The City Assessor provides property data going back to FY2016
- We can use this data to study changes in use and assessed values in the NCD at the parcel level.
 - 100% overlap of HCM district boundary
- CDD study analyzes Assessed Properties: 2016, 2020, 2024



Half Crown-Marsh NCD District

HCM District Demographics: Assessing Data

Statistic	FY2016	FY2020	FY2024
Parcels	225	224	224
Buildings	226	226	226
Total Assessed Value	\$525,487,400	\$964,648,100	\$1,175,440,000
Average Assessed Value	\$2,335,500	\$4,306,465	\$5,247,500
Average Assessed Value of Single-Family Homes	\$849,363	\$1,168,152	\$1,480,496
Single Family Homes	130	133	133
Single Family Homes w/Auxiliary Apartment	6	6	6
Two-Family Homes	16	14	14
Three-Family Homes	13	11	11
4-8 Unit Apartment Buildings	4	4	4
8+ Unit Apartment Buildings	1	1	1
Condo Units	226	225	225
Condo Buildings	28	29	29
Owner-Occupied Properties	234	239	217

- The data from the property database shows minimal change in the NCD over the period from FY2016 – FY2024, except for the doubling of the assessed value of the properties (values are not adjusted for inflation).
- A small number of buildings were altered to reduce the number of units in those buildings.
 - Three two-family buildings were converted into single family homes.
 - One three-family building was converted into a two-family.
 - One three-family building was converted into a single family.

*HCM Commission never regulates/reviews building use or number of units.

Questions?

Decennial Review Report

- <https://www.cambridgema.gov/historic>
 - Districts & Historic Properties
 - Half Crown-Marsh NCD

The screenshot displays the Cambridge Historical Commission website. The header features the commission's logo and name, along with navigation links for Calendar, Map Gallery, CHC Blog, Image Gallery, and CambridgeMA.GOV. A search bar is also present. The main navigation menu includes 'PERMITS & APPLICATIONS', 'DISTRICTS & HISTORIC PROPERTIES' (highlighted with a red circle), 'ABOUT CHC', 'CAMBRIDGE HISTORY', and 'RESEARCH AIDS'.

The 'DISTRICTS & HISTORIC PROPERTIES' page content includes:

- A sidebar with a list of districts, where 'Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District' is circled in red.
- Main text explaining that Cambridge has two Historic Districts and four Neighborhood Conservation Districts (NCDs).
- Information about preservation easements and landmark designation.
- A note that all demolition permit applications must be reviewed by staff and may require a hearing.
- A mention of the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).
- A prompt to check an address using the MyCambridge tool or call 617-349-4683.
- A 'Frequently Downloaded' list containing links to project plans, historic districts brochure, neighborhood conservation districts brochure, landmarks brochure, window guidelines, local ordinances, and economic impacts of historic preservation.
- A 'Frequently Asked Questions about Districts' section.

The right sidebar, titled 'How Can We Help You?', includes dropdown menus for 'I'd like to...', 'Learn about...', and 'Choose a District...'. Below this is the 'myCambridge' logo and a 'Contact Us' section for Charles M. Sullivan, Executive Director, with his contact information and address.

Decennial Review Report

- <https://www.cambridgema.gov/historic>
 - Districts & Historic Properties
 - Half Crown-Marsh NCD

A recent amendment to Article 2.78 of the Municipal Code, the enabling ordinance which governs the Neighborhood Conservation Districts, has required routine decennial reviews of all said districts. The 10-year report will include a study of neighborhood demographics and any trends, a summary of the activities of the NCD over the previous decade, and guidance on recommended changes to the boundaries, guidelines, and/or procedures of the NCD, if there are any.

The Half Crown-Marsh NCD Commission is made up of volunteer neighborhood residents of varied backgrounds who collectively review building permits and applications for a Certificate of Appropriateness for new construction, demolitions, and certain alterations to publicly visible facades in the district. The commission does not review most repairs, paint colors, building use, or interior alterations. Since January 1, 2013, the Half Crown Commission and/or CHC Staff has reviewed 462 applications. Of these 462 applications, 96.9% (449) were granted Certificates of Appropriateness, Non-Applicability or Hardship, and were approved.

A public meeting was held on May 20th via Zoom where CHC staff presented slides and a history on the last ten years of work by the Commission. The slideshow can be found [here](#).

The Draft Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD) Preliminary Decennial Review Report can be found [here](#). We solicit questions, comments, and feedback on the report and can include letters as an addendum to the report.

To stay up to date on the Decennial Review process or to reach out with questions or comments regarding the district and its review, contact Eric Hill at ehill@cambridgema.gov

Decennial Review Report

Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD) Preliminary Decennial Review Report



By: Eric Hill, Survey Director, and
Charles Sullivan, Executive Director
Cambridge Historical Commission

August 28, 2024

Commissioners:

Marie-Pierre Dillenseger, Chair; Aaron Kemp, Vice Chair.

Ruby Booz, Peter Schur, Jo Solet, Members; Donna Marcantonio, James Van Sickle,
Alternates.

- I. Introduction
- II. History and Establishment of the Half Crown-Marsh NCD
- III. Current Conditions of Half Crown-Marsh NCD
 - a. Present Boundaries of Half Crown-Marsh NCD
 - b. Membership of Half Crown-Marsh NCD Commission
 - c. Objectives and Principles for the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District
- IV. Summary of Activities of Half Crown - Marsh NCD Commission: 2014-2024
 - a. Summary of Cases 2014-2024
 - b. Example Cases 2014-2024
- V. Demographic and Housing Analysis
 - a. Demographics Study
 - b. Housing Study
 - c. Other Comparisons
- VI. Guidance on Changes to HCM NCD and Neighborhood Discussion
- VII. Assessment on Diversity and Representation in HCM NCD
- VIII. Conclusion
- IX. Appendix
 - a. Map of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District
 - b. Order Establishing the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District
 - c. Guidelines for Infill Construction and Substantial Additions or Alterations
 - d. CDD Analysis of Half Crown-Marsh Demographics and Housing
 - e. Correspondence Received from the Public Regarding the Decennial Review of the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District

Next Steps:

- ✓ • Monday, August 26:
 - Draft Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Preliminary Decennial Review Report posted, mailing on Sept HCM hearing and walking tour sent to all owners.
- ✓ • Saturday, September 7:
 - Walking tour highlighting 10 years of commission review/projects, discussion
- ✓ • Monday, September 9:
 - HCM meeting to review report, provide comments, edits. Make recommendation.
- Thursday, September 12:
 - Cambridge Historical Commission reviews HCM NCD Preliminary Report, sends recommendation to City Council.
- Late September:
 - City Council receives report.
 - “No later than three months following the end of the year in which the NCD was subject to review, the City Council shall adopt an order either to re-approve of the NCD (with or without changes), discontinue the NCD, or establish a Study Committee to consider deeper changes related to district boundaries, guidelines, and procedures.”

Half Crown-Marsh NCD Commission Motion

As Adopted, September 9, 2024

The Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission finds that:

WHEREAS, the Half Crown Neighborhood Conservation District and the Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District were established pursuant to Article III of Chapter 2.78 of the City Code by orders of the City Council dated April 9, 1984, and December 18, 2000, respectively and consolidated into the Half Crown-Marsh HCM Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD) on July 30, 2007; and

WHEREAS, consistent with the provisions of Section 2.78.280 of the City Code relative to amendments to neighborhood conservation districts, and a newly required Decennial Review, the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission and Cambridge Historical Commission staff have conducted a review of the NCD; and

WHEREAS, a draft Preliminary Decennial Review Report has analyzed the current commission membership, district boundaries, guidelines, and procedures of the Half Crown-Marsh NCD, a summary of the activities of the NCD over the previous decade, and a study on the demographics and housing in the district; and...

Half Crown-Marsh NCD Commission Motion

As Adopted, September 9, 2024

...WHEREAS the Commission held several public hearings and a walking tour to discuss the Half Crown-Marsh NCD with residents and property owners within its boundaries to gauge public support or opposition to the district and its present jurisdiction and procedures; and

WHEREAS the membership of the Half Crown-Marsh NCD Commission is representative of residents owning property and residing within the district and represent a wide range of expertise in the review process for cases; and

WHEREAS the Half Crown-Marsh Commission has balanced the development of its constituent neighborhoods and contributed significantly to their quality of life without impeding necessary housing rehabilitation and modernization, and has never denied projects that would result in new housing units in the district; therefore;

The Commission reaffirms the existing Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District without modifications, as originally established by the City Council on July 30, 2007.

Questions, Comments & Discussion

Eric Hill

ehill@cambridgema.gov