

**MID CAMBRIDGE
NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT
DRAFT PRELIMINARY DECENNIAL REVIEW REPORT**



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SUMMARY

This report constitutes a decennial review of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission, as required by Chapter 2.78.280 of the Cambridge Municipal Code.

Neighborhood conservation districts (NCDs) are created in Cambridge to conserve the character of the built environment in architecturally and historically significant areas of the city. The districts recognize the particular historic and architectural qualities of neighborhoods and encourage their protection and maintenance for the benefit of the entire community. NCD commissions accomplish this by reviewing applications for building permits for new construction, demolition, and alterations that are visible from a public way. Most applications are approved administratively, but cases that involve demolition, new construction, large additions, and alterations such as replacement windows and new window or door openings on publicly visible facades require a public hearing. Commissioners, CHC staff, and applicants discuss proposed projects and how they align with district goals and objectives. Review of permit applications by CHC staff provides an opportunity to speak with homeowners and offer advice as to preservation and restoration options.

The Mid Cambridge district is roughly bordered by Prospect Street to the east, Prescott Street to the west, Kirkland Street and the Somerville city line to the north, and Massachusetts Avenue to the south. The designation protects approximately 1,300 properties, including many significant residential, commercial, public, and institutional buildings constructed in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Designated by the City Council in 1985, Mid Cambridge is the largest of four NCDs in Cambridge.

Between January 1, 2015, and December 31, 2025, the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission or Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC) staff reviewed 2,785 building permit applications. The vast majority, totaling 2,532, were approved administratively. Of the applications that went to the Commission for review, sixty were granted binding Certificates of Appropriateness, 153 were granted non-binding Certificates of Appropriateness. The 47 non-binding denials and two binding denials involved the removal of original architectural features such as original porch trim, doors, or windows.

The adoption of amendments in 2023 limiting the Commission's authority over the size and shape of new construction and additions caused great confusion among commissioners about their role in a changing regulatory environment. The adoption of multifamily zoning in 2025 brought a spate of new projects, all of which were eventually approved. By late 2026 all but one of the commissioners had been appointed within the previous twelve months, bringing fresh energy and dedication to the body.

The actions of the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission have enhanced the unique character of the district by conserving the architectural qualities of buildings and their settings while allowing necessary changes. The Commission's review of development projects has not limited new housing construction or arbitrarily hindered property owners' desires for upgrades. Since the multifamily zoning amendments were adopted in February 2025, four 6-story development projects have been approved by the Commission. Two of these involved complete demolition in favor of new construction and two preserved significant buildings, allowing six-story rear additions as new construction. All four proponents responded positively to Commission recommendations as well as neighbors' concerns raised at well-attended hearings. The review process results in projects that better reflect the character of the neighborhood while providing much-needed housing in new and rehabilitated buildings. Overall, these approved projects represent approximately 165 new units and 90,000 GFA of construction in Mid Cambridge since the multifamily housing zoning amendments were adopted.

This report recommends renewal of the Mid Cambridge NCD Order through adoption of an updated Council Order, as discussed in Part VI and included as Appendix C. Recommended amendments include transferring non-binding reviews to staff; ensuring timely review by limiting the number of potential subcommittee meetings; and closer coordination with the Community Development Department reviews.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Historic preservation and zoning are legislative initiatives that serve the public interest by regulating the built environment. The objective of historic preservation (and neighborhood conservation) is to protect buildings and neighborhoods from inappropriate alterations or destruction. The purpose of zoning, on the other hand, is to protect property interests by regulating land use, density, and bulk. Both zoning and preservation operate through municipal boards, but while preservation is qualitative, zoning is quantitative.

Historic preservation in the United States has evolved from an early desire to protect buildings and sites associated with the great men and events of the Revolutionary period to an appreciation of more recent periods of American architecture and urban development, including the relatively recent past and vernacular residential, commercial and industrial architecture.

In Cambridge, attitudes toward preservation have mirrored the national experience. The first four historic districts were enacted in 1963, to protect the landmarks of the American Revolution. When these were linked in 1976, the resulting Old Cambridge Historic District added dozens of significant houses from all periods of American architecture. Enactment of a demolition delay ordinance in 1979 gave the Cambridge Historical Commission authority to temporarily protect preferably preserved significant buildings more than fifty years old.

The unbridled climate of development in the 1970s threatened several neighborhoods near Harvard Square. Neighborhood activists desired protection from overdevelopment but could not gain the necessary zoning amendments. Historic districts at that time were associated with elitist attitudes and strict controls, and some proponents desired a more flexible regulatory tool that could be overseen by neighborhood residents, rather than a citywide commission.

The central theory of the neighborhood conservation district concept was that protection efforts should be tailored to the nature of the area. Some neighborhoods, like Tory Row, are nationally significant for their architecture and associations with American history, which justified protecting the publicly visible features of every individual house – including paint colors - to the greatest extent possible. In neighborhoods composed of vernacular buildings where the whole could be considered greater than the sum of the parts, protection efforts could focus on the form and massing of structures, rather than their details.

In Cambridge, "neighborhood conservation" encompassed the natural resources concept of "wise use." "Preserving" a resource (in this case, a neighborhood) meant maintaining and defending it in every practical way, while "conserving" it meant allowing reasonable changes. By analogy, historic districts resemble national parks, where great efforts are made to protect every significant feature, while NCDs resemble national forests, which are managed as sustainable environments, and changes are permitted as long as the integrity of the greater ecosystem is maintained.

In 1981, the City Council responded to community concerns by adopting what is now Chapter 2.78, Article III of the City Code, by which the City Council is authorized to designate NCDs by Council Orders, based upon the recommendations of the Cambridge Historical Commission and the findings of an investigation and report conducted by a study committee. The Ordinance decentralized the protection of significant neighborhoods in Cambridge in a manner beyond that authorized in the Historic Districts Act, MGL Chapter 40C. To do so, the drafters relied upon Cambridge's "home rule" authority under the Massachusetts Constitution but found a precedent in Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975, the act establishing the Boston Landmarks Commission. This act authorized the City of Boston to designate architectural conservation districts, protection areas, and protected landmarks. Ch. 2.78, Article III drew on Chapter 772 for many concepts and definitions, but wherever practicable also drew from the language of Chapter 40C, adapting procedures and authority designed for historic districts to the new task of decentralizing neighborhood protection under NCD procedures.

As currently stated, the purposes of Article III are:

...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 ... 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 (as amended 2023).

NCD commissions consist of seven members and three alternates. Members are to have “demonstrable knowledge and concern for improvement, conservation and enhancement of the district,” and at least one “training or experience in historical preservation, architecture, and/or a similar field” (Ch. 2.78.160.A). Members may be appointed to no more than two consecutive three-year terms.

NCD commissions typically schedule monthly public hearings. Following the procedures in the ordinance and the goals and guidelines in the Order enacting the district, the NCD commission may grant certificates of appropriateness, non-applicability, or hardship, as the circumstances allow:

A Certificate **of Non-Applicability** may be issued for work which matches existing conditions, interior alterations, alterations not visible from a public way, and any other work which does not require review by the NCD commission. These certificates are generally issued by the Historical Commission staff.

A Certificate **of Appropriateness** may be issued for reviewable alterations, construction or demolition which the neighborhood conservation district commission deems not incongruous to the character of the building.

A Certificate **of Hardship** may be issued for work which is not otherwise appropriate if the Commission determines that failure to approve an application would entail a substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, and that the work would not be a significant detriment to the district.

Appeals from decisions of the NCD commission may be made by an applicant or by ten registered voters of the City. The initial appeal is made to the Cambridge Historical Commission and must be initiated within twenty days after the filing of the notice of a determination with the City Clerk. “The Historical Commission may overrule the determination and return it for reconsideration consistent with that finding. If the applicant is aggrieved by the determination of the Historical Commission, or if action is not taken by the Historical Commission within thirty days of filing for review, the applicant may appeal to the superior court” (Ch. 2.78.240).

Following the enactment of the enabling ordinance in 1981, the City Council adopted the Half Crown NCD in 1984, the Mid Cambridge NCD in 1985, the Avon Hill NCD in 1998, and the Marsh NCD and the Harvard Square Conservation District in 2000. (The Half Crown and Marsh NCDs were consolidated in 2007.) Although each district was motivated by concerns unique to the neighborhood, protection from over-development was paramount. The Half Crown NCD was established to regulate demolition and new construction, while the Mid Cambridge NCD initially sought to control infill development from townhouse developments, and to protect buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 2023, Chapter 2.78 was amended to require a decennial review of each existing NCD, with the Mid Cambridge NCD due for review in 2026. Section 2.78.280 (B) states that

The Historical Commission with other relevant City departments will present a report to the City Council no later than September 30 of the year in which review is scheduled to occur. The report shall contain:

1. Summary of current NCD membership, boundaries, guidelines, and procedures.
2. Summary of the activities of the NCD over the previous decade including (but not limited to) a list of any cases in which an application was outright rejected as well as relevant and instructive examples of cases in which applications were approved or approved with modifications.
3. Information about any demographic changes or other major changes that occurred within the district over the previous decade.
4. Guidance on recommended changes to the boundaries, guidelines, and/or procedures of the NCD, if there are any.
5. Assessment of progress toward achieving diversity and representation goals for the NCD.

Section 2.78.280 (B) further states,

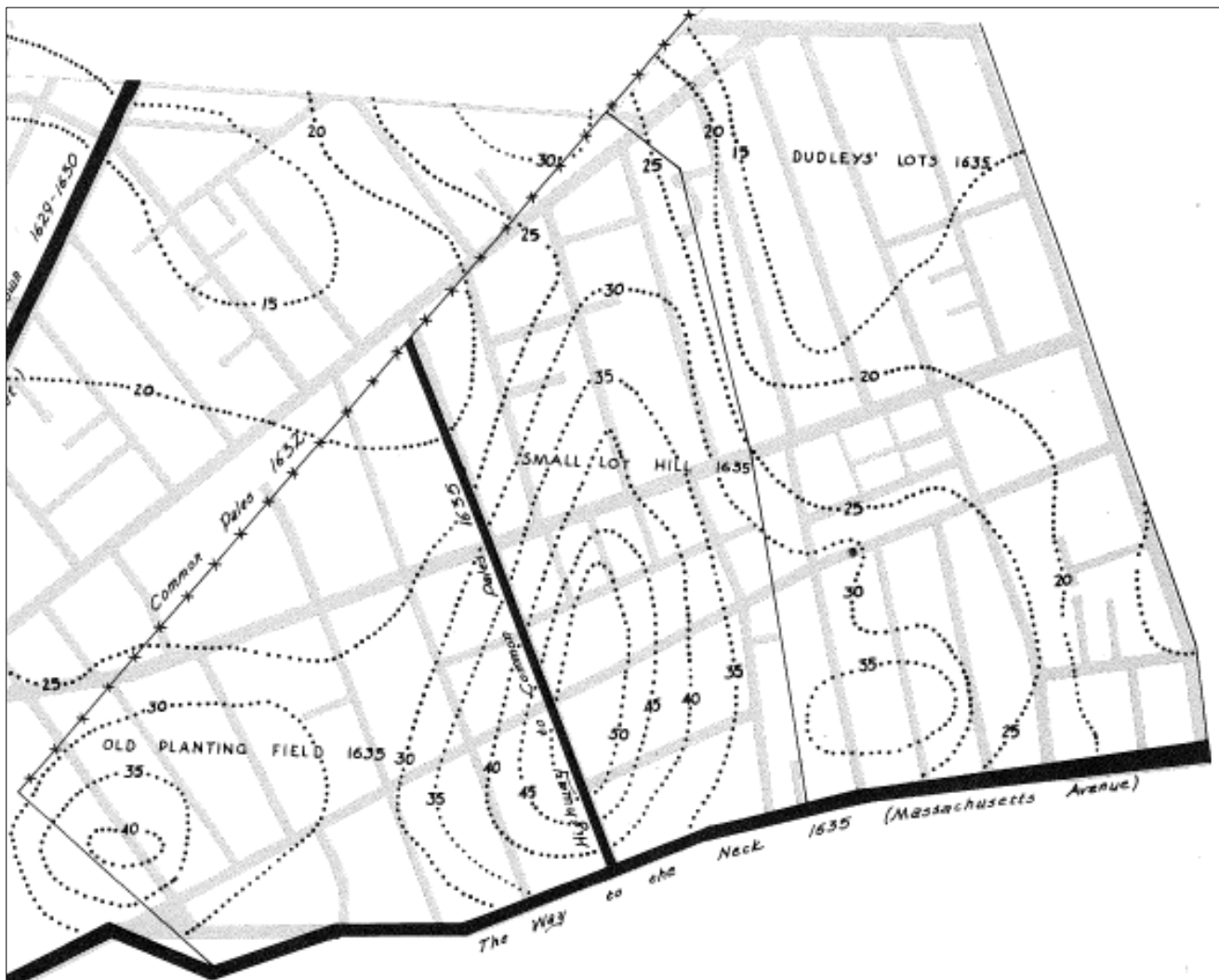
No later than three months following the end of the year in which the NCD was subject to review, the City Council shall adopt an order either to re-approve of the NCD (with or without changes), discontinue the NCD, or establish a Study Committee to consider deeper changes related to district boundaries, guidelines, and procedures.

This report summarizes the history of the Mid Cambridge neighborhood, the conditions that led up to the establishment of the NCD in 1983, and the early activities of the Commission, and reviews the activities of the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission during the years 2015-2025.

II. History of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood and the Establishment of the Mid Cambridge NCD

The Mid Cambridge neighborhood is bracketed by three squares: Harvard Square, Cambridge's original village and academic center; Inman Square, a modest neighborhood shopping district; and Central Square, Cambridge's traditional downtown and municipal center. Massachusetts Avenue, Kirkland Street, Beacon Street and Prospect Street surround the neighborhood, while Broadway is a main thoroughfare. The district includes the city's public library and high school as well as two major hospitals in a dense matrix of 19th century suburban homes, early 20th century three-deckers and apartment buildings, and mid-century townhouses and high-rise apartments. The multi-layered urban character of the district, which has been carefully managed by the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission since 1985, has features from almost every period of Cambridge history.

The geography of Mid Cambridge is dominated by Dana Hill, running north and south from Massachusetts Avenue to Washington Street in Somerville. Lying near the original settlement at Harvard Square, this area was cultivated within a few years of settlement. The topography influenced the location of pathways that evolved into Massachusetts Avenue and Kirkland Street as well as later development.



Topography and Early Land Use in Mid Cambridge

As Cambridge became wealthier during the 18th century, the small farming strips originally allotted to settlers were gradually assembled into large estates, whose boundaries over the years determined the location of streets and sub-neighborhoods. The toll bridges built from Kendall Square and East Cambridge to Boston in 1793 and

In the 18th century members of the Colonial elite transformed several farms into elegant country seats with mansions surrounded by landscaped gardens. Ralph Inman, a West Indian planter and Loyalist, built a mansion on Inman Street in 1756. Patriot Francis Dana built a mansion in 1785 atop Dana Hill. While Dana's heirs developed his land systematically, Inman's was broken up and sold piecemeal. Fortifications that were erected on Dana Hill during the Siege of Boston were obliterated by later development but may remain as archeological sites.

1793-1912

After the completion of the West Boston Bridge, Main Street, Harvard Street, and Broadway opened the large estates to speculation. Three factors determined the suburban nature of subsequent development in Mid Cambridge: its proximity to established urban centers; the new roads linking the centers, and the growth of transportation systems along these roads. Although the conditions necessary for the development of Mid Cambridge as a suburb existed by 1810, extensive construction did not occur until the middle of the century. Estates were sold in parcels that were then laid out with short streets and house lots; only a few sections of the large eighteenth-century holdings remained as small semi-rural estates until late in the nineteenth century.



View of Boston from Memorial Hall, 1875, looking toward Ellery Street with Cambridge Street at left. The large open field was slated for development until Frederick Rindge gifted it to the city along with a new library and technical school (now the site of CRLS)

Construction was sporadic, but the presence of the main thoroughfares imposed a pattern upon the new side streets, which were cut through straight and parallel to each other between the main avenues. Deed restrictions also controlled development. Starting with the sale of the Dana land, restrictions often specified setbacks and minimum costs and always prohibited commerce and trade in any form. These restrictions, sometimes covering large areas but occasionally applicable to only two or three houses in a row, were an early form of zoning.

Development in Mid Cambridge around the turn of the twentieth century was characterized by the subdivision of

several substantial properties on the main thoroughfares and construction of three deckers and apartment houses. In the late 1880s, Frederick Hastings Rindge took an enormous undeveloped parcel off the market and donated it to the city as a site for a main library and technical high school. The first few apartment houses were built as private dormitories near the Harvard campus in the 1890s. Electrification of the streetcar lines beginning in 1889 stimulated construction of multifamily buildings along Massachusetts Avenue, while the possibility of a Dana Hill station on the Cambridge subway (completed in 1912) probably influenced investors to construct Burton Hall on Dana Street in 1909.

1912-1981

The electrification of street railways in 1889 and the completion of the Cambridge Subway in 1912 stimulated multifamily construction in many parts of the city. Cambridge's population grew from 70,000 in 1890 to almost 110,000 in 1920. The growing interest in city planning coupled with concern about densification and the uncontrolled growth of industry led to the adoption of Cambridge's first zoning ordinance in 1924.

The zoning history of Mid Cambridge has largely reflected perceptions of the neighborhood's highest and best uses. The 1924 zoning code placed Mid Cambridge in a district which permitted "dwellings, hotels, clubs, churches, schools, philanthropic institutions ... with customary incidental accessory uses including garage for not more than two cars." The ordinance allowed four story buildings up to 60' high with 5' side and rear setbacks and at least 25' from the center of the street. Many were designed in a U or H shape footprint, creating courtyards that provided air and light to the units. Such buildings were invariably built of brick in a vaguely Georgian Style with minimal architectural detailing.



John Alden Apartments, 285 Harvard Street (1929, Frank H. Bignotti, architect) Buildings like this were planned so every apartment occupied a corner to maximize light and air for the occupants

During the Depression attitudes toward older neighborhoods changed. The revised 1943 zoning code, adopted in anticipation of post-war growth, allowed multi-family dwellings, apartment houses, lodging houses, dormitories, group dwellings, and hotels along the Broadway and Harvard Street corridors, and allowed the area's unfashionable Victorian houses to be cut up into rooms and small apartments. Permissible heights were raised to 65' or six stories. Streets south of Harvard Street and north of Broadway had a 2 ½-story, 35' height limit, consistent with existing density. Little or no new construction occurred under the 1943 code, but the allowance of multi-family

conversions reflected the lower value placed on urban living and Victorian houses during this period.

The zoning code adopted in 1962 reflected both negative Modernist attitudes toward traditional urban neighborhoods and the city's increasing desperation during the postwar urban crisis. Mid Cambridge was divided into several new districts. A 35' height limit was retained on many of the side streets, but districts allowing up to 85' with a Floor-Area-Ratio (FAR) of 1.75 were established along the corridors while the area nearest Harvard Yard was allowed an FAR of 3.0 and unlimited height. The relaxed height and density limitations almost immediately brought forth the five-story apartment building at 345 Harvard Street, the seven-story building at 334 Harvard Street, and the ten-story Harvard Towers at 295 Harvard Street, all of which replaced significant early houses. The most prevalent examples of new construction, however, were the much more easily constructed three- and four-story "pillbox" apartment buildings that replaced many single-family houses during the 1970s. These were typically built to conform exactly to the zoning envelope and were widely derided for their lack of character. The 1962 code proved to be as controversial in Mid Cambridge as elsewhere in Cambridge, and by the early 1980s the City Council had downzoned some blocks to more restrictive levels.



329 Harvard Street, built in 1849, demolished in 1966 for a new apartment building.



5 Centre Street, built 1843, demolished 1969, new apartment building constructed in 1970.

In 1976, Cambridge enacted a Townhouse Development Ordinance to encourage the construction of owner-occupied, attached housing units. The ordinance was intended to promote a more compatible form than the prevalent pillbox apartment buildings, but many of the new townhouses were designed without any connection to the neighborhood context and resulted in the demolition of several architecturally significant residences. Residents

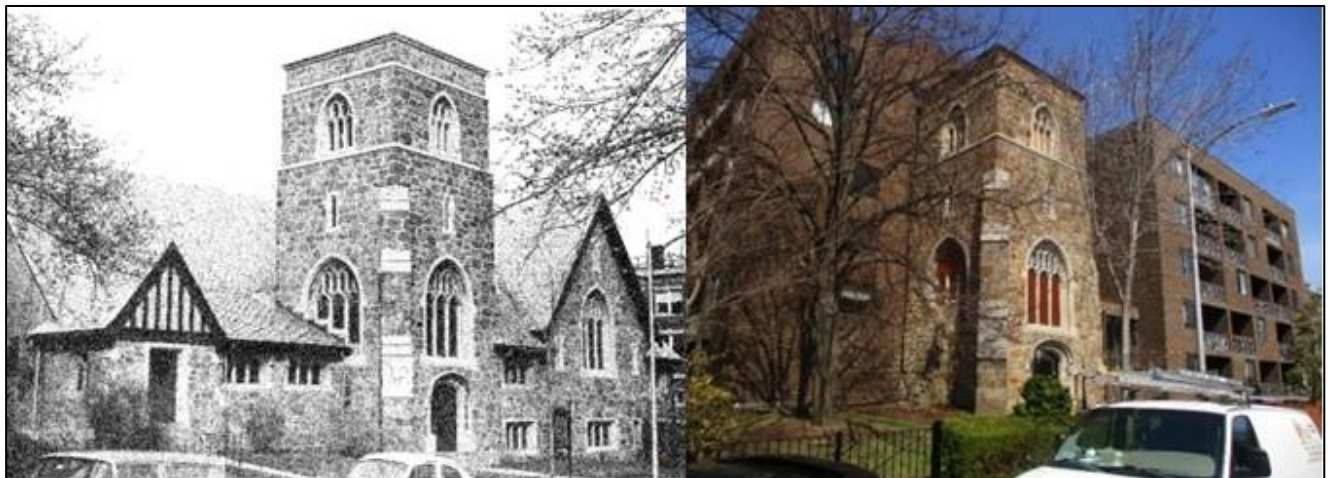
saw the increased density, relaxed lot width, yard setbacks, and height requirements, and the absence of any design review as detrimental to the neighborhood.

In 1977, a proposed 9-unit townhouse development on Irving Street sparked strong objections from neighbors who not only felt the design was out of character for the neighborhood, but also claimed it violated the townhouse ordinance, specifically the inclusion of 25 feet or more of continuous curb cut. The neighbors were upset about the demolition of a significant Victorian structure and the proposed parking lot in front of the units. They urged the developer to locate the parking behind the units, out of sight from the street. The developer ultimately integrated the parking with the units below grade. This was a major victory by citizen pressure when neither the Planning Board nor the Historical Commission had the ability to perform design review.



36 Irving Street, 1873 house demolished for the construction of 9 townhouses, 1977.

The Townhouse Development Ordinance was amended in 1978. According to the *Cambridge Chronicle*, the “City Council considered changes in the zoning law designed to ensure that townhouse development causes minimal disruption to the city’s older neighborhoods. Planning Board seeks to encourage townhouses over block-like small apartment structures, sometimes referred to as ‘Arlington pillboxes,’ including the requirement that the Planning Board review all major townhouse developments of 6 or more units in Res. B zones, and 12 or more units in C-1 will be reviewed by the Planning Board.”



Third Congregational Society, 321 Harvard Street (1911, Newhall & Blevins, architects) mostly demolished for Stone Tower Apartments (1974, Architects Design Group).

1981-2026

In 1981, the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Association, which at the time had 500 members, petitioned the city to initiate an NCD study for the area. The Mid Cambridge NCD Study Committee was appointed by the City Manager following the acceptance of a petition of ten registered voters by the Historical Commission.

The Study Committee Report stated that the purpose of the NCD would be to “provide a means by which the residents and property owners of Mid Cambridge, together with the city government, can influence the nature of change in the physical character of the neighborhood. It is recognized that Mid Cambridge can and should change and evolve. The purpose of the NCD is not to arrest change, much of which is desirable, but rather to influence it for the best interests of the neighborhood.”

The task of the Study Committee was to define the visual character of the neighborhood and then establish guidelines that would make it possible to conserve and enhance the neighborhood while allowing and often encouraging specific changes to take place. By character was meant the physical character--the buildings, streets and spaces, textures and details, green spaces, and vistas of Mid Cambridge as they were visible to the public. The character of Mid Cambridge was also considered to include the neighborhood's social and cultural diversity. However, it was to its visible appearance that the NCD was primarily addressed.

One of the major purposes of the Mid Cambridge NCD was to encourage new construction or alteration to be harmonious with the street or streets on which it is located. Beyond these specific relationships, there is, however, a more general character. Mid Cambridge is a neighborhood of great diversity in its physical appearance, a mixture of three-deckers and large and small single houses and apartment buildings, of brick and wood clapboard and shingle, of flat roofs and pitched roofs. The diversity is close-grained and is a basic part of the character of the neighborhood.

The neighborhoods of Mid Cambridge also consist of many private backyards, driveways, tree-shaded streets, porches, detached houses with light on four sides, a pedestrian scale, and other amenities. The tightly packed but separate dwellings that tend to dominate most of Mid Cambridge are part of its character and, in many ways, are felt by the neighborhood to be an advantage as a living pattern over both higher- and lower-density alternatives.

Mid Cambridge in general is a neighborhood of a particular time, from the middle of the nineteenth century up to the start of the Great Depression. It has examples of most of the architectural styles of this period--Greek Revival, Italianate, Mansard, Queen Anne, and Colonial Revival being among them. Thus, despite the great diversity, there is a coherent time frame to the neighborhood.

In 1985, the City Council voted to designate the Mid Cambridge NCD and authorized the City Manager to appoint a commission of five members and three alternates. The initial Order included both binding and non-binding reviews.

Non-binding, or advisory, reviews extended to exterior alterations to existing listed National Register structures, and structures containing or proposed to contain conforming non-residential uses, specifically:

- The alteration is visible from a public street; and
- The alterations involve significant changes in bay windows, cornice, fascia boards below the cornice, including gutter and trim detail, porches, cornerboards, window and door casings, skylights covering more than 1/3 of the visible roof area, all signs except home-occupation signs.

Binding reviews extended to the following:

- Demolition of 33% or more of the floor area of a structure not originally used to garage automobiles;
- New construction of more than 750 sf of floor area, including additions to existing structures;
- New construction of structure on more than 33% of the lot area not already occupied by structures;
- Enlargement of the floor area of an existing structure by more than 33%;

- relocation of an existing structure onto or off of a site;
- Any alteration or construction of a structure containing or proposed to contain non-conforming uses.
- Publicly owned structures

In February 1988, the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission adopted a set of guidelines still in effect titled “Guidelines for Determining the Appropriateness of Proposed Construction” (see Appendix D). The guidelines direct the Commission to consider all applications in terms of the impact on the District as a whole and on the surrounding properties and immediate streetscape. The guidelines take the form of questions that the Commission would ask of all proposed construction projects. The categories include Scope of Work, Development Characteristics, Landscaping, Aesthetic Considerations, and Impact on Neighborhood.

In 1992, the City Council voted to amend the NCD Order to allow more neighborhood input. Advisory, or non-binding, reviews were now required for alterations, including:

- Construction of between 150 and 750 square feet of floor area;
- Exterior alterations that require a variance or special permit;
- Removal or alteration of original decorative elements on a building;
- Changing window and door size;
- Changing roof pitch or configuration.

In addition, alterations to the 103 district properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places became subject to binding review.

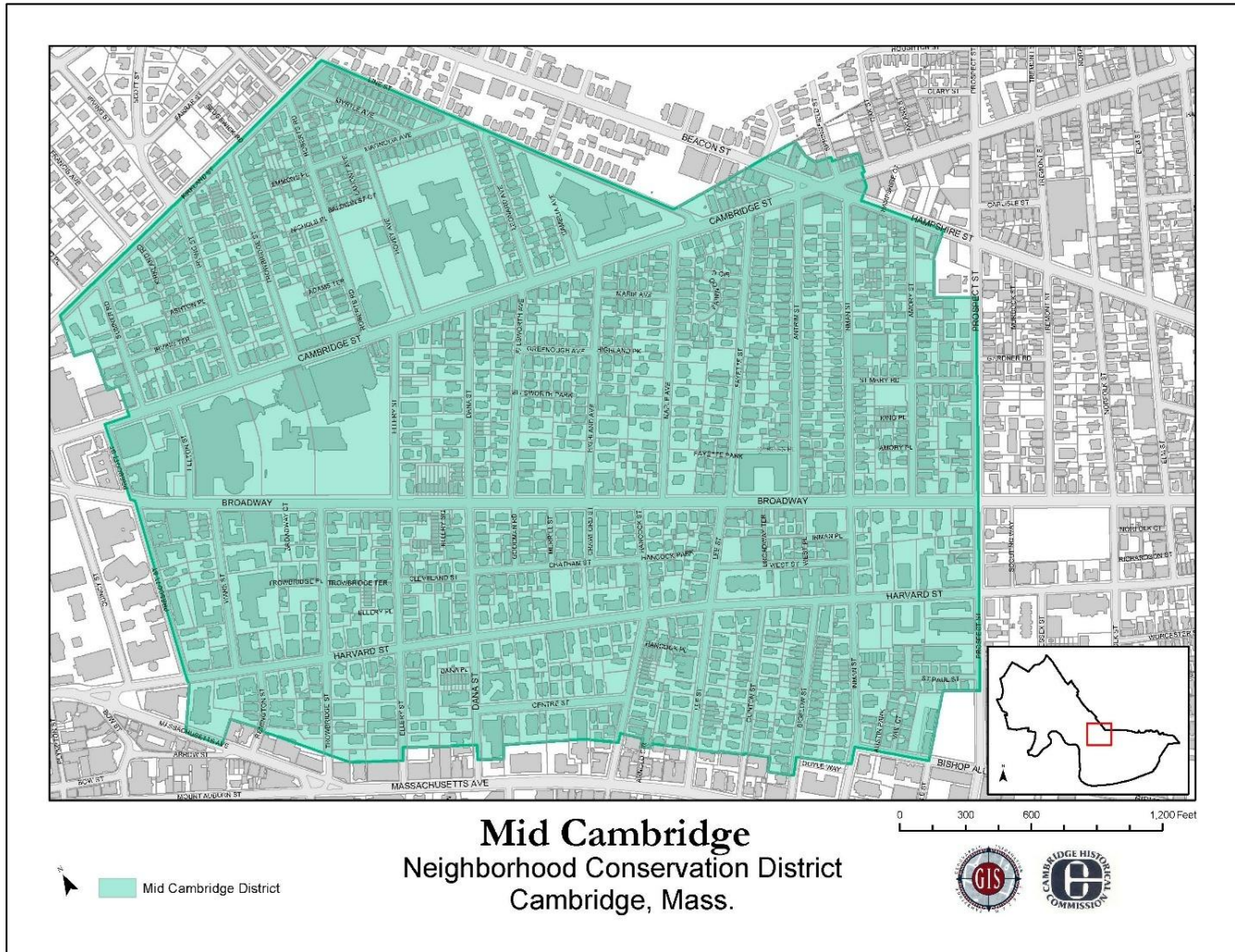
In 2023, the City Council adopted amendments to the enabling ordinance for landmarks and neighborhood conservation district commissions and voted to approve the following changes affecting NCD commissions:

- Amended purpose statement.
- Expanded NCD commission membership with new qualifications.
- NCD commissions must consider City Council goals in considering applications for certificates.
- ADA compliance, accessibility, climate resiliency, and renewable energy features now subject to advisory (non-binding) review.
- Commissions may not base decisions on the appropriateness of the size and shape of new construction or additions.
- Commissions may not impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by the zoning ordinance in the case of new construction or additions.
- NCD commissions 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.
- Review of existing NCDs every 10 years and new NCDs 10 years after adoption.
 - Half Crown-Marsh (2024, 2034, etc.)
 - Mid Cambridge (2026, 2036, etc.)
 - Avon Hill (2028, 2038, etc.)
 - Harvard Square (2030, 2040, etc.)

III. Current Conditions of the Mid Cambridge NCD

The 2023 amendments requiring a decennial review required that the report contain a “summary of current NCD membership, boundaries, guidelines, and procedures.”

The Mid Cambridge NCD currently operates under an Order most recently amended in 1992 and an Ordinance amended in 2023. In the case of conflicts, the more recently amended Ordinance prevails.



A. Present Boundaries

The district is roughly bordered by Prospect Street to the east, Prescott Street to the west, Kirkland Street and the Somerville city line to the north, and Massachusetts Avenue to the south. It contains approximately 1,300 buildings, including residential, commercial, public, and institutional uses. Mid-Cambridge is the largest NCD in Cambridge. The boundaries are as originally adopted in 1985.

B. Membership of the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission

The statutory requirements for membership are described in Art. 2.78.160 of the City Code, as amended in 2023:

“...the City Manager shall appoint a neighborhood conservation district commission to consist of seven members and three alternates who shall...have demonstrable knowledge and concern for improvement, conservation, and enhancement of the district... The membership shall be as follows:”

- Member 1. District homeowner
- Member 2. District renter
- Member 3. District resident
- Member 4. District resident
- Member 5. District business operator/owner or District resident
- Member 6. Cambridge resident
- Member 7. Cambridge resident with professional qualifications
- Alternate 1. District resident
- Alternate 2. District resident
- Alternate 3. District resident

“Members shall be appointed by the City Manager with regard to the diversity of residents within and surrounding the district. Such members shall serve for a term of three years, except that the initial appointments shall be for one member to serve one year and one member to serve two years, and vacancies shall be filled for the unexpired term of office.”

The recent amendments to Chapter 2.78.160 also state that: “...City Manager shall appoint a neighborhood conservation district commission to consist of seven members and three alternates 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 designated neighborhood in terms of age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and property ownership or tenancy. Appointments shall reflect the City's goals for anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion... Members and alternates must have the ability to work and interact effectively with individuals and groups with a variety of identities, cultures, backgrounds, and ideologies.”

The present membership of the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission includes seven commissioners with varied educational, professional, and personal backgrounds. Members on the commission include architects, a fundraiser, an editor, an attorney, an urban planner, an academic and career advisor, an engineer, and a consultant. Four of the commissioners are renters and the remaining six are homeowners.

C. Objectives and Principles of the Mid Cambridge NCD

Per the enabling ordinance, the purpose of NCDs are now defined as:

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 (Cambridge Municipal Code, Ch. 2.78, Art. III, as amended 2023).

The 1992 order establishing the Mid Cambridge NCD directs the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission to consider all applications in terms of the impact on the District as a whole and on the surrounding properties and immediate streetscape. The general objectives of the district as set out in the 1992 order are to:

1. avoid excessive infill;
2. encourage new construction which complements existing buildings;
3. encourage preservation of neighborhood buildings;

4. protect National Register structures; and
5. enhance the economic vitality of the neighborhood.

The first of these objectives is now potentially in conflict with the 2023 amendments to the NCD ordinance. An NCD Commission can no longer make decisions about the appropriateness of an addition or new construction based on the size or shape of the addition or new building and may not impose requirements more restrictive than the zoning regulations. The proposed new Mid Cambridge district order amends the general objectives and provides several administrative changes to streamline the permitting process.

IV. Activities of the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission: 2015-2025

The 2023 amendments requiring a decennial review required that the report contain a “summary of the activities of the NCD over the previous decade including (but not limited to) a list of any cases in which an application was outright rejected as well as relevant and instructive examples of cases in which applications were approved or approved with modifications.”

The Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission reviews new construction, additions, demolition, and alterations that affect the exterior architectural features, other than color, of structures within the District. These cases are reviewed and typically approved by the Commission at its monthly meeting. Ideally, NCD reviews are performed concurrently with other city departments and boards, but applicants may opt to apply for reviews sequentially, introducing inefficiencies the amended Order is intended to address.

Applications for interior alterations, general maintenance, and in-kind repairs are reviewed by Commission staff and issued a Certificate of Non-applicability. (Recent amendments to Chapter 2.78.190 exclude ADA-compliance or climate resiliency features from review.) This review is administrative and does not require review by the Commission at a public meeting. These cases are typically reviewed and approved within 1-5 days of receipt of a complete application.

Review of permit applications by CHC staff provides an opportunity to speak with homeowners about preservation and repair options. For example, in some cases, homeowners have sought to replace original wood front doors that no longer function well because they are unaware of companies in the area that can restore them. Once made aware of the options, homeowners have opted to go with restoration instead of discarding original architectural features.

A. Summary of Cases 2015-2025

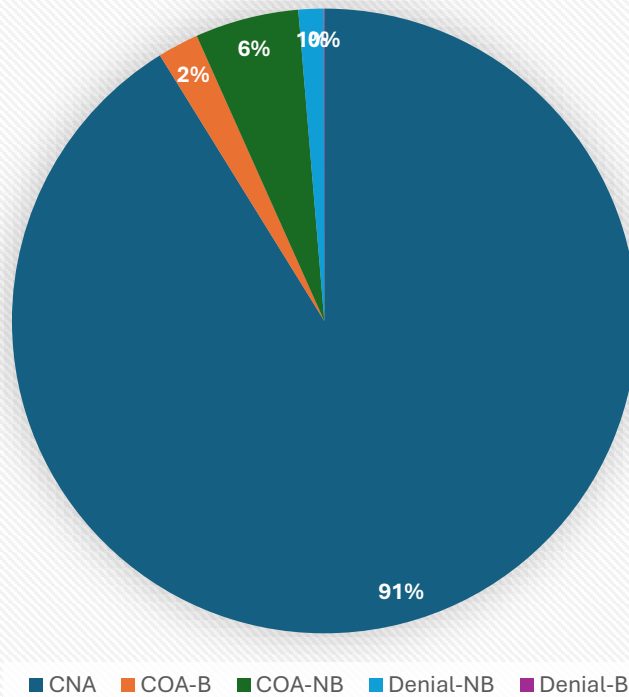
Between January 1, 2015, and December 31, 2025, the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission and/or Cambridge Historical Commission staff representative for the district reviewed 2,785 permit applications with the following breakdown:

- 2,532 were issued Certificates of Non-applicability,
- 60 were granted binding Certificates of Appropriateness,
- 153 were granted non-binding Certificates of Appropriateness,
- 47 received non-binding denials
- 2 received binding denials:
 - 1357 Cambridge Street – window alterations to a National Register structure
 - March 2026 – revised window design as per Commission’s previous recommendation approved at staff level
 - 1673 Cambridge Street – install vinyl shed
- 7 applications were withdrawn

Non-binding, or advisory, hearings typically involve the proposed replacement of original exterior features, such as windows, doors, cladding, or balusters, with replacements that are not in keeping with the character of the building. These advisory hearings provide an opportunity for the Commission to advocate for the preservation of original architectural features or replacement in kind. The applicant may proceed with either the Commission’s recommendations or not. Of the 47 non-binding denials, 18 were for replacing original windows with vinyl. Another 17 non-binding denials were issued for replacing original siding with vinyl or synthetic material. The remaining twelve denials involved alterations such as porches or porch components such as railings and/or columns; window locations or sizes; and chimney removal.

Certificates of Hardship can be granted if the Commission determines that failure to approve an application would entail a substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, and that the work would not be a significant detriment

Case Outcomes 2015 - 2025



to the district. Certificates of Hardship are very uncommon and have not been issued in the last ten years.

CNA- 2,532 COA-B- 60 COA-NB- 153 Denial NB- 47 Denial-B- 2

Summary of cases, from January 1, 2015, and December 31, 2025.

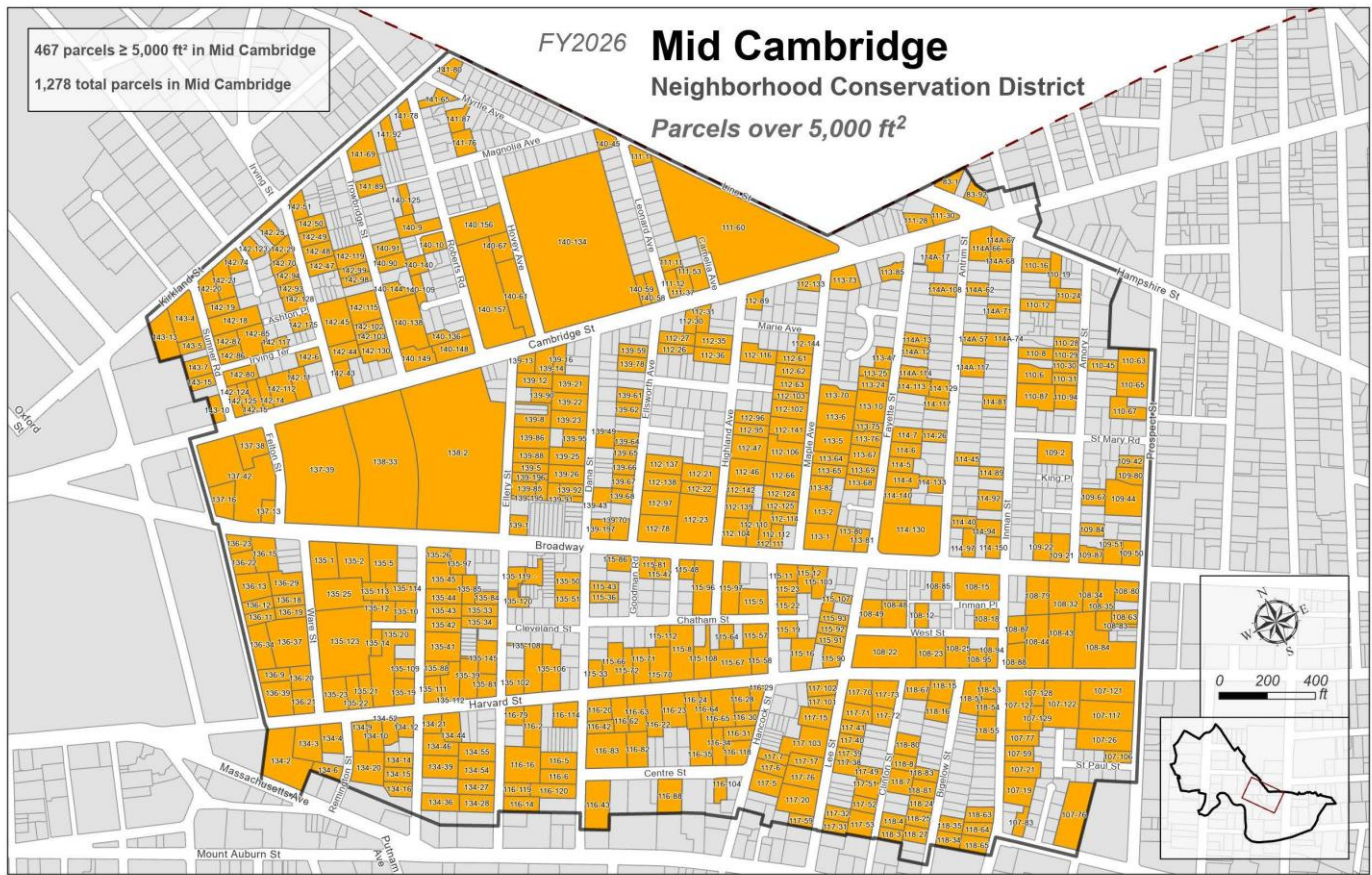
B. Sample Cases, 2015-2025

Cases resulting from 2025 Zoning amendments

The recent citywide zoning amendments allow the construction of four-story residential structures with a minimum five-foot setback on the sides and rear, and a minimum 10-foot setback on the front. Projecting bays that do not meet grade are allowed to extend into the setbacks by 3.5 feet. On lots that are 5,000 square feet or more, an additional two stories are allowed if 20% of the dwelling units meet inclusionary zoning requirements.

Below is a map showing the number of lots in the Mid Cambridge NCD that are 5,000 square feet or more. Out of a total of 1,278 parcels, 467 (36.5%) are 5,000 square feet or more. The largest lots include institutional properties, such as the Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School, Cambridge Public Library, CHA Cambridge Hospital, Spaulding Hospital, Youville House, and City Hall Annex.

Six-story development projects reviewed since the zoning amendments include 60 Ellery Street, 84-86 Ellery Street, 88 Ellery Street, and 406 Broadway.



Map illustrating lots consisting of 5,000 square feet or more (City of Cambridge GIS Department, 2026).

The Commission has approved four six-story multifamily housing projects since February 2025 representing approximately 165 new units and 90,000 GFA of construction.

1. 60 Ellery Street: Demolish structure and construct 6-story building

The Commission approved the demolition of a 1923, 9-unit residential brick building and the construction of a 6-story multi-unit building. Final approval was delegated to the Architects Committee of the Commission, which reviewed further revisions to the façade materials and details. The Commission advised using brick and clapboard instead of metal panels to reflect the residential character of the neighborhood. The Commission also recommended simplifying the façades, revising the design of the entrance, moving the transformer underground, and adding more landscaping. The revised design resulted in one additional unit.



*Initial proposal**Revised proposal**Approved proposal*

2. 84-86 Ellery Street: Demolish structure and construct 6-story building

The Commission determined that the existing brick building was significant as a well-preserved example of a double house constructed in brick and granite in the Second Empire style. The Commission asked the applicant to return with a revised design that preserved the front portion of the building with the addition in the rear. The applicant agreed and returned to the Commission with a new scheme. The revised proposal was approved and also included an Architects Committee meeting scheduled at the applicant's discretion to further refine the design.

*Original proposal**Revised and approved proposal*

3. 88 Ellery Street: Partial demolition and construction of 6-story building

The Commission determined that the existing structure, an Italianate style house constructed in 1870, was architecturally significant, but that the addition in the rear could be demolished. The applicant returned with a proposal that preserved the original structure and proposed an addition at the rear. The revised proposal was approved with further refinements reviewed at an Architects Committee meeting scheduled at the applicant's discretion.

*Initial proposal**Revised proposal**Approved proposal*

4. 406 Broadway: Demolish structure and construct 6-story building

The Commission approved the demolition of a 1925 brick house and the construction of a 6-story multi-unit building. The Commission recommended revising the first floor by reducing the amount of glazing, revising the balcony and railing design, and simplifying materials. The project was approved with an Architects Committee meeting to review brick detailing, façade revisions, and a revised landscape plan, and reconsideration of the Juliet balconies on the rear façade abutting a residence (see figure below).



Initial proposal

Revised proposal

Revised and approved proposal

Selected Projects Reviewed Before the 2023 Amendments to the Enabling Ordinance

The Mid Cambridge NCD Commission has repeatedly made improvements in the projects brought for approval and achieved success with several important binding reviews of alteration and new construction projects. The 2023 amendments limiting the commission's ability to review size and shape of alterations and new construction makes such reviews more difficult if not impossible

1. 123 Hancock Street.

In 2023, the Commission approved the removal of the ell, enlargement of a dormer, and the construction of a new detached dwelling unit behind the 1840 Greek Revival-style house at 123 Hancock Street. The project was revised in response to Commission and public comments regarding the scale, massing, and location of the new structure, as well as the configuration of the decks.



123 Hancock Street, Before



After

2. 14 Amory Street

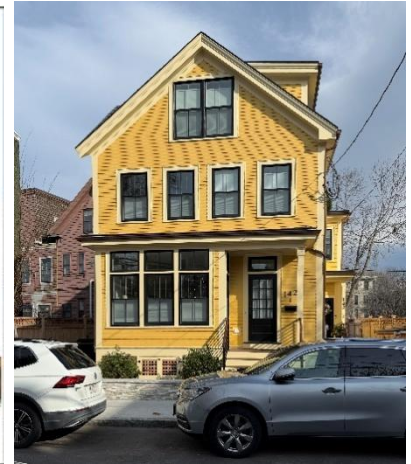
In 2022, a partially collapsed building at 142 Amory Street was determined by the Board of Survey to be past the point of structural rehabilitation and was demolished. The Commission reviewed and approved the construction of a two-family residence after the design was revised, which simplified the overall massing, facades, and fenestration.



142 Amory Street Before



As proposed



As approved

3. 75-77 Inman Street

In 2019, the Commission approved the renovation of the existing Italianate structure at 75 Inman Street built in 1868, demolition of the rear addition, and the construction of a new addition for an additional unit in the rear. The Commission determined that the existing rear addition was not historically significant and that the proposed restoration and addition were in keeping with the character of the neighborhood. The applicant was also able to preserve a mature tree in the rear



75-77 Inman Street, Before and After

4. Vellucci Plaza

In 2018, the Commission approved the redesign of Vellucci Plaza in Inman Square, including reducing the size of the existing plaza on the west side of Hampshire Street and creating an additional plaza on the east side of the street; paving, street furniture, lighting, and other landscape features. Public-owned buildings and properties are subject to binding review.



Vellucci Plaza, before

After

5. 1500 Cambridge Street

Also in 2018, the Commission reviewed the proposed demolition of a 1903 commercial building at 1500 Cambridge Street and the construction of three dwellings. The project was revised twice in response to the Commission's recommendations regarding the massing, materials, railing details, and entries to make the design look more residential and better integrated with the streetscape. The Commission approved the demolition of the building and the revised design.



6. 20 Sumner Road

In 2016, the Commission approved the construction of an addition, a solar chimney, window screens, glass enclosure on the front porch, and an ADA ramp, as well as the installation of photovoltaic shingles, replacement of windows and siding at 20 Sumner Road, originally built in 1923. The project was part of a larger energy retrofit of the structure. The building houses the Harvard Center for Green Buildings and Cities and is intended to be used for research to study alterations and energy projects that can be replicated by homeowners



20 Sumner Road, before



After

7. 330 Harvard Street.

In 2016, the Commission approved the renovation and relocation on site of an 1844 Greek Revival structure at 330 Harvard Street, the demolition of a portion of the ell, and the construction of a new addition and a detached two-family dwelling in the rear.



330 Harvard Street, Before



After

8. 344 Broadway

Also in 2016, the Commission approved installation of a shelter, bike racks, and lockers at the City Hall Annex. The Commission recommended eliminating a fence, extending the granite curbing, and adding trees.



Older Cases

The Mid Cambridge NCD Commission has played a significant role in approving new construction and alterations at several important institutions, including construction projects at Cambridge Hospital and Youville Hospital, Rindge & Latin High School, Harvard's two-building CGIS complex on Cambridge Street (1998), the adaptive reuse of a storefront for the Swiss Consulate, and restoration and new construction at the Cambridge Public Library's main library (2004).

1. 449 Broadway – Cambridge Public Library restoration and addition

The Commission approved the proposed expansion of the Cambridge Public Library at 449 Broadway, the restoration of the historic library, and the renovation and upgrading of the landscape and park facilities of the library site. These approvals commenced at a concept level and progressed in a series of subsequent reviews, culminating in the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness in 2004, and continued as needed.



2. 420 Broadway, 1968, Swiss Consulate

In 2006, the Commission approved the addition of a glass pavilion and garden on the roof of 420 Broadway, owned and occupied by the Swiss Consulate.



420 Broadway, before

After

3. 1456-1464 Cambridge Street

In 2003, the Commission approved the demolition of a 1922 commercial building at 1456-1464 Cambridge Street, and the construction of six townhouses.



1456-1464 Cambridge Street, before



V. Demographic and Housing Analysis (provided by Community Development Department)

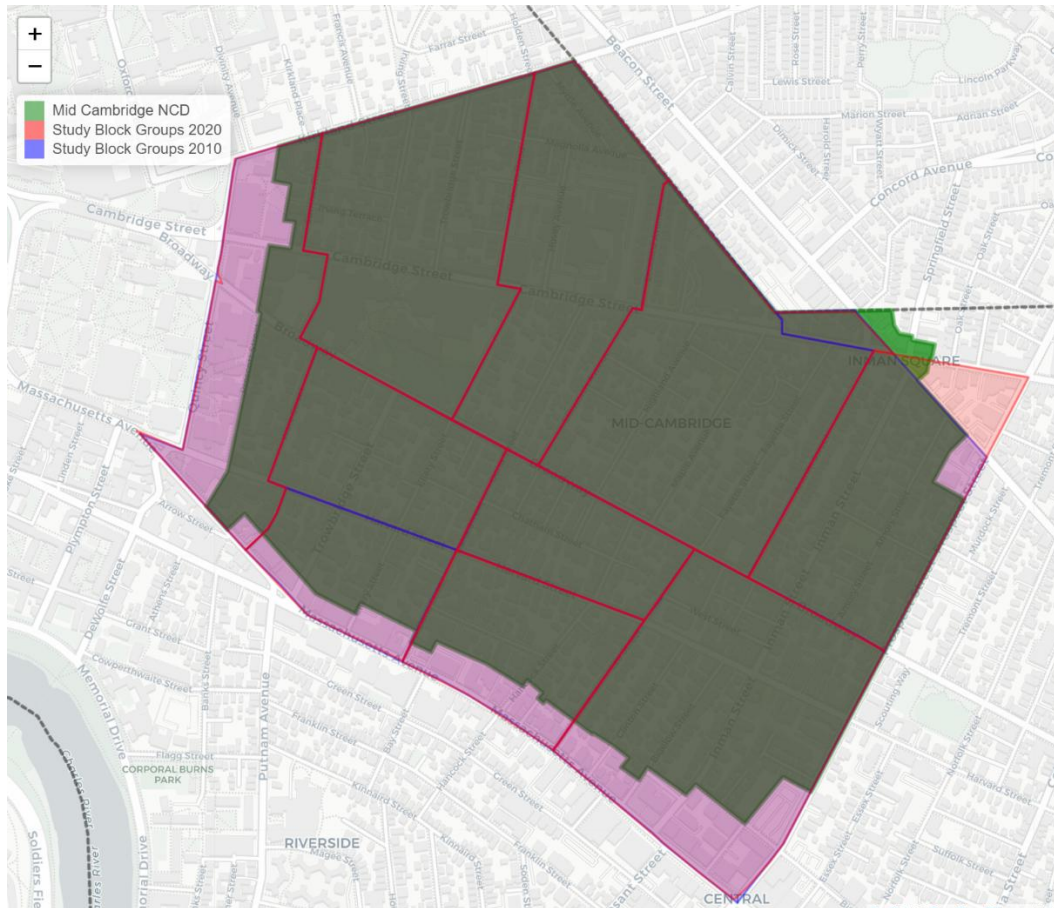
The 2023 amendments requiring a decennial review required that the report contain “information about any demographic changes or other major changes that occurred within the district over the previous decade.”

A. Demographic Study

1. Methodology

Our best data source for timely demographic data is the American Community Survey (ACS), a sample survey conducted each year by the Census Bureau. Most estimates in the ACS are available at the block group level, which is the second smallest Census geography. The Census Bureau updates these boundaries at each Decennial Census. The map below shows the 2010 and 2020 block groups that are mostly or entirely within the boundary of the Mid Cambridge NCD. The alignment is close, with some extra parcels included along the west and south edges of the NCD and some differences between 2010 and 2020 block group boundaries apparent at the northeast corner.¹ The alignment is close enough to create a demographic picture of the NCD, however, and to make comparisons between the 2010-2014 ACS (which uses the 2010 boundaries) and the 2020-2024 ACS (which is the most recent and uses the 2020 boundaries). Since the ACS is a sample survey, we use the pooled 5-year results to reduce the uncertainty of the estimates.

Census Block Groups that intersect the NCD



¹ According to FY2026 Land Use layer, there are 25 residential units in the area of the 2020 block groups that does not intersect with the NCD boundary (red area in northeast corner). There are 9 residential units in the NCD area that is not covered by either the 2010 or 2020 block groups (green area in northeast corner).

2. Census Data for Matching Blocks

Statistic	ACS 2010-2014		ACS 2020-2024	
	Estimate	Margin of Error (+/-)	Estimate	Margin of Error (+/-)
Housing Units	6,506	303	6,894	554
Occupied Housing Units	5,904 (91%)	308	6,144 (89%)	518
Renter Occupied	3,824 (65%)	297	3,872 (63%)	390
Owner Occupied	2,080 (35%)	229	2,272 (37%)	392
Population	11,641	736	12,627	1,165
Population Under 18	1,115 (10%)	262	1,322 (10%)	321
Population 65+	1,395 (12%)	225	2,151 (17%)	412
Asian Alone Population	1,384 (12%)	296	2,760 (22%)	584
Black or African American Alone Population	603 (5%)	267	470 (4%)	177
White Alone Population	8,970 (77%)	627	8,023 (64%)	974
Two or More Races Population	483 (4%)	254	1,118 (9%)	293
Hispanic Population ²	792 (7%)	274	734 (6%)	240
Individuals in Poverty	1,893 (16%)	493	1,020 (8%)	296

3. Discussion

Comparing the 2010-2014 ACS estimates to the 2020-2024 estimates will give us an idea of demographic changes in the Mid Cambridge NCD. Note that since the ACS is a sample survey, the values are estimates with an associated margin of error. When the range of the estimate from one year (the estimate +/- the margin of error) does not overlap with the range from another year, that is known as a “statistically significant” difference.

- The shares of occupied, renter occupied, and owner-occupied housing units did not change significantly.
- The total population increased by 8%, though the difference is not statistically significant.
- There was an increase in the share of the population age 65+ from 12% to 17%.
- The largest changes among racial and ethnic groups were the near doubling of the share of the Asian Alone population and an increase from 4% to 9% in the population of two or more races.
- The share of the population in poverty decreased from 16% to 8%.

According to the 2020-2024 ACS, the population of the Mid Cambridge NCD study area:

² In the categorization system of the ACS, Hispanic ethnicity is considered separately from race.

- Has a smaller share of renter households than the city as a whole, with 63% vs. 67% citywide
- Is older than the city in general, with 17% age 65 or over vs. 12% citywide
- Has a somewhat larger share of Asian residents, with 22% vs. 20% citywide
- Has a smaller share of Black residents, with 4% vs. 10% citywide
- Has a larger share of White residents, with 64% vs. 56% citywide
- Has a smaller share of Hispanic residents, with 6% vs. 9% citywide

B. Housing Study

1. Methodology

We can also learn about characteristics and changes in the Mid Cambridge NCD from the Assessor's property database. The City Assessor provides property data going back to FY2016 up to the current fiscal year on [our Open Data site](#). Here we will look at data from assessments for fiscal years 2016, 2021, and 2026. We can use this data to study changes in use and assessed values in the NCD at the parcel level. This analysis includes only those parcels within the NCD boundary and is unrelated to Census block group geography.

2. Assessing Data for Mid Cambridge Parcels

Statistic	FY2016	FY2021	FY2026
Parcels	1,299	1,299	1,298
Buildings	1,369	1,377	1,378
Total Assessed Value	\$3,784,859,883	\$5,738,575,300	\$6,628,123,148
Average Assessed Value	\$2,913,672	\$4,417,687	\$5,106,412
Average Assessed Value of Single-Family Homes	\$1,139,751	\$1,751,958	\$2,231,631
Single-Family Homes	283	290	293
Single-Family Homes w/Auxiliary Apartment	15	14	12
Two-Family Homes	237	222	211
Three-Family Homes	136	135	127
4-8 Unit Apartment Buildings	68	65	61
9+ Unit Apartment Buildings	61	54	55
Condo Units	2,481	2,527	2,582
Average Assessed Value of Condo Units	\$522,328	\$772,375	\$897,387
Condo Buildings	413	435	463
Owner-Occupied Properties	1,861	1,632	1,572
Parcels with Non-Residential Uses	123	118	117

3. Discussion

The data from the property database for the NCD over the period from FY2016 – FY2026 shows:

- A large increase in assessed values, with the average value of single-family homes nearly doubling to \$2.2 million and a 72% increase in the average assessed value of condo units.
- Decreases in the numbers of two- and three-family homes and apartment buildings reflect condo conversions: 32 parcels that were one of those housing types in 2016 were condo buildings in 2026, representing 85 condo units.
- Properties claiming the owner-occupied tax exemption decreased by 16%.

C. Additional Comparisons

The Land Use Data on the Open Data Portal is a revised version of the property database that provides a better representation of property uses and counts of residential units in Cambridge. Combining this with the GIS parcel and building footprint layers lets us make some additional comparisons between residential development in Mid Cambridge and the city as a whole.

Statistic	Mid Cambridge NCD	Citywide
Lot area per dwelling unit (sq. ft.)	1,053	1,144
Population density based on 2020 Census (people/sq. mile)	34,188	18,591
Share of lot area covered by buildings for parcels with residential buildings	41.9%	36.6%

VI. Guidance on Changes to Mid Cambridge NCD and Neighborhood Discussion

The 2023 amendments requiring a decennial review required that the report contain “Guidance on recommended changes to the boundaries, guidelines, and/or procedures of the NCD, if there are any.”

CHC staff conducted public outreach through district-wide mailings, online public meetings, walking tours, and public hearings to gather ideas and recommendations for meeting Council goals while more effectively protecting the District.

Public Meetings

Homeowners in the district were notified through mailings using addresses from the Assessor’s Office. An Every Door Direct mailing through the U.S. Post Office was also utilized to reach a wider swath of residents, including tenants. The Every Door Direct mailing went to every address within the Mid Cambridge NCD. The City’s Communications and Community Engagement Office assisted by distributing a flyer and engaging residents. Meeting minutes are included in the Appendix.

April 27, 2026: CHC staff held a public online meeting to explain the Decennial Review process, provide a brief history of the district, the Commission’s jurisdiction, a summary of cases from the last ten years, and specific examples of alterations, infill projects, and demolition and new construction. Staff also described the recent city-wide zoning changes and the resulting implications for the district.

Comments included questions regarding the new multi-family housing zoning, the outcome of non binding review processes and representative project examples. Staff also answered questions and discussed upcoming walking tours. Other comments included:

- Question regarding how the 20% affordable units is calculated for 6-story structures. Staff responded that calculating the affordability requirement by floor area rather than by unit count allow some affordable units to larger, multi-bedroom units suitable for families and noted that details are managed by the Community Development Department (CDD) staff.
- Request for more information regarding the non-binding denials, including outcomes of those projects. Staff replied that they would look into this for the report and noted that the value of the Commission's review process extends beyond formal approvals and denials, that property owners often gain a better understanding of their buildings and of preservation principles as a result.
- Questions regarding the upcoming walking tours — such as what information would be shared with participants that is relevant to gathering input for the report. Staff responded that the tours will draw on cases reviewed by the Commission, and to discuss potential development in areas such as Ellery Street and Broadway.
- Question regarding developers who refused to consider the Commission's suggestions, citing as-of-right entitlement to proceed without changes. Ms. Burks said she had not encountered this in recent years — not for roughly the last 15 to 20 years. Mr. Sullivan and Ms. Crosbie agreed, noting that while developers are not always pleased to appear before the Commission, those they have worked with have generally been cooperative with the review process.

May 18, 2026: CHC staff held a public online meeting and presented a slide show providing a detailed examination of the NCD Commission’s purview, including binding and non-binding review processes and representative project examples. Staff also answered questions and discussed upcoming walking tours.

Public comments included the following:

- Questions on the review process and public feedback
- Why are developers required to have a meeting with neighbors in the NCDs when there are

Commission reviews?

- In-person Commission meetings would be more conducive to a productive dialog.
- All reviews should be binding or developers won't comply. The recent developments have been very concerning.

June 22, 2026: CHC staff held a public online meeting to present a draft of proposed revisions to the Mid Cambridge NCD Order, including general objectives, review authority, review criteria, and exemptions from review.

Public comments included the following:

- Investor-driven redevelopment is making the neighborhood less equitable, less diverse, and less affordable by displacing existing tenants in favor of higher-end units.
- Question about dropping the “protect National Register structures,” since binding review already covers such structures, but suggested it still be named explicitly, given the legal duty involved. Staff agreed there is no reason it couldn't be called out as a goal.
- The proposed changes as essentially restating what Council already intended in 2023 and expressed skepticism that the revisions will produce real change and questioned whether NCDs still serve a purpose given the shift toward multifamily zoning citywide.
- Request for clearer criteria defining the trade-off between retaining significant buildings and supporting density — e.g., roughly half of recent reviews have hinged on “significance” determinations — and suggested the goals could lean further toward density.
- Questions on where the line is drawn between preserving buildings that reflect the neighborhood's history (e.g., long-standing triple-deckers and small apartment buildings) versus replacing them with much larger new construction.
- Staff responded to several of the comments and questions and acknowledged the goals can be in tension (density vs. character conservation) and said reconciling them is the Commission's core function, exercised as collective judgment. He noted Mid-Cambridge's history is more economically and racially diverse than commonly assumed and cited a historically Black community near the old Longfellow School/City Hall Annex predating the Civil War, and a 19th-century working-class layer beneath the neighborhood's better-known estate history. He explained that this layered history factors into significance determinations.
- Say “retaining significant buildings or significant aspects of buildings,” since in some current projects only a facade, not the whole structure, merits preservation; cited similar partial-retention practice in Boston's South End.
- Add affordability as a consideration — encouraging a mix of price points in new projects to preserve economic diversity.
- Questioned whether a renter-representation requirement should be added to the Commission and questioned whether binding review is necessary to achieve the Commission's goals, given it can be used to delay or block housing. Ms. Crosbie replied that the NCD Commission currently has several renters. Mr. Sullivan spoke to the permanence of demolition.
- Why don't the proposed goals address project timeliness directly?
- Comment on maintaining the quality of life for residents and suggested that the reference to economic vitality should be retained as a goal.

- How will the Order protect existing renters from displacement, and requested explicit language protecting the neighborhood's landscape character, not just buildings.
- Terms like “significant,” “diversity,” and “density” are or could be further defined, given they mean different things to different people, and suggested “buildings and landscape” in the first goal. Staff noted “significance” draws on definitions developed since the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act and said the final report will clarify these terms further.
- Could the Order specify material or design characteristics (citing other municipalities' brick-percent-age-style requirements) to keep new density-driven construction visually consistent with the neighborhood.
- The Architects Committee meetings have been invaluable for the neighborhood and noted that architects want design guidelines. Delays on the 60 Ellery St. project were driven by the developer's own scheduling, not the Commission process. Also noted developers there had proposed materials rated to last only 25 years.
- Without clear design guidelines, it's unreasonable to expect timely reviews — architects need defined standards (e.g., minimum brick percentage) rather than open-ended discretion.
- The city, beyond the NCD, should adopt design guidelines for single-family homes and duplexes (currently mostly addressed only for larger multifamily projects).
- The City could better honor the historic Black community that was described by removing barriers to affordable housing for similarly situated residents today, rather than treating goals as inherently in conflict, and stated that current zoning reform is about applying equal rules city-wide rather than preserving neighborhood-specific outcomes.

Walking Tours

Cambridge Historical Commission staff hosted two free walking tours through the District. On May 28, 2026, the tour covered an area of Mid Cambridge north of Broadway. A second tour was conducted on June 13, 2026, focusing on the neighborhood south of Broadway. The tours highlighted the development of the neighborhood as well as recent projects reviewed by the Commission. Attendees were able to ask questions about the district.

Hearings Before the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission and the Cambridge Historical Commission, October 7 and October 8, 2026

[To be added.]

VII. Assessment of Diversity and Representation on the Mid Cambridge NCD

The 2023 amendments requiring a decennial review required that the report contain an “assessment of progress toward achieving council diversity and representation goals for the NCD.”

The Mid Cambridge NCD Commission is currently comprised of seven members and two alternates from a range of educational and professional backgrounds. Members include architects, an urban planner, an academic advisor, an attorney, an editor, an engineer, and a consultant. All the commissioners live in the district, including four renters and five homeowners. Membership is over 50% female (five of nine) and includes a wide range of ages. Ethnicities include Middle Eastern/North African, Asian/East Indian, Hispanic/Latino, and White/Caucasian. CHC staff has worked with the City Manager’s office to solicit new members who represent the diversity of the neighborhood in terms of age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and property ownership or tenancy. Appointments reflect the City’s goals for anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A recent resignation and relocation have resulted in two vacancies to be filled. As of September 30, 2026, interviews have been completed and recommended appointments are ready to be submitted to the City Manager.

VIII. Conclusion and Recommendations

Since its establishment in 1985, the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission has reviewed over 7,600 cases ranging from minor exterior alterations to additions, new construction, and demolition for residential, institutional, and commercial properties within the district.

The day-to-day operations of the NCD Commission have proceeded without major incident. Disruptions in work schedules are avoided through close communication between city staff, owners, and project teams. The volume of cases requiring public hearings has remained low (9%), which is typical of Historic Districts and NCDs in Cambridge. These cases tend to be larger projects which may require additional review by other City Boards. With 91% of cases approved administratively by staff within a matter of days, the NCD does not cause extensive delay or expense to the permitting process.

The Commission continues to achieve the goal stated in the original Study Committee Report, “to provide a means by which the residents and property owners of Mid Cambridge, together with the city government, can influence the nature of change in the physical character of the neighborhood. It is recognized that Mid Cambridge can and should change and evolve. The purpose of the NCD is not to arrest change, much of which is desirable, but rather to influence it for the best interests of the neighborhood.”

The NCD conserves the unique character of a dynamic and ever-changing neighborhood. The neighborhood retains its historic character, walkability, and distinctiveness through the preservation of character-defining elements. The NCD has not hampered progress, nor has it impeded City Council goals to increase access to affordable housing, promote sustainable use of energy, and resiliency. The Commission hearings provide a forum for neighbors to engage in the city planning process.

Of the 2,532 permit applications submitted in the past ten years, two received binding denials, and 47 received non-binding (advisory) denials. The forum provided by NCD Commission meetings and staff reviews has resulted in residential rehabilitation and led to greater preservation activity. This report documents a small sample of the many instances when NCD commission review has resulted in measurable benefits to the proponent and to the community at large.

- The 2023 amendments to Chapter 2.78 limiting NCD commission jurisdiction over size and shape of additions and new construction and the multifamily zoning amendments of 2025 radically altered the scope and focus of the Mid Cambridge NCD’s mission. While the Commission has responded positively to the

City Council's goals for housing production, the inefficiencies and contradictions of the 1992 Mid Cambridge Order have only become more apparent. The existing district order of 1992 incorporates many references to zoning in the review criteria and refers to the prior jurisdiction of the Commission to be more flexible or more restrictive than the zoning code allows. This also order differs in many respects from the other NCD district orders in terms of procedures and references to dimensional regulations and land use. This has long been confusing and no longer seems functional. This Report presents a new, proposed Council Order that would renew the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District with goals and procedures aligned with current priorities. The 1992 Order alluded to the reasons for designation as described in the 1985 Study Report without restating them. They are now included in the proposed Order.

- Membership requirements have been amended to reflect the 2023 amendments to Ch. 2.78, Art. III.
- The review authority of the district has been amended to allow non-binding reviews by CHC staff of freestanding ADUs less than 900 square feet (or less than 750 sf if an addition) and certain alterations to buildings not listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Review authority is extended to successive applications for permits adding square footage that are individually non-binding but cumulatively meet a threshold for binding review.
- Review criteria have been amended to reflect recent amendments to the enabling ordinance.
- The role of subcommittees in reviewing projects for approval has been clarified.
- The educational requirements have been clarified.
- The provision for fees has been deleted as not in conformance with city policies.
- Review procedures have been simplified and streamlined.

By including ADUs and the above modest alterations to properties in the district as non-binding/staff review, applicants and homeowners will no longer have to wait for a monthly public meeting of the Commission, as staff will provide insight and comment on projects and their appropriateness before granting a Certificate. The applicant will have the ability to address these comments or pursue the permit as originally applied.

Where a review by the Commission is determined by the change in square footage, such review shall be based on the cumulative total of such changes in the past three years preceding the date of application for a building permit, as determined by certificates of occupancy or zoning compliance or building permits issued and/or still in force during that three-year period.

Exemptions from review allowed in Ch. 2.78, Art. III are now listed in the Order. Exemptions are projects that have little impact on the district and thus do not require extensive review. These cases are approved administratively when received in the online permitting system. Exemptions including accessibility features and climate resiliency improvements included in the amendments to Chapter 2.78 in 2023 are also listed in the proposed Order.

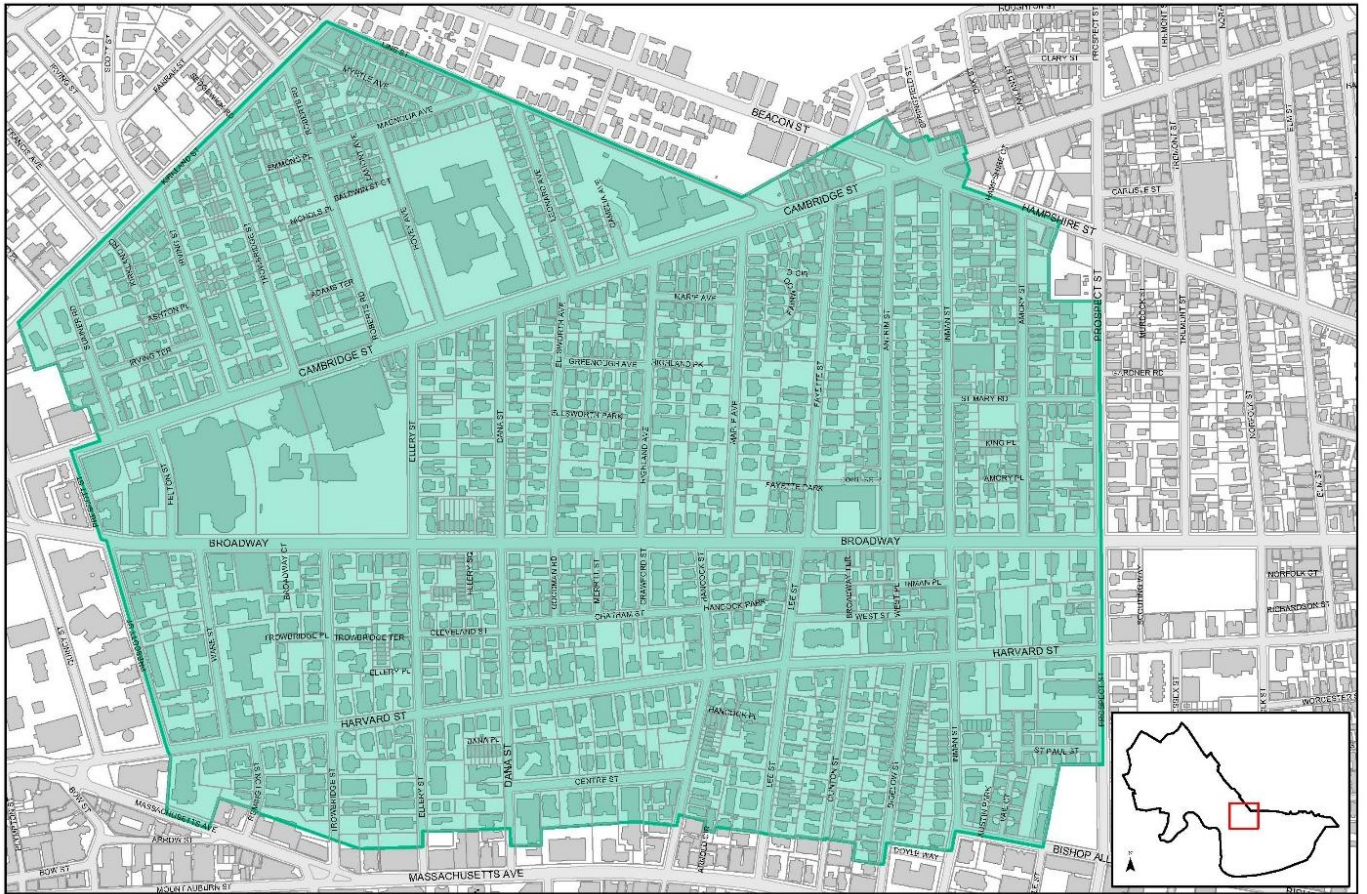
In addition to rewriting and simplifying the Order, a new set of design guidelines have been drafted to provide a baseline for the decision-making process when alterations are proposed for properties in the District. The guidelines cover exterior surfaces; masonry; windows and doors; roofs and gutters; chimneys; porches and overhangs; new construction/additions; streetscapes; and demolition. The proposed guidelines do not discourage or prevent or prevent change from occurring but offer preferred options when dealing with original character-defining architectural features. The proposed guidelines can be found in Appendix E.

No changes to the district's boundaries are recommended at this time.

X. Appendices

- H. Map of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District
- I. Order Establishing the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District
- J. Proposed Order Renewing the Mid Cambridge NCD
- K. Present Guidelines for Determining the Appropriateness of Proposed Construction Projects
- L. Proposed Design Guidelines
- M. Minutes of the Decennial Review public meetings
- N. Public Comments

Appendix A: Map of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District



 Mid Cambridge District

Mid Cambridge
 Neighborhood Conservation District
 Cambridge, Mass.



Appendix B:

1992 Order Establishing the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District

City of Cambridge



Calendar Item Number 6

IN CITY COUNCIL

June 8, 1992

COUNCILLOR MYERS

ORDERED_: That the following amendment to the 1985 City Council Order establishing the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District as set forth in the FINAL STUDY REPORT FOR- AMENDING THE ORDER OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE DISTRICT dated June 28, -1991 be and hereby is adopted and reads as follows:

I. Designation of Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District:

Pursuant to section 2.78.140-270 of Article III of Chapter 2.78 of the General Ordinances of the City of Cambridge (designation procedures), there is hereby designated as a neighborhood conservation district the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District having the boundaries set forth on the map entitled "Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District," as designated by the Cambridge City Council-January 21, 1985 (for purposes of this Order, the "District"), which District shall be administered by a commission to be known as the "Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission" (for purposes of this Order, the "Commission"), appointed by the City Manager pursuant to paragraph (A) of Section 2.78.160. The reasons for the designation of the District are those set forth in the designation report (for purposes of this Order, the "Report"), of the study committee and as approved by the Historical Commission with respect to said District, which reasons shall guide the Commission in its administration of the District.

II. Membership

Pursuant to paragraph (A) of Section 2.78.160 (membership requirements) the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District shall consist of five members and three alternates appointed by the City Manager and have qualifications as defined in paragraph (3), with the additional requirements that one neighborhood resident member of the Commission shall be a tenant, the neighborhood property owner member shall be a resident of the District, and all alternate members shall be resident property owners of the District. No member of any other appointed board or commission, with the exception of at least one member of the Cambridge Historical Commission, shall serve on the Commission.

III. Review Authority.

The authority of the Commission shall extend to the following two required categories of review of proposed changes in the District:

A. The Commission may make non-binding recommendations for any of the following that are visible from a public way:

1. New construction, including additions to existing structures of more than 150 and less than 750 square feet of floor area;
2. Alteration of the exterior appearance of a structure that requires a variance or special permit under the zoning ordinance then in effect;
3. Alteration involving any of the following:
 - a. removal or enclosure of any historic or original decorative element, such as a cornice, fascia, soffit, bay, porch, hood, corner-board, window sash, or window or door

- casing;
- b. increase or diminishment of the size and/or change in the location of windows or doors;
- c. increase or diminishment of the slope, pitch, or configuration of a roof or removal of historic or original roofing material.

B. The Commission may make binding recommendations for that portion of any of the following that are visible from a public way:

1. New construction, including additions to existing structures, involving any of the following:
 - a. more than 750 square feet of floor area;
 - b. more than 33% of the lot area not already occupied by structures;
 - c. enlargement of the floor area of an existing structure by more than 33%;
2. Demolition of 33% or more of the floor area of an existing structure not originally used to garage automobiles, including relocation of an existing structure onto or off of a site.
3. Any alteration -or construction -of the following:
 - a. structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places, except those subject to Historical Commission review;
 - b. publicly owned structures;
 - c. structures containing or proposed to contain non-conforming uses.

Where a review by the Commission is determined by the change in lot area covered by structures or the change in the floor area of structures on a lot, such review shall be based on the cumulative total of such changes in the past three years preceding the date of application for a building permit, as determined by certificates of occupancy or zoning compliance or building permits issued and/or still in force during that three year period.

IV. Review Criteria to be Considered by the Commission

The Commission shall apply certain criteria in addition to those contained in Section 2.78.220 in considering applications for certificates of appropriateness, nonapplicability, and hardship.

General Criteria. All applications shall be considered in terms of the impact of the proposed new construction or alteration, relocation or demolition of an existing building on the District as a whole, and in addition with regard to the potential adverse effects of the proposed construction, alteration, relocation or demolition on the surrounding properties and on the immediate streetscape and the economic assessment of the alternatives to the proposed action.

A. General objectives shall be to:

1. Avoid excessive infill;
2. Encourage new construction which complements existing buildings;
3. Encourage preservation of neighborhood buildings;
4. Protect National Register structures; and
5. Enhance the economic vitality of the neighborhood.

B. Construction of a New Building and Alterations to Existing Buildings. Review of the design of a proposed new building, relocated building, or applicable alteration of an existing building, shall be made with regard to the compatibility of the building with its surroundings, and the following elements of the project shall be among those considered: -

1. site layout;
2. provisions for parking;
3. volume and dimensions of the building;

4. provisions for open space and landscaping;
5. the scale of the building in relation to its surroundings; and
6. the changes to existing buildings as related to new construction.

C. Demolition or Relocation of an Existing Building. The Commission shall apply the provisions of Section 2.147(k) with regard to the proposed demolition of an existing building, and in addition shall consider the following factors:

1. the physical condition of the building;
2. a claim of substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, for the owner or occupants; and
3. the design of the proposed replacement-structures, if any.

V. Determinations by the Commission.

The determinations of the Commission shall be binding regarding activities detailed in paragraph 3B of this order, and shall be expressed through the issuance of certificates of appropriateness, nonapplicability, or hardship. Any determination may contain conditions as the Commission determines to be necessary to fulfill the objectives of the District. Such conditions may impose limitations stricter than the applicable zoning regulations only to the extent of a one-third reduction in (1) the additional floor area or (2) additional dwelling units permitted on the site, or a one-third reduction or one-half increase in the number of parking-spaces required by zoning, except that in the case of a building damaged by fire that structure may be rehabilitated to its full extent prior to the fire.

In imposing binding conditions with the issuance of a certificate, or in denying a certificate, a concurring vote of at least four (4) of the members of the Commission shall be required.

All determinations that impose restrictions on an applicant shall be in written form stating the findings of facts and the standards and criteria upon which the restrictions were found to be necessary. All determinations shall be available for inspection at the office of the Cambridge Historical Commission. In no case shall a building permit be issued until the Commission has made a determination under the provisions of Section 2.78.140-270.

VI. Education and Incentive Program.

The Commission shall, in cooperation with the Cambridge Historical Commission, conduct an ongoing educational program in the district to make known the objectives of the District and the Commission, to encourage preservation of the District's historical character, and to make available information to advance and encourage voluntary protection of the District's distinctive architecture.

The regulatory provisions of this Order shall not take effect until an initial appropriation of \$10,000 to the Cambridge Historical Commission is made by the City Council to support such an educational program and further provided that an additional \$5,000 is so appropriated in each subsequent fiscal year. Should the additional funding not be appropriated for any given fiscal year the regulatory provisions of this Order shall not be enforced for any application for a building permit made after July 1 of that fiscal year or until such appropriation is made.

VII. Fees.

The Commission may establish a schedule of fees which may be mandatory for those activities subject to review under paragraph III.B of this Order. All other fees shall be voluntary.

VIII. Coordination with Other Agencies and Boards.

The Board of Zoning Appeal, Board of Appeals, Building Commission, Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission, and other City boards, agencies, and officials are directed to

coordinate all review, hearing, permitting, and other procedures relative to physical changes within the District to the extent practicable, consistent with their respective responsibilities.

IX. Procedure.

In addition to the provisions of Section 2.78.220 and 2.78.230 of the enabling ordinance, the Commission shall observe the following procedural requirements:

- A. For any review for which the recommendations are not binding, as detailed in paragraph III.A of this Order, the Commission shall review the application at a public meeting of the Commission. The Commission shall give not less than forty-eight hours notice of such public meeting by publicly posting such notice in the office of the city clerk. In addition, notice of any meeting provided for in this ordinance shall be given by the Commission to the applicant and to abutters of the subject property and to such other persons and in such manner as the Commission may determine. The Commission may among other forms of notice require that the applicant maintain on the building which is the subject of an application a notice, in a form designated by the Commission, visible from the nearest public way, of any meeting upon the application, and the applicant shall comply with such requirements. Final recommendations shall be made available to the applicant within thirty (30) days of an application for a certificate.
- B. For any review for which the recommendations are binding, as detailed in paragraph III.B of this Order, the issuance of the appropriate certificate shall be made within forty-five (45) days of an application for a certificate.
- C. Failure of the Commission to act within the time periods specified in this Section shall mean approval of the application for a certificate and the Commission shall thereupon issue a certificate of hardship unless an extension of time is granted by the applicant in writing.
- D. Where a public hearing is held by the Commission, notice shall be given to property owners and tenants of property required to receive such notice under Chapter 40C using the current street listing maintained by the Cambridge Election Commission. Such notification shall be considered educational expense under the provisions of -section VI of this order.
- E. In addition to any appeal allowed pursuant to section 2.78.240, the Commission may agree to the appointment of an arbitrator acceptable to both the Commission and the applicant who would make recommendations to both parties where disagreement between the Commission and the applicant persists.
- F. Four members shall constitute a quorum for the Commission.

X. Appeals.

Any person aggrieved by a determination of the Commission may appeal to the Cambridge Historical Commission within twenty-one (21) days after the filing of such determination with the City Clerk, as governed by the provisions of Chapter 40C of the Massachusetts General Laws, Section 2. 78. 240 of the Code of the City of Cambridge, and any regulation promulgated by the Cambridge Historical Commission.

XI. Ordinary Maintenance.

Nothing in this Order shall be construed to prevent the ordinary maintenance, repair or replacement of any exterior architectural feature of the District which does not involve a change in design or materials: or the outward appearance thereof, nor to prevent landscaping with plants, trees, or shrubs, nor construed to prevent the meeting of requirements certified by a duly authorized public officer to be necessary for public safety because of an unsafe or dangerous condition.

In City Council June 8, 1992

Adopted by a yea and nay vote:

Yeas -9; Nays: 0 Absent 0.

Attest: D. Margaret Drury, Temporary City Clerk.-.

A true- copy:

Attest: D. Margaret Drury Temporary City Clerk

Appendix C:

Proposed Order Renewing the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District:

I. Designation of Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District:

Pursuant to section 2.78.140-270 of Article III of Chapter 2.78 of the General Ordinances of the City of Cambridge (designation procedures), there is hereby renewed as a neighborhood conservation district the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District, having the boundaries set forth on the map entitled "Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District," as originally designated by the Cambridge City Council-January 21, 1985 and subsequently amended by Council Order adopted on June 8, 1992 (for purposes of this Order, the "District"), which District shall be administered by a commission to be known as the "Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission" (for purposes of this Order, the "Commission"), appointed by the City Manager pursuant to paragraph (A) of Section 2.78.160. The reasons for the designation of the District are those set forth in the designation report (for purposes of this Order, the "Report") and as set forth in Paragraph II below, which reasons shall guide the Commission in its administration of the District.

II. Reasons for Designation

The Mid Cambridge neighborhood developed between the mid-nineteenth century and the onset of the Great Depression and reflects nearly every architectural style from that era—Greek Revival, Italianate, Mansard, Queen Anne, and Classical Revival among them. Its physical character is marked by great diversity including triple-deckers, apartment buildings, and one- and two-family houses of all sizes; brick, wood, and shingle exteriors; flat and various pitched rooflines. Along with the buildings, character is derived from the streets and spaces, textures and details, and vistas that are woven into the fabric of the neighborhood. The character of Mid Cambridge also includes the neighborhood's social and cultural diversity.

Pressures for change threaten the District's diverse architectural character, which this measure seeks to preserve, conserve and protect from adverse environmental influences. The Order will accomplish this purpose by establishing a process for guiding changes to properties in the District while ensuring that additions and alterations to properties are compatible with the character of the District, by offering a forum for community dialogue about proposed changes to properties in the District, by providing technical assistance to District property owners on issues of conservation and preservation, and by fostering wider public appreciation of the District, and will thereby promote the public welfare by making the District a more attractive and desirable place in which to live, work, and visit.

III. Membership

Pursuant to Section 2.78.160, membership of the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission shall be selected and appointed as follows:

The City Manager shall appoint a neighborhood conservation district commission to consist of seven members and three alternates 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 designated neighborhood in terms of age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and property ownership or tenancy. Appointments shall reflect the City's goals for anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Members and alternates must have the ability to work and interact effectively with individuals and groups with a variety of identities, cultures, backgrounds, and ideologies. The membership shall be as follows:

- Member 1. District homeowner
- Member 2. District renter
- Member 3. District resident
- Member 4. District resident
- Member 5. District business operator/owner or District resident
- Member 6. Cambridge resident
- Member 7. Cambridge resident with professional qualifications
- Alternate 1. District resident
- Alternate 2. District resident
- Alternate 3. District resident

IV.. Review Authority.

The authority of the NCD Commission shall extend to the review of all construction, demolition, or alteration that affects exterior architectural features visible from a public way, other than color, within the District, except as otherwise provided in this Order. The following required categories of review shall apply.

A. The Commission shall make binding recommendations for any of the following that are visible from a public way:

1. Construction of a detached building more than 900 square feet of floor area
2. Construction of an addition more than 750 square feet of floor area
3. Demolition, including:
 - a. complete removal of a structure or relocation of an existing structure onto or off of a site,
 - b. demolition of more than 33% of a building's footprint
4. Any alteration -or construction -of the following:
 - a. properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places, except those subject to Historical Commission review;
 - b. publicly owned properties;

Where a review by the Commission is determined by the change in square footage, such review shall be based on the cumulative total of such changes in the past three years preceding the date of application for a building permit, as determined by certificates of occupancy or zoning compliance or building permits issued and/or still in force during that three-year period.

B. The Mid Cambridge NCD administrator or CHC staff shall conduct a non-binding review for any of the following that are visible from a public way:

1. Additions to an existing structure of more than 150 and less than 750 square feet of floor area;

2. New construction of a free-standing accessory dwelling unit (ADU) less than 900 square feet or an addition for an ADU under 750 square feet

3. Alterations involving any of the following (except for properties described in Paragraph A.4 that are public buildings or not on the National Register):

- a. removal or raising of a roof or portions of a roof to add less than 750 square feet
- b. removal or enclosure of any historic or original decorative element, such as siding, cornice, fascia, soffit, bay, porch, hood, corner-board, window sash, or window or door casing;
- c. increase or diminishment of the size and/or change in the location of windows or doors;
- d. increase or diminishment of the slope, pitch, or configuration of a roof or removal of historic or original roofing material.
- e. Fences or walls (or combination thereof) over 7 feet in height

C. Exemptions. The authority of the Commission shall not extend to the review of the following categories of architectural features, and features so excluded may be constructed or altered without review by the Commission:

- 1. Interior alterations.
- 2. Paint color.
- 3. Accessibility features.
- 4. Climate resilient improvements.
- 5. The alteration of the exterior of an existing structure in a manner that does not increase or diminish the size of the structure, and that does not require the removal of any cornice, fascia, soffit, bay, porch, hood, cornerboard, or window or door casing, or any other protruding decorative element, and that does not alter the shape of a roof.
- 6. The installation or alteration of flush skylights that do not cover more than one-third the area of the roof plane in which they are installed.
- 7. Permanent signs of a professional nature that comply with the Zoning Code, lawn statuary, zoning-exempt or temporary signs, and recreational equipment, subject to such conditions as to dimension, location, lighting and similar matters as the Commission may specify,
- 8. Terraces, walks, driveways, sidewalks and similar structures substantially at grade level which are not to be used for parking,
- 9. Storm doors and storm windows, screens, window air conditioners, lighting fixtures, antennae and trelliswork,
- 10. Fences under 7 feet in height,
- 11. Public infrastructure including streets, traffic devices and signs, sidewalks, bike lanes.

D. Ordinary Maintenance. Nothing in this Order shall be construed to prevent the ordinary maintenance, repair or replacement of any exterior architectural feature of the District which does not

involve a change in design or materials: or the outward appearance thereof, nor to prevent landscaping with plants, trees, or shrubs, nor construed to prevent the meeting of requirements certified by a duly authorized public officer to be necessary for public safety because of an unsafe or dangerous condition.

V. Review Criteria to be Considered by the Commission

The Commission shall apply certain criteria contained in Section 2.78.220 of the Municipal Code in considering applications for certificates of appropriateness, non-applicability, and hardship.

- A. General Criteria. All applications shall be considered in terms of the impact of the proposed new construction or alteration, relocation or demolition of an existing building on the District as a whole, and in addition with regard to the potential adverse effects of the proposed construction, alteration, relocation or demolition on the surrounding properties and on the immediate streetscape.
- B. General objectives shall be to:
 - 1. Preserve original architectural features by retaining significant buildings or architectural details that reflect the history of the neighborhood.
 - 2. Encourage context-sensitive alterations and design compatible with the neighborhood's character.
 - 3. Support increased density in response to City Council goals and to meet city -wide housing demand.
 - 4. Protect structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- C. Demolition or Relocation of an Existing Building. The Commission shall apply the provisions of Section 2.78 Article III with regard to the proposed demolition of an existing building, and in addition shall consider the following factors:
 - 1. The physical condition of the building;
 - 2. Any written claim of substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, if provided; and
 - 3. The design of the proposed replacement structures, if any.

VI. Determinations by the Commission.

The determinations of the Commission shall be binding regarding activities detailed in paragraph III B of this Order and shall be expressed through the issuance of certificates of appropriateness, non-applicability, or hardship. Any determination may contain conditions as the Commission determines to be necessary to fulfill the objectives of the District. Such conditions may include further review of final details such as exterior materials, to be held at an authorized subcommittee meeting, or additional review by staff as the design advances. The additional review shall not prevent the applicant from initiating other permitting processes.

All determinations shall be available for inspection at the office of the Cambridge Historical Commission. In no case shall a building permit be issued until the Commission has made a determination under the provisions of Section 2.78, Article III.

VII. Education and Incentive Program.

The Commission shall, in cooperation with the Cambridge Historical Commission, conduct ongoing educational activities in the district to make known the objectives of the District and the Commission, to encourage preservation of the District's historical character, and to make available information to advance and encourage voluntary protection of the District's distinctive architecture.

VIII. Coordination with Other Agencies and Boards -

The Board of Zoning Appeal, Inspectional Services Department, Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission, Planning Board, Community Development Department, and other City boards, agencies, and officials are directed to coordinate all review, hearing, permitting, and other procedures relative to physical changes within the District to the extent practicable, consistent with their respective responsibilities.

IX. Procedures.

When taking action under the provisions of this Order and Sections 2.78.190, 2.78.200, 2.78.210, and 2.78.220 of Article III of Chapter 2.78, the Neighborhood Conservation District Commission shall make its determinations within forty-five days after the filing of a complete application for a certificate of appropriateness, non-applicability, or hardship, or within such further time as the applicant may in writing allow or the Neighborhood Conservation District Commission may determine in accordance with regulations that the Commission may adopt consistent with Section 2.78.230 of said Article III. When taking actions regarding the exempt activities, the Historical Commission staff shall make its determinations within five days after the filing of a complete application for a certificate of appropriateness, non-applicability or hardship, or such further time as the applicant may in writing allow.

In addition to the provisions of Section 2.78.220 and 2.78.230 of the enabling ordinance, the Commission shall observe the following procedural requirements:

- A. When taking action on binding reviews under the provisions of this Order and Article III of Chapter 2.78, the Commission shall review the application at a public meeting of the Commission. The Commission shall give not less than forty-eight hours notice of such public meeting by publicly posting such notice in the office of the city clerk. In addition, notice of any meeting provided for in this ordinance shall be given by the Commission to the applicant and to abutters of the subject property and to such other persons and in such manner as the Commission may determine. The Commission may among other forms of notice require that the applicant maintain on the building which is the subject of a hearing for binding review, in a form designated by the Commission, visible from the nearest public way, of any meeting upon the application, and the applicant shall comply with such requirements.
- B. Failure of the Commission to act within the time periods specified in this Section shall mean approval of the application for a certificate and the Commission shall thereupon issue a certificate of hardship unless an extension of time is granted by the applicant in writing.
- C. Four members or alternates shall constitute a quorum of the Commission.
- D. The Commission may approve a project with the condition that specific design revisions are further reviewed at a meeting of the Architects Committee scheduled at the discretion of the applicant. This additional review does not prevent the applicant from commencing with the permit application process with other city departments. Any outstanding issues regarding revisions to the design shall be delegated to staff-level review. The Commission may delegate staff review in lieu

of an Architects Committee meeting.

X. Time Limit for Commission Action

When taking action under the provisions of this Order and Sections 2.78.190, 2.78.200, 2.78.210, and 2.78.220 of Article III of Chapter 2.78, the Commission shall make its determinations within forty-five days after the filing of a complete application for a certificate of appropriateness, non-applicability, or hardship, or within such further time as the applicant may in writing allow or the Commission may determine in accordance with regulations that the Commission may adopt consistent with Section 2.78.230 of said Article III.

In City Council June 8, 1992

Adopted by a yeas and nays vote:

Yeas -9; Nays: 0 Absent 0.

Attest: D. Margaret Drury, Temporary City Clerk.-.

As Amended in City Council XXXX XX, XXXX

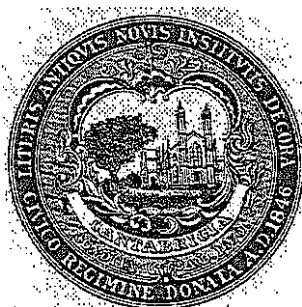
Adopted by a yeas and nays vote:-

Yeas X; Nays X; Absent X

Attest: XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX, City Clerk

Appendix D:

Present Guidelines for Determining the Appropriateness of Proposed Construction Projects



Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

831 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139
 Telephone: 617 349 4683. Fax: 617 349 3116 TTY: 617 349 6112
 E-mail: histsncds@cambridgema.gov
 URL: <http://www.cambridgema.gov/Historic/midcambridgehome.html>

Nancy Goodwin, *Chair* Tony Hsiao, *Vice-Chair* . Carole
 Perrault, Charles Redmon, Lestra Litchfield, *Members* Siobhan
 McMahon, Sue-Elie Myers, Monika Pauli, *Alternates*

To: Applicants to the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation
 District Commission

From: Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Re: Guidelines for Determining the Appropriateness of Proposed Construc-
 tion Projects

The order establishing the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District directs the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission to consider all applications in terms of the impact on the District as a whole and on the surrounding properties and immediate streetscape. The commission is specifically directed to:

1. avoid excessive infill;
2. encourage new construction, which complements existing buildings;
3. encourage preservation of neighborhood buildings;
4. protect National Register structures; and
5. enhance the economic vitality of the neighborhood.

The Guidelines listed below are formulated to assist applicants proposing construction projects. The Guidelines take the form of questions the Commission will ask of all proposed construction projects. Applicants for construction projects should be prepared to address these questions in their presentations to the Commission. For further information about this process, contact Allison Crosbie at the Historical Commission of-
 fice, 617-349-4683.

I. Scope of Neighborhood

- A. What is the impact of the project on the surrounding area? Physical, visual and traffic impacts should be identified. The surrounding area is defined in its smallest dimensions, as the lots of the abutters and the abutters' abutters. However, the Commission may determine that a project

may affect a larger area, depending on the scope of the project. If the Commission determines that a larger area is affected; the Commission will identify the extent of that area and the ways in which the project affects that area.

II. Development Characteristics

A. Is the project appropriate to the neighborhood and in scale with the surrounding area? Massing, bulk, height, and fenestration will be taken into consideration in determining the scale of the proposed project in relation to the surrounding area.

B. Is the height of the project appropriate considering the height of buildings in the surrounding area?

C. Is the density, or Floor Area Ratio (FAR), of the proposed project complementary to the FAR of buildings in the surrounding area?

D. Is the massing of the project appropriate to the surrounding area?

E. Are the setbacks of the project appropriate to the surrounding area?

1. What are the current and the proposed setbacks for the project?

2. Are any variances on setbacks needed?

3. What would the distance be between the proposed construction and any other buildings on the lot?

4. What would the distance be between the proposed construction and buildings on the abutting lots?

F. Are any variances of any sort needed?

III. Landscaping

A. Are any mature trees (3" caliper or over) being removed? If so, what is their approximate height and age, and what is their type and location?

B. Is any excavation and/or landfill included in the project?

C. Is there a substantial grade change along any of the lot lines?

D. Is a change of the existing grade proposed?

IV. Aesthetic Considerations

A. What is the historic character of the buildings in the neighborhood?

B. What are the architectural features of the buildings in the neighborhood?. What are the architectural features of the proposed development (including materials, design, and setting)?

V. Impact on Neighborhood

A. How does the project affect parking in the neighborhood?

B. What is the parking plan for the proposed development?

C. What are the provisions for access to the proposed development by emergency vehicles?

D. What is the location and noise impact of mechanical equipment?

E. Will the project diminish light and air to the abutters? If so, what is the nature and extent of diminished light and air to the abutters?

F. How will trash be accommodated once the project is complete?

G. Do the neighbors support the proposed development?

Adopted February 2, 1988

Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Appendix E: Proposed Design Guidelines

MID CAMBRIDGE NCD

DRAFT DESIGN GUIDELINES (September 2026)

The following guidelines have been developed for the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD) to promote and support the diverse architectural fabric of the neighborhood. The guidelines are intended to provide an objective baseline for decision-making when changes are proposed to properties in the district.

The guidelines recognize that many buildings and structures in the district have been altered over time and will continue to evolve to meet the needs of occupants. The guidelines do not discourage change; they offer preferred options for dealing with character-defining elements.

A. Wood Exterior Surfaces

Wood was the most common material used for residential buildings in the district.

1. Character-defining wood features may include historic siding, cornerboards, door and window trim, soffit and fascia, cornices and brackets. These features should be retained and repaired as needed.
2. Historic exterior surfaces may contain environmentally hazardous materials, including lead and asbestos, which should be treated and disposed of according to state and local regulations.
3. When necessary, replacement of wood elements should be in kind, including the same material, style, matching width, thickness, profile, and texture where applicable.
4. The removal of subsequent and the repair of original wood siding is encouraged.
5. The application of metal siding, vinyl siding, asbestos shingles, asphalt siding and other covering materials is discouraged throughout the district. The approval of such treatment will be on a case-by-case basis, and its application should always incorporate the retention of door and window surrounds and the use of cornerboards.

B. Masonry

Masonry is also a common exterior surface in the district, particularly apartment buildings and institutional buildings. Masonry can be damaged when metal, vinyl, or other types of covering are installed over facades.

1. Exposed masonry surfaces should remain exposed. Existing exposed masonry surfaces should not be covered with artificial materials (EIFS, cementitious covering, vinyl, aluminum siding, etc.).
2. Care should be taken to avoid covering of historic foundations and also keep them free from concentrations of excessive moisture.

3. Historic concrete, cast stone (sills, lintels, cornices and other architectural details) should be repaired and retained. As with brick, any replacement should match the original in material, size, color, texture and finish.
4. Stone walls, including historic garden walls, should not be concealed by parging or other treatments. Where any historic details exist, they should be retained.
5. Painting over masonry is discouraged. Masonry is porous, allowing moisture to evaporate. Painting the surface traps moisture, resulting in freezing and thawing, which can cause cracking and flaking. Paint will eventually peel and require frequent touch-ups or full repainting, increasing maintenance. Paint is also very difficult to remove and can leave scars on the surface.
6. Repointing is necessary maintenance but care should be given to the mortar type, color, texture, and profile.

C. Windows and Doors

Windows and doors are among the most character-defining features of a building. They can account for as much as one-third of a building's surface area. Typically, windows and doors are formally arranged on the front facades of buildings. Historically, residential doors were made of wood with raised or recessed panels, often incorporating glazing.

1. The historic relationship of wall surface to openings, often referred to as the "fenestration" of the windows and doors, should be maintained.
2. The overall size of window and door openings should not be modified.
3. Original doors and windows should be repaired rather than replaced. If replacement is necessary, an effort should be made to match the original as closely as possible in material, configuration of panes, and dimension.
4. If windows have to be replaced, replacements should match style, including muntin profiles and the dimension of glazing. Appropriate materials include wood or a combination of wood interior/fiberglass exterior, wood interior/aluminum exterior, or a composite such as fibrex. Vinyl windows are not recommended because they tend to have bulkier and wider frames compared to historic windows; they lack the historical profiles of original sashes; and they can warp in extreme heat and are not very durable.

Storm Doors and Windows

5. The use of exterior storm doors and windows is encouraged. Full-glass storm doors are preferred; in all cases, storm doors should expose as much of the inside door as possible.
6. Interior storm windows are encouraged. They offer a highly effective solution to air infiltration and do not compromise the exterior appearance of the window.
7. Exterior storm windows should fit the openings of the windows without having to infill any portion of the opening or to flatten any portion of an arch. Storm windows should be installed within the window opening rather than on the outside surface of the building or the window frame. Meeting rails should align with that of the window itself.

D. Roofs, Gutters, and Downspouts

Visible roof material within the district includes original slate shingles, but most buildings now have asphalt or composite shingles. The roofs of many buildings also contain character-defining features, such as dormers and cupolas. The shape, size, and materials of gutters and downspouts also contribute to the character of a roof.

1. Original roof shape, details, ornamentation, and other character-defining elements should be maintained.
2. The preservation of visible slate roofs is encouraged.
3. Replacement gutters should match the profile of the original. Original wood gutters do not accommodate the increased rainfall that occurs today. Fiberglass gutters, which are made on a mold of a wood gutter and are indistinguishable in appearance from them, or copper gutters, which can be formed to any traditional gutter profile, are appropriate replacements. Both of these types of gutters in a standard 4"x5" size have a capacity almost four times that of a wood gutter. Aluminum flat-bottomed (K-Style) aluminum gutters are discouraged. Although they have a large capacity, their profile is not traditional, and the thin metal is not very durable.
4. Equipment such as satellite dishes, antennas, and HVAC units should be located inconspicuously and attached to the building in a manner that does not harm historic building materials.
5. Skylights should be flat and parallel to the roof surface and cover less than 1/3 of the roof surface. Skylights are not recommended for slate roofs.

E. Chimneys

Chimneys that are prominently visible on the structure and include decorative details are important architectural features and should be retained.

1. Chimney rehabilitation and reconstruction should match the original in dimension, materials, brick pattern, details, and form as closely as possible.
2. The parging (stuccoing) of previously un-parged chimneys should be avoided.

F. Porches and Overhangs

Porches and overhangs are important character-defining features. Many properties exhibit original porches or porches that have acquired significance over time.

1. Porches on any elevation should be retained.
2. If enclosing a porch is necessary, it should be done in a manner that it is reversible and that avoids damage or destruction to historic features. Every effort should be made to ensure that the enclosed porch still looks like a porch, not like an enclosed room.
3. Porch details should be repaired rather than replaced. If deterioration is too severe, replacements should match the original size and appearance to the greatest extent possible.

G. New Construction / Additions

The construction of new buildings presents exciting opportunities. New construction and additions should be contemporary, of their time, but also incorporate elements that visually relate to neighborhood character, such as materials, porches, or window alignment.

1. For new construction, consideration should be made of the prevailing setback of the street in addition to current zoning regulations.
2. New buildings should relate to general patterns of buildings, including fenestration, entries, roof types and common building shapes, as they appear in the surrounding architecture of the district.
3. For the construction of new multi-unit residential buildings, the specific design guidelines have been developed by the City's Community Development Department, titled *Design Guidelines for Multi-Family Housing* shall be applied
4. New buildings should incorporate compatible exterior materials as are found on the historic buildings within the district.
5. Additions to existing buildings should be made on a side or rear elevation with a minimal impact on historic features and should be made in a manner that, if removed in the future, historic material would not be irreparably damaged.
6. Additions should use materials compatible with the existing building and incorporate appropriate finishes, scale, roof form, and window and door proportions.

H. Streetscapes

Driveways, parking areas, walls, fences, and landscape structures contribute to the unique character of the district and the unique character of the city overall. In addition, maintaining street views is also important to the experience of the streetscape.

1. Trash containers not intended for public use should be located at the rear of buildings or other inconspicuous locations, and should not damage or obscure significant historic features of a building.
2. Whenever possible, transformers should be located below ground or as inconspicuously as possible.
3. The placement of utility entrances should occur at rear elevations or other inconspicuous sites. In all cases, concealment is the most important factor with respect to utility service and historic buildings.
4. Retaining walls, when visible from a public way, should be constructed of traditional masonry materials (i.e., brick or stone). Concrete may be approved in some cases.
5. Fences are character-defining features of primary elevations and contribute to the character of the streetscape. Fences are not regulated in the district unless over 7 feet in height, but maintaining views of the building from a public way is encouraged.

I. Demolition

While the Commission advocates for the preservation of historic architectural fabric, demolition is reviewed on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration public interest and City Council goals as well as the architectural and historical significance of the structure, claims of hardship, and the design of any proposed replacement structure(s).

Appendix F:

Minutes of the Decennial Review Public Meetings

DRAFT

Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Decennial Review – Public Meeting Minutes

April 27, 2026

This was the first of three public meetings held as part of the decennial review of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD), conducted remotely via Zoom. The meeting was recorded, and the recording and presentation slides were made available on the Cambridge Historical Commission's Decennial Review webpage following the meeting.

Presenters: Allison Crosbie, Preservation Administrator; Charles "Charlie" Sullivan, Director; Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner; Eric Hill, Survey Director

Allison Crosbie welcomed attendees and explained that the evening's agenda would cover the purpose and background of the decennial review, the establishment of the Mid Cambridge NCD, a summary of the Commission's case history, sample projects, and a question-and-comment period.

Purpose of the Decennial Review

Ms. Crosbie explained that the decennial review requirement stems from 2023 amendments to Article 2.78 of the Cambridge Municipal Code, which governs neighborhood conservation districts. The amendments now require each NCD to undergo a decennial review, producing a report that looks back over the preceding ten years, focused on demographics and a summary of Commission cases, and that looks forward with recommended changes, if any, to the district's boundaries, guidelines, or procedures.

The report is prepared by staff, submitted to the Cambridge Historical Commission for review, and then submitted to the City Council for a vote, expected this fall. The Council may vote to amend the district, uphold it as is, or rescind the NCD designation.

Overview of the Mid Cambridge District

Ms. Crosbie noted that Mid Cambridge is by far the largest NCD in the city, extending roughly from Prospect Street on the east, down to (but not including) buildings on Massachusetts Avenue, up Prospect Street to Kirkland Street, down Line Street along the Somerville border, and capturing part of Inman Square. The district contains approximately 1,500 buildings, including residential, commercial, public, and institutional uses; the Commission has purview over city-owned buildings and Harvard-owned buildings within the district. Building styles range from Greek Revival, Colonial Revival, Mansard, and Queen Anne dating to the mid-19th century, through the Depression era, along with apartment buildings constructed in the 1960s and 1970s.

Ms. Crosbie noted the district originated in the early 1980s out of concern over the demolition of existing structures and the construction of townhouses without design review.

Historical Background: Zoning and the Origins of the Commission

Charles Sullivan described the postwar context leading to the district's creation. In the 1950s, Cambridge was losing population, and the city was concerned about a stagnating economy and an eroding tax base relative to Harvard and MIT. A new zoning code adopted in the late 1950s (effective 1962) included a floor-area ratio of 4 and unlimited heights in certain districts, which spurred scattered high-rise construction, including at Harvard and Lee Streets in 1962 and near Inman Square on Cambridge Street.

Mr. Sullivan described a subsequent wave of smaller, boxy apartment buildings known locally as "Arlington pillboxes," which filled out the zoning envelope permitted in C1 districts (35-foot height limit, roughly 15-foot setbacks) and appeared throughout Mid Cambridge in the 1960s and 1970s, in some cases replacing historic structures, including a Lutheran church on Harvard Street (1974, tower retained) and a mansion further up Harvard Street (1969).

In the mid-1970s, the City Council responded to the proliferation of pillboxes with a zoning amendment encouraging townhouse development, typically built at right angles to the street and divided into six or seven units. Mr. Sullivan cited an example on Harvard Street near Hancock Street that replaced one of an ensemble of three Greek Revival houses (two of which remain); the architect used varied materials, colors, and textures on the façade to visually break up the building's scale. This project, he said, triggered a strong neighborhood reaction against infill development in Mid Cambridge.

Regulatory Timeline

1977 – Mid Cambridge rezoned from C2 to C1, lowering the height limit from 85 feet to 35 feet.

1983 – Enabling Ordinance for Conservation Districts and Landmarks established.

1985 – Mid Cambridge NCD order adopted by the City Council, primarily to review demolition, new construction, and alterations to National Register-listed properties. An accompanying educational requirement produced the Commission's publication *Maintaining Your Old House in Cambridge*.

1992 – Mid Cambridge NCD order amended to expand the Commission's jurisdiction over alterations.

2020 – City Council adopted the Affordable Housing Overlay for 100% affordable housing projects.

2023 – Enabling Ordinance (Chapter 2.78) amended to restrict the Commission's ability to consider the size and shape of new construction or alterations – described by Mr. Sullivan as a major change to the Commission's operations and goals.

2025 – City Council adopted the Multi-Family Housing Ordinance.

Ten-Year Case Summary (2015-2025)

Ms. Crosbie reported that staff reviewed 2,785 applications between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2025. The breakdown of outcomes was as follows:

- The large majority received staff-level approval via a Certificate of Non-Applicability, issued when a scope of work does not require formal review – typically interior work, work not visible from a public way, or in-kind repair or replacement.
- Over 200 Certificates of Appropriateness were granted by the Commission; the majority were non-binding (advisory) determinations, with 60 binding determinations.
- 47 non-binding denials were issued (advisory only; applicants are not required to comply).
- 2 binding denials were issued: one involving a shed structure in a prominent site location, where the Commission's recommended material substitution was ultimately adopted by the applicant; and one involving a proposed window reconfiguration at a National Register structure in Inman Square (the Druid), where the Commission recommended a fold-up window design instead of full sidewalk-level openings – a solution the applicant is currently pursuing.
- 7 applications were withdrawn.

Ms. Crosbie clarified the current scope of Commission review: new construction, demolition, and alterations visible from a public way (including additions, relocation of windows and doors, and replacement of windows, doors, and siding). The Commission does not review building use, paint color (though it may recommend), interior renovations, in-kind replacement (handled at staff level), plant material or hardscaping (though a landscape plan is expected under Mid Cambridge guidelines, and permeable paving is encouraged but not required), fences and walls under six feet, or solar panels (unless installation would require removal of significant original material, such as a slate roof; several such installations have been approved successfully to date).

Sample Projects Reviewed by the Commission

Ms. Crosbie presented a series of representative cases from the past decade, illustrating the range of the Commission's work:

Routine alterations: roof dormers, porch enclosures, and window and siding replacement, including an in-kind wood shingle and clapboard restoration at a National Register structure.

A 1920s building, already altered from its original form (2016) – Substantially reworked for Harvard's Center for Green Buildings and Cities, including new window types and a new siding system.

The Riles Building, Inman Square (2018) – Restoration of a Mansard roof form that had been removed, believed to date to the 1960s.

75 Inman Street – Removal of a small rear addition and construction of an attached additional unit; the applicant preserved a mature shade tree on the site during construction in response to neighbor concerns.

123 Hancock Street – A Greek Revival structure; the Commission approved removal of a small rear addition, a new rear addition, and a separate new structure on the site, working with the architect to step back the massing to preserve visual prominence for the original building.

Additional infill projects on Inman Street, Fayette Street, and Ellsworth Avenue, reflecting a range of approved styles.

Amory Street – Following a partial structural collapse and condemnation in 2022, the Commission approved a new two-family dwelling that draws visual cues from the surrounding neighborhood.

Cambridge Street (2005) – Harvard's Center for Government and International Studies buildings, which required demolition of an 1858 structure and relocation of an 1887 building to Sumner Road.

Cambridge Public Library (2004) – A lengthy review process resulting in approval of the library's expansion, restoration of the existing building, and renovation of the surrounding park.

Velucci Plaza – A more recent project reconfiguring the intersection, which divided the existing plaza in half; the Commission weighed in on materials and overall design.

Recent Changes Affecting the Commission

Ms. Crosbie and Mr. Sullivan summarized further changes stemming from 2023 amendments and subsequent zoning actions:

Commission membership has increased to 10 (7 members and 3 alternates).

The Commission may no longer weigh in on accessibility features or climate-resiliency features.

The Commission may no longer deny a Certificate of Appropriateness based on the size or shape of a structure, nor impose dimensional or setback requirements beyond those required by zoning, for as-of-right structures. The Commission may still discuss size and shape and make non-binding recommendations.

The ordinance now directs the Commission to consider relevant City Council goals from time to time, including addressing the housing crisis (making it easier to build more housing of all types, with a focus on affordability) and sustainability/climate resilience (an area where the Commission has consistently advocated for sustainable materials in new construction).

Ms. Crosbie summarized the 2025 Multi-Family Housing Ordinance: it allows residential use citywide, removes minimum lot sizes, increases residential height limits (up to 45 feet, or 74 feet for six-story buildings, in relevant districts), reduces setback requirements, and reduces special permit requirements.

Projects Since the 2025 Zoning Changes

60 Ellery Street – A 1923 brick Colonial Revival house; the applicant proposed demolition and a six-story replacement building. The Commission approved the project after several rounds of revision, which included simplifying the upper-story materials (removing metal panel cladding

deemed out of character), revising the front entrance and side transformer/storage area, and ultimately added one additional unit to the design.

406 Broadway – A 1925 brick Colonial Revival structure; the applicant proposed demolition and a six-story replacement. After an initial design with extensive glazing and varied materials, the Commission asked for a simplified façade more consistent with neighborhood context; both demolition and new construction were subsequently approved following an Architects Committee meeting – an optional follow-up design session, open to any Commission member, that applicants may request to finalize refinements after an initial review.

486 Ellery Street (address as given in the recording; may warrant confirmation) – The applicant initially proposed full demolition and a six-story building. The Commission determined the existing structure was architecturally and historically significant, but approved demolition of two later rear wing additions. The applicant returned with a revised design preserving the main structure, which was approved.

Next Steps

Ms. Crosbie noted that this first meeting was intended to provide background; the next two meetings in the decennial review series will take a closer look at the Commission's guidelines and procedures and discuss potential updates. A QR code and contact information were provided for submitting comments and questions outside of the meeting.

Public Questions and Comments

Sarah Burks facilitated the comment period, allotting approximately three minutes per speaker given the number of raised hands.

- Ms. Marilee Meyer, noting she had come from a City Council hearing on multi-family zoning, raised a concern about how affordable-housing requirements are calculated under current zoning. She noted that the original standard called for 20% of units to be affordable, but that this has effectively shifted to 20% of floor area, which she said allows flexibility in unit size that could reduce the number of affordable units delivered. She asked whether the Commission was seeing this play out, though she acknowledged that this calculation is outside the NCD Commission's jurisdiction.
- Ms. Burks responded that calculating the affordability requirement by floor area, rather than by unit count, allows some affordable units to be larger, multi-bedroom units suitable for families, and that the details are managed by the Community Development Department's housing staff.
- Mr. John Pitkin asked for more information on the ultimate outcomes of the 47 non-binding denials issued over the past decade – specifically, what happened with those projects afterward, and whether the denials had any positive or other effect on the outcomes. Ms. Crosbie agreed that staff would look into this and include it in the report.

Charles Sullivan added that the value of the Commission's review process extends beyond formal approvals and denials: discussions with applicants, whether the case is binding or non-binding, frequently add value, and property owners often gain a better

understanding of their buildings and of preservation principles as a result, with many non-binding cases ultimately supporting Mid Cambridge's preservation goals. He said staff would aim to emphasize this dynamic in the next two presentations.

Mr. Sullivan cited the Harvard Center for Government and International Studies (CGIS) project as an example: the initial proposal was for a single large, six-story building behind Gund Hall on Cambridge Street, and the Commission, with strong support from the neighborhood, objected to its bulk adjacent to a residential area. This led Harvard to split the project into two buildings on opposite sides of Cambridge Street, better matching the surrounding residential density.

Mr. Pitkin agreed that the Commission's influence at the discussion stage – even short of a binding requirement – has in some cases been very effective in achieving better design outcomes.

Mr. Pitkin also invited attendees to a Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Association community forum that Thursday, 6:15–8:15 PM at the Longfellow Building gymnasium, at which the NCD decennial review would be on the agenda; Mr. Sullivan and two other Historical Commission staff members planned to attend to answer questions and help publicize the review process.

- Mr. Kyle Hoepner asked about the strategy for the planned walking tours – specifically, what information would be shared with participants that is relevant to gathering input for the report. Mr. Sullivan responded that the tours will draw on cases reviewed by the Commission, aiming to show a variety of examples of where Commission involvement was positive and where outcomes did not work out as expected, and to discuss potential development in areas such as Ellery Street and Broadway.

Mr. Hoepner also asked whether before-and-after project comparisons of the kind shown in the presentation – similar to the 60 Ellery Street and 406 Broadway examples – would be made available online, for a broader set of cases than the ten years covered in the report. Ms. Crosbie confirmed that additional examples would be included in the forthcoming report and could be posted online.

- Ms. Meyer asked whether staff had encountered developers who refused to consider the Commission's suggestions, citing as-of-right entitlement to proceed without changes. Ms. Burks said she had not encountered this in recent years – not for roughly the last 15 to 20 years. Mr. Sullivan and Ms. Crosbie agreed, noting that while developers are not always pleased to appear before the Commission, those they have worked with have generally been cooperative with the review process.
- Mr. Pitkin asked when the meeting slides and presentation would be posted online, noting he wished to circulate the link. Ms. Burks said she would post them before the end of the business day. Ms. Burks also noted that an email distribution list has been established for the decennial review, and invited attendees who wish to receive meeting reminders and updates to request to be added.

Sarah Burks and Charles Sullivan thanked attendees for their time and participation, and the meeting concluded.

DRAFT**Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District
Decennial Review – Public Meeting Minutes**

May 18, 2026

This was the second of three public meetings held as part of the decennial review of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD), conducted remotely via Zoom. The meeting was recorded, and the recording and presentation slides were made available on the Cambridge Historical Commission's Decennial Review webpage following the meeting.

Presenters: Allison Crosbie, Preservation Administrator; Charles "Charlie" Sullivan, Director; Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner; Eric Hill, Survey Director

Call to Order and Introductions

Allison Crosbie opened the meeting, welcoming attendees to the second meeting of the Mid Cambridge NCD Decennial Review. Attendees introduced themselves:

- Allison Crosbie – Preservation Administrator
- Sarah Burks – Preservation Planner
- Eric Hill – Survey Director
- Charlie Sullivan – Executive Director

Purpose of the Decennial Review

Ms. Crosbie explained that 2023 amendments to Article 2.78 of the Municipal Code now require each Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD) to undergo a decennial review. The review must include a report examining the past 10 years, covering:

- Neighborhood demographics
- Activities of the NCD Commission over the previous decade
- Recommended changes, if any, to the boundaries, guidelines, and/or procedures of the district

The report will be reviewed by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission, then submitted to City Council for a vote to amend, uphold, or rescind the NCD.

History and Evolution of the Mid Cambridge NCD Ordinance

Ms. Burks summarized the history:

- 1982 – Original study committee proposed the Mid Cambridge NCD and issued a study report with recommendations.
- Ordinance later folded into the city code as Chapter 2.78, Article Three.

- 1985 – Following pushback on the original review authority, City Council adopted a simplified version of the order.
- 1991 – A new study committee was convened to consider amendments, proposing expanded jurisdiction/review authority for the Mid Cambridge Commission.
- 1992 – City Council adopted the amended district order reflecting the 1991 study.
- 2023 – City Council adopted amendments changing NCD Commission review jurisdiction and the factors commissions must consider in decision-making.
- 2025 – Multifamily housing ordinance adopted.

Original Review Authority (pre-1991)

Advisory review originally covered alterations to National Register-listed structures visible from a public street, including changes to bay windows, cornices, fascia, gutter trim, porches, corner boards, window/door casings, skylights, and signage (other than home-occupation signs).

Binding review originally covered, for changes visible from a public way:

- Demolition of 33% or more of a structure's floor area (excluding garages)
- New construction greater than 750 square feet
- New construction on more than 33% of previously unoccupied lot area
- Enlargement of floor area by more than 33%
- Relocation of a structure
- Alteration or construction involving a non-conforming use
- Changes to publicly owned structures

1991-92 Amendments

- Moved alterations to National Register properties from advisory to binding review.
- Added new advisory categories: additions between 150-750 sq ft; alterations requiring a variance or special permit; and alterations affecting window/door size, roof slope/pitch, or removal of original roofing materials.

2023 Amendments

- Made accessibility features, climate resiliency projects, and renewable energy projects non-binding/advisory.
- Exempted projects with more than 50% affordable units from NCD Commission review.
- Commissions may no longer consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of new construction or additions.
- Commissions may no longer impose dimensional or setback requirements beyond those required by zoning.

- Commissions must now also consider community goals as expressed by City Council. 2025 Multifamily Housing Ordinance
- Residential use types largely consolidated into the C-1 category.
- Minimum lot size requirements removed.
- Regulation now based on stories above grade and open space.
- Residential height limits increased.
- Density controls relaxed, including elimination of floor-area-ratio and minimum lot area per dwelling unit requirements.
- Required setbacks reduced; fewer projects require a special permit.

Sample Projects by Jurisdictional Category

Ms. Crosbie reviewed the district map and reiterated the two levels of review: advisory (e.g., new construction under 750 sq ft, alterations requiring a special permit/variance, various exterior alterations) and binding. She noted that under advisory review, if the Commission denies a Certificate of Appropriateness, the applicant may still proceed with the project as submitted.

Advisory Review Examples

- 6-8 Goodman Road (2020) - Enclosed porch and side dormer addition; Commission worked with the owner to refine the front porch design for a more gracious entrance.
- 8 Greenough Avenue (2021) - Window replacement/reconfiguration; Commission focused on consistent window style and visual alignment, especially at the front.
- 23 Greenough Avenue - Minor exterior alterations, including addition of a second primary entrance as part of a major interior renovation.
- Magnolia Avenue - Dormer, new windows, and a front-gable porch; though non-binding, the applicant voluntarily returned for additional review to refine the design.
- 1-3 Lamont Avenue (2023) - Siding replacement (vinyl to Hardie board/fiber cement) and window reconfiguration; Commission emphasized consistent window appearance on the front facade.
- 13 Goodman Road - Extensive renovation (originally proposed for demolition); added bays, reconfigured porch, removed second-story porch, added dormer; approved after several iterations.
- 29 Line Street - Denied: proposed changes to a distinctive front bay/entrance and siding/window type were found inconsistent with neighborhood character; applicant remained free to proceed as advisory.
- 381 Broadway - Denied: proposed removal of porch detail (columns, railings) was seen as eroding historic character; Commission asked the applicant to salvage materials for potential future restoration.

Binding Review Examples

Binding review applies to: new construction over 750 sq ft or on more than 33% of lot area; enlargement of existing floor area by more than 33%; demolition of 33% or more of a structure's floor area (excluding garages); relocation of an existing structure; and alterations/construction affecting National Register structures, publicly owned structures, or structures with non-conforming uses. Ms. Crosbie noted there are 103 National Register properties within the district.

- 382 Harvard Street (2021, National Register) – Full siding/trim replacement using fiber cement and Azek PVC; Commission required replication of original materials and detailing; most windows replaced except the original square front-facade windows.
- 206-212 Hampshire Street – Reconstruction and restoration of a mansard roof (following an earlier fire) along with window and storefront restoration; not National Register-listed, but binding due to addition size.
- 123 Hancock Street – Infill project behind a Greek Revival house; Commission rejected an initial mansard-style design as incompatible and approved a simpler, more modern design set back to preserve the prominence of the Greek Revival house.
- 106 Inman Street – Infill project; Commission found the original metal-panel proposal too commercial in character; applicant returned with an all-clapboard design.
- 17 Ellsworth Street – Infill project; Commission worked with the architect to create a more visible, defined entrance and revised window/dormer detailing.
- 142 Amory Street – Two-family building rebuilt following a partial structural collapse; Commission asked for a simpler design after finding the initial proposal too busy; simplified design approved.
- Center for Government and International Studies – Involved demolition of an 1858 structure and relocation of an 1887 building to Sumner Road; an earlier proposal to site the building behind Gunn Hall was not pursued.
- Cambridge Public Library – Lengthy review process; Commission promoted preservation of the existing library building and worked with the architect to integrate it with the new library design, including park renovations.
- 406 Broadway – Commission approved demolition of the existing structure but requested a simpler design with reduced materials and fenestration; revised design approved.
- 84-86 Ellery Street – Applicant proposed full demolition for a six-story building; Commission determined the main structure was historically significant and required retention/incorporation of the main building (rear addition could be removed); partial demolition approved.

Broader District Goals

Mr. Hill noted that when NCDs are established, the study committee and neighborhood define goals for the district. Some original 1980s goals – such as avoiding “excessive infill” (a term left undefined) – may no longer be relevant in 2026. The decennial review offers an opportunity to revisit and update these objectives. Original district goals included:

- Encouraging new construction that complements existing buildings
- Encouraging preservation of significant neighborhood buildings (e.g., allowing infill construction at the rear rather than full demolition, as at Ellery Street)
- Protecting National Register structures
- Enhancing the economic vitality of the neighborhood (relevant to the Inman Square commercial core and commercial properties on Prospect Street)

Next Steps

Staff invited residents and the public to comment on how the Mid Cambridge NCD has functioned over its nearly 50-year history and to offer recommendations on:

- Whether district goals should be updated
- Whether Commission jurisdiction should change
- Whether guidelines should better encourage compatible development and materials

Staff noted that additional public input will be gathered through upcoming walking tours. Between this meeting and the next meeting on June 22, staff will prepare a draft with proposed recommendations on goals, guidelines, and jurisdiction for discussion at the following meeting.

Public Questions and Comments

Ms. Crosbie opened the floor for questions and comments, inviting feedback on which aspects of the current jurisdiction (alterations, demolition review, new construction/additions) are working well and which may warrant amendment.

Marilee Meyer asked whether a new policy order or amendment automatically voids or supersedes prior rules, or whether older provisions (e.g., discouraging parking in front yards) carry over when not explicitly addressed in later amendments – specifically, whether the 2023 amendments (which removed Commission oversight of size, shape, and setbacks) fully superseded earlier, more detailed provisions from the 1992 order.

Kyle Hoepner asked about the review process and how feedback will be incorporated in the final report. Staff replied that all comments will be included in the report.

Mr. John Pitkin asked why developers are required to meet with neighbors in the NCDs when there is already a Commission review process that includes public comment. Mr. Pitkin also commented that in-person Commission meetings are more conducive to a productive dialog.

Ms. Chiara Gerhardinger expressed concern over the apparent reduced opportunities for public input on development projects.

Mr. Sullivan thanked everyone for attending, and Sarah Burks reminded everyone of the upcoming walking tours.

DRAFT
Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District
Decennial Review – Public Meeting Minutes

June 22, 2026

This was the third public meeting held as part of the decennial review of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD), conducted remotely via Zoom. The meeting was recorded, and the recording and presentation slides were made available on the Cambridge Historical Commission's Decennial Review webpage following the meeting.

Presenters: Allison Crosbie, Preservation Administrator; Charles Sullivan, Director; Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner; Eric Hill, Survey Director

Background and Purpose of the Meeting

Director Charlie Sullivan opened by summarizing that the current Mid Cambridge NCD order derives from amendments adopted pursuant to a 1982 ordinance. In 2023, the enabling ordinance (Chapter 2.78 of the City Code) was amended to:

- Restrict NCD commissions' ability to review the size and shape of new construction and additions.
- Exempt energy-efficiency and accessibility improvements from review, among other changes.

Because the Mid Cambridge order is decades old and “time has overtaken [it] in some respects,” and because the 2023 amendments established a rotating 10-year sunset review for all NCD commissions, the Mid Cambridge sunset review will come before City Council this fall. Staff has been reviewing the order and Commission records in light of the 2023 amendments and the 2025 multifamily housing ordinance (which abolished parking requirements, among other changes) and the requirement that NCD commissions consider City Council housing-production goals.

Staff is proposing amendments to clarify, simplify, and modernize the jurisdiction and operations of the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission. This meeting is one of a series (including neighborhood walking tours) intended as fact-finding, not decision-making. Proposals discussed tonight reflect the staff's estimate of how to modernize the order; they will be the subject of a Cambridge Historical Commission public hearing this summer and will be submitted to City Council in September for consideration as part of the decennial review.

Update on Multifamily Housing Projects in Mid Cambridge

Allison Crosbie gave a brief update on four multifamily housing projects approved to date by the Commission:

- 60 Ellery Street and 406 [Broadway] – full demolition, to be replaced with six-story buildings.

- 84-86 Ellery Street (two adjacent properties) – demolition approved only for non-original rear additions; the main original structures are being preserved with new additions built at the rear.

Proposed Revised Goals for the District

Staff reviewed the current goals of the Mid Cambridge NCD:

- Avoid excessive infill
- Encourage new construction that complements existing buildings
- Encourage preservation of neighborhood buildings
- Protect National Register structures
- Enhance the economic vitality of the neighborhood

Staff proposed consolidating these into three goals:

- Conserve the diverse architectural character of the district by retaining significant buildings that reflect the history of the neighborhood.
- Encourage architectural diversity and context-sensitive alterations consistent with the neighborhood's character.
- Support increased density in response to City Council goals and to meet citywide housing demand.

Staff proposed removing “enhance economic vitality,” noting the Commission has no real authority over building use and the goal was never clearly defined or applied. Ms. Crosbie noted that of the four multifamily projects discussed above, two involved structures deemed not architecturally/historically significant, while two others were considered significant – determinations made on a case-by-case basis.

Charlie Sullivan added context from the original 1985 purpose statement of Article 2.78, which calls for preserving and conserving the city's beauty and heritage; identifying and maintaining neighborhoods and structures reflecting the city's architectural, cultural, political, economic, racial, or social history; fostering appropriate use and public appreciation of such areas; welcoming diverse residents, including those with marginalized identities who shaped Cambridge's history; and balancing these purposes against other city priorities such as affordable housing, sustainability, and accessibility. This purpose statement was amended in 2023 to reflect Council goals on housing production and diversity. He noted Mid Cambridge's history is more architecturally, racially, and economically layered than commonly recognized – citing, as one example, a formerly Black community near the City Hall annex/old Longfellow School site – and that the Commission's role is to exercise collective judgment balancing sometimes-competing goals.

Public Comment on Proposed Goals

- Suzanne Blier (5 Fuller Place) argued that developer/investor-driven projects are making Mid Cambridge less equitable, less diverse, and less affordable by displacing existing tenants;

clarified that Mid Cambridge is a conservation district, not a historic district, allowing new design and transformation of existing buildings.

- Jessica Sheehan (Plymouth Street) corrected the record on research regarding NCDs and housing costs, noting the cited research specifically addresses neighborhood conservation districts, not just historic districts.
- Lee Farris (Norfolk Street) asked whether “protect National Register structures” should remain an explicit goal, since it doesn't appear in the proposed three goals. Mr. Sullivan agreed this was a reasonable point, noting National Register structures already receive binding review, but agreed there was no reason it couldn't also be listed as an explicit goal.
- James Zahl (Pemberton Street) observed that after 16 months of watching Mid Cambridge NCD meetings, he has seen commissioners grapple with the gap between the district's original goals and current city housing expectations (including a drastically changed definition of “demolition”), leading some commissioners to question the continued role of NCDs; viewed the proposed goals as a step in that direction.
- Tyler Edsel (99 Hancock Street) noted a tension between “retaining significant buildings” and “supporting increased density,” observed that roughly half of recent project reviews found buildings significant, and suggested defining clearer criteria for significance (e.g., a building notable enough that people would visit it); personally favored weighting the density goal more heavily.
- Carrie Saunders (Ellery Square) raised a related question about where the significance line is drawn – whether “significant buildings reflecting neighborhood history” risks preserving buildings tied to a particular income level (e.g., triple-deckers and 6-9-unit buildings) versus replacing them with much larger buildings that could contradict the neighborhood's history of economic diversity. Mr Sullivan responded that the goals can be mutually exclusive by design, and that the Commission's role is to exercise collective judgment weighing multiple factors and the neighborhood's actual layered history (including periods of wealth, subsequent subdivision, and working-class development).
- Kyle Hoepfner (Center Street) suggested revising “retaining significant buildings” to “retaining significant buildings or significant aspects of buildings,” since in some cases (e.g., an Ellery Street project) only a facade or specific architectural elements needed preservation, not the whole structure; also suggested clarifying that “significant” can mean architecturally and/or historically significant.
- Pauke Corstens (17R Ellsworth Avenue) asked whether affordability – e.g., a mix of price points in new developments – should be added as a goal, while acknowledging this may be outside the NCD's purview.
- Jessica Sheehan asked (1) whether the Commission could require a minimum number of renters on the board, since renters may weigh affordability differently than homeowners, and (2) whether binding review is necessary to achieve the NCD's goals, or whether an advisory-only process would suffice, given her concern that binding review functions mainly as a tool to delay or block housing. Mr. Sullivan noted the Commission currently has at least two

renters, and that the 2023 amendments already increased the required number of renter commissioners. The binding-review question was addressed later.

- Jack Schultz (Clifton Street) asked whether a timeliness standard could be added to the goals, arguing that unclear guidelines – more than the review process itself – are what slow projects down; urged the addition of concrete design/material guidelines. Staff acknowledged this was a fair point not on tonight's agenda but said it would be considered in the staff recommendations.
- Lillian Ross (14 Antrim Street) asked why “enhance economic vitality” was being removed, since “quality of life” might be a related concept worth retaining. Mr. Sullivan explained the term was never clearly defined and felt it was outside the Commission's purview, especially for a neighborhood like Mid Cambridge that isn't facing significant economic distress; and he noted that “quality of life” is addressed elsewhere in the 2.78 purpose statement.
- Elena Saporta (102 Ellery Street) asked how the goals would protect against displacement of existing renters (citing Ellery Street as an example) and requested that landscape character be explicitly protected as well.
- Nancy Seideman (Cleveland Street) asked whether terms like “significant,” “diversity,” and “density” would be further defined, since they can mean different things to different people; suggested “buildings and landscape” language. Staff (Charlie Sullivan) responded that “significance” has an established definition rooted in the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and related local code language (association with historic persons/events, or architectural/cultural/political/economic/social significance), which staff will clarify further in the report.
- Niva Thai (Antrim Street; works in construction/development in Cambridge) supported higher-density affordable housing but expressed concern that developers often use low-cost materials with little architectural intention; asked whether the NCD could adopt approved material/design standards (as some other municipalities require, e.g., minimum brick-facade percentages). Staff (Charlie Sullivan) discussed the philosophical tension between prescriptive design guidelines (which can be restrictive) and case-by-case review without guidelines (as used by the Cambridge Historical Commission), noting Mid Cambridge has historically favored giving architects creative freedom while avoiding overly rigid rules and acknowledged the Commission is sometimes criticized for a design-review process that runs long.
- James Zahl added that honoring the history of formerly Black and working-class residents in Mid Cambridge could include removing barriers that keep housing unaffordable to similarly situated residents today, and cautioned against a small group in the neighborhood resolving competing goals in ways that work against citywide fairness in housing. Mr. Sullivan clarified he had not meant to suggest that specific historic area must be preserved, but rather that the neighborhood's full history – architectural, economic, racial, and social – should inform project review.

Review Authority: Binding vs. Non-Binding (Advisory) Review

Staff (Allison Crosbie) reviewed the two levels of Commission review and proposed clarifying language.

Binding Review

Binding review currently covers:

- New construction of more than 750 square feet, or on more than 33% of lot area not already occupied by structures.
- Enlargement of floor area by more than 33%.
- Demolition of 33% or more of a structure's floor area (excluding structures principally used as garages), including relocation of a structure onto or off the site.
- Alteration or construction affecting National Register structures, publicly owned structures, and (proposed for removal) structures with non-conforming uses – staff proposed removing this last category since the Commission has no authority over building use.

Staff proposed clarifying that “750 square feet” means gross floor area as defined by the zoning ordinance (Article 5.25), aligning with how other departments calculate square footage (e.g., covered porches count; mechanical spaces do not). Staff also proposed defining “demolition” by reference to the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) definition, which includes relocating a building, removing a defined percentage of framing/foundation, or removing a roof (including raising roof height, changing roof pitch, or adding stories).

Non-Binding (Advisory) Review

Advisory review currently covers:

- New construction between 150 and 750 square feet.
- Exterior alterations requiring a variance or special permit (uncommon).
- Alterations affecting original architectural fabric/details (e.g., corner boards, original windows, porches).
- Increase or diminishment in size, or change in location, of windows and doors.
- Changes to roof slope/pitch/configuration, or removal of historic/original roofing material (e.g., original slate roofs).

Under advisory review, if the Commission denies a Certificate of Appropriateness, the applicant may still proceed with the project as submitted; staff noted advisory review nonetheless functions as an effective educational tool that can lead to improved designs.

Public Comment and Discussion – Binding vs. Advisory, and Definitions

- Suzanne Blier asked whether a developer could be required to submit building plans to ISD at the same time as a demolition permit application, since it is currently difficult for the public to see what is proposed alongside a demolition request. Mr. Sullivan explained that in historic districts and NCDs, demolition and new construction are reviewed together under a

single permit (unlike the citywide demolition-review ordinance, which allows separate demolition permits); an NCD demolition proposed without a paired replacement project would be unlikely to be approved absent extenuating circumstances.

- Jessica Sheehan asked for the justification for binding review generally, given how much can already be accomplished through advisory review, and questioned why the Commission needs the power to delay or block projects if that isn't the stated purpose. Mr. Sullivan responded that binding review exists to protect resources of recognized significance (e.g., National Register-listed buildings) and major new construction/demolition, where letting go lightly under advisory review only would be inappropriate; noted 750 sq. ft. is roughly half the size of a new townhouse and is intended to capture major additions, not minor ones, though the exact threshold is debatable, especially given the Commission's new inability to review size and shape.
- A commenter asked whether binding review would apply to a simple roof replacement; staff clarified that ordinary re-roofing is not binding, but changes meeting ISD's definition of demolition (e.g., raising roof height, changing pitch, adding stories) would be.
- Jack Schultz questioned the rationale for the 750-square-foot threshold, noting it is smaller than the average Cambridge apartment (roughly 1,000+ sq. ft.) and could subject nearly every project to binding review and associated delay, especially given that National Register status already provides protection for historically significant buildings. Staff said they would look further into this.
- Lee Farris argued that binding review is appropriate because larger buildings warrant more public input, and that debate should focus on where the threshold should be set (e.g., is 750 sq. ft. right, should there be time limits on binding review) rather than whether binding review should exist at all; stated binding review has resulted in improved building designs in ways advisory review would not have.
- Nancy Seideman voiced strong support for retaining binding review at the 750-square-foot threshold, asked how many projects typically fall near that threshold, and noted that under the new multifamily zoning, the NCD binding-review process may be one of the only remaining ways for neighbors to have meaningful input on nearby projects (citing Ellery Street as an example).
- Carrie Saunders echoed support for binding review, describing the Ellery Street projects' multiple rounds of Architectural Committee review as valuable, and clarified that any delays in that process (e.g., a developer taking six months to return with revisions) have been due to the applicant's own timeline, not the Commission.
- James Zahl argued for defining "demolition" independently in the Mid Cambridge ordinance (Chapter 2.78) rather than by reference to the ISD definition, since the ISD definition (used for different regulatory purposes) can classify even adding a fourth story or raising a roof as "demolition," which he felt stretches the ordinary meaning of the term, though he acknowledged it does expand the Commission's authority.
- Brendan Hickey similarly flagged a potential conflict between advisory review (which separately addresses roof-pitch changes) and binding review (which, under the ISD definition,

treats roof-pitch changes as demolition), and cautioned against incorporating the ISD definition by reference, since any future ISD change would automatically alter the NCD's jurisdiction; recommended the NCD adopt its own independent definition of demolition.

- Marie Saccochio argued strongly for retaining mandatory/binding review, stating that outside developers and investors are focused solely on profit and that purely advisory review is ineffective, citing examples of contractors disregarding advisory recommendations. She also raised concerns that ISD does not consistently refer true demolitions to the Historical Commission, citing examples from East Cambridge, and argued this suggests the NCD's authority is more likely to be under- than over-extended.
- Asha Danieri (18 Clinton Street), cautioned against generalizing about developers, noting many Cambridge-based developers (including herself) care about preservation. She described a lack of clarity in Commission jurisdiction from her own experience and urged staff to ensure the new language clearly resolves ambiguity about what the Commission can and cannot review, and not to allow the Commission to overstep new zoning restrictions. She also asked for a concrete example of how “volume and dimensions of the building to the extent allowed under Article 2.78.220” would be applied.

Proposed Review Criteria for New Construction and Additions

Ms. Crosbie reviewed current and proposed criteria the Commission considers for new construction and additions:

- Site layout
- Provisions for parking (if proposed – parking is no longer required under current zoning, but if an applicant proposes parking, the Commission may still review it)
- Volume and dimensions of the building, to the extent allowed under Article 2.78.220 (reflecting the 2023 restriction on reviewing size/shape, subject to further change)
- Provisions for open space and landscaping (open space itself is calculated under zoning and not independently reviewable by the Commission, though the Commission can encourage a landscape plan without mandating specific plantings)
- Scale of the building in relation to its surroundings, to the extent allowed under Article 2.78.220
- Proposed new language: architectural compatibility with nearby structures and neighborhood context (replacing an existing, unclear “changes to existing buildings” criterion)
- Consideration of City Council goals

Public Comment and Discussion – Review Criteria

- Suzanne Blier suggested adding criteria addressing loading/offloading zones, fire department access to structures behind other buildings, and clarifying how the landscaping criterion applies to trees and structures on or near abutting properties.

- Mary Saccochio (referenced again in this section) and other commenters previously noted concerns about the historic vs. NCD jurisdiction distinction; staff confirmed the Mid Cambridge Commission has complete and exclusive jurisdiction within the district (i.e., this review is not in addition to a separate Cambridge Historical Commission review).
- Seth Asako, 395 Broadway, and Lee Farris both suggested that the “architectural compatibility with nearby structures” criterion be made more specific – for example, addressing style and materials directly – so that it functions more like an actual design guideline rather than a general standard. Lee Farris specifically suggested a non-controversial guideline requiring exterior materials to have a minimum expected lifespan (e.g., more than 25 years), noting broad agreement exists that new buildings should be durable regardless of one's views on density. Staff acknowledged these criteria are presented as headlines for now and that a fuller rationale would be developed for each.
- Lee Farris noted that having consistent, spelled-out material/design standards would reduce the need to have the same discussion (e.g., expected material lifespan) repeated for every individual project.

Exemptions from Commission Review

Ms. Crosbie noted that no new exemptions have been added since the 2023 amendments to Chapter 2.78, which exempted accessibility improvements and sustainable energy updates from Commission review; no further exemptions are currently proposed.

- Brendan Hickey asked whether exterior lighting falls within or outside the Commission's purview. Ms. Crosbie responded that she does not believe lighting is included.

Closing Remarks

With no further hands raised, Mr. Sullivan closed the meeting with additional context on the Commission's recent history:

- The 2023 amendments removing the Commission's authority to review size and shape of new construction/additions represented a significant “culture shock” for commissioners who had reviewed projects with full authority over size and shape for decades; this coincided with a controversial case and public criticism of the Commission's understanding of its own jurisdiction, and provoked strong reactions from commissioners at the time. The Commission today is almost entirely new, having served only under the current rules.
- The 2025 multifamily zoning changes, adopted roughly a year later, similarly surprised commissioners and developers alike; many developers were not shovel-ready or fully designed at the time. Mr. Sullivan noted that, to his knowledge, only one multifamily project reviewed by the Historical Commission or an NCD commission has secured financing to date; others are still seeking financing, which may explain delays such as the six-month gap before the 60 Ellery Street developer returned to the Commission after its Architectural Committee review – i.e., delays have often reflected financing and permitting conditions, not Commission foot-dragging.

- The NCD Commission is not the only city review these projects undergo: the Community Development Department (CDD) conducts a separate advisory review under citywide multifamily housing design guidelines, and other departments (e.g., ISD, DPW) review requirements such as green roofs, stormwater retention, and bicycle parking. Few developers have yet engaged with these other required reviews. The city is working to align CDD, ISD, DPW, and Historical Commission reviews to run concurrently rather than sequentially, to help speed up the overall process, though financing constraints may remain the primary obstacle regardless of regulatory timelines.

Mr. Sullivan thanked attendees for their comments and suggestions, stating that all input would be considered as part of the staff recommendations. He noted further opportunities for public input would include an anticipated Cambridge Historical Commission hearing in early summer, as well as additional discussion before the matter reaches City Council in September.

Next Steps

Staff will incorporate tonight's public comments into a draft report with proposed recommendations on goals, guidelines, and jurisdiction. Written comments may continue to be submitted to staff by email.

Appendix G:
Public Comments

From: [Katie Slivensky](#)
To: [HistComm](#); [City Council](#); [City Clerk](#); [City Manager](#)
Subject: Re: Petition Re: the Planned Demolition of 13 Roberts Road
Date: Wednesday, July 8, 2026 10:52:04 AM

Dear City Council and Officials,

I wanted to reach out to thank the Mid Cambridge Historical Commission for their extraordinary thoughtfulness and consideration as our community pushed back on the demolition of 13 Roberts Road. The request by the developer, for now, has been denied. We are all breathing much easier!

The MCHC does not deny requests lightly, from any of the meetings I have attended. In fact, I've never even seen them do it before. They are very open to projects and willing to give developers many chances to proceed. However, this proposed demolition and construction was certainly not creating affordable housing in the area, and was instead taking advantage of the ordinance for profit only, while destroying a beautiful example of working and middle class history in the city of Cambridge. To us who live here, it seemed to be an obvious no, and we were so relieved to hear the Commission ultimately agree. Our whole neighborhood wants to make sure they are acknowledge for their important role and work to help the communities of Cambridge thrive! Especially right now, given the murky nature of the new zoning.

The three units of 13 Roberts were going to be bought, entirely demolished, and turned into three luxury condos at a price none of the current tenants could hope to afford, forcing them all out, while simultaneously increasing the building height and size to shadow the surrounding neighbors, block sunlight to our tended gardens and yards, and destroy 13 Roberts' own green spaces and many mature trees, which when added all together would have been detrimental to our local climate cooling efforts. This was so opposite of the goals of the zoning ordinances as we understood them, we could scarcely believe it was allowed. But they pushed on.

We banded together and reached out to the MCHC, who were reviewing the proposal. They thankfully heard us and saw themselves how this was a case of a developer (one with a history of trying this exact thing, who has a bad reputation for flawed and harmful projects around the city) just acting out of greed. In fact, at the meeting Monday night, the developer could offer no reason to justify their planned demolition other than it would make them, personally, more money. Nothing about the building's state itself. Not a word about helping the housing situation in Cambridge. Not a concern for the other local residents who would be greatly affected. Just a plain goal for profit, almost like a cartoon villain would state.

Initially, the MCHC offered the developer a chance to modify their plans and return with a more thoughtful approach at their May meeting. They returned last night at this July meeting with an even less thoughtful approach, making their luxury condos each individually even bigger, and clearly showing what their entire goal was. Not adding housing. Not making affordable housing. Just maximizing condo builds to the new sizes allowed by zoning to make even more money.

Our community came together twice now to push back on this. We are stressed and exhausted, and fearful for the innocent tenants at 13 and other nearby properties who could get swept up in this bid for profit and similarly kicked out. While we celebrate stopping this bid for 13

Roberts for now, we are all concerned about this happening again or to others.

In conclusion, I want to request the city add some guard rails to the zoning allowances to protect communities from this kind of thing in the future, so it doesn't always fall on citizens to fight each and every project. **Our community is highly in favor of allowing for building to help affordable housing and increase housing!** We are still reeling that this developer was planning to use that zoning to do neither of those things, and in fact do the opposite. And that this would be legal.

I also wanted to write to share our community's strong appreciation for the Historical Commission. They seem to be the only line of defense at the moment to sort good faith projects from bad under the new ordinances. We are so grateful to them. There is an immense swell of support from Mid-Cambridge for this Commission, and I felt it important to inform the City Council and City Offices of that support. It's wonderful knowing there's a group of expert individuals looking at these projects as they come along, encouraging the considerate and helpful ones to go through, and pushing back on the projects that help no one and only harm our history and our residents. Cambridge has a strong history of striving for equitable, compassionate communities, with thoughtful design and structure, and gosh it was nice to see that in action Monday night at the Mid Cambridge Historical Commission meeting!

Please, feel free to reach out to me with any questions about our efforts re: 13 Roberts and what the local feelings are.

With gratitude and hope that our little battle over on Roberts Road can help others avoid similar threats,

Katie Slivensky
17A Roberts Rd

From: [P.BARTON](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Support Renewal Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (MCNCD)
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 2:23:21 PM

To whom it can concern,

I generally support the renewal of Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (MCNCD). Please consider discussing adjustments to it but renew it. A renewal is not a mandate for no change ever.

Cambridge just passed multifamily zoning. This by itself was never a mandate to withdraw Conservation Districts, not immediately, and not at all. That is not what was passed.

It is too soon after passing a significant zoning change to start withdrawing Conservation Districts.

It is more appropriate to wait until the City has seen and felt the impact of the very recent zoning changes to consider using that alone as justification for making other changes based on asserted notions that it would be harmonious to the very recent zoning changes.

The City long ago passed a leash law for dogs and presently such a law is in effect. The City has not seen fit to expand the leash law to cats just because it applies to dogs.

I am not opposed to affordable housing. I am not opposed to conservation. I am not opposed to change.

Patrick Barton
130 Appleton St

From: [Josiah Bonsey](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: MCNCD renewal
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 10:51:12 AM

To whom it may concern:

My wife and I own a condominium at 354 Broadway, and a few years ago, we were required to appear before the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District committee. We wanted to remove a dilapidated chimney from our roof, which was at risk of collapse. This chimney was connected to a fireplace that has not been used for several years, possibly decades.

The committee ultimately approved our plans to remove the chimney, but not before at least one member of the committee suggested that it would have been ideal to rebuild the chimney, despite the fact that it would serve no practical function.

I am a proud born-and-raised Cantabridgian, and take great interest in our local history. I appreciate that the MCNCD is intended to help conserve the architectural legacy of our neighborhood.

But as a resident, I couldn't tell you how the MCNCD has worked to improve my quality of life. I can, however, describe at great length why dealing with the MCNCD felt like a cumbersome and inconvenient process, that could have resulted in my family incurring a great expense for a non-functional chimney, that not a single person would ever gaze upon from the sidewalk with an appreciative eye.

In our current economic environment, with extremely high costs for real estate and home renovations and repairs, it is time to take a much more serious look at the costs and benefits of neighborhood conservation districts, and ask ourselves who has benefitted from their existence. I don't believe that the district has benefitted me or my fellow condo owners. I'm willing to be convinced otherwise, but I would have to hear the Historical Commission affirmatively make the argument in public. Until then, it's impossible for me not to think that the MCNCD is an idea whose time has passed.

Thank you.

Josiah Bonsey
354 Broadway #1

From: [Dana Bullister](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Please Oppose Mid-Cambridge NCD Renewal
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 3:16:41 PM

Dear Cambridge Historical Commission,

I urge the Commission to recommend against renewing the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District.

Cambridge faces a severe housing shortage and the inability for most people to affordably live in our city has been [the single most urgent issue facing Cambridge for years](#), according to comprehensive resident surveys.

The MCNCD adds uncertainty, delay, and cost to new housing production in one of the city's most desirable neighborhoods, undermining the multifamily zoning reforms adopted last year. I support more housing in Mid-Cambridge, including affordable and multifamily homes, and respectfully ask that the MCNCD be allowed to expire.

Sincerely,
Dana Bullister
21 Brookline Street #105

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Dana Bullister
dana.bullister@gmail.com | +1 (774) 270-1385

From: [Shannon Canavin](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Allow the MCNCD to expire
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 9:15:14 AM

Hello,

I am a resident of Cambridge and am writing to share my support of allowing the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (MCNCD) to expire at today's meeting.

Cambridge has a severe housing shortage, and every delay to new housing production makes it worse and drives up housing costs and rents. The MCNCD explicitly aims to stifle the creation of new housing through arbitrary aesthetics as a justification for delaying or blocking affordable housing projects, resulting in its having one of the lowest percentages of permanently affordable homes in Cambridge.

Cambridge just passed multifamily zoning last year after years of advocacy. We should not allow this exceptionally large NCD to continue acting as a backdoor veto on new housing. I support more housing in Mid-Cambridge and urge the Commission to decline to renew the MCNCD.

Thank you,
Shannon Canavin
182 Third St, Cambridge, MA 02141

Shannon Canavin (she/her/hers)
Artist Visa Services LLC
857-998-0219
www.artistvisaservices.com

From: [Avik Chatterjee](#)
To: [Histncds](#); [City Council](#); [City Manager](#)
Subject: Opposing renewing the Mid-Cambridge NCD
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 3:33:51 PM

To Cambridge leadership,

I am writing to support multifamily homes and oppose the Mid-Cambridge NCD.

I have been a Cambridge resident since 2013 and a homeowner here since 2020. I support affordable housing and increased density in Cambridge, and oppose archaic barriers to housing from bodies like the Mid-Cambridge NCD.

Professionally, I am a physician for people experiencing homelessness, and have written extensively about the impact of homelessness on individuals and families, including children. Uniquely high housing costs in Massachusetts are a result of policies and processes like the Mid-Cambridge NCD, and must be done away with.

Please contact me with questions.

Avik

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Avik Chatterjee, MD, MPH

Associate Professor of Medicine, Boston University School of Medicine

Physician, Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program

Lecturer, Harvard Medical School

Associate Epidemiologist, Division of Global Health Equity, Brigham and Women's Hospital

From: [Miah Ebels Duggan](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Opposing the renewal of MCNCD
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 6:52:49 AM

To whom it may concern,

I am commenting to express my opposition to renewing the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District.

It is no surprise that the top issue on most Cantabrigian's minds is housing prices. The city has a well-documented housing shortage, having added many more jobs than housing units in the past two decades.

We're in this mess thanks in no small part to entities like NCDs, which retain localized, undemocratic power to block developments that would benefit our whole community. Indeed, the mandate of the MCNCD is to block new housing: its charter's explicit goal is to "prevent excessive infill development." History shows that "excessive" is here interpreted as "any multifamily housing."

In the 2025 elections, Cambridge voters clearly affirmed 2025's progressive multifamily zoning reforms, re-electing six of the seven incumbents who voted for its passage. Cambridge wants more housing. The power to block project after project should not rest in the hands of a few people that most Cantabrigians don't even know about.

New neighbors make Cambridge stronger and more vibrant. Denser housing is more energy-efficient, encourages healthy lifestyles by increasing walkability, and *brings down housing costs*. In order to build, Cambridge must remove obstacles that only serve the exclusionary interests of a few residents. Please vote against the MCNCD's renewal.

Gratitude,
Miah Ebels Duggan
3 Sacramento St

From: [Elena Saporta](#)
To: [Crosbie, Allison](#)
Subject: Fwd: reminder: Mid-Cambridge NCD Review tonight
Date: Monday, April 27, 2026 6:51:52 PM

Hi Alison,
~ FYI ~
Best, Elena

Dear all,

My daughter is arriving from out of town this evening so I doubt I can make tonight's meeting. Although the following issues may be outside the historical commission's purview, I strongly believe that they should play a significant role as part of any planning process in Cambridge:

- **Tree Protection:** is the MFH Ordinance allowed to violate the pre-existing Municipal Tree Ordinance, whose main thrust is the protection of trees on private property? The tree ordinance was several years in the making. The consultant's fee was over \$1M.

- **Traffic / Parking / Deliveries:** I will use Ellery Street as a 'case study,' here:

1. Ellery Street is the only street in mid-Cambridge with a direct connection between Cambridge Street and Mass. Ave.

For this reason, it receives a significant volume of through traffic.

2. The entrance and exit to the CRLS faculty and staff garage is on Ellery Street between Cambridge and Broadway.

As a result, traffic on the street backs up every morning and afternoon.

3. There is already a dearth of on-street parking on Ellery. It is magical thinking to assume that the hundred or so new residents

will all be car-less. Even for those without cars, there will presumably be more uber / lyft pick-ups and drop-offs, as well as

an increased demand for deliveries (eg. Amazon, Uber Eats).

- **Solar Access:** In December, 2025, I had a full pv solar array installed on my roof - at great expense. I have also been

creating a garden / oasis in my backyard over the past 36 years. (This year my garden will be featured on CPL's

Secret Gardens of Cambridge tour for the seventh time). The proposed development at 88 Ellery Street will shade both

solar panels and garden. Protecting existing solar panels, bio-diverse open spaces and pervious surfaces should

be required.

Other factors typically considered as integral to a comprehensive City Planning process include:

- Utility infrastructure impacts (electric, water, sewer, gas)
- Waste disposal
- Flood risk

Sorry I can't be there!

All the best,
Elena

Elena Saporta, ASLA, RLA, LEED AP

On Mon, Apr 27, 2026 at 1:39 PM Marilee Meyer <mbm0044@aol.com> wrote:

MID CAMBRIDGE NCD DECENNIAL REVIEW

6:00 PM Monday, April 27, 2026

Location:

Online
Cambridge

Neighborhood:

Mid-Cambridge

Contact:

Allison Crosbie, acrosbie@cambridgema.gov, 617-349-4683

Notice is hereby given that a public meeting will be held on Monday, **April 27, 2026, at 6:00PM** to introduce the Decennial Review process for the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District.

PLEASE NOTE: The public will be able to participate online via the Zoom platform (<https://zoom.us/>) from a phone, tablet, or computer. To join a remote meeting, register at

<https://tinyurl.com/MCApril27> or call (301)715-8592 Webinar ID: 841 7556 9566. Call 617-349-4683 or check online if you have questions about the meeting location.

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From: [Tyler Etzel](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Please do not renew the Mid-Cambridge NCD
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 6:06:21 PM

As a resident of Mid-Cambridge, I strongly oppose the MCNCD in it's current state. The MCNCD has materially reduced new housing construction in the neighborhood, and given that making it easier to build housing is one of city council's main goals, I believe the best course of action is to let the commission expire.

My main points of concern:

- The commission has a lot of power for an unelected body, and isn't representative of the residents of the neighborhood. The commission doesn't have a reasonable timeline to complete review for projects, and there are no checks/balances to make sure their decisions really do justly weigh potential benefits to residents from allowing development to happen.
- If the commission is weaponized to delay/block housing on any plot marginally related to anything historical (e.g. the decision on 84-86 Ellery St), we risk undermining the legitimate preservation of truly exceptional buildings!

-Tyler Etzel
99 Hancock St

From: [Lee Farris](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Cc: [City Council](#); [City Clerk](#); [Huang, Yi-An](#)
Subject: Support for MCNDC continuation
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 6:01:09 PM

I am writing in support of renewing the MCNCD.

I note that MCNCD has approved a number of proposals for large housing developments; therefore I think MCNCD is not exclusionary. I think that the discussion in MCNCD has generally resulted in much better projects- better in terms of how they fit into the neighborhood while still resulting in large amounts of new units, including inclusionary units. The time needed for these discussions is worth the improved results.

I think it makes sense to give residents in a neighborhood input on what is built in the neighborhood, because residents have a lot of local knowledge they can share to make a project better. The residents should be diverse and representative of the neighborhood.

I ask that the Historic Commission continue the MCNDC.

Thanks,

Lee (she/her)
Lee@LeeFarris.net
Norfolk St. Cambridge 02139

From: [Deborah Fawcett](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 8:49:39 AM

I strongly support renewal of the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District.

Deborah Fawcett

Deborah P. Fawcett

Attorney at Law

35 Norris Street

Cambridge, MA 02140

617-694-5056

DeborahPFawcett@gmail.com

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From: [Ethan Frank](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Cc: [City Council](#)
Subject: Don't renew Mid Cambridge NCD in its current form
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 12:38:30 PM

To the Historical Commission,

A neighborhood conservation district can be a tool to preserve the “character” of a neighborhood, but mostly they are tools to delay and block much-needed affordable housing.

The current NCD abuses its power with unclear guidelines and arbitrary / non-existent deadlines, and I'd like to see it removed or if brought back, in a much reduced capacity.

Sincerely,
Ethan Frank

From: [Matt Goldstein](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Oppose MCNCD Renewal
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 3:25:58 PM

Dear Cambridge Historical Commission,

This email is to express my strong opposition to renewal of the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District. Housing is THE central issue facing our city. My main objection to NCDs is that they are fundamentally anti-democratic: unelected NCD members exert a huge measure of control over housing production in our city. Decisions about it cannot be delegated to non-elected residents/quasi-officials. It would be an act of extreme cynicism for the city to enact MFH and AHO and then continue to allow NCDs to throttle housing. Cambridge residents see through this kind of maneuvering. There is no compromise arrangement here.

Here are the facts:

- Cambridge has a severe housing shortage, and every delay to new housing production makes it worse and drives up housing costs and rents.
- NCDs are a known tool of exclusion, using aesthetics and "character" as justification to block multifamily projects.
- Mid-Cambridge has [one of the lowest percentages](#) of permanently affordable homes in Cambridge.

I will be following this issue closely and supporting/voting for city councillors who continue to support housing by opposing NCDs.

Matt Goldstein
North Cambridge
415-215-2396

From: [Esther Hanig](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Cc: [City Council](#); [City Manager](#)
Subject: The Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (MCNCD) renewal opposition
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 5:47:43 PM

Mayor Siddiqui, Vice-Mayor Azeen, and Esteemed Cambridge City Councilors,

I am writing to ask that you vote not to renew the MCNCD. Not only is it not representative of the neighborhood with too few young renters on the Commission, while it may represent some of the current neighbors, it neither represents Mid-Cambridge residents of the future nor the broader interests of the city. As a consistent roadblock to the construction of desperately needed housing, its renewal would negatively impact the future of the neighborhood it purports to represent, as well as the needs of the city.

Thank you for your consideration.

Esther Hanig
136 Pine St., #2

From: [Noah Harper](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Strong Opposition to Renewing Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 9:21:51 AM

Hello,

As a resident of Mid-Cambridge, as well as an urban planner, I'm writing to express strong support for more multifamily housing in my neighborhood, and to strongly oppose the renewal of the MCNCD.

As a renter, I pay more than half of my income to live in our neighborhood. I'd like to be able to stay in the community as long as possible, but if we continue to arbitrarily enforce a scarcity of homes here, prices will continue to rise, and only those with the deepest of pockets will be able to live here. Without neighborhood change, renters like me will continue to be displaced from Mid-Cambridge.

I'd like to see more homes, more rental and ownership, more affordable and market-rate units, buildings of different sizes and shapes and architectural styles. I'm excited for change here in Mid-Cambridge--ending the MCNCD will enable us to champion new housing development that will make Mid-Cambridge more affordable, vibrant, and resilient in the long run.

Thank you,

Noah Harper, AICP
898 Massachusetts Ave #3,
Cambridge MA 02139

--

Noah Harper | powerandplace.substack.com

From: [Aram Harrow](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: opposing MCNCD renewal
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 4:30:37 PM

Dear Cambridge Historical Commission,

I am glad that you are reviewing the MCNCD.

I want to share a story about how it has harmed my family specifically, even with a non-binding review.

My wife and I have always loved living in Cambridge. After our young kids started growing up, we looked for a place with more space within Cambridge. Our realtor told us that this was naive and that we should try a nearby town, like Arlington. But we were able to afford a house in Cambridge by finding one that was 150 years old, with lead paint, ancient wiring and dangerous stairs. We planned to renovate it before moving in. But, long story short, we needed an advisory hearing from the MCNCD before the last stage of our construction. Even though their recommendation was non-binding, getting on their calendar, holding the hearing and waiting for their letter delayed us two months. This meant that the work couldn't get done over the summer, and we had to wait until the following year. As a result we had to move into our house with the construction only partly done, and live in a construction site for the final stage of the project.

Others have been impacted much more by the MCNCD. Probably the biggest impacts are felt by those who cannot live in Cambridge at all because there is a body charged by the city with "preventing excessive infill development." But if you want to know why housing is so hard to afford in Cambridge now, I am sure that it is the sum of many stories like ours: a 9-month delay here, a reduction in number of units there, and now our school population is shrinking and young people can't stay here, all in the name of "conservation".

Please take this opportunity to end the MCNCD.

Thank you for your work and taking the time to read this.

Aram Harrow
Ellsworth Ave

From: [Louide Henri](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Cc: [City Council](#); [City Manager](#)
Subject: I support multifamily homes and oppose renewing the Mid-Cambridge NCD
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 10:48:57 AM

To whom this may concern,

As a Cambridge resident, I support multifamily homes and oppose renewing the Mid-Cambridge NCD.

ida.

Cambridge, given the robust public transit, is morally obligated to help solve the housing crisis. Multifamily development is how we create a brighter future for the state:

Cambridge has a severe housing shortage, and every delay to new housing production makes it worse and drives up housing costs and rents.

NCDs are a known tool of exclusion, using aesthetics and "character" as justification to block multifamily projects.

Mid-Cambridge has [one of the lowest percentages](#) of permanently affordable homes in Cambridge.

Cambridge just passed multifamily zoning last year after years of advocacy. We should not allow this exceptionally large NCD to continue acting as a backdoor veto on new housing.

Best Regards!

From: [Thomas Hentschel](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Cc: [City Council](#); [City Manager](#)
Subject: Oppose renewing the Mid-Cambridge NCD
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 12:48:38 PM

Dear Historical Commision members,

It feels like the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (MCNCD) has too much power to block new housing projects from being constructed. The MCNCD gives neighbors a loophole to effectively block housing projects permitted by the new multifamily zoning law using bad-faith arguments based on exclusionary criteria like aesthetics and neighborhood "character".

As a renter, every delay to develop more housing to address the severe housing shortage in Cambridge acutely affects me in the form of large rent increases and scarcity in finding an affordable place to live. I support more housing in Mid-Cambridge, and I think the best path forward is to let the MCNCD expire.

Thomas Hentschel,
295 Harvard St, Cambridge, MA 02139

From: [Brendan Hickey](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Cc: [City Council](#); [City Clerk](#)
Subject: Mid-Cambridge Decennial Review public comment
Date: Friday, June 19, 2026 3:55:36 PM
Attachments: [ncd_jurisdictional_guidance.pdf](#)

The Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission should not be renewed.

Attached you will find the Cambridge Historic Commission's own April 1, 2025 training slides, obtained through a public records request. Staff are coaching commissioners to regulate size and shape by proxy, after the Council removed size and shape their jurisdiction.

Page 13 advises that when discussing a project's "general design," a commissioner can suggest "stepping back an addition or new construction" or "changing the shape of a roof." These are size-and-shape modifications. The same slide then advises that such suggestions "should not be included in the Certificate of Appropriateness." This is an impermissible review, applied as informal pressure and kept off the record, where it can't be reviewed or challenged. The slide states its own rationale: avoiding "confusion, questions around enforcement, or unnecessary legal challenges." The goal is to influence the outcome without creating a reviewable record.

This fits a broader pattern. For nearly two decades, the NCD ran a title-swapping scheme to evade term limits in violation of city ordinance. Membership almost entirely turned over after this came to light. However, the same staff who administered that scheme still train new commissioners. As these slides show, they're still coaching them to work around the law.

Renewing the Mid-Cambridge NCD would invite further interference with the Council's policy objectives.

Sincerely,
Brendan Hickey

From: [Daniel Hidalgo](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Oppose MCNCD Renewal
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 4:14:45 PM

Dear Cambridge Historical Commission,

I am writing to urge you to decline to renew or dramatically alter the rules governing the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District. The district has become a tool used to delay and block the creation of new housing, one of the top priorities of the city. If it's to remain in place, strong rules should be put in place that limit the district's jurisdiction and ability to delay badly needed housing. I appreciate the hard work involved in running these districts, but they should operate in light of the city's broader goals and needs.

Best,
Daniel Hidalgo

From: [Aaron Homer](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Opposing Renewal of MCNCD
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 9:35:54 AM

Hello,

I'm writing to oppose the renewal of the MCNCD. MCNCD's approach to 60 Ellery Street and the "Architects Committee" demonstrates a clear misuse of power at a time when Cambridge desperately needs more housing. City committees should not be acting as undemocratic HOAs.

Thank you,
Aaron Homer
90 Grozier Rd, Cambridge MA 02138

From: [Patrick Joyce](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Please don't renew the MCNCD
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 3:07:02 PM

Dear Cambridge Historical Commission staff -

I'm writing to urge you to allow the MCNCD to expire so that our city can continue its growing efforts to create more housing in every neighborhood.

As a former resident of Mid Cambridge (I currently live in North Cambridge), I know it's been one of the slowest neighborhoods to increase the stock of permanently affordable homes in our city.

One of the ways we can change that is by removing the obstacles posed by the MCNCD, which has only delayed development and made projects more expensive.

Mid Cambridge should be allowed to contribute to solving the housing crisis with new multifamily housing as much as any other neighborhood.

Please decline to renew the MCNCD!

Thank you for your service and the important work you do,

Patrick Joyce
2130 Massachusetts Ave., #7C
Cambridge 02140

From: [Annette LaMond](#)
To: [Azeem, Burhan](#); [Flaherty, Timothy](#); [McGovern, Marc](#); [Nolan, Patricia](#); [Siddiqui, Sumbul](#); [Simmons, Denise](#); [Sobrinho-Wheeler, Jivan](#); [Al-Zubi, Ayah](#); [Zusy, Catherine](#)
Cc: [Sullivan, Charles M.](#); [Hill, Eric](#); [Crosbie, Allison](#); [HistComm](#); [City Manager](#); [City Clerk](#)
Subject: Mid Cambridge NCD – Please Support
Date: Monday, September 7, 2026 1:24:59 PM

Dear Councillors,

I am writing in support of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District. I urge the Council to reapprove the District with the modifications to goals and review guidelines proposed by the CHC in June.

I write as a longtime Cambridge resident. Except for two years in New Haven, my husband and I have lived in Cambridge since 1971. We started out as young graduate students in a rental apartment building on Broadway, later living in apartments on Walnut Avenue, Walker Street and Mt. Auburn Street. We patronized local shops and restaurants in each neighborhood. After buying a house and having children, we came to know the city in a deeper way as we became acquainted with its schools, recreational facilities, community buildings, and institutions. Along the way, we have volunteered for nonprofit organizations throughout the city. Now, having achieved senior citizen status, we know the city and its distinctive neighborhoods very well.

When we first lived in Cambridge, the city was rather grungy. Many buildings, public and private, needed maintenance and most parks were in shabby condition. (In the early 1990s, my sons played on a Little League field with so many rocks that the fielders couldn't predict how a ball would bounce.) Over the past 25 years, the city has been transformed. And much credit is due to the Cambridge Historical Commission with its oversight of projects in Historic Districts and Neighborhood Conservation Districts, its reviews of demolition applications, as well as its administration of CPA grants for historic preservation. Along the way, I have attended CHC various hearings, and always come away impressed by the Commission, both staff and commissioners; this is so, even when I might have preferred another outcome.

The Mid Cambridge NCD is part of the story of the city's transformation over the past decades. I have attended a number of organized walks through the District's streets, two of which were focused on looking at development projects, pre and post-NCD. The stories of particular projects – the sensitivity of the NCD commission members – are striking. Thanks to the Mid Cambridge NCD, new projects have proceeded, but with sensitivity to surroundings. Development has been allowed, but in ways that fit the neighborhood. Thanks to the NCD, Mid Cambridge is a place where people want to live – not just for a year one two, but to settle. And one of the strengths of our city is the number of people who have built their lives here.

Recently, I took a friend – new to Cambridge – through Mid-Cambridge. She was impressed and said that she would like to live in the neighborhood. I told her that the City Council is about to review the NCD, and that dismantling it is a possibility. For a newcomer, considering the neighborhood as a place to live, that prospect was alarming.

I urge you to support the Mid Cambridge NCD. The loss of the NCD would harm not only the neighborhood, but the city as a whole.

Sincerely,

Annette LaMond

7 Riedesel Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138

From: [Janice Lichtman](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Fwd: Please do not renew the Mid-Cambridge NCD
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 1:32:58 PM

I am a Cambridge resident. Housing costs have skyrocketed to the point where I am not sure how much longer I can keep living in this city I love. One of the biggest reasons for the exorbitant costs of housing is decades of downzoning and limitations on building new housing. Cambridge made a great move towards equity last year by passing multifamily zoning. Please do not allow this exceptionally large NCD to continue acting as a backdoor veto on new housing and block the progress we've made. I support more housing in Mid-Cambridge and urge the Commission to decline to renew the MCNCD.

Sincerest thanks,
Janice Lichtman

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“Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind.”

Dr. Seuss

--

“Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind.”

Dr. Seuss

From: [Reeva Meyer](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (MCNCD) Renewal
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 5:43:49 PM

To the Members of the Cambridge Historical Commission:

My succinct message follows:

I support multifamily homes in Mid-Cambridge and urge you to support the expiration of the Mid-Cambridge NCD.

Further comments: Cambridge has a severe housing shortage. The MCNCD has suppressed housing in Mid-Cambridge for decades and runs counter to the 2025 Multifamily Housing Ordinance which ended exclusionary zoning.

Cambridge is committed to becoming a more welcoming city for a wide range of people. Please support multifamily homes and oppose renewing the Mid-Cambridge NCD.

Thank you for your attention to this crucial matter.

Sincerely,
Reeva J. Meyer
30 Dover Street, #3
Cambridge 02140
Co-owner since 1994

From: [David Hattis](#)
To: [City Council](#); [Histncds](#)
Subject: Mid Cambridge NCD Decennial Review
Date: Friday, June 19, 2026 12:51:49 PM

Hello,

Given the citywide conversation about multifamily zoning and the Mid Cambridge NCD's upcoming decennial review, I wanted to write in to express support for the changes that the city council has made to make it easier to build housing in neighborhoods like Mid Cambridge.

Prior to multifamily zoning reform in 2025, almost all of Mid Cambridge was zoned as C-1. This was permissive compared to the A and B zones elsewhere in the city, but still fairly restrictive. On top of that, the Mid Cambridge NCD (until the council changed the rules governing NCDs in 2023) in practice functioned as a second, non transparent layer of zoning. Often developments would be proposed in Mid Cambridge that were zoning compliant, and then a negotiation would take place where the scale of the development was made smaller.

I wanted to see how much housing was built in the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District from 2015 to 2025. To do this I downloaded the City's [Housing Starts data](#) and I filtered for developments that were within the boundaries of the Mid Cambridge NCD. The result I got is that between 2015 and 2025, the area covered by the Mid-Cambridge NCD lost 23 homes. These 23 lost homes include the 24 homes demolished at Vail Court in 2018. If we remove that property from consideration, we get that the area covered by the Mid-Cambridge NCD added only one net new home between 2015 and 2025.

Much of this failure to build homes was due to the previous zoning, which was quite restrictive. The Mid Cambridge NCD also contributed to the difficulty of building new homes. Often (what appear to be) zoning compliant proposals would come before the Mid Cambridge NCD, and over a series of meetings, a negotiation would happen where the development would be forced to be smaller. One example is 10 Ellery St., which until 2013 was a two family home located next door to a six story building. The owner proposed building an additional 2 unit building on the lot, bringing the total number of homes on the lot to 4. It went before the mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation Commission; the minutes of that meeting are [here](#):

Despite the proposal (I believe) being zoning compliant (the C-1 district at the time allowed 0.75 FAR), the proposal was rejected. Two months later, the applicant revised their proposal so that the building was significantly smaller and had only two total units on the lot rather than four. Even this smaller proposal was [rejected by the mid-Cambridge NCD](#) because it (among other reasons) "represented excessive infill".

Eventually a new structure at 10 Ellery St was built, but in the end no new homes were added to the lot; today there are still only two homes at 10 Ellery st. Other examples of zoning compliant proposals being forced by the Mid Cambridge NCD to be smaller include:

6 Maple Ave ([final approved design](#) lost a floor relative to first proposal), 17 Ellsworth ([final design](#) was 500 square feet less than initial design), 12 Fayette St ([final design](#) reduced by 400-450 square feet; was only approved after 4 meetings!).

In summary, prior to the multifamily zoning reform and the changes to the NCD rules in 2023, it was extremely difficult to build housing in places like Mid Cambridge. I applaud the council for the changes that are making it possible to add housing in these kinds of neighborhoods. Hopefully in 10 years the data shows that more homes exist in the Mid Cambridge NCD than do today.

David Hattis
393 Broadway

From: [Deb Nicholson](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Do not renew Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (MCNCD)
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 11:17:52 AM

Hello,

I am a long time Cambridge resident and homeowner. I am writing in to oppose the renewal of the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (MCNCD.)

Over the last two decades, I have watched many friends and neighbors move away from Cambridge. They move in, put down roots and become neighbors only to be told that when they are ready to start families or need an extra room for some other reason that they will not be able to stay. Sometimes, they don't even need more space, they just need a safer, more modern or more accessible living situation or they want to buy instead of rent but our housing market offers next to nothing for middle class families making a modest living.

Cambridge has utterly failed to keep pace with housing demands in our town. Hiding behind "neighborhood character" makes it impossible to build more housing for working people, teachers, professors, nonprofit professionals and families -- people who want to stay here, people who are being forced out every year. It's cowardly, selfish and short-sighted to design our zoning solely for the enrichment of the few residents who want to draw the ladder up behind them and see Cambridge stagnate.

I hope that we will firmly choose to END the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (MCNCD) so that we can build the neighborhood we need.

Thank you,
Deb Nicholson
Ward 3

From: [Gus Rancatore](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: I support renewing the Mid-Cambridge Historic District!
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 3:50:04 PM

Gus Rancatore

The city needs a comprehensive plan for housing not one created by recent graduates of the MIT Real Estate Program.

From: [Leah Rand](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Cc: [City Council](#); [City Manager](#)
Subject: Opposition to renewal of Mid-Cambridge NCD
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 8:52:38 AM

Good morning,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to renewing the Mid-Cambridge NCD. I have many concerns about the NCD. It is a non-transparent process that is not accountable to the City and its residents. Projects are being delayed because a self-named "architects committee" hems and haws over the aesthetics of a design, all while driving up the costs of holding property awaiting development and depriving would-be residents of their homes. The NCD's mission to prevent housing density is in direct contravention of the City's multifamily zoning ordinance. After years of debate, the Council and residents chose to allow higher density housing. Yet, this unelected, unaccountable body stands in the way of fulfilling that shared vision.

As a long-time mid-Cambridge resident, I support more housing in Mid-Cambridge; I want others to be able to enjoy this wonderful neighborhood and the advantages it offers.

Sincerely,
Leah Rand

From: [Justin Saif](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Cc: [City Council](#); [City Manager](#); [Abettercambridge Info](#)
Subject: Opposition to Renewal of Mid-Cambridge NCD
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 2:19:44 PM

Good afternoon,

I write to oppose renewal of the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District. MCNCD has severe structural issues that cannot be remedied by the incredibly minor tweaks proposed by Commission staff.

Structural Problems

Arbitrary and Conflicting Guidelines. The NCDs have a conflicting set of guidelines, and their training materials make the legally dubious claim that they can ignore their existing mandate not to consider the size and shape of a building by leaving such grounds out of any written decisions. The Land Court struck down Brookline's NCD Ordinance, finding it in part a home rule violation not permitted by state law.

Accountability Gaps. Some commission members were permitted to serve for decades, skirting term limit rules, and only remedied recently when these repeated violations were pointed out

Renter Exclusion. Renters make up 2/3 of Cambridge residents. Despite that fact, renters have been significantly underrepresented on the commission, while a small group of homeowners have rotated through for years.

Process as Punishment. The MCNCD imposes no firm timeline on project approvals. Keeping a project in review indefinitely is itself a tool of opposition that drives up costs

Open Meeting Law Issues. Questions have been raised as to whether the MCNCD Commissioners have privately deliberated by email. Such private deliberations would constitute a clear violation of the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.

Harm to Affordability. [Analysis has shown](#) that Neighborhood Conservation Districts **reduce infill housing** and **increase housing costs** in Cambridge, consistent with their original intent.

Cambridge has a severe housing shortage, and every delay to new housing production makes it worse and drives up housing costs and rents. NCDs are a known tool of exclusion, using aesthetics and "character" as justification to block multifamily projects. Mid-Cambridge has [one of the lowest percentages](#) of permanently affordable homes in Cambridge. Cambridge just passed multifamily zoning last year after years of advocacy. We should not allow this exceptionally large NCD to continue acting as a backdoor veto on new housing.

I support more housing in Mid-Cambridge and urge the Commission to recommend non-renewal of the MCNCD.

Best,
Justin

To: Cambridge Historical Commission

Re: Decennial Review of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD)

Date: September 21, 2026

I write to support the Mid Cambridge NCD and their mission in the city of Cambridge. I urge City Council to renew their charter and in fact increase their authority. The boundaries should remain the same. The NCD does some remarkable work in reviewing housing projects, recommending changes and appropriately rejecting first attempts at renovation and demolition. I have found their role central to maintaining a sense of the historic nature of Mid Cambridge. The staff is very helpful, well informed, patient and courteous, and well versed in our community and its historic character. And I applaud the willingness of fellow citizens to serve on the Board, which can be a thankless responsibility.

The NCD is critical to maintaining the character of Mid Cambridge by advancing projects that will serve the neighborhood, and not irrevocably alter it. The staff know the history, they appreciate the complexity and are aware of the balances that need to be accommodated as we move forward and work to expand available housing. And with conservation in their name, conserving character of our housing needs to be a part of their mission.

The multi-family zoning changes of 2025 has been very challenging for the city and NCD. I think the Commission and the staff have navigated these challenges effectively, dealing with developers and residents who are angry and frustrated about the changes and what they may mean for the City.

This has happened because the Council is not doing an adequate job in ensuring how the multitude of projects can be accommodated without straining the infrastructure to the point of breaking – e.g., water/sewer impacts, safety and access for essential services with more density, parking availability and air pollution, impact on existing solar, loss of open space. If you look at the many projects on Ellery St for example, this needs to be done while maintaining the historic nature of mid-cambridge - respecting the library, high school, and the juxtaposition of old and new within a few blocks. Do not take the lack of planning on the Council's part as a reason to limit the authority of the NCD.

The Council has made NCD's job more difficult. Because the Council did not think through the issues cited above with the new multi-family zoning - many people think the NCD should deal with those and they have not been given the authority to do so. Therefore, the Council needs to address those issues, and not "solve" the problem by further limiting the authority of the NCD.

I advocate for the City Council maintaining the Charter of the District and the Historical Commission and in fact, their roles should be strengthened given the challenges we are facing with expanding housing in the city. For example, by allowing them to work with City departments who have oversight over other areas of development (issues noted above). They should be allowed to change the dimensions and scope of projects if they find them not in keeping with the area. I cite Ellery St. as an example of where this needs to be done.

In closing, I urge you the Council to reaffirm the authority and responsibilities of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District. We need their help and knowledge to keep mid Cambridge vibrant, livable and historic.

Sincerely,

Nancy L. Seidman

9 Cleveland St

September 7, 2026

To the Cambridge City Council,

I am writing in support of renewing the MCNCD. Anyone familiar with the buildings it has helped preserve knows how pivotal its work has been to maintaining the beauty and architectural integrity of mid-Cambridge.

A two family-across the street from me was gutted and rehabbed a few years ago. The MCNCD presided over a series of meetings that began with a design that was unacceptable to the neighbors. The MCNCD facilitated the conversation between the neighbors and the contractor, listening respectfully to both sides and offering helpful insights. The skillful negotiation resulted in both a design and a process that everyone felt good about.

As Cambridge embarks on an unprecedented building spree, the MCNCD is more important than ever. It is the only city entity tasked with preserving the distinctive architectural beauty and character that makes mid-Cambridge one of the most desirable neighborhoods in the country. MCNCD has done an excellent job of fulfilling its mandate of “preserving, conserve and protect the beauty and heritage” of mid-Cambridge. It must be allowed to continue this work.

Sincerely,

Debra Shapiro
404A Broadway

From: [Dave Slaney](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: MCNCD renewal
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 10:57:55 AM

To the Historical Commission,
I strongly oppose the renewal of the MCNCD. For too long, that body has obstructed the building of the new housing our city sorely needs. Thank you.
Dave Slaney
237 Norfolk St.

From: [Elena](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Oppose MCNCD renewal
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 11:31:15 AM

Hello,

I'm a Cambridge resident and I urge you to not renew the MCNCD. I have been a renter in Cambridge on and off since 2012. Now, as a new parent interested in buying a home for my growing family, it is clearer than ever to me that Cambridge is in a severe housing shortage and affordability crisis. Buying in Cambridge is likely out of reach for myself and many others who contribute to the vibrancy of this community.

The MCNCD exists as a tool to block housing, and in particular, the building of new multifamily housing projects that will increase available and affordable units. Cambridge passed the Multifamily Housing Ordinance in 2025 because we, as a city, decided that we **need** exactly that type of new building in order to meet the demands of the current moment. We should not let the MCNCD, a commission that does not represent the view of Cambridge as a whole, block these efforts in one of the most central, well-resourced, and largest neighborhoods in Cambridge.

Cambridge's character will always be defined by the people who live here and the ways we adapt to a changing world, more so than by any particular aesthetic style. I urge the Historical Commission to decline to renew the MCNCD.

Thank you,

Elena Stein
45 Yerxa Road #305
Cambridge, MA 02140

From: [Sarah Stone](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Cc: [City Council](#); [City Manager](#)
Subject: No to renewal of MCNCD
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 6:11:23 PM

Dear Cambridge Historical Commission and City Council,

I have lived in Cambridge for 8 years, in Mid-Cambridge for 5. I'm writing to oppose the renewal of the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District in its present form. I appreciate that entities like the NCD provide value to our city, but their roles must be clarified and their oversight must be placed on a timeline. It is a fact that we are in a housing crisis and the NCD has attempted to block developments that would have added a significant number of housing units to the neighborhood. That is unacceptable.

NCDs should be subject to greater transparency so that - among other things - Cambridge residents can seek out and read [minutes from more recently than 2022](#). I would propose that the MCNCD be allowed to choose a certain number of projects per year that they can support conserving. I also believe developers should have an eye towards aesthetic harmony with existing buildings when making their proposals, but that these aesthetics be clarified and not subject to the NCD's case-by-case whims.

Please remember that the result of an ever worsening housing crisis is that Cambridge will become a museum: full of beautiful buildings, but with no renewal by future generations because so few can afford to live here.

Thank you!
Sarah

From: [N Trivedi](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Amendments to NCDs
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 6:18:01 PM

Dear CHC:

I am a 16 yr Cambridge resident. I believe the NCDs should be updated to take into account the new Multifamily Housing Overlay. Whereas it's important to have a way for residents to share feedback with the City and developers, NCDs should work in tandem to bring development to neighborhoods but not be an arbiter of development or zoning - that's what the Council and zoning ordinances are for.

Thank you,
Neheet Trivedi
Magoun St Cambridge

From: [Susan Turner](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: MCNCD tonight
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 12:40:06 PM

I have another commitment tonight or I'd come to the meeting.

It is distressing to see some residents of Cambridge trying to keep their privileged housing while others are priced out of living here. We have gotten to the point of having only wealthy people on one hand, and people who qualify for the present subsidized affordable housing, with little in between on the other. Unfortunately with our zoning from the past, we have avoided responding to the need for more housing in general. The apartment on Erie St. for mostly poor people fits perfectly easily in the neighborhood. But there needs to be more such buildings - 13 stories high - now, for more people of varied incomes. Rather than keeping the restrictions of the past, we must respond to the needs of the present. Please make Cambridge an example of how to grow, not how to keep people away.

Susan Turner
182 Magazine St. #2

From: [Wayne Welke](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Cc: [City Manager](#); [City Council](#)
Subject: Please Oppose Renewing the Mid-Cambridge NCD
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 11:45:10 AM

Dear Commission Members and Staff -

The MCNCD is an archaic vestige of NIMBYism that deserves to die a natural death! Please do not renew this overt restriction of the new housing for which Cambridge voters have worked so long.

Cambridge just passed multifamily zoning last year after years of advocacy. Please do not allow this exceptionally large NCD to continue acting as a backdoor veto on new housing, especially since Mid-Cambridge has one of the lowest percentages of permanently affordable homes in Cambridge.

NCDs are a known tool of exclusion (red-lining by another name), using aesthetics and "character" as justification to block multifamily projects. As a Cambridge resident and home-owner of over 55 years, I urge you to reject renewal of the MCNCD and make homes available to all.

~Wayne Welke

30 Dover Street - #3
Cambridge, MA 02140
603.264.3674 (cell)
welke@alum.mit.edu

From: [James Zall](#)
To: [Histncds](#)
Subject: Mid-Cambridge NCD Review
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 12:23:38 PM

To the CHC staff,

In the past 16 months, I've attended (via Zoom) several MCNCD meetings. Early in this period, I heard the Commissioners try to bridge the gap between

1. their assigned role in maintaining the appearance and layout of Mid-Cambridge as first built, mostly in the 1800s and early 1900s, and
2. the zoning laws and housing policies set by Cambridge government as it mitigates the consequences of our present housing shortage.

At first, Commissioners wondered aloud about how this important question would be settled. More than one even asked *if there was still a role* for a Neighborhood Conservation District.

Over a period of months, the Commission's solution to this dilemma became apparent. Commissioners still discussed out-of-scope issues, but replaced direct references to height and shape of buildings with subjective standards -- whether a proposed building felt jarring, intimidating, incongruous, overbearing, etc. A previously casual approach to public comment gave way to speakers being cut off when their statements were construed as insufficiently limited to the specifics of the case at hand.

It has become clear that the gap between the housing policies and laws established by City Council and City departments, and the NCD's city-assigned role of maintaining a long legacy of smaller residential buildings and exclusionary practices, is a matter of overlapping jurisdictions with irreconcilable goals. If we are going to survive the our economic, political and social problems around housing, the answer to the MCNCD Commissioners' question, "Is there still a role for an NCD?" must be "no".

Please allow the jurisdiction of the Mid-Cambridge NCD to expire.

Thank you,

James Zall

203 Pemberton Street