

Mid Cambridge NCD Decennial Review Public Meeting

Cambridge Historical Commission

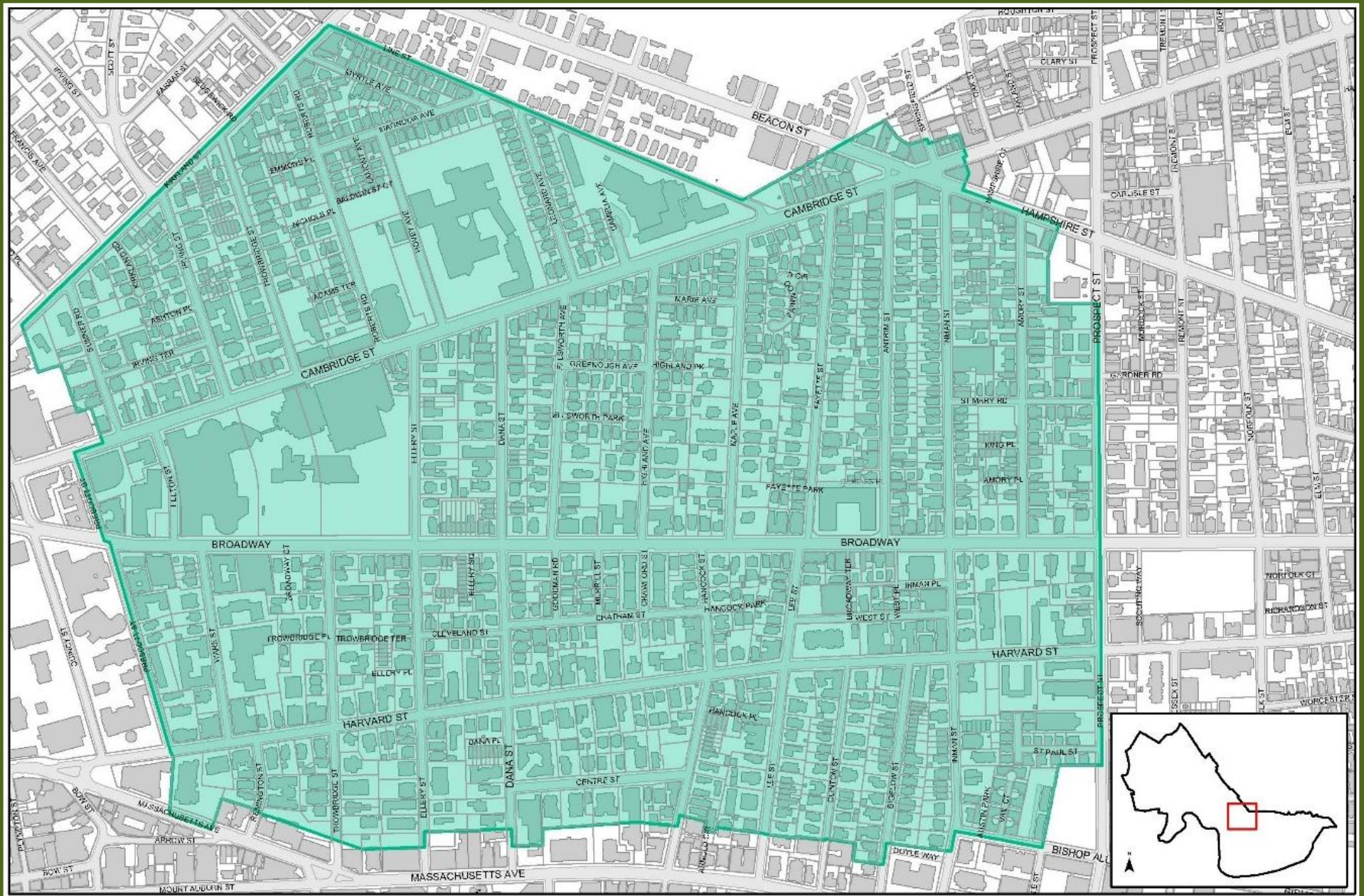
April 27, 2026

Agenda

- Why a Decennial Review?
- Mid Cambridge NCD Background
- Summary of Cases 2015-2025
- Sample Projects
- Questions

Why a Decennial Review?

- Amendments in 2023 to Article 2.78 of the Municipal Code, the enabling ordinance which governs the Neighborhood Conservation Districts, require routine decennial reviews of all said districts.
- The 10-year report will include a study of neighborhood demographics, a summary of the activities of the NCD over the previous decade, and guidance on recommended changes to the boundaries, guidelines, and/or procedures of the NCD, if there are any.
- Report submitted to City Council for a vote to amend, uphold, or rescind the NCD.



Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Map

Mid Cambridge NCD District

- Approximately 1,500 buildings, including residential, commercial, public, and institutional uses.
- Architecturally diverse range of housing dating from the mid-19th century to the Depression and apartment buildings from the 1960s and 70s, all within a very dense area.
- 103 properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places
- District was established in 1985
 - Concerns over the demolition of historic structures and the construction of townhouses with no design review.



The 1962 Code in Action



295 Harvard Street (1962)

The 1962 Code in Action



5 Centre Street (1970)

Mid Cambridge NCD



321 Harvard Street, 1974



329 Harvard Street, 1969

The 1962 Code in Action – 1978 Townhouse Amendment



318, 320, and 324 Harvard Street (1840, 1977, 1843)

The catalyst for adoption of neighborhood conservation district in Mid-Cambridge

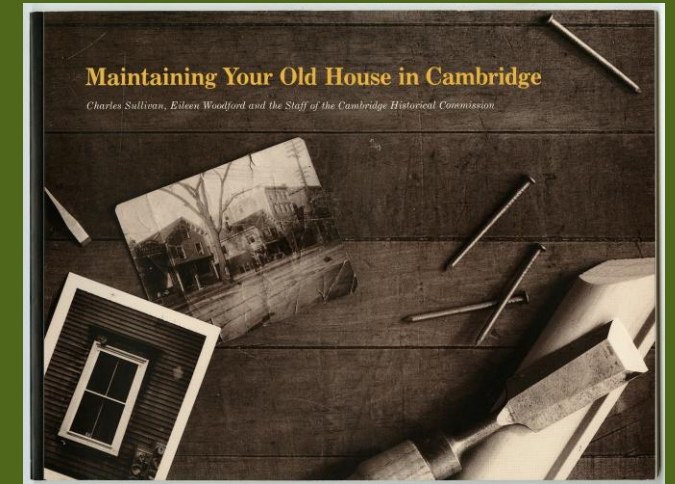
The 1962 Code in Action – 1978 Townhouse Amendment



Harvard Street between Lee and Dana streets; post-1961 in blue, post 1978 in red

Partial Timeline of Zoning and NCD in Mid Cambridge

- 1962 – Upzoning
- 1976 – Town House Ordinance created; provided flexibility from some requirements and incentivized semi-detached homes on lots that could be subdivided and sold
- 1977 – Zoning Code; parts of MC were rezoned from C-2 to C-1, lowering height limits from 85 feet to 35 feet
- 1983 – Landmark and NCD Ordinance enacted by CC (Ch. 2.78, Art. III)
- 1985 – Mid Cambridge NCD order adopted by CC; review primarily of demolition, new construction and alterations to NR-listed properties; *Maintaining Your Old House in Cambridge* resulted as an educational outreach component
- 1992 – Mid Cambridge NCD order revised by CC, expanded jurisdiction of alterations with both binding and non-binding categories
- 2020 – Affordable Housing Overlay for 100% affordable projects adopted by CC
- 2023 – Enabling ordinance (Ch. 2.78, Art. III) amended by CC, modifying the membership, goals, procedures and authority of NCDs.
- 2025 – Multifamily Housing Ordinance adopted by CC; allows 3+ units citywide



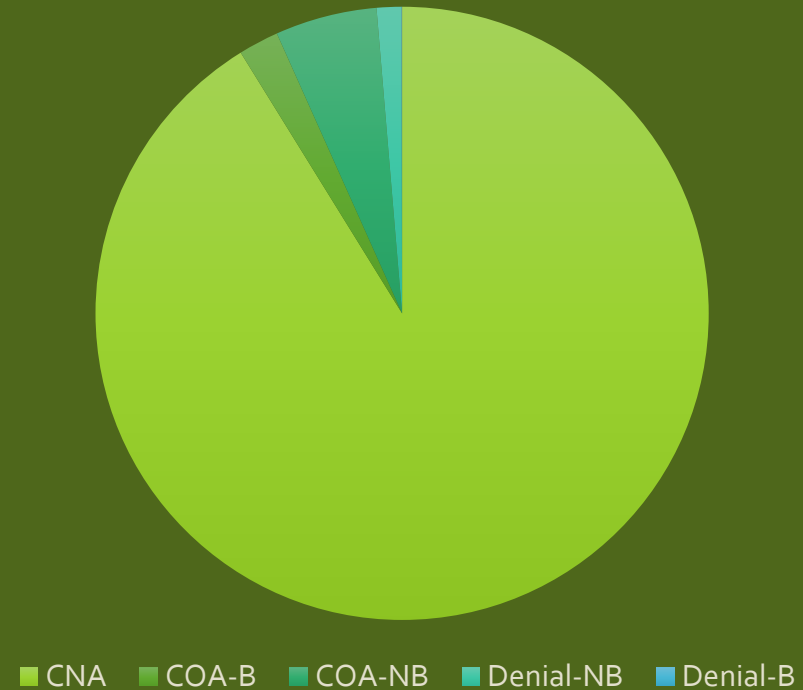
Summary of Cases: 2015-2025

- From January 1, 2015, to December 31, 2025, the MC Commission and/or CHC Staff have reviewed 2,785 applications.
- These applications are broken down into:
 - Certificate of Non-applicability (staff approval) 2,532
 - Certificate of Appropriateness - Binding 60
 - Certificate of Appropriateness - Non binding 153
 - Denials - Non binding 47
 - Denials - Binding 2
 - Withdrawals 7

Summary of Cases: 2015-2025

- Approvals- 2,745
 - Certificate of Appropriateness- 213
 - Commission review
 - Certificate of Non-Applicability- 2,532
 - Staff-level administrative review
- Denials – 49
 - Non binding (advisory) – 47
 - Binding - 2
- 7 cases withdrew

Case Outcomes 2015 - 2025



Jurisdiction of Mid Cambridge NCD

MC Commission Reviews:

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

- Including:
 - New Construction
 - Demolition
 - Alterations
 - Additions
 - Window/door reconfigurations
 - Window/door/siding replacements

MC Commission does NOT Review:

- Building use
- Paint colors
- Interior renovations
- Work not visible from public way
- Replacement in-kind
- Plant material/hardscaping
- Fences and walls less than 6'-0"
- Solar panels

Sample Projects: Alterations



Roof dormers, porch enclosure or alterations, window and siding replacement, chimney removal



Sample Project: Alterations

- Project Date: 2016
- 20 Sumner Road - Harvard Center for Green Buildings and Cities
- Much of the historic fabric had been replaced over the years
- Energy retrofit renovation study



Before



After

Sample Project: Alterations

- 206-212 Hampshire Street
- Project Date: 2018
- Restoration of 1868 building and reconstruction of mansard roof



Sample Project: Infill- 75 Inman St.

- Project Date: 2018
- The Commission approved the demolition of the rear addition and the construction of an additional unit.
- A mature tree in the back was preserved.



Before



After

Sample Project: Infill – 123 Hancock St.

- Project Date: 2023
- The Commission approved the demolition of the rear addition and the construction of a separate dwelling.
- The new building was stepped back to give visual prominence to 1840 Greek Revival house in front.



Before



After

Sample Projects: Additional Infill



106 Inman St. - 2024



12 Fayette St. - 2021



17 Ellsworth Ave. - 2019

Sample Project: New Construction

- 142 Amory Street
- Project Date: 2023
- Existing building was condemned after rear portion collapsed.
- The Commission approved the construction of a two-family dwelling.



Before



After

Sample Project: New Construction

- 1730 and 1737 Cambridge Street – Center for Government and International Studies
- Project Date: 2005
- Demolition of an 1858 structure and relocation of an 1887 building to Sumner Road



Sample Project: 449 Broadway

- Project Date: 2004
- The Commission approved the expansion of the library, restoration of the existing library, and renovation of the park



Sample Project: Vellucci Plaza

- Inman Square
- Project Date: 2018
- The Commission reviewed the changes to the plaza which was divided by the new street layout.



Recent Changes to MC Commission

Other Revisions to Chapter 2.78 Include:

1. Expanded membership of NCD Commissions
 - a. Now seven members + three alternates
2. Review Procedures
 - a. “... The [NCD] commission...shall review all construction, demolition or alteration that affects the exterior architectural features, other than color, ADA compliance features, accessibility features, climate resiliency features, or renewable energy features of any landmark or within any neighborhood conservation district”
3. Majority Affordable Housing Review Authority
 - a. “Housing that either is developed under the Affordable Housing Overlay, as defined in Section 11.207 of the Zoning Ordinance, or has a majority of units permanently reserved for households at or below 100% of Area Median Income” is now advisory only.
 - b. To date, several projects with 20% inclusionary housing have been proposed in the District, three of which are on Ellery Street, one on Broadway.

Recent Changes to MC Commission

Other Revisions to Chapter 2.78 Include:

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

Current City Council Goals:

Housing and Zoning: Address the housing crisis by making it easier to build more housing of all types with a focus on affordability and protections for low, middle-income, elderly, and disabled residents.

Economic Opportunity and Equity: Ensure the City of Cambridge offers economic opportunities to all residents and businesses and is taking steps toward greater economic equity, especially among our marginalized communities.

Transportation: Improve the safety, efficiency, access, and sustainability of transportation options for all, and advocate for key transit priorities with the MBTA and other state and regional partners.

Sustainability and Climate Resilience: Deepen the City of Cambridge's commitment to addressing the climate crisis through the use of sustainable energy and strengthening climate resilience and supporting our residents and businesses through this transition.

Government and Council Performance: The City Council is committed to effective decision making through close collaboration with each other and the City administration, to communicate transparently and to deepen accountability and engagement with the community.

Multi Family Housing Zoning Adopted Feb. 10, 2025

- Allows all residential use types everywhere
- Removes minimum lot sizes
- Regulates based on “stories above grade” and open space, removes density limits for residential use (FAR, lot area per dwelling unit)
- Increases residential height limits
- Reduces setback requirements
- Reduces special permit requirements
- Continues to support all-affordable development

Height Limits - Residential Neighborhoods

Old Zoning



Res. A-1, A-2, B Res. C, C-1

New Zoning



Res. C-1 – Base

Inclusionary
(5,000+sf lot)

New Residential Min. Yard Setbacks

District	Front	Side/Rear	AHO
Res. Districts	5-10* feet	5** feet	Per base district or AHO (least restrictive)
Other Districts	None-10 feet	None	Per base district or AHO (least restrictive)

* Front yards may be reduced to average of abutting lots

** Side/rear yards may be reduced in these ways:

- Waived where buildings directly abut on lot line
- Flexible if opposite sides sum to 10 feet and at least 10 feet from other building
- Vertical additions may match existing non-conforming setbacks

Sample Project: 60 Ellery Street

- Project Date: 2025-2026
- 1923 brick Colonial Revival house
- Proposal called for demolition and construction of 6-story building.
- The Commission approved the proposal after revisions including façade and entry design, materials, and location of transformer
- Revised design created an additional unit



Existing building

Sample Project: 60 Ellery Street



Initial Proposal



Architects Committee Design Review

Sample Project: 406 Broadway

- Project Date: 2025-2026
- Demolition of 1925 brick Colonial Revival structure and construction of 6-story building.
- Applicant was asked to return with revised design that simplified the facades and look more residential. Demolition and new construction approved with additional review at Architects Committee meeting.



Sample Project: 406 Broadway



Initial Proposal



Architects Committee Design Review

Sample Project: 84-86 Ellery Street

- Project Date: 2025-2026
- Initially proposed demolition of 1877 mansard and construction of 6-story building.
- Main structure determined to be historically and architecturally significant.
- Demolition of rear addition and construction of addition approved with additional review at Architects Committee meeting.



Existing building

Sample Project: 84-86 Ellery Street



Initial Proposal



Approved

Upcoming Meetings:

- May 18, 6:00 PM - Public Meeting
- May – walking tours - dates to be determined
- June 22, 6:00 PM – Public Meeting

You can also email us at Histncds@CambridgeMA.GOV with comments and questions.



Questions, Comments