

Mid Cambridge NCD Decennial Review Public Meeting

Cambridge Historical Commission

May 18, 2026

Agenda

- Introduction
- Why a Decennial Review
- Mid Cambridge NCD Prior Iterations
- Sample Projects by Jurisdictional Category
- 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 NCD Prior Studies & Jurisdiction

- 1981 – CC enacted Ordinance 953 allowing for designation of NCDs
- 1982 – Study Committee for Mid Cambridge NCD issues study report and recommendations for review of alterations, demolition and new construction. Amended recommendations follow.
- 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
- 1991 – Study Committee to consider amendments to Jurisdiction
- 1992 – Mid Cambridge NCD amended district order adopted by CC, moved review of alterations to NR properties to binding review and expanded jurisdiction by adding review of alterations to other properties as advisory
- 2020 – Affordable Housing Overlay for 100% affordable projects adopted by CC
- 2023 – City Council adopts amendments to Landmark and NCD Ordinance, changing review jurisdiction for size and shape of additions and new construction as well as certain categories of alterations; removed review of affordable housing projects with majority of units dedicated as affordable.
- 2025 – Multifamily Housing Ordinance adopted by CC; allows 3+ units citywide with increased height and lot coverage

Review Authority per 1985 District Order

Advisory:

- A. Exterior alterations of structures listed on the National Register or of structures with conforming non-residential uses, provided that
 - 1. The alteration is visible from a public street
 - 2. Alteration involves significant changes to a any of the following features: bay windows, cornice, fascia boards below the cornice including gutter and trim details, porches, cornerboards, window and door casings, skylights covering more than 1/3 of the visible roof area, or signs other than home-occupation signs.

Binding:

- B. Activity visible from a public way involving any of the following,
 - 1. Demolition of 33% or more of floor area of a structure not used principally to garage automobiles
 - 2. New construction of more than 750 sf
 - 3. New construction of structures on more than 33% of the lot area not already occupied by structures
 - 4. Enlargement of floor area by more than 33%
 - 5. Relocation of a structure onto or off of a site
 - 6. Alteration or construction of a structure with non-conforming use(s)
 - 7. Publicly owned structures

Review Authority per 1992 Amended Order

Advisory:

- A. New constructure more than 150 and less than 750 sf
- B. Exterior alterations that require a variance or special permit
- C. Alterations involving
 1. Removal or enclosure of any historic or decorative element such as a cornice, fascia, soffit, bay, porch, hood, cornerboard, window sash, or window or door casing
 2. Increase or diminishment of the size and/or change in the location of windows or doors
 3. Increase or diminishment of the slope, pitch or configuration of a roof or removal of historic or original roofing material

Binding:

- A. New construction
 1. of more than 750 sf
 2. on more than 33% of the lot area not already occupied by structures
 3. enlargement of floor area by more than 33%
- B. Demolition of 33% or more of floor area of a structure not used principally to garage automobiles including relocation of a structure onto or off of a site
- C. Any alteration or construction of the following:
 1. structures listed on the National Register, except those subject to Historical Commission review
 2. publicly owned structures
 3. structures with non-conforming uses

Recent Changes to MC Commission

2023 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
 - b. Exempt from NCD review: “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”

Recent Changes to MC Commission

Other Revisions to Chapter 2.78 Include:

3. Factors for Consideration by NCD Commissions:
 - a) NCD Commissions shall not consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of new construction or additions to existing buildings.
 - b) NCD Commissions shall not impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by zoning.
 - c) 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.

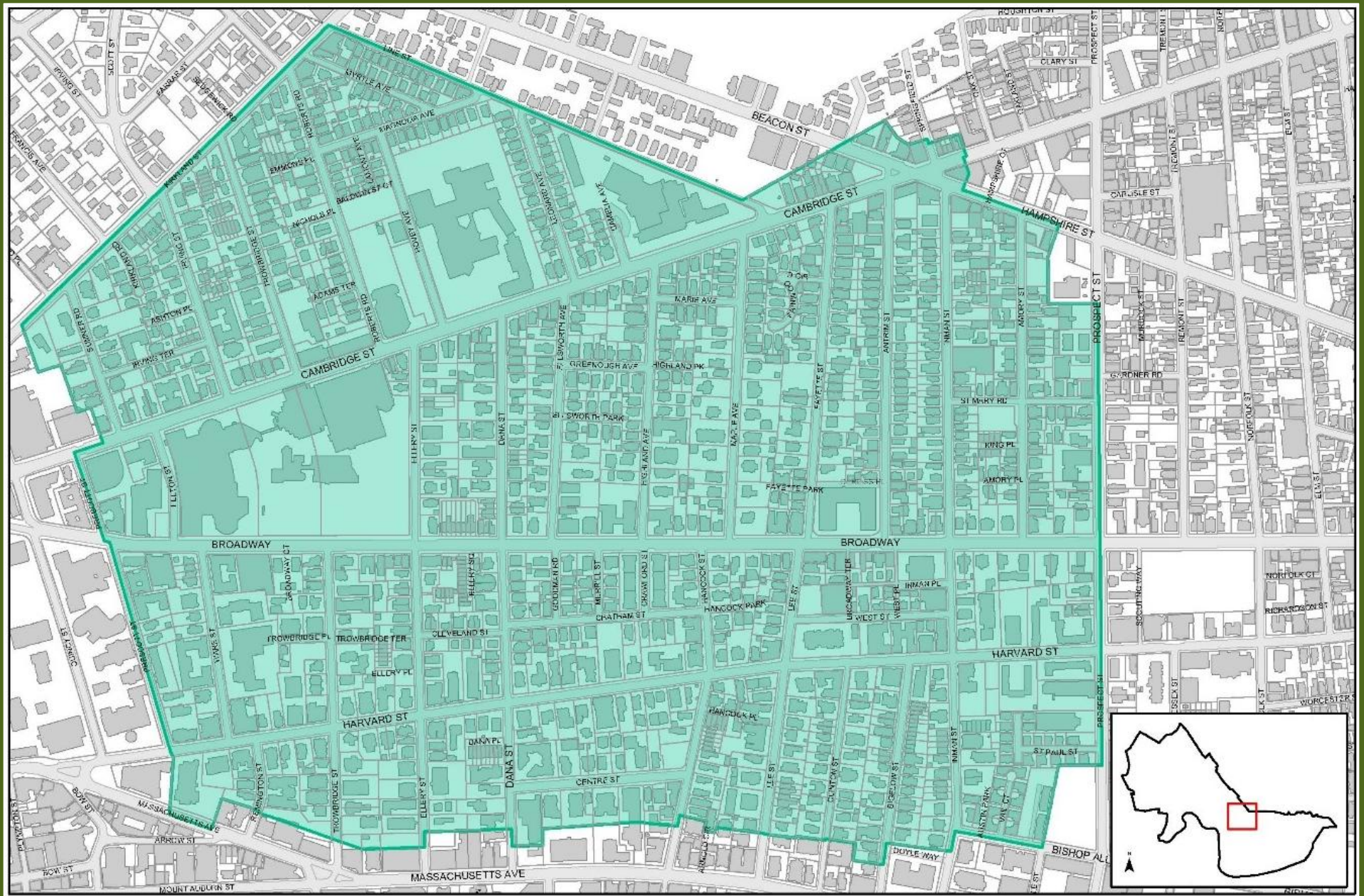
Transportation: Improve the safety, efficiency, access, and sustainability of transportation options for all, and advocate for key transit priorities with the MBTA and other state and regional partners.

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
- Increases residential height limits
- Removes density controls for residential use (FAR, lot area per dwelling unit)
- Reduces dimensions of required setbacks
- Reduces special permit triggers



Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Map

Jurisdiction of Mid Cambridge NCD

- **Advisory (or non-binding) Review:**
 - New construction of more than 150 and less than 750 sf of floor area
 - Alterations that require a special permit or variance,
 - Alteration that removes, encloses, relocates, increases or diminishes aspects of the exterior architectural fabric of the structure
- Typical cases involve replacing original siding, windows, porches, removing chimneys, or adding new dormers or rear additions.
- If the Commission denies a Certificate of Appropriateness, the applicant can still proceed with the project as submitted.

Alterations: Advisory Review-Approved

Before



6-8 Goodman Road - 2020



8 Greenough Avenue - 2021



23 Greenough Avenue - 2019

After



Alterations: Advisory Review-Approved

Before



11 Magnolia Ave. - 2020



1-3 Lamont Ave. - 2023



13 Goodman Road - 2024

After



Alterations: Advisory Review-Disapproved

Before



29 Line Street - 2024



381 Broadway - 2019

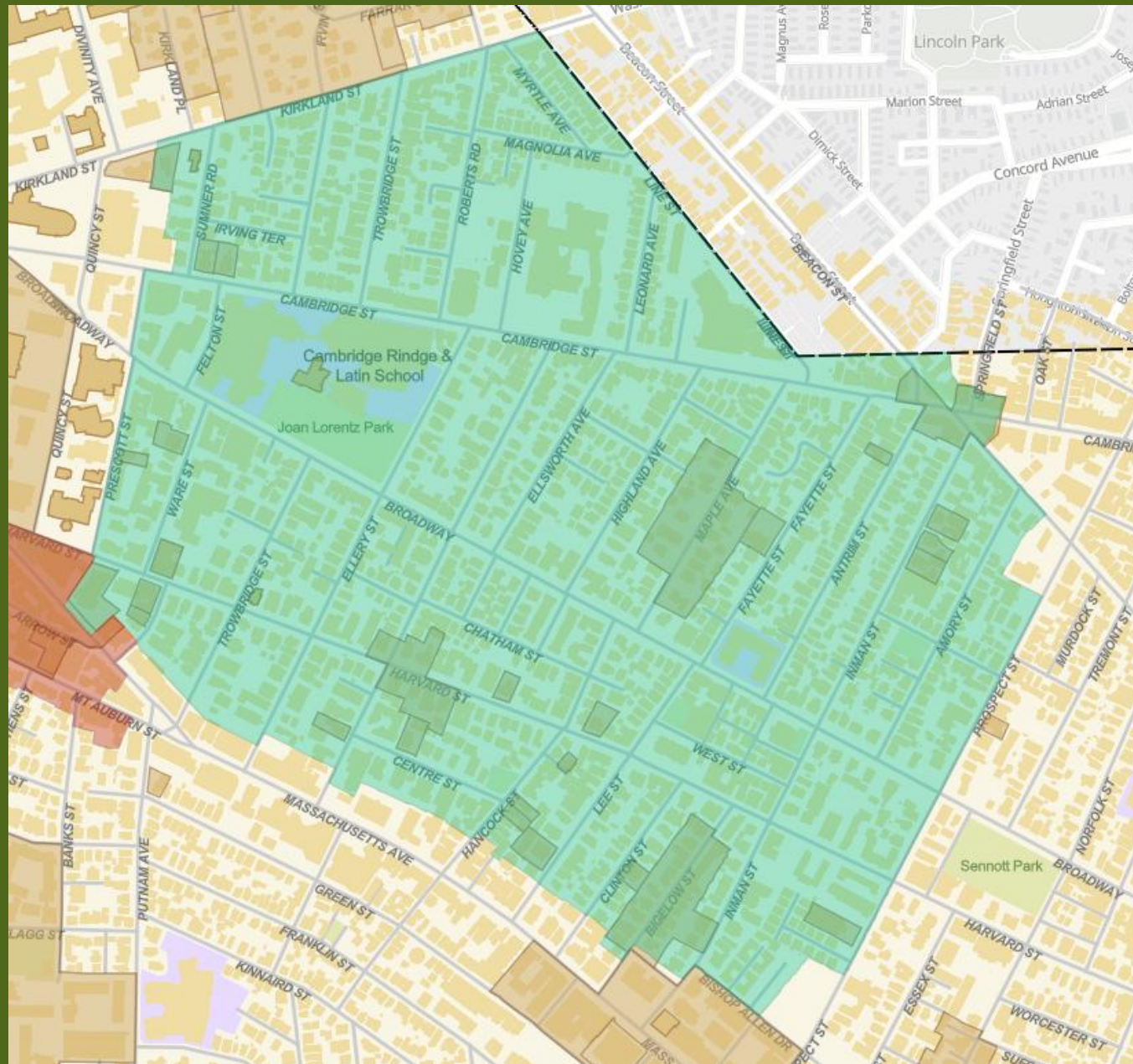
After



Jurisdiction of Mid Cambridge NCD

Binding Review

- New construction, including additions . . . involving any of the following:
 - More than 750 square feet of floor area
 - 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%
- 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
- Any alteration or construction of the following
 - Structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places, except those subject to Historical Commission review
 - Publicly owned structures
 - Structures containing or proposed to contain non-conforming uses.



103 Properties in MC listed on the National Register of Historic Places

Alterations: Binding Review-Approved

Before



382 Harvard Street (NR) - 2021



206-212 Hampshire Street - 2020

After



Binding Review: Infill – 123 Hancock St.

- Project Date: 2023
- Demolition of rear addition of Greek Revival house and construction of new detached dwelling



Initial proposal



Approved

Binding Review: Additional Infill



106 Inman St. - 2024

Initial Proposal



17 Ellsworth Ave. - 2019

Initial Proposal



Binding Review: 142 Amory Street

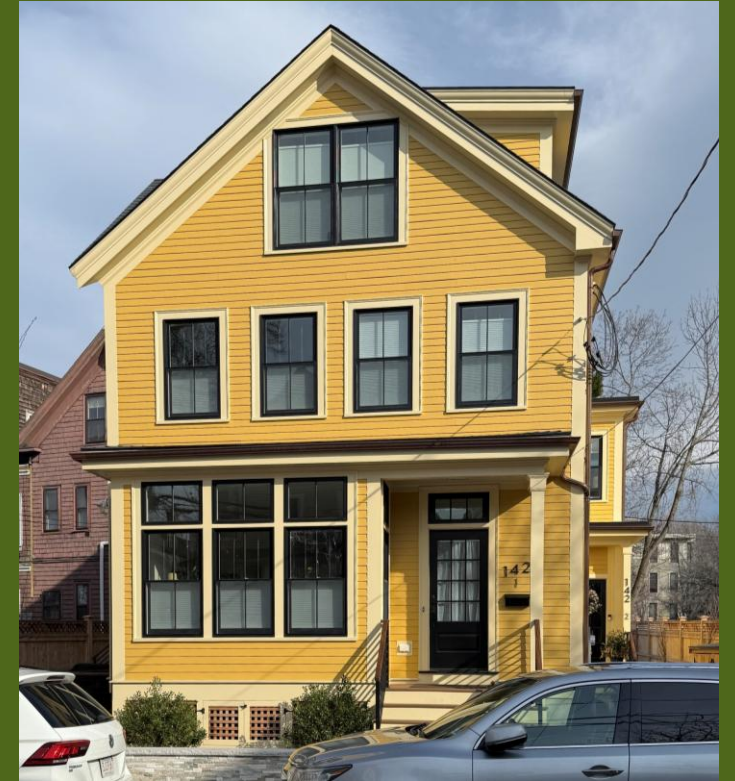
- Project Date: 2023
- New 2-family residence



Partially collapsed building



Initial proposal



Approved

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



Demolition/New Construction

- 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

Demolition/New Construction

- 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 – full demolition and new construction



Approved – partial demolition

Goals of Mid Cambridge NCD

General Objectives:

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

Upcoming Meetings:

- **May/June-- Walking Tours** (registration not required)
Thursday, May 28 at 5:30 PM, meet at front of Library, 449 Broadway
Saturday, June 13 at 10:00 AM, meet at front of City Hall, 795 Mass. Ave.
- **May June 22, 6:00 PM – Public Meeting**

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



Questions, Comments