

Mid Cambridge NCD Decennial Review Public Meeting

Cambridge Historical Commission

June 22, 2026

Agenda

- Introduction
- Draft Proposed Revisions to MCNCD Order
 - General Objectives
 - Review Authority
 - Review Criteria
 - Exemptions from Review

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 to be submitted to City Council in September 2026 for a vote to amend, uphold, or rescind the NCD.

Approved Multi-family housing in Mid Cambridge



60 Ellery Street



406 Broadway



88 Ellery Street



84-86 Ellery Street

Article III. - Establishment of Neighborhood Conservation Districts and Protected Landmarks

2.78.140 - Purpose.

- The City Council finds it necessary to enact this article under Section 6 of the Home Rule Amendment in order 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. To achieve these purposes, the City may designate neighborhood conservation districts and landmarks to be administered as set forth in this article.

Goals of Mid Cambridge NCD

Current:

- 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

Proposed:

- 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 city-wide housing demand
- ~~Enhance the economic vitality of the neighborhood~~

Review Authority

Current binding review:

- 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

Proposed binding review:

- A. New construction
 - 1. of more than 750 gross square floor as defined by the Zoning Ordinance 5.25
 - 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 a structure, as defined by the Inspectional Services Dept., not including structures used principally to garage automobiles
- 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~~ (Commission has no purview over use)

- Demolition permits are required by the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) under the following conditions:
 - relocating a building, or
 - removing 50% or more of the area of the exterior walls or roof (framing), or
 - removing a roof (including but not limited to raising the overall height of a roof, re-building roof to a different pitch, or adding additional stories to a building), or
 - removing 50% or more of floor framing, or
 - removing 50% or more of the foundation, or
 - removing 25% or more of the volume above grade of a building

Review Authority

Current advisory review:

- A. New construction 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

Proposed advisory review:

- A. New construction more than 150 and less than 750 gross square floor area as defined by Zoning Ordinance 5.25
- 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

Review Criteria – New Construction and Additions – elements to be considered

Current :

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
6. Changes to the existing buildings as related to new construction

Proposed:

1. Site layout
2. Provisions for parking if provided
3. Volume and dimensions of the building to the extent allowed under Article 2.78.220
4. Provisions for landscaping with structures
5. The scale of the building in relation to its surroundings to the extent allowed under Article 2.78.220
6. Architectural compatibility with nearby structures and neighborhood context
7. Consideration of City Council goals

Exemptions from Commission Review

Current exemptions, including 2023 amendments to Ch.2.78:

- Additions less than 150sf
- Accessibility improvements (ramps, lifts, etc.)
- Sustainable energy upgrades, such as solar panels
- Signs, temporary structures, lawn statuary, or recreational equipment
- Fences under 7 feet
- Terraces, paving, walks, driveways, sidewalks, and similar structures at grade level
- Skylights that cover less than 1/3 of the visible roof area
- Alterations not involving historic features or openings
- Storm doors, storm windows, screens, window air conditioners
- Ordinary maintenance, repairs, reconstruction
- Interior alterations
- Exterior features not publicly visible
- Paint color

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.

Upcoming Meetings:

- Mid Cambridge NCD Commission - August
- Cambridge Historical Commission - tbd

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

