

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

August 6, 2026 – Meeting conducted online via Zoom Webinar (874 3594 1809) - 6:00 P.M.

Present: Liz Lyster, Vice Chair; Joseph Ferrara, Gavin Kleespies, Paula Paris, Kyle Sheffield, Members; Florrie Darwin and Michael Rogove, Alternate Members

Absent: Chandra Harrington, Chair; Yuting Zhang, Member; Scott Kyle, Alternate Member

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, Executive Director; Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner

Public present: See attached list.

This meeting was held online with remote participation pursuant to Ch. 2 of the Acts of 2023.

The public was able to participate online via the Zoom webinar platform.

In the absence of Chair Harrington, Vice Chair Lyster assumed the chair. With a quorum present, she called the meeting to order at 6:10 P.M. She designated both alternates present to vote on all matters then reviewed online meeting instructions and public hearing procedures, noting that public questions and comments would be combined and limited to two minutes. She dispensed with the consent agenda procedure.

Public Hearings: Demolition Review

Case D-1827: 146 Spring St, by Wei Zhang. Substantial demolition of house (1847).

Mr. Sullivan shared slides and summarized the case. At the previous hearing on June 18, the Commission determined that 146 Spring Street was significant and preferably preserved, placing it under a 12-month demolition delay, which began June 18. The owner submitted new materials and revised plans seeking reconsideration of that finding.

Mr. Sullivan briefly displayed slides (aerial view, lot plan, previous massing drawings) to re-establish context, explaining that the Commission had found the prior proposal insufficiently detailed for judging its streetscape impact. He then invited the applicant to present.

John Le, the architect, apologized for not being able to stay for the hearing at the prior meeting. He described the existing building as a 2½-story Greek Revival single-family house with vinyl siding and vinyl windows. It was approximately 25' 6" tall, less than the neighboring buildings at 148 Spring Street (about 4 feet taller) and 144 Spring (about 6 feet taller).

Mr. Le said the intention was to make the enlarged building fit into the neighborhood context. He described key elements of the revised proposal including height under 35 feet, reproduced Greek Revival motifs, and dormers. He described the doorways and building materials.

Ms. Lyster called for questions of fact from commissioners.

Mr. Kleespies asked whether the Spring Street door was operable. Mr. Le answered that it was there for aesthetics, but not operable.

Mr. Sheffield asked if the dormer cheek walls were flush with the street-facing façade. The applicant confirmed they were in the same plane. Mr. Sheffield asked the distance between the front and rear buildings. Mr. Le said they were about 5 to 6 feet apart.

Mr. Sheffield noted that zoning code requires a minimum of 10 feet between two buildings. Wei Zhang, the owner, reported that the zoning staff had confirmed that 10 feet was not required due to the existing non-conforming setbacks. Ms. Lyster asked why the Spring Street door could not be made functional. The architect gave reasons concerning floor height changes. Commissioners expressed concern about the lack of floor plans, ambiguities about stairs and setbacks, and the detailing of the side entrance.

Ms. Lyster called for questions of fact and public comment from the public attendees. Each speaker would have two minutes.

Attorney Deborah Fawcett, representing the owner of 148 Spring Street, asked whether the 4-story building would comply with fire code egress requirements, including pressurized stairwells. She raised concerns that revised design disrupts scale of historic workers' cottage streetscape. She suggested exploring increased massing for the rear building instead of doubling the height of the front building.

Ilan Levy of 148 Spring Street expressed his strong opposition to the redesign. The decorative columns and fake door were pure performance without architectural integrity. He said the Commission had correctly found the building preferably preserved and should maintain that decision.

Marie Saccoccio of 55 Otis Street opposed the design. Workers' cottages in East Cambridge are rare. The plans were unclear and there were unanswered zoning and fire safety questions.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street critiqued the non-functional Spring Street door as undermining the façade's authenticity. The main entrance should have appropriate scale and gravitas. She recommended revising the dormers to be subordinate to main roofline.

Ms. Lyster closed the public comment period.

Mr. Kleespies began by acknowledging that the applicants had clearly responded to feedback from the prior meeting. He considered the new design a meaningful improvement. An operational front door facing Spring Street was essential to maintaining the neighborhood character. The dormers required setbacks from the front wall to mitigate the building's overall massing.

Ms. Darwin said the dormers should appear subordinate. She questioned if the design met the MFH design goal for neighborly massing, noting the extremely tight proximity between the new four-story mass and the rear building. The design still required further refinement.

Mr. Sheffield praised the applicants for their improvements but raised several concerns. He described the submission as being at the conceptual level, not schematic. The applicants needed to prepare design drawings and confirm code compliance before returning.

Mr. Rogove sought clarification about the Commission's authority. He wanted to ensure it was not providing unintentional design review beyond the scope of the demolition review ordinance. Mr. Sullivan clarified the decision is guided by whether the replacement project mitigates adverse impacts enough to justify lifting the demolition delay, but this often includes negotiating design elements. The scale of the building at 133 Spring Street helped to contextualize the proposal.

Ms. Lyster echoed concerns about the Spring Street door, dormers, safety, and livability concerns for the ground floor units. She expressed appreciation for the applicants' effort and said the Commission wanted to help get to a solution, not impede development.

Mr. Sheffield moved that the Commission maintain its prior finding that the building at 146 Spring Street is preferably preserved in the context of the revised replacement proposal presented and invite the applicant to return with further revisions. Ms. Darwin seconded. A brief discussion followed. Mr. Rogove asked for explicit expectations for the next submittal. Commissioners and staff agreed applicants should return with dimensioned architectural plans, and streetscape elevations, verification of building separation compliance, and redesigned dormers. The motion passed 6-1 in a roll call vote. (Ferrara, Kleespies, Paris, Sheffield, Lyster and Darwin voting for the motion; Rogove voting against).

Mr. Sullivan noted that the building the applicants were welcome to return with a more complete proposal while the project remained under demolition delay.

Public Hearings: Demolition Review

Case D-1826: 178-180 Elm St. NC, by Charles Zammuto agent for Mario Bussolati Estate. Demolish double house (1892).

Mr. Sullivan reported that the case had been continued from the June 18 meeting with the owners' consent. On June 18, the Commission found the building significant but had not yet made a determination of whether the building was preferably preserved in the context of the replacement project.

Charles Zamuto thanked the staff for meeting at the site and noted the revised plan was based on staff guidance and neighborhood context.

Architect Vera Xie described the current proposal, which would preserve and reinterpret key Queen Anne architectural ideas and aim for compatibility with both Elm Street and Miller Avenue streetscapes. She described revisions including reduced window sizes and ADA ramp. The material palette would include composite cladding with a wood-grain texture, for which details had been provided.

Rooftop mechanical equipment would be screened behind the parapet. She showed a rendering comparing the height with neighboring buildings.

Ms. Lyster called for questions of fact from commissioners.

Mr. Sheffield asked if brick had been considered as a material. He questioned whether the rendering showing a cantilevered bay above the garage ramp was realistic. Ms. Xie said the rendered view was Photoshopped but dimensional ramp studies were completed. Mr. Sheffield asked about mechanicals placement. Ms. Xie pointed to a mechanical room in the basement and HVAC condensing units on the roof. Mr. Sheffield also asked the height of the roof stair and elevator headhouses. Ms. Xie answered that the stair headhouse was approximately 7' above the roof deck but the parapet was 4' so it would not be visible from ground level. Mr. Sheffield pressed for true architectural elevations showing the building's height compared to neighbors along Elm and Miller, not just perspective renderings.

Ms. Lyster asked if the front entry design had changed; the architect said only the ramp was added, not the door. Ms. Lyster expressed confusion over the mechanical layout, questioning inconsistencies between the drawings and verbal description. Ms. Darwin asked if the main entry was more visually prominent than before. Ms. Xie said the ramp helped accentuate the entrance. Ms. Paris asked about the distribution of one and two-bedroom units, parking, and electric vehicle charging. Mr. Kleespies noted missing kitchens from two units. The architect acknowledged the floor plans were preliminary.

Ms. Lyster called for questions of fact and public comment.

Carolyn Maltus of Miller Avenue expressed shock that no one was discussing the massive impact on Miller Avenue. The neighbors would lose views of the sky due to the proposed height and proximity. She noted the project was only 5 feet from her yard, with no vegetation buffer. She said the proposal was deeply out of scale with the existing neighborhood.

Ms. Saccoccio said the proposed building looked more like an office building than a residence. She said the building's size and modernity were incompatible with the historic neighborhood.

Ms. Meyer said the front door still lacked architectural presence. She recommended refining the bay windows and detailing to better reflect Queen Anne precedents.

Ms. Lyster closed the public comment period.

Mr. Sheffield praised the design improvements but said the drawings were still at the concept level. AI-generated floor plans were unacceptable. He asked for full schematic level plans and elevations.

Mr. Kleespies indicated demolition of the Queen Anne building with its corner turrets would be a loss to the neighborhood. The proposed building would be much larger than anything on Elm or Miller. He acknowledged the positive aspects of the proposal, including net-zero design, accessibility, and affordable units. The project was moving in a good direction, but the Commission still lacked necessary information.

Mr. Rogove reflected on the meaning of a preferably preserved finding and if suburban-style historical context should be frozen or interpreted anew. He expressed support for the project conceptually.

Mr. Ferrara moved to find the building not preferably preserved in the context of the current design proposal. Mr. Sheffield seconded. The commissioners clarified their expectations for the next submission, which should include: dimensioned architectural plans and elevations, streetscape elevations along Elm and Miller, and refinement of the bays, façade detailing, and garage ramp. The motion passed 6-0-1. (Ferrara, Kleespies, Paris, Sheffield, Lyster, Darwin voting for the motion and Rogove abstaining)

Ms. Lyster reassured applicants the Commission believed they were moving in a good direction.

Preservation Grants

Case PG 27-1: 96 Gore St. \$22,000 to restore the chimney and door.

Mr. Sullivan shared his screen and introduced the application. He said Just-A-Start had certified that the property owner met income-eligibility requirements for affordable housing assistance. The house was one of East Cambridge's earliest (1827) workers' cottages. The requested grant would assist in preserving the chimney stack, which had been revealed on the interior by the owner. The repair estimate for the chimney was \$34,000. The grant would also support the restoration of the double front entry doors, which required stripping, refinishing, and repair at an estimated cost of \$8,000. Mr. Sullivan recommended a grant of \$22,000 (approximately 50% of the cost), given the exceptional age of the building and the rarity of its type.

Ms. Paris asked whether some of the cost should be covered by the rehab agency and whether the applicant can cover their share. Sullivan confirmed the owner can cover the match.

Mr. Kleespies asked about the interior work. Mr. Sullivan said the chimney is architecturally significant and structurally supporting the exterior portion of the chimney. A recapture clause would apply if the property is sold within 10 years.

Mr. Sheffield described the chimney restoration as preservation of the building's structural stability, preventing long-term risk of collapse or fire. He emphasized that the cottage is one of East Cambridge's most charming and earliest residences.

Ms. Darwin moved to approve the grant of up to \$22,000, with consideration to be given to adding a preservation restriction on the restored elements. Mr. Sheffield seconded the motion, which passed 7-0. (Ferrara, Kleespies, Paris, Sheffield, Lyster, Darwin, Rogove)

Community Preservation Act

Consider project proposals for determination of significance, per CPA procedures.

Sullivan explained that the Commission’s specific role in this phase of the CPA process is not to approve projects or funding amounts, but to determine whether each listed project qualifies as “significant historic resource” under the CPA statute — a prerequisite for CPA historic-preservation grants.

He then reviewed the list of project proposals. See attached list.

Ms. Paris disclosed she served on the board of Black History in Action for Cambridgeport, which had put forward one of the proposals. Mr. Sullivan recommended that she abstain.

Ms. Darwin moved that all listed FY27 CPA preservation projects be declared significant historic resources eligible for CPA preservation funding. Mr. Kleespies seconded.

Ms. Paris recused herself from the vote due to her role on the board of BHAC.

The motion passed 6-0 with Ms. Paris not voting. (Ferrara, Kleespies, Sheffield, Lyster, Darwin, Rogove).

Minutes

Ms. Lyster asked whether commissioners had any changes, corrections, or comments regarding the minutes. All commissioners signaled they were satisfied with the document as presented.

Ms. Darwin moved to approve the minutes. Ms. Paris seconded the motion, which passed in a roll call vote 7-0. (Ferrara, Kleespies, Paris, Sheffield, Lyster, Darwin, Rogove)

Director’s Report

Mr. Sullivan offered updates on upcoming programs, preservation events, departmental collaborations, and notable city architectural news. MIT’s new School of Architecture building would be celebrated in style on September 7.

Multiple commissioners expressed concern about inconsistent or insufficient architectural documentation being submitted by applicants, especially given recent complex multi-story redevelopment proposals. Mr. Sullivan acknowledged commissioner feedback about improving clarity for applicants regarding required architectural documentation and standards.

Adjournment

Mr. Sheffield moved to adjourn. The motion was approved 7-0. (Ferrara, Kleespies, Paris, Sheffield, Lyster, Darwin, Rogove)

The meeting adjourned at 9:38 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks

Sarah L. Burks, Preservation Planner

Members of the Public Present on August 6, 2026

John Le	Worcester
Wei Zhang	146 Spring St
John Driscoll	178-180 Elm St, North
Charles Zammuto	178-180 Elm St, North
Vera Xie	178-180 Elm St, North
John Hawkinson	--
Ilan Levy	148 Spring St
Greg Zammuto	178-180 Elm St, North
Deborah Fawcett	Attorney
Alistair Lewis-Bowen	
Cara Washburn	
Debbie Zammuto	178-180 Elm St, North
Lucy Patton	
Rebecca Herrmann	
Marie Saccoccio	55 Otis St
Carolynn Maltas	

Note: See <https://www.cambridgema.gov/historic/permitsApplications/projectplansandstaffreports> for a link to the Zoom meeting recording.

Community Preservation Act
FY27 Historic Preservation Grant Applications
Determination of significance for eligibility for Community Preservation Act funding

Excerpts from the Community Preservation Act, MGL Chapter 44:

Section 5 (b)(2): The community preservation committee shall make recommendations to the legislative body for the acquisition, creation and preservation of open space; for the acquisition, preservation, rehabilitation and restoration of historic resources.

Section 5: “Historic resources”, a building, structure, vessel real property, document or artifact that is listed on the state register of historic places or has been determined by the local historic preservation commission to be significant in the history, archeology, architecture or culture of a city or town.

Description	Applicant
Gift of the Wind Restoration	Arts Council
City Hall Window Treatment	Capital Projects
City Hall Belfry Restoration	Capital Projects
Engine Four Improvements	Capital Projects
Preservation Grants	CHC
Preservation Projects Admin.	CHC
Document Conservation	CHC/Clerk/CPL/DPW
Vital Records Conservation	City Clerk
Water Petition Conservation	City Clerk
Collection Processing	CPL
Cemetery Chapel SG Windows	DPW
Non-Municipal Applicants	
St. Augustine’s Basement Accessibility	Black History in Action in Cambridgeport
Tarbell School Partial Façade Restoration	Cambridge Comm. Center
Odd Fellows Hall Façade Restoration	The Dance Complex

Cambridge Historical Commission
July 31, 2026