

MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION

Monday, February 2, 2026, 6:00 PM, online Zoom meeting

Commission Members present: Tony Hsiao, *Chair*, Catherine Tice, Katinka Hakuta, Aaron Canto, Felix Rosen, Jacquelyn Fahey Sandell, Min Ho Kim, Alex Van Praagh

Absent: Pauke Corstens, Ksenia Kaladiouk (both public attendees)

Staff present: Allison Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public: See attached list

This meeting was held via online Zoom webinar <https://tinyurl.com/MC020226> with remote participation and was closed to in-person attendance. The public was able to participate online via the Zoom webinar platform. The meeting ID was 836 7669 4634.

Commission Chair Tony Hsiao made introductions and called the meeting to order at 6:05.

MC-7446 (CONTINUED): 406 Broadway, by S&J Broadway RE LLC. Demolish structure and construct 6-story building

Ms. Allison Crosbie, preservation administrator, presented the background on the building and summarized the previous reviews of the project.

Architect Geoff Farrell presented the revised proposal for 34 residential apartment units over six floors, ranging from studio to one-bedroom and two-bedroom units. Mr. Farrell presented two design concepts in response to previous feedback. Concept 1 featured a simplified material palette focusing on brick with reduced glazing on the front facade, black aluminum railings instead of glass, and the top floor pulled back approximately 10 feet. The design included vertical and horizontal brick patterning to create visual interest, with soldier course banding. Concept 2 utilized brick as the primary finish with lighter porcelain tile cladding for bay windows and balconies as accents, with a two-tone color to highlight window locations. Both concepts address wrapping the bay window element along the west facade. Other revisions include consistent black aluminum railings throughout, ground-floor windows along Broadway, and a new stair providing direct access from the main entrance to the sidewalk on Broadway.

Commission Questions

Commissioner Min Ho Kim asked about balconies on the Broadway street elevation that don't extend all the way across, specifically, why one balcony is biased toward the right. Mr. Farrell answered that it was to create less of a mirrored element and add movement to the facade rather than creating an exact replica.

Commissioner Alex Van Praagh asked about the transformer location. Mr. Farrell confirmed it would be on Broadway adjacent to the existing curb cut and driveway. Mr. Van Praagh asked about the sizes of the eight new trees in front, specifically the red maple and tulip trees. Mr. Farrell stated he didn't have the canopy sizes and would coordinate with the landscape architect to provide that information. Mr. Van Praagh asked about the setback from the property line to the front edge of the balcony. Mr. Farrell clarified that there is a 10-foot front property line setback, with the balcony structure allowed to encroach 3.5 feet into that setback, resulting in a 6.5-foot setback from the front property line. Mr. Van Praagh asked if the rendering showing the blue building next to the proposed structure was an accurate representation of the spatial relationship. Mr. Farrell confirmed the rendering was to scale, though images might be slightly distorted.

Commissioner Katinka Hakuta asked for clarification on the different materials shown. Mr. Farrell explained that what appeared to be multiple materials were actually different treatments of the same brick material. There are two brick materials (one for the darker tone with different installation patterns, one for the lighter tone), dark stone porcelain tile cladding on a small niche in the rear facade, siding material only on the rooftop penthouse for roof access, and exterior landscaping stone for the retaining wall. The material on the west elevation between windows is the same lighter-toned brick used on bay window extrusions.

Mr. Hsiao asked about a discrepancy on sheet A3.00 between the plan and elevation for the sixth-floor balcony. Mr. Farrell acknowledged this was a graphical error, and the intent is for the railing to extend the full length. Mr. Hsiao asked about the brick coursing patterns, specifically the horizontal and vertical patterning, and different brick colorways around window frames. Mr. Farrell explained that the intent was to create relationships between multiple floors by ganging windows together across vertical planes rather than just horizontal planes, creating visual interest without switching materials entirely. Mr. Hsiao asked about soldier course detailing on side facades at the Juliet balconies and recessed balconies. Mr. Farrell confirmed that this header condition occurs on top of window door openings.

Mr. Van Praagh followed up on the brick patterning and asked if they had seen any specific examples of reorienting the brick as shown. Mr. Farrell said not this specifically, but pointed out other brick buildings in the area.

Mr. Kim asked about the seams on the brick elevation, whether they are they control joints. Mr. Farrell answered that he accentuated the lines to make it clearer on the drawing.

Mr. Hsiao asked about the material at the base and the terraces. Mr. Farrell answered they had not worked that out yet.

Public Questions and Comments

Mi Ryung Song and her husband of 11 Goodman Road explained they directly about the property and were not aware of the zoning changes. They asked about the logistics of residents moving in and out of the building. Mr. Farrell answered that there is a secondary entrance on Broadway that will be used for moving and maintenance-related activity. Ms. Song expressed concern regarding the resulting lack of privacy with the new 6-story building so close to their property. She asked if they would reconsider the proposed Juliet balconies on that façade since they would look right down on her yard.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street stated that while she appreciated the effort, she remained concerned about the scale and massing, that she felt the building was still too large for the site. She questioned whether a six-story building was appropriate and raised concerns about the impact on neighboring properties.

Steve Minichiello and Debbie Shapiro of 404 Broadway argued that the building lacks integrity and would stand out like a sore thumb and negatively impact the quality of life of the neighborhood. Mr. Minichiello asked the Commission to pause the project review until neighbors can meet with the City Council. He went on to say that this building does not look like anything in the neighborhood, and he can't believe this is what he is going to see out his window every day. Mr. Hsiao responded that the Commission has no authority to pause the review process, that the applicant has the legal right to be heard.

James Zall of 203 Pemberton Street stated that Cambridge has a serious housing shortage, with about one-third of residents owning homes and two-thirds renting. He noted that previous zoning restrictions favored owners over renters, and that in the recent election, voters did not support the "repeal slate" candidates who wanted to change the new zoning. He stated this reflects what a substantial number of residents want.

Commission Comments

Mr. Hsiao thanked the applicant for the revisions, which are an improvement, specifically the calming down of the overall palette by reducing the number of different colorways and materials. Mr. Hsiao further stated that he preferred the all-brick iteration, that it contains the materiality, and that there are many ways to detail brick, which can be further explored, but advised caution with doing too many variations.

Mr. Kim agreed with Mr. Hsiao and mentioned that the facades are still a little bit fussy, such as the west elevation with the staggering of patterns and recommended developing a system that determines the alternating moves. He also advised being careful with the sourcing of the brick, making sure samples and the final product are consistent.

Mr. Van Praagh agreed with the previous comments and advised trying to reinforce the geometries of the building. As for ceramic paneling, Mr. Van Praagh suggested a darker color, whereas the lighter color is too busy. He also stated he appreciated the responsiveness to previous comments, but had concerns about the landscape plan. He noted the transformer on the Broadway side would be prominent and questioned whether larger trees like red maples and tulips were appropriate, given their mature canopy sizes could be 40-50 feet and would shade the building extensively. He was concerned about conflicts between tree roots and sidewalks, and between tree canopies and balconies. He felt the renderings showed an unrealistic presentation of what would be produced.

Commissioner Jacquelyn Fahey Sandell acknowledged Mr. Van Praagh's comments about tree size and root disturbance to sidewalks. She noted the applicant responded to feedback about wrapping design elements around the corner and thought that it was done nicely.

Commissioner Felix Rosen stated he appreciated the intention of adding different brick patterning and thought the sample images shown were tasteful examples, but felt the patterning was overwhelming, especially with the offset pattern running from bottom to top of the building. He suggested using ornamental details more subtly, consistent with other larger brick buildings in the area.

Mr. Hsiao commented that the building has a base form with a wrapper consisting of balconies and bay windows. He suggested that simply acknowledging this might be enough, rather than creating many sub-orders within it. He recommended thinking of the frame as a secondary structure with its own detailing, noting that detailing a frame in brick is very different than detailing a wall. He encouraged establishing a rigorous set of rules for the patterning rather than having many different patterns. He suggested that the frame versus body detailing might be sufficient expression without over elaboration.

Mr. Hsiao motioned to approve the proposal (Option 1- all brick) with the condition that an Architects Committee is held to review revisions, including refinement of the brick detailing, updated landscaping plan that reconsiders choice of trees, reconsideration of Juliet balconies on the rear façade that impacts the abutting neighbor, giving consideration to concerns raised by immediate abutters about the Juliet balconies on the backside. He moved to delegate final refinements to the Architects Committee as the applicant continues to refine. Ms. Hakuta seconded the motion. Commissioner Catherine Tice asked that the applicant produce a more accurate rendering at the Architects Committee meeting. The motion passed 8-0 (Tony Hsiao, Katinka Hakuta, Catherine Tice, Aaron Canto, Alex van Praagh, Min Ho Kim, Felix Rosen, and Jacquelyn Fahey Sandell all voting in favor).

MC-7463 (CONTINUED): 88 Ellery Street, by Royal Temple LLC c/o Robin Li.

Demolition and construction of 6-story building.

Ms. Crosbie gave a brief introduction to the property, an Italianate style home constructed in 1870 and summarized the previous proposal.

Mr. Huggens Lafond introduced himself and the applicant Mr. Robin Li and said he would be presenting the project on behalf of the Mr. Li. Mr. Lafond proceeded to show the revised design that he said was in response to the Commission's feedback, most notably eliminating the cantilever overhang, moving the new addition further back, and reducing its visual prominence. He noted the existing porch incorporated into the new primary entryway with an ADA accessible ramp. The design also included setbacks of the upper floors with roof decks to break up the vertical plane and reduce perceived density. Materials included fiber cement panels and brick at ground level. The design will also include passive house elements such as triple glazed windows and high-performance insulation.

Commission Questions

Mr. Rosen asked what the specific features of the addition were that made this design subordinate to the historic structure. Mr. Lafond answered that they are using fiber cement clapboards that will look like traditional siding, they're going to use neutral earth tones that won't take away from the building, and there will be some exposed brick on the ground level and noted they have not finalized these details.

Commissioner Aaron Canto asked about the original structure's main door; does it lead to a common space or a private unit? Mr. Lafond responded that it's a separate entrance, but they're still working out the interior of the existing house.

Mr. Van Praagh asked how the front bay resolves with the original portico entry. Mr. Lafond pointed out the accessible ramp. Mr. Van Praagh then asked about the material studies. Mr. Lafond stated that these studies are all options that are in alignment with the front building. Mr. Van Praagh asked which one was favored. Mr. Lafond answered the first one with neutral tones. Mr. Van Praagh asked how the existing building interacts with the new addition on the north side. After navigating to slide 25, the Mr. Lafond described a 5-foot setback on that side and explained that the roofscape of the existing building is preserved, with the new construction set back 35 feet from the curb.

Ms. Tice noted that in the new scheme, only approximately one-third of the original porch columns are retained (6 small columns on the northern side of the existing building) and asked why more of the porch was not preserved. The applicant acknowledged having considered a glass atrium option that would have preserved more of the porch, but described the current approach as viewing the porch transformation as a historical progression of the property. Ms. Tice asked whether any modern interpretations of the building's Italianate style had been considered for the new facade. The applicant stated that the three facing walls are being kept intact and

that the main change to the exterior is updating cladding to fiber cement (from original stucco and traditional siding) for code compliance, while retaining historic interior finishes visible through the foyer.

Mr. Hsiao noted that the proposed design effectively doubles the width of the existing side portico. Mr. Li confirmed this. Hsiao asked whether the applicant intends to replicate all colonnade detailing and brackets in the enlarged porch; Mr. Li confirmed that they would.

Mr. Kim asked how the existing building meets the new construction at the roofline. Mr. Li responded that a further detailed study is planned, with the intention of preserving the existing wall and roof slope and eave details, and constructing new walls abutting—rather than over—the original details.

Mr. Kim raised a concern about the floor-to-floor heights of approximately 11.5-12 feet and whether fiber cement boards are available in those dimensions. Mr. Li referenced a similar passive house project completed in Inman Square using the same material approach, noting that large-format panels (not necessarily 12 feet tall) can create a modern look while serving as effective insulation and soundproofing.

Mr. Kim observed that the third-floor facade appears to lack windows in the rendering and asked whether that is intentional. The applicant confirmed the intention is to leave that facade relatively blank to create a subordinate backdrop behind the historic building, but acknowledged further study is needed for unit plan design.

Ms. Hakuta asked whether the siding on the historic building would be changed. Mr. Li confirmed the historic building will be kept as is, with fiber cement of similar color and scale applied only to the new addition. Ms. Hakuta asked where trash access is located. Mr. Li indicated a trash room is planned on the south side of the ground floor, with a service access point, though this was not shown on the current diagrammatic plan.

Mr. Van Praagh asked to see the service entry. Mr. Li realized it was not shown on the plans. Ms. Fahey Sandell raised the question of how trash would be brought to the street, given the ADA ramp configuration. The applicant acknowledged that the plan needs further development.

Ms. Crosbie asked for the distance from the lower left corner of the existing building to where the addition begins. Mr. Li confirmed approximately 15 feet.

Mr. Van Praagh asked about the mature trees indicated on the landscape plan and transformer site. Mr. Li answered that the trees are to be removed and the transformer is intended to be placed on the ground within the setback area on the side of the property.

Public Questions and Comments

Ms. Meyer raised concerns about the floor plans (slides 13-16), questioning what is happening above the original house on the upper floors. The applicant confirmed that the upper floors step back, with the existing building's footprint visible below the new addition. Ms. Meyer also asked about the black boxes visible around the perimeter of the floor plans; the applicant confirmed these are lightwells to bring natural light to the basement level.

Ms. Meyer strongly encouraged the use of darker exterior colors rather than white or light tones, as the lighter palette is not subordinate to the historic building. And she suggested pulling the upper floor bays back further to give the original building more breathing room, even if it means reducing unit count. The applicant welcomed the feedback and confirmed that the color palette is not finalized.

Ms. Diane Rubin and Andy Strassman, speaking on behalf of multiple Dana Street neighbors who back up onto the property, requested that serious consideration be given to softening the rear of the building to avoid a large blank wall facing neighboring yards. Ms. Rubin referenced the adjacent 84-86 Ellery Street development, which agreed to plant a row of trees along the rear. She asked the Commission to consider requiring a similar landscape buffer and suggested pulling the rear of the building back 2-3 feet to accommodate tree planting. Ms. Rubin also flagged a concern that the basement window wells may protrude into the 5-foot setback, effectively leaving little room for landscaping along the rear lot line. Mr. Li agreed to take tree planting under advisement and to explore coordination with neighbors.

Ms. Pauke Corstens of 17R Ellsworth Avenue thanked the applicant for reworking the proposal to make the historic house more prominent. She raised two concerns, namely that the current material study color scheme (top left option) makes it difficult to read the historic house; she referenced the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and the Carolus Magnus Church in Aachen as examples of successful contrasting additions to historic structures. The applicant acknowledged the comment. Ms. Corstens raised broader livability questions, including where residents will park bicycles, where they will recreate, and how snow removal will be managed given the limited open space. She also echoed the tree and green space concerns raised by neighbors.

Commission Comments

Mr. Van Praagh noted the absence of an east elevation in the submitted package and requested all four elevations for the next submission. He also noted the absence of a rendering of the service entry and a complete landscape plan. He characterized the proposal as still needing further development in terms of palette and materiality, and encouraged the applicant to study the street elevation collage (page 4 of the packet) showing the surrounding context. He referenced the adjacent proposal at 84-86 Ellery as an example of a design that works more carefully with the existing building

before adding to the rear. He noted that the detail of how the new material connects to the existing roof needs further study and suggested the rear addition on the historic building could potentially be removed to allow a more considered material connection.

Mr. Hsiao acknowledged the design improvements from the prior submission and commended the applicant for responding to feedback. However, he stated that the massing remains disproportionate relative to the existing house and continues to overwhelm it. He noted the aerial view comparing 88 Ellery with the adjacent 84-86 Ellery is telling: at 84-86, the addition reads as a backdrop; at 88 Ellery, it does not. The new addition is still essentially subsuming the roof of the historic house, which is a fundamental unresolved issue. Doubling the width of the existing side portico significantly changes its proportion relative to the front porch and begins to overwhelm the historic building. The ADA ramp in its current location poses practical challenges (placement on the sidewalk edge; pedestrian circulation issues) and should be reconsidered. Mr. Hsiao suggested reconsidering whether the porch can remain intact, with a landscape buffer and a separately designed accessible entry approach. Mr. Hsiao confirmed fiber cement panels are available up to 4×12 feet, but raised concerns about the scale of the panelized material relative to the clapboard siding of the existing house. He encouraged further refinement of material proportion. He deferred on colorway but endorsed the direction of earth tones.

Mr. Rosen agreed with Mr. Van Praagh and Mr. Hsiao. He pointed out that the design strategy relies too heavily on the existing historic structure to carry the burden of making the overall project compatible with the streetscape, leading to missed opportunities in the treatment of the addition itself. He requested that the next submission include design references for the addition drawn from the surrounding streetscape context.

Mr. Kim emphasized the importance of evaluating the project from pedestrian-level viewpoints (north and south elevations from the street) rather than only from a distance across the park. He noted that, because the historic building at 88 Ellery is shorter and closer to the public right-of-way than the adjacent building, the massing of the addition has a compounding effect, appearing more aggressive. He suggested looking at the Frost Terrace Apartments by Bruner Kott (near Porter Square) as a precedent for adding residential density behind an existing historic structure.

Ms. Hakuta anticipated a continuance and urged the applicant to resolve the fundamental design and operational details—particularly trash access—before returning to the Commission. She stated that without resolution of these basic practical questions, the Commission cannot meaningfully evaluate the proposal.

Mr. Canto concurred with Mr. Kim's reference to the Frost Terrace Apartments and expressed interest in seeing the next iteration of the proposal.

Mr. Rosen mentioned that it would be helpful to see design references for the addition.

Mr. Hsiao proposed continuing the hearing so the applicant has the opportunity to respond to the Commission's feedback, including reconsidering the massing, allowing more of the existing house to remain clearly intact and unobscured, providing all four building elevations, resolving how trash and service access will function, including how materials will reach the street. Reconsider the side portico and the ADA ramp placement; explore retaining the existing porch intact and developing accessible entry separately and further refine material palette, scale, and color to ensure the addition is clearly subordinate. Consider providing precedent references from the surrounding streetscape.

The January 5 and 12, 2026 meeting minutes were approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public Present February 2, 2026

Panelists:

Geoff Farrell, architect	406 Broadway
Sunny Zuo, applicant	406 Broadway
Huggens Lafond	88 Ellery Street
Robin Li, applicant	88 Ellery Street

Attendees:

Marvin Gilmore	
Irina Cain	96 Ellery Street
Alex Bob	
Elizabeth Gombosi	
James Zall	203 Pemberton St.
Barbara Hirsch	44 Dana Street
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana Street
Lacey McCafferty	
Sophia Regazzini	
Richard Goldman	
Mi Ryung Song	13 Goodman Road
Suzanne Lee	9 Goodman Road
Merav Gold	
Lawrence Adkins	
Geradine Guardino	61 Dana Street
Christina Catalano	
Thalia Wheatley	61 Dana Street
Kyle C	
Debbie Shapiro	404 Broadway
Steve Minichiello	404 Broadway
Diane Rubin	59 Rubin Street
Tong Wu	
Sam Zhang	
Pauke Corstens	17R Ellsworth Avenue
Ksenia Kaladiouk	227 Prospect Street
Lauren Budd	
John Pitkin	18 Fayette Street
Neelam Modi	
Andrew Stuckey	
Hyejin Im	