

MINUTES OF THE MID CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSION

Monday, January 12, 2026, 6:00 PM, online Zoom meeting

Commission Members present: Tony Hsiao, *Chair*, Catherine Tice, Katinka Hakuta, Charles Redmon, Nan Laird

Absent: Monika Pauli

Staff present: Allison Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public: See attached list

This meeting was held via online Zoom webinar <https://tinyurl.com/MC01122026> 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 845 1210 5194.

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

MC-7459: 1385 Cambridge Street, by Lubavitch of Cambridge Inc. Modify previously approved addition.

Ms. Allison Crosbie, preservation administrator, gave a brief overview of the building and explained that the applicant is proposing a change to a previously approved design. Ms. Crosbie showed slides of the original design and the proposed revision.

Architect Morris Schopf explained that the applicant would like to provide exterior space for the daycare program. The proposed change would convert the fourth floor into a semi-covered exterior play area.

Commission Questions

Mr. Hsiao asked for further clarification on the exterior space on the top floor. Mr. Schopf answered that the fourth floor would be roofed over and have a parapet wall and a transparent security pane for safety. The proposed openings occur on the front and side facades of the addition.

Public Questions and Comments

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street expressed concern over the vertical proportions between the fourth floor and the floors below and suggested a string cornice to better integrate the top and bottom sections.

Maria Fernandes of 10 Springfield Street stated that she had not known about this project previously and never received a notice. She stated that the addition would block sunlight to her second-floor kitchen and pointed out that the applicant's drawings did not show the windows on her property. She also expressed concern over traffic, noise from the daycare, and the potential for items being thrown from the open fourth floor. Ms. Crosbie responded that she will check the abutters' list that is generated through the Assessor's office. Mr. Schopf offered

to have the applicant reach out to Ms. Fernandes but noted that the current proposal does not alter the building's footprint beyond what was already approved.

Commission Comments

Commissioner Catherine Tice noted that the original design of the windows had a rhythm to them and asked if the new openings could be more vertical to maintain the established rhythm of the historic building. Mr. Schopf answered that he could add granite detailing to the top and bottom of the openings to match the windows.

Ms. Hakuta wondered if the first-floor arch could be echoed on the top and commented that she felt the openings looked incongruous with the rest of the facade. Mr. Schopf pointed out that the placement of the openings is also dictated by the steel header and structural stability requirements at the building corners.

Mr. Hsiao commented that the original window layout had a dynamic pattern of two windows and one window on each floor and suggested that the openings retain this composition. And instead of a parapet, Mr. Hsiao recommended using a glass railing behind the opening to meet safety codes.

The applicant, Mendy Raskin, responded that they wanted to bring in as much light as they could, but can look at creating a more symmetrical layout while still maintaining structural stability by keeping away from the corners of the building. Mr. Hsiao noted that it will be a stronger composition and that more detailing will help make it work. He also referred to a brick building on River Street near Whole Foods, where they did something similar in creating an open top floor with window openings.

Ms. Tice pointed out that they will have ample sunlight, which will change seasonally, and reminded them that the other openings in the building will also help.

Mr. Raskin replied that he is happy to revise as requested and asked if this only applies to the front façade. Mr. Hsiao confirmed that the front façade facing Springfield Street is the most visible to the public, and they can proceed with the other facades as proposed.

Commissioner Chuck Redmon asked about adding a fourth opening. Mr. Raskin answered that they could look at that as well.

Mr. Raskin said he missed the beginning of the meeting and was told that one of the abutters had some concerns, and he would be happy to speak with her.

Mr. Raskin asked about the color of the brick. Mr. Hsiao answered that he did not have a problem with the brick color being different from the existing historic building, and that it actually acknowledges that it's a new infill structure.

Mr. Hsiao motioned to approve the proposal with the condition that the openings more closely align with the other windows on the façade, with a similar proportion and detailing around the openings to further integrate the whole composition. Mr. Redmon seconded, and the motion passed 5-0.

MC-7463: 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.

Architect Michael Deng and applicant Robin Li introduced themselves, and Mr. Deng explained the design philosophy behind the proposed 6-story addition to the substantially demolished existing structure, stating that they are integrating, not demolishing, the historic structure. They are complying with the new zoning and constructing a building with 20% affordable housing with units for growing families. The proposal includes the restoration of the street-facing and north facades, and Mr. Deng noted that there is a 27-foot setback in front of the first three floors, and additional upper floors will cantilever over the existing structure. A 3-story glass curtain wall box will connect the new and old structures, preserving some of the interior to create a lounge and a portion of the original south façade within a public lobby space. Proposed exterior materials include terracotta cladding on the lower floors to echo local brick, and aluminum and glass on the upper floors for a modern aesthetic. Mr. Deng cited several projects as precedents, including the Cambridge Public Library, Harvard Art Museum, and the Swiss Consulate, all of which involve glass additions. Mr. Deng presented drawings, including a site plan, floor plans, elevations, and a streetscape elevation.

Commission Questions

Ms. Tice asked about the proposed garden level. Mr. Deng answered that there are units on the garden level, which is four feet above grade, and they will have windows and light wells to bring in more light.

Commissioner Nan Laird asked about the first slide showing a rendered street view of the proposed building and stated that the elevations don't appear to line up with other drawings. Mr. Deng clarified the design. Ms. Laird commented that it's hard to really tell what this is going to look like.

Mr. Hsiao asked for clarification on how much of the existing structure is being preserved. Mr. Deng went over a plan to explain how much of the north and south facades are being preserved along with the east façade.

Ms. Hakuta noted that all the precedents that they presented were institutional and asked if they looked at any residential projects to inform their design. Mr. Deng responded that they couldn't find examples in the immediate area, but there are similar projects in other older cities, specifically Boston where there are examples of churches turned into housing.

Ms. Laird asked if the proposed transformer in front could go underground since it would be so visible. Mr. Deng said they are looking at that.

Mr. Hsiao asked if they looked at the proposed project next door at 84-86 Ellery Street. Mr. Deng said they did look at it, and while that building is a brick structure they seek to do a more modern, glass-heavy integration.

Public Questions and Comments

Ms. Meyer expressed strong opposition to the proposal, stating that they are not preserving anything and that the historic building is being swallowed up by the addition. She criticized the proposed cantilever as negating the setback and said the glass atrium was wasted space and fails to maintain the historic house as a prominent feature.

Elena Saporta of 102 Ellery Street mentioned that there are three huge development projects on this street and questioned how privacy will be maintained with the minimum 10-foot distance between the new structure and the adjoining properties, and windows facing each other at such close range. She also asked who the architect is because the drawings don't have any names listed. Mr. Deng replied that he is the architect and he is designing for the inevitable higher-density urban setting. Ms. Saporta also pointed out a tree that will be impacted by the new transformer.

Susan Bernstein of 82 Ellery Street commented that the proposed building overhang feels overpowering and pointed out that 84-86 Ellery ended up with a design that works better with the neighborhood. She also stated that all that glass is uncomfortable.

Andrew Stuckey of 52 Bishop Allen Drive commented that he liked the proposed modern design.

Diane Rubin of 59 Dana Street read a letter that she and Andrew Strassman wrote to the Commission stating that the proposed box plunked down on the site was inappropriate. They pointed out that the people living in the back of the property are severely impacted by the project and would like the applicant to consider this.

Alessandro Doria of 3 Ellsworth Avenue commented that they should be looking at residential examples like 401 Broadway, which is an apartment building from the 1900s. He also suggested looking at triple-deckers and said this is a cozy neighborhood and should stay that way. He stated that the proposal is inappropriate.

Yang Gao of 192 Cambridge Street asked how many units are proposed and how many bedrooms. Mr. Deng answered 60 units, with the majority likely being 2-bedroom units, followed by 10% 3-bedroom units and 20% 1-bedroom units. Ms. Gao stated that right now housing is too expensive, and the zoning changes should help young people afford to live here.

Ms. Chiara Gerhardinger of 3 Ellsworth Avenue stated that the project is a humongous, ugly structure, it looks like two structures, and said that Cambridge is already a dense city. She urged the applicant to think about the people who live in the neighborhood and stated that this is heartbreaking.

Commission Comments

Mr. Hsiao thanked attendees for their comments and acknowledged the strong emotional response to the project. He pointed out that the precedents that were presented by the applicant for contrasting styles are institutional or commercial. He explained that the Cambridge Public Library addition is visually detached from the historic structure; the Swiss Consulate preserved the historic one-story structure and built a glass addition on top and pulled

back from the edge; and the Harvard Art Museum preserved the original building in front and expanded in the back. He advised moving the new portion further back, because as it is now, it is too dominating. He suggested looking at the proposal for the adjacent property as an example. He also suggested further exploration of materials and that they need to be thoughtful and sophisticated, and the details really matter.

Ms. Laird stated that the project represents excessive infill that fills nearly the entire lot and it leaves insufficient breathing room for the historic fabric.

Ms. Tice concurred with Mr. Hsiao and echoed the suggestion to look at the proposal for 84-86 Ellery Street.

Ms. Hakuta also agreed, stating that the project does not look residential, the cantilever looks inappropriate, and pointed out that they have many options with the off-center location of the house on the lot.

Mr. Hsiao proposed continuing the hearing to allow the applicant to return with a revised design that responds to the comments by the Commission. The applicant agreed.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator

Members of the Public Present January 12, 2026

Panelists:

Mendy Raskin, applicant	1385 Cambridge Street
Morris Schopf, architect	Salem, MA
Michael Deng, architect	NPT Design
Robin Li, applicant	88 Ellery Street

Attendees:

Richard Goldmann	
Maria fernandes	10 Springfield Street
Helen Snively	Fayette Park
Lacey McCafferty	
Christina Catalano	
Tong Wu	
Yang Gao	192 Cambridge Street
Sam Zhang	
Kyle C	
Elena Saporta	102 Ellery Street
Andrew Stuckey	52 Bishop Allen Drive
Marjorie Saunders	
James Zall	203 Pemberton St.
York Yang	
Judith Fortin	
Vera Kreilkamp	
Deborah Galef	
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana Street
Sandy MacDonald	
Mikki Ansin	
Frankie Lieberman	24 Ellsworth Avenue
Susan Bernstein	82 Ellery Stret
Debby Shapiro	404 Broadway
Martha O	
Yasemin Isler	
Dolores Johnson	
Robert Luchetti	5 Cleveland Street
Maureen Monks	
Peter Stokes	
Leslie Saul	
Kari Kolb	
Susan Twarog	
Matt Zachem	
Kay K	Ellery Place

Ronn Kliger	
Suzette Levenson	
Catherine Alexander	
Canal St	
Cy Britt	
Hyejin Im	
Thalia Wheatley	61 Dana Street
Robert Humphreville	
Diane Rubin	59 Dana Street
Wai Chee Dimock	
Dorian Hardwick	
Cynthia Hadzi	
Jacquelyn Fahey Sandell	8 Clinton Street
John Goodman	
Hans Nagrath	
Jeffrey Fernandes	
Debb Knight	
Dick Dionne	
John Hawkinson	
Alessandro Doria	3 Ellsworth Avenue
Marianne saccardi	
John Pitkin	
Chiara Gerhardinger	3 Ellsworth Avenue
Stan Twarog	
Erika Ramos	
Nana Zarchi	
Nick Greenfield	
Archana Venkataraman	
Thomas Sacardi	
Lauren D	
Elizabeth Gombosi	
Maureen Monagle	
James Williamson	Churchill Street