

Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission  
Guidelines for Infill Construction and Substantial Additions or Alterations  
*Adopted by vote of June 9, 2008*

Introduction

The following Guidelines for Infill Construction and Substantial Additions or Alterations are intended to provide general guidance to the Commission for a variety of situations. The guidelines are intended to offer general advice to applicants and provide assistance to the Commission in arriving at its decision regarding the appropriateness of a particular proposal, but are not intended to be prescriptive measures that must all be applied equally in every case.

Infill construction and substantial additions or alterations should follow the District's historic precedent and conserve the modest character of the District's mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century workers' housing and the overall simplicity of its traditional wood-frame vernacular architecture.

Definitions

**Infill construction** means the construction of additional free-standing dwelling unit(s) on a premises.

**Substantial additions or alterations** means 1) the construction of additional dwelling unit(s) attached to or within an existing building or 2) the enlargement of an existing building, either of which would result in a 25% or greater increase in the footprint, lot coverage, or floor area of the existing building.

Guidelines

A. Where infill construction or substantial additions or alterations are proposed, the new addition or freestanding building should be subordinate in massing, height, and level of ornamentation to the existing house. The Commission will use the following characteristics in conjunction with B-D below as guidelines to make a determination of appropriateness in applications for infill construction or substantial additions or alterations. Infill construction or substantial additions or alterations should have:

1. lot coverage or floor area that is generally smaller than the existing house;
2. overall height that is generally lower than the existing house; and
3. exterior treatment that is as simple as the existing or original conditions of the house and that is not inappropriate to it.

Changes made within the five years preceding an application for infill construction or substantial additions or alterations, even if made pursuant to a prior Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability, will generally be considered to be changes to "the existing house."

B. Infill construction and substantial additions or alterations should not entirely block existing layered views from the public way through yards and between houses. Infill construction and substantial additions or alterations should be placed to preserve some significant portion of existing layered views from the public way or to create alternative new views from the public way through yards and between houses.

C. Infill construction or substantial additions or alterations should not significantly diminish light to existing neighboring properties by casting large new shadows beyond the applicant's property line. New shadows should fall mainly on the applicant's property.

D. Because of historical concern about the effect of new construction on the water table and subsoil conditions in much of the District, applications for infill construction and substantial additions or alterations that involve significant excavation will not be considered complete without a soils report and/or drainage plan and calculations from a civil engineer indicating that the proposed construction, addition or alteration will not adversely affect either the stability of the soil or likelihood of flooding at either the subject site or any nearby property.

#### Zoning Compliance and Appropriateness

Construction, additions and alterations that satisfy the applicable zoning do not necessarily satisfy the standard of appropriateness under the terms of these guidelines or the order establishing the District. Ideally, a proposal for infill construction or substantial addition or alteration should comply both with the existing zoning and with the terms of the order establishing the District and these guidelines. Applicants are strongly encouraged to pursue proposals that satisfy the applicable dimensional requirements of the zone in which the premises are located.

Applicants should be aware that an application for a proposal that is "as-of-right" by zoning may nonetheless not meet the Commission's standard of appropriateness and that the Commission "may in appropriate cases impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by applicable provision of the zoning ordinance." (Ch. 2.78.220, Cambridge City Code)

The city's zoning code is a legal framework based on a topic of state statute (ch. 40A MGL) that is separate and distinct from neighborhood conservation regulation. It is a product of substantial due process and sets city policy on development standards. While the Commission may recommend dimensional and setback requirements that are at variance from the requirements of the zoning ordinance, its determinations will not require an unwilling applicant to obtain relief from the applicable provisions of the zoning ordinance.

## APPENDIX: Relevant Language from City Code and District Order

Chapter 2.78, Article III, Section 220 of the Cambridge City Code describes the factors to be considered by neighborhood conservation district commissions:

- A. In passing upon matters before it, the Historical Commission or neighborhood conservation district commission shall consider, among other things, the historic and architectural value and significance of the site or structure, the general design, arrangement, texture and material of the features involved, and the relation of such features to similar features of structures in the surrounding area. In the case of new construction or additions to existing structures a commission shall consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the structure both in relation to the land area upon which the structure is situated and to structures in the vicinity, and a Commission may in appropriate cases impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by applicable provision of the zoning ordinance. A Commission shall not consider interior arrangements or architectural features not subject to public view.
- B. A Commission shall not make any recommendation or requirement except for the purpose of preventing developments incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance or the distinctive character of the landmark or neighborhood conservation district.

Additionally, the July 30, 2007 City Council Order establishing the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District provides goals for the district and criteria for the evaluation of applications by the Commission. Section III of the Order outlines the objectives and principles of the district as well as the general criteria and specific factors to be considered by the Commission when it reviews applications for new construction and alterations within the District.

### III. Factors to be considered by the Commission.

The Commission shall apply the following guidelines and criteria in addition to those contained in Sections 2.78.220.A and B in considering applications for certificates of appropriateness.

#### A. Objectives and Principles for the Half Crown-Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District

The following objectives and principles are to be applied in considering applications for certificates of appropriateness or hardship. The Commission shall endeavor to:

1. Conserve the historic architectural character of the Neighborhood, including the modest character that typifies the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup>-century workers' and suburban housing of the Neighborhood and the overall simplicity of its traditional wood-frame vernacular architecture, as well as the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century apartment houses where they exist.

2. Conserve the historic development patterns of the Neighborhood, including its dense network of short, through-block streets, courts, back streets, and ways.
3. Conserve views through yards and between houses to maintain the pattern of visual layering that characterizes streetscapes in the Neighborhood while respecting the residential privacy of individual properties.
4. Allow for architectural diversity and individualized alterations while respecting the traditional small scale of the housing stock.
5. Encourage the planting of trees and greenery to enhance the landscape amenities of the Neighborhood.
6. Encourage low fences to define the street edge while protecting views of houses and through yards, and also while permitting flexibility to minimize the adverse visual effect of trash containers, air compressors, transformers and other fixtures whose location may not otherwise be practically screened from public view.
7. Consider traffic impacts of proposed development as they may affect traditional street patterns and pedestrian activity.
8. Discourage the construction of parking lots as a principal use.

#### B. General Criteria

Applications shall be considered in terms of the impact of the proposed new construction, demolition or alteration on the District as a whole, and in addition with regard to the following factors:

1. the architectural and historical significance of the structures on the site, if any;
2. the physical characteristics of the site, including but not limited to existing vegetation and topography; and
3. the potential adverse effects of the proposed construction, demolition, or alteration on the surrounding properties, and on the immediate streetscape.

#### C. Specific Factors to Be Considered

In addition to the General Criteria set forth in Subsection III.B above, and consistent with the Objectives and Principles set forth in subsection III.A above, the Commission shall base its decisions on the following specific factors when considering applications for appropriateness or hardship.

1. *Construction of a new structure.*

Review of the design of a proposed new structure or substantial addition to an existing structure shall be made with regard to the compatibility of the building with its surroundings, and the following elements of the proposal shall be among those considered:

- a. site layout;
- b. provisions for parking;
- c. volume and dimensions of the structure;
- d. provision for open space and landscaping;
- e. the scale of the structure in relation to its surroundings;

and

- f. the effect on the water table or subsoil conditions of adjacent properties...

...3. *Alteration to existing structures.*

Review of proposed alterations to an existing structure (including alterations that may constitute or involve new construction or demolition, in which case factors described in the preceding paragraphs 1. and 2. may also apply), and of all other features not exempted from review under Section V below, shall be made with regard to the following additional factors:

- a. the extent to which the integrity of the original design has been retained or previously diminished;
- b. the consistency of the proposed alteration with the character, scale, massing, and detailing of surrounding properties; and
- c. the proximity of adjacent surrounding structures.