

**Cambridge, Massachusetts, Code of Ordinances >> Title 2 - ADMINISTRATION AND PERSONNEL  
>> Chapter 2.78 - HISTORICAL BUILDINGS AND LANDMARKS >> Article III. - Establishment of  
Neighborhood Conservation Districts and Protected Landmarks >>**

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

2.78.140 - Purpose.

2.78.150 - Definitions for Article III.

2.78.160 - Neighborhood conservation district commission—Established—Membership requirements.

2.78.170 - Powers and duties.

2.78.180 - Designation procedures.

2.78.190 - Review procedures.

2.78.200 - Maintenance, repair and reconstruction.

2.78.210 - Certificates of appropriateness, nonapplicability or hardship.

2.78.220 - Factors considered by Commissions.

2.78.230 - Public meetings and hearings.

2.78.240 - Appeal procedure.

2.78.250 - Historical Commission authority not limited.

2.78.260 - Limitation on applicability.

2.78.270 - Enforcement and remedies.

**I 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 and to improve the quality of its environment through identification, conservation and maintenance of neighborhoods, areas, sites and structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City; to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose; to foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge and appreciation of such neighborhoods, areas or structures; and by furthering these purposes to promote the public welfare by making the City a more attractive and desirable 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.

*(Ord. 1002 (part), 1983; prior code § 2-147(k)(1))*

**I 2.78.150 - Definitions for Article III.**

In addition to the terms defined in Section 2.78.080 of this chapter, the following terms, when used whether or not capitalized in this subsection, shall have the meanings set forth in this section, unless the context otherwise requires:

- A. "Demolition" means the act of pulling down, destroying, removing or razing structures, or commencing the work of total or substantial destruction with the intent of completing the same.
- B. "Exterior architectural features" means and includes such portion of the exterior of a structure as is open to view from a public street, way, park or body of water, including but not limited to the architectural style and general arrangement and setting thereof, the kind, material and texture of exterior building materials, and the type and style of windows, doors, lights, signs and other appurtenant exterior fixtures.
- C. "Historic district" means an area so established under the authority of Chapter 40C of the General Laws.
- D. "Landmark" means any property within the City so designated in accordance with Section 2.78.180 of this article.
- E. "Neighborhood conservation district" means any area within the City so designated in accordance with Section 2.78.180 of this article.
- F. "Neighborhood conservation district commission" or "district commission" means a commission provided for by Section 2.78.160 of this article.
- G.

"Structure" means a combination of materials including a building, sign, fence, wall, terrace, walk, driveway, street, bridge, statue, monument or other manmade feature.

- H. "Gross floor area" means the floor area so defined in Article 2.000 of the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Cambridge.

*(Ord. 1166 §§7, 16, 1995; Ord. 1002 (part), 1983: prior code § 2-147(k)(2))*

### **2.78.160 - Neighborhood conservation district commission—Established—Membership requirements.**

- A. Upon designation as provided in Section 2.78.180 of this article of any neighborhood conservation district, and unless the designation provides that the Historical Commission itself shall exercise authority with respect thereto, the City Manager shall appoint a neighborhood conservation district commission to consist of five members and three alternates. The members shall include three residents of the neighborhood, not less than two of whom shall be homeowners; one neighborhood property owner (who may or may not be a neighborhood homeowner); and one member or alternate of the Cambridge Historical Commission. One member and/or one alternate of a neighborhood conservation district commission, in addition to the mandated member of the Cambridge Historical Commission, may be a Cambridge resident who lives outside the district. The remaining alternates shall be neighborhood property owners. The neighborhood conservation district commission shall act solely in the exercise of those functions described in this article which are applicable to the district under its administration.
- B. Any member or alternate of the Historical Commission may be appointed to a neighborhood conservation district commission for a term coterminous with such person's term as a member or alternate of the Historical Commission. Members and alternates of a neighborhood conservation district commission who are not members of the Historical Commission shall by reason of experience or education have demonstrable knowledge and concern for improvement, conservation and enhancement of the district, and at least two of the members or alternates shall have professional qualifications related to real estate or architecture or historic preservation. The members of the neighborhood conservation district commission shall be appointed by the City Manager with regard to the diverse viewpoints expressed in the creation of the district. Such members shall serve for a term of three years, except that the initial appointments shall be for one member to serve one year and one member to serve two years, and vacancies shall be filled for the unexpired term of office. Each member and alternate shall continue in office after expiration of his or her term until a successor is duly appointed and qualified, except that no member shall serve more than two consecutive terms.
- C. The neighborhood conservation district commission shall elect annually a Chairman and Vice-Chairman from its own number. In the case of absence, inability to act, or unwillingness to act because of self-interest on the part of a member, his or her place shall be taken by an alternate member designated by the Chairman, if available, otherwise by the Vice-Chairman if available, otherwise by a majority vote of the members and alternate members of the Commission present. The person exercising the function of Executive Director of the Historical Commission shall serve as secretary of each neighborhood conservation district commission. Persons serving as members or alternate members of a neighborhood conservation district commission shall, as a result of such service, be considered as "special municipal employees" for purposes of Chapter 268A of the General Laws.

*(Ord. 1331, 12/14/2009; Ord. 1166 § 8, 1995; Ord. 1002 (part), 1983: prior code § 2-147(k)(3))*

### **2.78.170 - Powers and duties.**

The Historical Commission and each neighborhood conservation district commission shall have like powers, functions and duties with respect to each landmark and neighborhood conservation district over which it has jurisdiction as is provided Historic District Commissions under clauses (a) through (g) under Section 10 of Chapter 40C of the General Laws with respect to historic districts, including without limitation with respect to the approval and disapproval of certificates of appropriateness, nonapplicability and hardship, the dating and signing of such certificates, the keeping of records and adoption of rules and regulations, the filing with the City Clerk and Building Department of certificates and determinations of disapproval by it, and the determination of designs of appurtenances (excluding colors) which will meet the requirements of the landmark or neighborhood conservation district.

*(Ord. 1002 (part), 1983: prior code § 2-147(k)(9))*

### **2.78.180 - Designation procedures.**

- A. The Historical Commission by majority vote may recommend for designation as a landmark any property within the City being or containing a place, structure, feature or object which it determines to be either (1) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth or (2) historically or architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures; may recommend for designation as a neighborhood conservation district any area within the City containing places and structures which it determines are of importance to the architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City, and which considered together cause such area to constitute a distinctive neighborhood or to have a distinctive character in terms of its exterior features; and may recommend amendments to any designation of landmark or neighborhood conservation district theretofore made.
- B. Prior to the recommendation of designation or amendment of designation of any landmark or neighborhood conservation district an investigation and report on the historical, architectural and other relevant significance thereof shall be made. The report shall recommend the boundaries of any proposed landmark or neighborhood conservation district and shall recommend for incorporation in the order of the City Council designating each landmark or neighborhood conservation district general and/or specific standards and appropriate criteria consistent with the purposes of this article and the provisions of Section 2.78.190 of this article that are to be applied in making any determination of the type referred to in Sections 2.78.170, 2.78.210 and 2.78.220 of this article, with respect to the designated landmark or within the designated neighborhood conservation district.
- C. In the case of a landmark, the report shall be prepared by the Historical Commission. In the case of a neighborhood conservation district, the report shall be prepared by a study committee consisting of three members or alternates of the Historical Commission and four persons appointed by the City Manager, including at least one person who resides in the district under consideration, at least one person who owns property in the district under consideration, and one person who owns property or resides elsewhere in the City and has demonstrated knowledge and concern for conservation and enhancement of those exterior features of the City which are important to its distinctive character.
- D. Any ten registered voters of the City may petition that the Historical Commission initiate, or the Historical Commission on its own may initiate, the process of designating a landmark or neighborhood conservation district or amending or rescinding any such designation theretofore made. The Commission shall within forty-five days following the filing of such request or petition hold a preliminary hearing and arrange for the preparation of a report and, if required, request the appointment of a study committee. The Historical Commission shall not reconsider a proposed designation, amendment or rescission of designation within one year of its previous hearing thereon, unless two-thirds of all its members vote to do so. No later than forty-five days after the transmittal of a report to the Commission pertaining to a proposed designation, the Commission shall hold a public hearing. The Commission shall give not less than fourteen days notice of such public hearing by publication in a newspaper of general circulation in the City and by mailing notice thereof to the owner of the proposed landmark and to every owner abutting the proposed landmark or within the proposed neighborhood conservation district, each such owner to be determined from the then current records of the Assessing Department, and to the City Manager, the Planning Board and the City Clerk.
- E. Prior to the public hearing, the Commission shall transmit copies of the report to the Planning Board for its consideration and recommendations.
- F. The recommendation of the Historical Commission with regard to any designation, amendment or rescission shall be transmitted to the City Manager and to the City Clerk with a copy of the approved designation report. Designation of a landmark or a neighborhood conservation district or amendment or rescission of designation shall be by order of the City Council. In the case of a designation, the order shall include a statement of the reasons for such designation and a statement of standards which the Historical Commission or neighborhood conservation district commission is to apply under Sections 2.78.170 and 2.78.190 through 2.78.220 of this article.
- G. No designation, amendment or rescission of designation shall become effective until a map setting forth the boundaries of the landmark or neighborhood conservation district or change in the boundaries thereof, has been filed with the City Council and has been recorded with the Registry of Deeds for the South District of Middlesex County.
- H. If the order establishing or amending a neighborhood conservation district contains provisions for both regulatory and educational/incentive programs, the regulatory provisions of the order shall not be effective unless and until the educational/incentive provisions of the order are funded.
- I. Following acceptance of a designation petition by the Historical Commission, no application for a building permit for new construction or alterations on the premises of a property being considered for designation shall be granted until reviewed by the Commission as though the property were designated as a landmark or a neighborhood conservation district under this Article III. Beginning with the acceptance of a designation petition and until (a) the Historical Commission makes a negative recommendation on a proposed designation, (b) the City Council determines not to enact the proposed designation, or (c) one year has elapsed, whichever is less, the Commission shall review all proposed construction, demolition, or alteration that affects the exterior architectural features, other than color, of

the structures on the premises of a proposed landmark or within a proposed neighborhood conservation district.

- J. Notwithstanding the prior provisions of this section 2.78.180, a neighborhood conservation district previously established by order of the City Council, in accordance with this section, which order instructs that there be a review of the activities of the neighborhood conservation district commission established pursuant to that order, following one or more public hearings by such neighborhood conservation district commission and by the Historical Commission, and a report to the City Council by such commissions containing a summary of testimony at such hearings and recommendations by such commissions for amendments to the powers, responsibilities and procedures of such neighborhood conservation district commission (including amendments to the boundaries of the affected neighborhood conservation district), may be amended by the City Council, in a manner consistent with the recommendations of such report, or be rescinded without the necessity of the appointment of a new study committee or of a de novo study process.

*(Ord. 1331, 12/14/2009; Ord. 1166 §§9, 10, 17, 18, 1995; Ord. 1009A (part), 1984; Ord. 1002 (part), 1983; prior code § 2-147(k)(4))*

### **2.78.190 - Review procedures.**

- A. Except as the order designating or amending a landmark or neighborhood conservation district may otherwise provide in accordance with this article, the Historical Commission or neighborhood conservation district commission having jurisdiction shall review all construction, demolition or alteration that affects the exterior architectural features, other than color, of any landmark or within any neighborhood conservation district.
- B. The order designating or amending a landmark or neighborhood conservation district may provide that the authority of the Historical Commission or neighborhood conservation district commission having jurisdiction shall not extend to the review of one or more of the following categories of structures or exterior architectural features of the landmark or within the neighborhood conservation district in which event the structures or exterior architectural features so excluded may be constructed or altered without review by the Commission:
1. The application of exterior wall material in a manner that does not require the removal or enclosure of any cornice, fascia, soffit, bay, porch, hood, window or door casing, or any other protruding decorative element;
  2. Alterations to the exterior of existing structures that do not increase or diminish the size and location of windows and doors, cause the removal of any bay, porch, hood, window or door casing or any other protruding decorative element, or alter the appearance of a roof;
  3. The exterior appearance of a new structure that does not require a variance or special permit under the zoning ordinance then in effect;
  4. Signs, temporary structures, lawn statuary, or recreational equipment, subject to such conditions as to duration of use, dimension, location, lighting, removal and similar matters as the Commission may reasonably specify;
  5. Terraces, walks, driveways, sidewalks and similar structures substantially at grade level;
  6. Walls and fences;
  7. Storm doors and windows, screens, window air conditioners, lighting fixtures, antennae, trelliswork and similar appurtenances.
- C. The Historical Commission or a neighborhood conservation district commission may determine from time to time after a public hearing that certain categories of exterior architectural features or structures, including, without limitation, any of those enumerated in this section, if the provisions of the applicable order do not limit the authority of such commission with respect thereto, may be constructed or altered without review by such commission without causing substantial derogation from the intent and purposes of this article.
- D. If the order establishing or amending a neighborhood conservation district provides, the determination of a neighborhood conservation district commission shall be binding only with regard to applications to construct a new building, to demolish an existing structure if a demolition permit is required, to construct a parking lot as a principal use, and to construct an addition to an existing structure that would increase its gross floor area, and in all other cases the determinations of a commission shall be advisory only and not binding on an applicant. In no case shall a building permit be issued until the commission has made a determination under the applicable provisions of this article.

*(Ord. 1002 (part), 1983; prior code § 2-147(k)(5))*

### **2.78.200 - Maintenance, repair and reconstruction.**

Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to prevent the ordinary maintenance, repair or replacement of any exterior architectural feature of a landmark or within a neighborhood conservation district which does not involve a change in design or material or the outward appearance thereof, nor to prevent landscaping with plants, trees or shrubs, nor construed to prevent the meeting of requirements certified by duly authorized public officer to be necessary for public safety because of an unsafe or dangerous condition, not construed to prevent any construction or alteration under a permit duly issued prior to the effective date of the order which designates that landmark or district, nor construed to prevent the reconstruction, substantially similar in exterior design, of a structure or exterior architectural feature damaged or destroyed by fire, storm or other disaster, provided such reconstruction is begun within one year thereafter and carried forward with due diligence.

*(Ord. 1002 (part), 1983: prior code § 2-147(k)(6))*

### **2.78.210 - Certificates of appropriateness, nonapplicability or hardship.**

- A. Except as the order establishing or amending a landmark or neighborhood conservation district may otherwise provide, no structure designated a landmark or within a neighborhood conservation district shall be constructed or altered in any way that affects exterior architectural features unless the Historical Commission or neighborhood conservation district commission having jurisdiction shall first have issued a certificate of appropriateness, a certificate of nonapplicability or a certificate of hardship with respect to such construction or alteration.
- B. Any person who desires to obtain a certificate from the Historical Commission or neighborhood conservation district commission shall file with the Commission an application for a certificate of appropriateness, a certificate of nonapplicability or a certificate of hardship, as the case may be, in such form as the commission may reasonably determine, together with such plans, elevations, specifications, material and other information, including in the case of demolition or removal a statement of the proposed condition and appearance of the property thereafter, as may be reasonably deemed necessary by the Commission to enable it to make a determination on the application.
- C. No building permit for alteration of an exterior architectural feature of a landmark or construction of a structure or for alteration of an exterior architectural feature within a neighborhood conservation district and no demolition permit for demolition or removal of a landmark or of a structure within a neighborhood conservation district shall be issued by the City or any department thereof until the certificate required by this article has been issued by the Historical Commission or neighborhood conservation district commission having jurisdiction.

*(Ord. 1166 §§11, 12, 1995; Ord. 1002 (part), 1983: prior code § 2-147(k)(7))*

### **2.78.220 - Factors considered by 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.

*(Ord. 1002 (part), 1983: prior code § 2-147(k)(8))*

### **2.78.230 - Public meetings and hearings.**

The Historical Commission and each neighborhood conservation district commission shall adopt rules for the reasonable conduct of its meetings and public hearings, which rules shall not be inconsistent with the procedures provided for meetings of and hearings by historic district commissions under Section 11 of Chapter 40C of the General Laws; and in the absence of the adoption of any such rules, meetings and public hearings of the Historical Commission and of each neighborhood conservation district commission shall be in conformity with the provisions of Section 11 of Chapter 40C applicable to historic district commissions.

*(Ord. 1002 (part), 1983: prior code § 2-147(k)(10))*

### **2.78.240 - Appeal procedure.**

Any person aggrieved by a designation of a landmark or district may appeal to the superior court within thirty days after such designation. Any applicant aggrieved by a determination of a neighborhood conservation district commission or ten registered voters of the City opposing a determination under this article may appeal to the Historical Commission within twenty days after the filing of the notice of such determination with the City Clerk. The Historical Commission may overrule the determination and return it for reconsideration consistent with that finding. If the applicant is aggrieved by the determination of the Historical Commission, or if action is not taken by the Historical Commission within thirty days of filing for review, the applicant may appeal to the superior court. Appeal from a Historical Commission determination shall be taken within thirty days of the formal decision; appeal from a failure to act shall be taken within sixty days after the filing for review. The superior court may reverse a determination if it is not supported by substantial evidence in the record. In all other respects, the appeal shall be made in the same manner as provided under Section 12A of Chapter 40C of the General Laws.

*(Ord. 1166 §13, 1995; Ord. 1002 (part), 1983: prior code § 2-147(k)(11))*

### **2.78.250 - Historical Commission authority not limited.**

No provisions of this article shall alter or diminish the duties and functions of the Historical Commission under the authority of Chapter 40, Section 8D and Chapter 40C of the General Laws, or apply to any historic district currently administered by such commission, or restrict the establishment of any future historic district under Chapter 40C of the General Laws.

*(Ord. 1002 (part), 1983: prior code § 2-147(k)(13))*

### **2.78.260 - Limitation on applicability.**

The provisions of Article II of this chapter (relative to procedures for demolition permits for significant buildings) shall not be applicable with respect to the demolition of any structure within a neighborhood conservation district if the appropriate neighborhood conservation district commission has issued a certificate of appropriateness or a certificate of hardship permitting the demolition of such structure.

*(Ord. 1002 (part), 1983: prior code § 2-147(k)(14))*

### **2.78.270 - Enforcement and remedies.**

The Historical Commission and any neighborhood conservation district commission are each specifically authorized to institute any and all actions, proceedings in law and in equity, as they deem necessary and appropriate to obtain compliance with the requirements of this article or to prevent a threatened violation thereof. Any violation of any provision of this article may be punished to the like extent provided in Section 13 of Chapter 40C of the General Laws for a violation of said Chapter 40C. In addition to the foregoing, no building permit shall be issued, with respect to any premises upon which a landmark or a structure within any neighborhood conservation district has been voluntarily demolished otherwise than pursuant to a certificate granted after compliance with the provisions of this article, for a period of two years after the date of the completion of such demolition (the word "premises" for the purposes of this sentence referring to the parcel of land upon which the demolished structure was located and all adjoining parcels of land under common ownership or control.)

*(Ord. 1002 (part), 1983: prior code § 2-147(k)(12))*