

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

December 1, 2022 – Meeting conducted online via Zoom Webinar (852 1548 3253) - 6:00 P.M.

Members present (online): Bruce Irving, *Chair*; Joseph Ferrara, Chandra Harrington, Jo Solet, Susannah Tobin, *Members*; Paula Paris, Gavin Kleespies and Kyle Sheffield, *Alternate Members*

Members absent: Liz Lyster, Yuting Zhang, *Members*

Staff present (online): Charles Sullivan, *Executive Director*, Sarah Burks, *Preservation Planner*; Eric Hill, *Survey Director*

Public present (online): See attached list.

This meeting was held online with remote participation, consistent with the provisions set forth in the Act Relative to Extending Certain State of Emergency Accommodations signed by Governor Baker on July 16, 2022. The public was able to participate online via the Zoom webinar platform.

With a quorum present, Mr. Irving called the meeting to order at 6:03 P.M. He explained the online meeting instructions and public hearing procedures, then introduced commissioners and staff. He dispensed with the Consent Agenda and designated the alternate members to vote as needed.

Public Hearing: Neighborhood Conservation District Study Proceedings

East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Study: Consider the report of the East Cambridge NCD Study Committee and make recommendations.

Mr. Sullivan shared slides documenting the history of the East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District (ECNCD) study, including the timeline, study committee members, the proposed boundaries, and how the process began. He noted that some long-time residents of East Cambridge were originally concerned about the uptick in development pressure with renovations to historic buildings removing original fabric. The goal statement and ten secondary goals were discussed at length during the study and would be the baseline for a future commission to approve or deny future projects.

Mr. Sullivan added that after much deliberation amongst the study committee members and public, it was decided that a bifurcated approach for review would make the most sense for a future East Cambridge district. The proposal would have binding review for demolition and new construction throughout the district, with additional binding review for some alterations to properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. For properties not listed on the National Register, an owner might need to go before the district commission, but the decision of the commission would be advisory and not binding on the applicant.

Mr. Sullivan then provided a few examples of recent projects in the neighborhood, explaining how the proposed jurisdiction would apply in those cases. After this, he explained the outreach conducted by the staff and committee to inform owners, renters and other neighborhood stakeholders. He described the methodology and results of the postcard polls. He then reported that the proposal was reviewed by the Cambridge Planning Board at its November 22, 2022 meeting. With seven members present at that meeting, the Planning Board voted unanimously to support the district proposal with the following three suggestions: 1) make review of Affordable Housing Overlay projects by an East Cambridge NCD commission non-binding; 2) adjust the boundary by removing the properties fronting Bent Street; and 3) develop

Cambridge Street-specific guidelines. Mr. Sullivan explained that staff appreciated the Planning Board's suggestions, but considered the current guidelines, which were written with Cambridge Street in mind, to be satisfactory. Mr. Sullivan concluded his presentation.

There being no questions of fact from the Commission, Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact from the public.

Mary Ellen Doran, 48 Spring Street, asked for the definition of "consensus" and elaborated that there did not seem to be a consensus in support or opposition of the ECNCD proposal. Mr. Sullivan explained that there was no mention of consensus in the ordinance and a consensus was not required for the CHC or City Council to approve or reject a study report.

Momchil Tomov asked what changes the proposed ECNCD would bring regarding existing reviews of National Register properties. Mr. Sullivan explained that projects impacting properties on the National Register of Historic Places are not presently reviewed by the Historical Commission unless a demolition permit is applied for, and even that is not dependent on the National Register status. Mr. Tomov then asked when the changes would/could take effect. Mr. Sullivan stated that if the report was approved by the Historical Commission, it would be sent to the City Council for a simple majority vote. There was no required timeline for Council review, but it could occur in early to mid-2023.

Robert Massie, 78 Fifth Street, explained that he had vinyl siding on his house. Would he be able to replace that with new siding? Mr. Sullivan said that if the house was listed on the National Register of Historic Places it would necessitate a binding review by the Commission. If it was not, the review would be non-binding. Either way, the project seemed approvable if no major features would be removed.

Chuck Hinds, President of the East Cambridge Planning Team, asked about the poll of property owners, inquiring if they got one vote per property they owned. Mr. Sullivan said that a postcard was sent to every property owner. A person could vote as many times as they had properties in the study area.

Heather Hoffman, 213 Hurley Street, asked if there were any existing NCDs in Cambridge that were formerly redlined. Mr. Sullivan noted that the Marsh neighborhood and parts of Mid-Cambridge were redlined in the past. He stated that parts of East Cambridge, Cambridgeport, North Cambridge and Mid-Cambridge had once been rated as less than optimal. Only the Brattle Street area, Coolidge Hill and Larchwood were given the rating of acceptable for investment.

Justin Saif, 239 Hurley Street, asked why the study committee member who resigned was not replaced. Mr. Sullivan stated that Valerie Reece resigned in July because she was moving abroad and would be unable to attend virtual meetings. She was not replaced because the study process was winding down.

Chelsea Tomov stated that she did not get a poll card. Her house was renovated, so why was it included? She also asked why changes would come under Commission review in National Register areas. Mr. Sullivan explained that the National Register districts and buildings are of special concern and are a federal designation, demonstrating the broad public interest in some kinds of alterations.

Caroline Lowenthal, 62 Fulkerson Street, asked why postcards were not delivered per address

rather than to property owners and registered voters. Mr. Sullivan stated that the statute required staff to notify property owners in the study area. The study committee discussed additional means of outreach and decided that a poll of active voters would pick up both renters and owners. Staff did not distribute a poll through Every Door Direct as those would be delivered to hundreds of residents outside of the study area.

Nina You, 101 Third Street, asked what the NCD proposal would cost the city. Mr. Sullivan explained that the NCD commissioners were volunteers. Existing staff would undertake the additional responsibility for the district. The NCD proposal would not cost the city any additional money.

Loren Crowe, 8 Museum Way, asked about the word “appropriate” that had been used several times in the ECNCD Study Report. He wanted to know if it was an opinion or based on something else. Mr. Sullivan stated that a decision to award a Certificates of Appropriateness was a collective judgement made relative to the guidelines and goals of a district.

Mr. Crowe then asked why the residential members of the study committee are all white. Mr. Sullivan explained that the study committee was not all white, and the staff and a representative from the City Manager’s office had recommended appointments based on the diversity of the applicants and their knowledge of architecture, history, and the neighborhood.

Marie Saccoccio, 55 Otis Street, asked if interior features would be regulated. Mr. Sullivan reiterated that interior features would never be subject to review or approval by an ECNCD commission.

Mr. Irving asked if any study committee members would like to make a comment.

Francesca Gordini, a study committee member, explained that she supported the proposed district in part because of the cost of housing in the neighborhood and city at-large. She was a renter and felt that the proposal could slow down the luxury redevelopment of affordable apartments that had been the trend in the area in recent years.

Bill Dines, 69 Otis Street, explained that the study process had been very rigorous. The neighborhood warranted design review and conservation. He had lived in East Cambridge nearly all of his life and hoped the Commission would support designation.

Kyle Sheffield, a study committee member, stated that the committee worked very hard to strike a balance of the various interests and opinions of the residents who spoke at the meetings.

Gavin Kleespies, a study committee member, added that the process had been long, difficult, and contentious at times. He recognized that everyone on the committee was operating with good intentions even if their opinions differed. East Cambridge was under incredible development pressure but not at all by affordable housing projects. The Commission invests a lot of time and money to assist affordable housing projects in existing NCDs and citywide.

Mr. Irving opened the public comment period with a time limit of two minutes per speaker.

Ruby Huang, 28 De Wolfe Street, stated her support of the proposal due to the immense pressure on the historical neighborhood.

Marie Saccoccio explained that she was a life-long resident and that if anyone should be hurt

about not being appointed to the study committee, it should be her. The group that was appointed brought a lot to the table and represented a great mix of the neighborhood. Valerie was a lawyer, Bill a fifth generation East Cambridge resident, and Ron a property owner on Cambridge Street. Francesca had a fresh perspective as a renter and younger resident. East Cambridge had a rich history and it should be preserved.

Ms. Doran said she had attended most meetings and did not support the district proposal.

Audrey Cunningham, 49 Gore Street, related that she was attacked on Twitter by opponents of the ECNCD. The study committee bent over backwards to accommodate the views of the opposition, who would never be happy. She supported designation.

Betty Saccoccio, 55 Otis Street, read a letter in support that was sent to the commissioners.

Mr. Crowe quoted a previous statement by Mr. Sullivan about consensus. He said that Mr. Sullivan stated in a meeting that if there was no consensus, the Commission would not send the matter to the City Council. The poll showed no consensus.

Mr. Saif said it was long past time to pull the plug on the “rigged process.” Preservation restrictions drive up housing prices. Homeowners have benefitted from racist zoning.

Mr. Hinds expressed support for the NCD proposal and said that it would not impact property values. It was the high-rise office and laboratory buildings that had driven up demand and prices.

Ms. Hoffman said that the postcards did not show consensus one way or the other. Each person should have gotten one vote, but that was in the past. She supported designation.

Suzanne Blier, 5 Fuller Place, said the history of East Cambridge was very impressive. Peer-reviewed studies showed that prices stabilized or rose less quickly in conservation districts compared to non-conservation districts. She added that the process was the opposite of rigged; there were many drafts and additions to the report based on public comment and recommendations.

Patrick McNeal said he felt excluded from the process. If not for the mailings and postcard poll, he would not have known about the study. As written, the report did not speak to his concerns.

Susan Johansen thanked all the study committee members for their time and diligence on the report. She supported designation.

Mr. Irving closed public comment period. He called for a ten-minute recess then reconvened the meeting at 8:43 P.M. He opened the hearing up to comments by the Commissioners.

Mr. Ferrara stated that the proposal seemed to be level-headed and not a major burden on the neighborhood.

Ms. Harrington appreciated the committee and staff for attempting to include everyone’s opinions whether as part of the goals and guidelines or as addendums in the report.

Dr. Solet added that she too was grateful to the committee members and staff for their work. The report was very comprehensive. It was also instructive to see cases during the interim period.

Ms. Tobin also echoed her gratitude for the committee members and staff. The public was very engaged and spent a lot of time on this process.

Ms. Paris asked Mr. Sullivan to clarify the choices for action by the Commission. She noted that the committee members were not paid for their participation in the study. She greatly appreciated the opinions on both sides as it made the report more robust.

Mr. Sheffield stated that it was a very challenging process. The complex themes and goals that had to be worked out took time. He thanked the public for their participation throughout.

Mr. Kleespies agreed that it had been difficult. He had concerns about forwarding the report to City Council since the poll was not resoundingly in favor. Not many minds had been changed in the process. He was in favor of the district but was concerned about the lack of a majority in support.

Mr. Irving stated that East Cambridge was a fragile environment facing a lot of development pressure. He supported sending the report to City Council. He recognized the amount of work put into the study and the necessity of the protection. City Council should consider the proposal.

Mr. Sullivan explained the possible courses of action for the CHC. They could adopt the report as written; adopt it with one or more of the Planning Board suggestions; or send it back to the committee for revision.

Mr. Irving asked if accepting the Planning Board suggestions would necessitate the report going back to the study committee. Mr. Sullivan indicated it should not.

Mr. Ferrara stated that he was in favor of accepting the Planning Board recommendations to make AHO project reviews non-binding and remove properties fronting Bent Street.

Ms. Harrington asked if existing NCDs have jurisdiction over AHO projects. Mr. Sullivan stated that the historical and NCD commissions retain their authority over Affordable Housing Overlay projects. Mr. Kleespies said that accepting this proposal might lead the City Council to alter CHC and NCD authority regarding these projects. Mr. Sullivan said that this was possible but might occur regardless.

Ms. Tobin moved to accept the Preliminary Report including the adoption of the Planning Board suggestions for advisory review of AHO projects and amendment to the boundary line at Bent Street, and to transmit a Final Report to the City Council with a recommendation for adoption of the designation order. Ms. Harrington seconded. Mr. Irving designated alternates Kleespies and Sheffield to vote on the motion, which passed 7-0 (Ferrara, Harrington, Solet, Tobin, Irving, Kleespies and Sheffield).

Public Hearing: Alterations to Properties Under Study for Designation

Case 4886: 21 Loomis St., by Kevin Emery & Eamon Fee. Reduce the size of the existing building and modify the foundation to meet zoning setback requirements. Renovate existing house and construct an attached dwelling unit at rear of existing as previously approved.

Mr. Sullivan reported that the property was currently under landmark study. The Commission had previously approved an application for relocating the house, restoring it, and adding an attached garage and second dwelling unit. That design required zoning relief, which was not granted so the applicants had returned with a zoning-compliant proposal.

Kevin Emery and Eamon Fee, owners and developers, introduced themselves. Mr. Emery said the Board of Zoning Appeal had denied their petition. The neighbors objected to a second unit on the lot. This

was their fifth hearing with the Commission for this property.

Mr. Fee described the current proposal. The house would be temporarily moved to the back of the lot so that a new foundation could be built that would conform to zoning setbacks. Approximately one foot of width would be removed from the center of the house and then it would be positioned back on the new foundation. This approach would enable the preservation of the two ends and most of the structure of the house. He described the restoration of the house and said the new unit at the back had not changed.

Ms. Harrington asked how the change would solve the problem of neighborhood opposition. Mr. Emery explained that the proposal would conform to zoning and no relief would be needed. They had exhausted all other options to save the building.

Dr. Solet asked if they could still renovate the existing house and not build a second unit. Would that option be feasible? Mr. Fee said they had been carrying the costs for 21 months and there was no way they could recoup with that approach. Mr. Emery noted that zoning allows two families on the lot, and they had bought it for that purpose.

Mr. Irving asked for questions from the public.

Roxanne Spartichino of 15 Loomis Street stated that the Board of Zoning Appeal was concerned about shadows on her property. She noted that the existing shared driveway would need to support three houses. She expressed concern about the trees. She did not want to see the house changed. Mr. Irving indicated that she would have opportunity later to make public comment.

John Chun of 48 Loomis Street thanked the applicants for the detailed plan to make the house conform to zoning. He asked if the proposal would put the house at risk by moving it and removing the center portion. Could the house be so damaged that they would come back requesting to demolish the whole thing? Mr. Fee answered that the house would not collapse. It would be braced first and moved one section at a time. Mr. Chun asked if the Commission could require that the house be replicated if it were to be damaged or demolished. Mr. Sullivan replied in the affirmative.

Justin Saif of 259 Hurley Street asked if the Commission had jurisdiction over trees, shadows and open space. Mr. Sullivan answered that the Commission did not have jurisdiction over the removal of trees, but the city did have a tree ordinance that was administered by Public Works. Shadows and other impacts on neighboring properties or the streetscape could be considered in making a determination of appropriateness. The site plan was within the Commission's jurisdiction. Mr. Saif noted that only what was visible from a public way was subject to review.

Mr. Irving opened the public comment period.

Mr. Saif commented that there was a housing crisis in the city. The proposed development was innocuous and should be approved.

Ms. Spartachino remarked that there were 93 new units recently constructed on Concord Avenue and thousands more coming nearby. The open space was visible from the street behind. The owners of this house and one next door allow neighbors to walk through the property to get to Rafferty Park.

Christopher Cassa of 103 Gore Street said it was important to build more housing and supported the ability to walk through the neighborhood. He supported approval to let the project move ahead.

Alisa Lemberg of 25 Loomis Street agreed that neighbors are allowed to cut through the lot. She asked the applicants if there was a way to work out issues about the shared driveway, tree protection, etc. Mr. Emery said he was available to meet about those things.

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Mr. Sullivan reminded the Commission that they had previously granted the applicants a Certificate of Appropriateness. This was effectively an amendment to that proposal. It was an intervention to the existing structure that would allow the project to be built in a zoning-compliant way.

Mr. Kleespies moved to approve the application for a certificate of appropriateness for the modified proposal, as submitted. Mr. Ferrara seconded. Mr. Irving designated alternates Kleespies and Paris to vote, and the motion passed 6-1. (Kleespies, Ferrara, Harrington, Tobin, Irving and Paris in favor and Solet opposed).

Mr. Sheffield moved to adjourn and Ms. Paris seconded. Mr. Irving designated alternates Sheffield and Paris to vote. The motion passed 7-0 in a roll call vote. (Sheffield, Paris, Ferrara, Harrington, Solet, Tobin and Irving). The meeting adjourned precisely at 10:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Present on the Zoom Webinar online, December 1, 2022**

Bill Dines	69 Otis St
Ron Creamer	501 Cambridge St
Eamon Fee	9 Gregory Ln, Reading, Mass. 01867
Charles Fineman	75 Winter St
Jean Spera	12 Sciarappa St
Justin Saif	259 Hurley St
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St
Mary Ellen Doran	48 Spring St
Jay Dharia	Cambridge St
Ruby Huang	Harvard College
Debbie Perez	80 Cambridgepark Dr
Katharine Forst	10 Cowperthwaite St
Audrey Cunningham	49 Gore St
Alisa Lemberg	25 Loomis St
Dan Inbar	110 Spring St
Suzanne Blier	5 Fuller Pl
Nina You	101 Third St, No. 3
Anne Marie Dattero	38 Gore St
Marie Elena Saccoccio	55 Otis St
Frank Welch	75 Otis St
Betty Saccoccio	55 Otis St
Roxanne Spartichino	15 Loomis St
Gabriela Cuba	80 Cambridge Park Dr
Charles Hinds	207 1/2 Charles St
Patrick McNeal	112 Spring St
Susan Johansen	150 Cambridge St
Caroline Lowenthal	62 Fulkerson St
Patrick Magee	877 Cambridge St
Barbara Rubel	21 Otis St
Joan Pickett	59 Ellery St
Robert Massie	78 Fifth St
John Chun	48 Loomis St
Jon S	85 Gore St
Julie Steinhilber	113 Otis St
Courtney Crummett	106 Otis St #3
Loren Crowe	8 Museum Way
Marc Levy	3 Potter Pk #1
John Hawkinson	Cambridgeday.com
Maxwell Christmas	392 Eliot Mail Center
Steve Hill	24 Lambert St
Momchil Tomov	25 3rd St
William Reilly	100 Gore St, Unit B
Heather Hoffman	213 Hurley St

Emma Lubin	17 Fairmont Ave
Chris Smith	145 Fifth St
Demian Szyld	68 Otis St
Christos Tsokos	109 Gore St
Jason Alves	544 Cambridge St
Daniel Herlihy	40 Second St
Andrew Richardson	176 Third St #2
Chelsea Tomov	25 Third St
Erin Saif	259 Hurley St, Unit 4
Bill Boehm	18 Laurel St
Luciano Cesta	'-
Tim Logan	56 6th St
Christopher Cassa	103 Gore St, Apt 2

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.