



# City of Cambridge

## Executive Department

**YI-AN HUANG**  
City Manager

CMA 2024 #182  
**IN CITY COUNCIL**  
September 9, 2024

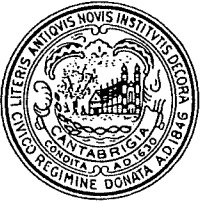
To the Honorable, the City Council:

Please find attached a report detailing the Board of Zoning Appeal's proposed modifications to the Zoning Ordinance, specifically concerning the implementation of dormer guidelines.

Very truly yours,

Yi-An Huang  
City Manager





# City of Cambridge

MASSACHUSETTS

## BOARD OF ZONING APPEAL

831 Mass Avenue, Cambridge, MA.  
(617) 349-6100

Date: August 23, 2024

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Subject: Dormer Guideline Zoning Petition

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Petition: To consider adoption of the attached Dormer Guideline Zoning, after referral to the Planning Board and Ordinance Committee for public hearing and report.

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To the Honorable, the City Council,

We are pleased to present the attached Dormer Guideline Zoning Petition for the Council's consideration.

On July 25, 2024, the Board of Zoning Appeal (the "Board") convened to review the existing process and guidelines related to the addition of dormers to residential properties. This review included discussions with City staff.

The Board found that the current process for approving dormers—often requiring either a Special Permit or a Variance—can be complex and burdensome for homeowners seeking to expand their living space. The proposal seeks to simplify this by incorporating dormer conditions directly into the Zoning Ordinance, making the building permit approval process more predictable and transparent and thereby reducing the time and expense associated with zoning application reviews and hearings before the Board of Zoning Appeal. The proposed revisions are designed to facilitate the expansion of homes through dormers as-of-right, which is a common and reasonable method for increasing living space and contributing to the City's housing stock.

The Board acknowledges that while the proposal is a significant step forward, further adjustments may be needed. We believe it is appropriate to start the hearing process for the City Council to consider any substantive amendments. The attached text includes modifications and clarifications from the Board's discussions.

Six Board members appeared during the July 25th hearing and voted unanimously in favor of transmitting the attached petition to the City Council.

Sincerely,

Jim Monteverde

Board of Zoning Appeal, Chair

**The Cambridge Board of Zoning Appeals voted unanimously on July 25, 2024 to submit this petition to update the Zoning Ordinance.**

## **Rationale**

The Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) reviews numerous cases of homeowners and developers wishing to add a dormer (or dormers) to their roof to create additional habitable space in existing attics. Construction of dormer(s) can be an effective tool for expansion of existing homes or adding units to the City's housing stock. The frequency of cases has increased in recent years along with the cost of housing and difficulty for families to purchase larger homes.

We believe that the current process should be clarified and simplified to facilitate this reasonable and common way of expanding a home, as-of-right. This revision will eliminate the time and expense of a zoning application review and hearing for this frequent request.

The current process for gaining approval for dormers can involve either a Special Permit or a Variance when the structure is non-conforming and will not meet Zoning Ordinance section 8.22.1.h, along with compliance with a stand-alone set of Dormer Guidelines that are neither referenced nor appended to the Zoning Ordinance. Including the specific dormer conditions suggested in this proposal into the Ordinance will incentivize proponents to follow the City's dormer standards as well as make the review process more predictable and clearer for Proponents.

## **Proposed revisions to the Ordinance**

### **1. ARTICLE 2.000 DEFINITIONS**

Add the following definition: Dormer- A roofed projection built out from a sloping roof, containing a window or windows.

### **2. Revision to 8.22.1.h.2**

**h.** Construction of a dormer or dormers to a nonconforming one- or two-family dwelling which may further violate the yard, height and/or FAR requirements of Article 5.000 ~~but no other requirements of Article 5.000 including FAR, in the following cases:~~ shall comply with the following conditions:

- ~~1. A dormer or addition to the second story that does not extend horizontally beyond the vertical walls of the existing first story of the structure. The primary face of dormer(s) shall not extend beyond the face of the wall below.~~
- ~~2. A dormer on the third story no longer than fifteen (15) feet that does not extend horizontally beyond the vertical walls of the existing second story nor above the existing ridge line provided that the total linear length of all dormers on the third story of the building, after the issuance of the permit by this Subparagraph h 2, does not exceed fifteen (15) feet. The length of any dormer shall not exceed 1/2 of the length of the roof upon which it is built.~~
3. Sides of dormer(s) shall not extend to within 3'-6" of the existing roof termination.
4. Windows within dormers shall cover a minimum of 50% of the primary dormer wall.
5. The top of the dormer shall not extend above the existing roof ridge.

## **ARTICLE 2.000 DEFINITIONS**

***Dormer.*** A roofed projection built out from a sloping roof, containing a window or windows.

## **ARTICLE 8.000 NONCONFORMITY**

### **8.22.1**

- h. Construction of a dormer or dormers to a nonconforming one- or two-family dwelling which may further violate the yard, height and/or FAR requirements of Article 5.000 shall comply with the following conditions:
  - 1. The primary face of dormer(s) shall not extend beyond the face of the wall below.
  - 2. The length of any dormer shall not exceed 1/2 of the length of the roof upon which it is built.
  - 3. Sides of dormer(s) shall not extend to within 3'-6" of the existing roof termination.
  - 4. Windows within dormers shall cover a minimum of 50% of the primary dormer wall.
  - 5. The top of the dormer shall not extend above the existing roof ridge.



**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE**  
 CAMBRIDGE CITY HALL, 795 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE  
 CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

TO THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE:

Cambridge Board of Zoning Appeal hereby petitions the City Council of the City of Cambridge to amend the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Cambridge, as amended, as follows:

- Amend the Zoning map in the area(s) set forth in the attached text description(s) and map(s) by
  - changing the base Zoning District(s) from \_\_\_\_\_ to a new zoning designation(s) of \_\_\_\_\_
  - creating a new Overlay Zoning District(s) entitled \_\_\_\_\_
  - deleting or amending the boundaries of the current Overlay Zoning District(s) entitled \_\_\_\_\_
- Amend the text of the Zoning Ordinance as set forth in the attached text by
  - inserting a new Article(s) and/or section(s) numbered and entitled \_\_\_\_\_
  - deleting the current Article(s) and/or section(s) numbered and entitled \_\_\_\_\_
  - amending the current Article(s) and/or section(s) numbered and entitled 2.000 Definitions and 8.22.1.h.2 Non-conformance

with the intent of allowing certain dormer(s) construction as-of-right

Contact Person: Jim Monteverde, BZA Chair  
 Street Address: 12 Oak Street, Cambridge, MA, 02139  
 Telephone Number: 617-646-5350  
 E-mail Address: monteverde@cbtarchitects.com

Attach the following materials:

- Signatures of 10 or more Cambridge residents registered to vote in Cambridge (if applicable – see attached page template)
- Map Amendments: a map and text description describing the exact boundaries of the area to be rezoned
- Text Amendments: a document providing the exact wording of all inserted, deleted, or amended sections (also provide in a word processing format to [cityclerk@cambridgema.gov](mailto:cityclerk@cambridgema.gov))

FOR CITY CLERK USE ONLY – Zoning Petition Number: \_\_\_\_\_