



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

CMA 2026 #4
IN CITY COUNCIL
January 12, 2026

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Attached for your consideration is the Final Landmark Designation Report for the Nathaniel Stickney House at 45 Mt. Auburn Street, received from Executive Director of the Historical Commission, Charles Sullivan.

Very truly yours,

Yi-An Huang
City Manager



FINAL LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

Nathaniel Stickney House

45 Mt. Auburn Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts



The Nathaniel Stickney House at 45 Mt. Auburn Street, constructed in 1846, is significant as a rare extant wood-frame residence from the mid-19th century in Harvard Square. It is also significant for its association with Nathaniel Stickney, a prominent lumber dealer and wharf operator. The property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing resource in the Harvard Square Historic District, established in 1988, and it is included in the Harvard Square Conservation District established in 2000.

The Historical Commission initiated a designation study of the Stickney House on September 5, 2024, in response to a citizen's petition submitted in May 2024. Amendments in 2023 to Chapter 2.78 of the Municipal Code prevent commissions administering neighborhood conservation districts from considering "... the appropriateness of the size and shape" of new construction or additions to existing structures. This loss of jurisdiction was a contributing factor to the citizen petition for initiation of the landmark designation study.

Designation of the property by the City Council as a Cambridge Landmark would protect the entire premises from inappropriate alterations and would guide future alterations while respecting the distinct architectural and historic character of the landmark. The proposed designation offers approval in principle for removal of the ell and one-story brick addition as well as relocation of the house to the corner of DeWolfe Street to accommodate new construction, which would be subject to binding review as to size and shape as well as exterior appearance and materials.

Eric Hill and Charles Sullivan
Cambridge Historical Commission
November 24, 2025

Introduction

The Nathaniel Stickney House at 45 Mt. Auburn Street was constructed by a carpenter and lumber dealer with a business in Harvard Square for his own home. The residence was listed as a contributing resource in the Harvard Square Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982 as an important example of the Greek Revival style in the district. Additionally, the property was highlighted in the 2019 Harvard Square Conservation District Study Report of as an important surviving wood-frame building significant for its connections to the Gold Coast development of Harvard Square in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Amendments in 2023 to Chapter 2.78, Art. III of the Municipal Code prevent commissions administering neighborhood conservation districts from considering the appropriateness of the size and shape of new construction or additions to existing structures. Landmark designation of the building would re-establish the Cambridge Historical Commission's ability to make decisions regarding the size and shape of potential new construction or additions at the site.

In April 2024 the owner, the Foundation for Civic Leadership, announced plans to close the building for renovations. Activist groups and community organizers who had been occupants of the building, then known as The Democracy Center, claimed an existential threat, protested the closing and secured a remonstrance from the Cambridge City Council. The Commission received a landmark petition for the property in May 2024.

On September 5, 2024, the Commission held a public hearing to consider the petitioners' request for a landmark study. After public testimony and discussion, the Commission voted 5-1 to accept the petition and initiate the study. The effect of the vote was to treat the property as if it were already a designated landmark for a period of up to one year while the Commission staff prepared a report and draft recommendations to the City Council.

During the one-year landmark study period, staff engaged with the owner and his architect in an informal design review exercise. Staff considered the owner's goals, zoning considerations, and preservation priorities to prepare the following recommendations for designation and design standards and criteria which would preserve the Stickney House while permitting flexibility for further development of the site.

At the conclusion of a public hearing on November 6, 2025, the Historical Commission voted unanimously to recommend designation of the Stickney House as a Landmark. While the Commission's jurisdiction over size and shape of new construction lapsed with the expiration of the study period, it would be re-established if the City Council decides to designate the property as a landmark. If the building is not so designated, it would remain under the jurisdiction of the Harvard Square Conservation District.

Location and Zoning Considerations

The Nathaniel Stickney house at 45 Mt. Auburn Street is a 2½-story frame building built in 1846. According to the assessors, the building consists of three units with a total floor area of 7,619 square feet. The assessed value of the building is \$2,539,900, and the overall value of the property is assessed at \$4,483,300. The owner, The Foundation for Civic Leadership, purchased the property in 2002 (Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, Book 35980, Page002).

The property consists of a 5,102 square foot lot measuring 88’ on Bow and Mt. Auburn Streets, 63’ at DeWolfe Street, and 51’ at the abutter (Assessors Map 133, Lot 49). The lot is bounded by Mt. Auburn Street to the south, DeWolfe Street to the east, Bow Street to the north, and the adjacent property at 45½ Mt. Auburn Street to the west (under different ownership).



Cambridge Assessing Department

The base zoning is O-3, a business, professional office, and multi-family residential district which provides a height limit of 90’ for non-residential uses or 120’ or ten stories for residential use without the need for a special permit. The property is also within both the Harvard Square Overlay District and the Harvard, Radcliffe, Lesley Overlay District.

Table 5-1: Table of District Dimensional Requirements

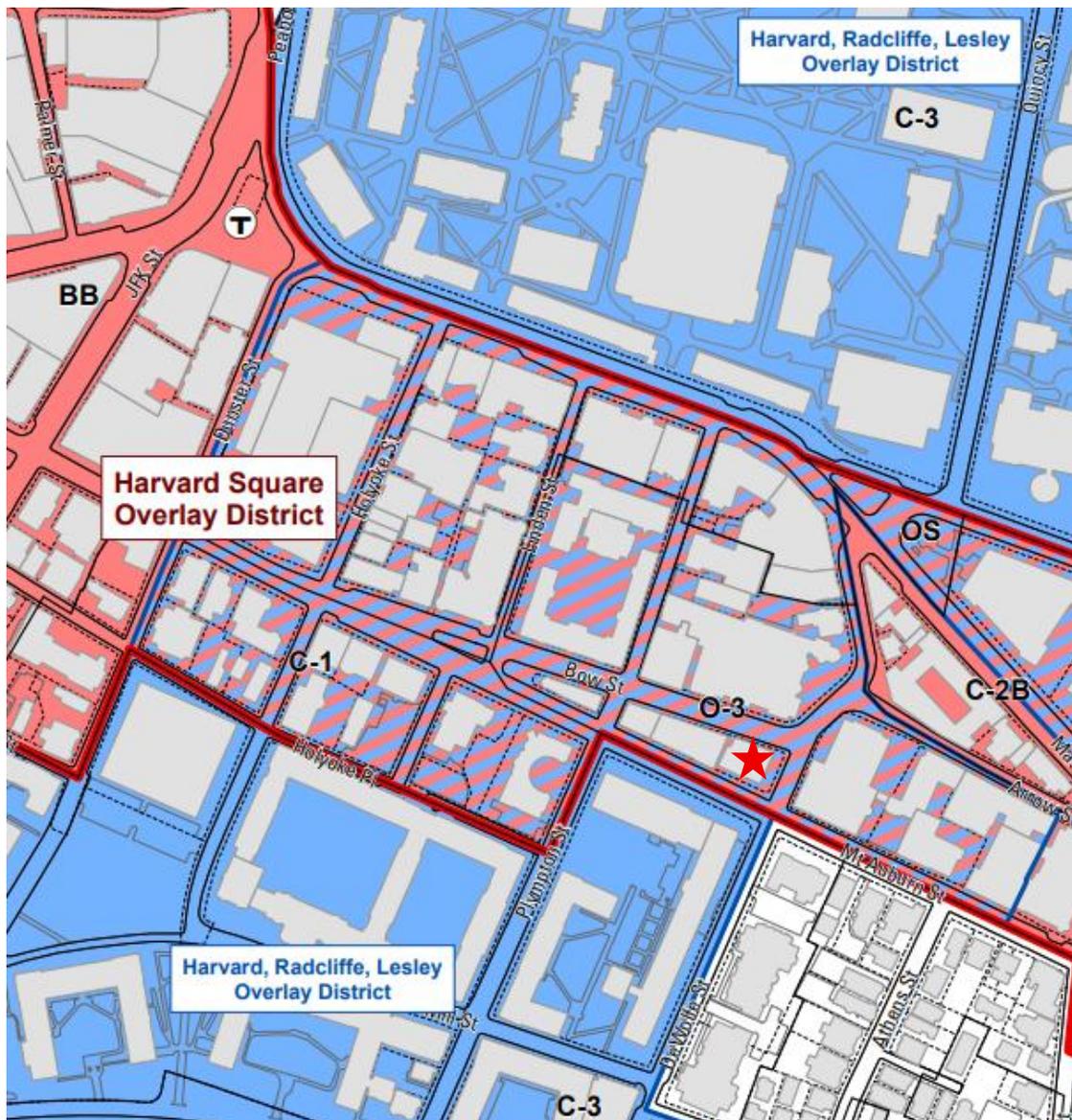
District	All Uses	Residential Uses (Section 4.31 a-j.)				Non-Residential Uses (Section 4.30 except 4.31 a-j.)				
	1. Min. Open Space Ratio (5.22)	2. Max. Stories Above Grade (5.23)	3. Max. Building Height in feet (5.23)	4. Min. Front Yard Setback in feet (5.24)	5. Min. Side or Rear Yard Setback in feet (5.24)	6. Max. Building Height in feet (5.23)	7. Min. Front Yard Setback in feet (5.24)	8. Min. Side Yard Setback in feet (5.24)	9. Min. Rear Yard Setback in feet (5.24)	10. Max. FAR (5.25)
5.32 Office Districts										
Office 3	10%	10	120	5 ^(a)	none	90 ⁽³⁶⁾	$\frac{H+L^{(6)(33)}}{5}$	$\frac{H+L^{(34)}}{6}$	$\frac{H+L^{(16)(34)}}{5}$	2.0 ⁽³⁶⁾
O-3 / HSOD	10%	10	120	**5 ^(a)	none	*60 / 80	$\frac{**H+L^{(6)(33)}}{5}$	$\frac{**H+L^{(34)}}{6}$	$\frac{**H+L^{(16)(34)}}{5}$	***3.0

**Height Allowed as-of-right / Height Allowed by PB special permit*
***Setbacks may be reduced by PB special permit*
****FAR exemption for ground floor retail spaces 1,500 sf or less*

Redevelopment of the site for residential purposes would likely trigger review based on additional square footage as follows:

- +2,000 sq ft – Public Advisory Consultation with Harvard Square Advisory Committee
- +25,000 sq ft – Building and Site Plan requirements (Section 19.50) and Green Building
- +50,000 sq ft – Planning Board Advisory Consultation
- +75,000 sq ft – Planning Board Special Permit

Designation of the Stickney House as a landmark would not preclude appropriate development of the site but would give the Cambridge Historical Commission jurisdiction over the size and shape of additions or new construction beyond its review authority under the Harvard Square Conservation District, which includes binding review of demolition, alterations, and the general design of new construction and additions but does not allow the Commission to consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the new construction or additions.



Zoning Districts in Harvard Square

Cambridge Community Development Department

Ownership and Occupancy

The Stickney House, which was originally configured as a double house with side-by-side entrances, was a private residence from its construction in 1846 until 1897, when it was converted to a boarding house by Nathaniel Stickney's heirs. The property was then acquired by the University Associates, a group of Harvard alumni who were assembling properties between Mt. Auburn Street and the river on Harvard's behalf. The property was later sold to the Speakers Club, an undergraduate club that was one of about 28 such organizations that renovated or built clubhouses in Harvard Square between 1887 and 1956. The Speakers Club eventually merged with the Pi Eta Club, but numerous scandals prompted its graduate board to close the facility in 1990. The club sold the property to the present owners, the Foundation for Civic Leadership, in 2002.

Area Description

The Stickney House at 45 Mt. Auburn Street is located within the Gold Coast subdistrict of the Harvard Square Conservation District, which includes Mt. Auburn Street from Bow and DeWolfe streets west to Winthrop Park and the side streets north toward Massachusetts Avenue and south toward the Harvard River Houses. This area was initially developed in the 1830s-'60s as a residential neighborhood and reflects the layering of historical development trends in Harvard Square throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The neighborhood is an important buffer zone between the commercial activity along Massachusetts Avenue to the north and the institutional precinct of the River Houses to the south.

The Gold Coast appellation reflects the prevalence of private dormitories and undergraduate clubs that were constructed during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and early 20th century for affluent undergraduates. Many of the private dormitories were acquired by Harvard University in the 1920s and incorporated into Adams House; while others were converted into apartment buildings. Some clubs were designed to accommodate commercial activities or were later altered for this purpose.

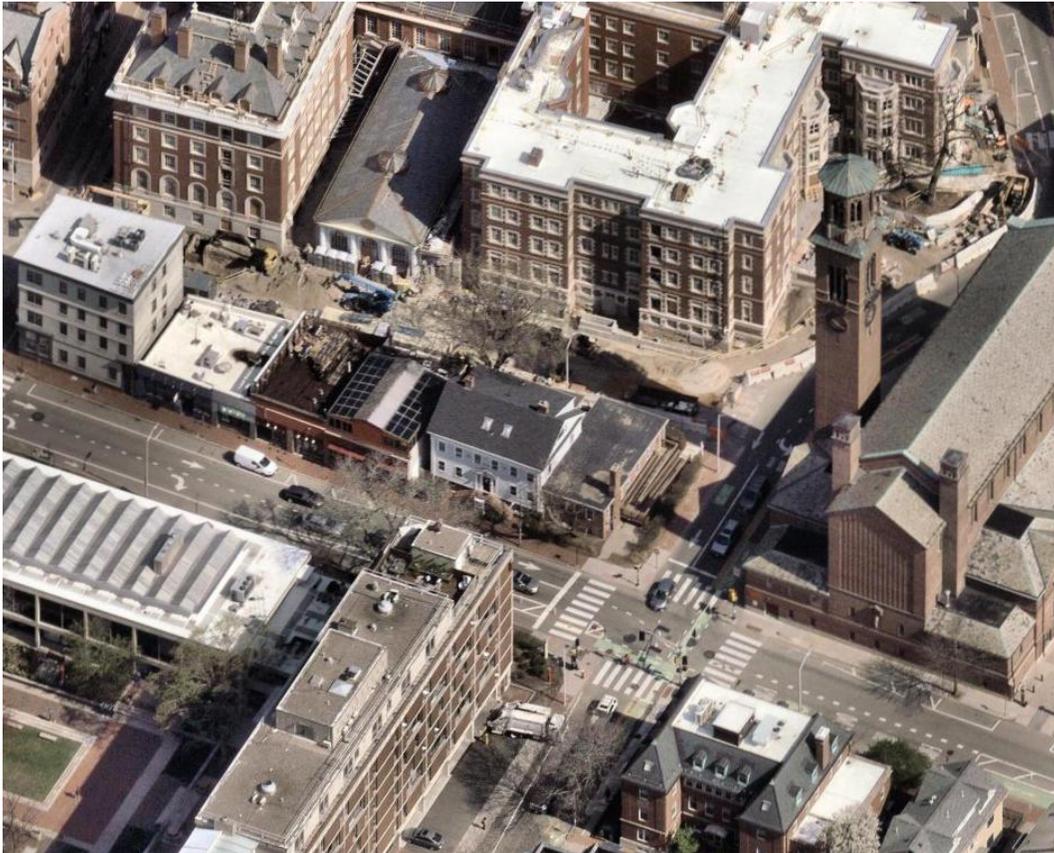
Presently, commercial activities on Mt. Auburn Street include a mixture of restaurants and service establishments but lack the intensity of Harvard or Brattle squares or JFK Street. Several early 19th-century houses are interspersed between the dormitories, clubs, and institutional buildings, but almost all have been adapted for other uses, including that of the Stickney House/Speakers Club at 45 Mt. Auburn Street.

The Final Report of the 2017-2019 Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee of December 31, 2019, mentions the following on the significance of remaining early wood-frame buildings in the Gold Coast subdistrict:

Though buildings in the Gold Coast are predominantly of masonry construction, several significant examples of wood frame construction remain. Among the most vulnerable may be 20 and 22 Holyoke Street; the Greek Revival house (once a student club, now offices) at 43-45 Mt. Auburn Street; a long-unoccupied Greek Revival at 41 Winthrop Street and an adjoining vacant lot owned by Harvard University; and a trio of houses at 69 and 71-77 Dunster Street and 17 South Street, also owned by the university. These and other

wood-frame houses contribute greatly to the rich character of the subdistrict, and their preservation should be given a high priority.

Today, the Nathaniel Stickney House serves as an important anchor to its block and remains a significant early wood-frame building constructed in the earliest phase of development of the area. While neighboring buildings that share the block with the Stickney House rise between one- and four-stories, buildings across Bow, DeWolfe, and Mt. Auburn streets are taller. Westmorely Hall (Adams House, Harvard University) to the north on Bow Street stands five stories; Quincy House Residence Hall (Harvard University) to the south on Mt. Auburn Street stands seven stories; and the bell tower of the St. Paul's Church on DeWolfe Street rises roughly 160 feet from the sidewalk.



Aerial view showing 45 Mt. Auburn (center) with surrounding neighborhood.

Architectural Description

The Nathaniel Stickney house is a 2½-story, Greek Revival style building constructed as a double-house in 1846 with a one-story clubroom addition constructed in 1928. The property has three street frontages, with its primary façade facing Mt. Auburn Street. The house originally had a generous side yard at the corner of DeWolfe Street, but much of this was taken up with a one-story brick addition constructed by the Speakers Club in 1928.

The exterior of the Stickney house is clad with vinyl siding over the original clapboards with the original exterior trim remaining largely intact. Many of the six-over-six window sash, protected by aluminum storm windows, appear to be original. The Colonial Revival pedimented front door

surround probably dates from renovations in 1928 and replaced a two-door entry. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The raised foundation is brick above ledgerstone. Although converted to an undergraduate club in 1928, the building maintains a residential character.

The 1928 brick clubhouse addition, designed by Harry Carlson, features little ornament and is rectangular in form. The fenestration of the addition continues from the Stickney House with squat six-over-six basement windows and six-over-six windows above. A soldier course delineates the basement from the first floor. The remainder of the building is laid in Flemish bond. An asymmetrical chimney extends from the eastern wall of the addition, terminating at about the height of the eaves of the Stickney House.



Nathaniel Stickney House, 45 Mt. Auburn Street.



DeWolfe Street elevation

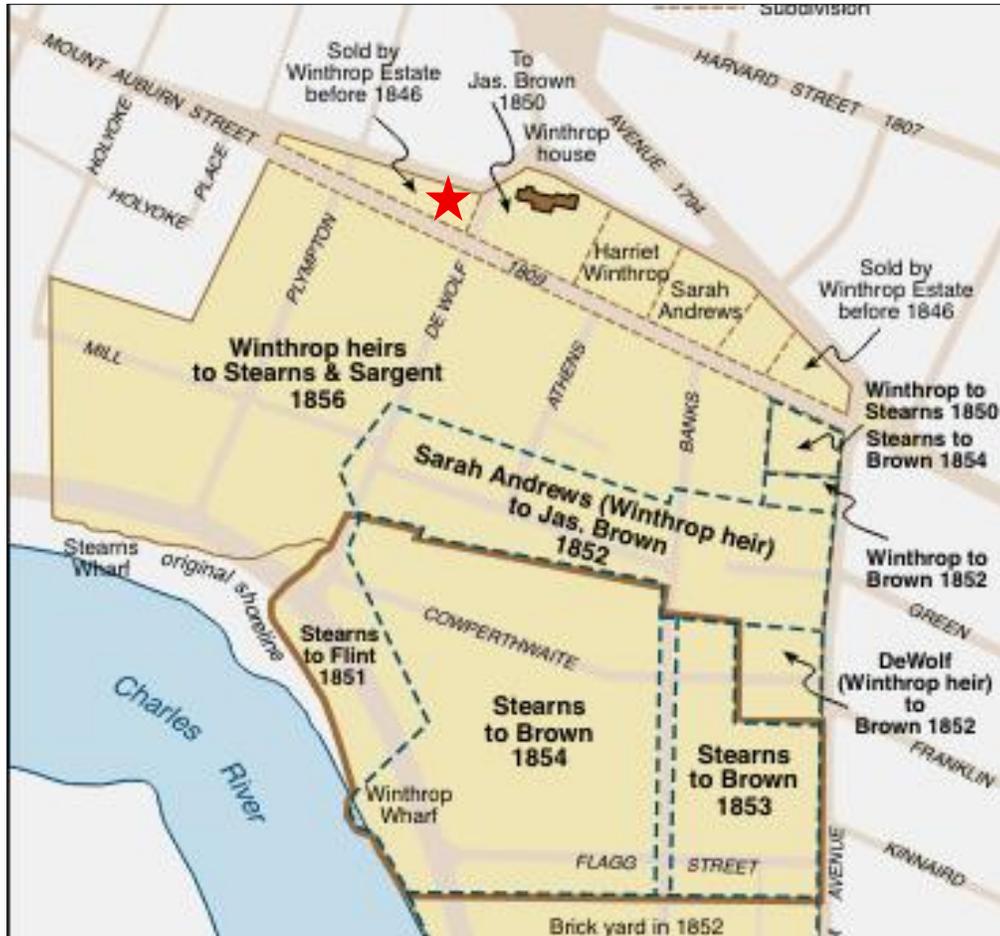


Colonial Revival entry, added during 1928 alterations for Speakers Club

History and Significance

The Nathaniel Stickney House was built in 1846 near the northwest corner of a 46-acre Colonial-era estate, once the property of Middlesex County Sheriff David Phips. William Winthrop (1753–1825), one of the few men of business in the town, acquired the Phips estate after the Revolution. There were about 8½ acres of salt marsh between Holyoke and DeWolfe streets, and below that the riverbank was relatively firm. The 35 acres of upland included 20 acres of “English mowing” (hayfields) and four acres in cultivation. The rest was pasture, which supported six cows Winthrop kept to supply milk to the college. The Phips mansion may no longer have been habitable, because in 1818 Winthrop used the old foundation to build a new house that overlooked the wharf where his schooners landed cargos of firewood and building materials.

Winthrop died childless in 1825, leaving his estate in trust for the five children of his brother, John; the property was to be divided among them after twenty-one years. Winthrop’s farm remained intact until 1843, when the trustee of his estate sold off the extremities of the long, narrow block between Mt. Auburn and Arrow streets. Housepainters and glaziers Joshua and James Thayer bought a lot near the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Mt. Auburn Street; their 1844 house at 9 Mt. Auburn is the oldest still standing on the former Winthrop farm. Lumber dealer Nathaniel Stickney bought a lot just west of Winthrop’s house and built 43-45 Mt. Auburn Street in 1846.



Disposition of the Winthrop farm, 1844-1856. Source: Building Old Cambridge, Fig. 4.259

Nathaniel Newton Stickney (1816-1897) was born in Bridgeton, Maine and came to Cambridge as a young journeyman carpenter. Nathaniel married Catharine Beeman Kempton of Frankfort, Maine in 1846, the same year he built 45 Mt. Auburn Street as his own residence. In 1849, Catharine died from complications during childbirth, and in 1851, Nathaniel married Catharine's sister, Hannah Helen Kempton.

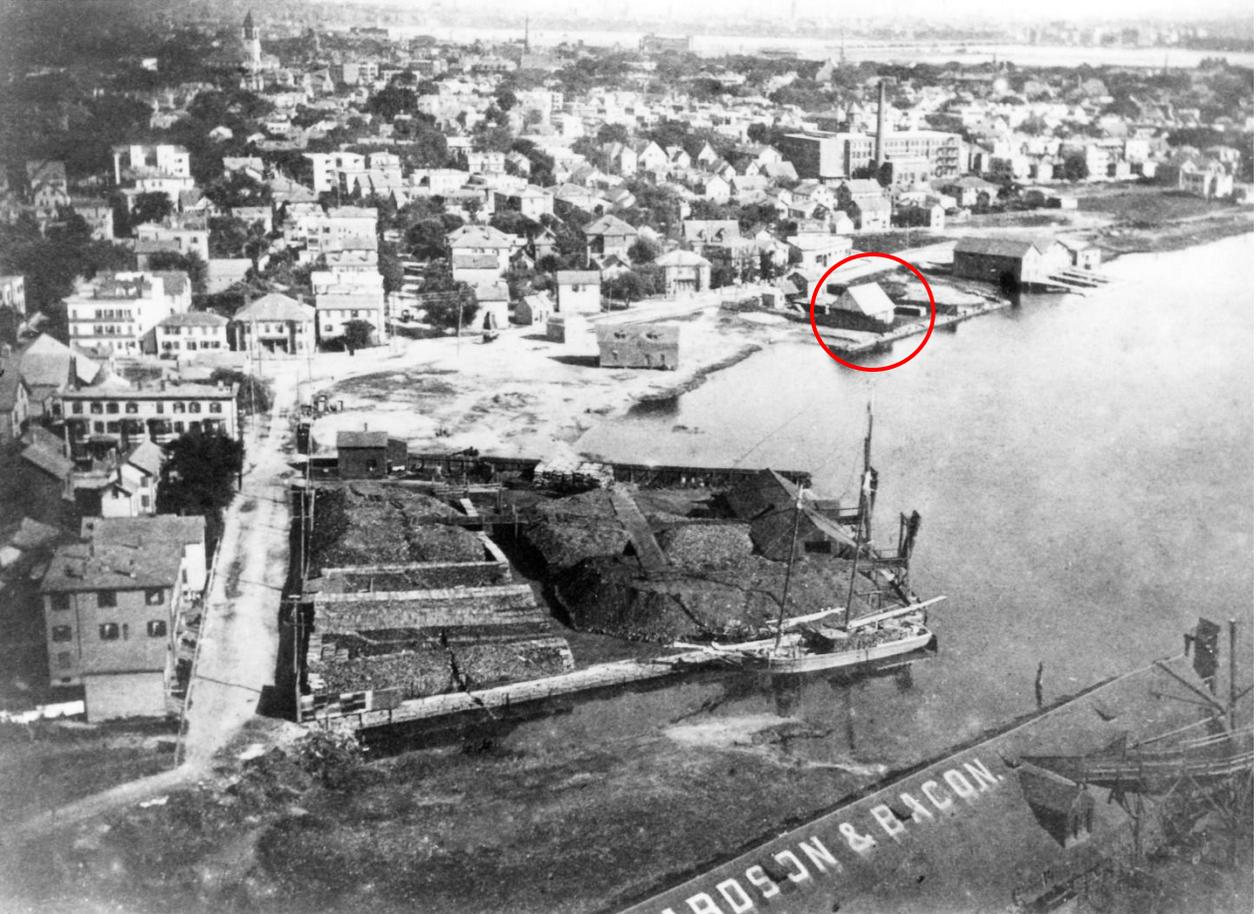
In the 1860s Nathaniel entered a partnership with Royal Gilkey, a lumber dealer in Watertown, but by about 1870 he had leased Winthrop's Wharf and established his own lumber business there. Lumber was delivered by schooner from Southern and Down Eastern points, feeding the construction boom that transformed Old Cambridge after the Civil War.



N. N. Stickney house and lumber wharf in 1873, before the extension of DeWolfe Street to Bow Street.
Source: G.M. Hopkins, *Atlas of the City of Cambridge, Mass.*

N. N. STICKNEY & CO.
DEALERS IN
Rough and Dressed Lumber,
LIME, CEMENT, HAIR, AND PLASTER.
 Also Gutters, Conductors, Mouldings, Laths, Shingles, Pickets, C. Posts, etc.
WINTHROP WHARF,
DE WOLF STREET, - - - OLD CAMBRIDGE.
N. N. STICKNEY. WILLIAM E. SAUNDERS.

Advertisement for Nathaniel Stickney's lumber yard on Winthrop's Wharf, at the foot of DeWolfe Street (1874 Cambridge Directory).

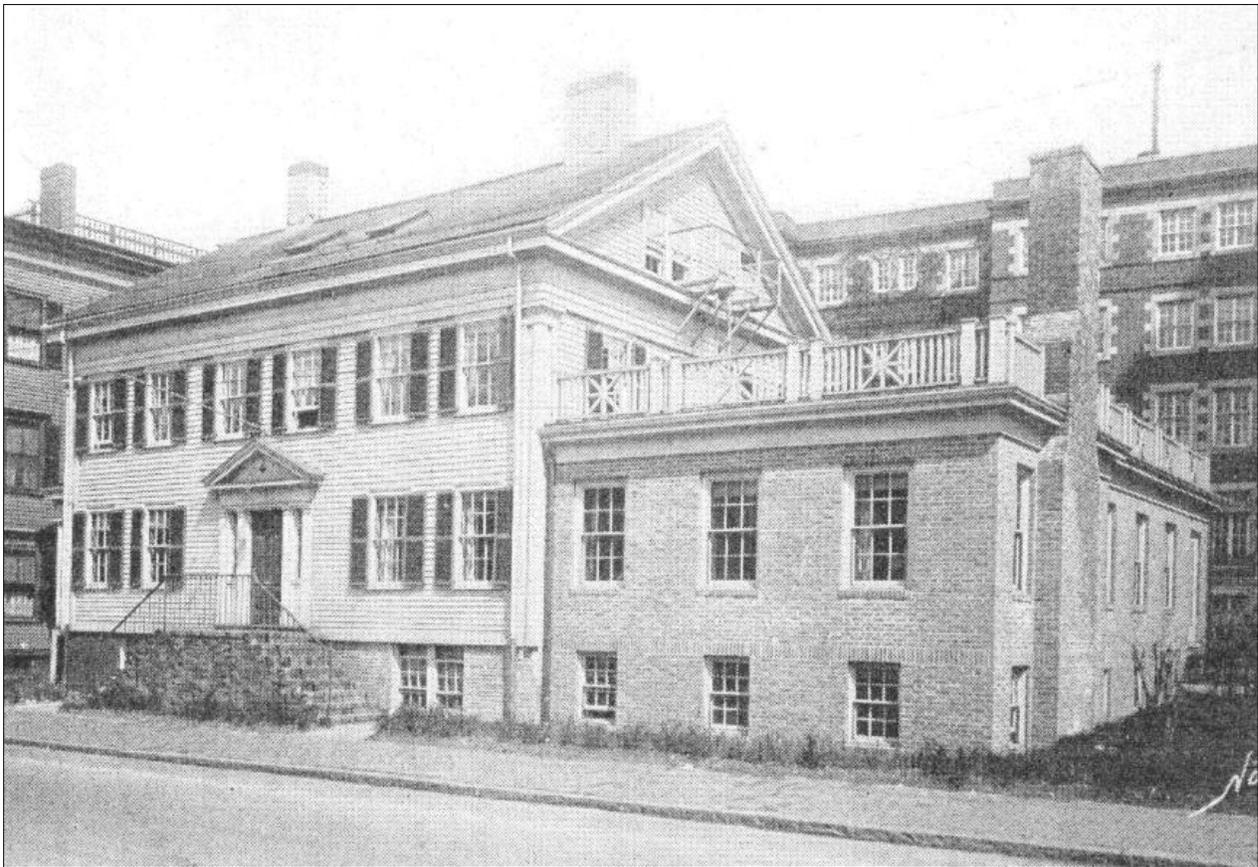


The industrial waterfront of Old Cambridge, looking downstream from the chimney of the Boston Elevated Railway power plant in 1897. A schooner is unloading bulk cargo at Sargent's Wharf. Winthrop's Wharf and Stickney's lumber sheds are just downstream, next to Harvard's boathouses. Source: Harvard University Archives.

Beginning in about 1895, the Cambridge Park Commission improved the riverbank and constructed Charles River Road, the precursor to Memorial Drive. After Stickney's death in 1897, the house was acquired by the University Associates, a group of Harvard alumni who were secretly buying properties between Mt. Auburn Street and the river on behalf of Harvard University. Harvard razed dozens of houses to create the River Houses, but the university apparently had no interest in the Stickney property, and the University Associates sold it in 1926. By this time the location could have been considered an extension of the Gold Coast of Harvard student clubs and once-private dormitories. A Roxbury property developer intended to clear the site and erect a three-story building but died before he could do so. The mortgage holder recovered the property

and sold it to the Speakers Club, an undergraduate club that was one of about 28 such organizations that renovated or built clubhouses in Harvard Square between 1887 and 1956.

The Speakers Club was organized about 1909, and until 1915 it occupied the former home of Louis and Elizabeth Agassiz on Quincy Street where the Fogg Museum now stands. The club first moved to Holyoke Street, but when Harvard purchased that property it acquired 45 Mt. Auburn Street. In 1928 the club retained architect Harry J. Carlson (1869-1957) to convert the Stickney house. Carlson, a partner in the firm of Coolidge & Carlson, was not a Harvard graduate but had designed several distinguished buildings for the university community. An 1892 graduate of MIT, he had also worked for Cram & Ferguson and McKim, Mead & White. Carlson combined the two sides of Stickney's double house and added a one-story brick club room, which may have been intended as the base for a taller structure. The addition remains unchanged except for the removal of a roof balustrade.



Speakers Club, 43-45 Mt. Auburn Street, 1935. Source: Harvard College Class Album.

The Speakers Club merged with the Pi Eta Club, but its graduate board closed the facility in 1990. After a failed merger with the Sigma Chi Club the club sold the property to the Foundation for Civic Leadership in 2002.

The Foundation for Civic Leadership (FCL), founded by Harvard graduate Ian Simmons, accommodated a variety of activist organizations that made their home there, including such groups as Art Without Borders, Avaaz, Boston Mobilization, The Foundation for Civic Leadership, Sustainable Endowments, The Pacific Forest Trust and The Catholic Democrats. In 2009 these groups

protested a proposed sale of the building; the deal fell through when Harvard's Undergraduate Council could not raise the \$4 million sale price or the \$400,000 estimated cost of renovations.

In April 2024 FCL announced a plan to close The Democracy Center on July 1 for renovations. Activist groups and community organizers who had been users of the space, claiming an existential threat, protested the closing and secured a remonstrance from the Cambridge City Council.

Relationship of Property to Landmark Criteria

The purpose of landmark designation is described in Ch. 2.78.140 of the City Code, which was enacted in 1983:

... 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, 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 desirable place in which to live and work.

The enabling ordinance states:

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 its 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 ... (Chapter 2.78.180.A)

The Nathaniel Stickney House meets criterion (1) for its associations with the architectural, cultural, economic, and social history of the City, including its origins as a Greek Revival Style house constructed by lumber dealer and wharf operator Nathaniel Stickney and its associations with the Gold Coast of Harvard dormitories and clubs, and criterion (2) as a rare surviving mid-19th century wood-frame structure in Harvard Square.

Proposed Standards and Guidelines for Review of Alterations and Additions

Under the neighborhood conservation district and landmark designation ordinance, Ch. 2.78, Art. III, the Historical Commission is charged with reviewing all construction, demolition or alterations that affects the exterior architectural features (other than color) of a designated landmark. Recent amendments to Ch. 2.78 (2023) amended the commission's jurisdiction in the case of new construction or additions to existing structures in neighborhood conservation districts, meaning that the commission cannot consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of additions or new construction or impose dimensional or setback requirements in addition to those required by applicable provision of the zoning ordinance for properties protected solely by their inclusion in the Harvard Square Conservation District. Landmark designation of the building would re-establish commission oversight of the size and shape of potential new construction or additions on the lot.

This section of the report describes exterior architectural features that are among the characteristics that led to consideration of the property as a landmark. Except as the Order designating or amending the landmark may otherwise provide, the exterior architectural features described in this report should be preserved and/or enhanced in any proposed alteration or construction that affects those features of the landmark.

The General Standards described below represent current best practices in historic preservation and are generally applicable to any designated property. The following Guidelines are to be consulted during consideration of applications for Certificates of Appropriateness for alterations to the landmark described in this report. The standards and guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive or comprehensive; the Commission must use its collective judgement in determining the appropriateness of any proposed project.

In this context the verb **should** indicates a recommended course of action; the verbs **shall or must** indicate those actions that are specifically required to preserve and protect significant architectural elements.

A. General Standards¹

Subject to review and approval of alterations to exterior architectural features under the terms of this report, the following standards shall apply:

1. The historic character of a property must be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property must be avoided.
2. Changes and additions to the landmark which have taken place over time are evidence of the history of the property and its context. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right and, if so, that significance should be recognized and respected.
3. Significant historic and architectural features of the landmark, including but not limited to those identified in this report, should be preserved if practicable in a manner consistent with these standards.
4. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement, the new feature must match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials.
5. The use of synthetic replacement materials is discouraged, except when substituted for perishable features exposed to the weather or when necessary to accommodate the effects of climate change.²
6. Chemical and/or physical treatments (such as sandblasting) must not be used in a manner that damages historic materials. The surface cleaning of structures must be undertaken using the gentlest means possible and the results should preserve the patina that characterizes the age of the structure. Applications of paint or masonry

¹ This section was adopted as a general standard by the Historical Commission on January 6, 2022.

² See *Cambridge Historical Commission Practices in Reviewing Synthetic Trim and Gutters*, June 26, 2018

preservative solutions will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis; painting masonry surfaces will be considered only when there is documentary evidence that this treatment was used at some point in the history of the property.

7. Architectural (building façade) lighting, streetscape lighting, and signage lighting, when allowed by a Certificate of Appropriateness, should reinforce definitive characteristics of historic and contemporary architecture as well as create high quality 24-hour streetscapes. To achieve these goals, projects should minimize brightness, and light trespass, monitor light color (temperature Kelvin), and focus lighting on significant features.

8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project should be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures must be undertaken.

9. Alterations or additions that may be needed to assure the continued use of the historic structure or site or that expand the volume or footprint of the structure should not radically change, obscure or destroy character defining spaces, materials, features or finishes. New additions should be considered only after it has been determined that project requirements cannot be successfully met by altering non-character-defining interior spaces.

10. Additions should reflect an explicit understanding of the architectural character of the historic building and its context. Additions should be designed in a manner that makes clear what is historic and what is new, but should not arbitrarily impose contrasting materials, scales, or design vocabularies. Design of the new work may be contemporary or may reference design motifs from the historic building. Regardless of the design approach, the result should appear as a harmonious whole.

a. Additions should respect the essential form of the historic building. Additions are best located at the rear and/or side of a historic building.

b. Additions should be considered in terms of their effect on the context of the site. Additions can contribute variety and interest in complex urban environments but should not distract from significant nearby structures.

c. Additions should not compromise the historic aspects, architectural significance, or the distinct character of the landmark, neighborhood, and environment.

d. Additions should be clearly differentiated from the historic building but still compatible in terms of materials, relationship of solids to voids, and color in relation to the main structure and/or surrounding significant structures.

e. Additions should cause the least possible loss of historic materials so that character-defining features are not obscured, damaged, or destroyed.

11. New construction on a designated property shall conform to the guidelines for alterations, where applicable.

12. Demolition of a designated structure can be allowed only as a last resort after all practicable measures have been taken to ensure preservation, or unless required to

comply with requirements certified by a duly authorized public officer to be necessary for public safety because of an unsafe or dangerous condition.

B. Guidelines for Review of Alterations at 45 Mt. Auburn Street

1. Architectural Character

Characteristic Greek Revival features of the Nathaniel Stickney House include its pedimented gable ends, corner pilasters, and entablature at the cornice. The front entry is Colonial Revival in style and is significant for its connections with the 1928 renovation into a clubhouse by architect Harry J. Carlson. The six-bay, center entrance facade features double-hung windows which may be original or date to the 1920s renovation. The house is covered with vinyl siding, but original wood cladding remains underneath. The ell and brick 1928 addition are distinctly secondary to the main house. The massing, character, and details of the main house must be respected; the ell and brick clubhouse addition may be considered not significant, and their preservation is not a priority.

2. Site Development.

The current building footprint fills much of the constrained lot, bounded on three sides by streets and a two-story structure with minimal setback to the side. Subject to zoning requirements and the Certificate of Appropriateness process, repositioning the building on the lot and construction of a new addition could be allowed even if it requires removal of the present ell and brick addition.

3. Alterations

All publicly visible exterior alterations are subject to the Certificate of Appropriateness process.

a. Exterior surfaces and features

Original exterior materials shall be preserved insofar as practicable. Repairs should be incremental and executed with materials and surfaces matching the original when possible. Some exterior material may no longer be sound. In conformance with past practice, replacement of features in ground contact may be made with approved synthetic materials. All replacement elements must match originals in dimensions and appearance. The removal of artificial siding and restoration or replication of original wood siding and trim is strongly recommended.



Wooden clapboard exposed from break in overlaying siding.

b. Fenestration

Most if not all historic window openings appear to retain historic dimensions. Replacement windows may be allowed but should replicate historic patterns and details as closely as possible. Inappropriate gable end window openings should be reduced to accommodate single double hung windows comparable to those in the rest of the house.

c. Roof

The gable roof is covered with three-tab asphalt shingles. The twin bubble skylights, if replaced, should be replaced with flat units to minimize their visual impact from the street. Additional skylights may be appropriate. Rooftop mechanicals are not permitted on the sloped roof. Solar panels, if any, should be mounted close to the roof plane and not less than 18" from the sides and ridge.

d. Entrances and front porch

The current main entrance is accessed by brick steps with iron railings. Replacement of the entry steps and railings would be permitted with synthetic materials insofar as they replicate period- and style-appropriate profiles. Accessibility is of great importance, and the Commission would support reasonable accommodations to make the building accessible, either within the main structure or with additions.



Existing entry and stairs fronting Mt. Auburn Street.

e. Interior features

Although interior features are not subject to the jurisdiction of the Historical Commission, the owner should be encouraged to preserve significant features where they exist or donate them to architectural salvage companies for reuse. New structural elements and rehabilitation of the framing may be required. Interior floor levels may be altered so long as these changes would not impact the fenestration and proportions of the exterior features.

f. Architectural lighting

Architectural lighting should conform to the general standards for review.

4. Selective Demolition

The ell of the Stickney house, while original to the building's construction, is not considered to be architecturally or historically significant. The Commission may approve removal of the ell in the context of an appropriate program for an addition or new construction, whether or not the building remains on its present site.

The rear dormer of the Stickney house is not significant, and its removal or alteration may be considered appropriate. Alternatively, the dormer or a new rear dormer could be useful to connect the third floor of the Stickney House to a possible future rear addition.

The brick clubroom wing of the house, although designed by a prominent architect, does not contribute to the significance of the Stickney house either architecturally or historically. Removal of the wing may be deemed acceptable in the context of an appropriate development plan.

5. Relocation

Given the lot conditions of 45 Mt. Auburn Street, removal of the ell and additions and relocation of the Stickney House to front DeWolfe Street would allow the building to remain a focal point for the site and create a viable footprint for an attached addition or detached new construction and restore views of the presently concealed side elevations.

The main block of the Stickney house is 42' wide and 31' deep. If it is relocated to face DeWolfe Street with a 5' front setback the remaining buildable footprint (not counting setbacks) would be roughly 50' square.

If the building is relocated to face DeWolfe Street, the top of the new foundation should be placed at approximately the same height above grade, measured in relation to the height of the present foundation at Mt. Auburn Street, and faced with water-struck red brick to match the appearance of the present foundation.

6. Additions and New Construction

Evaluation of an addition should consider the architectural character of the building and its immediate surroundings and conform to the general guidelines for additions outlined above.

Construction of a new building under the zoning now in effect requires a different design calculus. In the O-3 district within the Harvard Square Overlay District, an office building could be as high as 80', while a residential structure could reach

120'. The immediate sur-

roundings of the Stickney house demonstrate a mixture of densities, with one-, two- and a four-story building on the same block and a range of five- and six-story brick dormitories across Bow Street. The massive St. Paul's Church faces the site across DeWolfe Street, while the low-rise Kerry Corner neighborhood abuts the site to the southeast. Apart from Quincy House, the prospect toward the southwest is of predominantly low-rise buildings with the Lowell House tower in the distance.



Ell as viewed from Bow Street.

Of the immediately adjoining buildings, the tower of Adams House is 115' high, while Westmorely Court is 60'. The nave of St. Paul's church is 56' high, and its campanile reaches 125'. The dormitory wing of Quincy House is 70' high. Somewhat further away, the Leverett House tower is 12 stories, or 120', while Mather's tower and the Peabody Terrace towers are 20 stories, or 200'. The Smith Campus Center has ten stories and is 105' high.³

At and near street level, the deferential criteria for additions should apply, while at higher levels the design should be considered in a broader context. The appropriate height of a new building adjacent to the Stickney house should be considered in the context of the Gold Coast subdistrict. A 120' tower would be higher than the cupola of Adams House and about as high as the campanile of St. Paul's Church, while a 60' building would be about as high as the church itself. New construction to the full height allowed by zoning could block one of the most important sight lines in the city, the easterly view down Mt. Auburn Street. On the other hand, the Commission must consider the broad public interest in supporting housing construction, affordable or otherwise.



Figure I. View east on Mt. Auburn Street, 2017.

Google Streetview

Recommendations

On November 6, 2025, the Historical Commission voted unanimously to accept the CHC staff recommendation in favor of the proposed landmark designation of the Nathaniel Stickney house, with the provision that the designation a) explicitly recognize the appropriateness of removing the ell and clubroom addition, relocating the house to face DeWolfe Street and restoring the house to

³ All dimensions from Sanborn Map Company atlases but not otherwise confirmed.

its appearance as renovated in 1928, subject to Commission approval of construction materials, details, and site improvements, and b) consider the appropriateness of construction of a new building that conforms to the zoning in effect on the date of designation, explicitly retaining the Commission's authority to impose conditions as to the height and setbacks, and subject to Commission approval of exterior features such as balconies, cantilevers, fenestration, materials, and construction details under the Harvard Square Conservation District guidelines.

**Proposed Order Designating the Nathaniel Stickney House
at 45 Mt. Auburn Street as a Cambridge Landmark**

ORDERED,

That the Nathaniel Stickney House at 45 Mt. Auburn Street be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter 2.78, Article III, Section 2.78.180 of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on November 6, 2025. The premises so designated is defined as lot 49 on assessor's map 133 and the structures thereon.

This designation is justified by the significance of the building with respect to the architectural, cultural, economic, and social history of the City, including its origins as a Greek Revival Style house constructed by lumber dealer and wharf operator Nathaniel Stickney and its associations with the Gold Coast of Harvard dormitories and clubs, and as a rare surviving mid-19th century wood-frame structure in Harvard Square.

The effect of this designation shall be that review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability shall be required before any construction activity can take place on the designated premises or any action can be taken affecting the appearance of the premises, that would in either case be visible from a public way. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the provisions of the Final Landmark Designation Report dated November 24, 2025, with respect to the designated premises, and by the applicable sections of Chapter 2.78, Article III, of the Cambridge Municipal Code.



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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URL: <https://www.cambridgema.gov/historic>



Chandra Harrington, *Chair*; Elizabeth Lyster, *Vice Chair*; Charles Sullivan, *Executive Director*
Joseph V. Ferrara, Gavin W. Kleespies, Paula A. Paris, Kyle Sheffield, Yuting Zhang, *Members*
Florrie Darwin, Scott Kyle, Michael Rogove, *Alternates*

December 1, 2025

To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager

From: Charles Sullivan, Executive Director

Re: Final Landmark Designation Report, 45 Mt. Auburn Street

I am transmitting the Final Landmark Designation Report for the Nathaniel Stickney House at 45 Mt. Auburn Street with the Historical Commission's recommendation to the City Council that the property be designated as a Cambridge Landmark under Ch. 2.78, Art. II of the City Code.

The Nathaniel Stickney House, constructed in 1846, is significant as a rare extant wood-frame residence in Harvard Square. It is also significant for its association with Nathaniel Stickney, a prominent lumber dealer and wharf operator, and with the clubs and dormitories of Harvard's Gold Coast. The property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing resource in the Harvard Square Historic District, established in 1988, and it is included in the Harvard Square Conservation District established in 2000.

The designation, which can be accomplished by a simple majority vote adopting the attached Order, recognizes the development potential of the site. It will maintain current protection for the publicly visible exterior of the Nathaniel Stickney House from inappropriate alterations. The proposed designation offers approval in principle for removal of the ell and one-story brick addition as well as relocation of the house to the corner of DeWolfe Street to accommodate new construction, which would be subject to binding review as to size and shape as well as exterior appearance and materials. The Nathaniel Stickney House would then become Cambridge's 44th designated landmark.

Attachment



City of Cambridge

Agenda Item No. 4
IN CITY COUNCIL
January 12, 2026

ORDERED: That the Nathaniel Stickney House at 45 Mt. Auburn Street be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter 2.78, Article III, Section 2.78.180 of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on November 6, 2025. The premises so designated is defined as lot 49 on assessor's map 133 and the structures thereon.

This designation is justified by the significance of the building with respect to the architectural, cultural, economic, and social history of the City, including its origins as a Greek Revival Style house constructed by lumber dealer and wharf operator Nathaniel Stickney and its associations with the Gold Coast of Harvard dormitories and clubs, and as a rare surviving mid-19th century wood-frame structure in Harvard Square.

The effect of this designation shall be that review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability shall be required before any construction activity can take place on the designated premises or any action can be taken affecting the appearance of the premises, that would in either case be visible from a public way. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the provisions of the Final Landmark Designation Report dated November 24, 2025, with respect to the designated premises, and by the applicable sections of Chapter 2.78, Article III, of the Cambridge Municipal Code.