



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

CMA 2026-123
IN CITY COUNCIL
May 4, 2026

To the Honorable, the City Council:

I am writing to recommend the following appointments to the Conservation Commission, effective May 4, 2026:

Appointment(s):

Full Member (formerly Associate):

- Jim Gerstle – three (3) year term

Associate Members:

- Rob Vandenabeele – one (1) year term
- Juliet Simpson – one (1) year term

The Conservation Commission also recommends the reappointment of one (1) current member. They have made valuable contributions and would appreciate the opportunity to continue serving.

Reappointment(s):

- Kathryn Hess - three (3) year term

Conservation Commission

The Conservation Commission administers the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (310 CMR 10.0), reviewing, permitting, and inspecting projects in or adjacent to Cambridge's wetlands, floodplains, and water bodies. The Commission also plays an important role in implementing the Massachusetts Stormwater Management Policy and Standards. The seven (7) members of the Conservation Commission are appointed by the City Manager to three-year terms and are served by one permanent staff person, the Commission Director.

The City also began including Associate Members on the Commission in 2023. The State Department of Environmental Protection had recommended that Conservation Commissions consider adding Associate Members to help build a pipeline for future full members. The Associate Members are not voting members of the Commission but participate in all aspects of project review.



The Commission currently has six (6) diverse members (1 vacancy):

- Members reside in West Cambridge, North Cambridge, Mid Cambridge, and Wellington/Harrington Neighborhoods
- Professions vary widely including Legislative Experience, Landscape Architect, Environmental Compliance, and Environmental Attorneys.

The City Manager's Office posted a call for applications on December 2, 2025, with a closing date of January 9, 2026. The opportunity was also shared through City communications. A total of twelve (12) applications were received, and five (5) candidates were selected for interviews, based on their experience, knowledge and interest. An interview panel of City Staff from Public Works' Engineering Division, including the Conservation Commission Director, considered applicants' qualifications both individually and in relation to other Commission members. The interview panel unanimously recommends the candidates for appointment.

Appointments:

Jim Gerstle – 3 years

Mr. Gerstle is a retired Chemical Engineer with time and desire to serve his community. Jim was appointed as an Associate Member in 2024 and contributed greatly during this time. Jim has never missed a meeting. Jim's professional background, attention to detail and reliability are valuable for our work.

Rob Vandenabeele – Associate 1-year

Mr. Vandenabeele is an active environmentalist, who has completed the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions Fundamentals Certificate; as well as certificates in horticulture, urban forestry, and conservation through the Harvard Extension School.

Juliet Simpson – Associate 1-year

Associate; Ms. Simpson is an aquatic ecologist working in the academic and private sectors on human impacts on wetlands and waterways. Currently, she is an advisory specialist for wetlands and coastal resilience in the Sea Grant program at MIT.

Reappointments:

Kathryn Hess – 3 years

Ms. Hess is a resident of Neighborhood 9 and brings over 21 years of experience as a hydrologist with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). She also served with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Inspector General, where she evaluated the effectiveness of environmental programs, with a primary focus on water quality and contamination. Ms. Hess has

strong knowledge of the Wetlands Protection Act. Ms. Hess has been a valued Conservation Commission member for over 4 years and a member of the Fresh Pond Advisory Board for almost 2 years. Kathryn is an asset to the Commission.

I appreciate the willingness of these community members to serve as members of the Conservation Commission, and, with your approval, look forward to their appointments.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Yi-An Huang". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Yi-An Huang
City Manager