



# City of Cambridge

## Executive Department

**YI-AN HUANG**  
City Manager

CMA 2025 #186  
**IN CITY COUNCIL**  
July 23, 2025

To the Honorable, the City Council:

I am hereby requesting a transfer in the amount of \$20,000,000 from the General Fund Employee Benefits Department Salary and Wages account to the General Fund Reserve Department Extraordinary Expenditures account to fund expenses related to the demolition of 221 Mount Auburn Street. Once the City's FY 26 Free Cash amount is certified by the state, I anticipate submitting a recommendation to the City Council for a Free Cash appropriation to replenish the Employee Benefits Department Salary and Wages account.

### **Background**

In 2023, significant structural deficiencies were uncovered at the nine-story Riverview Condominiums at 221 Mount Auburn Street. Engineers, conducting exploratory work for roof and drainage repairs, discovered that the building was not constructed according to its original design. The Riverview-in-Cambridge Condominium Trust (Condo Trust) subsequently hired SGH, Inc. to assess the concrete slabs. Through visual observations, drone photography, non-destructive testing, and examinations at exploratory openings, SGH, Inc. identified critical issues:

- **Low Reinforcement:** Steel reinforcement was placed lower than specified in the design drawings.
- **Low Concrete Compressive Strength:** The concrete's strength was lower than required.
- **Utility Penetrations:** The concrete slabs had penetrations and alterations that were not part of the original design.

These issues, particularly the low reinforcement and concrete strength, were found to be widespread throughout the building.

With a comprehensive understanding of the "as-built" conditions, SGH performed a structural analysis of the building's concrete slabs. This analysis revealed a "very low (to potentially zero) safety factor" when the slabs are subjected to code-required loads. These loads include the building's weight (structure, walls, floors, roofing), occupancy loads (people and their possessions), and environmental loads like snow. The building was vacated in December of 2024. After assessing repair options, the condominium association determined that it was not feasible to renovate and that the building must be demolished.

The Condo Trust shared SGH's report with the City's Inspectional Services Department (ISD) on April 28, 2025, and met with City leadership on June 4, 2025. During this meeting, the Condo Trust representative and their consultants expressed concerns about the structural condition of the building, especially with additional snow loads. Subsequent analysis indicated the building has numerous slab-column connections that are potentially dangerous even without snow loads.



City leadership began meeting weekly with the Condo Trust representative and their consultants, including the structural engineers who had conducted the analysis, and a contractor experienced in this type of demolition. The City also engaged an independent engineering firm, STV Consultants, to provide expert advice to City staff.

The City's primary objective in this involvement was and is to protect public health and safety. Based on the information shared by the Condo Trust representative and their consultants, as well as the City's independent engineering firm, the City determined that the necessary course of action was to exercise its authority under state law (M.G.L. c. 143, § 6) and declare the building unsafe and in need of demolition. On June 27, 2025, the Commissioner of ISD formally notified owners that the building must be removed and gave them until July 3, 2025 to comply with the order. The Condo Trust representative and their lawyers informed the City that the Condo Trust has exhausted all avenues to secure the financing necessary to perform the demolition and cannot comply with the removal order.

On July 7, 2025, the City convened a Board of Survey, consisting of the City Engineer, Acting Fire Chief, the Building Commissioner and an independent engineer (STV Consultants) to assess the property and issued a report that confirmed the building needs to be demolished in order to protect the health and safety of the public.

The City has also been coordinating with state partners, including the Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP), Department of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM), Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), and Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR). In addition, City staff began meeting one-on-one with direct abutters and hosted an in-person community meeting on July 10, 2025, to update the neighborhood on the situation. The presentation from the community meeting is attached. Another community meeting (virtual) is scheduled for July 24, 2025, at 6:30 p.m.

With the completion of the Board of Survey process, the City will be seeking a court order requiring the condominium owners to perform the necessary demolition work or to confirm that the owners and Condo Trust have exhausted all options for performing the necessary demolition work. The City will also be seeking an order that if the owners either refuse or are unable to perform the work, that the City is authorized to do so and to recover its costs, pursuant to MGL c.143.

### **Estimated Costs**

The City is moving urgently to demolish the building in order to protect public health and safety. While many unknowns remain, securing this \$20,000,000 appropriation is critical to proceed with contracts for a structural engineering consultant, an environmental consultant, and a demolition contractor. Staff will be closely managing expenditures, but this is an incredibly complicated project.

The estimated \$20,000,000 will fund:

- Development of a demolition plan addressing structural and environmental risks
- Required permitting, including with MassDEP for Non-Traditional Demolition
- Risk-reduction protocols during demolition
- A comprehensive traffic management plan
- Demolition of the building
- Safe disposal of debris, including asbestos-containing material

### **Process for Cost Recovery for Demolition of Riverview Condominiums**

The City of Cambridge will recover the costs associated with the demolition of the Riverview

Condominiums, including interest and any collection fees, directly from the property owners. This action is authorized by Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Chapter 143, Section 9 and Chapter 139, Section 3A, which empower municipalities to collect expenses incurred in addressing public health or safety nuisances and hazards.

Following the completion of the demolition, the City will issue bills to all the unit owners with their pro-rata share of the cost. Additionally, a statement of claim will be filed at the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, placing a lien on the properties. Any charges that remain unpaid at the time of the FY27 tax billing (fall 2026), will be added to the real estate tax bills of each condominium. Once added, these charges will be collected as part of the regular tax bill.

Attachments: Presentation from July 10, 2025 Community Meeting

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yi-An Huang', written in a cursive style.

Yi-An Huang  
City Manager