



# City of Cambridge

## Executive Department

**YI-AN HUANG**  
City Manager

CMA 2025 #287  
**IN CITY COUNCIL**  
December 8, 2025

To the Honorable, the City Council:

I am writing in response to AR 25-59 regarding the city owned property at 25 Lowell Street.

### **History of the Property**

The property at 25 Lowell Street, was the former Lowell School. The building was constructed in 1883 and was used as a wood-framed schoolhouse by the Cambridge Public Schools through 1979. The building is on the National Register of Historic Places and is the only remaining structure of its kind in Cambridge. The building has been leased to the New School of Music (NSM) since 1980. The NSM sublets a portion of the building to the Cambridge Art Association.

The parcel is approximately 11,990 square feet and the building is approximately 5,900 square feet, excluding the basement.

### **Current Lease to New School of Music**

The New School of Music was founded in 1976 by composer, conductor, and musician Nicholas Van Slyck. The NSM was originally located on Concord Avenue, before moving to 25 Lowell Street in 1980. The school has approximately 450 students, 78% of whom live in Cambridge.

The New School of Music pays rent to the City equivalent to 8% of their registration fees, minus a portion that is used for building repairs. The annual payment to the City is approximately \$25,000. The NSM is responsible for regular maintenance of the building and has been an active steward in maintaining this historic structure securing grant funding to keep up with the exterior painting, roofing, etc. Even with those efforts, the historic wood-frame building will likely require more significant upgrades to address plumbing, HVAC, accessibility, etc. in the next 10 to 20 years. Those renovations could easily cost \$12M to \$15M (based on 2025 construction costs) and are not currently identified in the City's capital plan.

### **City's Disposition Ordinance**

In 1990 the City Council passed the Disposition Ordinance, 2.110.010, which outlines the process required to dispose of City property either through the sale or leasing of said property. The purpose of the ordinance is to ensure that City property is used in a way that best serves the public purpose; that fair market value is received for the private use of public property; and that City property is disposed of



without favoritism. Disposition of City property also has to follow M.G.L. c.30B. However, the City can transfer property to the Affordable Housing Trust, Cambridge Housing Authority or Cambridge Redevelopment Authority without having to follow these processes.

Based on state law and local ordinances, if 25 Lowell Street were to be used for affordable housing, the City could transfer the property to the Affordable Housing Trust. If 25 Lowell Street were to be leased or sold for other purposes, such as for use by non-profit organizations, it would need to go through the Disposition Process outlined in the City's Disposition Ordinance and comply with G.L. c.30B. This would include:

- Preparation of a report evaluating alternative uses for the parcel, including
  - A fair analysis of how the greatest public benefit can be obtained from the property in question.
  - At least one community meeting
  - Financial impact of each alternative
  - Existing zoning status of the property
  - Development potential of the property
  - Description of development plans
  - Recommended financial arrangements
- Planning Board Hearing on the report
- Recommendations by both the City Manager and Planning Board in response to the above report to the City Council for the lease or sale of the property
- City Council public hearing and vote to allow the disposition of the property
- A procurement process pursuant to G.L. c.30B, which requires an open and fair competition where the City would establish the value of the property, the criteria and terms of a sale, then accept and evaluate bids and award the contract for the property.

### **Next Steps**

Understanding that the process required for disposition of City property varies significantly if the future use of the property is affordable housing compared to other uses, it will be helpful to better understand the potential for affordable housing at this site, as well as the needs of the non-profits that currently call this location home.

In the next 3 months, City staff will develop concept plans to help evaluate how the site could be used for affordable housing and what an affordable housing use could look like at this location. City staff will also meet with the New School of Music and the Cambridge Art Association to better understand their space needs.

We will come back to the City Council in spring 2026 with high level alternatives for this site and a proposed process for further consideration.

Very truly yours,



Yi-An Huang  
City Manager