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Raccoons are becoming domestic animals, but not yet pets

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CAMBRIDGE DAY

THE WEEK OF JAN. 15 – JAN. 22 2026 FREE

Self-defense claimed in stabbing

By MICHAEL F. FITZGERALD

MEDFORD, Mass. — Cambridge District Court prosecutors on Friday charged Victor J. Rivas with assault and battery with a dangerous weapon leading to serious bodily injury and with carrying a dangerous weapon. Rivas, 51, was involved in an altercation on Tuesday night in an apartment at 116 Norfolk St. in Cambridge that led to a fatality. Rivas pled not guilty through his public defender, who argued that Rivas had acted in self-defense.

Assistant District Attorney Jacob McCrindle told Associate District Court Justice Kareem A. Morgan that the state was continuing to investigate whether a charge of murder or manslaughter was warranted. He said there was some evidence corroborating the defendant's claim that he had acted in self-defense.

McCrindle and public defender Carolyn McGowan provided more details about the incident, which was said to have happened during a marijuana purchase. Rivas had been admitted to the building by another resident, a woman, who was in the studio apartment with the decedent, who has not been named. Rivas and the decedent then went into a bathroom, where the other resident heard an argument ensue.



Michael F. Fitzgerald

Victor J. Rivas and his attorney faced the judge at his arraignment in Cambridge District Court, Jan. 9, 2026.

The surveillance camera in the building's lobby then showed Rivas "fleeing" the building, according to McCrindle, followed quickly by the decedent, who fell in the lobby. The victim was able to describe Rivas to police, who had been dispatched at approximately 7:52 PM in response to a 911 call reporting that a man had been stabbed.

Fire and Emergency Medical Services responders brought the man to a local hospital, where he later died.

McCrindle told the court that police found Rivas nearby and arrested him. "They saw he had blood on his face and hands. He notified the police he had been robbed."

McGowan emphasized that Rivas immediately told police about the robbery, that the man had held a knife to his throat and pushed him against the wall. Further, the woman who had let Rivas in said at one point the door to the bathroom opened and she could see Rivas being held against the wall. A knife alleged to be the decedent's was found in two pieces on the bathroom floor, and the struggle had been violent enough to dislodge the toilet seat.

See SELF-DEFENSE, Page 3

CRLS students reflect on a semester without cell phones

By JULIA CARPI

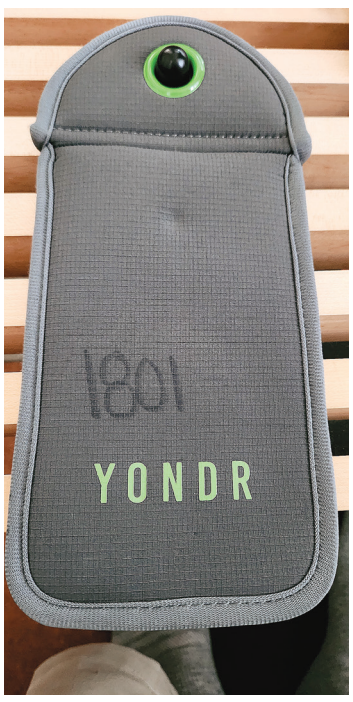
Students at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (CRLS) have just completed their first semester without their cell phones during the school day.

Under a new policy rolled out at the start of the school year, students lock their cell phones in Yondr pouches — lockable bags often used at concerts and other live events to limit device usage — at the beginning of each school day. Students lock the pouches with magnetic devices stationed at the school's main entrances, and carry the locked pouch with them throughout the day, according to the CRLS Student Handbook.

To accommodate the school's open campus, the policy allows students to unlock their phones for use during off-campus lunch and relock them when they return for class.

The policy came with a learning curve, according to student members of the school committee Eva Asraf and Zihaam Jama.

"In the beginning of the year, it took some more time to get to class, simply because the whole process was so new, and it was a little bit unorganized," said Asraf, a senior. "But I think that with time, everyone adapted to the process, and it's become a lot more efficient."



Michael F. Fitzgerald

A Yondr pouch used by Cambridge Rindge and Latin students to be cell-phone free at school

Jama, also a senior, added that long lines getting into school were "hectic" but after a few weeks students adjusted.

Still, students generally seem to feel unenthused about the bell-to-bell aspect of the policy, which mandates that a student cannot check their phone throughout the school day unless they go off-campus for lunch period.

"It's not great," said Sian Kim, a sophomore, about the new CRLS policy. "I don't get why the school decided to do this — it's the fault of the person if they can't keep from using their cell phone in class."

Asraf said she noticed the effect of the policy most during lockdown and fire drills, when she realized she would not have her phone to contact someone in the event of an emergency.

Cell phones bring chaos, not safety

Administrators told students that in most cases, having a cell phone in an emergency situation does not increase safety, Jama said. "[School administrators] said that you're not supposed to have your phone in those moments. As much as you want to contact your parents and make sure you're safe, it just causes more chaos," she said.

The policy does have exemptions for students that require personal devices for medical needs, and an "alternative plan, such as a non-locking pouch" will be set up for such students.

See CELL PHONES, Page 4

CRLS hockey scores fundraising victory



Alex Degterev

Goalie Owen Goldstein led Cambridge Rindge and Latin's Hockey Fights Cancer fundraising.

By ALEX DEGTEREV

The Cambridge Rindge and Latin boys' and girls' hockey teams may have split their games in their third annual Hockey Fights Cancer fundraiser, but both were the clear winners when it comes to fundraising.

The two teams have so far raised $15,445, best tally in the nation amongst those participating — a list which includes both collegiate and fellow youth league teams. Supporters can still donate to the campaign.

The money will be used to fund a litany of patient programs and support services through the American Cancer Society.

Hockey Fights Cancer started in 1998, when John Cullen, a center for the Tampa Bay Lightning, returned to the team after a year undergoing treatment for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. That sparked a partnership between the Lightning and the Moffitt Cancer Center Foundation, soon joined by the NHL and NHL Players Union.

Cambridge teams got involved in 2024 after Stew Wiley, head coach of the boys' hockey team, stepped away when a member of his family was diagnosed with cancer. One of the players on Wiley's team that year was Daniel Brightman.

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Charles River Task Force continues to hear community concerns

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Cambridge rents ease ▪ Legislature looks at inclusionary zoning

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Johnny Gandelman on embracing the unknown

CAMBRIDGE NEWS INC.

METRO

New city council is back in the zone

By JANE PETERSEN

Zoning continued to draw lively debate as the new Cambridge city council term kicked off on Monday.

The biggest matter of interest was a petition (ORD 2025 # 17) to create four new zoning districts in the corridor from Cambridge Street's intersection with Fayette Street through Inman Square to its East Cambridge intersection with East Street. This "upzoning" would increase the number of new units that could be built from 520 to 1190, according to the Cambridge Community Development Department. If approved, there could be up to eight stories of residential housing along the length of the corridor, up to 10 stories in parts of Inman Square, up to 12 stories near Webster Ave. and Windsor St., and up to 15 stories near Lechmere Square

The petition, which implements the findings of the Our Cambridge Street Study that brought together neighbors and policymakers between to establish goals from the area, was unanimously recommended to city council by the planning board during its October 21st meeting.

Supporters of the petition argued on Monday that increasing the housing capacity would improve affordability by helping meet the current demand.

"Tonight, I am calling for you to do well by our people, to do well by renters like myself, and to do well by process," said Dana Bullister, who was the first runner-up in November's election to join council. She made reference to the Our Cambridge Street Study, saying "The most important priority of our council should [be] addressing the single most important priority of our residents, which is addressing our severe housing crisis."

Opponents, however, say that the ordinance will displace current residents as buildings that are currently there would need to be torn down to build taller residences. And if the new buildings have fewer than ten units, they would also not need to have dedicated affordable housing units.

Lee Farris, president of the Cambridge Residents Alliance, argued that the new petition would result in six-floor residential buildings with no affordable units and no active ground floor. She said the new zones would not be subject to the City's "4+2" model, which only allows six stories if affordability requirements are met. "Many councilors have said that the inclusionary units are a key reason why they support the petition. Now it appears there will be very few," she said.

The petition was tabled at the end of last term, when three of the city's nine councilors voted against advancing it for further consideration. It was tabled for a second time during last night's meeting to allow the council more time to deliberate the measure, according to Mayor Siddiqui. The council has one more meeting, on January 26, before the petition expires on January 28th.

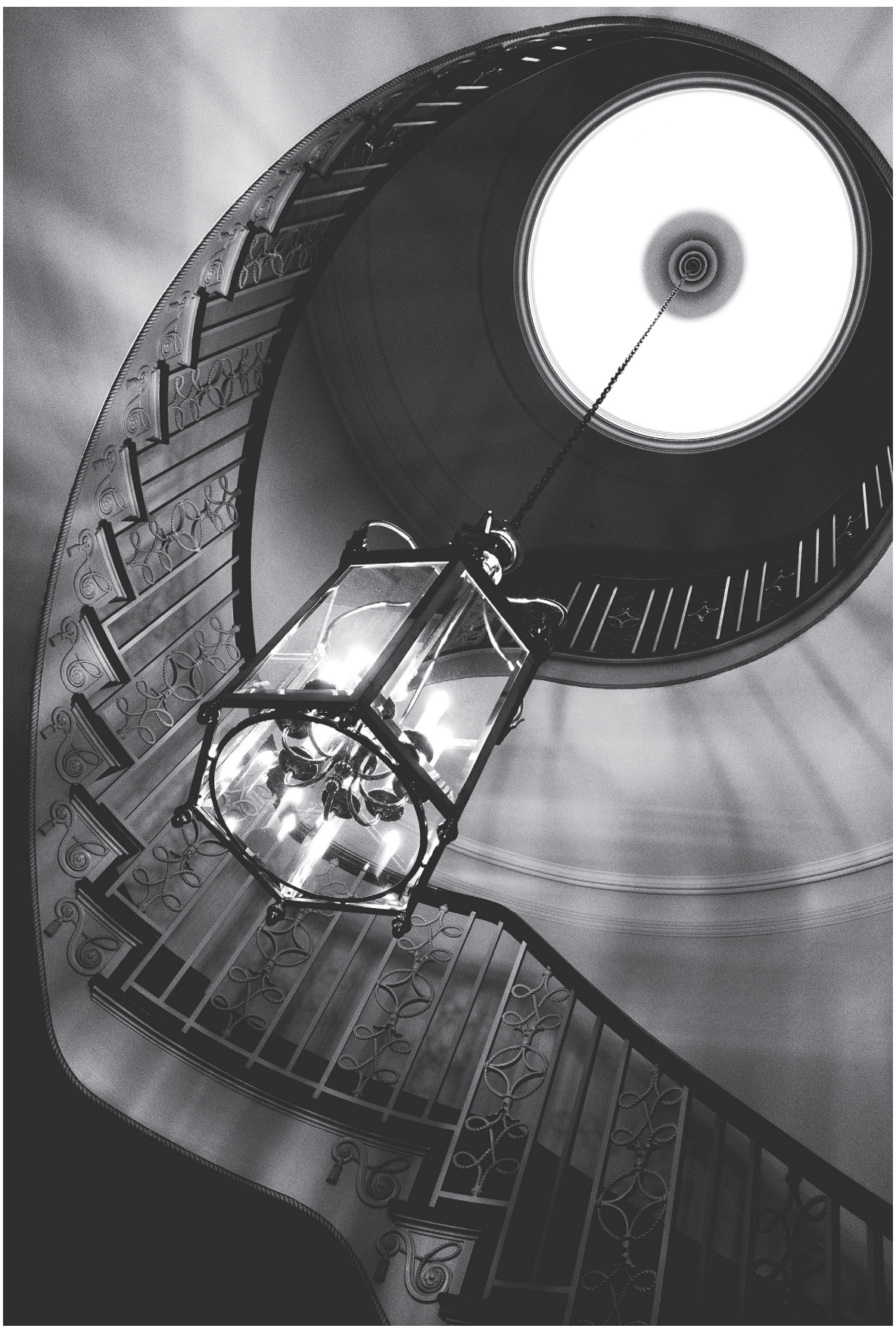
Beyond zoning, the City Council also considered and approved several policy orders (POs) on Monday night, all by unanimous vote. They include a PO to install speed humps along Fayerweather Street, and a PO for city staff to find ways to exclude certain residents near MBTA stops from getting street parking permits. Some councilors expressed the need to encourage public transit use in lieu of parking, given that residential buildings are no longer required to provide on-site spots.

"This policy order was inspired because there's extraordinary parking scarcity in many areas," said Councilor Cathie Zusy, one of its sponsors. She said making permits available to everyone moving into new housing would add to "parking misery."

One order aimed to explore new ideas for city memorials beyond park benches and street dedications, while another was also unanimously passed to mark 2026 as the Centennial Celebration of Negro History Week, which was celebrated during the second week of February from 1926 until it was expanded in 1976 to become Black History Month.

"This is an opportunity for our city to [look at] the contributions of individuals and how we got where we are," said Councilor E. Denise Simmons. She noted that it was important to tell the story of the people "whose sweat and labor not only built this city, but have had extraordinary contributions that have been erased and marginalized."

Community View



Photograph by Fern Nesson

Seek and find

It isn't the stairway to heaven, or the beacon of hope. But it does light the way to a certain rarefied kind of knowledge.

Here are two other hints: It's in a building constructed in the 1930s. And, it belongs to Harvard but is open to the public.

If you think you recognize this stately staircase, or you track it down, send a note to editor@cambridgeday.com with the subject line "Stairs." We will laud your expert eye in this space.

Submit your photos for Community View at this QR code. see this weeks' photo below.

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by CAMBRIDGE DAY

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METRO

Jehlen's seat draws a crowd



Bryce Vickmark Photography

State Rep. Christine Barber is looking to shift to the state Senate.

By SYDNEY WISE

Christine Barber and Neheet Trivedi are the most recent to bid for the state Senate seat that will be vacated by Patricia Jehlen this year, bringing the number of declared candidates to four. In addition, state Rep. Erika Uyterhoeven, whose district covers southern Somerville, told Cambridge Day she was exploring a run for the seat.

Jehlen, 82, has represented the Second Middlesex District, which covers Somerville and Medford plus parts of Cambridge and Winchester, for 20 years. She announced in December that she won't seek reelection this fall. Shortly thereafter, Somerville City Councilor Matt McLaughlin and Winchester entrepreneur and School Committee member Tom Hopcroft threw their hats into the ring.

Barber announced her intent to run in a press release Monday. "Our communities deserve a Senator who is ready on day one and laser focused on delivering for Somerville, Medford, Cambridge, and Winchester," she said in the release. "I will bring collaborative leadership and community voices to Beacon Hill."

Barber currently represents the 34th Middlesex District, which covers northern Somerville and much of Medford, in the House. She was elected to the post in 2014, prior to which she worked in health policy research and advocacy.

Data from the Massachusetts Office of Campaign Political Finance showed that Trivedi has also entered the race. A political committee under Trivedi's name was created on December 1.

Trivedi is listed as sales director at Cloud Factory, an AI consulting company. His LinkedIn profile states that he transitioned to director, client principal and general manager this month. A Cambridge resident, Trivedi has also worked on the Cambridge Climate Committee and the Massachusetts Avenue Planning Study Working Group.

More contenders may enter the race. Uyterhoeven is "seriously considering running for State Senate," she told Cambridge Day Tuesday, adding that she'd received encouragement to do so from the community.

McLaughlin, 44, was elected to the Somerville City Council in 2013, where he represents the city's eastern neighborhoods in Ward 1. He posted a statement to Instagram Dec. 9 saying "I'm running for State Senate because the cost of living is pushing working people out of Massachusetts. I spent my entire adult life fighting for affordability and giving voice to people who are often overlooked by those in power."

Hopcroft led the Mass Technology Leadership Council, a Dedham-based coordinating group for tech executives, from 2008-2022. In 2023 he left to found the Net Zero Institute, a decarbonization nonprofit based in Winchester. "This district needs someone who can work across neighborhoods and sectors, build coalitions around our shared values, and deliver results that benefit people across our communities," he said in a statement emailed to Cambridge Day.

Self-defense

From Page 1

McCrindle had noted that Rivas has "a significant record in terms of number of charges," mostly related to possession of a Class B substance (in Massachusetts, drugs like cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine).

He also has had driving offenses. His most recent charge was in 2017 for possession of a Class B substance with intent to distribute, for which Rivas completed a term of probation in February 2019.

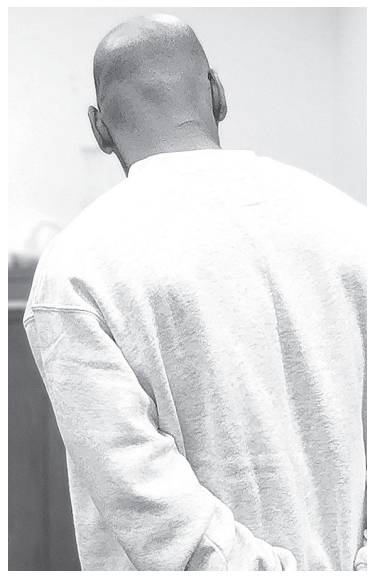
"Strong case" for self-defense

When McGowan addressed the court, she said that the defense had a "very strong case" that Rivas had acted in self-defense. She also noted he has been homeless for much of his adult life, has no assets, and was found with only $18 in his pockets. "He has had a difficult life," McGowan told the court. She said he was entering a transitional housing program and was about to start a vocational training program. "It would be devastating to him to lose transitional housing and access to this program."

In a dramatic moment, she pointed to Rivas and noted the bandages on his forehead, incurred during the altercation. Then she asked him to turn around, showing the judge a wound of an inch-and-a-half to two inches long on the back of Rivas's neck. "That's some kind of laceration. That was bleeding at the time [police found him]. His coat was sliced in a way that was consistent with his account of having been attacked."

She also said that when Rivas learned of the death, he reportedly fell to the ground, distraught.

The prosecution asked for $75,000 bail, arguing that even if the state did not pursue manslaughter or murder charges, the current charges "are still very serious charges that carry significant penalties."



Michael F. Fitzgerald

A laceration on the back of Victor Rivas's neck, cited in court Jan. 9, 2026 as an example of him being attacked.

Morgan, after conferring with the attorneys, set release at a $5,000 surety. He ordered home confinement to the transitional housing, but with bi-weekly windows of release for legal and medical services and essential items. Other conditions were that Rivas be fitted with a GPS device, that he stay away from 116 Norfolk and have no contact with the victim's family or any witnesses, and that he be subjected to random drug screens.

McGowan asked that that Rivas be released with a curfew that would allow him to attend a local vocational program in the Boston area that he is scheduled to start Jan. 14. Morgan said he could not grant that without knowing the expected schedule, but said he was open to considering it.

A pre-trial date was set for February 6.

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MARKET PULSE

Cambridge Sales 2025*

110	486	63
Singles	Condos	Multis

Somerville Sales 2025*

65	379	166
Singles	Condos	Multis

Source: MLS PIN statistics for "Market Pulse"

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METRO

Community concerns continue over Riverbend Park

By GANDHARVIKA GOPAL

After months of meetings, the Charles River Task Force begins the new year working toward a drafted report amid confusion and frustration over project goals and process. The task force, one of the latest efforts to reconcile contention over issues like road closings at Riverbend Park, will provide recommendations to state departments to better engage with local communities.

At meetings in November and December, members of the public and task force individuals questioned the group's methods for community engagement. Tensions over which communities are prioritized as stakeholders ran high at a Nov. 17 public hearing. "This is what failure looks like," one resident said. "This is a failure: an upset room."

At a virtual task force meeting on Dec. 1, members raised concern about outreach methods and project materials. Much of the meeting was a debate on internal processes, and members expressed confusion with the project. "What is this grand plan? We do not know the grand design of this mission," task force member Lawrence Adkins said. "We're trying to get somewhere where we all know where we're going."

Sasha Parodi with Metropolitan Area Planning Council, the consultant for the project, assured the group that the project is still in its initial phase. "We're at the widest part of this process. We've got all this information and now we're trying to understand it so we can start narrowing." The final goal of the task force is a report submitted to the state with recommendations to ensure engagement and improve communication with community members, particularly historically underrepresented communities. "How do we ensure voices that have often been marginalized are part of this process?" said state Rep. Marjorie Decker, the task force's creator.

Though echoing the same broad goal, the task force doesn't clearly define who its stakeholders are. Minutes from meetings in August and September show discussions about who is identified as a stakeholder and how people or institutions requesting to be stakeholders could be considered. That confusion played out at the Nov. 17 hearing and sparked similar conversations from past meetings on Riverbend Park about who is prioritized in decisions about river access.



Gandharvika Gopal

Charles River Task Force co-chairs Jonathan Guzman (standing, left) and Sasha Parodi at a public gathering last November.

Familiar themes

Task force co-chairs Jonathan Guzman and Monika Roy, who work in environmental justice for the state's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and DCR, respectively, led November's second of three public hearings. "All of your lived experiences help to shape this task force and what comes forth in the spring," Roy told the crowd of nearly 200 people gathered at Cambridge Community Center.

Some attendees disagreed on whose voices and experiences should be prioritized. Chris Cassa of the Memorial Drive Alliance noted that some possible stakeholders, particularly Harvard University, were not present. That drew objections from others in the crowd.

"This is the time for us to talk, because we were not allowed to talk," one Riverside resident said. Another emphasized that Riverside voices should be prioritized over students who would someday leave the area she calls home: "It's recreation for them, it's quality of life for us." Nearly all the speakers who addressed city staff from the audience were Black.

"Some of the frustration expressed at the hearing stemmed from the lack of clear communication in both DCR's and the City of Cambridge's outreach for the event," Decker said by email Dec. 5, referring to the state Department of Conservation and Recreation. "Public materials – such as emails and flyers – simply invited residents to provide 'community feedback on Memorial Drive' without making clear the specific charge of the task force." For example, a notice by the city of Cambridge sent Nov. 13 called for any "resident, commuter or visitor who uses Memorial Drive" in the defined area to go to the meeting and give feedback. Decker's newsletter to constituents from the next day said the meeting was about "bringing residents from subsidized housing and communities of color to share their experience and expertise."

The city's publicity work took its cues from the state, Cambridge spokesperson Jeremy Warnick said. It was DCR flyers that first welcomed any "resident, commuter or visitor." The budget act that created the task force is comprehensive. Decker's publicity and the publicity for meetings done by state and city appear to pull from different parts of the act. In emails to Cambridge Day, Decker captured what she considers the specific charge of the task force in three bullet points: addressing equitable access to the Charles River between the Longfellow and Eliot bridges; ensuring inclusive engagement with all relevant stakeholders in decisions affecting the Charles river area; and improving communication with those stakeholders.

The task force's website describes those goals in similar language, with the addition of "improving programming along the Charles River to benefit a diverse range of stakeholders." Decker's specific charge doesn't mention programming.

The stretch of Charles River land defined by the state and Decker, between the Longfellow and Eliot bridges, begins in West Cambridge, passes through Riverside and Cambridgeport and ends in Area II at Kendall Square.

The state's task force website says it wants engagement from "stakeholders" along that river area – "a diverse range" or "a wide variety." Decker's clarification of "relevant" stakeholders in her email newsletter reflects the statute's parameters for task force membership: "not less than six individuals whose primary residence is within a half-mile of the Charles River and who are members of an environmental justice population or live in subsidized housing; provided, however, that at least two [live] in the Riverside neighborhood," which is historically predominantly Black and immigrant. The statute does not define "relevant stakeholders" as it does task force membership.

"The purpose of the task force has not changed, to ensure that all voices are represented," Decker said. In shaping membership, "I was very intentional in ensuring that these voices were included, so they would play a meaningful role in shaping the process and developing the Task Force's recommendations."

Most of Cambridge is considered an environmental justice population, though part of West Cambridge closest to the Eliot Bridge is excluded, according to a state map. But the focus is to "meaningfully engage communities that have historically been marginalized and underrepresented," Decker said.

"The statute does not clearly articulate the task force's primary goal, which has led to some understandable and unfortunate confusion," she said. When the November meeting split up for small discussions, though, questions drawn from the task force's survey focused on issues such as Memorial Drive, and when it closes to motor traffic to become "Riverbend Park," rather than the community engagement Decker described.

That the affected area in the statute includes Cambridgeport but task force membership doesn't name the neighborhood perplexes state representative Mike Connolly, whose district encompasses Cambridgeport. Noting the discord at the Nov. 17 meeting, Connolly said: "I have a lot of concerns about how this came to be."

Engagement concerns

Since the first hearing on Nov. 10, Metropolitan Area Planning Council staff door-knocked along River Street and Putnam and Western avenues to make contact with neighbors. They focused on homes, staff said, and didn't reach apartment buildings in the area. Decker and multiple residents noted Nov. 17 that there were specific areas to be engaged with that weren't reached by these methods, including areas of Riverside and lower-income and assisted-living apartment complexes.

"Historically, DCR's been terrible at engaging communities," Decker said. She expressed frustration, saying she was not told that certain areas weren't reached. "There have been 40 years of conversations where Riverside has been excluded," Adkins said at the hearing. "For whatever reason, process stopped at River Street… open the means of conversation, open the means of planning!"

"Surveys and word of mouth is insufficient," another audience member said. There have been complaints from previous Riverbend Park meetings about late notices and a lack of communication with affected communities.

MAPC staff assured there are meetings scheduled with properties along Memorial Drive and are working to connect with the Cambridge Housing Authority. The group will continue organizing small group meetings, one-on-one conversations and focus groups, staff said.

A big effort

The task force is made up of 17 city officials, local organization representatives and residents. The group has completed five meetings between August and December, two public hearings in November, a site visit, various outreach efforts and a public survey. At the Dec. 1 meeting, MAPC staff reported 462 responses to the survey. The effort, which got no specific state funding, began in August. Decker's budget act initially set a deadline for the task force report for the end of June 2025. In November, the task force said it would begin to draft a report the following month and have it ready to publish in early spring.

The task force will meet in January to continue reviewing data and community feedback. Since recent meetings, Decker noted in an email that she has extended the deadline to "ensure the team has the time needed to achieve its goals thoughtfully without rushing." That report draft will then be circulated and a final hearing will be held. After the hearing and the 30-day written comment period, the task force will hold a concluding meeting, then finalize and submit the report.

Cell phones

From Page 1

Parents and guardians who need to contact a student during the school day are to do so through their Learning Community office, and students are to use a school phone to contact their families, the handbook says.

Some students miss their phones during moments in class. CRLS senior Neelu Trivedi found that she was missing her phone during Art and English classes, when she used to play music from her phone to help her focus and take progress pictures of her work. She says now she mostly uses her Chromebook to play music from YouTube and her art teacher takes progress pictures of student work.

Some students noted they felt there was more engagement now between students and teachers. "[The policy] works in ways where it gets people to actually contribute and participate in classes," Jama said. "With me, I think I am more involved with the teacher. I grew more connections with them, stronger relationships."



Bethany Versoy / Cambridge Public Schools

Zihaan Jama, senior at Cambridge Rindge and Latin.



Bethany Versoy / Cambridge Public Schools

Eva Asraf, senior at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School.

Subverting the cell policy

Perhaps unsurprisingly, some students are also finding creative ways to circumvent the policy. "People are definitely finding ways to bypass the Yondr pouches," Trivedi said. Some students place other objects in the locked pouches, such as old cell phones or a deck of flashcards, she added.

CRLS Senior Oliver Ginnis said he has seen some students get caught with their phones and others get away with keeping them, "but what I would say is that regardless of whether people have their phone in the pouch, there's certainly less usage."

Distractions persist, however, Ginnis said. "I think there's always going to be like an escape from work. And I don't think the phone is what drives it."

Chromebooks, which are school issued, can be distractions. Apple Watches are another, although the school's official policy does ban all personal devices

Class level might also factor into how the policy is being followed. Some students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses said they noticed less of an effect of the policy in classes where students have always tended to be engaged with the teacher and class activities.

A phoneless school day is not entirely new to CRLS students. Students were previously required to put their phones away during class periods, a policy that placed an additional burden on teachers, according to some students and administrators.

"This school-wide protocol relieves individual teachers from the constant burden of managing phone use in their classrooms," the handbook says. It also removes "the combative element" between the teachers and students, Ginnis added. Administrators cited teacher burden as a motivating factor behind the policy at an August 5 meeting of the school committee.

One area that remains unaffected by the new policy is campus social life, where most interactions happen without their cell phones anyway. Device-less lunch periods are even more interactive than before, according to Asraf.

"Not having your phone is educational, but it also builds social [bonds] and community in our school," Asraf said.

■ Do you know of a business opening or closing in Cambridge or Somerville? Send news to business@cambridgeday.com.

BUSINESS & MONEY

Senate backs inclusionary zoning

By JENNIFER SMITH



Daderot via Creative Commons0 1.0

Just as an end-of-year lawsuit launched a broadside against a decades-old policy to boost affordable development, state lawmakers moved to make it easier for cities and towns to roll out their version of that same policy.

A Cambridge developer is arguing that the city's so-called inclusionary zoning program, which requires developers to set aside a number of units for lower- and middle-income people, is unconstitutional at its core. The suit aims to crack the foundations of inclusionary zoning in Massachusetts, adopted by communities like Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville.

Meanwhile, senators struggling to make headway on a housing crunch across affordability levels are looking to pull all the levers they can, including lowering the difficulty of implementing inclusionary zoning locally.

The legal and legislative moves set up a clash over rules governing housing development at a time when there's broad consensus that the state needs to build more units across communities.

Inclusionary zoning rules condition getting permits to build residential projects of a certain size on making a percentage of the units affordable. Cambridge credits its inclusionary zoning policy with creating over 1,600 units of affordable housing, and Somerville in 2023 described its policy as the "primary pipeline adding to the City's permanent affordable housing stock."

Suit challenges Cambridge policy

But a lawsuit filed last month in Land Court by Cambridge zoning attorney and developer Patrick Barrett and the conservative Pioneer Legal Foundation claims that the Cambridge policy is unconstitutionally forcing developers to "surrender fundamental property rights" by selling their units at lower than market rate.

Cambridge first passed its inclusionary housing policy in 1998. As the Greater Boston housing market surged in the mid 2010s, the Cambridge City Council ushered in one of the highest inclusionary zoning rates in the country — a 20 percent set aside for low- and moderate-income renters and homebuyers for new construction with 10 or more units.

Somerville's program has been in place since 1990, expanded in recent years to require 20 percent of low- and middle-income units in buildings of four or more units. Boston has managed an inclusionary development program since the Mayor Thomas Menino era in 2000. The city strengthened its requirements in 2024, lowering the number of units needed to trigger the policy and increasing the required number of affordable units.

Housing production has slowed, even in historically strong markets like Greater Boston, which city officials attribute mostly to macroeconomic trends like the COVID-19 pandemic affecting supply chains and labor costs, and spiking inflation.

In a statement when the suit was filed, Cambridge spokesperson Jeremy Warnick said the city's Inclusionary Housing Zoning Ordinance "has become a model for other communities

looking to create affordable housing for low- and moderate-income residents and ensure the socioeconomic diversity of the community is reflected in new housing."

The lawsuit could take two years or more before a trial even starts. Yet over the course of the challenge, which targets the very nature of inclusionary development, lawmakers may kick open the gates for more communities to consider an array of inclusionary policies of their own.

'YIMBY' bill gets green light

A showpiece bit of pro-housing legislation, shorthanded as the "YIMBY" bill, got the green light from the Senate's housing committee in December. The bill would establish a statewide housing production goal, reduce the minimum lot size for new construction, and do away with parking minimums. But the version approved by the committee also includes new language that would allow municipalities to create inclusionary zoning policies by a simple majority vote of their legislative bodies rather than the two-thirds support often required in local codes. An earlier version of the bill, filed by Sen. Brendan Crighton of Lynn, did not include any provisions about inclusionary zoning.

Crighton said inclusionary zoning is an important tool for unlocking affordable housing, and allowing the policy to be adopted by majority vote, not two-thirds support, would bring it in line with recent reforms allowing other zoning decisions to be made by simple majority.

"It's really difficult to make any of these pro-growth zoning changes with that super majority threshold, which is really not typically how democratic bodies should function," he said.

Some of the loudest pro-housing voices in progressive Massachusetts cities, however – proponents of "Yes In My Back Yard" building, or YIMBYs – are notably cool to inclusionary zoning policies, which some say can slow growth by driving up developers' costs.

Risks to inclusionary zoning

YIMBYs advocate for robust housing development at all affordability levels, but they embrace the supply-and-demand argument that significantly boosting production is the key to ensuring more lower-cost housing. They tend to oppose or at least voice skepticism of policies like inclusionary zoning that could in any way slow production of new units.

The Somerville YIMBY group, comparing the downside risks of inclusionary development to a game of musical chairs, notes that San Francisco recently rolled back fees and inclusionary zoning rules as its housing market stagnated.

"Inclusionary zoning helps lower-income people get chairs, and that's great," the group wrote, "But it also risks stopping the creation of enough chairs for everyone, which would only exacerbate the housing crisis."

Abundant Housing Massachusetts, the state's major YIMBY organization, considers the sprawling pro-housing bill a priority because of other provisions. But the new language on inclusionary zoning caught YIMBYs off guard.

"Inclusionary zoning at the right level can be an important tool for creating diverse communities," said the group's executive director, Jesse Kanson-Benanav. "But it has to be at the right level, and even in the strongest market we have in Greater Boston – Cambridge – inclusionary zoning without funding or benefits to developers is not working and producing the affordable housing that we would expect."

Another approach on Beacon Hill

A standalone inclusionary development bill more in line with the YIMBY pitch was filed by Sen. Lydia Edwards of East Boston, Senate co-chair of the housing committee.

Under Edwards's bill, a community could by simple majority vote approve an inclusionary zoning ordinance or by-law that requires that up to 13 percent of units be affordable, so long as it will not "unduly constrain the production of housing in the area impacted."

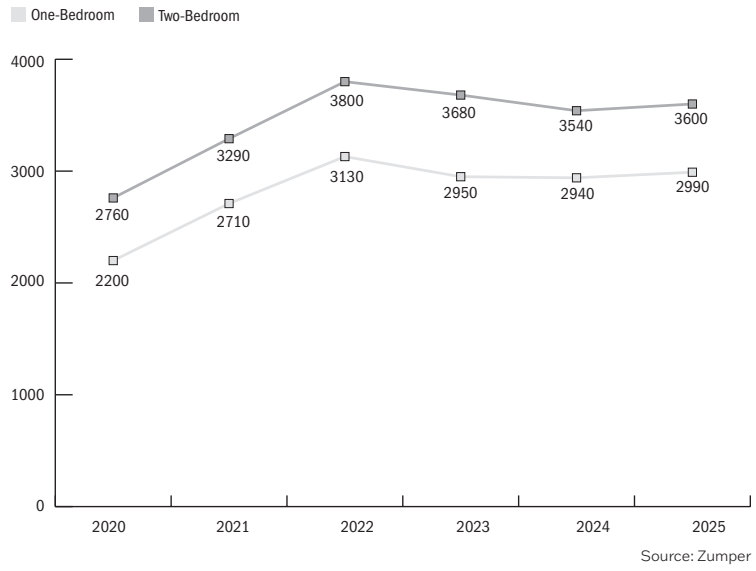
Both Crighton's broader YIMBY bill and the standalone legislation from Edwards were reported out favorably from the Senate housing committee and sent to the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

"I understand there are concerns around unintended consequences from our partners in the YIMBY world," Crighton. "And I certainly don't want anything to be signed into law that could actually limit housing or have unintended consequences. So we're certainly open to different ways that we could prevent this from being misused." While the lawsuit plays out that challenges the constitutionality of inclusionary zoning policies, Crighton suggested there is support for expanding inclusionary zoning even if details need fine-tuning.

"I think there's still a lot of interest there," he said.

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Cambridge rents cool — for now



Source: Zumper

By CHINANU OKOLI

Apartment hunters in Cambridge are seeing slight relief from the expensive housing market this winter.

Between November and December 2025, the median rent for one-bedroom apartments fell 0.3% to $2,990 while the median rent for two-bedroom apartments remained flat at $3,600, according to a regional report by Zumper, a digital startup that aims to help people find apartments, houses and condos to rent in North America. The report analyzed active listing data for the month of December, aggregated by city, to calculate median asking rents in the Boston metro area.

Despite last month's dip, Cambridge rental prices overall continue to trend upward, and Cambridge remains one of the most expensive cities to rent in Massachusetts, second only to Brookline. Data provided to Cambridge Day from Zumper showed median asking rents peaked in Cambridge in 2022 before plateauing the following year.

Median rents still rising

Between December 2024 and December 2025, the median rent for both one- and two-bedroom apartments in Cambridge increased by 1.7%.

Some other cities in the state also saw similar modest increases in the median rent for one-bedroom apartments over the same time period, but Medford and Portsmouth saw 8.8% and 18.5% increases, respectively. Every city listed in the report exceeds the national median rent for one-bedroom apartments of $1,501.

When it came to two-bedroom rentals, most Massachusetts towns saw single-digit increases or decreases in rent. Six, including Cambridge, saw no change.

"I think the biggest driver to a lot of cities having flat year-to-year changes is that there's been a lot of new supply that's come along across Greater Boston and there's even more scheduled to be completed by the end of this year," said Crystal Chen, the author of the report. That new supply in Cambridge includes 3,112 net new housing units in the city since 2018 and the Cambridge Housing Authority's approval of 500 new apartments to be developed over the next five years.

Factors affecting the price of rent

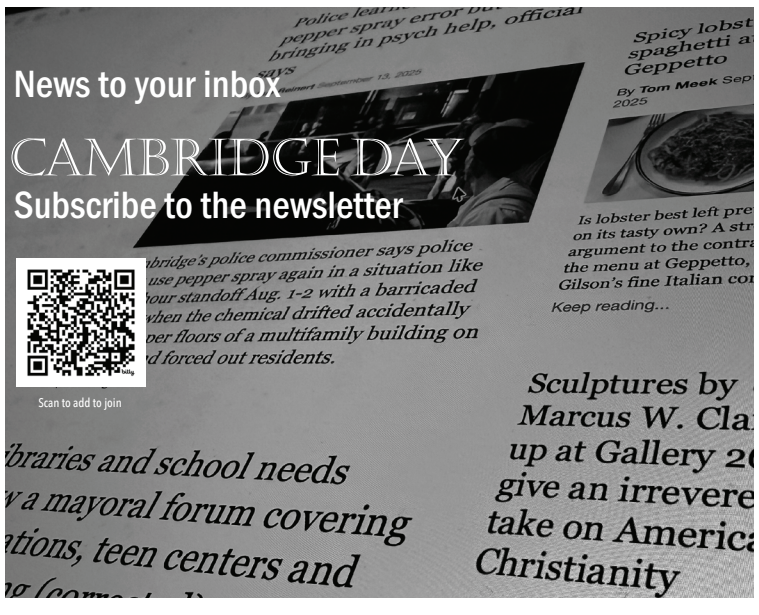
Chen noted that cities that saw significant changes are small in size and have few active listings. This means they have a greater chance of fluctuating more dramatically across the board.

"Medford is a really compact city, it's 8 or 9 square miles, so there's really limited room for new housing," Chen said. "So even any modest migration can move rents quickly."

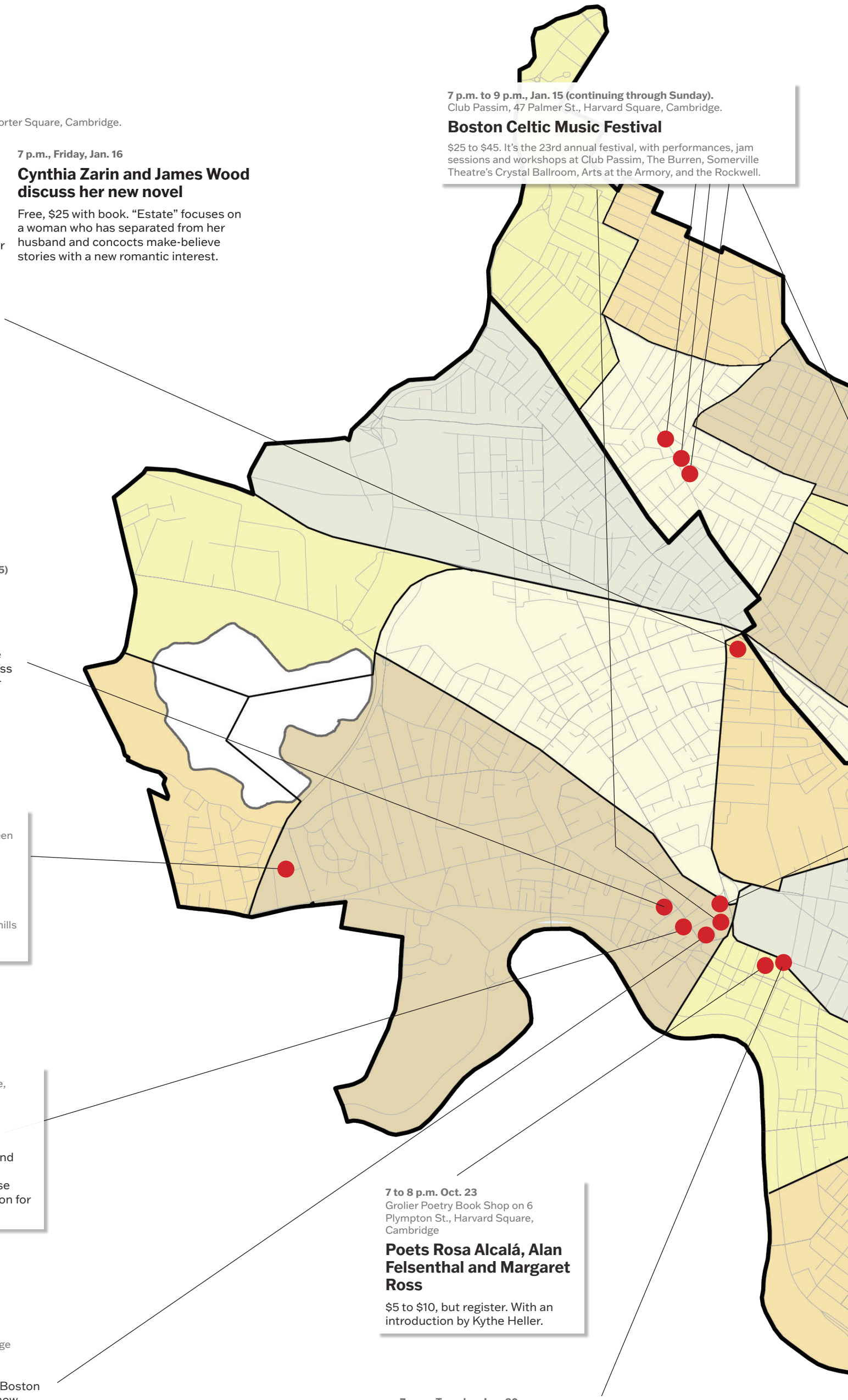
Another factor in the flat rates is economic uncertainty and the risk that poses to renters looking to live in more expensive areas. "It seems like household formation has slowed," Chen said. "Everyone's complaining about how living costs are elevated and that probably prompts renters to either stay put or look further away for more affordability."

With an increase in housing supply and modest demand for new properties in the winter months, Chen said she anticipates rents to stay relatively stable or even dip slightly. But this trend may not last, she warned. "Once the current wave of new construction is absorbed, rents are likely going to stabilize and then gradually resume growth," she said. "For now, renters are benefiting from more options and fewer bidding wars, so it's good that they have greater leverage than they're used to."

ADVERTISEMENT



EVENTS AHEAD JAN. 15–22



Porter Square Books, 1815 Massachusetts Ave., Porter Square, Cambridge.

7 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 15

Max Bazerman goes "Inside an Academic Scandal: A Story of Fraud and Betrayal"

Free, $33 with book. In 2012 Bazerman, along with four coauthors, published a paper showing that promising to tell the truth by signing your name before filling out a form produced greater honesty than signing afterward. In 2021, it was discovered that two of the experiments in the paper were fraudulent. Harvard's Todd Rogers joins.

7 p.m., Friday, Jan. 16

Cynthia Zarin and James Wood discuss her new novel

Free, $25 with book. "Estate" focuses on a woman who has separated from her husband and concocts make-believe stories with a new romantic interest.

7 p.m. to 9 p.m., Jan. 15 (continuing through Sunday).
Club Passim, 47 Palmer St., Harvard Square, Cambridge.

Boston Celtic Music Festival

$25 to $45. It's the 23rd annual festival, with performances, jam sessions and workshops at Club Passim, The Burren, Somerville Theatre's Crystal Ballroom, Arts at the Armory, and the Rockwell.

Loeb Drama Center, 64 Brattle St., Harvard Square, Cambridge

2 p.m. and 7 p.m., Jan. 17 (continuing through Feb. 15)

"Wonder" theater

$35 to $129. An American Repertory Theater presentation from the novel by R.J. Palacio and the 2017 film: Auggie Pullman, a kid with facial deformities, has been homeschooled his entire life. He must navigate a world filled with kindness and cruelty when his family decides it's time for him to start going to school.

10:15 to 11:30 a.m., Jan. 15
Cambridge Public Library Collins Branch, 64 Aberdeen Ave., West Cambridge.

Fresh Pond Nature Walk

Free, but register. During this relaxing walk of Fresh Pond, ranger Amanda Garms shares insights about what's growing, changing and blooming in the neighborhood. The walk is on uneven terrain, down hills and over roots, not on a paved path.

The Brattle Theatre, 40 Brattle St., Harvard Square, Cambridge.

2 p.m., Sun. Jan. 18

"Ju Dou" on the big screen

$17. The 1990 film directed by Zhang Yimou and Gong Li, who played the title character, has become known as one of the greatest Chinese movies ever made. This version is a restoration for its 35th anniversary.

7 to 8 p.m. Oct. 23
Grolier Poetry Book Shop on 6 Plympton St., Harvard Square, Cambridge

Poets Rosa Alcalá, Alan Felsenthal and Margaret Ross

$5 to $10, but register. With an introduction by Kythe Heller.

7:30 p.m., Jan. 16
The Sinclair, 52 Church St., Harvard Square, Cambridge

Three Percent returns

$20. Indie jam rock band that helped make the Boston scene in the '90s and the aughts headlines a show including Johnny Trama & The B3 Kings, Mary McAvoy, DJ J-Wall, DJ Ryan Brown and Elvi$. Each ticket sold will give 25 cents to The Shout Syndicate to support youth-led arts programs in Boston.

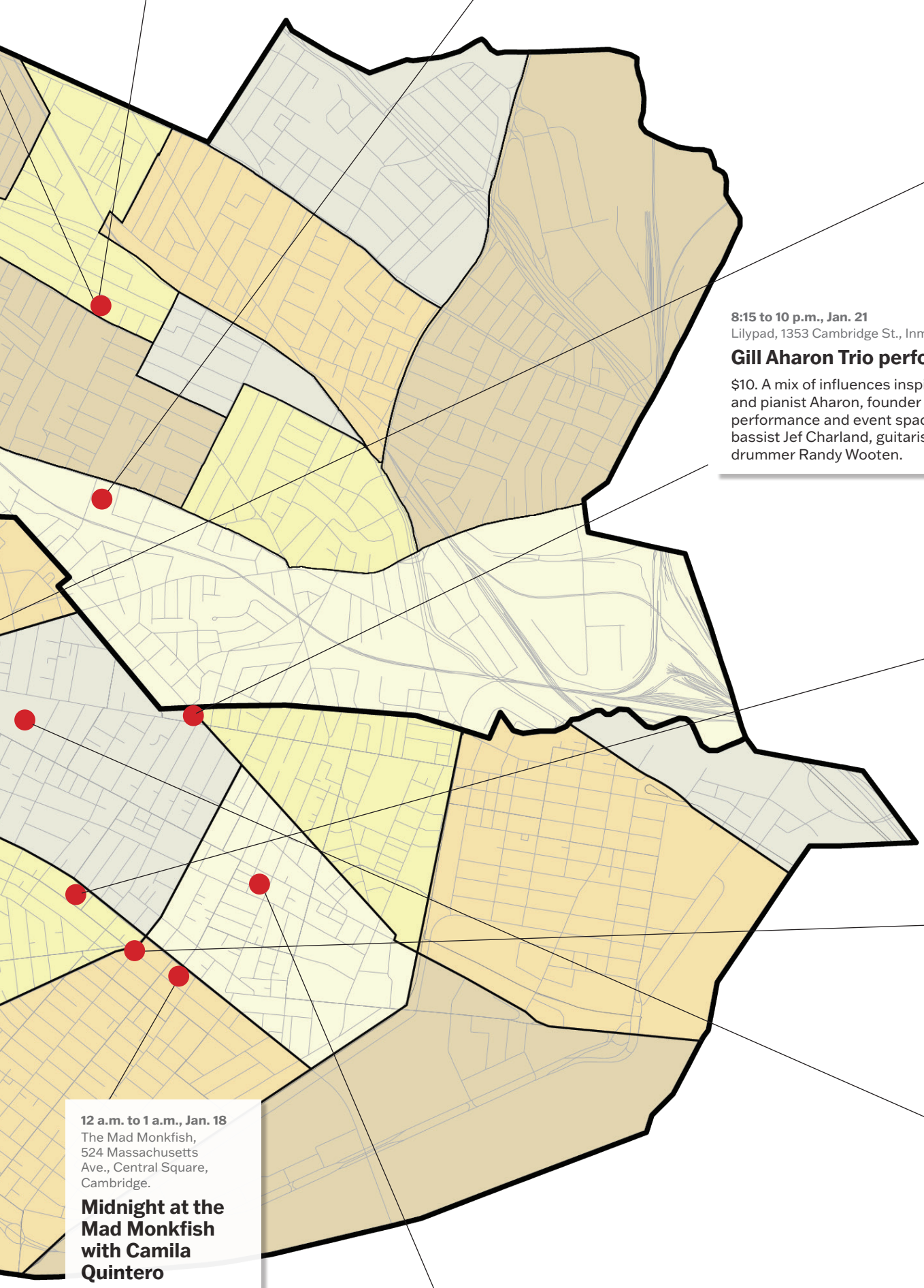
7 p.m., Tuesday, Jan. 20
Harvard Book Store, 1256 Massachusetts Ave., Harvard Square, Cambridge.

"99 Ways to Die: And How to Avoid Them"

Free. Sex, poison, drugs, biological warfare, disease, animals, crime, the elements — these and other fatal forces are detailed in emergency medical doctor Ashely Alker's new book. She'll discuss with Harvard Medical School's Dr. Alister Martin.

■ List your cultural happenings at events@cambridgeday.com.

Scan here for more events.



7 to 8:30 p.m., Jan. 21

The Rooted café at Arts at the Armory, 191 Highland Ave., Spring Hill, Somerville

Songwriters in the Round

Free. Four songwriters share the stage, taking turns performing and occasionally joining in on harmonies or guitar. Inspired by "guitar pulls" at Nashville's Bluebird Café, the event encourages conversation and collaboration.

7:30 p.m., Jan. 22

Aeronaut Brewing, 14 Tyler St., near Union Square in Ward 2, Somerville.

Dave Fox Trio

Free. Original jazz compositions and arrangements inspired by artists such as John Coltrane, Joe Henderson, Chick Corea, and Steve Swallow, and Thelonious Monk. Includes bassist John Lockwood and Boston-area musicians and composers such as guitarist Phil Sargent and saxophonists Nicholas Brust and Bill Jones.

10:30 to 11:30 a.m., Jan. 18

First Parish Cambridge Unitarian Universalist, 3 Church St./1446 Massachusetts Ave., Harvard Square, Cambridge.

Worship: "From Our Mountain of Despair, a Stone of Hope" Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Sunday

Free. Rev. Rob Hardies discusses King's "I Have A Dream" speech and how it can bring hope today.

8:15 to 10 p.m., Jan. 21

Lilypad, 1353 Cambridge St., Inman Square, Cambridge

Gill Aharon Trio performs

$10. A mix of influences inspires composer and pianist Aharon, founder of the Lilypad performance and event space. The trio includes bassist Jef Charland, guitarist Andrew Stern and drummer Randy Wooten.

11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Jan. 19

St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 838 Massachusetts Ave., Riverside near Central Square, Cambridge.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Commemoration and Remembrance

Free. The City of Cambridge honors King and his legacy with members of the Cambridge community sharing readings of King's words calling for peace, justice and transformation. This year's program features musical selections by the Millennium Gospel Choir and a keynote address by Roeshana Moore-Evans. Organized by the Cambridge Peace Commission.

Central Square Church, 5 Magazine St., Cambridge.

2 to 5 p.m., Monday, Jan. 19

Sixteenth Annual Cambridge MLK Day of Service and Learning

Free and all ages but register. The event includes a 2 p.m. presentation at the church where King spoke Jan. 10, 1960, followed by a band of musicians leading attendees to the Senior Center, YWCA and City Hall to work in groups making blankets and scarves for those in need, valentines for vets and lonely elders or the homeless, and sorting clothing and books for local shelters. All are encouraged to bring nonperishable food, gently used winter clothing, children's books or new warm socks to donate.

Cambridge Main Library, 449 Broadway, Mid-Cambridge.

6 to 7 p.m., Tuesday, Jan. 20

Contemporary Book Group

Free, but register. The group concentrates on fiction and narrative nonfiction. This month's title: "Victorian Psycho" by Virginia Feito. In the Richard C. Rossi Room.

6 to 7:30 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 22

The First President and the First People: Washington in the Native Northeast

Free but RSVP. How diplomacy, collaboration and conflict shaped the early republic through Washington's relationships with Native Americans. Features Colin Gordon Calloway, author of "The Indian World of George Washington: The First President, the First Americans, and the Birth of the Nation" and Kabl Wilkerson, enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and doctoral candidate in the History Department at Harvard University.

12 a.m. to 1 a.m., Jan. 18

The Mad Monkfish, 524 Massachusetts Ave., Central Square, Cambridge.

Midnight at the Mad Monkfish with Camila Quintero

Free to enter. Quintero, a jazz vocalist at Berklee, has two student Downbeat Jazz Magazine awards for outstanding jazz vocalist performance and overall pop-blues vocal performance.

6 to 8 p.m., Jan. 20

Lamplighter Brewing, 284 Broadway, The Port.

Pottery with a Purpose

$75, and 21-plus. Founder Samantha Hoff provides materials and know-how to make an oyster plate and then hand-paint it in the same session. One dollar from every ticket to mental health initiatives.

FILM AHEAD JAN. 15–22

LOCAL FOCUS



Film Movement

Gong Li in a scene from "Ju Dou."

A week of cinematic rule-breakers

By OSCAR GOFF

This week the **Brattle Theatre** shows an infamous film by one of cinema's original provocateurs — Spanish filmmaker Luis Buñuel. His **"Viridiana"** (1962), in a restoration made for today's 4K digital projectors, screens Friday through Tuesday. It won the Palme d'Or at the 1961 Cannes Film Festival and was immediately denounced by the Vatican and banned in Franco's Spain, where authorities attempted to burn the negatives. It's not hard to see why: the wildly irreverent story involves an idealistic young nun (Buñuel regular Silvia Pinal) who, after inheriting her lascivious uncle's estate, attempts to turn it into a haven for vagabonds and outcasts, only to lose control as they turn the grounds into a home for debauchery. "Viridiana" is a masterpiece of outrage, a middle finger toward the ruling class, about which Buñuel reportedly quipped "I didn't deliberately set out to be blasphemous, but then Pope John XXIII is a better judge of such things than I am."

The **Harvard Film Archive** reopens this weekend with a new **"From the Collection"** series, featuring vintage 35mm prints from three Italian masters: Michelangelo Antonioni, Bernardo Bertolucci, and Ermanno Olmi. The series begins Saturday with two films by Olmi, perhaps the least known of the three directors (at least stateside), but by no means the least talented. In **"Il Posto"** (1961), a young man takes his first job and finds himself among middle-aged white-collar workers who don't have any better sense of what they're doing with their lives than he does. **"The Fiancés"** (1963), tells of a machinist who learns to appreciate his girlfriend only once he's separated from her by a job in a remote factory. In both films, Olmi epitomizes the late Italian neorealist style, centered on the working class and typically filmed on location. He casts a satirical eye toward the drudgery of work without losing affection for his characters.

Few names in contemporary Chinese cinema loom larger than Zhang Yimou. On Monday the Brattle, in association with STArt Film Studio, shows a new digital restoration of **"Ju Dou"** (1990), the film that put Zhang on the global radar. Gong Li plays Ju Dou, the mail-order bride of the cruel textile magnate Jinshan in rural 1920s China. She has an affair with her husband's impoverished nephew, and the two sire a child (while keeping his true parentage a secret). The young couple's prayers are seemingly answered when Jinshan is paralyzed, allowing them to live openly in their own home — at least until their son is old enough to understand the concept of revenge. As with Zhang's "Raise the Red Lantern" (1991) and "To Live" (1994). It was the first Chinese film nominated for a Best Foreign Language Film Oscar, and a must for any lover of international film.

Belmont World Film returns to the Brattle on Tuesday with its annual festival of family features and shorts. Animated with stop-motion and paper cutouts, **"The Songbirds' Secret"** (2025) tells of a young girl who makes an archaeological discovery while visiting her grandparents' farm in the French countryside. The young protagonist of the German live-action feature **"Greetings from Mars"** (2024) imaginatively transforms his own stay in the country into an expedition to the Red Planet. The day's programming is rounded out by short films. The Festival runs from Saturday Jan. 17 through Monday Jan. 25, with additional screenings at West Newton Cinema and Arlington's Regent Theatre; for the complete schedule, visit Belmont World Film's website.

Tuesday marks what would have been the 80th birthday of legendary filmmaker David Lynch.

Cambridge's cinemas will be paying tribute. On Monday, the Brattle has Lynch's **"Blue Velvet"** (1986), in which Kyle MacLachlan uncovers the sinister secrets of his hometown manifested in an unhinged Dennis Hopper. The homage continues on Tuesday with a double feature of Lynch's debut, **"Eraserhead"** (1977), and his nightmare, **"Inland Empire"** (2006). Also on Tuesday, the **Kendall Square Cinema** screens arguably Lynch's finest, the LA neo-noir **"Mulholland Dr."** (2001). All four selections are, to quote "Twin Peaks," "both wonderful and strange."

On Wednesday, the Kendall turns its Filmmaker Focus on the genre-hopping maverick Sam Raimi (perhaps timed to his new horror comedy "Send Help" which opens later this month). Raimi's cult classic **"Army of Darkness"** (1992) is the third entry in his landmark "Evil Dead" trilogy, but can be seen on its own. "Darkness" opens with Bruce Campbell's hapless demon-slayer Ash Williams transported to the Middle Ages, armed with only his 1973 Oldsmobile and his prosthetic chainsaw hand. To get home Ash must recover the Necronomicon Ex Mortis, the legendary "book of the dead." When he fails to correctly pronounce its incantations ("Klaatu, barada... necktie?"), he unleashes yet another legion of marauding ghouls. "Army of Darkness" melds the sword-and-sorcery epics of stop-motion wizard Ray Harryhausen with the slapstick comedy of the Three Stooges. It is packed with one-liners which will immediately enter your daily lexicon. All together now: Hail to the king, baby.

Oscar Goff is a writer and film critic based in Somerville. He is film editor and senior critic for the Boston Hassle, and a member of the Boston Society of Film Critics, Boston Online Film Critics Association and the Online Film Critics Society.

Cambridge-Somerville is a film mecca, with a half-dozen sites with a total 36 screens open daily:

The Brattle Theatre, 40 Brattle St., Harvard Square, Cambridge. Founded in 1953 and a nonprofit since 2001. One 250-seat theater with 7.1 surround sound and 35 mm capabilities with a specialty in themed repertory programs and classic, cutting-edge, foreign and art-house films as well as some first-runs and new releases of classics. **(617) 876-6837 and brattlefilm.org**

Harvard Film Archive at The Carpenter Center, 24 Quincy St., Harvard Square, Cambridge. Founded in 1979 at Harvard University. One 188-seat theater with DCP, 35mm, 16mm and Super 8 capabilities and a repertory archive of more than 40,000 pieces of cinema history from around the world. **(617) 495-7578 and harvardfilmarchive.org**

Somerville Theatre, 55 Davis Square. Founded in in 1914. Three screens with 1,566 seats, including one with Dolby Digital Sound and 24 surround speakers and 70mm capabilities for a mix of first-run and repertory fare and classics. **(617) 625-5700 and somervilletheatre.com**

Landmark Kendall Square Cinema, 355 Binney St., Cambridge. Opened in 1995. Nine screens with 682 seats with DLP digital projection and sound showcasing independent film, foreign-language cinema, restored classics and documentaries with some first-run and even blockbuster films mixed in. **(617) 621-1202**

Apple Cinemas Cambridge, 168 Alewife Brook Parkway, Cambridge Highlands near Alewife and Fresh Pond. First opened in 1965, reopened in 1990 with 10 screens. A specialty in screening South Asian cinema along with first-run films. **(617) 229-6555**

AMC Assembly Row 12, 395 Artisan Way, Assembly Square, Somerville. Opened in 2014 with a dozen screens for first-run films with Imax capabilities and Dolby sound. **(617) 440-4192**

FILM CLIPS



'Greenland 2: Migration'

Every January, Hollywood dumps movies in which the studios have no faith, such as this sequel to 2020's "Greenland" — a generic, end-of-the-world yawner with a meteor (or was that a comet?) and a regular Joe who has to get his betrothed to safety. In the sequel, Joe (actually, John, played by Gerard Butler) now has to get his family out of Greenland, past radiation hell and tsunami-level high water (note to POTUS: are you sure about this place?). John gets his wife (Morena Baccarin, "Deadpool") and son (Roman Griffin Davis) into a sea capsule and on to Liverpool, which alas is now mostly a pond. Lawlessness, tuberculosis-ridden air and block-destroying lightning storms must be overcome, all in the hopes of reaching a crater in the middle of France where life has started to regenerate. The catch is that this European tour features an obstacle course of factions warring over the narrow pass out, an English Channel converted into a shallow ravine of scree and an Alps-like mountain range. I found myself reflecting that the only reason to make this movie is to give people more reasons to dislike making Greenland a U.S. territory.

(TOM MEEK)

At Apple Cinemas Fresh Pond and AMC Assembly Row 12

★★



'OBEX' takes us back

Albert Birney is one of our great junk store fabulists. His films, such as 2021's "Strawberry Mansion" (co-directed with Kentucker Audley), are as inventive and heartfelt as those of Charlie Kaufman or Michel Gondry, lovingly crafted on a shoestring budget with hand-made props, rudimentary animation, and other low-rent techniques. In "OBEX," Birney stars as "Computer" Conor Marsh, a 36-year-old shut-in living in suburban Baltimore. Conor's only companions are a friendly neighbor (Callie Hernandez) and a faithful dog, Sandy. But he seems content. He's got a wall of VHS tapes, all the latest gadgets 1987 has to offer, and plies a healthy trade in printing ASCII-art images of his clients' family photos. One day, Conor responds to a magazine ad for a mysterious sword-and-sorcery computer game, OBEX, which promises to put users inside. OBEX proves to be lame, but once Conor plays it, weird things happen. He begins seeing and hearing things. His dot-matrix printer begins issuing cryptic messages such as "REMOVE YOUR SKIN." When his dog appears to get sucked into Conor's computer, he has no choice but to enter the digital realm himself to retrieve her.

The plot loosely recalls the "Tron" films, but no one will mistake Birney's film for their special effects bonanzas. "OBEX" owes more to the crude "shareware" games that circulated on 3.5" floppy disks in the early days of home computing. With its grainy, black-and-white 16mm photography, "OBEX" can resemble a sort of suburban "Eraserhead," the drone of summer cicadas standing in for that film's industrial soundscape. There are also some terrifying images, such as a field of staggering, naked ghouls in the headlights of Conor's old car. There's heart here, too. The deeper Conor plunges into this 8-bit fantasy world, the more we understand the sadness that led him to seclude himself from the real one. As absurd as it all is, we sense that Birney means every word of it. "Avatar" may be this year's big computer-generated spectacle, but the image of Computer Conor wielding his flimsy sword against a wolf-skulled demon king in an abandoned church will stick with this viewer longer than anything he saw on Pandora.

(OSCAR GOFF)

At the Brattle Theatre

★★★

MUSIC

ATTEND

Streaming and soaring



Raphael lehnen

Mikayla Shirley

By MICHAEL GUTIERREZ

Regular readers of this column know I sometimes write about streaming services that aren't Spotify, which is rips off artists and has a founder who makes decisions worth questioning.

My ethical alternative of choice, Bandcamp, has been through two corporate acquisitions since 2022 (first to Epic Games, then to Songtradr) and several rounds of layoffs, which makes me suspect Cory Doctorow's doctrine of enshittification is starting to take hold. So, I've been looking at Ampwall. Should you get amped about it? Maybe not yet.

I like that Ampwall is a public benefit corporation (PBC). A PBC is supposed to elevate the public good over profit. A music-streaming platform, organized as a PBC, could, in theory, maximize the golden eggs (the music and what it means for arts and culture) without exploiting the goose (the musicians) through short term thinking.

Not that Ampwall's corporate profile matters if the service doesn't work. In fact, it works very well, offering a smooth, uncluttered interface and a straightforward purchase process. It's free to search and stream the artists who have made portions of their music available, and you can make a purchase to stream the remainder. Ampwall charges artists and labels $10 per year to upload music, to sell downloads, and to maintain dedicated pages. I found Boston artist Daphne Blue Underworld's "Memory Palace," bought it, and it was mine to stream in the Ampwall cloud or download locally.

Here's the problem: Daphne Blue Underworld is one of only a few Boston-area artists on Ampwall. Using the keyword "Boston" I found only ten. When I searched by genre, the results went deeper, but only by degrees. It's not just lacking in Boston artists — I felt as though I were roaming a superstore with mostly empty shelves.

The deal-killer, though, is the absence of a mobile app. Mobile devices accounted for more than 90% of streaming platform usage in a 2019 study. Without a mobile app — founder Chris Grigg says one is in the works — Ampwall is just an interesting curiosity.

Hit This

Jan. 16: *Bus Crush Album Release Show (Lilypad, Cambridge)*

Alt rockers Bus Crush made their debut at Nice Fest in 2024 with none of the normal newbie nerves, probably because lead vocalist Olivia Sisay had performed there as a solo act in 2022. I'm expecting the same experienced vibe from the new Bus Crush album, since Sisay's previous collaboration with Ben Walker produced the notable album Sports & Leisure, stocked with buzzy guitars and alt 90s-influenced vamp. Doss and Megan From Work fill out a strong three-band bill.

Jan. 17: *Dayfest (The Burren, Crystal Ballroom, The Rockwell, Somerville)*

Can't decide what flavor ice cream you want? Pick them all. Dayfest, part of the Boston Celtic Music Festival, offers a smorgasbord of sounds in Davis Square on Saturday. Stop in at The Burren for the banjo-driven folk of the Simon Lace Trio. Check out Boston Scottish Fiddle Orchestra at Crystal Ballroom. Enjoy the Celtic harp of Riko Matsuoka at The Rockwell. Dayfest kicks off at 11am, so grab a coffee or whatever your preferred eye-opener, and get an early start.

Jan. 22: *Sharp Pins (The Armory, Somerville)*

Sharp Pins, the lo-fi indie rock project of Kai Slater, marks the latest member of the loose-knit, Chicago-centered music & arts collective Hallogallo to come through Somerville, following Lifeguard, Post Office Winter, and Horsegirl, who played the Armory last March. It's a young rock-n-roll scene with brick & mortar, homespun roots like you hardly see any more in this moment of online music discovery.

Live: Mikayla Shirley and Kazuki Tsubakida

Vocalist Mikayla Shirley held court in the Jazz Baroness room at The Mad Monkfish last Thursday. Shirley's voice crept around the room like a black cat at twilight during a set of beloved standards joined by pianist Kazuki Tsubakida. Though Shirley studies at Berklee College of Music, Tsubakida at the New England Conservatory, and "Berklee cats and NEC cats don't mix very often," as Shirley said, the pair found their rhythm.

Shirley is barely old enough to drink from the martini glass she had perched stage right, but her voice has the athleticism of Ella Fitzgerald's, the frankness of Billie Holiday's and the elastic vibrato of Sarah Vaughan. Her vocals transported the audience into a space of romance and elegance.

Tsubakida supported his partner's flights with an unexpected maturity. He took over at the three-quarter mark of each song, letting his finger work step into the spotlight before Shirley snuck in the backdoor to close it out, as though she had never left. Somehow, her final note hung in the air until after we realized the show was over.

Michael Gutierrez is an author, educator, activist and editor-in-chief at Hump Day News.

FOOD

■ Do you know of a restaurant opening or closing in Cambridge or Somerville, or do you have other food news tips? Send them to business@cambridgeday.com.

WHAT WE'RE HAVING

The Hollows fills up Teele Square



Tom Meek

Buttermilk fried chicken at The Hollows.

By TOM MEEK

For nearly 40 years Rudy's Cafe was a go-to staple in Teele Square serving Mexican comfort food to Tufts students, family herds and those seeking a tequila bar with a broad inventory of agave in casual yet aptly festive atmosphere. The beloved cornerstone fizzled out, as many did, during COVID.

As we know from the adage — when one door closes, another opens. Such is the happy case as The Hollows has recently hung the open sign at the junction of Holland and Broadway. The layout has not changed one iota, but the vibe has. It's still cozy and casual, but instead of Tex-Mex there's a retro zing to things. "Thunderbirds," Adult Swim-like adult animation play on the TVs and GWAR and other heavy-metal and punk band concert bills plaster the wall adjacent to the bar. You could think of it as the B-Side (RIP) or the Delux Cafe — the defiant outpost of defiance in Back Bay, whose persistence is greatly admired and appreciated — rebooted and reimagined and something to be happy for, because culturally cross-threaded gastro pubs with a bit of growl and sassitude seem to be on the wane these days. Like the Delux, the food at The Hollows is quiet quality at a really good price. It's a tight but far-ranging menu with comfort staples such as American chop suey, fried chicken, cheese fries, steamed mussels and a burger (of course).

It also steers into the more adventurous with a lobster bisque, braised tripe, roasted haddock and a catch of the day. The portions are generous and then some. If you dig crisp and lean, yet like juicy bacon bits, then The Hollows is your jam. Their frisée salad, that by this human's assessment is a trendy "chopped" with the chicory of the title as its centerpiece, is loaded with thick cubes of well-cured pork. It also comes with a delicately poached egg and a tangy balsamic dressing. Then there's the grilled octopus, a tender, succulent tentacle atop a bed of white beans and said bacon bits.

The things on the menu that took me by genuine surprise were that buttermilk-fried chicken and that thick homarus stew. A week ago, in our year-end write up of foods that resonated with us in 2025, we extolled the virtues of those putting new spins on our coveted New England lobstah while respecting the delicate nuance of its tender white flesh. Like Bar Enza's fisherman stew (currently not on the menu) and Moëca's lobster gnocchi, Hollows's bisque is a rich, dark lobster reduction that's more meaty and thick than the usual pink slurp. It's more savory, too, and at the Hollows, they pack it with generous nuggets of crustacean, peeled potatoes and carrots. The folks stewing it get all the textures right, the lobster is — as one can only hope and want — succulent and meaty, the carrots and potatoes a dial under al dente. It's shocking how good the bowl is from steaming entry to bottom-scraping spoonful. It's a nothing special, done exceptionally well.



Tom Meek

The lobster bisque at The Hollows.

And then there's the chicken. I can't count how many times I've been disappointed by fried chicken in the Boston area — over-seasoned batters, thick shells of breading, and bland meat beneath. No harm, no fowl, but still. I used to love Swanson's fried chicken TV dinners: not exactly virtuous, but undeniably savory and addictive. The Hollows hits that nostalgic sweet spot. The batter is nearly tempura-thin but richly seasoned, making the skin crisp without becoming a barrier. It locks in moisture, so the meat stays juicy and flavorful — no dry, chalky white meat destined for tomorrow's sandwich.

Both are comfort food dialed up — satisfying, indulgent, and surprisingly affordable.

The kitschy gothic concept behind The Hollows comes as no surprise, given that one of its principal partners and chefs is Charlie Redd, who also runs Dragon Pizza and the adjoining Dragon's Lair in Davis Square.

The Hollows isn't the Dragon's Lair to be sure — but it shares the same playful, inviting energy. It also shares the Dragon gelato, which is very much worth your spoon. The chocolate, in particular, is a standout: dark, dense, and studded with almost cookie-dough-like pockets. It's decadent without being cloying. There are nods to Rudy's, too: the fireplace remains, the house margarita lives on, and the appetizer list includes Rudy's queso cauldron — chips and cheese, or nachos.

Next door, of course, looms the Teele Square pit — the long-stalled development once slated to become a hotel. It remains a neighborhood curiosity and source of frustration. But step inside The Hollows, and you're transported somewhere warmer and more welcoming — the hole be damned.

Cambridge writer Tom Meek's reviews, essays, short stories and articles have appeared in WBUR's The ARTery, The Boston Phoenix, The Boston Globe, The Rumpus, The Charleston City Paper and SLAB literary journal. Tom is also a member of the Boston Society of Film Critics and rides his bike everywhere.

ARTS + CULTURE

Violinist Gandelsman on embracing the unknown



Hilary Scott

Johnny Gandelsman performing "This Is America" at Tanglewood Music Festival Aug. 11, 2024.

By MICHAEL GUTIERREZ

In a kindler, gentler timeline, a performance by violinist Johnny Gandelsman of works from his epic "This Is America" to help mark the 250th anniversary of the United States would be a fitting, if perfunctory, celebratory exercise. In the present political moment, it feels downright provocative. Gandelsman, who was born in Russia, raised in Israel, and moved to the U.S. at 17, comes to the local stage as part of the Boston Symphony Orchestra performance series "E Pluribus Unum: From Many, One." The BSO will bring its banner to the decidedly less posh Brattle Theatre for the first of three free Boston-area performances starting Jan. 21.

Gandelsman is known both for his playing of Bach and for drawing inspiration from fiddling. He has long been part of Yo-Yo Ma's Grammy Award-winning Silk Road Ensemble, and he received a 2024 MacArthur Foundation Fellowship.

"This Is America" forms a kind of bridge across generations. Gandelsman initially commissioned and performed solo violin works from 28 composers, ranging from mid-20th century legend Terry Riley, who is 90, to 19-year-old Harvard student Èbùn Oguntola. Conceived as an ongoing project, the setlist for the Brattle will feature some of the latest entries, including Rhea Fowler & Micaela Tobin's hybrid violin/electronics piece, "A City Upon a Hill?"

Cambridge Day interviewed Gandelsman via email. This interview was lightly edited.

Is deep engagement with recognized canonical figures (for example, recording the complete Bach sonatas) required to be considered "legitimate" in the contemporary or classical music scene?

It seems like the two worlds (Classical/Contemporary) are coming closer together, after decades of total separation. I'm not sure if recording Bach's Sonatas & Partitas and the Cello Suites gives me some street cred with the contemporary crowd, and vice versa. To be honest, I strangely feel a bit like an outsider in both worlds.

You've described "This Is America" as forcing you to confront the unfamiliar, inspiring feelings of fear, even rejection. You also described a "parental" feeling related to these works. Can you describe a specific example in which you experienced these two different kinds of feelings, and how you responded to this tension as a musician?

Perhaps it's somewhat natural to feel both. I did have moments of being terrified, when I was asked to do something I have never done before — free improvisation, singing, extended violin techniques I was unfamiliar with, etc.

The embarrassment of not knowing initially led me to judge and even dismiss some of those works. I was fortunate to work with composers who graciously helped me find my own way into their compositions. One of the big takeaways from this project was the painful realization that I was not immune to the very human experience of fearing and rejecting the unknown.

The parental feelings come from being intimately involved in helping each of the 28 anthology compositions come to life. Now that most of them have been performed and recorded, I get excited when I hear other violinists play them. It is a nice feeling to contribute in a small way to the expansion of the violin repertoire — so I do feel a bit like a proud papa.

Can you share some insight into how you constructed the setlists, in particular the selections for the Brattle Theatre show?

With 28 works and over four hours of music, there are unlimited ways one could build a setlist.

For each of the three shows, I tried to create something that showed the diversity of compositional styles represented in the anthology, while hopefully resulting in a cohesive listening journey for the listener. The Brattle Theatre program includes some of the more recent works (Gabriel Kahane, Carla Kihlstedt), as well as a couple of works with pre-recorded electronics (Angelica Negron, Rhea Fowler & Micaela Tobin). Rhea and Micaela's piece, "A City Upon a Hill?" uses recorded audio from the January 6th, 2021 insurrection — it is a visceral and powerful work, still very much relevant today.

I do hope that audiences will be curious about the entire collection, and either choose to attend more than one performance or seek out the album, which is available on all streaming platforms, as well as a 3-CD set.

The title "This Is America" will sound provocative to some in these days of aggressive nationalist rhetoric. What kind of commentary does the anthology offer on our present political excesses?

The dehumanizing language used by this administration and its supporters to describe anyone who doesn't look, think, pray or love like them is violent and offensive. It is also banal and old.

This collection of work, which features music written by brilliant composers and musicians from a wide array of backgrounds, stands as a clear repudiation of the false narrative being pushed onto our society, that the USA was/would be at its best when/if it were white, straight and Christian.

Are there any updates on future performances or forthcoming recordings that you'd like to share?

I am involved in a beautiful new collaborative project, called "Johnny Loves Johann," which sets J.S. Bach's complete cello suites to new choreography by John Heginbotham (Mark Morris Dance Group), Caili Quan (BalletX), Jamar Roberts (Alvin Ailey) and Melissa Toogood (Merce Cunningham/Pam Tanowitz). We premiered a few weeks ago at Carolina Performing Arts (UNC-Chapel Hill), and in April will have a week of performances at the Joyce Theater in New York City. This project is fun, surprising and quite moving — and the entire creative team is simply extraordinary. I have fond memories of playing the complete cello suites at a sold-out show at MIT's Kresge Auditorium in February of 2020 — which was the beginning of my journey with these works. Six years later, this music is now a part of me, and I very much hope to share "Johnny Loves Johann" with audiences in Boston and in the Berkshires.

Gandelsman is at the Brattle Theatre Jan. 21. Be aware this show is sold out, as is the Jan. 26 performance at the Vilna Shul in Boston. Tickets are still available for Jan. 25 at Union Church in Boston. bso.org. E Pluribus Unum: From Many, One.

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■ Send letters to forpublication@cambridgeday.com with the name, address, phone number and relevant affiliations of the writer or writers

SPORTS

CRLS sports: Boys' b-ball wins 5th straight, girls split



David Matthews, Jr.

Aaron Abebe, shown here against Attleboro, helped the CRLS boys' basketball team extend its winning streak to five games with strong performances against both Concord-Carlisle and Lowell.

By DAN EISNER

The Cambridge Rindge and Latin Boys' basketball team (6-2), ranked 12th in Eastern Massachusetts by the Boston Globe, increased its winning streak to five games with a 70-47 defeat of Concord-Carlisle on Jan. 6 and a 53-47 defeat of Lowell on Jan. 9.

Against Concord-Carlisle, Jaydaan Correia led the balanced scoring attack with 12 points. Imam Firman and Aaron Abebe added nine points each. Kabir Varanasi pulled down six rebounds and Itamar Fox had five assists. Against Lowell, Morris Lichtenstein led with 18 points, knocking down 5-of-11 attempts from beyond the three-point arc. Abebe had 11 points, three rebounds, and three assists. Levi Daniels-Prempeh was strong on the glass and grabbed 12 rebounds.

Girls' basketball: The girls' basketball team (3-5) split its games last week, defeating Concord-Carlisle, 40-33, on Jan. 6 and losing to Lowell on Jan. 9, 45-30. In the win over Concord-Carlisle, Avie Marshall led the way with 14 points and eight rebounds. Jaidah Hope recorded five points, nine rebounds, four assists, and four steals. Nada Elfathy scored eight points and had four rebounds, four assists, and four steals. In the loss to Concord-Carlisle, Hope led with eight points and three rebounds. Iyanna Harris added five points.

Boys' hockey: The boys' hockey team lost to Bedford, 2-1, on Jan. 7 and defeated Lowell on Jan. 10, 4-2. Henrik Emerton scored the lone goal against Bedford with assists from Joshua Pite and Matias Moore. Isaac Winter-Barkai had 17 saves. Against Lowell, Pite, Joel Perez, and Liam Molberger each recorded a goal and an assist. Tate Schoenau scored the other goal, Moore had three assists, and Everett Mildwoff and Vincent Caterina had one assist each. Goaltender Owen Goldstein recorded 27 saves. Girls' hockey: The girls' hockey team lost to Waltham, 8-0, on Jan. 7 and to Concord-Carlisle on Jan. 10, 3-2. Against Waltham, Max Cowen-Breen and Norah Whouley split time in goal, with Cowen-Breen making 32 saves on 39 shots and Whouley stopping four of five in the third period. In the loss to Concord-Carlisle, Caroline Rapp scored the first goal, getting an assist from Surina Phelan. Allie DelVicchio scored the other goal, with assists from Caroline and Allison Rapp.

Boys' track: In the third Dual County League meet of the season, the boys' track team defeated Westford, 68.33-31.66. The meet also featured Acton-Boxborough, Newton South, Concord-Carlisle, and Lincoln-Sudbury. Leon Ibanez-Fraile won the two-mile run with a time of 9:29.53, and Liam Eldridge finished first in the one-mile run (4:28.13). The 4x400 meter relay team of Aran Levitt, Henry Parker, Gael Berzin, and Eldridge won with a time of 3:46.83. In the 1,000-meter run, Kieran Eichler finished third (2:44.58). Jarehl O'Bannon won the high jump with a jump of 18'5 ¾".

Girls' track: The girls' track team lost to Westford, 58-42 despite Naomi Baldwin's victory in the 300-meter dash in 43.01 and a victory by the 4x400 meter relay team of Caie Thielow, Leah Hogan, Cassie DelVecchio, and Corinne Augustine in 4:24.05. Neva Hartman finished second in the 600-meter run (1:41.75), and Sophia Juanes Seto took second in the two-mile run (10:56.01).

Boys' swimming: The boys' swimming team lost to Concord-Carlisle, 94-69, on Jan. 6 and Weston, 96-82, on Jan. 9. Against Concord-Carlisle, Hong-Joon Koh finished first in the 100-meter breaststroke with a time of 1:07.29 to qualify for sectionals. Against Weston, Evan Wei qualified for sectionals in the 50-yard freestyle with a time of 23.98. The 4x200 medly relay team of Khantushing Lkhagvajargal, Hong-Joon Koh, Giacomo Cotta Ramusino Zambotti, and Wei qualified for the sectionals with a time of 1:49.09.

Girls swimming: The girls' swimming team lost to Concord-Carlisle, 92-78, on Jan. 6 and by the same score to Weston on Jan. 9. Against Concord-Carlisle, Lila Nguyen took second place in the 100-yard freestyle with a time of 58.39 to qualify for sectionals and the state championship. Bess Sterman finished first in the 200-meter freestyle with a time of 2:04.57.



Sarah Christopher

The Cambridge Rindge and Latin girls' hockey team hold the names of the people they played for at the Hockey Fights Cancer event, Jan. 10, 2026.

Hockey

From Page 1

His mother is Dr. Laura Brightman, a physician at Cambridge Health Alliance. She got a starter package of materials from the American Cancer Society and started organizing fundraising efforts.

Students put up "I Fight For ... " signs — a staple of this year's game, as well — to display who they were playing for. They added purple tape to their equipment to symbolize their support for cancer patients and used social media to spread word of the games

Players from the boys' and girls' teams met twice to plan events and both teams ran bake sales while the other played their charity game. They also helped clean up Simoni Rink after the event. In total, 21 players from CRLS donated roughly 45 hours of their time to raise over $3,200.

After this year's games, Brightman said "These players have been invested in Hockey Fights Cancer from the start, because it is a meaningful way for them to contribute to their community in addition to being athletes and students."

The Players Take Over

That was true for Owen Goldstein, a goalie for the CRLS boys' team. As a junior last year he took the lead on fundraising efforts and planning for the yearly games. "I really wanted to do it because a lot of members of my family were affected by cancer, and also I am interested in a career in medicine, and I felt like this was a really good way of starting off my career," he said.

Last year the team raised $6,000. This year, he said he "decided to really go for it." He sent out email updates almost daily to his team about the fundraiser and related initiatives, collaborating with the girls' team to plan fundraising efforts and participating in general outreach on behalf of his team. It was Goldstein's idea to combine Cambridge Youth Hockey Day with the Hockey Fights Cancer game. "I talked to our coaches, and we decided that we might as well do it on a day where we were going to have as many fans as possible," said Goldstein.

Caroline Rapp has helped to lead efforts for the girls' part of the joint effort. She said collaborating has been important. "A lot of times the boys' team does stuff that we don't get to partake in, and it's good that we also have a chance to join in and also do something for a good cause."

Rapp added that her team focused on general fundraising and spreading awareness throughout the community. "Some new players on the boys' team have raised a lot of money, and we have done a better job of getting it out there — this is our third year, so we know more about what we are doing," she said.

Boys and Girls Varsity Doubleheader

The boys' team played the first game of the doubleheader, against the Lowell Red Raiders. Tied 1-1 at the end of two periods, CRLS and Lowell traded goals in the third before the Falcons pulled away, winning 4-2.

Forwards Liam Molberger and Joel Perez, as well as defenseman Joshua Pite, each recorded a goal and assist. Tate Schoenau scored the other goal. Matias Moore had three assists and Vincent Caterina and Everett Mildwoff each had one. Goldstein made 27 saves.

Then the girls faced off against the Concord-Carlisle Patriots. The Patriots scored twice in the first period before the Falcons scored in the second to cut the lead to 2-1. The teams traded goals in the third and despite a hectic finish, the Falcons fell 3-2.

Rapp scored and added an assist, and Allie DelVecchio scored her first goal of the season. Surina Phelan and Allison Rapp also had assists. Goalie Max-Cowen Breen racked up 37 saves.

While fundraising goals were exceeded, CRLS boys coach Andrew Ball tempered the team's fundraising successes. "We hit a high number, I don't know that we can hit $15,000 again," said Ball. He added, "it's great to raise $15,000, but it's not about the amount of money, it's about the [players] taking ownership of this opportunity and learning what it's like to support things and do things that aren't just about them."



Gadi Reinhorn

The Cambridge Rindge and Latin boys' hockey team at the Hockey Fights Cancer fundraiser on Jan. 10, 2026.

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Newtowne Court 2026 Vent cleaning

CAMBRIDGE HOUSING AUTHORITY PURCHASING DEPARTMENT

Invitation for Bids Newtowne Court 2026 Vent cleaning

The Cambridge Housing Authority, as the Owner and Managing Agent for its affiliate properties, invites sealed bids for vent cleaning for our Newtowne Court property in Cambridge, MA. The Contractor shall be a firm regularly engaged in HVAC air conveyance system cleaning and shall maintain membership in the National Air Duct Cleaners Association (NADCA) or equivalent industry organization.

The awarded contractor will be responsible for cleaning of air handling units (AHUs), associated supply and return ductwork, bathroom exhaust systems, and dryer exhaust systems serving approximately **268 residential units** .

The not-to-exceed cost for this project will be $155,000.00. This contract is being procured in accordance with MGL Chapter 149 and will be awarded to the most responsible vendor offering these services at the lowest price.

Bid Forms and specifications will be available at www.procore.com on **Thursday, January 15, 2026, at 10:00 AM** (may be downloaded and viewed electronically).

All bids should be submitted electronically online at www.procore.com and received no later than **Thursday, January 29, 2026, by 2:00 PM . HARD COPY BIDS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.**

The deadline for General Bidder questions regarding this project can be directed to procurment@cambridge-housing.org no later than **Thursday, January 22, 2026, at 2:00 PM.** Questions received after the above deadline may not be considered by the Awarding Authority.

WILD THINGS

■ Send your high-resolution images of urban wild things with location, date, photographer's name and other useful information for possible use online to photography@cambridgeday.com.

Future pets? Maybe, but not yet

By JEANINE FARLEY



Anne

An urban raccoon peeks through rails on a wooden deck.

My neighbor sent me some photos of a friendly looking raccoon (Procyon lotor) peeping into her house through a skylight. The photo came at the same time I happened to be reading about the domestication of urban raccoons.

What is domestication? In 1868, Charles Darwin observed that domesticated animals shared traits missing from their wild ancestors — shorter snouts, smaller brains, smaller teeth, floppy ears, white patches, prolonged juvenile behavior, and docility around humans, or tameness. Contemporary scientists have confirmed Darwin's observation in urban foxes. A 2020 study of urban foxes in London found them with shorter and wider muzzles than their rural counterparts. This phenomenon may have transpired due to a reciprocal relation between diet and biomechanics. Urban foxes do not need jaw muscles as strong as rural foxes. Up to 37% of the urban dweller's diet consists of scavenged food.

Or consider mice. In 2002, Swiss biologists enclosed 12 mice in sheds. Provided food and water, the mice reproduced until the population reached the size of a small hamlet, some 260 to 430 in number. Why? Because the mice could come and go as they pleased through openings that were too small for predators to pass through. The scientists monitored their safe space for more than 14 years (20 generations). Some mice didn't like being handled and left. The mice that remained in the sheds lost their fear of humans and developed heads 3.5 percent smaller than wild mice. They also sprouted patches of white fur.

Something similar seems to be happening to urban raccoons. In the process of overcoming new urban challenges, they may be developing physical changes associated with domestication.

Snout length is an easily observed sign of domestication. Researchers at the University of Arkansas collected 19,495 images of raccoons on iNaturalist, of which 249 were high-quality and showed a complete head in profile. Dividing the images between rural (38) and urban (211), they concluded city raccoons bore snouts 3.56 percent smaller than their country cousins. Why? Again, possibly diet and biomechanics.

Domestication begins to occur when an animal species encounters humans. When we leave food waste behind, the animals may remain in our vicinity. Humans have the added benefit of scaring away predators. Humans also scare away large predators. So human-occupied territory has two things going for it — food and fewer predators. However, animals must still adapt. They must be cautious and careful around us, but not so afraid that they leave. Such is the initial stage of domestication. Over time, the animals with a reduced flight response pass on their docility to their offspring. Over time, the animals with a reduced flight response pass on their docility to their offspring.

Our domesticated animals — pigs, cows, sheep — have been selectively bred over many generations. After dogs became tame, we bred them for a variety of purposes, such as retrieving badgers in burrows (dachsunds), friendliness (pugs), protection (dobermans), pulling (huskies), speed (greyhounds), smelling (bloodhounds) or herding (sheepdogs). Nor does the process go on forever in straight line. Domesticated cats, for example, are an exception to the rule of the shorter snout. Wild cats typically have short snouts, which affords them the bite force they need but which also limits their sense of smell. Domesticated cat snouts cannot get much shorter without impairing their ability to smell. Therefore, domesticated cats have snouts that are similar in length to their wild counterparts.

Should you welcome the urban raccoon? Their snouts may be shortening, and they may look cute in photographs from your neighbor. But beware: they are still wild animals, sometimes carrying rabies, leptospirosis, salmonella, or the parasite that causes the flu-like toxoplasmosis. They can also carry canine distemper or the rash-causing feline parvovirus. Treat them with the same wary respect you would give to any other wild animal.

Have you taken photos of our urban wild things? Send your images to Cambridge Day, and we may use them as part of a future feature. Include the photographer's name and the general location where the photo was taken.

Jeanine Farley is an educational writer who has lived in the Boston area for more than 30 years. She enjoys taking photos of our urban wild things.



Beth Baisch

An urban raccoon on a Toronto roof.



Cambridge Fire Department

This North Cambridge resident got stuck in a grate in 2024. The Cambridge Fire Department used olive oil to help slide it free.



Richard George

A raccoon in Strawberry Hill, Nov. 30, 2021.



Margaret Lewis

A raccoon exits a tree nest near Horn Pond, April 18, 2024.

Wild Things is taking questions

Do you have questions about birds, bugs, bees, butterflies or other wildlife? Send questions to **wildthings@cambridgeday.com** and we will find out the answer.