October 11, 2026

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Embold Research
RE: Cambridge Multifamily Housing Ordinance Survey Results

A new survey[1] by Embold Research indicates a widespread belief among Cambridge residents that the city should prioritize building housing options, with strong support for the Multifamily Housing Ordinance. Reflecting residents' need for greater housing affordability, a majority of residents express support for the ordinance's changes to the zoning rules to allow for more residential homes to be built in the city. Support is especially pronounced among young people and renters.

Cambridge Agrees That Affordable Housing Needs To Be a Top Priority

A large majority of Cambridge voters think housing affordability should be a top priority for the City Council. More than eight in ten (84%) say that housing affordability should be the "single top priority" or "one of the top priorities" for the Cambridge City Council. This sentiment is shared across Cambridge, and is particularly strong among voters under the age of 35 (94%) and near universal with renters (96%).

[1]*Polling was conducted online from September 28 - October 4, 2026. Using Dynamic Online Sampling to attain a representative sample, Embold Research polled 442 registered voters in Cambridge, MA. Post-stratification weighting was performed on age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and 2024 presidential vote. The margin of error is 4.9%. You can see a full methodology statement here.*

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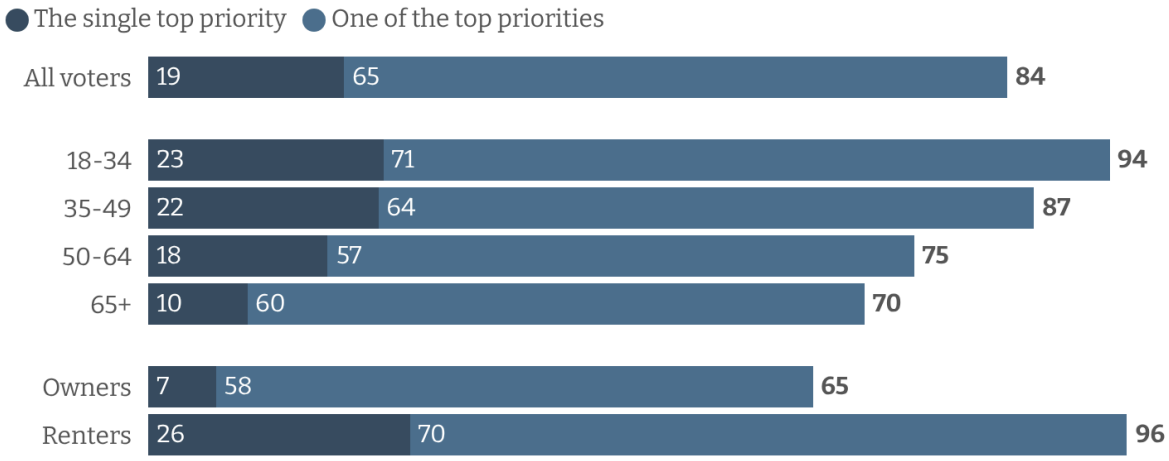
The Cambridge City Council faces many competing demands, including the city budget and property taxes, public schools, transportation, housing, and public safety. Compared with these other issues, how much of a priority should making housing more affordable be for the City Council?



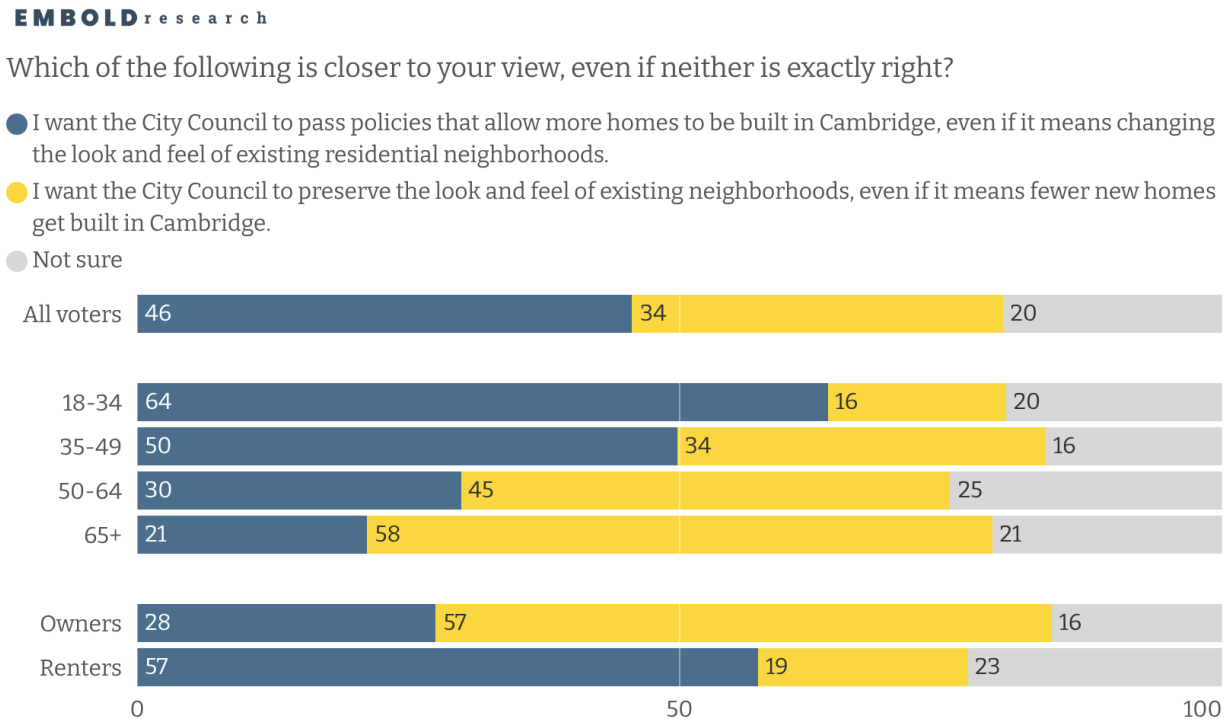
Housing affordability is a salient issue for many Cambridge residents, with the shortage often taking a personal toll. When respondents were asked if they or someone close to them have been impacted by the cost or availability of housing in Cambridge, eight in ten said that they have been personally impacted by the lack of housing they can afford in one way or another. Nearly every response offered detailed accounts from people of all walks of life, ranging from tenured academics, to young renters who feel hopeless at the prospect of buying, to families who are afraid of being priced out of their home.

> *"Basically everyone I know struggles to pay rent & live a fulfilled life."*
>
> *"Finding housing in Cambridge has been my single biggest stressor both financially and emotionally at any time. I have had to move due to the difficulty of finding affordable housing."*
>
> *"We are tenured academics, one at Harvard and the other at Rutgers, both Research 1-A institutions, and the very notion that we might be able to buy a house within reasonable proximity to Harvard is fantastical. Our children are in their 20s and have told us already that they cannot imagine ever being able to live (buying or renting) in the neighborhood where they have grown up."*

The affordability challenge may also threaten the city's ability to retain residents. Many responses say that the lack of housing they can afford makes their future in Cambridge precarious. They cite their inability to keep up with the rising cost of housing as the primary reason they are considering moving out of Cambridge, noting that they have witnessed many people leave for this very reason.

> *"If it wasn't for income restricted apartment buildings I wouldn't be able to live here."*
>
> *"It is by far the most stressful factor in my life and rent going up again this September has caused me to seriously consider moving out of Cambridge."*
>
> *"I feel that I contribute meaningfully to this community as a citizen and neighbor, but my long-term ability to live in Cambridge is jeopardized by the lack of affordable rental and home ownership."*

A plurality (46%) of Cambridge prefers for the City Council to give precedence to building more homes over preserving existing neighborhoods. This view is particularly strong among voters aged 18-34 (64%) and renters (57%). However, one in three (34%) voters would prefer to preserve existing neighborhoods at the expense of fewer new homes being built.

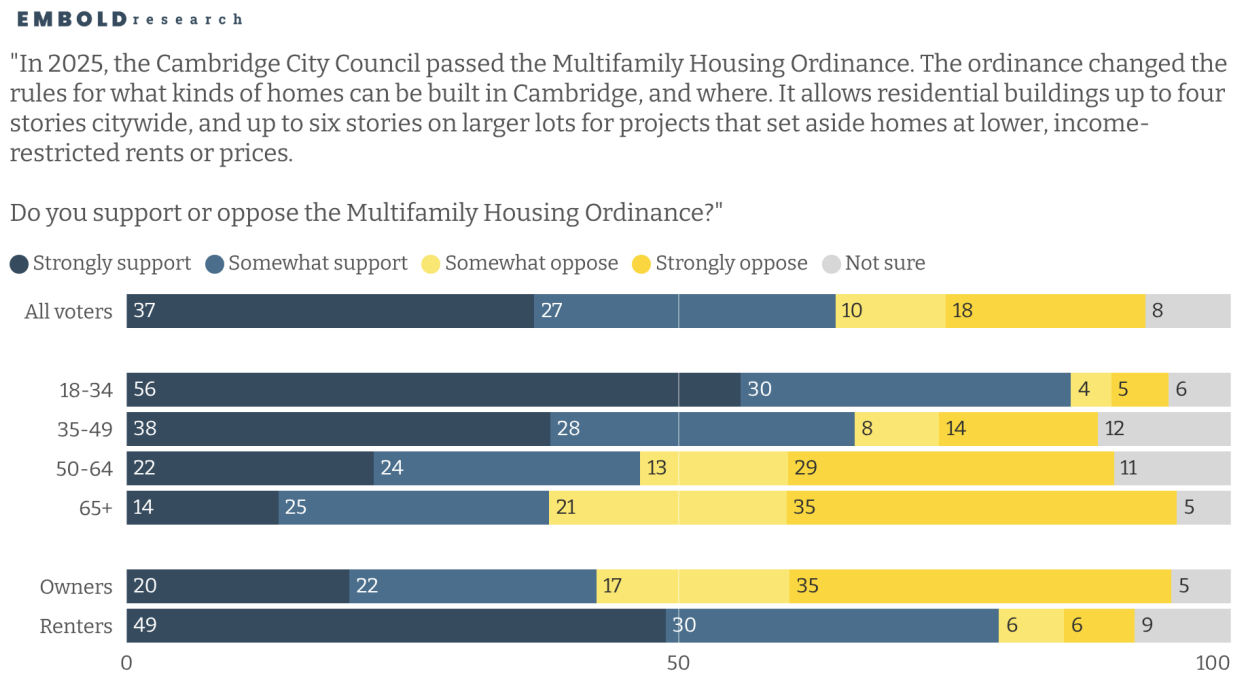


Some people struggling with housing affordability have tackled the sentiment to prioritize preserving the look and feel of neighborhoods over increasing housing availability head on:

> *"I'm the last of my friends and relatives to remain in the city. I will likely be priced out in the next couple of years. Hearing that we need to 'preserve the neighborhood' as a reason not to allow apartments tells me that I am not considered part of the neighborhood."*

Most Voters Back The Multifamily Housing Ordinance, with Vocal Opposition Led by Seniors and Homeowners

Residents broadly support the Multifamily Housing Ordinance's expansion of the type of residential buildings that can be built in Cambridge. Nearly two in three (64%) support the ordinance. Opposition is largely concentrated among voters 65 and older (57%) and homeowners (52%). However, among voters aged 18 to 34 and 35-49, who make up the majority of Cambridge's population, support for the ordinance sits at 86% and 66% respectively. Similarly, eight in ten renters (79%) are supportive of the ordinance.

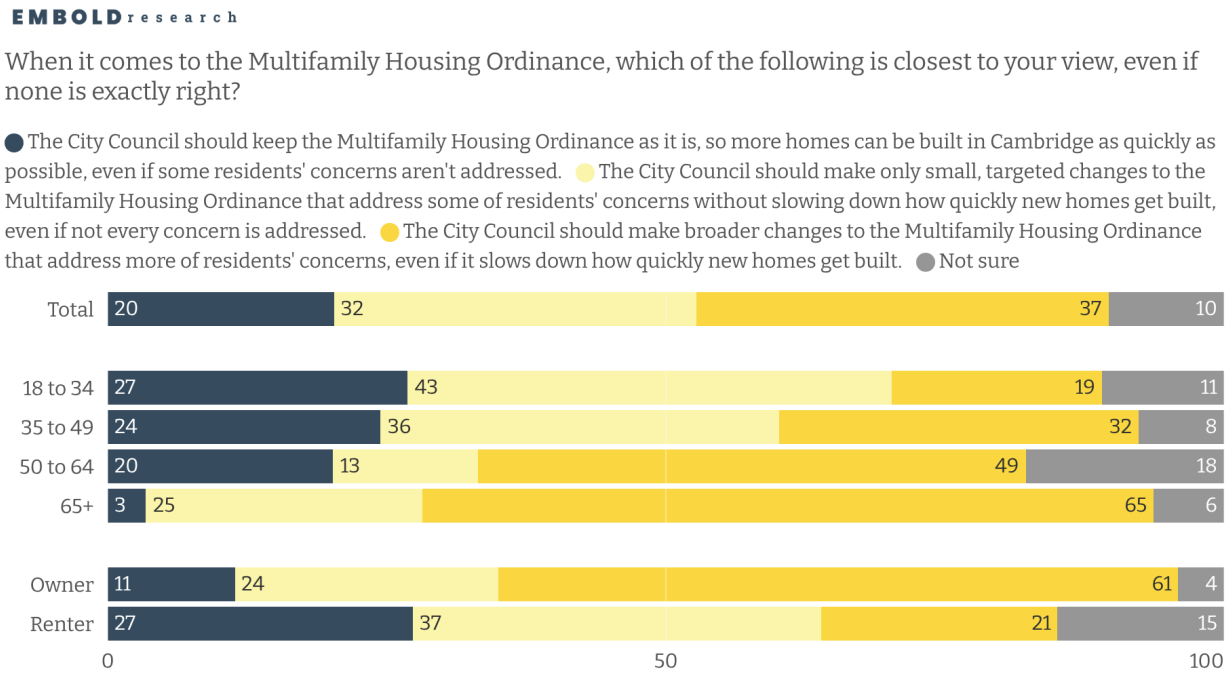


Older voters and homeowners are more likely to have heard of the Multifamily Housing Ordinance. Two in three homeowners (68%) say that they have heard "a lot" or "some" about the ordinance. In contrast, only four in ten renters (43%) report the same. There is also a gap

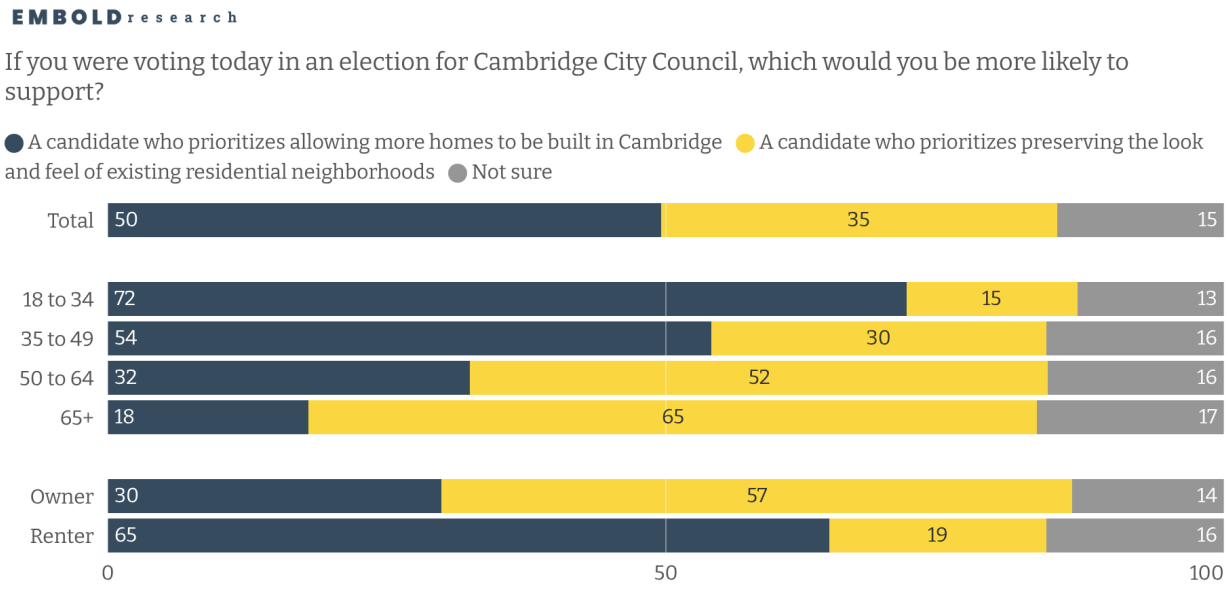
in awareness by age, with younger people less likely to have heard of the ordinance than older people. The people who are less likely to have heard of the ordinance are also the most likely to support it. The gap in attention may address why there is vocal opposition to the ordinance despite its strong support among Cambridge residents.

Voters Are Split on Changing The Ordinance

When asked how the City Council should handle the ordinance going forward, one in five (20%) want the ordinance kept as it is, while another 32% favor small, targeted changes that address some concerns without slowing down new housing. Meanwhile, 37% want the City Council to make broader changes that address more of residents' concerns, even if this slows down how quickly new homes get built. Support for broader changes is concentrated among voters 65 and older (65%) and homeowners (61%). Younger voters and renters see it differently: small, targeted changes are the top choice among voters aged 18 to 34 (43%) and renters (37%), and only about one in five in each group (19% and 21%) want broader changes.



Pro-Housing City Council Candidates Are in a Strong Position

Candidates for City Council who prioritize building homes over preserving the look and feel of existing neighborhoods fare well. One in two (50%) voters prefer candidates who prioritize building more homes, compared to 35% of voters who prioritize preserving the look and feel of existing residential neighborhoods. Candidates who prioritize building more homes especially appeal to voters under 35 years old, with 72% of voters under 35 more likely to support candidates who take this position.

The pattern holds across housing status and age. Renters favor a candidate who prioritizes building more homes by more than three to one (65% to 19%), and 72% of voters aged 18 to 34 say the same. Homeowners and voters 65 and older lean the other way, with majorities of each (57% and 65%, respectively) preferring a candidate who prioritizes preserving the look and feel of existing residential neighborhoods.