

An Order Establishing the Harvard Square Conservation District

Adopted December 18, 2000, as Amended December 20, 2020

There is hereby designated and established under the provisions of the Chapter 2.78, Article III of the City Code a neighborhood conservation district to be known as the Harvard Square Conservation District (the "District"), an area bounded as shown on the map entitled "Harvard Square Conservation District 2000," attached to this Order and incorporated into this Order in full. However, this Order shall not take effect until the effective time of an amendment to Section 11.50 of the Cambridge Zoning Code to create a Harvard Square Historic Overlay District.

I. Reasons for Designation

Harvard Square is Cambridge's historic core and reflects the distinctive architectural, cultural, political, economic, and social history of the city. Founded as Newtowne in 1630 and intended to be the capital of Massachusetts, Cambridge was the first planned town in English North America. Harvard Square still retains its 17th-century street plan, but has evolved into a distinctive mixed-use community containing significant buildings of many periods and styles and characterized by its commercial and social vitality. Pressures for change threaten the District's diverse architectural character, which this measure seeks to preserve, conserve and protect from adverse environmental influences. The Order will accomplish this purpose by establishing a process for guiding changes to properties in the District while ensuring that additions and alterations to properties are compatible with the character of the District, by offering a forum for community dialogue about proposed changes to properties in the District, by providing technical assistance to District property owners on issues of conservation and preservation, and by fostering wider public appreciation of the District, and will thereby promote the public welfare by making the District a more attractive and desirable place in which to live, work, and visit.

II. District Established

As authorized in Paragraph A, Section 2.78.160 of Article III of the City Code, the neighborhood conservation district hereby established shall be administered by the Cambridge Historical Commission. The District shall be known as the Harvard Square Conservation District.

III. Statement of Goals and Guidelines and Standards for Review

The Goal of the District and of this Order is to protect the Harvard Square Conservation District's distinctive physical and experiential characteristics and to enhance the livability and vitality of the District. The Historical Commission should seek to enhance the unique physical environment and visual form of the District; preserve its architecturally and historically significant structures and their settings; encourage creative design that contributes to the richness of its environment; mitigate character-diminishing impacts of new development; and discourage homogeneity by encouraging diversity of development and open space patterns and building scales and ages. The District must remain a pedestrian-friendly, accessible, human-scale, quirky, mixed-use environment that supports dynamic urban experiences, complements nearby neighborhoods, and respects the history and traditions of its location.

The following Secondary Goals for the District are intended to provide general guidance in a wide variety of situations, and are not intended to be applied to every project. They are statements of policy, not prescriptive measures that must be applied equally in each situation.

1. Significant Buildings. Preserve historically or architecturally significant buildings and structures as well as those that contribute to the distinctive visual character or historical significance of the District.
2. Sustain the vitality of the commercial environment. Sustain the vitality of the commercial environment while preserving architecturally-significant or original building fabric at street level and above. Encourage the restoration of missing features where these have been documented. Except for protected storefronts, encourage creative contemporary commercial design inside the restored framework of storefront openings. Encourage creative signage. Support below-grade commercial spaces where appropriate. Regardless of use, encourage architectural solutions that preserve storefront fabric, transparency, and utility.
3. Contemporary Design. Where context allows, support creative, contemporary design for new construction that complements the context of abutting buildings and enhances the character of the subdistrict. Recognize and respect well-reasoned contemporary design during the review process. Support innovative approaches to enhancing the unique character of Harvard Square while mitigating the detrimental impacts of development on proximate areas.
4. Diversity of Form. Build on and sustain the diversity of existing building form, scale and material. Preserve and encourage appropriate green spaces, scale-appropriate open spaces, and new buildings that support the prevailing character of the subdistrict. Preserve the remaining wood frame buildings throughout the District. Maintain a consistent setback or streetwall condition where that character has been set. Support small-scale storefronts to preserve the vitality and character of the streetscape.
5. Public Environment. Create a high-quality public environment in the District with compatible materials, lighting, signage, and street furniture such as bollards, benches, moveable seating, and the like. Provide adequate facilities for trash and recycling and surfaces that can be cleaned and maintained. Encourage planted greenspaces and accommodate trees where possible.
6. Pedestrian Experience. Protect and enhance the pedestrian experience. Expand the network of pedestrian walkways and paths wherever they can conveniently provide alternate routes through the District. Increase public access to alleys and interior spaces where appropriate and upgrade the paving and landscaping of such spaces. Enhance accessibility and safety for pedestrians throughout the District.
7. Residential Development. Enhance the all-hours neighborhood quality of Harvard Square by supporting existing residential uses and encouraging additional residential

units in mixed-use buildings.

8. Compatible Design. Encourage compatible design that supports a wide diversity of uses serving the needs of surrounding neighborhoods, students, workers and visitors from around the world.
9. Transportation. Encourage creative solutions to the District's transportation issues by providing balanced accommodations for through and local traffic, cyclists, and pedestrians. Promote smooth movement of traffic on through streets and seek creative design and management solutions for side streets where traffic volume and speeds can be regulated to give highest priority to pedestrians. Provide adequate bicycle parking throughout the District. Protect pedestrian safety and experience through careful design and placement of features such as loading docks, curb cuts, and receptacles for trash and recycling. Encourage replacement of surface parking lots with compatible new structures. Discourage provision of on-site parking for new construction.
10. Environmental Sustainability. Encourage environmentally sustainable development that takes into consideration the embodied energy of the existing built environment, material life cycles, passive design, energy conservation, and current standards for best energy conservation practices. Alterations to existing buildings that seek to promote energy conservation should be accomplished in a manner that respects character-defining materials and designs.
11. Architectural lighting. Architectural (building façade) lighting, streetscape lighting, and signage lighting, when allowed by a Certificate of Appropriateness, should reinforce definitive characteristics of historic and contemporary architecture as well as create high quality 24-hour streetscapes. To achieve these goals, projects should minimize brightness, and light trespass, monitor light color (temperature Kelvin), and focus lighting on significant features.

The foregoing goals also recite the standards for preservation and change within the District. In addition to the factors specified in Section 2.78.220, and subject to any specific provisions of this Order, in exercising its authority with respect to the District and in considering applications for certificates of appropriateness, hardship, or nonapplicability, the Historical Commission shall be guided by the preceding general goal for the District as a whole and by such of the preceding secondary goals as it determines to be applicable to the project or situation before it.

The Historical Commission shall also be guided by the standards and guidelines described in the "Final Report of the Harvard Square Neighborhood Conservation District Study Committee," dated November 29, 2000, as amended by the "Final Report of the 2017-19 Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee," which after public hearing the Historical Commission may adopt as regulations and thereafter amend from time to time.

In addition, the Historical Commission and project proponents shall consider the amended goals and guidelines specific to each of the seven subdistricts that make up the Harvard Square Conservation District. The subdistrict goals and guidelines describe the physical and historical

development of each area over time, identify notable buildings and spaces, and set forth preservation priorities and recommendations for each sub-district.

As permitted by Chapter 2.78.190.B, the Historical Commission may determine from time to time after public hearing that certain categories of exterior architectural features, structures, or signs may be altered without review by the Commission; provided, however, that every such alteration shall be determined by the Executive Director of the Historical Commission to conform to the regulations adopted by the Commission for the administration of the District.

IV. Review Procedures

The authority of the Historical Commission shall extend to the review of all construction, demolition, or alteration that affects exterior architectural features, other than color, within the District, except as otherwise provided in this Order. The determinations of the Commission shall be binding.

A. Exclusions from Review

As permitted by Ch. 2.78.190.B, the authority of the Historical Commission shall not extend to the following categories of structures or exterior architectural features and such structures or features may be constructed or altered without review by the Historical Commission.

- Storm doors and storm windows.
- Signs that conform to Section 7.000, “Signs and Illumination” of the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Cambridge, as the same may be amended with respect to Section 11.50, “Harvard Square Overlay District.”

B. Certificates of Nonapplicability

The following categories of alterations shall be issued a Certificate of Nonapplicability provided they conform to the applicable standards and guidelines of the District:

- Roof repairs and HVAC equipment not visible from a public way.
- Replacement windows pursuant to regulations that after public hearing the Historical Commission may adopt for this purpose.
- Alterations that the Executive Director of the Historical Commission determines do not alter, enclose, or extend further than the decorative or structural framework of the building or retail space originally intended to surround a storefront. The framework consists of such elements as piers, columns, cornerboards, quoins, cornices, and similar structural or decorative features.
- Storefront alterations that the Executive Director of the Historical Commission determines do not obscure, remove, relocate, or replace historic or original exterior architectural features. Exterior architectural features include, but are not limited to, such features as brackets, window and door casings, fascia, hoods, bays, and window sash.

V. Protected Storefronts

Notwithstanding the other provisions of this Order, all alterations to storefronts at the following addresses shall require review in accordance with Ch.2.78, Article III:

1304 Massachusetts Avenue
1316 Massachusetts Avenue
1320 Massachusetts Avenue
30-30A Plympton Street

VI. Coordination with Other Agencies and Boards

The Historical Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, Inspectional Services Department, and other City boards, agencies, and officials are directed to coordinate all review, hearing, permitting and other procedures relative to physical changes within the District to the extent practicable, consistent with their respective responsibilities.

VII. Public Notice

In addition to the notice requirements in Ch. 2.78.230, applicants scheduled to appear before the Historical Commission in a public hearing shall place a public notification placard on the premises that are the subject of the application. Placards shall be posted not less than seven days prior to the meeting and shall be maintained in public view and legible condition until the Historical Commission's determination is filed with the City Clerk. Placards shall be obtained by the applicant from the Historical Commission and shall be located as indicated on a plan provided by the Historical Commission. Placards shall be securely mounted on the subject premises at the street line or within the property, but not more than 20 feet from the street line, so as to be legible to persons passing on the public street without the necessity of trespassing. Stolen, destroyed, or illegible placards shall be promptly replaced and placards shall be promptly removed after the filing of the Historical Commission's determination. Information to be placed by the applicant on the placard shall indicate the address of the property; the date, time, and place of the public hearing; the nature of the action requested; and the application case number.

VIII. Time Limit for Commission Action

When taking action under the provisions of this Order and Sections 2.78.190, 2.78.200, 2.78.210, and 2.78.220 of Article III of Chapter 2.78, the Historical Commission shall make its determinations within forty-five days after the filing of a complete application for a certificate of appropriateness, non-applicability, or hardship, or within such further time as the applicant may in writing allow or the Historical Commission may determine in accordance with regulations that the Commission may adopt consistent with Section 2.78.230 of said Article III.

IX. Recommendation to City Council

During the twelve-month period prior to the fifth anniversary of the effective date of this Order the Historical Commission shall hold a public hearing to discuss the effectiveness of the Harvard

Square Conservation District and to make a recommendation to the City Council, based upon its findings following such public hearing, as to whether this Order should continue in effect, continue in effect with amendments, or be repealed. In the event that the City Council repeals this Order, except as the repealing order otherwise directs, both the Harvard Square Conservation District and the Harvard Square Historic Overlay District shall cease to be in effect, but all valid certificates, permits, orders and determinations of any City board, commission or agency issued prior to such cessation shall continue in effect.

In City Council December 18, 2000

Adopted by a yeas and nays vote:-

Yeas 9; Nays 0; Absent 0

Attest: D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk

As Amended in City Council December 20, 2020

Adopted by a yeas and nays vote:-

Yeas 9; Nays 0; Absent 0

Attest: Anthony Wilson, City Clerk