



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

831 Massachusetts Avenue, 2nd Fl., Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139
Telephone: 617 349 4683 Fax: 617 349 3116 TTY: 617 349 6112
E-mail: histcomm@cambridgema.gov URL: <http://www.cambridgema.gov/Historic>

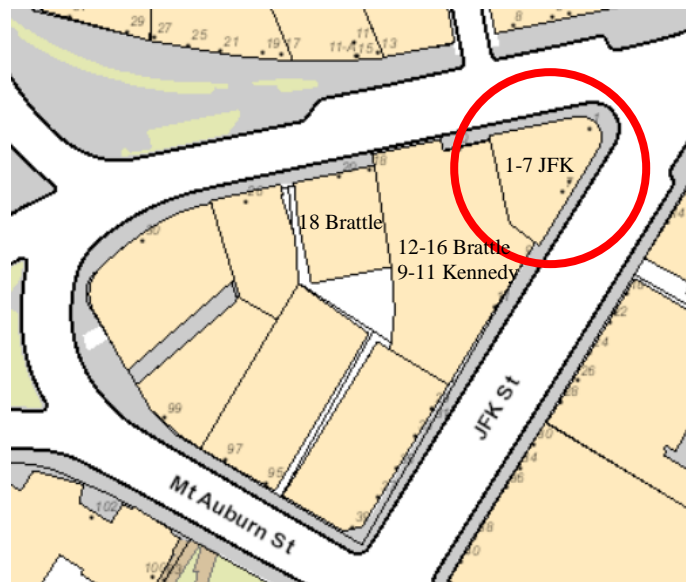
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Joseph V. Ferrara, Kyle Sheffield, Susannah Barton Tobin, *Alternates*

December 29, 2016

To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Charles Sullivan
Re: 1-7 John F. Kennedy Street, Updated Evaluation for Landmark Designation Study

Background

On November 23, 2016, the Commission received a petition requesting the initiation of a landmark designation study of the Abbott Building at 5 John F. Kennedy Street. Pending confirmation from the Election Commission that the petition contained the names of at least ten registered voters, the staff placed the matter on the agenda of the December 1 meeting of the Commission.



Abbott Building (circled)

On December 1 the Commission acknowledged receipt of the petition and voted to hold a public hearing on January 5 to decide whether to accept it. If it accepts the petition the Commission would have up to twelve months to prepare a report to the City Council. No additional regulatory process would be imposed because the building is already protected by the Harvard Square Neighborhood Conservation District.

On December 19, the City Council debated a resolution intended to put the Council on record as supporting the petition. The measure was charter-righted and will come up for consideration again on January 9. A copy of the resolution is attached.



5 John F. Kennedy Street, 2016

CHC photo

Abbott Building, 1-7 John F. Kennedy Street

The Abbott Building, built by real estate investor Edwin H. Abbott in 1909, is one of the most significant buildings in Harvard Square. Designed by the Cambridge firm of Newhall & Blevins, it was notable as “the first purely commercial Georgian Revival building in Harvard Square ... In 1913 a committee considering the future development of Harvard Square recommended adopting the Georgian Revival style to reflect the prestige of Harvard University and establish a new architectural character for the business district” (*Building Old Cambridge*, 695). The Abbott Building is a contributing structure in the Harvard Square National Register District, and has been protected by the Harvard Square Conservation District since 2000.

The Abbott Building is one of three buildings currently being proposed for redevelopment by Equity One: 1-7 Kennedy Street, 9-11 Kennedy Street, and 18 Brattle Street. This project, now called “The Collection in Harvard Square,” was reviewed by the Historical Commission on September 8 and on October 6, 2016. The case was again continued until December 1. The proponents initially intended to construct a three-story glass addition above 9-11 Kennedy Street (the Urban Outfitters building), but their revised plans call for demolition of that building and construction of a new brick infill structure. Only the Abbott Building is the subject of this landmark designation petition.

Landmark Criteria and Goals

Landmarks are enacted by the City Council upon recommendation of the Historical Commission. The Commission commences a landmark designation study process by its own initiative or by voting to accept a petition of ten registered voters.

The criteria provided in the ordinance outlines eligible properties as:

any property within the city being or containing a place, structure, feature, or object which it determines to be either (1) importantly associated with one or

more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic, or social history of the City or the Commonwealth or (2) historically or architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures... (2.78.180.A)

The purpose of landmark designation is described in the ordinance, which was enacted to,

preserve, conserve and protect the beauty and heritage of the City and to improve the quality of its environment through identification, conservation and maintenance of neighborhoods, sites and structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City; to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose; to foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge and appreciation of such neighborhoods, areas, or structures; and by furthering these purposes to promote the public welfare by making the city a more desirable place in which to live and work. (2.78.140)

Relationship to Criteria

The Abbott Building meets criterion (1) for its associations with the economic and social history of Cambridge. It also meets criterion (2) as being architecturally significant in in the context of Harvard Square.

Discussion

The Abbott Building is already protected by the Harvard Square Neighborhood Conservation District, which was adopted in 2000 under the same Council Order that enables designation of landmarks. Designation as a landmark would not add any further regulatory protection.

The Equity One project is currently under review by the Historical Commission under the terms of the Harvard Square Conservation District. Acceptance of the petition and initiation of a landmark study would not change the nature of that review.

The landmark designation petition seeks to protect a building whose exterior features are not threatened by the current development project. The Equity One project as currently designed retains all the significant publicly-visible exterior features of the Abbott Building and proposes only minor alterations to the storefronts. Landmark designation of the Abbott Building alone is unlikely to result in a different outcome for the larger development project.

While petitioners are concerned about the nature of the Harvard Collection project and its effect on the retail climate of Harvard Square, the Commission's jurisdiction is limited to publicly visible features; it cannot consider interior arrangements, use, or landlord-tenant arrangements.

Staff Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Commission decline to accept the petition for the reasons stated.

cc: John Cattonar, Equity One
James Rafferty, Esq.



City of Cambridge

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IN CITY COUNCIL
 December 19, 2016

COUNCILLOR DEVEREUX
 COUNCILLOR CARLONE
 COUNCILLOR MAZEN
 VICE MAYOR MCGOVERN

- WHEREAS: The Abbott Building, located at 5 John F. Kennedy Street in Harvard Square, is one of the most significant and recognizable buildings in Harvard Square, representing the spirit of the Square's history, architecture, local retail, and culture; and
- WHEREAS: Built in 1909, the building's triangular shape, with the Curious George store facing the main intersection of Harvard Square and the MBTA station, serves as the center of the Square; and
- WHEREAS: The Abbott Building was built by Edwin Hale Abbott (1834-1927), a Cambridge resident, attorney, and railroad executive who also helped to build the Phillips Brooks House in Harvard Yard; and
- WHEREAS: The Abbott Building was designed by the local architectural firm Newhall & Bevins, who designed at least 37 additional buildings in Cambridge in the early 20th century; and
- WHEREAS: The building's structure and architectural details were centered around the look, proportions, and materials most consistent with Cambridge; and
- WHEREAS: The Abbott Building lies within the boundaries of the Harvard Square Neighborhood Conservation District; and
- WHEREAS: A redevelopment proposal is under consideration that would allow the alteration of some of the Abbott Building's most prominent and distinctive historic architectural features, prompting public concern that the proposed gutting and reconfiguration of the entry and upper level interior spaces will be visible from the public way; and
- WHEREAS: A citizen petition to initiate a Landmark Designation study was delivered to the Cambridge Historical Commission on November 23, 2016 with 13 signatures, and a Change.org petition was signed by over 5,000 people with the goal to protect the Abbott Building and neighboring spaces; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED: That the City Council hereby go on record in support of asking the Cambridge Historical Commission to initiate a landmark designation study process on the Abbott Building in Harvard Square.