

Preliminary Landmark Designation Report
EMF Building
116 Brookline Street & 112 Pacific Street, Cambridge



EMF Building after Galvin additions. Staff photo, 1970. Cambridge Historical Commission

The former EMF Electrical Supplies building at 116 Brookline Street and the adjacent Metropolitan Ice Company building at 112 Pacific Street are significant for their architecture, associations with the industrial and commercial development of Cambridge in the early-mid twentieth century, and their connections with the arts and culture of the greater Central Square area. Both buildings are distinctive examples of specialized early twentieth century industrial structures that were adapted for commercial use and later in the case of the EMF building, for cultural venues. The buildings and their relationship to the surviving industrial structures along Brookline Street make important architectural contributions to the streetscape of this area of Cambridgeport.

Cambridge Historical Commission staff received a citizen's petition requesting the initiation of a landmark designation study of the EMF Building on July 17, 2018. On August 9, 2018 the Commission initiated a landmark designation study for the property under Ch. 2.78, Art. III of the City Code. During the one-year study period, which extends through August 8, 2019, the property has been administered as though it were already a designated landmark.

During the study period, the owner submitted plans for adaptive reuse of the entire structure for office use. On October 4, 2018, the Commission issued a Certificate of Appropriateness for the exterior renovations of EMF Building including: re-opening of original windows, preserving signs, constructing accessible means of egress, re-building CMU walls, recladding select walls, installing new windows, installing a pad-mounted transformer. An additional Certificate of Appropriateness was granted on March 7, 2019 for the construction of a roof deck at 116 Brookline Street and altering the building at 112 Pacific Street.

Preservation options include immediate submission of a landmark designation recommendation to the City Council for both parcels together as a protected landmark under Article III, Chapter 2.78. Alternatively, the commission could allow its jurisdiction to lapse, as the property is now fully renovated and unlikely to see alterations in the foreseeable future.

Charles Sullivan and Eric Hill
Cambridge Historical Commission
August 5, 2019

C. Zoning

The EMF site is located in Special Business, Office and Industrial District 9. This district was established to promote the development of housing, particularly affordable housing, with the intent of encouraging “a gradual evolution of nonresidential uses in this Special District 9 now heavily nonresidential in character, from those least in harmony with the adjacent residential neighborhood and the residential uses ultimately desired in the district, to those nonresidential uses most compatible with residential uses and ultimately to residential uses exclusively” (Art. 17.95A). Use requirements are those in Residential C districts, except that under certain conditions pre-existing office and laboratory uses, retail and consumer services, industry, and storage are permitted. The new owner received a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Cambridge Historical Commission in October 2018 to rehabilitate the existing space for office use and did not propose to add to the building’s footprint or height. This renovation is now substantially complete.

D. Area Description

The EMF Building and the adjoining Metropolitan Ice Company Service Building are two of several commercial and industrial complexes along Brookline Street. Brookline Street and the streets to its south and east were previously lined with industrial buildings and complexes, many of which have been demolished or adaptively reused for offices or residences.

The Gulesian Building at 130 Brookline Street, across Tudor Street has been adapted for office use, while the former George Dyer Co. complex at 133-155 Brookline Street, renovated in 1998, is now occupied by condos. Further northeast, the former Simplex Wire & Cable campus and other industrial structures were demolished for the University Park development, which comprises offices, residences, commercial buildings, and a hotel.

The adjoining neighborhood on Brookline Street and westward is primarily residential, with one-, two- and three-family houses overlooking the EMF building and its neighbors. Brookline Street serves as a dividing line for the building typology and use in the neighborhood from industrial and commercial on the east and primarily residential on the west.

E. Planning Issues

The former owners of the EMF Building had converted the interior into multiple studio spaces that were primarily rented to musicians. Ledgemoor LLC acquired the property in 2016 and in April 2018 moved to empty out the building in preparation for conversion to office use. The evictions triggered an intense public debate about the importance of the site to the cultural scene in Central Square and the diminishing opportunities for affordable studio space in the community. Cambridge Historical Commission staff received a citizens’ petition requesting the initiation of a landmark designation study of the building on July 17, 2018. On August 9 the Commission determined that the building was significant and initiated a landmark designation study for the property under Ch. 2.78, Art. III of the City Code. During the one-year study period, which extends through August 8, 2019, the property has been administered as though it were already a designated landmark.

The owner had previously determined that, despite the Special District incentives for housing development conversion to office or laboratory space would be economically preferable. In September 2018 the owner submitted plans to adapt the entire structure for office use. On October 4, 2018, the Commission issued a Certificate of Appropriateness for exterior renovations, including restoration of

original window openings and installation of new lights; preservation of a projecting sign and painted signs; accessibility improvements; rebuilding CMU walls and recladding others; and installation of a pad-mounted transformer. An additional Certificate of Appropriateness was granted on March 7, 2019, for the construction of a roof deck at 116 Brookline Street (EMF) and alterations to 112 Pacific Street (Metropolitan Ice).

II. Description

The EMF Building and the adjacent Metropolitan Ice Company storage facility are the products of several owners and uses between 1920 and present day, and their architecture and additions showcase the evolution of the buildings over time. Both structures together serve as smaller-scale transitional buildings between the full-block industrial and office structures to their south and east and the two and three-story residential properties on the other side of Brookline Street. While not built at the same time nor as part of the same property, both structures are emblematic of the industrial history in Cambridgeport.

III. History of the Property

From the founding of Cambridge in 1630 until 1793 present-day Cambridgeport comprised a vast tract of unpopulated salt marshes and woodland. The nearest village centered around Harvard Square, whose residents owned tracts of marsh where they gathered the nutrient-rich salt marsh hay.

The opening of the West Boston Bridge on Thanksgiving Day in 1793 spurred the development of Cambridgeport. Prior to that time, there were only three houses east of Quincy Street and none south of Massachusetts Avenue. Most of the area was controlled by a handful of landowners, including William Jarvis, Francis Dana, and William Watson. Jarvis and Dana worked with the bridge company to lay out Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street, and in 1800 and 1801 Dana and Watson laid out Pearl, Brookline, and Franklin streets. Merchants and tradesmen quickly began to establish businesses



Cambridgeport as surveyed in 1847; 116 Brookline Street indicated. U.S. Coast Survey, *Boston Harbor*, 1857

in Lafayette Square at the Cambridge end of the causeway to the bridge. This initial burst of development was cut short by the Embargo of 1807 and the War of 1812, and the economy did not recover until the mid-1820s.

Brookline Street ran along the edge of the relatively well-drained upland pastures, separating them from the tidal marshes of the Charles River. The area was a somewhat desolate spot, subject to flooding in storms until the construction of a railroad embankment in 1853. The upper, residential portion of the street was fully developed by the end of the 1840s, as seen clearly on Walling's 1854 map. Below Auburn Street, Brookline developed as an industrial corridor. Early factories produced "premium wheat starch" and fatty soap; later came carmakers, full-service garages, and storage facilities. Then, as now, single-family houses jostled for space with triple-deckers and tenements.

The EMF Building was built in 1920 as a factory for the National Company, a manufacturer of "mechanical specialties"; initially these were toys and household items but later included mechanical components of radios. The company soon focused on production of short-wave radio receivers. National and a related electronics company, Browning-Drake, occupied the Brookline Street factory until the late 1920s, when it was purchased by Devices Corp., a manufacturer of exercise machines that entered bankruptcy in 1934. Later in the decade it was occupied by a manufacturer of oil burners and heating oil tanks.

Right: "National Impediaformer" manufactured by the National Co., Cambridge, Mass. ca 1925. CHC collection



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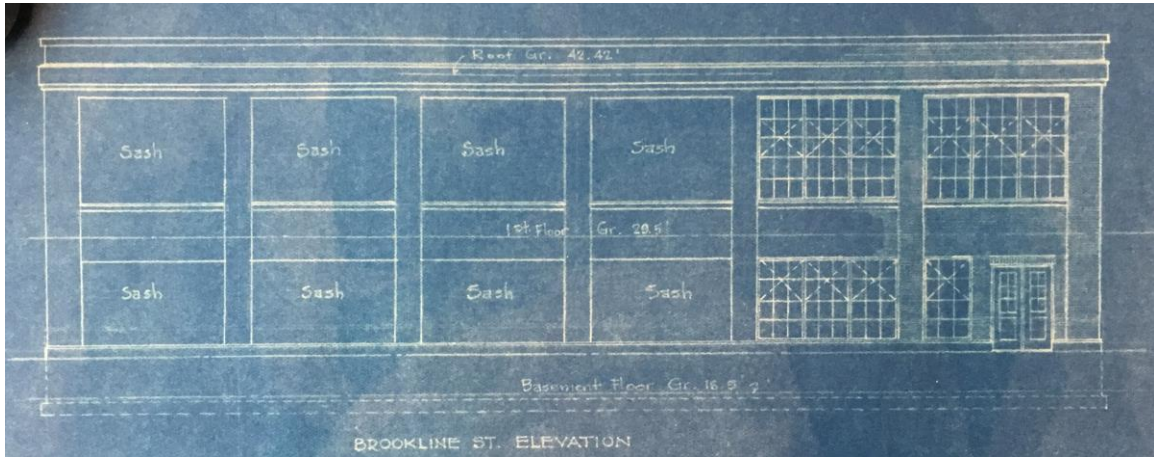
Operates from your electric light socket.

Manufactured by
Devices Corporation 120 BROOKLINE STREET
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

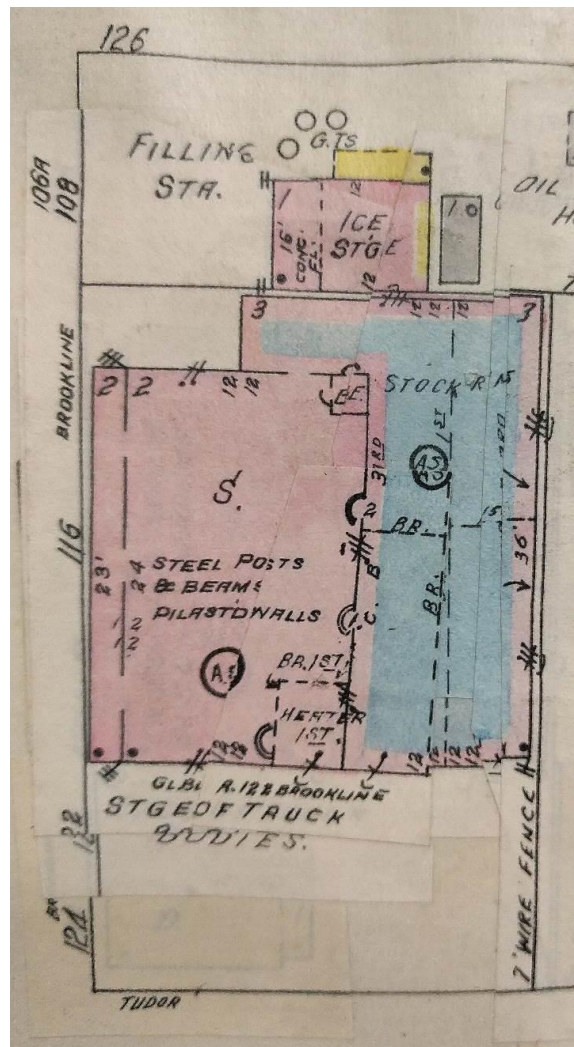
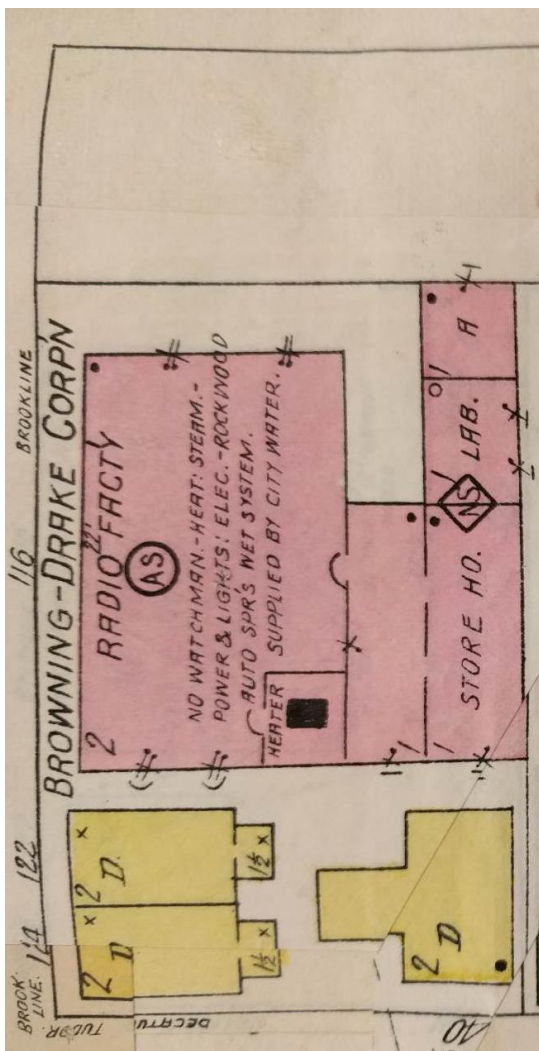


Left: "University Exerciser and Reducer" manufactured by the Devices Corp, 120 Brookline Street. *Cambridge Directory*, 1930

The original National Company factory was a two-story brick building with steel factory sash designed by architect A.E. (or possibly C.E.) Nichols, about whom nothing is known. The building measured 84 by 50 feet and was set back 8 feet from the sidewalk, as required at the time to allow the future widening of Brookline Street. By 1929 several one-story appendages for storage and laboratory use had been added at the rear.



Elevation, National Co. factory, 120 Brookline Street. (1920, C. E. Nichols, architect) Massachusetts Archives



108 and 116 Brookline Street, ca. 1929 and ca. 1955. Sanborn Map Co., *Atlas of Cambridge*, 1900-1929 and 1934-1955

Russian-born Abraham “Uncle Abe” Katz (1904-1997), the founder of EMF, was the son of a blacksmith who brought his family to the US when Katz was a child. He was raised in Colchester, Connecticut, and graduated from the town’s Bacon Academy High School. Katz then moved to Boston, where he worked at the Market Forge Co. in Everett; in 1924 he organized the Rossman Electric Co. with his business partner Louis Arvedon. He began EMF in Cambridge in 1928. Katz was the brother of Pearl Wise, the first woman elected to the Cambridge City Council.

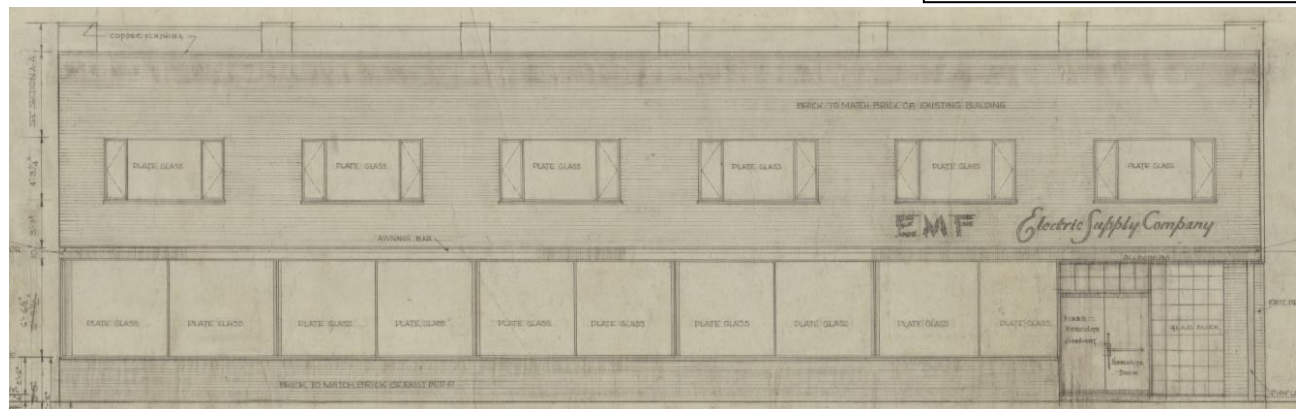
Katz had been operating an electrical supply and camera store at 438 Massachusetts Avenue in Central Square when he acquired the National factory in 1938. Katz’s new retail store, EMF Electrical Supplies, expanded into home appliances after WWII and became the kind of discount business that was later operated at a much greater scale by Lechmere Sales.¹ Katz initially used the building as a warehouse, but sales grew and in 1950 he retained Cambridge architect William L. Galvin to design



EXTERIOR VIEW OF THE MODERN EMF Electrical Co. store and storage bldg. at 110 Brookline Street. A busy mart, where Abe Katz and his able crew of assistants are kept “jumping” from morning to night. Yes, it’s a “live wire” crowd.

an 8-foot-deep addition with plate glass windows for retail displays. This was possible because the city had abandoned its early twentieth century plan to widen Brookline Street. The parapet of the original façade is still visible.

The National Co. factory, as adapted for retail use. Cambridge Sentinel



Storefront addition (1950, William L. Galvin, architect). William L. Galvin collection, CHC



The company eventually focused on industrial sales and in 1971 bricked up most of the showroom windows. EMF continued in business until about 2005. William Desmond then leased the building from the Katz family for a ten-year period and it began to emerge as a place for art to be made and shared. Eventually, the interior was sectioned off into rooms that could be leased by artists of all sorts. Room rentals ranged between \$450 and \$650 a month; the cost was shared by sub-lessees, which kept the spaces accessible to emerging artists and musicians.

¹ “EMF” is the abbreviation for “electromotive force,” which is defined as “the electrical action produced by a non-electrical source. A device that converts other forms of energy into electrical energy, such as a battery or generator, provides an emf as its output.” It is not clear why Katz named his business this way.



116 Brookline (right) and 112 Pacific Street (left) in 1994 photograph. Note the enclosed bricked-up storefronts at right.

According to William Desmond, a former building manager, the interior of the EMF building was lined with corridors connecting upwards of sixty rehearsal spaces and three recording studios. The solid brick walls and minimal fenestration prevented sound from the sometimes 200+ artists inside from spilling out into the neighborhood. Tenants said that many nearby residents did not know the space was being used by musicians--they would simply see people coming and going at all hours of the day and night.



116 Brookline Street, interior corridors constructed for musicians' studios. *Cambridge Day*, April 28, 2018

The EMF Building offered rare, affordable studio space near Central Square, which has long been a regional art and music hub. Many aspiring musicians collaborated on song projects, all the while gaining experience and fostering their own creativity and expression. They could rehearse in the in-house recording studios and perform at nearby Central Square venues such as The Middle East, TT the Bear's, and the Sonia Live Music Venue. Anna Rae, a longtime tenant, noted that EMF was a "one stop

shop" for artists, who turned the former electronics wholesale company building into a thriving community of artists and musicians in Cambridgeport.

While the EMF primarily housed musicians, visual artists often collaborated and showcased their work both on and inside the building. The spaces inside the storefront became pop-up art galleries,

offering exhibition space for aspiring visual artists. The large mural on the northern brick wall of the EMF Building was painted in 2014 by Caleb Neelon, a local artist who grew up not far from the building. Neelon never rented space inside but saw that blank brick wall and wanted to paint on it. To him the mural's quilt-like design and the quote, "THE FUTURE HOME OF WHERE THIS USED TO BE" represents the changes seen in the neighborhood and greater region.



116 Brookline Street, mural by Caleb Neelon. CHC staff photo, August 1, 2019.



EMF Building, 116 Brookline Street, July 2018

CHC staff photo

The adjoining Metropolitan Ice Co. building was built for ice storage in 1931. Metropolitan had a railroad siding in North Cambridge to receive natural ice, but by 1931 had largely converted to a manufactured product. The Cambridgeport building may have been used for local distribution and as a filling station for the company's trucks. Metropolitan used the building into the 1950s, when it was taken over by a heating oil distributor. Most recently it was occupied by a welding shop.



EMF Building, 116 Brookline Street, July 2018.

CHC staff photo



EMF Building, 116 Brookline Street, February 2019

CHC staff photo



Existing painted signs and previously approved replacement storefronts.

Previously approved recessed entry.



Previously approved cladding and new sash. Tudor Street façade (top) and viewed from Tudor Street Dog Park (bottom). CHC staff photos, August 1, 2019.

IV. Significance of the Property

The former EMF Electrical Supplies Building at 116 Brookline Street and the adjacent Metropolitan Ice Company building at 112 Pacific Street are together significant for their architecture and associations with the industrial and commercial development of Cambridge in the early-mid 20th century, as well as their connections with the arts and culture of the greater Boston area. Both buildings are distinctive examples of specialized early twentieth century industrial structure, later adapted for showrooms and commercial sales and storage. The buildings and their relationship to the other surviving industrial structures along Brookline Street make an important architectural contribution to the streetscape of this area of Cambridgeport.

V. Relationship to Criteria

A. Article III, Chapter 2.78.180 a.

The enabling ordinance for landmarks states:

The Historical Commission by majority vote may recommend for designation as a landmark 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 its 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 . . .

B. Relationship of Property to Criteria

The EMF Building and the adjacent Metropolitan Ice Company Building meet landmark criterion (1) for their important associations with the architectural, cultural, and economic history of the City.

VI. Recommendations

A. Purpose of Designation

Article III, Chapter 2.78.140 states the purpose of landmark designation:

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 . . . 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; [and] to foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge and appreciation of such . . . structures . . .

B. Preservation Options

Landmark designation or donation of a preservation restriction are two options for the permanent long-term protection and preservation of the buildings. The EMF building is not individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but National Register listing alone does not permanently protect and preserve buildings. No plans are underway for historic district or neighborhood conservation

district study in the area. On the other hand, there would appear to be no obvious threats to the property once the currently proposed adaptive reuse project is completed.

C. Staff Recommendation

The staff recommends the Commission find that the EMF Building and adjacent Metropolitan Ice Company Building together meet the criteria for landmark designation. Based on this finding, the Commission could either vote to recommend that the City Council designate the properties together as a protected landmark under Article III, Chapter 2.78, or allow its jurisdiction to lapse because the property will soon have been fully renovated under a Certificate of Appropriateness granted in 2018.

VII. Standards and Criteria

Under Article III, the Historical Commission is charged with reviewing any construction, demolition or alteration that affects the exterior architectural features (other than color) of a designated landmark. This section of the report describes exterior architectural features that are among the characteristics that led to consideration of the property as a landmark. Except as the order designating or amending the landmark may otherwise provide, the exterior architectural features described in this report should be preserved and/or enhanced in any proposed alteration or construction that affects those features of the landmark. The standards following in paragraphs A and B of this section provide guidelines for the treatment of the landmark described in this report.

A. General Standards and Criteria

Subject to review and approval of exterior architectural features under the terms of this report, the following standards shall apply:

1. Significant historic and architectural features of the landmark should be preserved.
2. Changes and additions to the landmark which have taken place over time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right and, if so, that significance should be recognized and respected.
3. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced.
4. When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
5. New materials should, whenever possible, match the material being replaced in physical properties, design, color, texture, and appearance. The use of imitation replacement materials is generally discouraged.
6. The surface cleaning of a landmark should be done by the gentlest possible means. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that damage exterior architectural features shall not be used.
7. Additions should not destroy significant exterior architectural features and should be recognizable as new architectural elements, without compromising the original building's historic aspects, architectural significance, or the distinct character of the landmark, neighborhood, and environment.

8. Additions should be designed in a way that, if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the landmark would be unimpaired.
9. Existing painted EMF signage and the mural tell the story of the building's recent past and should be preserved.

B. Suggested Review Guidelines

1. Site Development.

There appears to be little or no further as-of-right potential for development on the site beyond that which has already been approved by the Historical Commission.

2. Alterations

The Commission approved a Certificate of Appropriateness for the adaptive reuse project in Case 4000 on November 1, 2018. The approved plans and elevations by Bruner/Cott & Associates are titled "120 Brookline St Cambridge MA," dated August 8, 2018, and as supplementary drawings titled, "120 Brookline Street Additional Information," dated received on October 17, 2018. Approval did not include the exterior lighting on the second floor or the roof deck and delegated construction details to the staff. The owner returned to the commission with details of the roof deck and modifications to the Metropolitan Ice Co. building on March 7, 2019 and the Commission approved a certificate of appropriateness for those aspects of the project.

The Commission staff has approved the construction drawings submitted for a building permit and construction is now substantially complete.

a. Exterior surfaces

Exterior materials should be preserved insofar as practicable, except where previously approved for replacement. Special care should be taken to protect and maintain the brick masonry. Repointing the mortar joints should be done with special care to maintain the color and texture of the mortar and the profile of the joints.

b. Fenestration

The Historical Commission has approved re-opening and replacement of factory sash and storefront windows. Future addition of new window openings on the front and sides of the building should be discouraged.

c. Interior features

Although interior features are not subject to the jurisdiction of the Cambridge Historical Commission, the owner should be encouraged to preserve and highlight, where possible, structural materials and surfaces that represent the industrial history of the building.

VIII. Proposed City Council Order

ORDERED:

That the EMF Building, 116 Brookline Street, and the Metropolitan Ice Company Building, 112 Pacific Street, Cambridge, be designated together as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter 2.78, Article III, Section 2.78.180 of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on August 8, 2019. The premises so designated are the land defined as parcels 52 and 59 of assessor's map 95 and the buildings thereon and the premises described in a deed recorded in Book 72097, Page 337, and Book 72110, Page 113, of the South Middlesex Registry of Deeds.

This designation is justified by the important architectural and cultural associations the properties represent as early twentieth century industrial buildings associated with the National Company, an early electronics manufacturer, a once-prominent regional retailer, EMF Electrical Supplies, and for their important associations with the musical and arts communities of Cambridge.

The effect of this designation shall be that review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship, or Non-Applicability shall be required before any construction activity can take place within the designated premises or any action can be taken affecting the appearance of the premises, that would in either case be visible from a public way, that was not previously approved by Certificates of Appropriateness issued on November 1, 2018, and March 7, 2019. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the terms of the Final Landmark Designation Report, dated _____, __, 2019, with respect to the designated premises, by Section VII, Standards and Criteria of said report, and by the applicable sections of Chapter 2.78, Article III, of the Cambridge Municipal Code.

Bibliography

1. General Sources

Boston Globe

Cambridge Chronicle

Cambridge Day

Cambridge Sentinel

Hail, Christopher. *Cambridge Buildings and Architects*. Cambridge, 2002.

2. Government Records and Sources

Cambridge Historical Commission Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge

3. Other Sources

Cambridge City Directories

William Lawrence Galvin Collection, Cambridge Historical Commission

Mass. Dept. of Public Safety collection, Massachusetts Archives

Interviews with Caleb Neelon, Anna Rae, and Jonathan Glancy.

Appendix

Cambridge Inspectional Services Department condition report, April 24, 2018
Cambridge Fire Department condition report, April 27, 2019



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
INTEROFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

TO: Louis DePasquale
City Manager

DATE: April 24, 2018

FROM: Ranjit Singanayagam
Commissioner/I.S.D

A small, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Singanayagam'.

SUBJECT: 120 Brookline Street, Cambridge, MA. Former EMF Building

Based on a walkthrough with other City Officials, the following was noted.

This building was built in 1920, it consists of three different kinds of construction, heavy timber, concrete/masonry and wood frame.

It appears that, soil abatement needs to be done due to the contaminated soil in the surrounding areas, there may be a requirements for asbestos abatement due to the age of the building. It appears that since the original building was built there were additions to this building.

It was noted, the corridors are narrow and with un-even floor with open wiring may need to be insulated and open duck work without any insulation.

The existing sprinkler system may need to be updated or tested. Insufficient toilet facilities with no handicap facilities. There are no passenger elevators available and also appears to have no fire separation between tenant spaces. Roof needs to be inspected and replaced if necessary.

Further, some of the ceilings may have to be replaced and drop ceilings to be investigated for fire suppression. It also appears that there are no proper air exchangers and no heat provided at the 3rd floor level. All combustibles have to be removed.

No accessible entrance.

Provide diagrams to clear path of exits.

Depending on the cost of renovation, the whole building will need to comply with the Architectural Access Board requirements.



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
FIRE DEPARTMENT
 ISO Class 1 Fire Department
 HEADQUARTERS
 491 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA. 02138



GERARD E. MAHONEY
 ACTING CHIEF OF DEPARTMENT

TEL 617-349-4970
 FAX 617-349-4999

PAUL SHEEHAN
 ASSISTANT CHIEF

THOMAS F. CAHILL
 ASSISTANT CHIEF

April 27, 2018

Acting Chief Mahoney,

I had the opportunity last week to conduct a thorough walkthrough of the former EMF building located at 120 Brookline St. The building is equipped with a sprinkler system, a fire alarm system and a Knox Box which is located by the front entrance, containing a grand master key which should open most doors in the building. The building itself is two stories in some areas, three stories in others with a single story unit on the Pacific Street side. The building is made of concrete block for exterior walls and what appear to be block bearing walls on the interior. The remainder of the building is wood frame including heavy timber carrying beams, steel I beams and tongue and grooved wood flooring throughout the b. In many cases, the flooring is covered with plywood and where there are ceilings, they are acoustical tiles, however many are missing throughout the building. Above the drop ceiling is a significant sized interstitial space, unprotected by sprinklers or fire detection.

- Lighting in the common hallways varies with each hall. Some lighting consists of drop lights plugged into outlets controlled by wall switches, some lighting is hardwired and a few halls have no lighting at all.
- Many of the walls in common hallways are covered with either plywood or wood paneling over the wood framing.
- Fire doors not operating as designed.
- The combination of three buildings comprising one, create additional challenges for an emergency response as now faced with former exterior bearing walls, acting as interior walls, which will limit access in certain emergencies.
- A storage room adjacent to the elevator is packed from floor to ceiling and it appears that flammable liquids are being stored on the back shelves of this closet.

- The foundation shows signs of deterioration, and in some rooms, foam has been sprayed into the larger gaps.
- Some areas of the building appear to have no heat. Tenants of certain units are utilizing space heaters in these locations.
- Asbestos wrapped pipes are found in many areas. Any size fire will involve unknowingly disrupting what appears to be friable asbestos.
- The building has narrow hallways, many of which lead to dead ends. The floors are uneven and in some cases you are stepping up or down into rooms or adjacent hallways. Off the hallways, there are numerous rooms, most of which have 3 locks/deadbolts to enter. In certain cases (unit #23), you must unlock two deadbolts, open a door to find another door with three additional locks/deadbolts. There are fire doors located sporadically throughout, however few of them appear to function as designed. Some of the hallways have doors installed midway down the hall and triple locked. It is possible that tenants in some of the units can be locked behind these doors without adequate egress. Many of the rooms have sound proof rooms within them as small as 4' x 4', encapsulated in foam padding.
- The "New Alliance" room (unit # 28) has flammables stored in cabinets, the walls are covered in fabric and the floor is raised for acoustical reasons creating another large unprotected void which takes up a decent size portion of the second floor habitable area.
- Very little fire stopping between units and no visible fire stopping between floors. Large pipe chases throughout the building that communicate from room to room and floor to floor.
- Multiple ceilings in various rooms creating unprotected voids for fire travel.
- Numerous locked rooms within rooms that have access to them, and no egress. In some cases, access to them is via step ladders or makeshift stairs.
- Electrical junction boxes throughout the building with exposed wires.
- Exterior windows are mostly blocked with metal grates, plywood or built in air conditioners.
- I was unable to access and assess any hazards on the roof at this time.

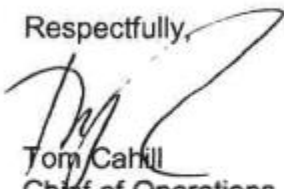
Conclusion:

Despite the efforts to forewarn occupants of our inspection, many units had clothing, string lights and other miscellaneous items hanging from and obstructing the sprinkler system, AV devices and pull stations. I only had access to approximately 5 of the rooms, however the others were described by management representatives as "similar".

This building could be a tremendous hazard to its occupants and first responders. In the event of a fire, you could expect a rapid fire spread throughout because of the large, unprotected interstitial spaces. Occupants encountering a smoke or fire condition will likely retreat to the rooms they are able to access which are clad with highly flammable soundproofing materials as well as combustibles designed to deflect sound for acoustical reasons

In my experience as a nationally certified fire investigator, I believe that although the building is equipped with a sprinkler system, a fire would rapidly overtake that system due to the amount of combustibles and interstitial spaces as noted. A search for occupants in a smoke charged building of this type will be limited as a result of the items discussed, and you should expect a less than desirable outcome for occupants and rescuers.

Respectfully,



Tom Cahill
Chief of Operations
Cambridge Fire Department
Cambridge, MA 02138
617-349-4975