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Preliminary Report of the 2017-19 Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee

Recommendations for Amending the Goals,
Guidelines, and Order Establishing the District

The Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee was appointed by the City Manager in August 2017 and began meeting that October. Monthly meetings continued through June 2018 and resumed in September. Attendees discussed the events that led to the establishment of the district in 2000 and the record of its operations and effectiveness. Representatives of the Community Development Department described zoning and sign regulations. Focusing on the *Final Report of the Cambridge Historical Commission Regarding the Proposed Harvard Square Conservation District*, the committee held detailed discussions about the goals, secondary goals, and guidelines of the District; the application of those goals and guidelines to matters of demolition, new construction, and alterations. The evolving character of the subdistricts was also discussed.

The next step is preparation of the Preliminary Report of the Study Committee for transmission to the Cambridge Historical Commission. The Historical Commission will discuss the Study Committee's recommendations at a public hearing and send a Final Report to the City Council for action. Following is a provisional outline of the Preliminary Report.

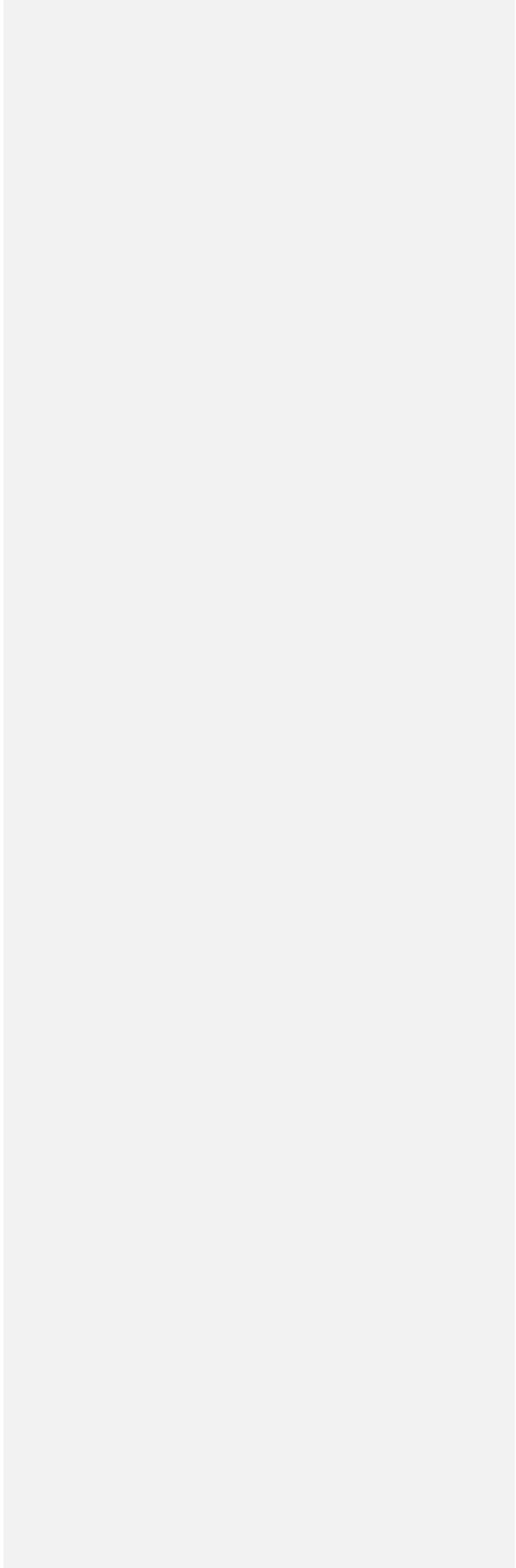
Preliminary Report of the 2017-18 Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee
With Recommendations for Amending the Goals, Guidelines, and Order Establishing the District

Summary of Recommendations

- I. Establishment and Operations of the Harvard Square Conservation District, 1995-2018**
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[Appendix A: Original Order Establishing the Harvard Square Conservation District](#)

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I. Establishment and Operations of the Harvard Square Conservation District, 1995-2018

On December 18, 2000, the Cambridge City Council, by a unanimous 9-0 vote, adopted an Order establishing the Harvard Square Conservation District (see Appendix A, Harvard Square Conservation District Order).

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The Harvard Square Conservation District, bounded by Massachusetts Avenue and Mount Auburn, Eliot, Bennett, Story, and Church streets, contains approximately 195 buildings. Within this District the Commission has binding review over demolition, new construction, and publicly visible exterior alterations to existing buildings, and can, in appropriate cases, impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by zoning. In making its decisions, the Commission follows guidelines intended to preserve historic resources while encouraging the social, economic, and architectural diversity that characterizes the Square. The Commission collaborates with the Harvard Square Advisory Committee on large projects that require special permits in the Harvard Square Overlay District.

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The initial impetus for the Conservation District was a July 31st, 1995 City Council directive that the Commission "submit a plan...for a Harvard Square Historic District which would preserve and protect all remaining historical buildings in Harvard Square." This Council Order was adopted during the controversy over the proposed redevelopment of the Read Block and the displacement of its retail and commercial tenants, including The Tasty, a popular lunch counter with a wide following. This was only the most recent event in the gradual demolition of wood-frame commercial buildings in the square and the perceived erosion of the square's traditional retail and service sectors. The Read Block/Tasty debate was a turning point in the on-going discussion about the Square because it heightened public awareness of the fragility of its older buildings and sharpened the discussion about the meaning and limitations of historic preservation.

A study committee appointed by the City Manager first considered the area for designation as an historic district under Ch. 40C of the General Laws. The Commission's October 1999 recommendation that the City Council establish a Harvard Square Historic District under M.G.L. Ch. 40C and related amendments to the Zoning Code expired at the end of the Council term. In June 2000 the City Council passed a new Order asking that the City Manager "direct the Historical Commission ... to prepare an alternative version of the proposed Harvard Square Historic District ordinance using the neighborhood conservation district model." The same members were reappointed as a new study committee in September 2000 (giving the Commission interim jurisdiction while it formulated a recommendation), and they determined that the neighborhood conservation district established under Ch. 2.78 of the City Code could be as effective in accomplishing historic preservation goals as a historic district, and could be more flexible and efficient than an historic district in a variety of respects, including the ability to delegate certain approvals to the staff.

On October 7, 1999 the Harvard Square Neighborhood Conservation District Study Committee recommended the establishment of a conservation district under Ch. 2.78, Article III of the City Code. The committee also recommended amending several existing provisions of the codes: (a) the zoning ordinance, to maintain the existing density allowed in the Harvard Square Overlay District; (b) Ch. 2.78, Article III, to clarify its appeal provisions and to extend the time within which action must be taken; and (c) the Historical Commission ordinance (Ch. 2.78, Article I), to provide for a Harvard Square representative on the Commission. The District was established on

December 18, 2000 and the amendments to the Zoning Code went into effect soon thereafter. However, the City Council took no action on the proposed amendments to Ch. 2.78.

Among the provisions of the Order was a requirement that the Historical Commission hold a public hearing and submit a report on the effectiveness of the first five years of the District, with a recommendation to the City Council as to whether the Order establishing the District should continue in effect, continue in effect with amendments, or be repealed. The reason for including this requirement in the Order was to ensure that the District continued to meet the objectives set forth in final study report and to provide an opportunity for amendments to be introduced after the District had been in effect for a reasonable period. The City Council received the Five-Year Report in December 2005 and placed it on file.

The Five-Year Report documented a baseline for considering the operations of the District. Between December 18, 2000 and October 31, 2005, the Commission received 362 applications for Certificates of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability for properties within the Conservation District:

- 277 (77%) were issued a Certificate of Nonapplicability by the staff because the alteration proposed was exempt from Commission review. These included interior alterations, ordinary maintenance and repair, alterations not visible from a public way, and storefront and sign alterations that met the District design guidelines.
- 85 (23%) applications were heard by the Historical Commission, which issued Certificates of Appropriateness in 68 cases. Three applicants received Certificates of Hardship, two received temporary certificates, and six applicants withdrew prior to a determination. Three applications were denied a Certificate of Appropriateness on the basis that the proposed alteration, demolition, or new construction was incongruous with the architecture of the building or incongruous with the characteristics and goals for the Harvard Square subdistrict in which it was located (see Appendix C, Denials of Certificates). Three cases could not be tracked.

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Subsequent experience supports the pattern established during the first five years of the District. By the end of October 2017, the Commission had processed 1,409 applications for all types of work requiring a building permit in the Harvard Square Conservation District. Of these 844 applications were for interior work, projects not visible from a public way, or telecom gear; 565 applications were made for substantive publicly visible work. Overall, about 75% received certificates after staff review, and the balance were determined by the Commission after public hearings.

Applications reviewed by the Historical Commission include signs and alterations; demolition and new construction; and additions. A brief review of cases from each of the design review categories follows.

A. Signs, Storefronts, and Alterations

Most sign applications conform to the Zoning Code and are approved by the staff with a Certificate of Nonapplicability. Applications for non-conforming signs requiring full Commission review have also been approved, but sometimes with significant amendments. For example, a sign consisting of a three-dimensional tomato planet with an orbiting carrot-shaped spacecraft,

measuring over 4' in diameter, was proposed for the Veggie Planet restaurant at 47 Palmer Street. The Commission expressed support for the creativity of the design, but the proposed sign exceeded the dimensional guidelines allowed by the existing preservation restriction. The original application was withdrawn, but subsequent applications for a carrot-shaped wall sign and a smaller tomato-shaped planet projecting sign were approved and Certificates of Appropriateness issued.

Examples of storefront alterations that were approved by the staff and required no public hearing before the full Commission include the restoration of the brownstone arches at 18, 20, and 22 John F. Kennedy Street and the restoration of the original storefront at 1270 Massachusetts Avenue. At 18 JFK Street a retailer initially wanted to install a new storefront, but when the Commission staff explained that restoration of the original brownstone arch hidden underneath layers of 20th century materials could proceed immediately under staff review, the retailer agreed to proceed on that basis. Two additional arches (out of four in the same building) were subsequently restored by a different tenant. Similarly, at 1270 Massachusetts Avenue projecting window bays installed in the 1970s, prior to the designation of the District, were removed in favor of restoration of the original plate glass windows and masonry jambs without further review.

Initially, there was some concern that design review of alterations would stifle creativity and lead to boring, monotonous, restoration-only designs. Several examples demonstrate that there is still plenty of creative thought being focused on commercial design in Harvard Square. Storefront renovations at 50 Church Street for Dado Tea opened up the concrete corner of the building to make a new entrance for the restaurant from the street and to make the space more inviting to the pedestrian. The metal and glass grid design for the Black Ink storefront at 5 Brattle Street was a significant departure from that of the previous tenant, Wordsworth Gifts, but could be approved by the staff without further review. The recessed entry and cafe seating option for the Mexican restaurant at The Garage building facing Mt. Auburn Street was a creative design that could be approved by the staff because it preserved the original structure of the building.

The 1956 aluminum façade of the Bank of America (formerly Harvard Trust Company) at 1408-1414 Massachusetts Avenue was restored in 2002. Though the 1956 aluminum screen covered a pre-existing Georgian Revival façade that comprised about 25% of the street frontage, the staff considered it to be a significant feature and encouraged the bank to retain it. The aluminum grid of louvers and windows were restored, and a modern storefront glazing system was installed on the first floor without full Commission review.

Only one of the four individually protected storefronts has been altered since the District was established. The severely deteriorated wooden storefront at 40 Bow Street was restored under a Certificate of Appropriateness issued in 2012. Approval for removal of masonry knee walls at 29-41 JFK Street was required because these elements were determined to be part of the original storefront surrounds protected by the district.

The Commission granted Certificates of Appropriateness for three projects that involved complete restoration of significant buildings. 40 Bow Street, a wood frame four-story tenement was restored in 2012-2016. Waverly Hall (1902), a six-story former private dormitory at 115 Mt. Auburn Street that proved to be in much worse condition than originally known, was meticulously

restored during the same period. The Conductor's Building at 106 Mt. Auburn (1912) had been derelict for many years when it was reopened as a restaurant in 2017.

B. Demolition and New Construction

The burst of development that preceded the establishment of the district soon wound down with only a few more projects that involved demolition and new construction. Significant development activity did not resume until 2016, when the new owners of the Abbot Building, the former Corcoran's Department Store, and 18 Brattle Street announced plans to redevelop the site.

In October 2000, while the Commission had interim jurisdiction before the City Council enacted the District, it approved a proposal to replace the old post office on Mount Auburn Street with a new office building.

In April 2001 denied an application by Harvard University to raze two buildings on Mt. Auburn Street. The University had selected Hans Hollein, a Viennese Expressionist who had won the Pritzker Prize for architecture in 1985, to design a technology services building for the Harvard Libraries at 88-96 Mount Auburn Street. On the site were an 1895 triple-decker and a two-story commercial building of 1971. The site, near the center of the original village of Newtowne, was surrounded by low rise, residential-scale buildings that buffered the commercial district of Harvard Square from the River Houses; the most recent nearby new construction was the modestly contextual Rosovsky Center, designed for Harvard-Radcliffe Hillel by Moshe Safdie in 1993. Hollein's proposed building was 62 feet high (not counting the inevitable mechanical pent-houses), with a sloping, undulating wire-mesh façade overhanging a recessed first floor. The Commission was prepared to sacrifice the three-decker but decided that Hollein's proposal was inappropriately bulky and "incongruous because of its aggressive indifference to its surroundings." Harvard then selected the Boston firm of Leers, Weinzapfel Associates to design a conventionally-massed four-story building with a glazed façade that the Commission approved in 2003. The building's height was kept low by placing several floors of mechanicals and offices below grade. Additionally, the University kept rooftop mechanicals to a minimum by installing a geothermal heating and cooling system, eliminating the need for rooftop condensers.

In 2004 the Commission approved Harvard University's plan to demolish and rebuild part of the Hasty Pudding theater at 12 Holyoke Street. The applicant proposed demolishing the theater itself, which was not accessible and did not meet modern code requirements and renovating the brick club house at the front of the site. The mass of the new theater was limited, and several floors were constructed below grade to keep the height of the new construction to a minimum.

The only project for new construction on an empty site since the establishment of the District was the theater/office building at 0-2 Arrow Street that was approved in 2002. The lot was cleared of buildings in the mid-1980s for an office building but appeals tied up the project for many years and the site remained empty until the Carr Foundation purchased it for an office building and theater. The architect used traditional cladding materials like brick and cast stone affixed to curtain wall framing, allowing generous amounts of glazing. The result was a gracious four-story post-modern building that employed traditional forms with a modern sensibility. The

through-block pathway created by this project provided pedestrian access between the Kerry Corner neighborhood and Massachusetts Avenue.

A decade-long hiatus in significant development activity occurred after these projects were completed. During the recovery from the Recession of 2008 a long-term owner of several significant properties decided to begin liquidating its holdings. The Dow-Stearns holdings dated back to the early years of the 20th century, and eventually included 1-8 and 17-41 Brattle Street, the Abbot Building at 1-5 J.F. Kennedy Street, the former Corcoran's Department Store at 9-17 JFK Street (with frontage on Brattle Street), and 18 Brattle Street. Some of these properties had been owned by a real estate trust for almost a century and had been managed for a steady income from a carefully curated group of tenants.

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The sale of the Abbot Building and its two abutting properties in 2015 for the unprecedented sum of \$85 million triggered widespread anxiety about the future of the Square. Actual property values, and consequently rents, had been artificially depressed for many years because the properties had been managed for steady income rather than capital gains. Although the physical character of any new development could be constrained by the Conservation District and the zoning code, the sale generated existential fears among tenants and the broader community of stakeholders.

Beginning in the fall of 2016 the Historical Commission held five public hearings and heard 25 hours of public testimony about the proposed project. In May 2017 the Commission approved a Certificate of Appropriateness for a project that involved restoration of the Abbot Building and 18 Brattle Street and replacement of the former Corcoran's store with a new structure. The Planning Board held further hearings, and in the spring of 2018 granted the project a Special Permit.

The Abbot Building hearings raised issues of the appropriateness of the proposed demolition, the design of the new building, and the details of the restoration. These were fully within the scope of the Commission's authority, but other matters of grave concern to the public were not. These included protection for existing tenants; the desirability of favoring small, locally-owned retailers over chain stores, large or small; the public's aversion to certain types of tenants, such as banks and offices, that often occupy space designed for retail stores. In the course of these hearings the Historical Commission agreed to initiate the current study of the jurisdiction, goals, and guidelines of the District.

Other development projects of an unprecedented scale are in discussion or anticipated. The proposed demolition of the Harvard Square Theater was approved in principle in September 2018; the replacement mixed-use building incorporates an innovative façade with the potential to display moving images with embedded LED lights, a feature that is not clearly within the jurisdiction of the District. The Dow-Stearns properties at 1-8 Brattle Street and 17-41 Brattle Street, comprising 55,000 square feet of mostly ground-floor retail space, changed hands for \$105 million in December 2017. The one-story buildings at 17-41 have a significant volume of unused FAR, the development of which will profoundly affect the future of Brattle Square.

C. Additions

In 2000, during the study period, the Commission approved significant changes in connection with the adaptive reuse of a former garage at One Bow Street that involved the addition of two stories to the existing two-story 1907 structure. The highly significant Cox-Hicks house at 98 Winthrop Street (ca. 1806) had long presented a difficult challenge for preservationists because it was no longer suitable for residential occupancy and could not be easily adapted for other uses. In 2001 a new owner approached the Commission with a plan to convert it to a restaurant and link it via a bridge to his adjacent restaurant, Charlie's Kitchen at 10 Eliot Street. After lengthy negotiations, the Commission approved an adaptive reuse project that involved razing several additions and constructing a new dining room on a cantilevered foundation to minimize the impact on the adjoining 18th century retaining wall. The original house was restored inside and out and now houses the Red House restaurant.

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II. Deliberations of the 2017-18 Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee

The Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee was appointed by the City Manager in August 2017 and began meeting in October. With some lapses, monthly meetings continued through January 2022. Attendees discussed the events that led to the establishment of the district in 2000 and the record of its operations and effectiveness. Representatives of the Community Development Department described zoning and sign regulations. Focusing on the *Final Report of the Cambridge Historical Commission Regarding the Proposed Harvard Square Conservation District*, the committee held detailed discussions about the goals, secondary goals, and guidelines of the District; the application of those goals and guidelines to matters of demolition, new construction, and alterations. The evolving character of the subdistricts was also discussed.

[more to follow]

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III. Amended Statement of Goals and Secondary Goals

The goals statement developed by the original Harvard Square Conservation District Study and incorporated in the Order in 2000 is the foundational document of the District. The goals and the accompanying secondary goals are meant to underlie every decision made by the Cambridge Historical Commission as it administers the district and should be cited in any motion to accept or deny an application for Certificates of Appropriateness, Non-applicability, or Hardship.

The amended goals statement maintains the structure of the original while clarifying some of the language. New language supports commercial urban experiences; creative signage, below-grade commercial spaces, and preservation of storefronts; residential development additional bicycle parking; and energy conservation. One new goal refers to the regulation of architectural lighting. Major changes are discussed below.

- a. Commercial urban experiences (introductory statement). The Study Committee debated the desirability of expressing support for locally-owned businesses, but there was no consensus on how or whether this should be accomplished. Some businesses are unique enterprises owned and operated by Cambridge residents; others may be locally-owned franchises of regional or national firms. All contribute to the vibrant commercial environment of the Square. The introductory statement now reads as follows:

The District must remain a pedestrian-friendly, accessible, human-scale, mixed-use environment that supports dynamic urban experiences, complements nearby neighborhoods, and respects the history and traditions of its location.

The Committee also discussed the proliferation of banks and offices in former retail spaces. It was recognized that this was a function of market demand, as the retail sector weakens relative to other sectors, and that matters of use were beyond the purview of the Conservation District. These issues could be addressed through amendments to the zoning code.

- b. Creative signage; below-grade commercial spaces; preservation of storefronts. (Goal #2)

Creative signage has historically been an important component of Harvard Square's exciting commercial environment. The Historical Commission is authorized to grant Certificates of Appropriateness for signs that do not conform to certain aspects of the sign code and has done so on numerous occasions.

Below-grade commercial spaces. Below-grade spaces can accommodate intensive non-retail activities that support the commercial vitality of the commercial core in the Harvard Square and Brattle Square subdistricts.

Preservation of storefronts. It cannot be presumed that the strong demand for storefront locations will continue. Retail enterprises face severe challenges nationwide, and it is possible that the retail sector in Harvard Square will contract. Many buildings in the District were designed or adapted for ground floor retail, and for reasons of historic preservation and conservation of the resource that they represent repurposed storefronts should be altered in a way that preserves their architectural fabric and that is reversible.

Goal #2 now reads as follows:

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.

c. Residential development (Goal #7)

Harvard Square support number of residents in existing buildings. The vitality of the neighborhood would be enhanced by additional residential development in buildings that are appropriate in scale, density and appearance.

Goal #7 now reads as follows:

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

d. Adequate bicycle parking; enhance pedestrian safety (Goal #9)

Provide adequate bicycle parking. Increasing numbers of commuters and shoppers access Harvard Square by bicycle. Cambridge zoning now requires new development to provide generous bicycle parking; the Conservation District should support this goal.

Enhance pedestrian safety. Cambridge has adopted Vision Zero to eliminate pedestrian fatalities. Public sector improvements, including redesign of sidewalks, crosswalks and public plazas, should enhance pedestrian safety while preserving traditional urban materials and street furniture.

The committee also discussed the separation of bicycle and automobile traffic on Brattle Street through the introduction of a two-way curbside bicycle path and flex posts. The committee agreed that the Historical Commission should engage with the Traffic Department and the Harvard Square community to study site-specific alternatives that might provide a better solution to the problem of bicycle safety, the pedestrian experience, truck deliveries, and automobile traffic.

Goal #9 now reads:

Transportation. Encourage creative solutions to the District's transportation issues, including parking, passenger drop-off, deliveries and cycling facilities. 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 trash receptacles. Encourage the replacement of surface parking lots with compatible new structures.

Goal #9 might be entirely revised to read:

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

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speeds can be regulated to give higher priority to pedestrians and cyclists. 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.

e. Energy conservation (Goal #10).

Conservation of energy is an important social goal. New buildings should be environmentally sustainable in conformance with City goals and policies. Energy conservation upgrades to existing buildings should be approached in a manner that respects historic architectural features.

Goal #10 now reads:

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 LEED standards. Alterations to existing buildings that seek to promote energy conservation should be accomplished in a manner that respects character-defining materials and designs.

f. Architectural lighting (New Goal #11).

Urban lighting, including architectural or building façade lighting, streetscape lighting, and signage lighting, impacts the quality of the 24-hour environment. Lighting goals are intended to enhance the quality of the streetscape, highlight unique architectural details, minimize light trespass, preserve dark skies, and conserve energy.

Currently architectural lighting is regulated only through the appearance of the fixtures; the quality and intensity of the light, changing light effects over time, and the architectural features to be illuminated are not regulated. Architectural lighting is widely considered to be a positive feature of some urban structures and environments, but with current technology can become objectionable through excessive brightness, motion, or inappropriate highlighting of architectural features. The enabling ordinance, Ch. 2.78, Art. III of the City Code, may need to be amended to confirm the District's jurisdiction in this area.

The proposed new goal reads:

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 color temperature, and focus lighting on significant features.¹

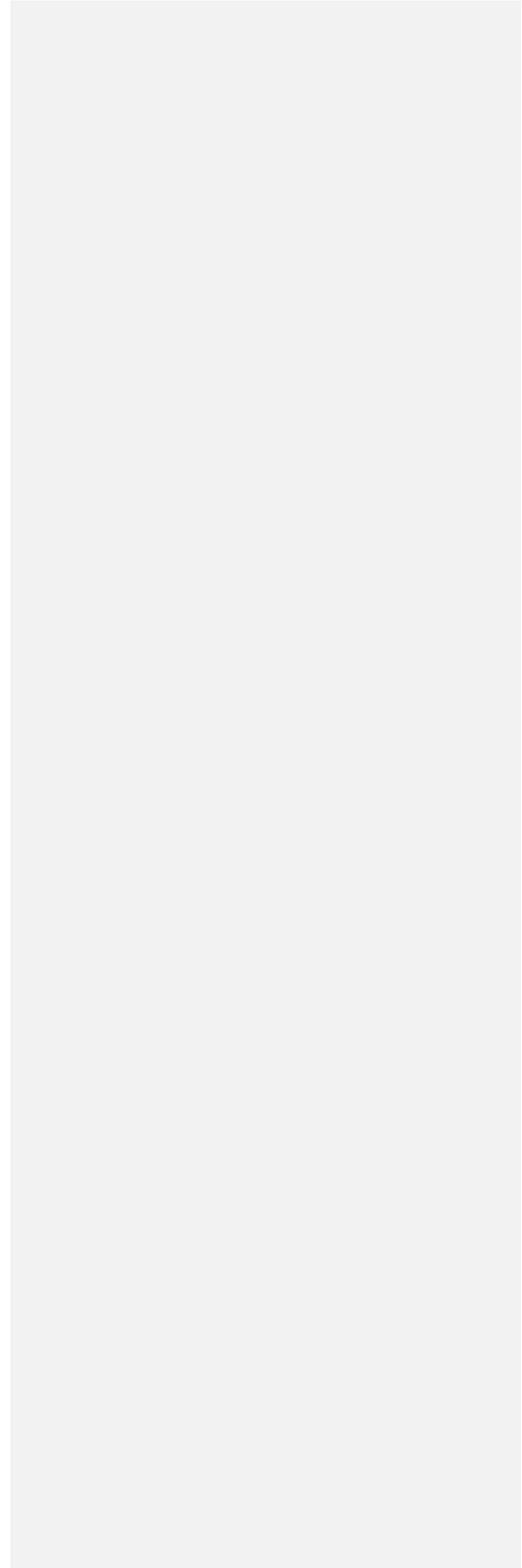
Minimizing brightness while highlighting unique architectural details will conserve energy, reduce trespass, and enhance dark skies. To define and enhance the after-dark

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¹ Color temperature is conventionally expressed in Kelvins, using the symbol K, a unit of measure for absolute temperature. Color temperatures over 5000 K are called "cool colors" (bluish), while lower color temperatures (2700–3000 K) are called "warm colors" (yellowish). In general, light temperature should exceed 3500K only in special conditions.

streetscape, consideration should be given to low-brightness building facade lighting as an alternative to brighter street lights.

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Revised Goals Statement

The revised Goals Statement now appears as follows:²

The Goal of the District and of this Order is to guide change and encourage diversity of the District's buildings and public spaces in order to protect its distinctive physical and experiential characteristics and to enhance the livability and vitality of the District for all people. The Historical Commission should seek to preserve and enhance the unique physical environment and visual form of the District; preserve its architecturally and historically significant structures and their settings and encourage creative design compatible therewith; mitigate character-diminishing impacts of new development on adjacent properties and areas; and discourage homogeneity by retaining and encouraging diversity of development and open space patterns and building scales and ages. The District must remain a pedestrian-friendly, accessible, human-scale, 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. **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 designs for new construction that complements the context of abutting buildings and enhances the character of the Sub-District. Recognize and respect well-reasoned contemporary design during the review process. Support

² Additions since 10/17/2018, 12/19/2018, 1/16/2019 highlighted). See Appendix 1 for a redlined version showing all changes.

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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 greenspaces, scale-appropriate open spaces, and new buildings that support the prevailing character of the Sub-District. 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 Uses.** 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.** **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 higher priority to pedestrians and cyclists. 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.

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Discourage provision of on-site parking for new construction. Encourage creative solutions to the District's transportation issues, including parking, passenger drop-off, deliveries and cycling facilities. 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 trash receptacles. Encourage the replacement of surface parking lots with compatible new structures.

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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 LEED standards. Alterations to existing buildings that seek to promote energy conservation should be accomplished in a manner that respects character-defining materials and designs.

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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.³ In general, light temperature should exceed 3500K only in special conditions. Minimizing brightness while highlighting unique architectural details will conserve energy, reduce trespass, and enhance dark skies. To define and enhance the after-dark streetscape, consideration should be given to low-brightness building façade lighting as an alternative to brighter street lights.

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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.

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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

³ Color temperature is conventionally expressed in kelvin, using the symbol K, a unit of measure for absolute temperature. Color temperatures over 5000 K are called "cool colors" (bluish), while lower color temperatures (2700–3000 K) are called "warm colors" (yellowish). In general, light temperature should exceed 3500K only in special conditions.

Committee,” dated November 29, 2000, as amended by recommendations of the current Study Committee, which after public hearing the Historical Commission may adopt as regulations and thereafter amend from time to time.

The Historical Commission and project proponents should also consider the goals and recommendations specific to each of the six subdistricts that make up the Harvard Square Conservation District. The subdistrict goals and recommendations—included in Chapter VII of the November 29, 2000 report and as amended by recommendation of the current Study Committee—describe the physical and historical development of each area over time, identify some of the more notable buildings and spaces, and set forth some of the preservation priorities and recommendations for each sub-area.

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.

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IV. Amended Guidelines for Demolition, Construction, and Alterations

Guidelines for demolition, construction and alterations were reviewed for consistency with the amended goals. Recommended amendments to the current (2000) guidelines for demolition, new construction and alterations are shown below in red:

The following guidelines for demolition, construction, and alterations expand upon the language of the Ordinance to provide additional guidance for administration of the Harvard Square Conservation District.

A. Demolition

Although the City's demolition delay ordinance ~~will does~~ not apply in ~~a-the~~ Harvard Square Conservation District, demolition ~~will be is~~ similarly defined as "the act of pulling down, destroying, removing or razing a structure or commencing the work of total or substantial destruction with the intent of completing the same".⁴ ~~The Cambridge Inspectional Services Commissioner has interpreted "substantial destruction" as including removal of a roof or one or more sides of a building, gutting the interior to the point where exterior features are impacted, or removal of more than 25% of a structure.~~ Work of this sort will be reviewed under the following demolition guidelines, while the removal of building components, including signs and storefronts, will be reviewed as alterations.

The purpose of reviewing demolition ~~or building moving~~ within the Conservation District ~~will be is~~ to preserve significant buildings and the diversity of building ages, styles, and forms that help to define the historical character of the Square. Other benefits ~~will~~ include the opportunity to review the significance of individual buildings in the context of specific development proposals, to consider creative re-use possibilities, and to encourage the care and maintenance of the building stock.

The Cambridge Historical Commission will issue a Certificate of Appropriateness to an applicant seeking to demolish a structure in the Conservation District if the project, including both the demolished and the replacement buildings, is determined to be "appropriate for or compatible with the preservation or protection of the . . . district."⁵ Approval of demolition will be dependent on a finding by the Cambridge Historical Commission that a) the demolition of the structure will not adversely impact the district, subdistrict, or abutting properties in the sense described in secondary goal #1, and b) the replacement project meets the purposes of the Conservation District with respect to secondary goals ~~#3-2~~ through ~~#9~~10, where these are applicable. Projects that involve relocation must provide a location that preserves the character and context of the building.

The history of Harvard Square suggests some specific criteria that may be applied to demolition proposals. Buildings that are over fifty years old, that are contributing structures in the Harvard Square National Register District, or that are part of the Square's dwindling inventory of wood-frame structures, are generally valued for their contribution to the character of the Square, and it

⁴ City Code, section 2.78.080.F. Demolition is categorized in Chapter 40C as an "alteration;" moving a building categorized as "construction."

⁵ Chapter 40C, Section 10a. This language is incorporated by reference in the Neighborhood Conservation District and Landmark Ordinance, Ch. 2.78.170.

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may be presumed that preservation will be strongly preferred to demolition (secondary goal #4).⁶ However, all such applications will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and the Cambridge Historical Commission will not necessarily protect all such structures from demolition.

B. Construction

Creative design solutions to development and renovation requirements will be encouraged to ensure that the unique resources and character of Harvard Square are protected.⁷ ~~Coordination with the Harvard Square Advisory Committee's large project review will be essential.~~

1. New Construction/Additions to Existing Buildings

Harvard Square is a kaleidoscopic urban environment. The Cambridge Historical Commission will recognize the continuing evolution of architectural design and the necessity of keeping the Square fresh, vibrant, and economically viable. Contemporary design expression will be encouraged in new construction (secondary goal #3).⁸

~~Proponents of projects requiring special permits on sites with little apparent impact on historic resources will be encouraged to initiate their public review process with the Harvard Square Advisory Committee. To the extent feasible, the Cambridge Historical Commission will seek to hold joint meetings with the Advisory Committee on projects that fall within both jurisdictions.~~

The existence of parallel reviews by the Historical Commission and the Advisory Committee is seen as a productive application of both zoning and historic preservation disciplines in a complex urban environment; in the event of conflict, however, conservation district protection, which requires Cambridge Historical Commission approval of building permits, will prevail. Because the specific circumstances of every development project cannot be predicted, it is not possible to specify an exact regulatory protocol governing the sharing of reviews between the Historical Commission and the Advisory Committee. The inherent logic of the project review process will guide the proponent.

The Cambridge Historical Commission will begin its review of a new construction project or addition with an analysis of the historic significance and architectural value of the premises and its immediate surroundings. New construction that accommodates older structures on or adjacent to the site will be encouraged. Construction that incorporates significant major portions of older structures may be acceptable; however, use of isolated historic architectural elements will be discouraged. Demolition involving retention of facades to allow replacement of historic structures with new construction (mis-named "facadectomies") will be discouraged unless the supporting

⁶ "Build on and sustain the diversity of the existing building form, scale and material. Preserve and encourage flowers, green yards and courtyards and small, free-standing and wood-frame buildings where that character prevails. Encourage streetwall buildings where that character has been set."

⁷ Secondary goals #2, #3, #6, #9, #10.

⁸ "Support creative, contemporary design for new construction that complements and contributes to its immediate neighbors and the character of Harvard Square. Recognize and respect creativity of design during the review process and mitigate the functional impacts of development on adjacent areas."

historic fabric is found to be unsalvageable.

In reviewing new construction or additions to existing buildings, the Commission "shall consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the structure both in relation to the land area upon which the structure is situated and to structures in the vicinity."⁹ Review of new buildings will be guided by considerations such as the appropriateness of the structure's height, scale, mass, proportions, orientation, and lot coverage; the vertical and horizontal emphasis, rhythm of openings, transparency, texture, and materials of the publicly-visible facades; sunlight and shadow effects; relationship to public open space; and landscaping.

Review of new buildings and additions will be further guided by the subdistrict goals ~~in Chapter VI~~ regarding the relationship of a proposed building to the site and to other buildings and structures in the vicinity.

Under the City Code, the Historical Commission acting as a neighborhood conservation district commission "may in appropriate cases impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by the applicable provision of the zoning ordinance."¹⁰ Implementing such a measure could result in a reduction of the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) allowed by zoning. The appropriate circumstances for imposing dimensional and set-back reductions could include a wide disparity of scale and density between the proposed project and its surroundings, or a situation in which the proposed project would destroy or diminish the historical resources of the site.

2. Alterations to Existing Buildings

Alterations to exterior architectural features visible from a public way will be subject to binding review by the Cambridge Historical Commission, guided by secondary goals #1, #2, ~~and #4, and 11~~. Storefronts will be treated more flexibly than building facades or upper stories. The goals of the district favor retention and repair, rather than replacement, of original or significant exterior fabric.

While irreversible changes ~~will be~~ subject to review and approval of the Cambridge Historical Commission, certain other visible exterior alterations ~~will be~~ reviewed by the staff or exempted from review entirely. Chapter 2.78, Article III identifies seven other categories of construction and alterations that may be exempted from review.¹¹ ~~From that list, the Study Committee recommends that~~ The following features ~~be are categorically~~ exempt from review and ~~do not~~ trigger an application process:

- Storm doors and storm windows (subject to specific design guidelines).
- Signs that conform to the Cambridge sign code as amended in the Harvard Square Historic Overlay District.

The Historical Commission ~~will adopt~~ has adopted procedures delegating review and approval of

⁹ Ch. 2.78.220.A.

¹⁰ Ch. 2.78.220.A.

¹¹ Ch. 2.78.190.B. Exterior color is categorically excluded from review in neighborhood conservation districts.

some reversible alterations which have the potential to adversely affect historic fabric to the staff. ~~Applications for projects that do not meet these criteria will be considered by the Commission at a public hearing.~~ A Certificate of Nonapplicability will be issued by the staff if Conservation District guidelines are followed. These categories will include:

- Ordinary repairs or maintenance using similar materials and construction details to those existing.
- Reconstruction replicating the exterior design of a building, structure, or exterior architectural feature damaged or destroyed by fire, storm, or other disaster, provided such reconstruction is begun within one year thereafter and carried forward with due diligence.¹²
- Roof repairs and HVAC equipment not visible from a public way.
- Window replacement in conformity with guidelines to be adopted by the Commission after public hearing.

Applications for alterations outside of these categories are considered by the Commission at a public hearing.

a. Interior Work and Alterations Not Visible from a Public Way

Interior arrangements and alterations to architectural features not visible from any public way are exempt from review in ~~a~~-neighborhood conservation districts and a Certificate of Nonapplicability for such work will be issued by Commission staff without delay.

b. Storefronts

The Cambridge Historical Commission recognizes that storefronts have significant impact on the character of a given subdistrict. To that end the Commission has created guidelines to ensure that storefronts complement the surrounding neighborhood while still allowing business owners to express their individuality and promote their goods and services.

Storefronts are a source of Harvard Square's continuing vitality, and the Cambridge Historical Commission ~~will seek~~s to encourage creativity in this regard (secondary goal #2).¹³ Most storefronts ~~will be~~ regarded as impermanent and the Historical Commission ~~will look~~s favorably on creative alterations that meet the particular needs of the retailer or office tenant, as long as the original structure and finishes are maintained or recovered (where they still exist). Alterations to upper stories ~~will be~~ regarded as having the potential for significant and permanent adverse effects and will be reviewed accordingly. Reversible changes to storefronts will not be

¹² Such replacement work will still be subject to review of the staff and issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness.

¹³ "Help sustain the vitality of the commercial environment by supporting creative, contemporary design for storefront alterations and additions, while preserving architecturally significant or original building fabric and character."

discouraged if they do not obscure or damage the structure or any original architectural features. Opaque glass will not be allowed in display windows unless specifically permitted.

The Cambridge Historical Commission ~~will has~~ adopted procedures delegating review and approval of two categories of storefront alterations to the staff. Applications for storefront alterations that do not meet these criteria ~~will beare~~ considered by the Commission at a public hearing. A Certificate of Nonapplicability will be issued by the staff for:

- Alterations that 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 do not obscure, remove, relocate, or replace historic or original exterior architectural features. Exterior architectural features may include, but are not limited to, such features as brackets, window and door casings, fascia, hoods, bays, and window sash.

~~Recent storefront alterations that comply with the proposed guidelines are at College House (1420-1442 Massachusetts Avenue); Origins at 8 Brattle Street; and Tess at 20 Brattle Street. In all three cases, structural members or decorative finishes of the original first floor facades were uncovered or restored, and new storefronts were inserted within them. In the case of College House, this involved both restoring and replicating the original granite piers and lintels of 1832 and inserting a plate glass storefront system that recalls a traditional storefront with a horizontal wooden sill applied to the glass (Fig. 5). At Origins, a ca. 1930 storefront was removed and the original marble clad pier and fascia restored; the new storefront was installed within this frame (Fig. 6). Finally, at Tess several generations of storefronts were removed, the brick piers of the original facade were restored, and a new fascia recalling the destroyed original was installed. Within this reconstructed framework is a radically original glass storefront that respects the original architecture of the building but makes a strong and exciting statement (Fig. 7). All three alterations would have merited Certificates of Appropriateness, issued by the Commission staff from a conservation district review.~~

~~A contrasting example of an approveable storefront alteration exists at the Abbot Building, where Wordsworth Books has a specialized branch selling children's books (Fig. 8). The business occupies a storefront that was not original to the building. The alterations involved a metal sign band across the stone cornice above the storefront and bright colors on the window trim. In the Conservation District, color changes will not be reviewed. The sign band is above the storefront and obscures the original fabric of the building; however, the sign is only pinned to the masonry and stands about six inches from it. This would have required review, but might have been viewed favorably as a reversible change.~~

A few storefronts in the Square retain their original design or have a subsequent design that is significant in terms of architectural or historical significance. The following storefronts and/or the buildings in which they are located ~~will beare~~ specifically designated in the Order as requiring Commission rather than staff approval of alterations:

- 1304 Massachusetts Avenue (Gnomon Copy) (Fig. 9)
- 1316 Massachusetts Avenue (Leavitt & Pierce)
- 1320-22 Massachusetts Avenue (J. August)
- 30-30A Plympton Street (Bow Street Flowers)

Alterations to these storefronts, including installation or alteration of signs, ~~will~~ require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Commission.¹⁴ Additional significant storefronts may be identified in the future, and the Cambridge Historical Commission may recommend to the City Council that they be added to the protected list.

It cannot be presumed that the strong demand for storefront locations will continue. Retail enterprises face severe challenges nationwide, and it is possible that the retail sector in Harvard Square will contract. Many buildings in the District were designed or adapted for ground floor retail, and for reasons of historic preservation and conservation of the resource that they represent repurposed storefronts should be altered in a way that preserves their transparency and architectural fabric and that is reversible.

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c. Windows

Windows are critical to maintaining the characteristic appearance of significant buildings. Replacement of wood windows with inappropriate modern units can destroy the traditional appearance of a building. The Commission ~~will~~ has established design guidelines for window alterations governing materials, muntin patterns, panning, and reflectivity.

~~In almost all cases,~~ Modern replacement windows are available that match the originals in appearance while offering significant energy efficiency. The Commission will, in most cases, allow window replacement ~~routinely~~ as long as design guidelines are met. Applications to replace windows that are ornamental in design or that contain significant original sash will require review by the Commission.

Review and approval of certain window alterations may be delegated to the staff. For example, applications for window alterations that do not change the size of the opening, configuration of the muntins, material, or transparency will receive a Certificate of Nonapplicability in the same manner as the exempted storefront alterations.

d. Masonry

Harvard Square contains many outstanding examples of brick masonry construction. Because the appearance of masonry can be irreversibly altered by improper pointing or cleaning, Cambridge Historical Commission approval will be necessary for these operations. Review will include approval of specifications for cleaning, cutting joints, mortar composition, and joint profiles. Replacement masonry units will be reviewed for color, size, and finish. Painting of masonry (brick, stone, or concrete) surfaces without a Certificate of Appropriateness will be prohibited.

¹⁴ See Appendix for a description and additional photographs of these storefronts.

e. Signs

Signs in Harvard Square should contribute to the commercial vitality of the area. Uniformity of signs and conformance to conjectural "historic" designs will not be encouraged. However, signs should not obscure any original architectural features of the structure on which they are located. Signs should be fastened to structures in the least destructive way possible.¹⁵

~~The Study Committee recommends that the Harvard Square Overlay District should be amended to transfer jurisdiction over signs which do not conform to the sign code applicable elsewhere in the City to the Cambridge Historical Commission (see discussion of Zoning Amendments). Limitations on the number of projecting or free standing signs on a lot; limitations on the size of individual wall, freestanding, or projecting signs; and limitations on the height of signs above the sidewalk, and placement of signs, would be deleted from the zoning ordinance with respect to the Harvard Square Overlay District and made subject to Cambridge Historical Commission review.~~

~~Under Chapter 2.78, Article III, The Cambridge Historical Commission will have~~has binding jurisdiction over size, materials, dimensions, illumination, and appearance of new or altered signs.¹⁶ However, signs that conform to the provisions of the zoning code regarding the total area of signs on each building and the height at which signs can be placed ~~will be~~are exempted from review. Decorative banners and temporary signs ~~will be~~are prohibited unless specifically approved "subject to such conditions as to duration of use, dimension, location, lighting, removal and similar matters as the commission may reasonably specify."¹⁷

f. Architectural lighting.

Urban lighting, including architectural or building façade lighting, streetscape lighting, and signage lighting, impacts the quality of the 24-hour environment. Lighting can be a positive feature in some urban environments, but with current technology can become objectionable through excessive brightness, motion, or inappropriate highlighting or architectural features.

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Lighting goals are intended to enhance the quality of the streetscape, highlight unique architectural details, minimize light trespass, preserve dark skies, and conserve energy.

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Currently architectural lighting is regulated only through the appearance of the fixtures; the quality and intensity of the light, changing light effects over time, and the architectural features to be illuminated are not regulated.

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

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¹⁵ Sandwich board signs are subject to permitting by the Department of Public Works when placed on a sidewalk and will not be subject to Historic District review.

¹⁶ Content, color, and graphics used on signs - the commercial message - will be exempt from review in the Historic District.

¹⁷ Chapter 2.78.190.A.7.

goals, projects should minimize brightness and light trespass, monitor color temperature, and focus lighting on significant features.¹⁸ Minimizing brightness while highlighting unique architectural details will conserve energy, reduce trespass, and enhance dark skies. To define and enhance the after-dark streetscape, consideration should be given to low-brightness building façade lighting as an alternative to brighter street lights.

C. Public Spaces

Municipal and utility company modifications to sidewalks, streets, and street furniture ~~will be~~ subject to the jurisdiction of the Cambridge Historical Commission. Review will be undertaken with consideration to the appropriateness of such materials and structures as paving and curbing, light standards, traffic and parking structures and signs, and utility structures visible at or above grade from any public way. In practice the Commission has declined to address striping and temporary barriers such as flex posts for bicycle paths.

~~The Cambridge Historical Commission may adopt a master plan for the treatment of publicly accessible private open spaces in Harvard Square and suggest public improvements of sidewalks, crosswalks, and lighting. The Commission will encourage privately initiated efforts to improve the public spaces of the Square and will serve as a public forum for discussion of alterations and coordination of privately and publicly funded improvements.~~

Proposals for public art installations, whether private donations or public projects, will be referred to the Cambridge Public Art Commission for a recommendation in accordance with established city policies.¹⁹ For the purposes of conservation district review, three-dimensional artworks will be considered to be structures, and murals will be considered to be signs if they contain an explicit message. In general, such installations must also be found to be appropriate for their setting and for the district as a whole.

¹⁸ Color temperature is conventionally expressed in Kelvins, using the symbol K, a unit of measure for absolute temperature. Color temperatures over **5000 K** are called "cool colors" (bluish), while lower color temperatures (2700–3000 K) are called "warm colors" (yellowish). In general, light temperature should exceed 3500K only in special conditions.

¹⁹ See "City of Cambridge Art Gifts and Donations Policy", adopted May 17, 1999, and Chapter 2.114 of the City Code, "Public Development Arts Projects."

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V. Amended Description and Guidelines for Subdistricts

The 1986 Development Guidelines, ~~developed for the Harvard Square Overlay District,~~ divided the Harvard Square Overlay District into six subdistricts based on architectural characteristics, historical development patterns, and modern usage trends. ~~This method has proven to be a useful portion of the Development Guidelines and the study committee unanimously agreed that revised and updated~~ Subdistrict descriptions and goals ~~should be~~ included in the 2000 Report as part of the guidelines for ~~a~~ the Harvard Square conservation district and for continued use in administering the administration of the Overlay District. The 2019 Study Committee supported a renewed emphasis on reviewing applications for alterations, demolition, and new construction in the context of the following restated subdistrict goals

Because Harvard Square is such a diverse environment, defining the context of subdistricts is important both in developing long-range planning goals and in making determinations of appropriateness for alterations to the physical environment. The six subdistricts are:

- A. Harvard Square/Massachusetts Avenue
- B. Bow Street and Arrow Street/Putnam Square
- C. The Gold Coast
- D. Winthrop Square/JFK Street
- E. Brattle Square
- F. Church Street

The subdistricts do not have precise boundaries, as the characteristics of neighboring subdistricts tend to overlap. In considering some sites, the guidelines for more than one subdistrict should be considered together and weighed according to the individual needs of the site.

A description of the unique qualities of each subdistrict and specific goals for each follows. The description is organized with a historical and physical description, followed by a focused discussion on the treatment of public spaces and private sites. A site map accompanies each description. Specific goals for each subdistrict have been identified to help boards and applicants apply the general goals and guidelines of the larger district to the special needs and circumstances of a particular site. Revisions to this document include updating the discussions of private development sites, summarizing recent discussions for improvements of public spaces, expanding the discussion of site and architectural history, and reinforcing the recommendations for preservation of significant structures.

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Subdistrict A: Harvard Square/Massachusetts Avenue

Harvard Square subdistrict

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Description

This subdistrict includes Harvard Square proper and the south side of Massachusetts Avenue as far as Quincy Square. The area marks the intersection of town and gown, with Harvard Yard on the north side of Massachusetts Avenue and mixed-use commercial, office, and residential structures on the south side. In the early years of settlement, the area was an open space north of the grid-patterned town, south of the Burial Ground, and adjacent to Harvard Yard. By the mid-17th century civic buildings appeared on the Square. For over 200 years, development in Harvard Square proper has been characterized by mixed uses. Residences, college buildings, meeting-houses, courthouses, and a market building were constructed around the Square in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Massachusetts Avenue from Dunster Street to Quincy Square was developed in the 19th century with mixed-use private dormitories and student clubs and continues

to serve students with retail stores and services. The strong presence of the MBTA subway station reflects Harvard Square's long history as a transportation hub.

Three- to five-story structures built out to the sidewalk predominate the south and west sides of Massachusetts Avenue near Harvard Square. The historic structures facing on the south and west sides of the Square itself include the Cambridge Savings Bank, the Read Block, the Abbot Building, 1-8 Brattle Street, the Harvard Cooperative Society, College House, and the Harvard Square



Harvard Square, with the Abbot Building (center)

Kiosk. Of these, the Abbot Building (1909) pioneered the Georgian Revival Style that in 1913 was recommended by the Harvard Square Business Association as appropriate for a collegiate business center. Certain mid-twentieth-century structures, such as Holyoke Center and the Fleet Bank (Harvard Trust Company) facade, have attained their own architectural significance. Although the architectural significance of Holyoke Center is acknowledged, another development of its size in the Square cannot be recommended. The mixed-use dormitories and clubs are of great architectural and historic significance. The smaller scale buildings on the side streets down to Mt. Auburn Street vary in quality and significance but provide a valuable context for the grander architecture on the avenue. Efforts in this subdistrict should also focus on the retention of the small retail storefronts that add vitality to the streetscape.



Harvard Cooperative Society (1924), former Harvard Trust Co. (1956), College House (1832-74)

Public Spaces

Public spaces in this area include the plaza around the Kiosk and the Harvard Station headhouse, Forbes Plaza at the Smith Campus Center, and sidewalks in various states of repair. Harvard Yard, a semi-public space, abuts the conservation district but is under the jurisdiction of the Old Cambridge Historic District.

The 2000 Study Committee Report recommended that “all publicly-accessible open spaces on private and public properties should be preserved. The public space in the center of Harvard Square should be well maintained for the general enjoyment and safety of its pedestrian users. The materials and design of the public space at the center of the Square can be used as a reference when designing future improvements to open spaces in the district.”



Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza

The plaza around the kiosk was designed by the MBTA in 1979-80 and completed in 1984. The design vocabulary – wire cut brick sidewalks, granite feature strips and bollards, and Washington-style light fixtures – was carried over to the west side of the Square and down Brattle and Elliot streets to Bennett Street. The sidewalks from Church Street to Bennet Street were rebuilt with clay pavers for enhanced accessibility about 2010. Forbes Plaza was reconstructed in 2017-18 pursuant to a Certificate of Appropriateness. The plaza around the headhouse and the kiosk itself are in the later stages of a redesign to enhance accessibility and provide greater public access to these assets. Materials and construction details

A long-range plan, called "Polishing the Trophy," for public and private sidewalk, crosswalk, and lighting improvements throughout the Square was commissioned in 1997 and funded by a combination of public and private resources. The study recommended improvements in most of the subdistricts, except Bow Street and Arrow Street/Putnam Square and part of the Gold Coast. The improvements in the Harvard Square/Massachusetts Avenue subdistrict which were proposed by this study included sidewalk replacement in front of the Read Block and College House, a new crosswalk in front of Holyoke Center, and lighting improvements to Cambridge Savings Bank, Holyoke Center, and the Omphalos statue near the news kiosk (no longer extant). Many of the recommended improvements have been carried out, including accessible sidewalks, crosswalks, and street lighting.

Private Sites

As evidenced by the Read Block development (1997) and the recently-approved redevelopment of the Abbot Building, substantial development potential still exists in the heart of the Square and along Massachusetts Avenue. Rehabilitation of existing structures should be the highest pri-



The Fairfax (1886), Porcellian Club 1890), and Hilliard's Bookstore (1827)

ority; there are no “soft” sites in the subdistrict where demolition and new construction could be considered. The possibility of rooftop additions to existing buildings seem unlikely, but any such proposals should be handled with great care.



8 Holyoke Street (1927)

Historical photographs can often be valuable references during the design of facade restoration or rehabilitation projects. Investigation of the collections of the Historical Commission is a good starting point for this kind of historical research. The rehabilitation of the Read Block included restoration of the 1896 facade, renovation of the forward portions of the original structures, and construction of a new 3-story structure at the rear. The renovated space accommodates both retail and office uses.



Restored storefronts, 1300-1310 Massachusetts Avenue

Retention of the small-scale retail environment, with narrow storefronts and interesting signs should be encouraged in this subdistrict. Careful attention should be paid to materials, storefront design, and signage. The 1907 Art Nouveau storefront at 1304 Massachusetts Avenue by Coolidge & Carlson is an example of exceptional storefront design. The unique lines, transparency, and high-quality materials of this storefront can be used as an example of a creative, contemporary approach to retail design in the district. Not every new storefront design in the Square can or should aim to be this unique, but it demonstrates the timelessness of an exceptional design.

Subdistrict B: Bow Street and Arrow Street/Putnam Square



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Description

This subdistrict includes properties on Bow Street and Arrow Street, and along the converging lines of Massachusetts Avenue and Mount Auburn Street from Quincy Square to Remington Street and the edge of Putnam Square. Putnam Square proper and the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Mount Auburn Street are in the Harvard Square Overlay District, but are not included within the boundaries of the Harvard Square Conservation District.

The subdistrict is characterized by a dizzying variety of building types, styles, and functions. The high-style St. Paul's and Old Cambridge Baptist churches abut or overlook apartment buildings, tiny residences, and a massive former manufacturing facility, the former Reversible Collar factory. Wood-frame homes about modern office buildings. Along Massachusetts Avenue most buildings include retail on the ground floor, but there are no retail uses along Mt. Auburn Street



Bow and Arrow Streets/Putnam Square Subdistrict

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The highest structures in this subdistrict are the campanile of St. Paul's Catholic Church, the stone spire of the Old Cambridge Baptist Church (in the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District), and the residential tower at 1105 Massachusetts Avenue. The locations of these towers correspond with the triangular boundaries of this subdistrict. The careful siting of the Old Cambridge Baptist Church at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Harvard Street allows for the spire to be seen from several different viewpoints, thus making it a prominent landmark in historic and contemporary photographs. The transition from dense Putnam Square to the smaller scale of the residential Riverside neighborhood is evident along Mount Auburn Street.

Historically, this area included small residences, light industry, and churches. Though industries are no longer active, the Reversible Collar factory at 8-20 Arrow Street and 21-27 Mount Auburn Street is still a dynamic structure that was adaptively re-used for retail and office space in the late 1960s and renovated through the federal tax act program in the mid-1980s and again in the mid-2000s. The commercial nature of Putnam Square developed primarily in the mid-twentieth-century. The larger mixed-use buildings there mostly went up in the mid-1970s. Construction of the Sundance Residences at 1075 Massachusetts Avenue in 2011 (in the Overlay District, but not in the Conservation District) completed the modern build-out of Putnam Square.

Public Spaces

The largest public space in this subdistrict is Quincy Square, which was redesigned and

landscaped in 1997. The project's purpose was to enhance the area for pedestrians while maintaining vehicular access. This project was a particularly-successful collaboration between a landscape architect (The Halvorson Company) and an artist (David Phillips). The Quincy Square Design Review Committee reviewed the design during a long and often contentious community process. The design included plantings of trees, shrubs, perennials, ground covers, and grasses along with stone walls, boulders and sculptures. The design remains both functional and attractive, and constitutes a model for others to emulate.



Quincy Square

[Google Maps ©2019](#)

Putnam Square, a very busy traffic intersection, did not contain many amenities for the pedestrian until 1998. The small, minimally-landscaped islands calm traffic and provide a pedestrian refuge. The publicly-owned gore at the corner of Arrow Street and Massachusetts Avenue was landscaped by the city in 1991 after an unsuccessful attempt by an abutting restaurant to privatize it. It receives minimal maintenance and represents an opportunity for enhancement.

Sidewalks throughout the subdistrict are a mixture of traditional brick and concrete, with accessible curb cuts patched in. Future sidewalk replacements should incorporate clay pavers for accessibility.

Private Sites

The major development sites identified in the 1986 guidelines have since been developed. The Inn at Harvard replaced a former Gulf gasoline station in 1990 and an office building at Zero Arrow Street went up in 2005. The significant 1906 garage concrete garage at 1230 Massachusetts Avenue was redeveloped with two new stories above a restored original façade in 2002. An unanticipated development occurred in 2007 with the development of the Veritas Hotel at 1131 Massachusetts Avenue. The design for this project, which was substantially a replica of an idiosyncratic 1869 Mansard altered in 1893, conformed to few of any of the guidelines for the district, although it does support the eclectic nature of the subdistrict.

The Old Cambridge Baptist Church spire and St. Paul's Catholic Church bell tower are important visual landmarks that should be respected by any new development. The development potential at St. Paul's Church was largely satisfied in the late 1980s, with the construction of the new choir school.

Several clusters of low-rise frame and brick buildings represent opportunities for site accumulation and redevelopment that threaten the character of the subdistrict. Near the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Bow Street a group of small-scale frame and brick buildings represents



a 140-year span of residential and commercial building construction in Harvard Square. The earliest buildings in the cluster, 12 Bow Street (ca. 1820) and 1208 Massachusetts Avenue (1842) are examples of residential buildings that were later converted to commercial uses. Other clusters occur at the intersection of Arrow Street and Massachusetts Avenue (two buildings) and at 1112-1134 Massachusetts Avenue (six buildings). Some buildings in the latter group have little or no significance, but their replacements should be carefully evaluated for compatibility with the eclectic character of the subdistrict. Here and elsewhere, some wood frame buildings have been covered

with artificial siding, but their original character is easily recoverable.



1156-1174 Massachusetts Avenue



1112-1134 Massachusetts Avenue

Denser development should be confined to Putnam Square. The industrial character of the Reversible Collar complex should be protected. The quiet, residential character along Mount Auburn Street should be maintained, and the wood-frame structures there should also be preserved. Development or adaptive re-use proposals should be sensitive to the fact that a transition from commercial to residential uses occurs in this subdistrict.



Reversible Collar complex, Arrow Street



12-30 Mt. Auburn Street

[to be continued with more updated subdistrict evaluations]

Appendix 1. Amended Statement of Goals, Secondary Goals, and Standards and Guidelines for Review²⁰

The Goal of the District ~~as a whole~~ and of this Order is to guide change and encourage diversity ~~of the District's buildings and public spaces~~ in order to protect ~~theirs~~ distinctive ~~physical and experiential~~ characteristics ~~of the District's buildings and public spaces~~, and to enhance the livability and vitality of the District for all people. The Historical Commission should seek to preserve and enhance the unique ~~functional-physical~~ environment and visual form of the District; preserve its architecturally and historically significant structures and their settings, and encourage ~~creative~~ design compatible therewith; mitigate ~~any adverse character-diminishing~~ impacts of new development on adjacent properties and areas; and discourage homogeneity by ~~maintaining the present~~ ~~retaining and encouraging~~ diversity of development and open space patterns and building scales and ages. The District must remain a pedestrian-friendly, accessible, human-scale, mixed-use environment that ~~supports local business~~ **dynamic urban experiences**, complements nearby neighborhoods, and ~~maintains-respects~~ the history and traditions of its location.

The following Secondary Goals for the District are intended to provide general guidance ~~to the Historical Commission~~ in a wide variety of situations, and are not intended to be applied to every project ~~that will come before it~~. 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. **Commercial Environment.** Sustain the vitality of the commercial environment ~~by 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, ~~allow for~~ ~~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.** Support creative, contemporary design for new construction that complements the context of abutting buildings and enhances the character of the Sub-District. Recognize and respect well-reasoned contemporary design during the review process. Support innovative approaches to enhancing the

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²⁰ (Redlined Draft; additions since 10/17/2018 12/19/2018 highlighted)

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- 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 greenspaces, scale-appropriate open spaces, and new buildings that support the prevailing character of the Sub-District. Preserve the remaining free-standing 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 ~~ensure that~~ 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~~ appropriate and upgrade the paving and landscaping of such spaces. Enhance accessibility and safety for pedestrians throughout the District.
 7. Residential Uses. Enhance the all-hours neighborhood quality of Harvard Square by conserving supporting existing residential ~~units-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, including parking, passenger drop-off, deliveries and cycling facilities. Provide adequate bicycle parking throughout the District. Protect pedestrian safety and experience through careful design and placement of features that challenge pedestrian access and experience such as loading docks, curb cuts, and trash receptacles ~~areas must be designed to have the least impact on the pedestrian experience.~~ Encourage the replacement of surface parking lots with compatible new structures.
 10. Environmental Sustainability. Encourage environmentally sustainable development that takes into consideration the ~~inherent embodied~~ energy of the existing built environment, material life cycles, passive design, energy conservation, and current LEED standards. 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. Ensure that architectural lighting, when allowed by a Certificate of Appropriateness, meets goals for energy efficiency and night-sky light pollution, avoids spill-over glare into adjoining residential areas, highlights rather

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than overwhelms architectural features, and is consistent in character with Harvard Square’s commercial environment.

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.

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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 recommendations of the current 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 should also consider the goals and recommendations specific to each of the six subdistricts that make up the Harvard Square Conservation District. The subdistrict goals and recommendations—included in Chapter VII of the November 29, 2000 report and as amended by recommendation of the current Study Committee—describe the physical and historical development of each area over time, identify some of the more notable buildings and spaces, and set forth some of the preservation priorities and recommendations for each sub-area.

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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.

Harvard Square Neighborhood Conservation District Study Committee
January 15, 2019

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