

Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza Working Group Recommendations – DRAFT

May 2018

Vision

The Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza Working Group envisions the Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza to be flexible and dynamic community assets that enhance the everyday life of Harvard Square, attract a broad range of people, and act as platforms for community gatherings, including civic, artistic, and social activities.



The interior of the Kiosk would function as a flexible space accommodating temporary, community-serving uses that occupy the space intermittently during the span of a typical week. In addition to these uses, a daily Kiosk operation would feature news for perusal or sale and serve as a Visitor Information Center. During periods with no active temporary use, the interior space would support the news and visitor information functions as well as acting as an informal public seating space. The Plaza would also accommodate a range of temporary, community-serving programming, and would function as a community resource for informal social seating and community gathering.



Depiction of activity around renovated Kiosk and reconstructed Plaza (Halverson Design Partnership)

Background

The Harvard Square Kiosk was constructed in 1927-28 as a headhouse and entrance to the subway line below, replacing a larger headhouse built in 1912. During 1981-84, the Kiosk was disassembled, removed, and stored while most of the station below was demolished during construction work to extend the terminus of the Red Line from Harvard to Alewife. A new headhouse was constructed in its place, and in 1984, the Kiosk was reassembled with some modifications to accommodate its use as a newsstand, including exterior magazine racks and a projecting cashier's booth. Since then, the City of Cambridge, which owns the structure, has leased it to multiple businesses operating as Out of Town News. The newsstand was originally founded in 1954, occupying a succession of stands that accompanied the Kiosk in what was then a small traffic island. During the construction of the Red Line extension, the traffic island was also expanded into the larger Plaza that exists today.



Kiosk, ca. 1938, functioning as headhouse (Boston Elevated Railway Collection, Cambridge Historical Commission)

Out of Town News is currently operated by Muckeys Corporation and sells a range of newspapers and magazines, as well as souvenirs and other items. The Plaza accommodates activities such as informal social gathering, impromptu performances, and chess playing. Supplementing regular City maintenance, the Harvard Square Business Association provides upkeep of the tables, chairs, and planters in the Plaza.

In 2013, the City collaborated with Harvard University and the Harvard Square Business Association to host the first of three community workshops with initial consulting support from Project for Public Spaces. These workshops addressed ideas for short- and long-term improvements and programming, and included discussion about the restoration and repurposing of the Kiosk. Ideas from the first workshop were documented in the May 2014 Harvard Square Vision Plan, and were later substantiated in the second and third community workshops. The Plan highlighted opportunities for the Kiosk and what it needed to promote activation in the Square including, more transparency, flexible use of space, better integration with the rest of the Plaza, more public engagement opportunities, and restoration of the historic structure. While some short-term ideas that came out of the community meetings have been implemented (i.e., placing loose tables and chairs in a portion of the Square as well as landscaping improvements), there was still not a clear vision for the Kiosk.



Kiosk in 2016 (Cambridge Historical Commission)

In 2017, the City established the Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza Working Group, composed of residents, business and property owners, representatives from local institutions, and subject matter experts, to create a vision for the future use, operation, and governance of the Kiosk and surrounding Plaza. The Working Group process has involved broad public input, including public meetings, surveys, and a Call for Ideas process, which have provided a wide range of ideas to inform the Working Group's discussions. Based on this community feedback, and with the support of City staff and three project consultants, Project for Public Spaces, Halvorson Design Partnership, and Touloukian Touloukian, Inc. the Working Group developed the recommendations captured in this document.

The City has appropriated \$8.6 million for the redesign and reconstruction of the Plaza, to improve accessibility and enhance the flexibility of the space, and for the restoration and renovation of the Kiosk.

Use and Programming

The Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza Working Group envisions that the Kiosk and Plaza would each accommodate regular daily uses while retaining sufficient flexibility to host temporary programming, as detailed in the following sections.

Daily Uses

A portion of the Kiosk would provide information to visitors and would notify passersby of events in the area and provide pertinent updates about Cambridge community life. Greeters would provide guidance to visitors, assisting them with navigation, offering brochures on activities and amenities, and sharing historical information about the area. If feasible, they may also sell tickets for nearby events. The Kiosk

would also feature a modest range of print news publications for perusal and/or sale, at a reduced scale from Out of Town News.



Depiction of daily uses in Kiosk featuring visitor information and news (Touloukian Touloukian, Inc.)

Temporary Programming

Intermittently throughout a typical week, the Kiosk would host a variety of functions of varying intensities that contribute to the vibrancy of Harvard Square. The range of programming in the Kiosk would celebrate community and creativity, promote civic engagement, highlight the historical legacy of the area, support Cambridge businesses and organizations and Harvard Square festivals and activities, and contribute to making Harvard Square a more delightful, engaging place. Kiosk programming would include functions such as:

- Small performances (e.g., jazz trio, poetry reading, etc.) with sound flowing into the square
- Voter registration and other civic functions
- Art installations
- Interactive and/or family-oriented programming (e.g., arts and crafts, face painting, etc.)
- Collection of warm-weather clothing or food donations
- Small lecture or roundtable style events (e.g., book talks)
- Exhibits/installations on the history of the area
- Sampling/promotion of goods or services or engaging activities sponsored by a business or organization (e.g., learning calligraphy with Bob Slate Stationer)

- Other entertaining, educational, or festive activities



Examples of temporary Kiosk activities, from top left: performance; voter registration; family activities – storytelling with arts and crafts (Touloukian Touloukian, Inc.)

A portion of Kiosk programming may also generate revenue to help offset operational costs. This programming may include temporarily hosting a business that pays to use the space for promotional activities that contribute to the life of Harvard Square and/or financial self-sufficiency of the operation, such as giving away free samples of a product or operating a fun activity that relates to the offerings of the business. However, all activities in the Kiosk or Plaza would need to be fully open to the public, with no entrance fees.

The Plaza would function as a community resource for informal social seating and community gathering, and would also occasionally host temporary uses, such as the following:

- Performances (both impromptu and planned)

- Interactive installations (e.g., public piano, artistic sculptures/seating, etc.)
- Family-oriented activities (e.g., storytelling, face painting, etc.)
- Tabling for community groups
- Outdoor markets (e.g., selling books, crafts, produce, etc.)
- Other entertaining, educational, or festive activities

Operation of activities in the Plaza would be coordinated so that they do not unnecessarily duplicate activities elsewhere in the square. Specifically, adjacent to the Plaza is Harvard University’s Smith Campus Center, currently under renovation and scheduled to reopen in 2018. The Campus Center will include flexible indoor and outdoor gathering spaces, including space for exhibitions, events, performances, and food offerings. Programming in the Kiosk and Plaza should be operated to complement these activities.



Depiction of reconstructed Plaza (Halverson Design Partnership)

Programming in the Plaza must not obstruct paths of heavy pedestrian flow, specifically the following: the path abutting the storefronts along the edge of the Plaza; the primary pedestrian paths flowing from the MBTA headhouse entrance, and the pathway north of the Kiosk connecting the crosswalk at the northeast of the Plaza and the crosswalk immediately to the west of the Kiosk.

Management and Operations

The City would hire an operating entity through a fair, transparent, and open bidding process to operate the Kiosk daily and execute temporary programming, consistent with the vision outlined in this document. These activities would include the following:

- Site maintenance, security, and cleaning (supplementing the services already provided by the City) of the Kiosk and Plaza

- Onsite staffing (executing daily uses and temporary programming – anticipating the possibility of staffing support from the Cambridge Office for Tourism)
- Offsite management (planning and scheduling events, marketing and promotion, financial management, etc.)

The process to seek and hire a Kiosk operator would start with a Request for Information (RFI), before proceeding to a Request for Proposals (RFP). In an effort to encourage a broad range of potential operators and seek the best outcome for the City, an RFI would enable interested parties to offer further considerations into the operations and feasibility of various aspects a scope proposed by the City. This process could also accommodate additional flexibility beyond what just an RFP could accomplish; based on the areas of core expertise and capacity of a responder, the RFI process may uncover information that would be useful in crafting the RFP scope and comparative evaluation criteria.

At the conclusion of the RFP process, the City would seek to select an operator; criteria to evaluate proposals may include:

- Capacity and experience necessary to plan and execute publicly accessible programming in the public realm
- Capacity and experience necessary to deliver visitor information in multiple formats
- Ability to form successful partnerships to leverage external capacity and in-kind resources
- Diverse programming schedule, offering frequent events, catering to a wide variety of people in the community, including visitors
- Programming schedule reflects goals as outlined in this document, including: celebrate community and creativity, promote civic engagement, increasing awareness of the history of the area, support Cambridge businesses and organizations and Harvard Square festivals and activities, and contribute to making Harvard Square a more delightful, engaging place
- Revenue-generating activities avoid over-branding and optimally align with the values of the City of Cambridge.
- Programming schedule complements City goals, engagement efforts, and programs (e.g., through voter registration, publicizing of events, promotion of Harvard Square and Cambridge as destinations, providing a platform for civic engagement, promoting Cambridge businesses, etc.)
- Visitor information strategy provides value for both visitors/tourists in Harvard Square and people who frequent the area; information and materials used fill key gaps in knowledge about navigation and about social and civic life
- Operations plan provides sufficient staffing coverage to accomplish the following:
 - Accommodates fluctuations in needs throughout the day, week, and year
 - Kiosk stays open and accessible to the public for majority of the day, ideally approaching Out of Town News' hours of operation

Financial Sustainability [in development – to be modified based on 5/31 discussion]

The intention is that the operation of the Kiosk and Plaza would be financially self-sufficient and could draw from a range of potential revenue streams and in-kind resources to offset operational costs, such as:

- Selling tickets for walking tours, theater, concerts, and other local events
- Promotional activities for products, services, and nearby stores/restaurants (e.g., as providing samplings of products or dishes) and occasional sale of goods
- Sponsored activities (such as a fun activity or a concert series sponsored by a business)
- Advertising (appropriately scaled)
- Interior displays with paid messages
- ATM in or around the Kiosk
- News sales at a modest scale

Governance & City Oversight

The City would manage a contract with a Kiosk operator. The contract would be structured to allow for sufficient flexibility on the part of an operator to manage a creative and dynamic schedule of programming and services, while ensuring that the City can apply appropriate limitations on activities, particularly on those that generate revenue. Revenue generating activities would not be allowed to generate too prominent of a presence or to overwhelm or dominate the essence of the place as a cherished hub of community.

The City Manager would appoint an Advisory Committee, representing a range of expertise, involving financial management, operations, arts and culture, and civic life, and will include Cambridge residents, as well as business and institutional representatives. The Advisory Committee would meet 2 to 3 times per year to review operations and finances of the Kiosk and Plaza, including the schedule and approach for programming, and would provide recommendations to the City Manager to help ensure the operation of the Kiosk and Plaza are consistent with the vision outlined in this document.

Appendix: Sample Operator Financials

Amounts shown below represent estimates for expenses by category and for net operating income to an operator for each proposed activity. Estimates are based on research in consultation with entities including the Musicant Group (an interdisciplinary placemaking and public space management firm and sub consultant to Project for Public Spaces); area visitor information centers and ticket sales venues; and Outfront Media. Note: temporary vendors and/or markets were estimated to generate an average net operating income close to zero and were not listed below.

Expenses

Uses	Estimate
Offsite Management (\$40/hr; 0.5 full time equivalent)	(\$45,000)
Program Coordination & Execution (\$25/hr; 1.0 full time equivalent)	(\$50,000)
Onsite Kiosk Staffing - 15 hrs/day (\$16/hr; 2.7 full time equivalent)	(\$90,000)
Site Maintenance, Security, Cleaning, & Operational Support (\$16/hr; 0.75 full time equivalent)	(\$25,000)
30% Labor Inflation (health insurance, payroll taxes, etc.)	(\$65,000)
Programming (10 small-scale activities per week, average of \$150 per activity; 4 signature events per year, \$3,000 per event)	(\$90,000)
Marketing & Promotion	(\$10,000)
Capital Expenditures, Supplies, etc.	(\$10,000)
Maintenance Materials & Repairs	(\$10,000)
Misc. Expenses	(\$10,000)
Total	(\$405,000)

Revenues

Sources	Low Estimate	High Estimate
Advertising	\$50,000	\$100,000
Interior Displays	\$20,000	\$40,000
Ticket Sales (commissions for tours, entertainment, museums, etc.)	\$10,000	\$75,000
Visitor Map (with advertisements from local businesses)	\$10,000	\$30,000
Promotions (25 to 60 sessions annually at \$1,000 revenue per session after permit costs)	\$25,000	\$60,000
Sponsorships (25-session weekly series of performances at \$2,500 to \$5,000 per session, minus \$400 per session for performer)	\$50,000	\$115,000
ATM in the Kiosk (1 or 2 machines)	\$10,000	\$25,000
Total	\$175,000	\$445,000