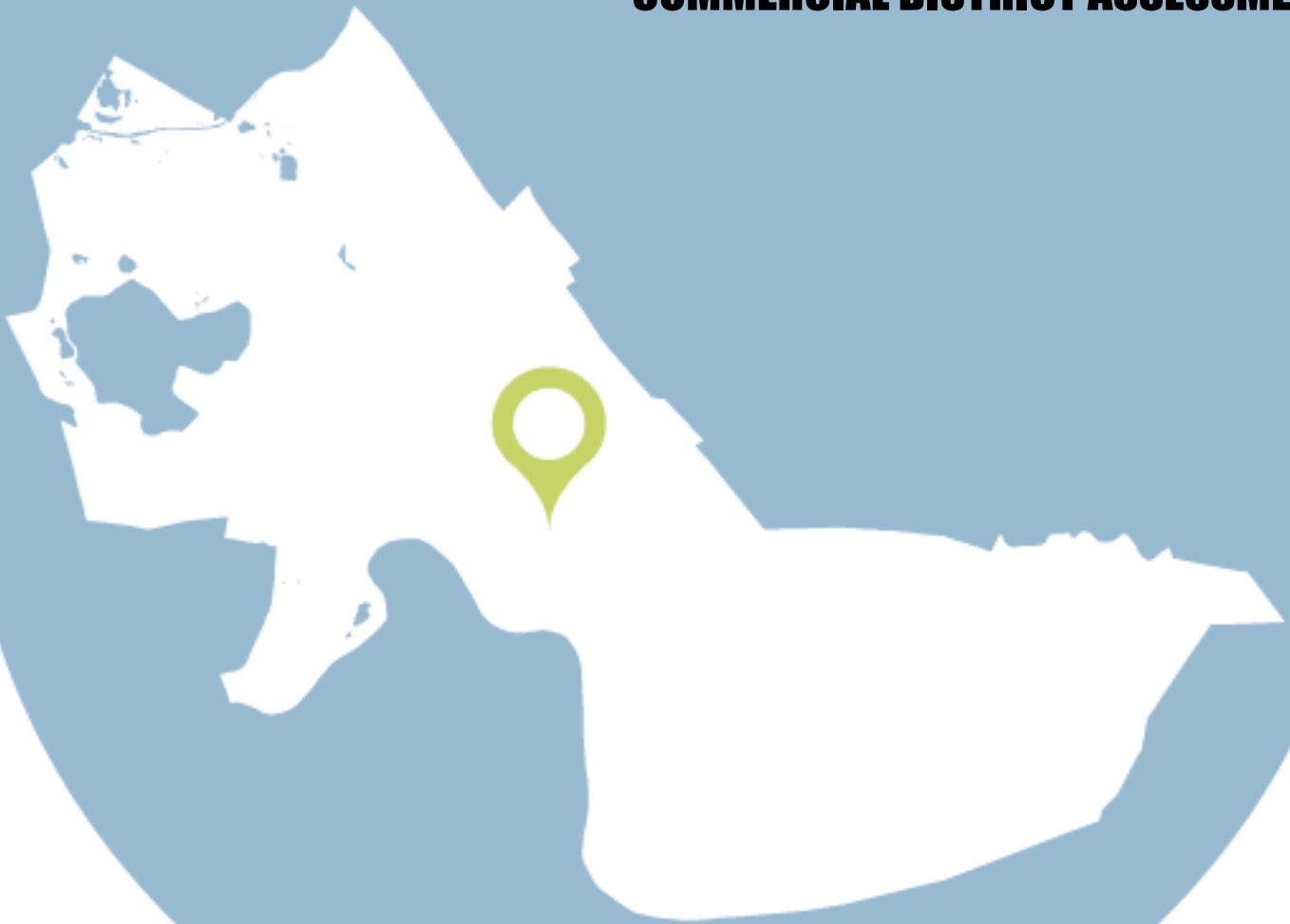


2023

HARVARD SQUARE CAMBRIDGE

COMMERCIAL DISTRICT ASSESSMENT



Prepared by:
City of Cambridge
Community Development Department
Economic Opportunity and Development Division



Acknowledgments

Executive Office

Yi-An Huang, *City Manager*
Owen O’Riordan, *Deputy City Manager*

Business Association

Harvard Square Business Association

Survey by Agency Landscape and Planning

City Council

Sumbul Siddiqui, *Mayor*
Alanna M. Mallon, *Vice Mayor*
Burhan Azeem
Dennis J. Carlone
Marc C. McGovern
Patty M. Nolan
E. Denise Simmons
Paul F. Toner
Quinton Y. Zondervan

Community Development Department

Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager
Khalil Mogassabi, Deputy Director & Chief Planner
Sandra Clarke, Deputy Director & Chief of Administration
Pardis Saffari, Director of Economic Opportunity and Development
Rona Abrahams, Administrative Assistant
Allyson Allen, Senior Economic Development Manager
Lola Campos, Economic Development Specialist
Christina DiLisio, Economic Development Specialist
Tyrone Fells, Small Business Specialist
Kingston Wei, Economic Development Intern

In this Report

Neighborhood Context	pp. 4-5
Key Findings and Opportunities	pp. 6-7
What We Heard from Merchants	pp. 8-9
What We Heard from Shoppers	pp. 10-11
Data Appendix	pp. 12-15

Existing conditions, business data, opportunities, and qualitative depictions of the Harvard Square neighborhood were gathered from roughly 372 surveys of neighborhood businesses, shoppers, workers, and residents. Additional data was collected from a quarter-mile walking distance (“walk-shed”) around the commercial district. The boundaries of Harvard Square trade area data and the survey methodology can be found on p.12 of this report.



Purpose of the District Assessment

The purpose of the Harvard Square Commercial District Assessment is to highlight the neighborhood's existing business landscape and consumer characteristics. Understanding the current business landscape provides the City and local business associations with a better understanding of how Harvard Square visitors and residents utilize the district and how they would like the district to evolve in the future. Data in this report will also assist business owners seeking a location in Harvard Square, and help current business owners understand potential opportunities for growth.

Key issues and opportunities identified in this assessment will help prioritize the City and local business association's initiatives and serve as an informational and marketing resource for the neighborhood.

ABOUT HARVARD SQUARE

Notable Places



**HARVARD MBTA
STATION & PLAZA**



HARVARD YARD



CAMBRIDGE COMMON

Background

Home to Harvard University, this square is an international destination, mixing history and learning with contemporary arts and entertainment. A unique blend of restaurants, shops and cultural offerings draws residents, students, professionals and visitors. With a little over 900,000 square feet of retail space, Harvard Square functions as a regional center for shopping in an urban, pedestrian-friendly context.

The character of Harvard Square reflects three and a half centuries of growth and change. At the center is Harvard Square MBTA Station, one of the busiest on the Red Line with bus links to multiple surrounding neighborhoods and towns. At Mt. Auburn Street and JFK Street is the historic Winthrop Square, which was one of the very first open-air markets in the pre-Revolutionary era—now, it is a well-used open space surrounded by a lively mix of cafes, restaurants, retail, housing, and institutional uses.

Demographics

More than 20,000 residents of Cambridge call the Harvard Square area home (see page 12 for the area boundary). The district's population continues to evolve, with African-American/Black (8.3%), Asian (20.5%), and Hispanic (5.8%) residents contributing to its diversity in 2020. The daytime population (30,058 workers)¹ and over 27,127 Harvard students² brings additional energy during the week to shop, dine, and work. For more information on Harvard Square demographics, see page 12.

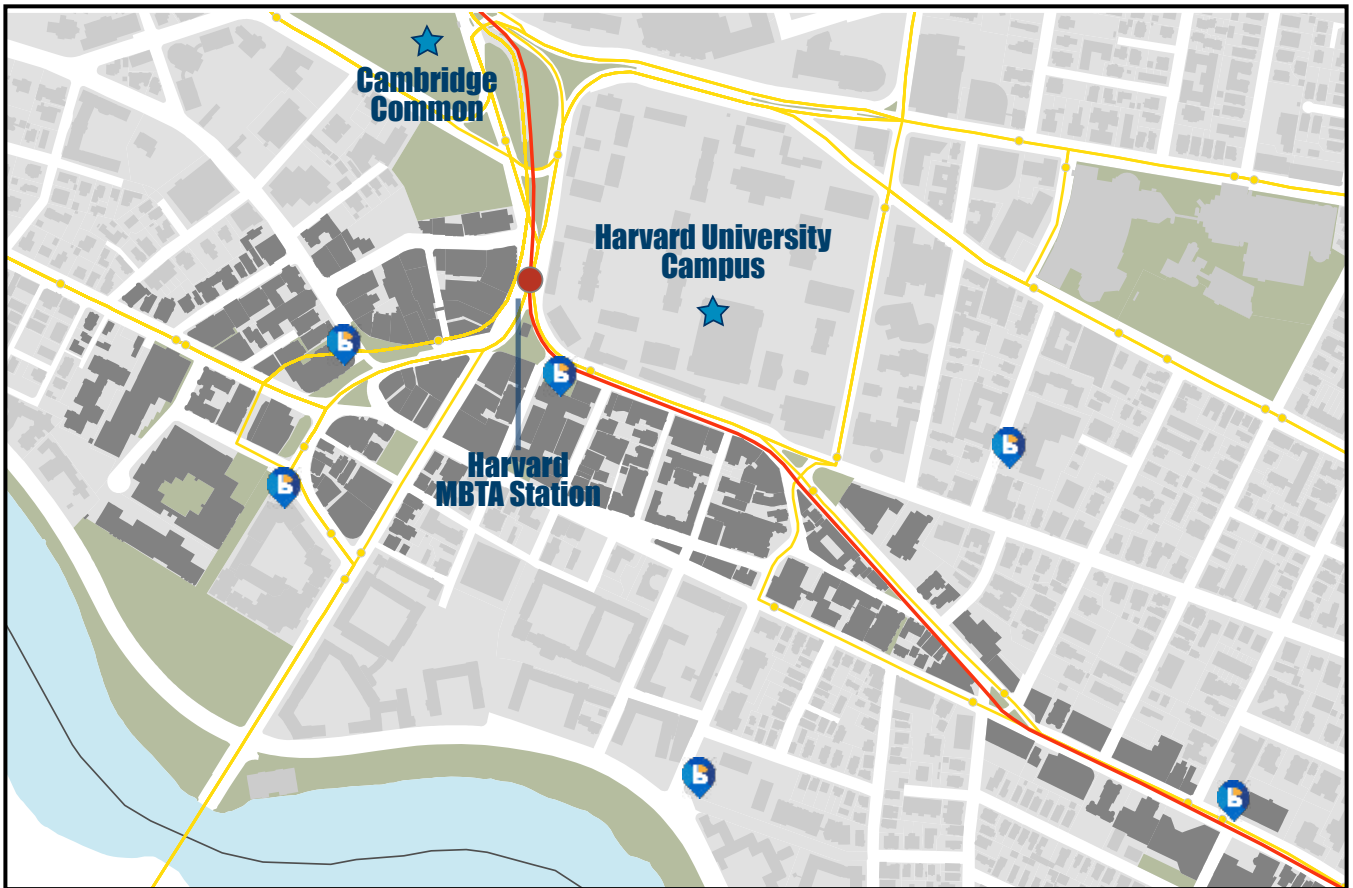
Future Opportunities

Harvard Square is tied to a unique set of characteristics that have been cultivated over time: a strong history, transit connectivity, and being an academic hub. In recent years, there have been new commercial and residential development in the square, including renovations to the MBTA bus tunnels and the Abbot building. New residents, visitors, and workers to the Square will provide an increase in the daytime and nighttime population of the square, which will be key for the Square's legacy business owners. Community Development Department's Economic Opportunity and Development staff works closely with property owners, business association, and retailers to support current businesses and potential businesses in the Square.

The City is committed to improving Harvard Square's public spaces. In 2021, the Community Development Department began activating Palmer Street with free public seating, interactive installations, and family-friendly activities. Renovation of the historic Harvard Square Kiosk building and surrounding plaza area is underway and is expected to conclude in 2023, at which point an operator for the Kiosk will begin activating the Kiosk as an inclusive public living room and site of collaborative cultural production. In future years additional sidewalk and street construction will improve pedestrian and bike safety.

1 - ESRI Community Analyst, July 2022). 2- Harvard University Town Gown Report (2022)
Photos: Nicolaus Czarnecki, Kyle Klein, Susan P. Pacheco

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT



Key Items

-  Point of Interest
-  T Stop
-  T Route
-  Bluebikes Station
-  Bus Stop
-  Bus Route

Transit Scores*

Bike Score

98 

Walk Score

98 


Transit Score

80 

*Note: These scores reflect how well a location is served by public transportation on a scale from 0 to 100.

Transportation

 **6** Bluebikes Stations

 **8** Bus Routes
(1, 66, 68, 68, 71, 73, 74, 75, 77, 78, 86, 96)




 **1** T Stop (Red Line)

21,526 Weekday Riders

Parking

 **325** Public Meter Spaces

Business and Neighborhood Association

-  Harvard Square Neighborhood Association
-  North of Harvard Neighbors
-  Harvard Square Business Association

Annual Community Events

-  MayFair (May)
-  Annual Oktoberfest (October)

Sources: MBTA, Walk Score, City of Cambridge Open Data, MBTA Ridership Viewer

KEY FINDINGS

Identified through District Assessment Surveys

Strengths

- Many local, longstanding businesses
- Key public transportation hub for neighboring towns, bringing in regional workers and visitors daily.
- Excellent accessibility via foot, bus, subway, bicycle, and car
- Anchor institution (Harvard University)
- Large population of students and tourists
- Accessible to multiple residential neighborhoods

Challenges

- Pressures on local businesses from increasing cost of goods and commercial rents
- Strain on public realm maintenance in consequence of considerable foot traffic between key nodes
- Uncertain impacts on local businesses due to changing demographics and the rise of e-commerce
- The difficult balance between parking availability and public demands for pedestrian space



Photos: Molly Atkin, Nicolaus Czarnecki, Kingston Wei, Kyle Klein, Pardis Saffari



Opportunities

Identified through District Assessment Surveys

- ◆ Attract new businesses to vacant storefronts that meet neighborhood demand for local businesses, affordable food options, and entertainment
- ◆ Continue to clean and maintain the streets and sidewalks across Harvard Square
- ◆ Continue to promote and expand existing private and public open spaces and add new streetscape amenities and beautification elements
- ◆ Foster more business-to-business communication and knowledge sharing to help long term business owners who plan to grow in place

BUSINESS LANDSCAPE

Ground Floor Business Inventory

212

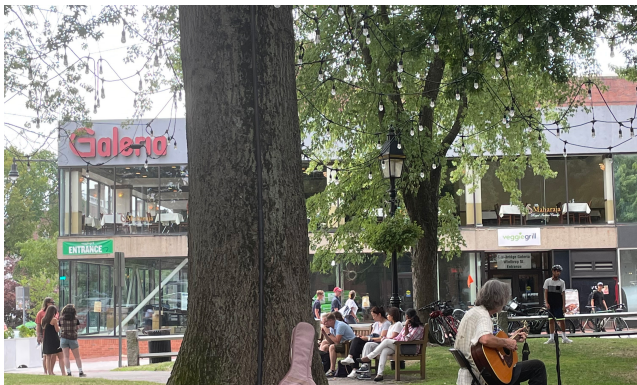
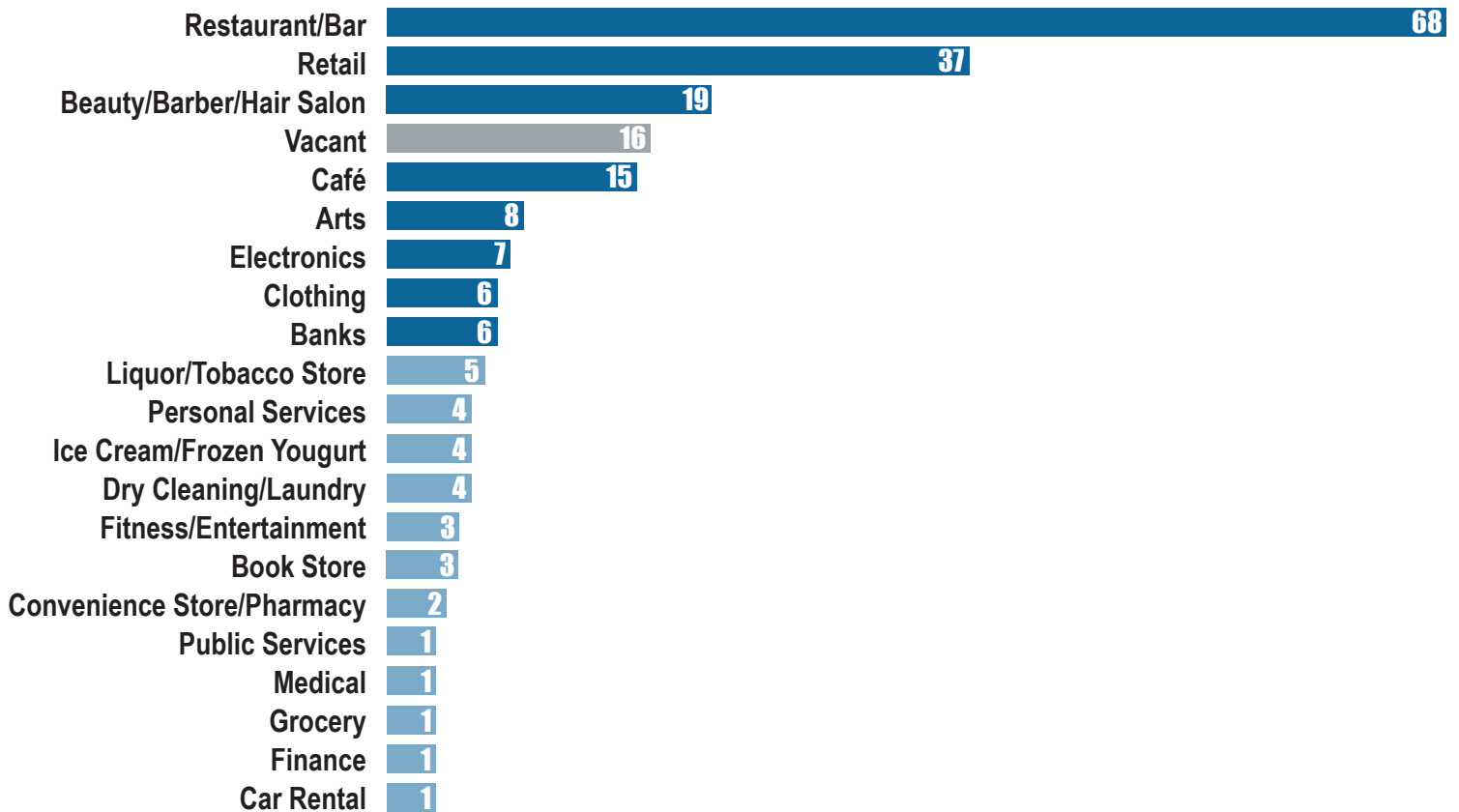
Total Number of Storefronts

7%*

Storefront Vacancy

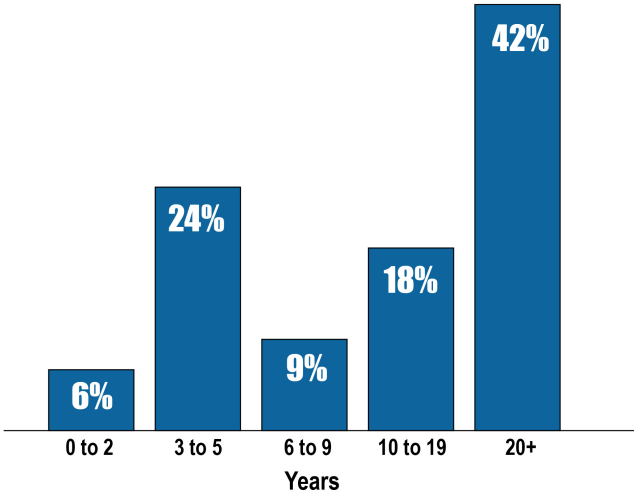
*Note: Numbers are based on a ground floor storefront survey conducted in May 2022. Some of the vacant properties were under lease negotiations at time of the survey. For a current list of vacancies, please go to <https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/economicopportunityanddevelopment/vacantstorefrontresources>

Storefront & Retail Mix



What We Heard From Harvard Square Business Owners

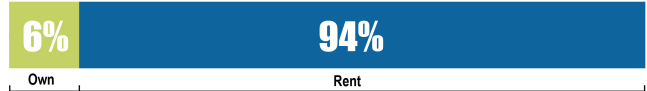
How many years have you been in business here?



How many employees do you have?



Do you Own or Rent your property?



Over the past year, has your business improved, stayed the same, decreased?



What changes (if any) do you think need to occur on or around your corridor to attract more shoppers?*

	% Businesses
Parking	79%
Community Events/Marketing	39%
Storefront Improvements	18%
Sanitation	15%
Business to Business Communication	15%
Safety	12%

What kind of resources would help you grow your business?*

	% Merchants
Marketing Support	64%
Financing	21%
Legal/Lease Support	18%
Assistance with Regulatory Compliance	15%
Training for Staff	9%
None of the Above	9%

*Note: Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer, totals may be more than 100%

What changes would you suggest to improve Harvard Square for residents, pedestrians, and shoppers?



PEDESTRIAN STREETS



SANITATION



PARKING



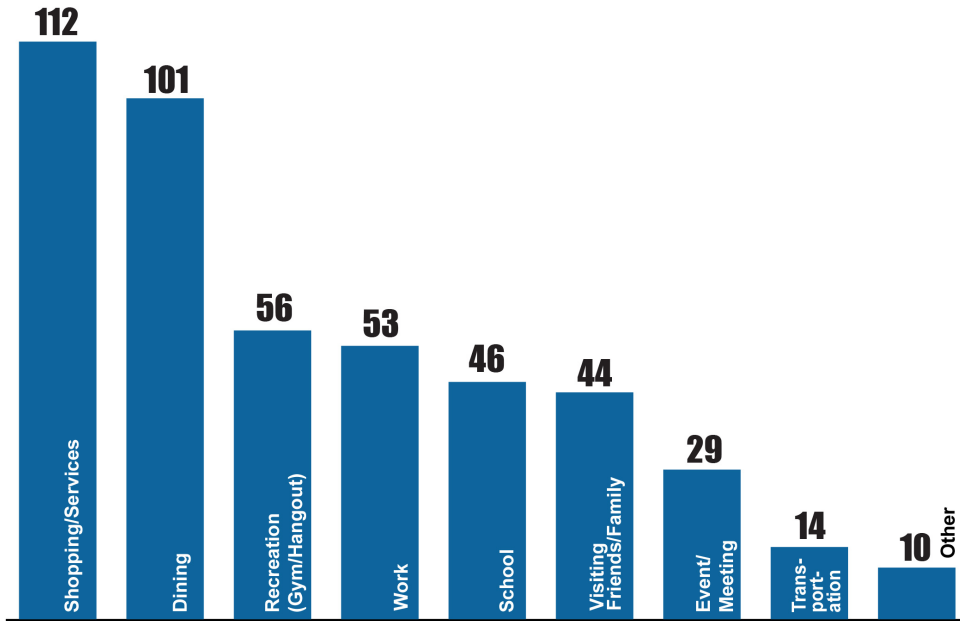
ACTIVE & DIVERSE STOREFRONTS

CUSTOMER OUTLOOK

What We Heard From Shoppers

What is your purpose for being in Harvard Square?

*Note: Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer.



What are the most common items you purchase in Harvard Square?*

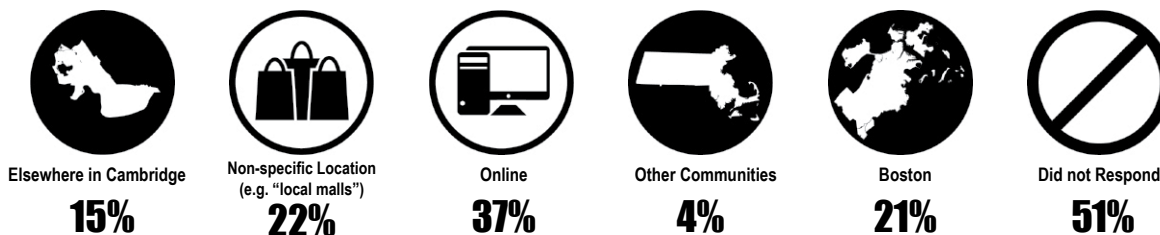
	% Shoppers
Food/Groceries	73%
Clothing	24%
Accessories (Shoes/Jewelry)	15%
Arts/Crafts	13%
Wine/Beer/Spirits	11%
Beauty/Personal Care Products	11%
Home Goods	9%
Electronics/Gifts	5%

What are the most common services you use in Harvard Square?*

	% Shoppers
Restaurant (Sit-Down)	58%
Restaurant (Take-Out)	51%
Pharmacy	16%
Music/Performing Arts Venue	16%
Hair Salon/Barber	8%
Medical	5%
Other	5%
Dental	2%

*Note: Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer, totals may be more than 100%

If not Harvard Square, where do you shop?



Note: Percentages for these categories are based on the 49% of survey respondents who responded to this question. 51% Did not respond to this question.

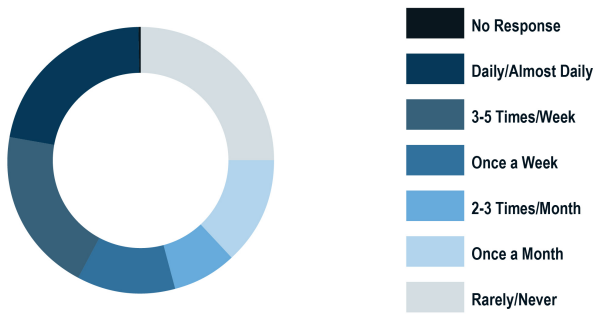
Source: Harvard Square Customer Intercept Survey (June 2022)

What We Heard From Shoppers

How do you usually travel to get to Harvard Square?*

	% Shoppers
Walk	39%
MBTA	52%
Bus	25%
Subway	27%
Drive	34%
Alone	17%
Carpool	10%
Uber/Lyft/Taxi	6%
Bike	15%
Own	12%
Bluebikes	3%
Company Shuttle	2%

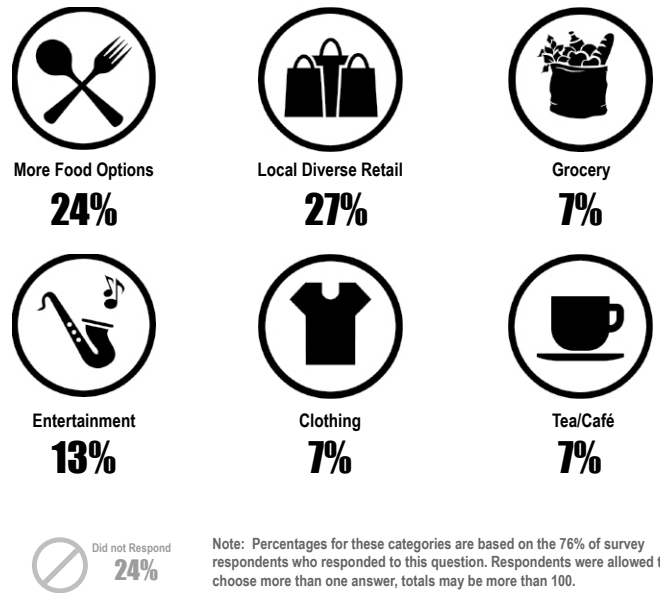
How often do you usually go shopping in Harvard Square?



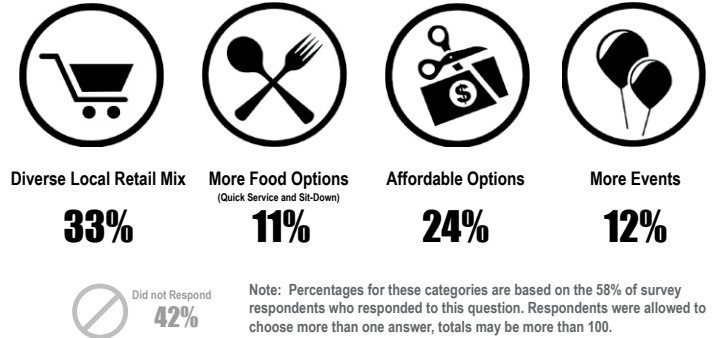
When do you usually go shopping in Harvard Square?*

	% Shoppers
Weekdays	33%
Weekday Nights	14%
Weekends	27%
Weekend Nights	8%
No Set Time	41%

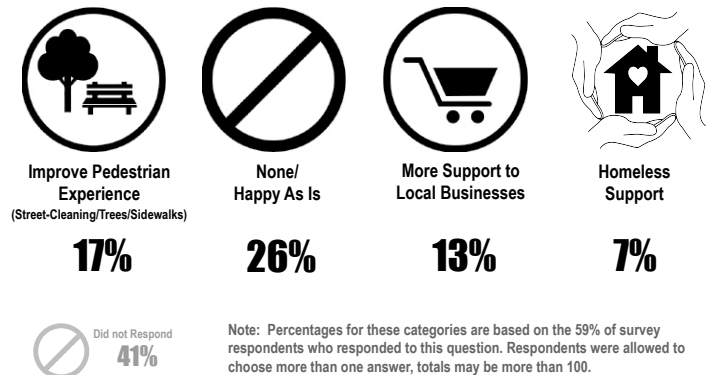
What new businesses would you like to see?



What would make you shop here more?



What changes would you like to see?



*Note: Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer, totals may be more than 100%

Source: Harvard Square Customer Intercept Survey (June 2022)

DATA APPENDIX

Survey Methodology

The City worked with Agency Landscape and Planning to survey people in Harvard Square over two-three weeks in June 2022 during peak times: morning, mid-day, and evening. We received 372 surveys from this effort. Additionally, City staff conducted a merchant survey. The merchant survey was conducted online and in person, and was available for two and a half weeks, from June 2022 to July 2022. We received 33 responses to the business owner survey.

Trade Area & Context Area Demographics

Total Population

20,663	Harvard Square
118,403	Cambridge
7,029,917	Massachusetts

Source: ESRI Community Analyst: Community Profile; US Decennial Census (2020)

Average Household Size

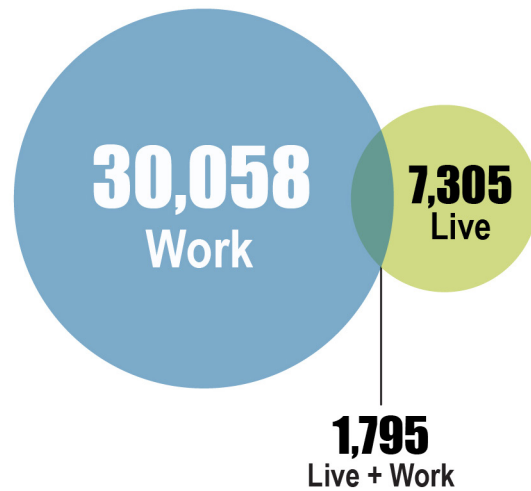
1.90	Harvard Square
2.09	Cambridge
2.50	Massachusetts

Source: ESRI Community Analyst: Community Profile; US Decennial Census (2020)

Median Household Income*

\$98,825	Harvard Square
\$112,565	Cambridge
\$89,026	Massachusetts

Commuting Patterns



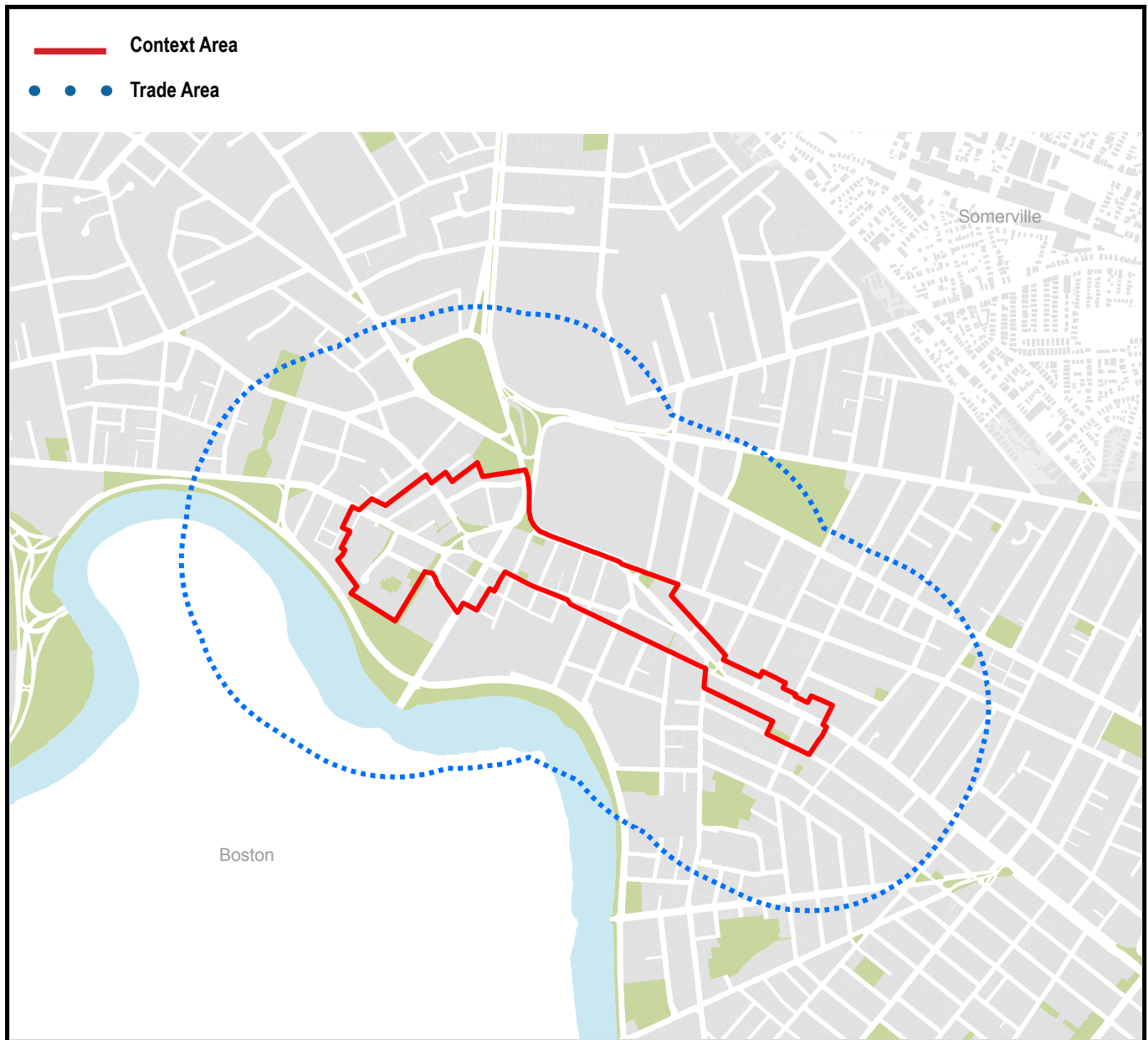
30,058	Work in Harvard Square, live elsewhere
1,795	Live & Work in Harvard Square
7,305	Live in Harvard Square, work elsewhere

Source: US Census OnTheMap data 2019
Data based on Origin Destination Employer Statistics.
Commuting Patterns data based on the trade area.

This report does not include a retail opportunity section. In previous reports the retail opportunity section included information on retail supply and demand data. This data helps us understand if residents in the neighborhood are leaving the district to spend money outside of the square. We are not able to provide this data set because ESRI Community Analyst does not provide data after 2019.

Context Area

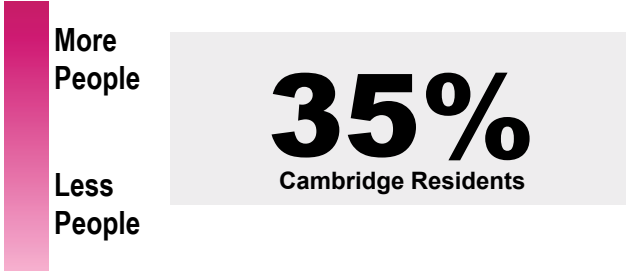
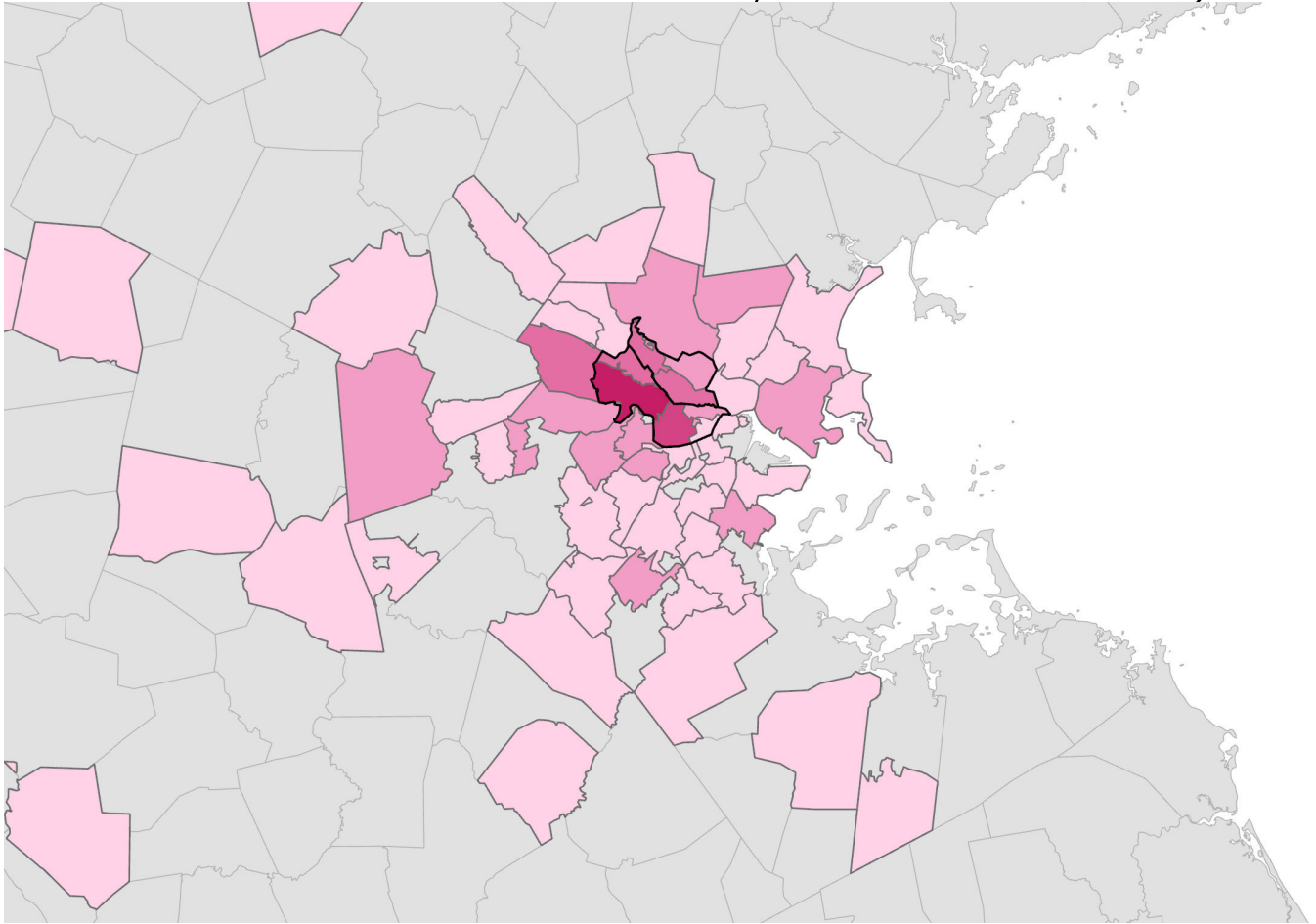
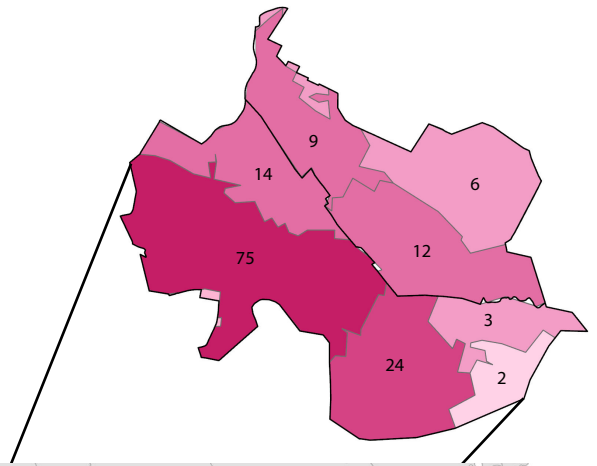
Harvard Square is defined in two ways in this report. The “Context Area” outlined in the map below refers to the commercial district boundaries identifying the greatest concentration of businesses in the Harvard Square area. The data presented in the Ground Floor Business Inventory on p.8 refers to businesses located in the Context Area and all surveys were distributed and taken within this boundary. The “Trade Area” represents the location of the residents who live within a quarter mile from the Context Area and are most served by the commercial district. Responses from this demographic are reflected in the report’s Appendix, pp.14-15.



Survey Respondent Locations

The map below shows the home location of survey participants. They provided their home location by zip code and the most frequent are mapped here. Of those surveyed, 337 provided a zipcode.

*International respondents are not counted

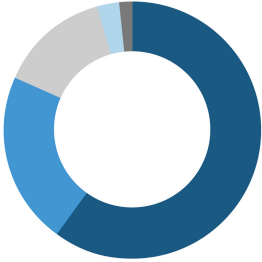


NOT PICTURED:
Domestic respondent home zip codes located in other areas of MA, RI, NH, CT, ME, VT, NJ, PA, MD, NC, VA, GA, FL, IA, OH, IN, MI, MN, IL, KS, NE, TX, AZ, OR, CA, and NY

Demographics

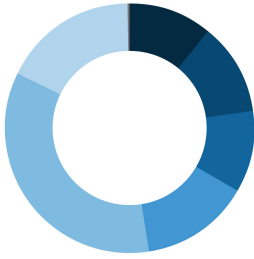
Shoppers | Harvard Square | Cambridge

What is your relationship to Harvard Square?



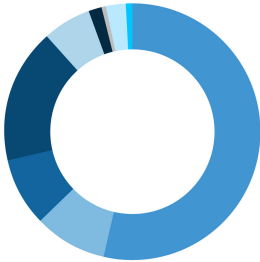
	% Shoppers
Other	60%
Resident	22%
Resident and Worker	3%
Worker	17%
Did not Disclose	2%

What is your age?



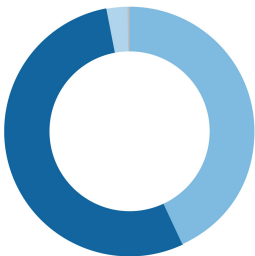
	% Shoppers	% Harvard Square Trade Area	% Cambridge
60+	11%	16.6%	%
50-59	12%	3.3%	%
40-49	11%	1.2%	%
30-39	14%	17.2%	%
20-29	35%	33.9%	%
<19	17%	27.7%	%
Did not Disclose	0%	X	X

What is your race or ethnicity?



	% Shoppers	% Harvard Square Trade Area	% Cambridge
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2%	0.2%	0.2%
Asian	17%	20.5%	19.2%
Black/African American	9%	8.3%	10.6%
Caucasian/White	54%	52.9%	57.3%
Latino/Hispanic	9%	5.8%	9.1%
Mixed/Multi-racial	6%	6%	9.2%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1%	0%	0%
Other	2%	1.5%	3.4%
Did not Disclose	1%	X	X

What is your gender?



	% Shoppers	% Harvard Square Trade Area	% Cambridge
Female	54%	52%	%
Male	43%	48%	%
Other	3%	X	X
Did not Disclose	0%	X	X

Source: US Decennial Census PL 94-171 (2020), ESRI Community Analyst: US Census 2010 ESRI 2022 Estimates (July 2022), Harvard Square Customer Intercept Survey (June 2022)

HARVARD SQUARE CAMBRIDGE

The Community Development Department (CDD) is the planning agency for the City of Cambridge. With five programmatic divisions, Community Planning, Housing, Economic Opportunity and Development, Environmental and Transportation Planning and Zoning and Development, CDD takes an interdisciplinary approach to manage and guide physical change in a manner consistent with the City's priorities, engaging and collaborating with community partners and other government agencies to make Cambridge a desirable place to live and work.

The Economic Opportunity and Development Division is committed to building an inclusive and sustainable economy in the City of Cambridge. The Division is responsible for a wide range of activities designed to meet the City's need for a vibrant, innovative, diverse, and thriving economic base that ensures economic opportunity for all. We offer a variety of resources and services, including site search and selection assistance, one-on-one meetings with staff, business workshops and classes, expert consulting services, and grants for accessibility, interior, and storefront improvements.

For more information:

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/economicopportunityanddevelopment>

Sources

ESRI and Infogroup, Inc. November 2019 ESRI Retail MarketPlace Profile.

ESRI and U.S. Census Bureau. July 2022 ESRI Community Profile.

U.S. Census Bureau. 2019. OnTheMap Application.

U.S. Census Bureau. 2020. Decennial Census

Photo Credits: Nicolaus Czarnecki, Gretchen Ertl Photography; Kyle Klein Photography; Molly Akin Photography; Susan P. Pacheco, Pardis Saffari, Kingston Wei

[cambridgema.gov/cdd](https://www.cambridgema.gov/cdd)

