



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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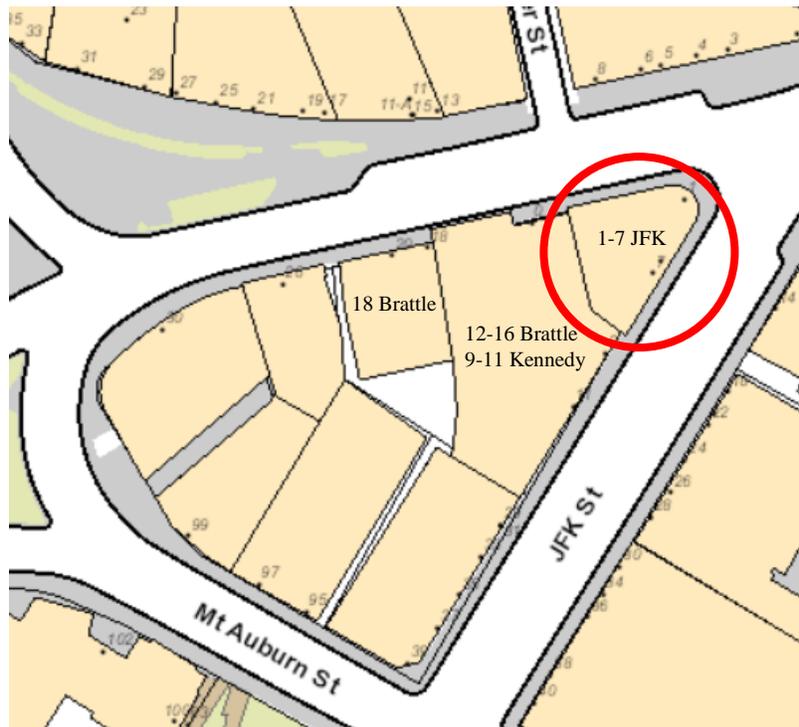
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November 29, 2016

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

Background

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



Abbott Building (circled)

In accordance with past practice, on December 1 the Commission will consider whether to accept the petition; if so, it will hold a public hearing on January 5 to confirm its decision. The Commission would then have up to twelve months to prepare a report to the City Council. No additional regulatory process would be imposed because the building is already protected by the Harvard Square Neighborhood Conservation District.



5 John F. Kennedy Street, 2016

CHC photo

Abbott Building, 1-7 John F. Kennedy Street

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

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

Landmark Criteria and Goals

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

The criteria provided in the ordinance outlines eligible properties as:

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

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

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

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

Relationship to Criteria

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

Discussion

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

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

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

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

Staff Recommendation

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

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