

**Final Landmark Designation Study Report  
Cambridge Masonic Temple  
1950 Massachusetts Avenue**



The Cambridge Masonic Temple is historically and architecturally significant as one of two purpose-built lodge buildings remaining in the city. The temple is associated with Freemasonry in Cambridge, which was first established in 1805. The history of the structure, which was built in 1910, reflects the evolution of Porter Square from an outlying district of Cambridge to a gentrified suburban area.

A proposal for a new hotel on the nearby Kaya-Ka restaurant site and zoning amendments to the Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District allowing for increased density and relaxed dimensional requirements for hotel uses in the overlay district prompted neighborhood speculation about the future of the Masonic Temple property. The City Council adopted an order on September 8, 2008 requesting that the Historical Commission consider initiating a landmark designation study of the property. On October 2, 2008 the Commission determined that the Temple met the criteria for a landmark designation study and initiated a one-year protection period during which the property has been protected as though it were already a landmark.

At a public hearing on October 8, 2009 the Historical Commission voted 7-0 to accept the corrected study report and forward the report to the City Council with a recommendation for landmark designation.

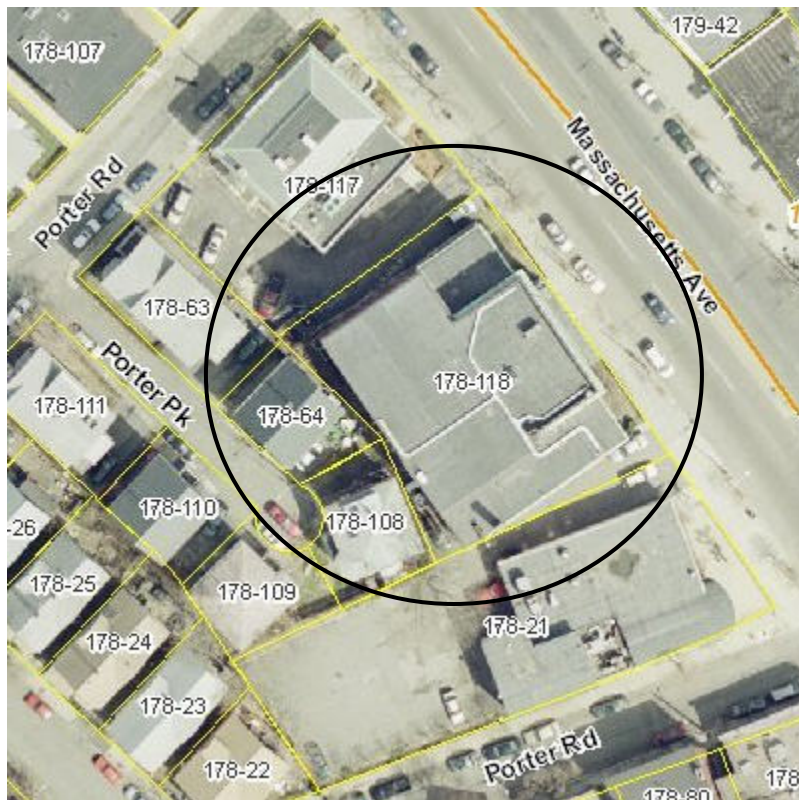
Charles M. Sullivan  
Cambridge Historical Commission  
October 8, 2009

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## I. Location and Planning Issues

### A. Address and Parcel Information

The Cambridge Masonic Temple is located at 1950 Massachusetts Avenue near Porter Road and just west of Porter Square. The Masonic Temple is the only building located on the lot (Map 178/Parcel 118). The site contains 12,484 square feet, while the building contains a gross floor area of 23,155 s.f. The total assessed value for the land and buildings according to the assessor's online database is \$2,402,200.



Detail of Assessor's Map 178 / Parcels 118, City of Cambridge GIS, 10/1/09

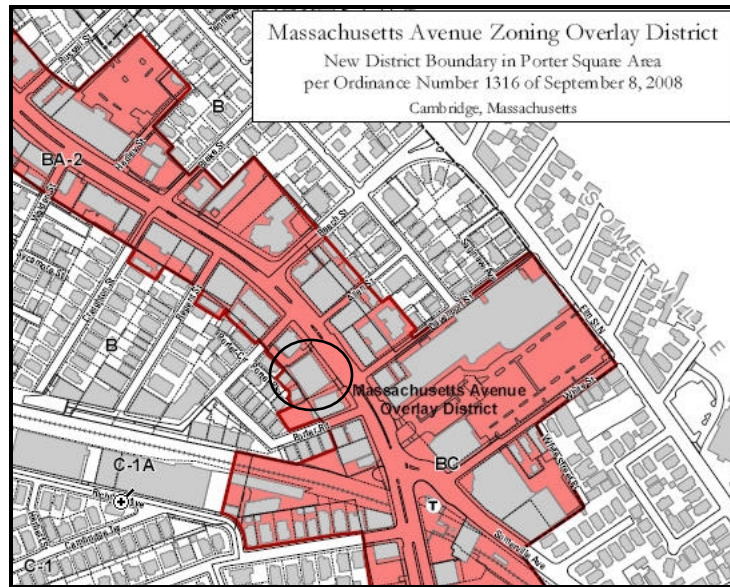
### B. Ownership and Occupancy

The Cambridge Masonic Temple is owned by the Cambridge Masonic Hall Association. The association is comprised largely of Cambridge, Belmont, Watertown, Winchester, Medford and West Somerville residents whose various lodges meet in the building. Portions of the building are also rented to a variety of office tenants.

### C. Zoning

The lot at 1950 Massachusetts Avenue is almost entirely within a Business C zoning district. The Business C district allows for business, general retail, office, and multifamily residence uses. The FAR limits vary depending on the use, with the base FAR set at 1.25 (1.60 for hotel

use with special permit; 2.0 for institutional and dormitory uses). The height limit in this district is 55 feet, and there is a minimum of 500 square feet of lot area required per dwelling unit.



The lot is also within the Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District, which was established to “create a more harmonious and consistent image for the development along the Avenue and adjacent areas, to encourage good building design and site development which enhances the pedestrian amenities along the Avenue, to ensure that changes along the Avenue are compatible with the scale and character of the abutting neighborhoods, to encourage the retention of existing buildings of historic value and uses which serve the abutting neighborhoods, and to discourage new development inappropriate in both scale and design” (Sec. 20.102). Provisions of the district are highly technical and primarily relate to new construction.

#### D. Area Description

The Cambridge Masonic Temple is situated on Massachusetts Avenue, a major thoroughfare, between the two intersections with Porter Road. The avenue in this vicinity is entirely commercial. The Porter Square Shopping Center (1956) is almost directly across the street, but with some exceptions most buildings in the vicinity date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Porter Station of the MBTA’s Red Line subway is less than a block away.



North Avenue Savings Bank, 1960 Massachusetts Avenue, and the Masonic Lodge

The temple is flanked by the former North Avenue Savings Bank building (1906) on the west and the Kaya-Ka Restaurant (1971) on the east. The Kaya-Ka was originally an Arby’s Roast Beef restaurant; it replaced the Third Universalist Church (1875), which was destroyed in a

hurricane in 1954. The temple abuts a Residence B district which contains many closely-packed one-and two-family houses and several apartment buildings.



Kaya-Ka Restaurant, 1924 Massachusetts Avenue and the Masonic Lodge

Several residential neighborhoods abut Porter Square, including the Avon Hill Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD), so designated in 1998, and the proposed Orchard Street National Register District west of Porter Square. To the north and east are the residential and retail areas extending beyond the boundary with Somerville.

#### E. Planning Issues

The Masonic temple, which has little or no excess development potential on its own site, is adjacent to a proposed hotel which has now received the zoning relief necessary for the hotel project. The 50-room Kaya-Ka Hotel would replace the Kaya-Ka Restaurant, but would contain its own 200-seat dining facility. It will be a five-story building, slightly taller than the Masonic temple (but, at 51', less than the 55' permitted), with one level of underground valet parking containing about 40 spaces accessed via a driveway next to the lodge. The two buildings will be about thirty feet apart at the sidewalk, but only twenty feet or less at their back corners. The excavation will be about 14' deep at the sidewalk (an earlier plan for a two-level garage would have required a 22' deep excavation).



Proposed Kaya-Ka Hotel, 1924 Massachusetts Avenue

The planning process for the Kaya-Ka Hotel began in November 2007, when the developer filed an application for a variance. Relief was needed because the site was split between a commercial (Business C) and a residential (Residential B) zone. Additional FAR was neces-

sary (23,800 s.f. requested, 10,000 s.f. permitted), and transitional zone requirements were considered onerous. The hotel would be a permitted use. The Board of Zoning Appeal indicated that the project was too big and the City Council subsequently amended the zoning code. The Planning Board granted a special permit in December 2008. The developers returned to the board in August 2009 and requested an amendment that would allow them to eliminate one level of parking by employing valet-operated stacking devices. The start of construction has not been announced.

## II. Description

### A. Type and Use

The Masonic temple was built by the Cambridge Masonic Hall Association in 1910 to provide accommodations for several Cambridge lodges, and it continues to serve that purpose. Several small meeting rooms have been converted to offices, which are rented to architectural and design firms.

### B. Physical Description

Designed in 1910 by local builder Frederick B. Furbish, the Cambridge Masonic Temple is a red-brick building with a monumental limestone portico facing Massachusetts Avenue. The building measures 105' wide and 80' deep, and essentially fills its lot, with minimal setbacks. A three-story central pavilion is flanked by two-story wings. The Georgian architecture features limestone lintels and sills, two-over-two double-hung sash, and the New England Brick Co.'s Harvard Blend red brick. The portico features four monolithic limestone columns with Ionic capitals.

The building was designed to accommodate several lodges, so it contains three lodge rooms, two banquet halls, two kitchens, and two dressing rooms, as well as an armory, a library, an auditorium with a stage, and various rooms for meetings and rituals. The building has not been significantly altered since it was built, although some spaces are rented as offices.

## III. History of the Property

### A. Deed History of the Property

The lot occupied by the Cambridge Masonic Temple originated in two parcels that were acquired by Samuel F. Woodbridge in 1873-1875. Part of the lot was land left over when the Third Universalist Society built a new church in 1875; the remainder was occupied by the Market Bank building. Woodbridge, a cattle broker, combined the two parcels into one roughly rectangular 12,584 square foot lot measuring about 130 feet on the avenue and 100' deep. Woodbridge's heirs sold the land to the Cambridge Masonic Association in 1908.

### B. Development History of Parcel and Surroundings

In the original division of Cambridge in the 17<sup>th</sup> century all the land north and west of the village between Massachusetts Avenue and Garden Street (except for Avon Hill) was held in common for grazing, with a narrow strip along the avenue and around the base of the hill connecting two immense pastures. The Proprietors of Common Lands distributed the north pasture

and the connecting link to individuals between 1703 and 1724, and by 1769 the future site of the Masonic Hall was occupied by a house built by Nathaniel Prentice, a chaise maker.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century a small community of blacksmiths and wagon builders grew up around the Davenport Tavern, which occupied the opposite corner of Beech Street and Massachusetts Avenue. After the opening of the West Boston and Craigie bridges in 1793 and 1809 an informal livestock market developed there, and the intersection achieved strategic importance for farmers and drovers from as far away as Vermont. Stockyards, a slaughterhouse, and a hotel were erected about 1831 and were acquired by Zachariah Porter of Brighton in 1837. The opening of the Fitchburg Railroad in 1843 stimulated the cattle trade, and the Cambridge Market Bank opened next door to Prentice's house in 1851. Porter's death in 1878 coincided with the growing suburbanization of North Cambridge, and the stockyards were sold off as house lots.

In 1874 the Third Universalist Society erected a church at 1924 Massachusetts Avenue on the present site of the Kaya-Ka restaurant. This building was designed by Ware & Van Brunt, architects of Memorial Hall, and expressed the architectural ambitions of the emerging neighborhood. It was followed by Van Brunt & Howe's Cornerstone Baptist Church in 1885, St. James Church by Henry L. Congdon in 1888, and a new Romanesque railroad station in 1897. In 1895, a group of young residents of the neighborhood built the Newtowne Club, an elaborate Colonial Revival building directly across the street from the future Masonic Hall site which contained a banquet hall, billiard room, and bowling alley. When the Cambridge Masonic Association acquired its site in 1906, North Cambridge (which at that time included Avon Hill) seemed to be emerging as an upper middle-class neighborhood with a thriving institutional center.

However, real estate trends of the period forecast a different future for the area. The electrification of the streetcar system after 1889 and the introduction of a uniform 5¢ fare opened North Cambridge to higher density housing designed to attract second- or third-generation immigrant families from crowded neighborhoods in East Cambridge, Cambridgeport and Boston. The Newtowne Club failed in the early 1920s, and an inexpensive store block filled its front lawn. Retail stores were prosperous, but most catered to the new residents. After World War II, the city passed up a chance to acquire the Rand estate for a park, and the Porter Square Shopping Center was built on the property in 1952-56. Retail activity along the avenue dried up. When the Third Universalist Church was damaged in a hurricane in 1954 its Armenian congregation opted to tear the building down. It was replaced by a used car lot and then a fast-food restaurant.

Porter Square began a resurgence with the completion of the Red Line Extension in 1986. Housing values rose and surrounding neighborhoods gentrified. Construction revived along the avenue, with a new office building at number 1972 and conversion of the Henderson Carriage building to offices about 1982. Controversy over zoning followed the conversion of the Long Funeral Home to condominiums in 2002, and a Massachusetts Avenue Overlay Zone was adopted in 2008 to further control development.

#### IV. Significance of the Property

The Cambridge Masonic Temple is significant for its associations with Masonic orders in Cambridge, and as a significant design by Cambridge builder Frederick B. Furbish.

## A. Historical Significance

Cambridge's first lodge of Masons was founded in Cambridgeport in 1805. The Amicable Lodge was the forty-second to be founded in Massachusetts (out of 234 at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). The lodge met in rented quarters in Cambridgeport and Old Cambridge until 1825, when it acquired a building on Franklin Street that it shared with a town school; this was replaced in 1865 by a meeting hall on Massachusetts Avenue at the corner of Temple Street in Central Square. From the beginning the Amicable Lodge included influential residents of the town, although it nearly went out of existence during a period of anti-Masonic agitation from 1828 to 1838. Early Masons in Cambridge included Nathaniel Livermore, a state representative, town and city clerk Lucius Paige, and Judge Samuel P.P. Fay.

Cambridge's second Masonic organization was the Putnam Lodge, founded in East Cambridge in 1854. The Mount Olivet Lodge was founded in Harvard Square in 1863, the Mizpah Lodge followed in 1867, and the Charity Lodge in North Cambridge in 1870. Other bodies included the Royal Arch Chapter and the Cambridge Commandery of the Knights Templar; all but the Putnam and Charity lodges met in the Central Square Masonic Hall, which was torn down in 1904 and replaced by the Cambridgeport Savings Bank. In 1896 the total membership of all the lodges was about 850.

After 1904 the displaced lodges convened at an Odd Fellows Hall on Massachusetts Avenue at the corner of Walden Street and charged the Cambridge Masonic Hall Association to explore proposals for a new main lodge building. The Association purchased the present site in 1908 and broke ground in 1910. Construction was completed and the building was dedicated in 1911; it was shared by three of the five Cambridge lodges. Unlike the Central Square Masonic Hall, the building contained no stores, and the association rented the stage to vaudeville shows until it retired the mortgage in the 1920s.

## B. Architectural Significance

The Masonic Hall at 1950 Massachusetts Avenue is one of two fraternal buildings remaining in Cambridge, but the only one still used for its original purpose. Typically, fraternal buildings contained large halls, often with a stage; meeting rooms and dressing rooms; rooms for storage of regalia; and kitchens. It was not uncommon for fraternal buildings to contain stores that could be rented to support the organization. The only other remaining fraternal building in Cambridge, the former Odd Fellows Hall at 536 Massachusetts Avenue (now The Dance Complex), has stores on the ground floor and the usual array of fraternal spaces above.

The Masonic Temple was designed in 1910 by Frederick B. Furbish and built by the Wellington Fillmore Co. Frederick Furbish was a native of Maine who lived and worked in Cambridge from 1878 to 1918. He was a carpenter and builder, but designed a few commissions, including his own house at 47 Wendell Street (1891), 106 Raymond Street (1892), and 20 Avon Street (1894). The contract to design the Masonic Temple in Porter Square no doubt had special significance to Furbish, who was himself a member of the Mt. Olivet Lodge for 22 years. He moved to Medford in 1902 and died there in 1918. The building is significant under landmark criterion (2) for its association with Furbish, a well known builder in Cambridge and a prominent member of the Masonic organization.



Cambridge Masonic Association building, 1950 Massachusetts Avenue. Photo 2009

The building's Georgian design has characteristic features such as its monumental scale, symmetry, massive Ionic columns, and staid masonry façade. The building was constructed with a steel and wood structure and brick exterior cladding. The interior finishes include plaster walls, concrete and hardwood floors, and elaborate woodwork in the ceremonial rooms. The building is also architecturally significant under landmark criterion (2) as a fine example of its style and period of construction

## V. Relationship to Criteria

### A. Article III, Chapter 2.78.180 a.

The enabling ordinance for landmarks states:

The Historical Commission by majority vote may recommend for designation as a landmark any property within the City being or containing a place, structure, feature or object which it determines to be either (1) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth or (2) historically or architecturally significant (in terms of its period, style, method of construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures . . .

### B. Relationship of Property to Criteria

The Cambridge Masonic Temple meets landmark criterion (1) for its important associations with the broad architectural and economic history of the City and as the only surviving Masonic lodge building in the city. It is one of two surviving fraternal buildings, and the only one in its original use. It reflects the evolution of Porter Square from a country crossroads to a commercial and institutional node for the emerging suburb of North Cambridge.

The property also meets criterion (2) as a rare example of its type in Cambridge and for its association with an important builder, Frederick B. Furbish.

## VI. Recommendations

### A. Purpose of Designation

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

preserve, conserve and protect the beauty and heritage of the City and to improve the quality of its environment through identification, conservation and maintenance of . . . sites and structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City; to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose; [and] to foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge and appreciation of such . . . structures . . .

### B. Preservation Options

Landmark designation or donation and acceptance of a preservation restriction are two options for the permanent long-term protection and preservation of the Cambridge Masonic Temple. While it is not individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, National Register listing alone does not permanently protect and preserve buildings. Demolition of significant portions would trigger the Historical Commission's review under the citywide demolition delay ordinance, but this provision of Ch. 2.78 provides only a delay mechanism and is not as strong a protection as landmark designation. No plans are underway for historic district or neighborhood conservation district study in the area surrounding the property. On the other hand, there appear to be no obvious threats to the property now that the Kayla-Ka Hotel has been fully permitted.

### C. Staff Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Commission find that the Cambridge Masonic Temple meets the criteria for landmark designation and vote to recommend that the City Council designate the property as a protected landmark under Article III, Chapter 2.78.

## VII. Standards and Criteria

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

### A. General Standards and Criteria

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

1. Significant historic and architectural features of the landmark should be preserved.

2. Changes and additions to the landmark which have taken place over time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right and, if so, that significance should be recognized and respected.
3. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced.
4. When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
5. New materials should, whenever possible, match the material being replaced in physical properties, design, color, texture, and appearance. The use of imitation replacement materials is generally discouraged.
6. The surface cleaning of a landmark should be done by the gentlest possible means. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that damage exterior architectural features shall not be used.
7. Additions should not destroy significant exterior architectural features and should not be incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance, or distinct character of the landmark, neighborhood, and environment.
8. Additions should be designed in a way that, if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the landmark would be unimpaired.

## B. Suggested Review Guidelines

### 1. Site Development.

There appears to be no further as-of-right potential for development on the site. Partial demolition seems unlikely because the space lost could not be replaced. Full demolition is also unlikely because the building appears to exceed the present allowable FAR by about 30% and that volume would be difficult to recapture through the special permit process. If additional space is constructed on top of the two-story wings the enclosures should be held well back from the parapets and designed to be complementary to but distinguishable from the original architecture.

### 2. Alterations

#### a. Exterior surfaces

The primary ornamentation of the temple is the Ionic portico. Alterations should take care to protect the masonry columns and the sheet metal cornice, which will rust and deteriorate if not maintained. The main cornice of the building also appears to be sheet metal. The front door surround and wrought iron balcony conveys the design skill and craftsmanship of the architect and builders. The brick masonry is in generally good condition.

Exterior materials should be preserved insofar as practicable. Special care should be taken to protect and maintain the columns, ornamentation, door surround, cornice, windows, and window trim. Repointing the mortar joints should be done with special care to maintain the color and texture of the mortar and the profile of the joints.

#### b. Fenestration

Introduction of new window openings should be discouraged. Existing sash should be maintained. Storm windows may be installed or upgraded without review in conformance with current Commission guidelines.

c. Interior features

Although interior features are not subject to the jurisdiction of the Cambridge Historical Commission, the owner should be encouraged to preserve original spaces and their materials and detailing such as the pilasters, cornices, wainscoting, staircases and window trim.

## VIII. Proposed Order

### ORDERED:

That the Cambridge Masonic Temple, 1950 Massachusetts Avenue, be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter 2.78, Article III, Section 2.78.180 of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on October 8, 2009. The premises so designated is the land defined as parcels Parcel 118 of assessor's map 178 and the building thereon and the premises described in a deed recorded in book 3374, page 422 of the South Middlesex Registry of Deeds.

This designation is justified by the important architectural and historical associations the property embodies as one of two extant fraternal buildings in Cambridge, and as the largest and most elaborate building in Cambridge designed by builder Frederick Furbish.

The effect of this designation shall be that review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability shall be required before any construction activity can take place within the designated premises or any action can be taken affecting the appearance of the premises, that would in either case be visible from a public way. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the terms of the final landmark designation report, dated October 8, 2009, with respect to the designated premises, by Section VII, Standards and Criteria of said report, and by the applicable sections of Chapter 2.78, Article III, of the Cambridge Municipal Code.

## X. Bibliography

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### 2. Government Records and Sources

Cambridge Historical Commission, Northwest Cambridge, Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge, Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1978.

Cambridge Historical Commission, survey files for Massachusetts Avenue

Cambridge Historical Commission Collection: biographical files for Woodbridge family, architectural files for Frederick B. Furbish.

Cambridge maps and atlases.

### 3. Other Sources

Cambridge City Directories.