

98 WINTHROP STREET  
COX-HICKS HOUSE

LANDMARK DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT  
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CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
OCTOBER 21, 1988

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## **Cox-Hicks House, 98 Winthrop Street**

### **I. Location and Economic Status**

#### **A. Address**

The Cox-Hicks House is located at 98 Winthrop Street, on parcel 18 of assessors' map 162. It occupies a 3405 square foot lot and is currently assessed in residential use at a valuation of \$96,600 for the building and \$253,100 for the land, the high valuation of the land reflecting the building's prime Harvard Square location. It is expected that the valuation may change due to the recent sale of the property to the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

The property lies in a BB-1 zone, thus allowing business, general retail, office, and multi-family uses. However, it is included as a contributing property in the Harvard Square National Register District and is part of the Harvard Square Overlay District. Thus, projects requiring a special permit or variance are subject to the review of the Harvard Square Advisory Committee, which may impose additional conditions as to use, height, parking, and setback requirements beyond those enumerated in the zoning code.

#### **B. Ownership and Occupancy**

The Cox-Hicks House is owned by the President and Fellows of Harvard College and managed by Harvard Real Estate, 1350 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, 02138. It is currently vacant but until 1987 was used as a single-family, owner-occupied residence. Harvard Real Estate intends to house offices of the Kennedy School of Government in the building.

#### **C. Area Description**

98 Winthrop Street is a rare surviving single-family house in an area of retail, office, and multi-family uses. It stands on a small rectangular lot on the western half of Winthrop Street, a narrow, one-way passage running from Holyoke Street to Eliot Square. The section of Harvard Square in which the Cox-Hicks House stands is a two block area defined by the curve of Eliot Street on the west and south (originally Creek Lane, following a creek that ran from Harvard Yard to the Charles River), Mount Auburn Street on the north, and Kennedy Street on the east.

Immediately adjacent to the Cox-Hicks House are 96 and 106 Winthrop Street, both early 19th century frame houses now in commercial use. All three buildings and the Winthrop Street retaining wall, which runs through the center of the block, are proposed for designation. Opposite the Cox-Hicks

House are the brick Georgian Revival Pi Eta Club (1908) and frame Pi Eta Hall (1896). To the south and west of the house are three three-story frame commercial buildings: 10-14 Eliot (1870), 14A-14B Eliot (ca. 1900), and 16-18 Eliot (1897-98). Other buildings in the area are the "Galleria," 55 Kennedy Street, a three-story brick retail mall built in 1975; 104 Mount Auburn Street, a 1983 four-story brick office and retail complex; and 63-65 Kennedy Street, a 1985 brick five-story garage with ground-floor retail. All of these buildings fill their lots. At 100 and 102 Mount Auburn Street are the Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church (built ca. 1919 as the Cantabrigia Club) and an 1869 frame mansard house, now in retail use. Winthrop Square, the city's original marketplace, stands opposite the Cox-Hicks House to the northeast.

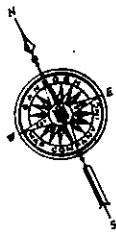
#### D. Planning Issues

The Cox-Hicks House stands in an area that has seen extensive redevelopment in the last ten years and that will continue to face development pressure into the foreseeable future. Major construction has concentrated on the former MBTA caryards and along Mount Auburn Street. Recent projects in the area include the Kennedy School of Government, Kennedy Park, the Charles Square retail/hotel/residential complex, and the University Place office complex. The effect of these projects has been to create a new focus of retail and office activity in Eliot and Brattle Squares.

Four pending developments in Brattle and Eliot Squares will augment the mid-rise, high density character of new construction in the area. These are the redevelopment of the Cherry Webb, Touraine site; concurrent development of "Brattle Way" in the interior of the Brattle-Story-Mount Auburn Street block; the redevelopment of the Harvard Motor House site; and planned Phase IV expansion of the Kennedy School of Government at the corner of Eliot Street and University Road. Though not imminent, the final Phase V element of Kennedy School construction along the south side of Eliot Street will complete a wall of buildings in that area. Still unknown at this time is the future of the frame buildings at 10 to 18 Eliot Street, which may be affected by plans to build on that site.

Overall, the impact of these developments on 98 Winthrop Street will be to increase the scale of the surrounding neighborhood, add to traffic and pedestrian activity, and encourage further new construction. Further development, particularly at 10 to 18 Eliot Street, should be carefully monitored to prevent the diminution of Winthrop Street's small, residential scale.

#### E. Map



HARVARD SQ

217

MASSACHUSETTS AV.

204

BRATTLE

BRATTLE SQ.

MT. AUBURN

WINTHROP

UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

SOUTH

207

Cox-Hicks House  
98 Winthrop Street  
Location Map



## II. Description

### A. Type and Use

98 Winthrop Street is a single-family residence and is now vacant. Harvard University, the building's owner, intends to convert the space to office use since single-family residential use in this urbanized setting is no longer viable, given the heavily retail and commercial character of the neighborhood. The exterior of the building and its landscaping will be maintained.

### B. Physical Description

The Cox-Hicks House is a diminutive, two-story, gable-roofed late Federal style cottage that faces north on Winthrop Street with its ridge parallel to the street. The small, hip-roofed entrance porch on the east elevation is probably original. A two-story, shallow-gabled ell, built ca. 1836, extends from the rear (south) elevation. Two one-story, shed-roofed late 19th-century additions (ca. 1880) on the south and west walls of the ell complete the structure.

The Cox-Hicks House stands on a slightly irregular rectangular lot of 3405 square feet. The lot is approximately 40 feet wide and 90 feet deep and slopes down from the east toward Eliot Street. A granite and fieldstone retaining wall (capped along the Winthrop Street side with a picket fence) defines the south and west perimeter of the lot. On the west and south lot lines, the wall drops to a depth of some ten feet, retaining the grade differential between higher ground along Kennedy Street on the east and lower ground on Eliot Street to the south and west. The house is set back some six feet from Winthrop Street with shrubs, foundation plantings, and a small tree in the front yard. A brick path leads along the eastern edge of the lot to the entry porch. At the rear of the lot is a small, fenced back yard with a mature elm tree. The house is clapboarded and painted a dark red with white trim and has a dark gray asphalt shingle roof.

The main section of the house is two bays wide and one bay deep and contains one room on each floor. It stands on a fieldstone foundation and is entered at the rear of the east elevation. A large, brick chimney, rectangular in section, rises from just inside the south elevation. A smaller, square chimney, which is a 20th century addition, runs up the exterior of the west elevation, detracting from the appearance of the house. Narrow cornerboards and an ogee crown moulding at the cornice enframe the main house. The windows have double-hung, six over six sash with Greek Revival casings. All of the windows have louvered blinds.

The entry porch on the east elevation contains a six panel door. The porch may date from the time of the rear ell addition or may be a later replacement.

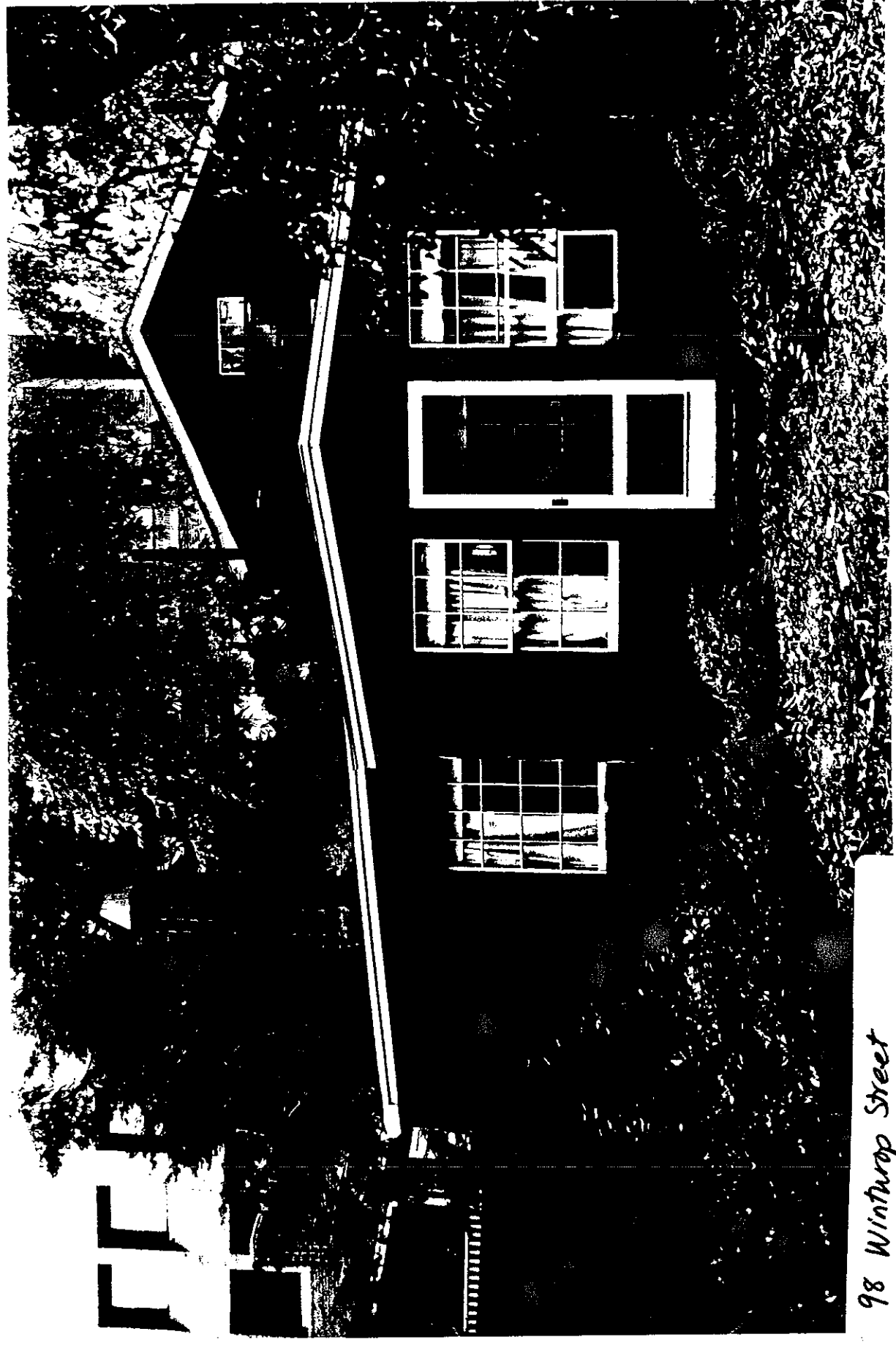
The rear ell is three bays long and two bays wide and rises a scant two stories in height to a shallow, gable roof. Windows on the first story contain six over six sash, but those on the second story are shorter, to accommodate the lower ceiling height, and contain three over six sash. There is a rectangular six-light fixed sash on the second story just behind the entry porch.

Two shed-roofed, one-story, additions lead off of the rear ell to the south and the west. The south addition is one bay wide and one bay deep and contains a large multi-light sash. The west addition is one bay wide and two bays deep and contains a pair of windows with six over six sash on the west wall. A modern six-panel door opens into the addition from the front yard.

#### C. Current Photographs



98 Wintthrop Street  
photo, 1988



98 Wintrop Street  
photo, 1988

### III. History of the Property

#### A. Historic Development Patterns

##### 1. Deed History

The Cox-Hicks House was probably built ca. 1806 as a tenant house for Mrs. Susannah Cox, a widow, by Israel Porter, innholder of the Blue Anchor Tavern on what is now Kennedy Street. The land on which the house is located was part of a one acre parcel conveyed by Rebecca Oliver to William Angier in 1746. The land at that time had a house and barn on it, probably at 63 and 65 Kennedy Street. Angier conveyed a quarter acre of this land along Winthrop Street to Isaac Bradish, who built a blacksmith shop at 94 Winthrop Street between 1775 and 1790. A second shop, still standing, was constructed sometime before 1801 at 106 Winthrop Street.

In 1801, Thomas Brattle assembled much of the present Kennedy-Winthrop-Eliot Street block into a one-acre parcel. The Brattle lot was broken up in 1806 after Brattle's death. A parcel comprising 96, 98 and 106 Winthrop Street (with its shop) was conveyed, in quick succession, first to William Gamage and then to John Mellen, who sold it in two lots: 96 and 98 to Israel Porter and 106 to William Warland. Three months after he purchased it, Porter sold his lot, with a building on it, to Susannah Cox. In 1810, Sarah Flagg, a widow, purchased the house and lived there with her mother, Elizabeth Hicks. The house remained in the Hicks-Flagg family until 1836, at which time Isaac Hyde, a Cambridge carpenter, purchased it. Hyde probably enlarged the house at that time by adding the rear ell and possibly the entrance porch. Hyde probably also retrimmed at least part of the house, since the window casings are Greek Revival in character. In 1846, Hyde subdivided the property and built the Greek Revival house at 96 Winthrop Street.

The property's late 19th century owner, George Mendall Taylor, purchased both 96 and 98, in 1867 and 1868. In 1925, Taylor's estate sold 98 Winthrop to Francis H. Bigelow. The most recent owner and last residential occupant, Mrs. David P. Rutstein, conveyed the property to Harvard College in 1987.

##### 2. Development History of Parcel

The Cox-Hicks House is located within the earliest-settled section of Old Cambridge, in the southwestern corner of the original Harvard Square street grid. Though the immediate area surrounding the house was laid out with houselots, it had an important commercial and municipal

component: the marketplace, established in 1635, and the second jail of 1681 stood opposite the Cox-Hicks House site, while several stores and taverns were located along nearby Kennedy Street. Kennedy (then Wood, later Boylston) Street was a major thoroughfare in 17th and 18th century Cambridge since it led to the causeway of the Great Bridge (1656). The Winthrop Street block retains more of its original configuration and scale than any other block of Harvard Square.

There were a dozen small shops and houses standing on the Winthrop-Eliot-Kennedy Street block by the mid 19th century. In the 1870s and '80s, frame tenements and three deckers were built on the north side of Eliot Street at 10-14, 14A-14B, and 16-18 Eliot. Other three deckers replaced smaller single-family houses on Eliot Street after the turn of the century. With the advent of the automobile, early houses along Kennedy Street were demolished for garages and used car lots. In the last ten years, Kennedy Street has been redeveloped with brick office and retail buildings. Thus, the Winthrop Street houses and wall are the sole surviving elements of the block's earlier development.

#### B. Historic Photographs, Maps

#### C. Bibliography

##### General Sources

Cambridge Historical Commission. Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge, Report Four, Old Cambridge, by Bainbridge Bunting and Robert H. Nylander. Cambridge, 1973.

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##### Maps and Atlases

Bromley, George W. and Walter S. Atlas of the City of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Philadelphia, 1894. 2nd ed., 1903, 3rd ed., 1916, 4th ed., 1930.

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Massachusetts. Philadelphia, 1873. 2nd ed., 1886.

#### IV. Significance of the Property

##### A. Historical Significance

As built and in the first 30 years of its existence, the Cox-Hicks House served as minimal housing for three widows, whose circumstances can be presumed to have been marginal. The original owner, Susanna Smith Cox, the widow of Walter Cox, had three children, aged ten and under, when she lived in the house. Mrs. Cox only occupied the house for four years before conveying it back to its builder, Israel Porter. Nothing further is recorded of the Cox family.

The second owner, Sarah Hicks Flagg, the widow of Timothy Flagg, lived there with her widowed mother, Elizabeth Nutting Hicks from 1810 until Mrs. Hicks' death in 1825 (at the age of 99). Mrs. Flagg remained in the house until her own death in 1836. While Mrs. Flagg's two daughters, Sarah Flagg Saunders and Elizabeth Flagg Wyeth, both married into prominent local families (William Saunders was a member of the city's first Common Council and father of three sons active in mid 19th century Cambridge politics and Jonas Wyeth was long the proprietor of the prosperous Fresh Pond Hotel), both she and her mother probably had to rely on the assistance of their children for their livelihood. The tiny cottage at 98 Winthrop Street is an example of the type of housing available for persons of such limited means in that period.

The house was subsequently owned by Isaac Hyde, a housewright, from 1836 to 1868 and after 1868 by George M. Taylor, a music teacher and organist who lived at 96 Winthrop Street (see Landmark Report for Hyde-Taylor House, 96 Winthrop Street) and rented 98.

In summary, the Cox-Hicks House has historical significance for its associations with the Hicks family of Cambridge. It is one of two surviving Hicks family houses in Harvard Square, the other being the John Hicks House (1762, NR 1985) on Kennedy Street. Elizabeth Nutting Hicks, the widow of one of six Cambridge natives slain on April 19, 1775, and Sarah Hicks Flagg, grandmother of a number of prominent mid-19th century Cambridge politicians, lived in the house from 1810 to 1836.

##### B. Architectural Significance

The Cox-Hicks House, built in 1806, is one of the earliest of perhaps a dozen early 19th century cottages surviving in Cambridge and is the only one retaining its original appearance. It predates the houses of East Cambridge and Cambridgeport, the other two areas of the city in which modest housing for the poor and working classes was

being built in the early 19th century. It is also the only extant early 19th-century house of its extreme small size. Only one room deep with a single room on each floor and a rear ell (which probably was not added until 1836), the Cox-Hicks House illustrates a type of minimal housing which has since disappeared from the city. Although other such tiny houses for the poorest classes must have existed in Cambridge in some numbers, their survival is rare due to what, in most cases, was probably poor construction, and to the inconvenience of their small size.

#### C. Historic Photographs

## V. Relationship to Criteria

### A. Section 4, Ordinance 1002

"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 (a) 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 (b) 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."

### B. Relationship of Property to Criteria

The Cox-Hicks House meets criteria (a) and (b) of Ordinance 1002 for its important associations with the broad architectural and social history of the City and for its architectural significance in terms of its period, style, and method of construction. It is significant in the city's social and architectural history as the only example of minimal housing for the poor in Old Cambridge and as one of very few surviving early 19th century cottages in the city. The house is associated with several widows and in its modesty illustrates the poverty that befell many widows of that time. It is particularly associated with Elizabeth Nutting Hicks (1726-1825) and her daughter, Sarah Hicks Flagg (1757-1830), members of prominent families in 18th and 19th century Cambridge.

Mrs. Hicks was the widow of John Hicks, said to have been a participant in the Boston Tea Party and an early victim of the Revolutionary War. Mrs. Hicks raised ten children, among whom were Jonathan (1752-1826), a regimental surgeon in the Revolutionary War, and John (1750-1794), a printer and publisher of the tory newspaper *The Post Boy*. Mrs. Flagg (1757-1830) raised two daughters, both of whom married into important Cambridge families and themselves had children who played active roles in mid 19th century Cambridge.

The Cox-Hicks House is architecturally significant in terms of its Federal period construction, its vernacular style and its unique, two-room plan. It is one of a half dozen Federal period houses in Old Cambridge, the earliest settled section of the city. Most of the other pre-1833 houses of Old Cambridge are two-story houses with the five bay facade and center entrance typical of fully realized Georgian middle class housing. By contrast, the Cox-Hicks House is of the simplest vernacular design, with an

extrememly modest plan. Entered on the end wall and with only two rooms in the main house, the Cox-Hicks House is atypical of Cambridge's surviving cottages. As a rare survivor, it has the capacity to evoke a sense of Cambridge's historic architectural character and the lifestyle of its poor citizens and thus contributes to the broad architectural and social history of the city.

## VI. Recommendations

### A. Section 1, Ordinance 1002

The purpose of landmark designation is stated in Section 1 of Ordinance 1002:

. . . 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 . . . 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.

### B. Preservation Options

The Cox-Hicks House is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing building in the Harvard Square National Register District. As such, it is protected from the adverse effects of federally licensed, permitted, or funded projects and, through listing on the parallel State Register of Historic Places, from the adverse effects of state funded projects. At the local level, it is covered by the provisions of the Harvard Square Overlay Zone, in addition to the general zoning regulations of the city.

The National and State Registers provide limited protection from public projects through review by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The Overlay District establishes zoning incentives for the preservation of contributing National Register properties and also calls for review of certain projects by the Harvard Square Advisory Committee. However, neither the Massachusetts Historical Commission's nor the Advisory Committee's powers allow for detailed, binding review of architectural designs. The Advisory Committee also cannot mandate the retention of a particular property.

Other options for the preservation of the Cox-Hicks House include designation as a Landmark under Ordinance 1002, or placement of a Preservation Easement on the property under the provisions of MGL Chapter 184. The property is now owned by a non-profit institution and therefore it is unlikely that a preservation easement would afford any value to the owner. If ownership of the property should change in the future, this option should be re-examined.

The two other major protective designations, a Neighborhood Conservation or a Local Historic District in Harvard Square, cannot be considered for the Cox-Hicks

House. These options are foreclosed by the Commission's previous agreement not to impose local district controls on Harvard Square in return for listing of the area on the National Register of Historic Places.

#### C. Staff Recommendation

It is the staff recommendation that the Cox-Hicks House be recommended to the City Council for designation as a Protected Landmark.

## VII. Standards for Design Review

### A. Introduction

The Commission's primary charge under Ordinance 1002 is to review "all construction, demolition, or alteration that affects the exterior architectural features, other than color, of any landmark." This landmark study report describes exterior architectural features that are among the characteristics which led to consideration of the property as a landmark. Except as the order designating or amending the landmark may otherwise provide, those features should be preserved and/or enhanced in any construction, demolition, or alteration of a landmark.

Section 8 of the ordinance sets general guidelines to be considered by the Historical Commission in reviewing changes to landmarks. Among other things, the Commission is directed to consider:

the historic and architectural value and significance of the site or structure, the general design, arrangement, texture and material of the features involved, and the relation of such features to similar features or structures in the surrounding area.

In all cases, a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship, or Non-Applicability must be issued by the Historical Commission prior to making any changes to a landmark. The Commission does not have authority to regulate the interiors of landmarks nor can they control changes to exterior architectural features not subject to public view. Nonetheless, Certificates of Non-Applicability must be issued for those changes. All applications are carefully reviewed by the Commission at a public hearing, in accordance with Ordinance 1002.

### B. General Standards

1. Historic and architectural features of the landmark shall 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 to the property may have acquired significance in their own right and 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 discouraged.

6. The surface cleaning of a landmark shall be done by the gentlest possible means. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that damage exterior architectural features shall not be used.

7. Contemporary design is encouraged for new additions when such additions do not destroy significant exterior architectural features and when such additions are not incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance, or distinctive character of the landmark.

8. New additions should be done in such a way that if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the landmark would be unimpaired.

#### C. Statement of Standards

##### 1. General

- a. Retain domestic character of landscaping, including fencing along front property line.

##### 2. Exterior Walls

- a. Remove exterior heating system chimney on west wall.

##### 3. Windows

- a. Remove window air conditioning units.

##### 4. Roof

##### 5. Other Elements

### VIII. Proposed Order

#### ORDERED:

That the Cox-Hicks House, 98 Winthrop Street, be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter Two, Article XVI, Section 2-147(k) of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on \_\_\_\_\_. The premises so designated are defined as Parcel 18 of Assessors' Map 162.

This designation is justified by the Cox-Hicks House's important associations with the broad architectural and social history of the city and by its historic and architectural significance in terms of its period, style and method of construction. It is significant as the only surviving example of minimal housing for the poor in Old Cambridge and as one of very few surviving early 19th century cottages in the city. It is associated particularly with Elizabeth Nutting Hicks and Sarah Hicks Flagg, two widows of prominent 18th and 19th century Cambridge families. The house is architecturally significant for its vernacular Federal style and its unique two-room plan. Finally, it is important for the contribution it makes to the small-scale, 19th century residential character of the Winthrop Street streetscape.

The effect of this designation shall be that no construction activity can take place within the designated landmark area, and no action can be taken affecting the appearance of the Cox-Hicks House, that would in either case be visible from a public way without review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability, as the case may be. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the terms of the landmark designation report, and by section VII, Standards for Design Review, and by the applicable sections of Ordinance 1002.