

Minutes of the Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee

December 14, 2017 – 14 JFK Street, Cambridge Savings Bank, 3rd Floor - 6:00 P.M.

Appointed Members present: Christopher Angelakis, William Barry, Joseph Ferrara, Christopher Mackin, Jerry Murphy, Jessica Sculley, Kyle Sheffield

Appointed Members absent: none

Additional committee participants: Jen Deaderick, John DiGiovanni, Gary Hammer, Frank Kramer

City staff present: Charles Sullivan, CHC; Sarah Burks, CHC; Suzannah Bigolin, CDD

Public present: John Hawkinson, Peter Kroon, Marilee Meyer, James Williamson

Charles Sullivan, Executive Director of the Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC), called the meeting to order at 6:10 P.M. Introductions were made around the room of all the committee, staff, and additional interested members of the public.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides illustrating applications made since the district was established in 2000 including demolition and new construction, additions and alterations, and restorations. He indicated that the new buildings were eclectic in style and restorations were true to the original design. Examples of restoration projects included the 1950s façade of 1408-1414 Mass. Ave., the Conductor's Building at 112 Mt. Auburn Street, 40 Bow Street, the Lampoon Building, and 115 Mt. Auburn Street.

Peter Kroon asked about the Harvard Square Improvement Fund money collected for 112-114 Mt. Auburn Street and how it was spent. Susannah Bigolin, Urban Designer at Community Development, said she did not know but could ask. Mr. Sullivan said he was not sure if money from the fund had ever been spent. Mr. Kroon said he had heard that the money was used towards building costs.

John DiGiovanni noted that the fund was an urban design tool because there were many buildings, such as the Abbot Building, where parking spaces would not be desirable and public transportation options were plentiful in the Harvard Square.

Mr. Sullivan reviewed the primary and secondary goals of the district. He explained that the Square did not have one style of architecture. Each project had its own architect and client with their own ideas. The Historical Commission reviewed projects for appropriateness, but did not dictate a particular design style. If a project could substantially meet the goals of the district, it could be approved.

Jen Deaderick commented that it was important for developers to know what to expect and that guidelines might have a prophylactic effect. Mr. Sullivan agreed that we do not know what may have been prevented by the guidelines for the district. Out of town developers might still overpay and over estimate what they can get approved, however.

Mr. DiGiovanni said it would be interesting to compare projects that were developed prior to the Conservation District to those that came after. He gave examples including the Inn at Harvard and One Brattle Square.

Frank Kramer commented that Gerald Chan was a long term investor. What he was planning on developing on Church Street with a new theater would be a gift to the city. The community's job was to

guide the money being invested into better projects. Guide what happens in Harvard Square through the Conservation District and zoning.

Jerry Murphy noted that overpaying was in the eye of the beholder. Kyle Sheffield agreed, adding that there was monetary value and intrinsic value. Mr. Murphy said people were not always motivated by profit.

Mr. DiGiovanni noted that four years of study had gone into the existing guidelines and district process. The committee's job was to determine if the district had been effective. The 2005 review of the district concluded that it was working well. It's hard to verbalize what character one wants to protect, but Mr. Sullivan had required the members of the earlier study committee to do just that in drafting the guidelines.

Mr. Sullivan continued the slideshow, illustrating storefront projects.

Sarah Burks provided a summary of sign and awning types, review guidelines, and local examples.

Mr. Kroon provided an update on the zoning petition that bears his name. He explained the reasons for the petition and the proposed changes. He said he had been careful to not enter territory that would intersect with the work of the conservation district study committee. The focus was on the retail ecosystem and not on development issues like massing, parking, etc. The petition also addressed the membership of the Harvard Square Advisory Committee and transparency for the use of money from the Harvard Square Improvement Fund. He asked for comments from the committee.

Mr. DiGiovanni asked what problem was trying to be addressed by the petition. He suggested that it should wait until the study committee completes its work.

Mr. Kramer said that in light of the major real estate transactions going on at the moment, it was an opportunity to set some limits via zoning amendment now rather than later.

The meeting adjourned at 7:53 P.M.

Mr. Williamson noted that the agenda had indicated there would be time for public comment. Mr. Sullivan apologized that the discussion had run way over time and there was no time left for public comment but he would welcome it at the next meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting would be on January 17, 2018 at 9:15AM at 1414 Mass. Ave.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner