

A photograph of a public plaza. In the foreground, there are large, vibrant yellow flower arrangements. In the middle ground, several people are seated at metal tables, engaged in conversation. A news kiosk with a curved roof and large glass windows is the central focus. The kiosk's windows display the text "OUT OF TOWN NEWS" in red. The kiosk is situated in front of a multi-story brick building with many windows. To the left, there are black streetlights and a traffic light. The overall scene is a busy, urban public space.

SUMMARY OF
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

HARVARD SQUARE KIOSK AND PLAZA

PRELIMINARY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY REPORT

Prepared for

***The City of Cambridge &
Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza Working Group***

Prepared by

Project for Public Spaces



INTRODUCTION

A successful Placemaking process always begins with research. PPS believes the community is the expert; we actively seek and consult with community members—including those who might not otherwise participate in an improvement effort—engaging with them where they live, work, and congregate. Through Placemaking workshops, facilitated public forums, and other meetings and partnerships, we tap into local knowledge and citizen expertise to identify issues, cultivate ideas, and make decisions about improvements to the public realm, ensuring that every decision made addresses the needs and aspirations of the local community. Using this multifaceted approach, we aim to empower people to enhance the places where they live, play, and work, while building a sense of community.

A critical step in the process of envisioning the future of the Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza is community engagement in order to understand existing assets and future opportunities for the site.

The community engagement process for the Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza project was designed with the following objectives in mind:

- To involve a large number of participants throughout the community.
- To go directly to the public through pop-up placemaking workshops in the Plaza.
- To understand existing operations, maintenance, programming, and usage conditions in the Plaza and Kiosk through interviews with stakeholders.
- To open a public forum for feedback through a community meeting and spark conversation around existing conditions in the Plaza through an on-site visit and Place Game exercise.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

POP UP WORKSHOP #1 SEPTEMBER 12-13, 2017

The first Pop Up Workshop was set up in the Harvard Square Plaza by the MBTA headhouse. Three questions were posted to prompt comments and ideas from passerbys, which were written on colorful post-it notes and hung. The workshop operated for two days.

The framing of questions and intention of this engagement was to gather feedback that spoke to feelings associated with the space and desires for the future.

These questions were:

- I like to [blank] here
- I want to [blank] here
- This place makes me feel [blank]

POP UP WORKSHOP #2 OCTOBER 4, 2017

The second Pop Up Workshop was set up in the Harvard Square Plaza under a tent against the east side of the Kiosk. Three boards were set up with questions about ideas for future uses and activities in the

Plaza and Kiosk with sticky notes available to post responses.

These questions were:

- What do you like best about this place?
- What are your ideas for the future of the Kiosk?
- What improvements to the Plaza would support your ideas for the Kiosk?

Two additional Dot Boards were displayed asking passerbys to vote on characteristics that define great places and perceived quality of these characteristics in the Plaza. An inspiration board with images of examples for amenities and flexible designs was also hung.

COMMUNITY MEETING OCTOBER 4, 2017 6:30 - 8:30 PM

The first community meeting consisted of several simultaneous engagement techniques. After an introductory presentation by PPS, participants discussed ideas in break-out groups and reported

back, sharing the ideas generated through discussion. Participants were also given index cards upon arrival on which they wrote down three words they felt described the Kiosk and Plaza as they see it now, and as they hope to see it in the future. These words were collected during the workshop and turned into a real-time word cloud to reflect a range of associations participants provided through the prompt. As participants entered they were also given four dots and asked to mark on a map their favorite places in or around the Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza. Lastly, postcards were provided for participants to expand on ideas or provide additional feedback which were collected at the end of the meeting.

SITE VISIT AND PLACE GAME OCTOBER 4, 2017 5:00 - 5:45 PM

18 people participated in an on-site discussion at the Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza and participated in the Place Game activity, which asks participants to observe the site and rate the quality of the place

based on several characteristics PPS has identified as 'indicators of a Great Place'.

SURVEY

A 13 question survey was distributed digitally and in paper form and was open for responses for 4 weeks. 194 responses were collected online and 25 were collected in paper form. The paper surveys were conducted on site at the Plaza.

Questions were related to perceptions and feelings about the existing conditions of the Kiosk and Plaza, what activities and uses respondents participate in currently, and what future activities would be attractive and desired in the Kiosk and Plaza.

CALL FOR IDEAS

An open Call for Ideas was another opportunity for submission of ideas for future uses and programming of the Kiosk and Plaza. The prompt asked for proposals in any kind of format, including written descriptions, designs, drawings, or even poems. The Call was intended to generate a diverse set of ideas to inspire a more creative Working Group process. Goals of the Working Group are for the Kiosk and Plaza to be:

- Flexible and adaptable – across

seasons, different times of day, month, or year

- Welcoming and safe for all users
- A community gathering space
- Navigable – maintaining the space as a busy transit thoroughfare
- Dynamic and engaging

Proposals were required to take into consideration that:

- The Kiosk is a historic building and any modification must be historically consistent. More information on the historic status of the building can be found in the draft Landmark Designation Report.
- The MBTA station head house structure will remain.
- The MBTA station elevator will be renovated.

Participants in the Call for Ideas were provided a series of supplemental materials to aid in the development of their proposals. These materials include a simplified basemap and detailed basemap in PDF form, a CAD file site plan, a series of aerial images, and a 3D SketchUp file of the site.

The submissions were displayed publicly on a tumblr page at www.harvardsquarekiosk.tumblr.com.

WORKING GROUP

In addition to community engagement the Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza Working Group plays a large role in moving this project forward. The Working Group was created to advise the City Manager on the vision, programming, operations and governance of the Kiosk and Plaza and is composed of residents, subject matter experts, property owners, and representatives from local businesses and institutions. Over the course of four meetings (May 11, June 29, September 12, November 8, 2017) the Working Group has learned about the history and existing conditions of the Kiosk and Plaza from the Historical Commission and Department of Works, identified goals for the project, discussed observations and ideas for future uses, and reviewed the Call for Ideas submissions. The Working Group will continue to meet over the next several months.



a.

Community Engagement Activities:

- a. Site Visit Participants
- b. Sticky Note Responses from Pop Up #1
- c. Pop Up #2 Tent
- d. Response board from Pop Up #2



b.



c.



d.

WHAT WE HEARD

THEMES AND OPPORTUNITIES



The Harvard Square Kiosk circa 1970

IMPORTANT THEMES TO CONSIDER

HISTORY

The Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza are sites with a rich history. Restoration of the Kiosk in a historically sensitive way that maintains the unique character of the built environment and experience in the space was a key concern mentioned throughout the engagement process. Others expressed a desire to showcase this historical narrative in the space through exhibits and displays.

LOCAL CHARACTER

Throughout the engagement process concerns about rising commercialization, desire for local business, and preservation of local character in Harvard Square have been voiced. The Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza were identified as a place which is a central hub, iconic landmark and symbol of history in the area. Preservation of a unique, historically sensitive, and local character is a major theme for this project.

OUT OF TOWN NEWS AND PRINT MEDIA

Many responses emphasized the important history and unique role Out of Town News has served in providing print media and access to international news. Print media and reading in general were also mentioned as valued elements in this space.

20% of millennials surveyed (ages 35 and under) self-identify as patrons of Out of Town News, compared to 44% of seniors (ages 65+)

PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE

The pedestrian experience in the Plaza is another important theme and consideration for users walking to and through the Plaza. The Plaza is a busy crossroads and key node for pausing however ADA accessibility, ease of movement through the various grade changes in the space and traffic safety are all challenges.

*Only **12%** of survey respondents remain on the plaza for more than 15 minutes. How can the Plaza and Kiosk become a place to linger longer?*

MAINTENANCE

Cleanliness and upkeep of the space were also prevalent topics throughout the process. "Clean" and "welcoming" were frequently mentioned desired qualities for the Plaza and Kiosk.

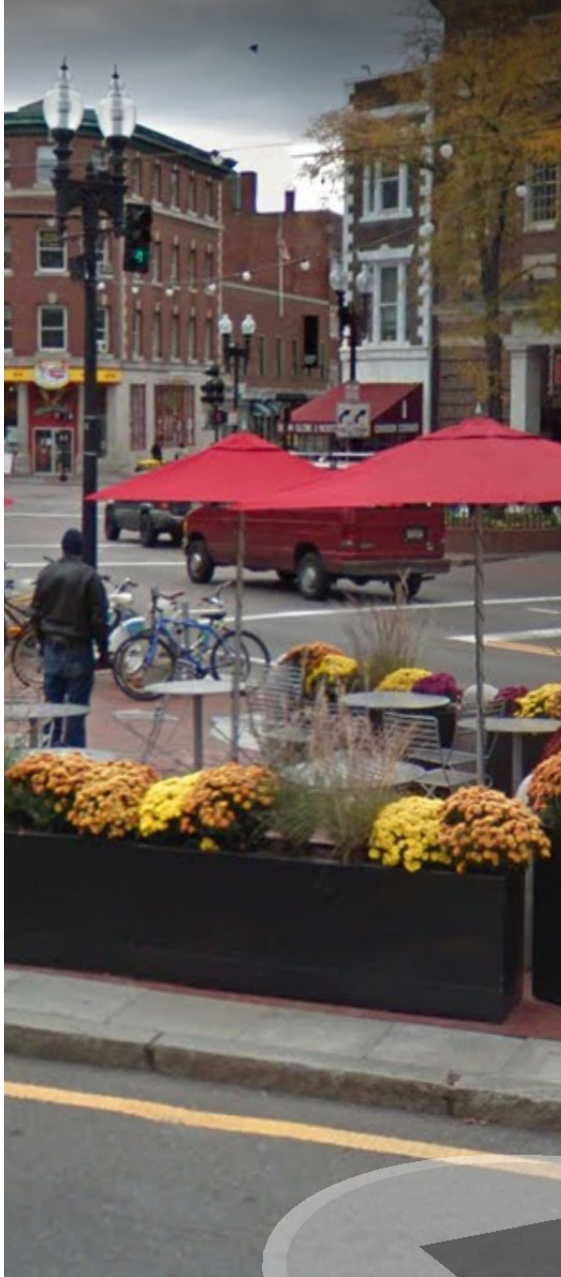
TRANSPORTATION

This is a major thoroughfare and central transportation hub. Feedback gathered emphasized the importance of being mindful of the function as an access point to MBTA and crossroads for pedestrian traffic. Noise and pedestrian safety in relation to surrounding traffic were also highlighted.

***90%** of survey respondents use the T station at Harvard Square Plaza, and over **65%** pass through at least 2-3 times per week*

Survey respondents frequently used the words "dirty," "messy," and "shabby" to describe the Plaza and Kiosk





OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

VISITOR SERVICES/TOURISM

Feedback indicated a desire for maintaining and enhancing clear and robust visitor information while striking a balance between serving tourist needs and local needs. Feedback also identified signage and wayfinding as missing elements in the space.

PROGRAMMING AND ACTIVITIES

Chess playing and watching buskers and performers were identified through the engagement process as existing activities that attract people to the space, however survey respondents also indicated opportunities for additional activities in the space. Comments expressed a desire for flexibility in the space that allows for a balance between programmed and spontaneous activity.

PLAZA AMENITIES

Amenities were mentioned as a major area for improvement, particularly comfortable and varied seating and increased greenery and landscaping. Some of the main desired qualities mentioned through the “Three Word Exercise” in the community meeting and survey are “inviting”, “welcoming”, and “comfortable”.

CONNECTIVITY

Comments from the Pop Up Workshops, community meeting, Call for Ideas and stakeholder interviews emphasized making sure activities in the Plaza and Kiosk complement and consider other activity (or lack thereof) in adjacent and nearby spaces. Some considerations mentioned were the nearby Harvard Smith Campus Center and the bank lobbies located along the perimeter of the Plaza.

*The **top three** survey responses for desired uses and activities, selected from eight multiple choice options, were **live music and performance, art exhibits, and community events.***

MBTA

A major element mentioned in many Call for Ideas submissions and throughout the engagement process was the MBTA headhouse entrance located in the Plaza. Submissions and comments discussed the unpleasant experience in the station mezzanine and entrance.

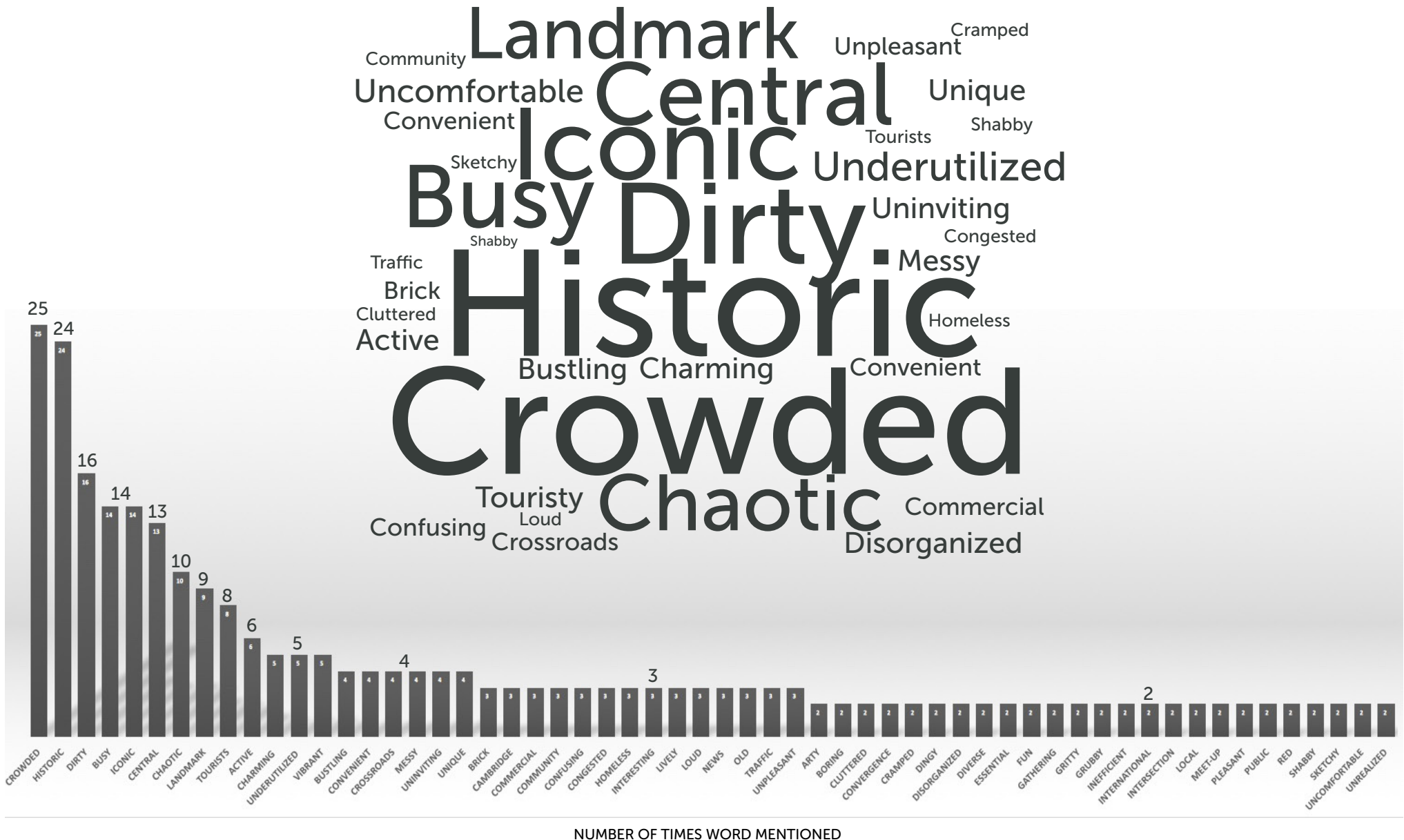
A DYNAMIC AND VIBRANT DESTINATION

In all the engagement activities participants often mentioned the interesting, international and iconic nature of this locale and the exciting opportunity to build on this reputation and history to create a more memorable, dynamic, vibrant, and welcoming destination.



WHAT THREE WORDS WOULD YOU USE TO DESCRIBE THE EXISTING KIOSK AND PLAZA?

RESPONSES FROM SURVEY AND COMMUNITY MEETING



NUMBER OF TIMES WORD MENTIONED

WHAT THREE WORDS WOULD YOU USE TO DESCRIBE YOUR VISION FOR THE KIOSK AND PLAZA IN THE FUTURE?

RESPONSES FROM SURVEY AND COMMUNITY MEETING



NUMBER OF TIMES WORD MENTIONED

BEHAVIOR MAPPING

Behavior mapping allows us to study people's stationary activities in a specific area for a predetermined amount of time. It is great for documenting stationary activities such as sunbathing, sitting, talking, and reading, documenting activities involving motion, like walking, jogging, biking, etc. and creating a snapshot of usage and activity in a given space. Volunteers helped record activity in and around the Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza during a two week period from September 12th to September 24th on weekdays and weekends. Volunteers recorded observations at four times of day: 8:00 AM, 12:00 PM, 4:00 PM, and 9:00 PM and recorded weather conditions, general ages of subjects observed, individual versus group activity, and what subjects were doing (for example socializing, eating, playing games, buying from a vendor, tourist activists, and more).



The zones where volunteers visited and recorded observations.

A SNAPSHOT OF ACTIVITIES

	MORNING (8:00 AM)	MIDDAY (12:00 PM)	LATE AFTERNOON/EVENING (4:00PM)	NIGHT (9:00PM)
LOCATION (HIGHER AREAS OF CONGREGATION)	Weekday: (1,4,5,9,11) the point, entrance to T and area around information kiosk, east side of headhouse Weekend: (3, 7, 8) close to Kiosk and across on Mass Ave	Weekday and Weekend: (5,8, 9,10,12) the point, area around information kiosk, entrance to T, and area around memorial tree, the pit	Weekday and Weekend: (3, 5,9,10,12) seating across on west side of Mass Ave, the point, area around information kiosk, entrance to T, and area around memorial tree, the pit	Weekday and Weekend: (1, 2,3, 6,8,9,10,12) The pit, entrance to the T, memorial tree area, seating across Mass Ave
GATHERING OF PEOPLE (LOW, MEDIUM, HIGH)	Weekday and Weekend: low to zero activity	Weekday: medium Weekend: high	Weekday and Weekend: high	Weekday: medium Weekend: high
INDIVIDUALS VS GROUPS	Weekday: higher prevalence of solitary individuals Weekend: mix of individuals and groups	Weekday and Weekend: mix of individuals and gatherings of small groups	Weekday and Weekend: congregations of many small to medium sized groups	Weekday and Weekend: mix of individuals and several gatherings of small groups
WHO	Weekday and Weekend: predominantly male adult (age 36-64)	Weekday: predominantly male; mix of adults (age 36-64), young adults (19-35) and seniors (65+) Weekend: mixed female/male; appearance of teens	Weekday and Weekend: mixed female/ male; mix of young adults and adults	Weekday: predominantly male; young adults Weekend: mixed male/female; young adults
WHAT ACTIVITY (PREDOMINANT USES)	Weekday and Weekend: waiting, maintenance, panhandling, sleeping or empty	Weekday: sitting at tables and on ledges, when sunny using kiosk for shade, sitting and relaxing and phone use Weekend: high activity and mix-socialilzing, sitting and people watching, performers, panhandling, eating,	Weekday: sitting at tables and on ledges, socialilzing, sitting and people watching, playing games Weekend: high activity and mix-socialilzing, sitting and people watching, performers, panhandling, eating, reading and writing, tourist activities.	Weekday and Weekend: people watching, socializing, playing games, watching buskers perform