



CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

Final Report of the Cambridge Advisory Committee on City Art, Monuments, & Markers

This document represents the Final Report of the Cambridge Advisory Committee on City Art, Monuments, & Markers. This Committee was jointly chaired by City Councilor Denise Simmons and Cambridge Peace Commission Executive Director Brian Corr. It was composed of a diverse set of Cambridge residents who devoted their expertise and lived experience to the project over several months.

This Committee explored the compelling questions about how we create the narratives of our society: about who we choose to elevate in those narratives, and who is diminished or completely left out. These narratives are built into our society in a multitude of ways, from the voice of which stories and personalities are documented in our history textbooks, to whom we name our public buildings after, to the names of the streets we live on. Whether or not we are fully cognizant of it, we engage with the history all around us practically every day. In recent years, we have witnessed and taken part in a growing effort to be much more deliberate in that engagement and mindful of its impacts.

That desire to be more deliberate led Councilor Simmons to [sponsor a policy order in April 2019](#) that called for a full accounting of local streets, schools, and public buildings that may be named in honor of those who had ties to the American slave trade. The order's intent was not to erase our city's sometimes complicated history, but rather to invite us to more honestly confront our history and the questions of how we shape and share our community narrative – and how it shapes us.

Two months later, Councilor Simmons [sponsored a second policy order](#) that sought to take this work further, asking City Manager Louis A. DePasquale "...to establish a working committee to review the monuments, memorials, and markers throughout Cambridge to determine whether any of these commemorate those who were linked to the slave trade or engaged in other similarly shameful acts, to determine which individuals – particularly women, people of color, and those from other historically marginalized communities – should be newly recognized with a monument, memorial, or marker, and to report back to the City Council on this matter in a timely manner." And that is where our work began.

In response to that policy order, the City Manager appointed a diverse group of Cambridge residents – individuals embodying multiple dimensions of diversity – to serve on this new working committee. We both were appointed as co-chairs, and the work of the Committee was expertly shaped and facilitated by Executive Director Corr in partnership with Ora Grodsky of Just Works Consulting, an individual steeped in facilitating these types of processes through the lens of meaningful participation and deep inclusion. We would like to take a moment to acknowledge and thank the Committee members and City staff who were all so generous with giving their time, talent, experience, and expertise these past several months, making these recommendations possible in hopes of creating a better City.

Sincerely,

E. Denise Simmons
Co-Chair
February 28, 2022

Brian Corr
Co-Chair
February 28, 2022

BACKGROUND

The work of the Cambridge Advisory Committee on City Art, Monuments, & Markers (the Committee) is the embodiment of a deep commitment: a commitment to honestly confront our history; to understand how the stories we tell about our past shape our present and future; and to tell a fuller story of who we are and where we have come from so that we can co-create a better, more inclusive future for all. This work includes asking the questions about whom we choose to celebrate, how we understand their lives, and whether there are other, lesser-known but no-less-important individuals who ought to be lifted up and celebrated.

While Cambridge is rightfully known for promoting equality and for its activism, and has played often-highlighted roles in both the standard narratives of our nation's history and the narratives of progressive social change, Cambridge is not an island, separate from the rest of society, nor is it immune from historical or present-day discrimination, oppression, or exploitation. Cambridge is a complex community where some of the most privileged individuals in the United States live side-by-side with families living in poverty; where a variety of racial, ethnic and linguistic communities live, work, learn, and play together; and people whose families have lived here for generations are neighbors to people who came to this country as undocumented immigrants and refugees, as professors, graduate students, and technology workers, and as people searching for a community where they feel comfortable, welcomed, and able to feel at home.

The intent behind this endeavor was not to erase the sometimes-complicated history of our city. Rather, it is to compel us to reckon more honestly with the complexity of our history and acknowledge that many of our celebrated stories have only told a portion of the truth. These narratives have, at times, omitted recognition of tremendous harm and oppression of certain peoples; at other times, these narratives have ignored important contributors to our shared story.

The Committee, composed of Cambridge residents from a variety of backgrounds, viewpoints, and experiences, was appointed by City Manager Louis A. DePasquale, and due to the Covid-19 pandemic met remotely each month between January and June 2021. This working committee set an aggressive timeline to effectively take on and fulfill their charge: to “advise the City Manager and City Council on issues relating to public art, monuments, and historic markers on City-owned property. Specifically... to develop recommendations on how the City should address City-owned monuments and markers, particularly those which may be viewed as inconsistent with the values of Cambridge, by which we mean a just City that prioritizes anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion.”

To place this work in its historical context, the six months during which the Committee met included: a global pandemic; continued police brutality and increasing gun violence across the country; increased awareness of the unfolding climate catastrophe; a presidential impeachment; a presidential election; an insurrection by white supremacists attacking the U.S. Capitol, Congress, and its staff and police officers in an attempt to prevent the orderly transfer of power to the incoming administration; and the discovery of [multiple unmarked gravesites of Indigenous children](#) who died from mistreatment, neglect, disease or accidents in government-funded residential schools in Canada after being forcibly removed from their families and culture, reminding the United States of its own genocidal past and present.

This context provides insight into the urgency of the Committee's charge and work. This work has been inspired by other municipalities who have also demonstrated a commitment to this critical process of historical reckoning, as well as our own need to reckon with the hidden histories and unrecognized legacies in our own community.

As the Committee began this process, it examined and built upon New York City's [Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments, and Markers](#) and the work that they conducted in 2018 as inspiration.

Similar to the impetus for that commission, Cambridge's Committee also recognized "...that public dialogue, opportunities for engagement, and debate about history are essential for democracy and should be nurtured ([Report to the City of New York, 2018, Page 2](#)).

COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

The Charge of the Committee established by the policy order was: "The Committee will advise the City Manager and City Council on issues relating to public art, monuments, and historic markers on City-owned property. Specifically, the Committee's charge is to develop recommendations on how the City should address City-owned monuments and markers, particularly those which may be viewed as inconsistent with the values of Cambridge, by which we mean a just City that prioritizes anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion. The Committee will develop procedures to evaluate monuments and markers for persons associated with the slave trade or engaged in other similarly shameful acts. The Committee will also make recommendations on how to determine which individuals – particularly women, people of color, and those from other historically marginalized communities – might be newly recognized with a monument/public art, memorial or marker."

COMPOSITION AND GOVERNANCE

The Committee was established in the form of a working group of members from across Cambridge, bringing together a wide range of both lived experience and expertise, including knowledge in the disciplines of art, history, education, architecture, archiving, public space, youth development, diversity, inclusion, and education. **The Committee was comprised of the following individuals:**

E. Denise Simmons, Co-Chair

City Councilor and Chair of the Civic Unity Committee

Brian Corr, Co-Chair and Co-Facilitator

Executive Director of the Cambridge Peace Commission and the Police Review & Advisory Board

Mr. Greggy Bazile

Artist/Muralist, Senior at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School

Mr. Melvin Downes, Jr.

Member, Black Trailblazers and the Cambridge Black History Project

Ms. Emmanuella Fede

Artist, Student in Early Education at Lesley University, works at Community Art Center in The Port

Cristine Hutchison-Jones, PhD

Project Manager. Initiative on Harvard and the Legacy of Slavery, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University

Ms. Eryn Johnson

Independent Consultant in Creative Place Making, Youth Development & Organizational Strategy, former Executive Director of the Community Art Center

Timothy McCarthy

Adjunct Lecturer in Public Policy, Harvard Kennedy School

Tiya Miles, PhD.

Professor of History, Harvard University

Dr. Janie Ward

Professor and Chair, Department of Africana Studies and Education, Simmons University

City Staff and Consultants Providing Resource Support to the Committee:

- **Ora Grodsky**, Just Works Consulting, Committee Co-Facilitator
- **Suryani Dewa Ayu**, Writer/Recorder
- **Neal Alpert**, City Council Aide
- **Valerie Beaudrault**, Historical and Genealogical Researcher
- **Charles Sullivan**, Director, Cambridge Historical Commission
- **Sarah Burks**, Planner, Cambridge Historical Commission
- **Jason Weeks**, Director, Cambridge Arts Council

TIMEFRAME AND PROCESS**1. Committee Meetings**

The timeline for this project began in June 2019, when the policy order to create the Committee was adopted by the City Council, and concluded in June 2021, when the Committee held its last meeting and a final public listening session to share its work and hear from the broader Cambridge community about its impact. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the Committee was delayed in its initial convening until January 2021. Once established, the Committee met virtually via Zoom, holding six formal meetings (one per month) which were open to the public, and each meeting was co-facilitated by Brian Corr and Ora Grodsky.

The Committee began by creating group norms and agreements to collectively establish how they would conduct their work and by creating a shared understanding of the Committee's charge. From this foundation, the Committee built upon the work of New York City's Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments, and Markers, and to further ground the Cambridge efforts a "Core Planning Team" comprising Councilor Simmons, Brian Corr, Ora Grodsky, Sury Dewa Ayu, and Neal Alpert met with representatives from New York City's commission at the beginning of the process. The Committee reviewed and borrowed from the template that New York City had established for their own, similar efforts to review, assess, and update their own monuments, memorials, and markers.

The Committee then developed a framework to be used by the City in the future when considering new or existing objects. This framework includes: **(1)** establishing a definition of "shameful acts" **(2)** establishing guiding principles for examining existing objects **(3)** establishing guiding principles for possible actions/remediations, and **(4)** establishing criteria to guide decisions about future city art, monuments, and markers.

2. Public Input

After a set of very productive meetings of the Committee focused on learning, examining, reexamining, and sharing, the Core Team conducted individual interviews with Committee members, to listen more deeply and understand their experience of engagement on the Committee – and their hopes for the future of this work.

The responses informed the work of the Core Planning Team and to create this Report. Additionally, the Committee held three public listening events, via Zoom, during which approximately 100 people were able to learn about the work of the Committee, ask questions, share their concerns about City art, monuments and markers, and provide general feedback to the Committee about its work.

Committee members attended the public listening sessions (which were also recorded) and engaged in real time with the feedback given on their work. All sessions began with sharing the work that the Committee had done to date, and the final feedback session included a presentation of draft recommendations and ended with a question-and-answer section. Attendees voiced ideas about changing language in the definition of shameful acts to be more specific, and many people added that they both enjoyed attending and wished to be more involved in this work as it moves forward, expressing gratitude for the work of the Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Core Group spent significant time reviewing the work and discussion of the Committee, the public feedback, and the original charge to the Committee, which allowed them to craft the following recommendations. Every aspect of these recommendations is informed by the work of the Committee and by the public feedback. Based on the policy order, the Committee worked to achieve the following Purpose & Desired Outcomes:

Purpose:

- Develop recommendations to the City Manager and City Council as to how the City should address City-owned monuments and markers.

Desired Outcomes:

- Develop procedures for review and assessment of those monuments, memorials, and markers which may be viewed as inconsistent with the values of Cambridge, by which we mean a just City that prioritizes anti-racism, equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- Develop a set of possible actions that could be employed to remediate problematic monuments, memorials and markers (e.g. removal, contextualization, etc.)
- Make recommendations for how to determine which individuals or events might be newly recognized with a monument/public art, memorial, or marker.
- Address how the Committee's recommendations can live on as an actionable process in the City.

Based upon the Committee's deliberations, the following are proposed:

1. The City Manager appoints a standing Advisory Committee to consider objects, activating the processes recommended below.
2. The Committee of advisors would meet on a regular basis throughout the year and have a part-time staff person who works in partnership with Cambridge Historical Commission and with the Cambridge Arts Council staff as needed.

3. The staff person would triage items that come to the Committee, screening them against the criteria to determine if they generally fit under the definition of a Shameful Act (as outlined below).
4. The staff person will coordinate Committee logistics as they review objects that fit the criteria of a Shameful Act.

Definition of Shameful Acts

The Committee defined a “shameful act” as:

“An act in which an individual was and/or continues to be:

- Directly engaged in, profited from, and/or was principally known for their role supporting the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade or enslavement; or
- Directly participated in the theft of land and/or genocide of Indigenous People; or
- Engaged in work and/or efforts that promoted the violence of white supremacy and/or a hierarchy of human value based on race, gender, and/or other aspects of human identity, including categories in the City of Cambridge’s non-discrimination ordinance.”

Guiding Principles for Examining Existing Objects

The set of guiding principles for examining objects is offered to guide an approach to examining objects. The Committee felt these principles, adapted from the New York City effort, were a helpful way to think through the difficulties of considering objects as in group setting with a range of perspectives:

- **Reckoning with power to represent values in public**
Recognizing that the ability to represent values in public is powerful; reckoning with deeply rooted inequities and injustices in Cambridge while looking to a just future
- **Historical understanding**
Respect for and commitment to in-depth and nuanced histories acknowledging multiple perspectives, including the narratives of people who have been actively marginalized
- **Inclusion**
Creating conditions for all people to feel welcome in Cambridge’s public spaces and enable inclusive public processes by which City art, monuments, and markers are included in such spaces
- **Complexity**
Acknowledging layered and evolving narratives represented in Cambridge’s public spaces, with preference for additive, relational, and intersectional approaches over subtractive ones. City art, monuments, and markers have multiple meanings that are difficult to unravel, and it is often impossible to agree on a single meaning
- **Justice**
Recognizing the erasure embedded in Cambridge’s collection of City art, monuments, and markers; addressing histories of dispossession, enslavement, and discrimination not adequately represented in the current public landscape; and actualizing equity

Criteria For Examining Existing Objects

In terms of determining whether an existing monument, marker, or memorial should be reviewed by the City, the Committee determined that the object must meet at least ONE of the following criteria:

- Community-led public reaction that supports a just City, prioritizing anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion;
- Significant community opposition (as part of larger cultural/political concerns);
- Recommendation from multiple local community members, particularly centering the voices of women, people of color, and people from other historically marginalized communities; and/or
- Egregious historical oversights, and/or revelation of new, significant information about the public art, monument, or marker and what or whom it represents.”

Possible Actions/Remediations

The proposed list of actions/remediations has been created for addressing an existing object. The Committee concluded that it is important to approach possible actions/remediations as a series of options, prioritizing re-contextualization, when necessary, to center education and dialogue. The Committee noted it is critical to highlight that the removal of an object would be considered to be a significant action that would only happen after careful discernment concluding that the circumstances were very serious. **The following options are presented in order of seriousness:**

- **No Action is Deemed Necessary**
The existing public art, monument, or marker remains in place without intervention.
- **Re-Contextualization**
Provide new or additional context by any means, including: install site-specific plaques or signage, update historical information, disclaim endorsement of the acts of historic figures, or provide information through a publicly accessible online database that offers translation services or mobile apps.
- **Relocation**
Relocate to another City-owned public site, or to an alternative location such as a long-term loan to cultural organizations, museums, or relevant historical, cultural, or educational settings.
- **New Temporary or Permanent Works**
Commission new markers or artworks in any medium including sculpture, performance, and socially engaged art in order to foster public dialogue on polarizing historical moments and to amplify additional or excluded voices and underrepresented histories.
- **Removal**
Remove offending, controversial, or outdated works from outdoor or indoor displays on public property.

Principles and Criteria to Guide Decisions About *Future* City Art, Monuments, and Markers

These principles and criteria are to be used when creating future City Art, monuments, and markers. When the City is working to determine if a piece of artwork, monument, or marker should be funded and shown in a public space, these are five pillars to guide that process:

- **Care & Generosity**
Recognizing that people can have a range of reactions and feelings about City Art, Monuments, Memorials and Markers. Making space for people who have feelings of connection or uneasiness with what is present or absent.
- **Inclusion and Transparency**
Recognizing the fundamental role of the entire community in determining future City Art, Monuments, and Markers, striving to reflect everyone in the work. Following transparent and accessible decision-making processes that deliberately hold multiple opportunities for input from people whose voices, values, and vision are not typically centered. Working to make sure the criteria on which decisions are made is clear, accessible, engaging, and relevant.
- **Equity**
Being deliberate about highlighting people from traditionally marginalized communities, particularly women and people of color, in representation and design.
- **Connection**
Recognizing how the work of future City Art, Monuments, and Markers connects with the larger visioning and planning for the City; recognizing the potential for support, synergy, and leveraging cross-departmental efforts.
- **Openness to New Insights**
Recognizing that, as categories and identities change, the criteria that are used to determine future recognitions will also likely evolve beyond what is seen at the time that these principles were developed in 2021.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The recommendations put forth by the Cambridge Advisory Committee on City Art, Monuments, & Markers, memorialized in this Report, provide a framework and guidance for actions for the City of Cambridge to further lean into its values, prioritizing active anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion. This Report is being presented to the City Council and the City Manager, with the hope that the City Manager will take these recommendations and use them as a framework that allows the City to both address the existing monuments, markers, and memorials in the community, and to establish a standardized, transparent process for considering all future public monuments, markers, and memorials.

The Committee's recommendations, and this Report, are to be thought of as a starting point; it is understood that the City Manager and their staff shall need to determine the logistics of how these recommendations can be actualized and fully implemented. The Co-Chairs of this Committee welcome any additional discussion the City Manager or their staff may require in order to move this process forward. The desire of the Committee is that the City Manager shall release a report to the City Council later this year detailing progress made on institutionalizing these recommendations.