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Preliminary Report of the 2017-19 Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee

With Recommendations for Amending the Goals,  
Guidelines, and Order Establishing the District



Harvard Square, 2018

Cambridge Historical Commission  
Updated for the meeting of May 29, 2019

v.1.1



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### Preliminary Report of the 2017-19 Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee

#### Summary

The Cambridge Historical Commission voted in March 2017 to initiate a study of the Harvard Square Conservation District in response to concerns about the goals, jurisdiction, and administration of the district. During an extended series of hearings on projects at 5 Kennedy Street (the Abbot Building) and 1-3 Brattle Street (&Pizza) many citizens expressed dissatisfaction with the scope of the District's jurisdiction, the goals and guidelines for administration of the district (and their application by the Commission), and stated a desire for identification of prominent or significant buildings in the district and stricter regulation of alterations to them.

The City Manager appointed the Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee in August 2017. The committee met monthly, with some interruptions, from October through June 2018 and from September 2018 through May 2019. Attendees, who included many interested parties and members of the public, discussed the events that led to the establishment of the district in 2000 and the district's operations and effectiveness. Representatives of the Community Development Department described zoning and sign regulations. Focusing on the *Final Report of the Cambridge Historical Commission Regarding the Proposed Harvard Square Conservation District*, the committee held detailed discussions about the goals, secondary goals, and guidelines of the District; the application of those goals and guidelines to matters of demolition, new construction, and alterations. The evolving character of the subdistricts was also discussed.

The Study Committee's recommendations focus on refinements to the goals and guidelines of the district and matters of jurisdiction. The report contains a proposed new Order for the Conservation District that contains revised goals, guidelines, and standards for review. The extended discussion in the report is also meant to supplement the 2000 *Final Report* as guidance for the Commission in administration of the District.

This Draft Preliminary Report of the 2017-19 Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee was prepared by Historical Commission staff in May 2019. When approved, the draft will be transmitted to the Cambridge Historical Commission for discussion at a public hearing. If accepted by the Commission the Final Report will be forwarded to the City Council with a recommendation for adoption of the amended Order establishing the district.

May 29, 2019



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## I. Establishment and Operations of the Harvard Square Conservation District, 1995-2018

On December 18, 2000, the Cambridge City Council adopted an Order establishing the Harvard Square Conservation District by a unanimous 9-0 vote (see Appendix A, Original Order Establishing the Harvard Square Conservation District).

The Harvard Square Conservation District contains approximately 195 buildings in an area bounded by Massachusetts Avenue and Mt. Auburn, Eliot, Bennett, Story, and Church streets. Within the district the Cambridge Historical Commission has binding review over demolition, new construction, and publicly visible exterior alterations to existing buildings, and can, in appropriate cases, impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by zoning. In making its decisions the Commission follows guidelines intended to preserve historic resources while encouraging the social, economic, and architectural diversity that characterizes the Square.

### 1. Establishment of the District

The initial impetus for the Conservation District was a July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1995 City Council directive that the Commission "submit a plan...for a Harvard Square Historic District which would preserve and protect all remaining historical buildings in Harvard Square." This Order was adopted during the controversy over the proposed redevelopment of the Read Block and the displacement of its retail and commercial tenants, including The Tasty, a popular lunch counter with a wide following. This was only the most recent instance of the gradual demolition of wood-frame commercial buildings in the Square and the perceived erosion of the square's traditional retail and service sectors. The Read Block/Tasty debate was a turning point in the on-going discussion about the Square. It heightened awareness of the fragility of the area's older buildings and sharpened public discussion about the meaning and limitations of historic preservation.



The Read Block, 1380-1392 Massachusetts Avenue, in 1968 and as restored. CHC staff photos 1968 and 2015.

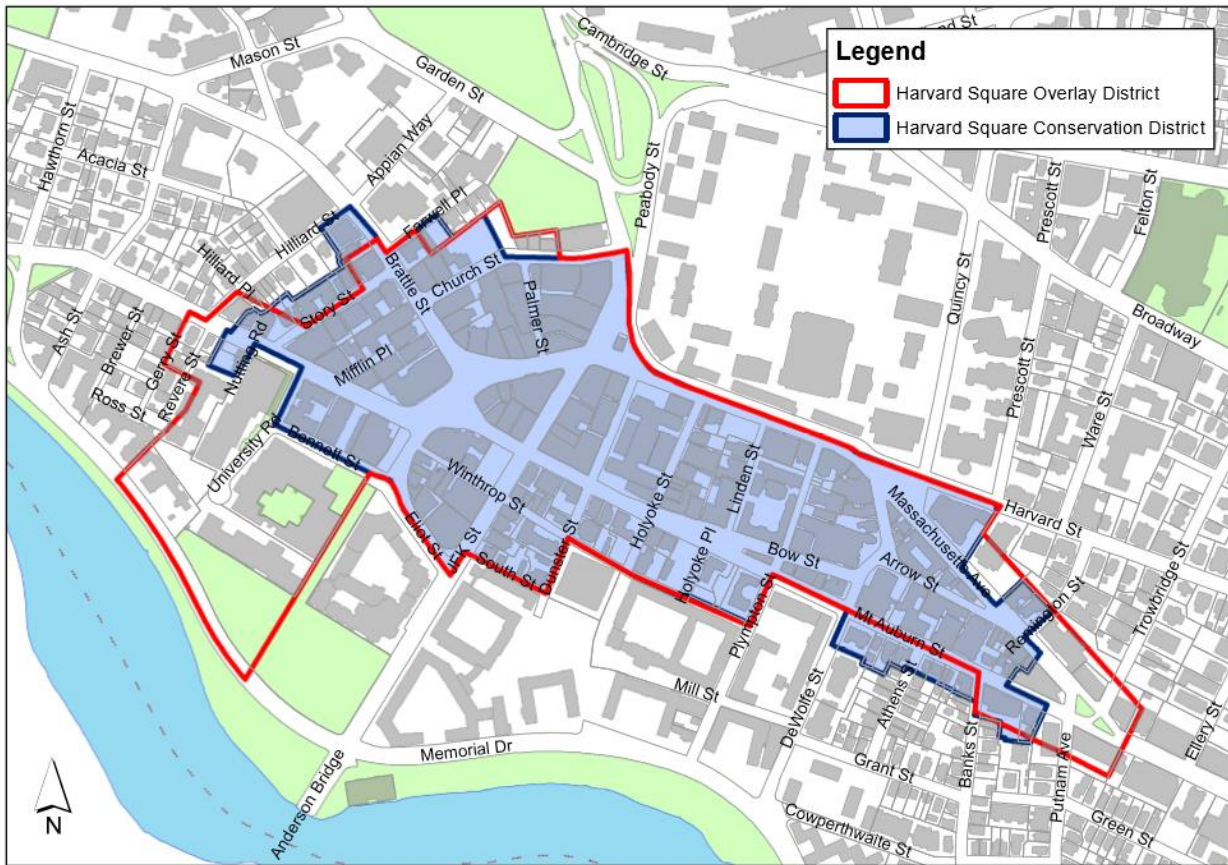
A study committee appointed by the City Manager first considered the area for designation as an historic district under Chapter 40C of the General Laws. The Historical Commission's October 1999 recommendation that the City Council establish a Harvard Square Historic District under M.G.L. Ch. 40C and adopt related amendments to the Zoning Code expired at the end of the Council term.

In June 2000 the City Council passed a new Order asking the City Manager to "direct the Historical Commission ... to prepare an alternative version of the proposed Harvard Square Historic District ordinance using the neighborhood conservation district model." The same members were reappointed as a new study committee in September 2000. They determined that the neighborhood



conservation district established under Ch. 2.78 of the City Code could be as effective in accomplishing historic preservation goals as an historic district and could be more flexible and efficient than an historic district in a variety of respects, including the ability to delegate certain approvals to the staff.<sup>1</sup>

On October 7, 2000 the Harvard Square Neighborhood Conservation District Study Committee recommended the establishment of a conservation district under Ch. 2.78, Article III of the City Code. The committee also recommended amending several existing ordinances: (a) the zoning ordinance, to maintain the existing density allowed in the Harvard Square Overlay District; (b) Ch. 2.78, Article III, to clarify its appeal provisions and to extend the time within which action must be taken; and (c) the Historical Commission ordinance (Ch. 2.78, Article I), to provide for a Harvard Square representative on the Commission. The District was established on December 18, 2000 and the amendments to the Zoning Code went into effect soon thereafter. The City Council took no action on the proposed amendments to Ch. 2.78.



The Harvard Square Conservation District and the Harvard Square [Zoning] Overlay District Cambridge GIS

## 2. Operations

Among the provisions of the Order was a requirement that the Historical Commission hold a public hearing and submit a report to the City Council on the effectiveness of the first five years of the District, with a recommendation as to whether the Order establishing the District should continue in

<sup>1</sup> Under Ch. 2.78.180, the initiation of the designation study gave the Commission interim jurisdiction over the proposed district while it formulated a recommendation to the City Council.

effect, continue in effect with amendments, or be repealed. The reason for including this requirement in the Order was to ensure that the District continued to meet the objectives set forth in Final Report and to provide an opportunity for amendments to be introduced after the district had been in effect for a reasonable period. The City Council received the Five-Year Report in December 2005 and placed it on file.

The Five-Year Report considered the operations of the District between December 18, 2000 and October 31, 2005. During this period the Commission received 362 applications for Certificates of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability for properties within the Conservation District:

- 277 (77%) were issued a Certificate of Nonapplicability by the staff because the alterations proposed were exempt from Commission review. These included interior alterations, ordinary maintenance and repair, alterations not visible from a public way, and storefront and sign alterations that met the District design guidelines.
- 85 (23%) applications were heard by the Historical Commission, which issued Certificates of Appropriateness in 68 cases. Three applicants received Certificates of Hardship, two received temporary certificates, and six applicants withdrew prior to a determination. Three applications were denied a Certificate of Appropriateness on the basis that the proposed alteration, demolition, or new construction was incongruous with the architecture of the building or incongruous with the characteristics and goals for the Harvard Square subdistrict in which it was located. Three cases could not be tracked.

During subsequent years the proportion of applications requiring a public hearing increased to about 40%. By the end of October 2017, the Historical Commission had processed 1,409 applications for all types of work requiring a building permit in the Harvard Square Conservation District. Of these, 844 applications for interior work, projects not visible from a public way, or telecom gear were reviewed by staff. The remaining 565 applications for substantive publicly visible work were reviewed by the Commission during public hearings.

### 3. Exercise of Jurisdiction

Applications requiring a public hearing before the Historical Commission generally fall into the following categories: signs and alterations; demolition and new construction; and additions. A brief review of cases from each of the design review categories follows.

#### A. Signs, Storefronts, and Alterations



Steaming Bagel, 12 JFK Street;  
Case 966, 1999

Most sign applications conform to the Zoning Code and are approved by the staff with a Certificate of Nonapplicability. The Commission has approved non-conforming signs that were considered appropriate for their locations and supportive of the commercial vitality of the Square. For example, the Commission has approved a steaming bagel on J.F. Kennedy Street, retro neon signs at 15 Brattle Street and 52 Church Street, and internally illuminated projecting signs at 11-21 Dunster Street and several other locations. Signs inside buildings but visible from the street are



Beat Brasserie,  
15 Brattle Street;  
Case 3404, 2015

not considered subject to the Commission’s jurisdiction, which is limited to “exterior architectural features” (Ch. 2.78.150.A).

Applications to alter storefronts can be approved by staff if the original storefront surround is retained or restored. Examples of storefront alterations that required no public hearing before the Commission include the restoration of the brownstone arches at 18, 20, and 22 J.F. Kennedy Street and the restoration of the original storefront at 1270 Massachusetts Avenue. At 18 JFK Street a retailer initially wanted to install a new storefront, but when Commission staff explained that restoration of the original brownstone arch hidden underneath layers of 20<sup>th</sup> century materials could proceed immediately under staff review the retailer agreed to proceed on that basis. Two additional arches (out of four in the same building) were subsequently restored by a different tenant. Similarly, at 1270 Massachusetts Avenue projecting window bays installed in the 1970s, prior to the designation of the District, were removed in favor of restoration of the original plate glass windows and masonry jambs without further review.



Read Building, 18-28 JFK Street, before and after arch restoration; Cases 1599 (2004) and 3439 (2015). CHC photos.

Initially, there was some concern that design review of alterations would stifle creativity and lead to monotonous, restoration-only designs. Several examples demonstrate that there is still plenty of creative thought being focused on commercial design in Harvard Square. Storefront renovations at 50 Church Street for Dado Tea opened up the concrete corner of the building to make a new entrance for the restaurant from the street and to make the space more inviting to the pedestrian. The Black Ink storefront at 5 Brattle Street was a significant departure from that of the previous tenant but was approved with staff review. The intensely controversial storefront alterations for &pizza at 1-3 Brattle Street in 2017 were approved by staff because they preserved the original structure of the building; signage conformed to zoning, and colors are exempt from review.



Black Ink storefront, 5 Brattle St; Case 1239, 2002

The district Order calls out four historically significant storefronts that cannot be altered without a public hearing. Only one the four has been altered since the District was established. The severely deteriorated wooden storefront at 40 Bow Street was restored under a Certificate of Appropriateness issued in 2012.

The 1956 aluminum façade of the Bank of America (formerly Harvard Trust Company) at 1408-1414 Massachusetts Avenue was restored in 2002. Though the aluminum screen covered a pre-existing Georgian Revival façade that comprised about 25% of the street frontage, the staff considered it to be an architecturally significant feature and encouraged the bank to retain it. The aluminum grid of louvers and windows were restored and a modern storefront glazing system was installed on the first floor without full Commission review.



Harvard Trust Co. façade, 1408-1414 Massachusetts Ave. Photo ca. 1958.

After public hearings, the Commission granted Certificates of Appropriateness for three projects that involved complete restoration of significant buildings. The Hycinthe Purcell tenement at 40 Bow Street (1889), a four-story wood frame building, was restored in 2012-2016. Waverly Hall



Purcell Tenement, 40 Bow Street, and the Conductor's Building, 112 Mt. Auburn Street ,after restoration

(1902), a six-story former private dormitory at 115 Mt. Auburn Street that proved to be in much worse condition than originally known, was meticulously restored during the same period. The Conductor's Building at 112 Mt. Auburn (1912) had been derelict for many years when it was reopened as a restaurant in 2017.

### B. Demolition and New Construction

The burst of development that preceded the establishment of the district soon wound down with only a few more projects that involved demolition and new construction. Significant development activity did not resume until 2016, when the new owners of the Abbot Building, the former Corcoran's Department Store, and 18 Brattle Street announced plans to redevelop that site.

In April 2001 the Commission denied an application by Harvard University for permission to construct a new building on Mt. Auburn Street. The University had selected Hans Hollein, a Viennese Expressionist architect who had won the Pritzker Prize in 1985, to design a technology services building for the Harvard Libraries at 88-96 Mount Auburn Street. On the site were an 1895 triple-decker and a two-story commercial building of 1971. The site, near the center of the original village of Newtowne, was surrounded by low rise, residential-scale buildings that buffered the commercial district of Harvard Square from the River Houses; the most recent nearby new construction was the



Harvard Library Services Building. Left, rejected original design (2000, Hans Hollein, architect); right, approved design (2002, Leers Weinzapfel, architects)

modestly contextual Rosovsky Center, designed for Harvard-Radcliffe Hillel by Moshe Safdie in 1993 (see photo below). Hollein's proposed building was 62 feet high (not counting the inevitable mechanical penthouses), with a sloping, undulating wire-mesh façade overhanging a recessed first floor. The Commission was willing to sacrifice the three-decker but decided that Hollein's proposal was inappropriately bulky and "incongruous because of its aggressive indifference to its surroundings." Harvard then selected the Boston firm of Leers, Weinzapfel Associates to design a conventionally-massed four-story building with a glazed façade that the Commission approved in 2003. The building's height was kept low by placing several floors of mechanicals and offices below grade. Additionally, the University kept rooftop mechanicals to a minimum by installing a geothermal heating and cooling system, eliminating the need for rooftop condensers.



Market Theater, Zero Arrow Street (2002)

The theater/office building at Zero Arrow Street that was approved in 2002 remains the only new construction on an empty site since the establishment of the District. The lot was cleared in the 1980s for an office building but the site remained empty until the Carr Foundation decided to build a theater and offices. The architect used traditional brick and cast stone cladding affixed to curtain wall framing, allowing generous amounts of glazing. The result was a four-story Post-Modern design that employed traditional forms with a modern sensibility. The through-block pathway created by this project provided pedestrian access between the Kerry Corner neighborhood and Massachusetts Avenue.

In 2004 the Commission approved Harvard University's plan to demolish and rebuild part of the Hasty Pudding theater at 12 Holyoke Street. Harvard razed the theater, which was not accessible and did not meet modern code requirements, and restored the brick clubhouse on Holyoke Street. The public visibility of the new theater was limited, and several floors were constructed below grade to keep the height of the new construction to a minimum.

A decade-long hiatus in significant development activity occurred after these projects were completed. In May 2008 the Commission approved a complex plan triggered by the MBTA's sale of the busway and Conductor's Building at 112 Mt. Auburn. The adjacent wood-frame Trinity Hall at 114 Mt. Auburn Street, a deteriorated former private dormitory, was demolished so that the Conductor's Building, the last surviving structure erected by the Boston Elevated Railway during the construction of the subway in 1909-12, could be restored. The Commission and the Planning Board approved an office building somewhat bulkier than zoning allowed through a transfer of development from the preserved building. This project was revived in 2013 and completed in 2016.



114 Mt. Auburn Street in 1995 and 2016



CHC photos

After the recession of 2008-2012 the Dow-Stearns Trust, a long-term owner of several significant properties, decided to begin liquidating its holdings. The Dow-Stearns holdings dated back to the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and by the 1990s included 1-8 and 17-41 Brattle Street, the Abbot Building at 1-5 Kennedy Street, the adjoining former Corcoran's store (with frontage on Brattle Street), and 18 Brattle Street. By 2015 the trust had owned some of these properties for almost a century and had long managed them for a steady income from a carefully curated group of tenants.

The sale of the Abbot Building and its two abutting properties in 2015 for the unprecedented sum of \$85 million triggered widespread anxiety about the future of the Square. The value of these properties (and consequently their rents) had been artificially depressed for many years because they had been managed for steady income rather than capital gains. Although the physical character of any new development could be constrained by the conservation district and the zoning code, the sale generated widespread concern among tenants and the broader community of stakeholders.

Beginning in the fall of 2016 the Historical Commission held five public hearings and heard 25 hours of public testimony about the proposed development of the three-building site. In May 2017 the Commission approved a Certificate of Appropriateness for a project that involved restoration of the Abbot Building and 18 Brattle Street and replacement of the former Corcoran's store with a new structure. The Planning Board held further hearings, and in the spring of 2018 granted the project a Special Permit.



Abbot Building, stages of CHC design review from October 2016 (adding a glass box above Corcoran's/Urban Outfitters) to May 2017 (new construction and restoration of the Abbot Building and 18 Brattle Street). PCA Architects.

The Abbot Building hearings raised issues of the appropriateness of the proposed demolition, the design of the new building, and the details of the restoration. These were fully within the scope of the Commission's authority, but other matters of grave concern to the public were not. These included protection for existing tenants; the desirability of small, locally-owned retailers over chain stores, large or small; and an aversion to certain types of tenants, such as banks and offices, that often occupy space designed for retail stores. In the course of these hearings the Historical Commission agreed to initiate the current study of the jurisdiction, goals, and guidelines of the District.

More development projects of an unprecedented scale are in discussion or anticipated. The demolition of the Harvard Square Theater was proposed in September 2018; the replacement mixed-use building would incorporate an innovative façade with the potential to display moving images with embedded LED lights, a feature that is not clearly within the jurisdiction of the District. The Dow-Stearns properties at 1-8 Brattle Street and 17-41 Brattle Street, comprising 55,000 square feet of mostly ground-floor retail space, changed hands for \$105 million in December 2017. The one-story buildings at 17-41 have a significant volume of unused FAR, the development of which will profoundly affect the future of Brattle Square. Also, Harvard University's Church Street parking lot has significant development potential. See the subdistrict section below for a discussion of these projects.

### C. Additions

Significant additions have been relatively rare in the District. In 2000, during the study period, the Commission approved the addition of two stories to the former Quincy Square Garage at 1230

Massachusetts Avenue (1907). The highly significant Cox-Hicks house at 98 Winthrop Street (ca. 1806) had long presented a difficult challenge for preservationists because it was no longer suitable for residential occupancy and could not be easily adapted for other uses. In 2001 a new owner developed a plan to convert it to a restaurant and link it via a bridge to his adjacent restaurant, Charlie's Kitchen at 10 Eliot Street. After lengthy negotiations, the Commission approved an adaptive reuse project that involved razing several additions and constructing a new dining room on a cantilevered foundation to minimize the impact on the adjoining 18<sup>th</sup> century retaining wall. The original house was then restored inside and out.



1230 Massachusetts Avenue (1907, with 2000 two-story addition; 98 Winthrop Street (1806, with 2001 addition and bridge)

In 2012-2014 the Commission approved rooftop additions at 57 J.F. Kennedy Street and 14-16 Eliot Street. 57 JFK (1974) was a two-story enclosed mall and 16-18 Eliot (1993) was a two-story commercial building designed as a placeholder after the former building was destroyed by a fire in 1990 (see photo below). Preservation of the original structures not being an issue, the Commission focused in the former case on the structure's proximity to Winthrop Park and eventually



57 JFK Street and 16 Eliot Street additions, both approved 2014

approved a design that stepped back from Winthrop Street to minimize shadows; this project is currently under construction. At 16-18 Eliot Street the additional height was controversial and members of the public criticized the contemporary design of colored synthetic panels as inappropriate for the traditional context of its surroundings. The Commission granted the project a Certificate of Appropriateness in 2014, but work had not commenced as of March 2019 and the permits have now lapsed.





## II. Deliberations of the 2017-18 Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee

The Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee was appointed by the City Manager in August 2017 and began meeting in October. The composition of the committee was limited by ordinance to five members and three alternates, all but one of whom had to be residents and/or property owners in the district, plus one member or alternate of the Cambridge Historical Commission. City Manager Louis DePasquale was careful to appoint a diverse group of individuals who would bring varied points of view to the table. The strict requirements for membership prevented the appointment of several otherwise-qualified citizens, but all of those who expressed interest in appointment were invited to attend the meetings and participate in the discussions.

All meetings were advertised in advance and all were open to the public. Attendance averaged about 15 participants, including appointed members of the study committee, individuals who were interviewed but not appointed, and interested members of the public. Everyone in attendance sat at the same table and participated in the discussion equally. CHC Executive Director Charles Sullivan moderated the meetings and Preservation Planner Sarah Burks took minutes.

Attendees discussed the events that led to the establishment of the district in 2000 and the record of its operations and effectiveness. Representatives of the Community Development Department described zoning and sign regulations. Focusing on the *Final Report of the Cambridge Historical Commission Regarding the Proposed Harvard Square Conservation District*, the committee held detailed discussions about the goals, secondary goals, and guidelines of the District; the application of those goals and guidelines to matters of demolition, new construction, and alterations. The evolving character of the subdistricts was also discussed.

With some lapses, monthly meetings continued through the Spring of 2019. Decisions about the direction of the study and the language of the revised guidelines to this point were reached by consensus; no votes were necessary to advance the agenda of the committee.

In May 2019 CHC staff submitted this Draft Preliminary Report of the 2017-19 Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee for consideration by the group. When discussions conclude the staff will advertise a public hearing at which the appointed members will hear testimony and decide how to proceed. If the members vote to approve the Preliminary Report it will be transmitted to the Cambridge Historical Commission, which will hold its own hearing. The Commission can send the report back to the committee for revisions or send it to the City Council with their endorsement; a copy is also sent to the Planning Board. The Council can adopt amendments to the Order establishing the district by a simple majority; amendments to Ch. 2.78 of the City Code, if any, will require a hearing before the Ordinance Committee and a two-thirds vote of the Council. Amendments to the zoning code, if any, must be reviewed by the Planning Board and must also receive a two-thirds vote of the Council.



### III. Amended Statement of Goals and Secondary Goals

The goals statement developed by the original Harvard Square Conservation District Study and incorporated in the 2000 Order is the foundational document of the District. The goals and the accompanying secondary goals are meant to inform decision-making of the Cambridge Historical Commission as it administers the district and should be cited in any motion to accept or deny an application for Certificates of Appropriateness, Non-applicability, or Hardship.

The amended goals statement maintains the structure of the original while clarifying some of the language. New language supports a) commercial urban experiences; b) creative signage, below-grade commercial spaces, and preservation of storefronts; c) residential development; d) transportation and pedestrian safety; and e) energy conservation. One new goal refers to the regulation of architectural lighting. Major changes are discussed below.

- a. Commercial urban experiences (introductory statement). The Study Committee debated the desirability of expressing support for locally-owned businesses, but there was no consensus on how or whether this could be accomplished. Some businesses are unique enterprises owned and operated by Cambridge residents; others may be locally-owned franchises of regional or national firms. All contribute to the vibrant commercial environment of the Square.

The Committee also discussed the proliferation of banks and offices in former retail spaces. It was recognized that this was a function of market demand, as the retail sector weakens relative to other sectors, and that matters of use were beyond the purview of the Conservation District. These issues could be addressed through amendments to the zoning code.

The introductory statement should be amended to read as follows:

The Goal of the District and of this Order is to protect the Harvard Square Conservation District's distinctive physical and experiential characteristics and to enhance the livability and vitality of the District. The Historical Commission should seek to enhance the unique physical environment and visual form of the District; preserve its architecturally and historically significant structures and their settings; encourage creative design that contributes to the richness of its environment; mitigate character-diminishing impacts of new development; and discourage homogeneity by encouraging diversity of development and open space patterns and building scales and ages. The District must remain a pedestrian-friendly, accessible, human-scale, mixed-use environment that supports dynamic urban experiences, complements nearby neighborhoods, and respects the history and traditions of its location.

- b. Creative signage; below-grade commercial spaces; preservation of storefronts. (Goal #2)  
Creative signage has historically been an important component of Harvard Square's exciting commercial environment. The zoning code authorizes the Historical Commission to grant Certificates of Appropriateness for signs that do not conform to certain aspects of the sign code and has done so on numerous occasions.

Below-grade commercial spaces can accommodate intensive non-retail activities that support the commercial vitality of the commercial core in the Harvard Square and Brattle

Square subdistricts.

It cannot be presumed that the strong demand for storefront locations will continue. Retail enterprises face severe challenges nationwide, and it is possible that the retail sector in Harvard Square will contract. Many buildings in the District were designed for ground floor retail, and for reasons of historic preservation and conservation of the resource that they represent repurposed storefronts should be altered in a way that preserves their architectural fabric and that is reversible. If appropriate, disfiguring storefront additions could be removed, and buildings that were originally designed for non-commercial purposes could be restored to their original appearance. Retail functions required by law to be screened from public view, such as marijuana dispensaries, should be located so as to preserve a viable portion of the storefront for visible retail activity or display.

Secondary Goal #2 should be amended to read as follows:

Sustain the vitality of the commercial environment. Sustain the vitality of the commercial environment while preserving architecturally-significant or original building fabric at street level and above. Encourage the restoration of missing features where these have been documented. Except for protected storefronts, encourage creative contemporary commercial design inside the restored framework of storefront openings. Encourage creative signage. Support below grade commercial spaces, where appropriate. Regardless of use, encourage architectural solutions that preserve storefront fabric, transparency, and utility.

c. Residential development (Goal #7)

Harvard Square supports a number of residents in existing buildings. The vitality of the neighborhood would be enhanced by additional residential development in buildings that are appropriate in scale, density and appearance.

Secondary Goal #7 should be amended to read as follows:

Residential Development. Enhance the all-hours neighborhood quality of Harvard Square by supporting existing residential uses and encouraging additional residential units in mixed-use buildings

d. Transportation; pedestrian safety (Goal #9)

Increasing numbers of commuters and shoppers access Harvard Square by bicycle. Cambridge zoning now requires new development to provide generous bicycle parking; the Conservation District should support this goal.

Cambridge has adopted Vision Zero to eliminate transportation fatalities. Public sector improvements, including redesign of sidewalks, crosswalks and public plazas, should enhance pedestrian safety while preserving traditional urban materials and street furniture.

The committee discussed the separation of bicycle and automobile traffic on Brattle Street through the introduction of a two-way curbside bicycle path and flex posts. The committee

agreed that the Historical Commission should engage with the Traffic Department and the Harvard Square community to study site-specific alternatives that might provide a better solution to the problem of bicycle safety, the pedestrian experience, truck deliveries, and automobile traffic. A preferred alternative might incorporate appropriate urban design features such as landscaping, distinctive pavement treatments, and lighting.

Secondary Goal #9 should be amended to read as follows:

Transportation. Encourage creative solutions to the District's transportation issues by providing balanced accommodations for through and local traffic, cyclists, alternative transportation methods, and pedestrians. Promote smooth movement of traffic on through streets and seek creative design and management solutions for side streets where traffic volume and speeds can be regulated to give highest priority to pedestrians. Provide adequate bicycle parking throughout the District. Protect pedestrian safety and experience through careful design and placement of features such as loading docks, curb cuts, and receptacles for trash and recycling. Encourage replacement of surface parking lots with compatible new structures. Discourage provision of on-site parking for new construction.

e. Energy conservation (Goal #10).

Conservation of energy is an important community goal. New buildings should be environmentally sustainable in conformance with City goals and policies. Energy conservation upgrades to existing buildings should be approached in a manner that respects historic architectural features.

Secondary Goal #10 should be amended to read as follows:

Environmental Sustainability. Encourage environmentally sustainable development that takes into consideration the embodied energy of the existing built environment, material life cycles, passive design, energy conservation, and current standards for best energy conservation practices. Alterations to existing buildings that seek to promote energy conservation should be accomplished in a manner that respects character-defining materials and designs.

f. Architectural lighting (New Goal #11).

Urban lighting, including architectural or building façade lighting, streetscape lighting, and signage lighting impacts the quality of the 24-hour environment. Lighting goals are intended to enhance the quality of the streetscape, highlight unique architectural details, minimize light trespass, preserve dark skies, and conserve energy.

Currently architectural lighting is regulated only through the appearance of the fixtures; the quality and intensity of the light, changing light effects over time (kinetic lighting), and the architectural features to be illuminated are not regulated. Architectural lighting is widely considered to be a positive feature of some urban structures and environments, but with current technology can become objectionable through excessive brightness, motion, or inappropriate highlighting of architectural features. Standards for architectural lighting need to be

developed, and the enabling ordinance may need to be amended to establish the District's jurisdiction in this area.

The committee also discussed the effects of lighting generated inside buildings, although the Commission's jurisdiction in this area is limited by legislation limiting mandate to regulation of publicly visible exterior architectural features. In new construction, light spill from ceiling fixtures can be controlled through conditions on a Certificate of Appropriateness, but this ability does not exist with interior renovations where no commission review is allowed.

Interior illuminated signage is not subject to review by the conservation district, while interior signs more than 12" away from a display window are not subject to zoning regulation either.

The proposed new Goal #11 reads as follows:

Architectural lighting. Architectural (building façade) lighting, streetscape lighting, and signage lighting, when allowed by a Certificate of Appropriateness, should reinforce definitive characteristics of historic and contemporary architecture as well as create high quality 24-hour streetscapes. To achieve these goals, projects should minimize brightness, and light trespass, monitor light color (temperature Kelvin), and focus lighting on significant features.

In general, light temperature should **not** exceed 3000K unless special conditions require a higher or lower value.<sup>2</sup> Minimizing brightness while highlighting unique architectural details will conserve energy, reduce trespass, and enhance dark skies. To define and enhance the after-dark streetscape, consideration should be given to low-brightness building façade lighting as an alternative to brighter street lights. Any fixtures casting light visible to public view must have dimming capability. Applications for a Certificates of Appropriateness are required to include detailed descriptions of the design of any lighting visible to the public, as well as equipment specifications and rendering(s) of the proposed appearance of the illuminated structure **and the effects of illumination on adjacent structures.**

Potential candidates for illumination in the Harvard Square Conservation District include the First Parish Church, the Charles Sumner statue, the Harvard Lampoon, the Abbott Building, the William Brattle House, St. Paul Church, and 48 Brattle Street (former Design Research building).

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<sup>2</sup> Color temperature is conventionally expressed in Kelvins, using the symbol K, a unit of measure for absolute temperature. Color temperatures over **5000 K** are called "cool colors" (bluish), while lower color temperatures (2700–**3000 K**) are called "warm colors" (yellowish). In general, light temperature should exceed 3500K only in special conditions.

#### IV. Amended Guidelines for Demolition, Construction, and Alterations

Guidelines for demolition, construction and alterations were reviewed for consistency with the amended goals. **Recommended amendments to the current (2000) guidelines for demolition, new construction and alterations are shown below in red.**

The following guidelines for demolition, construction, and alterations expand upon the language of the Ordinance to provide additional guidance for administration of the Harvard Square Conservation District.

##### A. Demolition

Although the City's demolition delay ordinance does not apply in the Harvard Square Conservation District, demolition is similarly defined as "the act of pulling down, destroying, removing or razing a structure or commencing the work of total or substantial destruction with the intent of completing the same".<sup>3</sup> The Cambridge Inspectional Services Commissioner has ~~interpreted defined demolition as involving "substantial destruction" as including~~ removal of a roof ~~or one or more sides of a building, gutting the interior to the point where exterior features are impacted,~~ or ~~removal of~~ more than 25% of a structure. Work of this sort will be reviewed under the following demolition guidelines, while the removal of building components, including signs and storefronts, will be reviewed as alterations.

The purpose of reviewing demolition or moving a building within the Conservation District is to preserve significant buildings and the diversity of building ages, styles, and forms that help to define the historical character of the Square. Other benefits include the opportunity to review the significance of individual buildings in the context of specific development proposals, to consider creative re-use possibilities, and to encourage the care and maintenance of the building stock.

The Cambridge Historical Commission will issue a Certificate of Appropriateness to an applicant seeking to demolish a structure in the Conservation District if the project, including both the demolished and the replacement buildings, is determined to be "appropriate for or compatible with the preservation or protection of the . . . district."<sup>4</sup> Approval of demolition will be dependent on a finding by the Cambridge Historical Commission that a) the demolition of the structure will not adversely impact the district, subdistrict, or abutting properties in the sense described in secondary goal #1, and b) the replacement project meets the purposes of the Conservation District with respect to secondary goals #2 through #10, where these are applicable. **Projects that involve relocation must provide a location that preserves the character and context of the building.**

The history of Harvard Square suggests some specific criteria that may be applied to demolition proposals. Buildings that are over fifty years old, that are contributing structures in the Harvard Square National Register District, or that are part of the Square's dwindling inventory of wood-frame structures, are generally valued for their contribution to the character of the Square, and it

<sup>3</sup> City Code, section 2.78.080.F. Demolition is categorized in Chapter 40C as an "alteration;" moving a building categorized as "construction."

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 40C, Section 10a. This language is incorporated by reference in the Neighborhood Conservation District and Landmark Ordinance, Ch. 2.78.170.



may be presumed that preservation will be strongly preferred to demolition (secondary goal #4).<sup>5</sup> However, all such applications will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and the Cambridge Historical Commission will not necessarily protect all such structures from demolition.

## B. Construction

Creative design solutions to development and renovation requirements will be encouraged to ensure that the unique resources and character of Harvard Square are protected.<sup>6</sup> ~~Coordination with the Harvard Square Advisory Committee's large project review will be essential.~~

### 1. New Construction/Additions to Existing Buildings

Harvard Square is a kaleidoscopic urban environment. The Cambridge Historical Commission will recognize the continuing evolution of architectural design and the necessity of keeping the Square fresh, vibrant, and economically viable. Contemporary design expression will be encouraged in new construction (secondary goal #3).<sup>7</sup>

~~Proponents of projects requiring special permits on sites with little apparent impact on historic resources will be encouraged to initiate their public review process with the Harvard Square Advisory Committee. To the extent feasible, the Cambridge Historical Commission will seek to hold joint meetings with the Advisory Committee on projects that fall within both jurisdictions.~~ The existence of parallel reviews by the Historical Commission and the Advisory Committee is seen as a productive application of both zoning and historic preservation disciplines in a complex urban environment; in the event of conflict, however, conservation district protection, which requires Cambridge Historical Commission approval of building permits, will prevail. Because the specific circumstances of every development project cannot be predicted, it is not possible to specify an exact regulatory protocol governing the sharing of reviews between the Historical Commission and the Advisory Committee. The inherent logic of the project review process will guide the proponent.

The Cambridge Historical Commission will begin its review of a new construction project or addition with an analysis of the historic significance and architectural value of the premises and its immediate surroundings. New construction that accommodates older structures on or adjacent to the site will be encouraged. Construction that incorporates significant major portions of older structures may be acceptable; however, use of isolated historic architectural elements will be discouraged. Demolition involving retention of facades to allow replacement of historic structures with new construction (mis-named "facadectomies") will be discouraged unless the supporting historic fabric is found to be unsalvageable. Unless the context dictates otherwise, new buildings should be built out to the property line, respecting the vitality of the sidewalk and plaza spaces.

<sup>5</sup> "Build on and sustain the diversity of the existing building form, scale and material. Preserve and encourage flowers, green yards and courtyards and small, free-standing and wood-frame buildings where that character prevails. Encourage streetwall buildings where that character has been set."

<sup>6</sup> Secondary goals #2, #3, #6, #9, #10.

<sup>7</sup> "Support creative, contemporary design for new construction that complements and contributes to its immediate neighbors and the character of Harvard Square. Recognize and respect creativity of design during the review process and mitigate the functional impacts of development on adjacent areas."

In reviewing new construction or additions to existing buildings, the Commission "shall consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the structure both in relation to the land area upon which the structure is situated and to structures in the vicinity."<sup>8</sup> Review of new buildings will be guided by considerations such as the appropriateness of the structure's height, scale, mass, proportions, orientation, and lot coverage; the vertical and horizontal emphasis, rhythm of openings, transparency, texture, and materials of the publicly-visible facades; sunlight and shadow effects; relationship to public open space; and landscaping.

Review of new buildings and additions will be further guided by the subdistrict goals regarding the relationship of a proposed building to the site and to other buildings and structures in the vicinity. Future developments should respect the Square's historical tradition of narrow storefronts and multiple retail entrances.

Under the City Code, the Historical Commission acting as a neighborhood conservation district commission "may in appropriate cases impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by the applicable provision of the zoning ordinance."<sup>9</sup> Implementing such a measure could result in a reduction of the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) allowed by zoning. The appropriate circumstances for imposing dimensional and set-back reductions could include a wide disparity of scale and density between the proposed project and its surroundings, or a situation in which the proposed project would destroy or diminish the historical resources of the site.

## 2. Alterations to Existing Buildings

Alterations to exterior architectural features visible from a public way will be subject to binding review by the Cambridge Historical Commission, guided by secondary goals #1, #2, #4, and 11. Storefronts will be treated more flexibly than building facades or upper stories. The goals of the district favor retention and repair, rather than replacement, of original or significant exterior fabric.

While irreversible changes are subject to review and approval of the Cambridge Historical Commission, certain other visible exterior alterations are reviewed by the staff or exempted from review entirely. Chapter 2.78, Article III identifies seven other categories of construction and alterations that may be exempted from review.<sup>10</sup> The following features are exempt from review and do not trigger an application process:

- Storm doors and storm windows (subject to specific design guidelines).
- Signs that conform to the Cambridge sign code as amended in the Harvard Square Historic Overlay District.

The Historical Commission has adopted procedures delegating review and approval of some reversible alterations which have the potential to adversely affect historic fabric to the staff. A Certificate of Nonapplicability will be issued by the staff if Conservation District guidelines are followed.

<sup>8</sup> Ch. 2.78.220.A.

<sup>9</sup> Ch. 2.78.220.A.

<sup>10</sup> Ch. 2.78.190.B. Exterior color is categorically excluded from review in neighborhood conservation districts.

These categories will include:

- Ordinary repairs or maintenance using similar materials and construction details to those existing.
- Reconstruction replicating the exterior design of a building, structure, or exterior architectural feature damaged or destroyed by fire, storm, or other disaster, provided such reconstruction is begun within one year thereafter and carried forward with due diligence.<sup>11</sup>
- Roof repairs and HVAC equipment not visible from a public way.
- Window replacement in conformity with guidelines to be adopted by the Commission after public hearing.

Applications for alterations outside of these categories are considered by the Commission at a public hearing.

a. Interior Work and Alterations Not Visible from a Public Way

Interior arrangements and alterations to architectural features not visible from any public way are exempt from review in a-neighborhood conservation districts and a Certificate of Nonapplicability for such work will be issued by Commission staff without delay.

b. Storefronts

The Cambridge Historical Commission recognizes that storefronts have significant impact on the character of a given subdistrict. To that end the Commission has created guidelines to ensure that storefronts complement the surrounding neighborhood while still allowing business owners to express their individuality and promote their goods and services.

Storefronts are a source of Harvard Square's continuing vitality, and the Cambridge Historical Commission seeks to encourage creativity in this regard (secondary goal #2).<sup>12</sup> Most storefronts are regarded as impermanent and the Historical Commission looks favorably on creative alterations that meet the particular needs of the retailer or office tenant, as long as the original structure and finishes are maintained or recovered (where they still exist). Alterations to upper stories are regarded as having the potential for significant and permanent adverse effects and will be reviewed accordingly. Reversible changes to storefronts will not be discouraged if they do not obscure or damage the structure or any original architectural features. Opaque glass will not be allowed in display windows unless specifically permitted.

<sup>11</sup> Such replacement work will still be subject to review of the staff and issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness.

<sup>12</sup> "Help sustain the vitality of the commercial environment by supporting creative, contemporary design for storefront alterations and additions, while preserving architecturally significant or original building fabric and character."

The Cambridge Historical Commission has adopted procedures delegating review and approval of two categories of storefront alterations to the staff. Applications for storefront alterations that do not meet these criteria are considered by the Commission at a public hearing. A Certificate of Nonapplicability will be issued by the staff for:

- Alterations that do not alter, enclose, or extend further than the decorative or structural framework of the building or retail space originally intended to surround a storefront. The framework consists of such elements as piers, columns, cornerboards, quoins, cornices and similar structural or decorative features.
- Storefront alterations that do not obscure, remove, relocate, or replace historic or original exterior architectural features. Exterior architectural features may include, but are not limited to, such features as brackets, window and door casings, fascia, hoods, bays, and window sash.

CHC staff will encourage glazing divisions in new storefronts to be delineated by mullions that reflect the rhythm of openings in the upper floors. Glazing should intersect, not cover, structural elements.

A few storefronts in the Square retain their original design or have a subsequent design that is significant in terms of architectural or historical significance. The following storefronts and/or the buildings in which they are located are specifically designated in the Order as requiring Commission rather than staff approval of alterations:

- 1304 Massachusetts Avenue (Gnomon Copy) (Fig. 9)
- 1316 Massachusetts Avenue (Leavitt & Pierce)
- 1320-22 Massachusetts Avenue (J. August)
- 30-30A Plympton Street (Bow Street Flowers)

Alterations to these storefronts, including installation or alteration of signs, requires a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Commission.<sup>13</sup> Additional significant storefronts may be identified in the future, and the Cambridge Historical Commission may recommend to the City Council that they be added to the protected list.

It cannot be presumed that the strong demand for storefront locations will continue. Retail enterprises face severe challenges nationwide, and it is possible that the retail sector in Harvard Square will contract. Many buildings in the District were designed or adapted for ground floor retail, and for reasons of historic preservation and conservation of the resource that they represent repurposed storefronts should be altered in a way that preserves their transparency and architectural fabric and that is reversible.

### c. Windows

Windows are critical to maintaining the characteristic appearance of significant buildings.

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix for a description and additional photographs of these storefronts.

Replacement of wood windows with inappropriate modern units can destroy the traditional appearance of a building. The Commission has established design guidelines for window alterations governing materials, muntin patterns, panning, and reflectivity.

Modern replacement windows are available that match the originals in appearance while offering significant energy efficiency. The Commission will, in most cases, allow window replacement as long as design guidelines are met. Applications to replace windows that are ornamental in design or that contain significant original sash will require review by the Commission.

Review and approval of certain window alterations may be delegated to the staff. For example, applications for window alterations that do not change the size of the opening, configuration of the muntins, material, or transparency will receive a Certificate of Nonapplicability in the same manner as the exempted storefront alterations.

#### d. Masonry

Harvard Square contains many outstanding examples of brick masonry construction. Because the appearance of masonry can be irreversibly altered by improper pointing or cleaning, Cambridge Historical Commission approval will be necessary for these operations. Review will include approval of specifications for cleaning, cutting joints, mortar composition, and joint profiles. Replacement masonry units will be reviewed for color, size, and finish. Painting of masonry (brick, stone, or concrete) surfaces without a Certificate of Appropriateness will be prohibited.

#### e. Signs

Signs in Harvard Square should contribute to the commercial vitality of the area. Uniformity of signs and conformance to conjectural "historic" designs will ~~not be encouraged~~ discouraged. However, signs should not obscure any original architectural features of the structure on which they are located. Signs should be fastened to structures in the least destructive way possible.<sup>14</sup>

The Cambridge Historical Commission has binding jurisdiction over size, materials, dimensions, illumination, and appearance of new or altered signs.<sup>15</sup> However, signs that conform to the provisions of the zoning code regarding the total area of signs on each building and the height at which signs can be placed are exempt from review. Decorative banners and temporary signs are prohibited unless specifically approved "subject to such conditions as to duration of use, dimension, location, lighting, removal and similar matters as the commission may reasonably specify."<sup>16</sup>

#### f. Architectural lighting.

Urban lighting, including architectural or building façade lighting, streetscape lighting, and signage

<sup>14</sup> Sandwich board signs are subject to permitting by the Department of Public Works when placed on a sidewalk and will not be subject to Historic District review.

<sup>15</sup> Content, color, and graphics used on signs - the commercial message - will be exempt from review in the Historic District.

<sup>16</sup> Chapter 2.78.190.A.7.

lighting, impacts the quality of the 24-hour environment. Lighting can be a positive feature in some urban environments, but with current technology can become objectionable through excessive brightness, motion, or inappropriate highlighting or architectural features.

Lighting goals are intended to enhance the quality of the streetscape, highlight unique architectural details, minimize light trespass, preserve dark skies, and conserve energy. Currently architectural lighting is regulated only through the appearance of the fixtures; the quality and intensity of the light, changing light effects over time, and the architectural features to be illuminated are not regulated.

Architectural (building façade) lighting, streetscape lighting, and signage lighting, when allowed by a Certificate of Appropriateness, should reinforce definitive characteristics of historic and contemporary architecture as well as create high-quality 24-hour streetscapes. To achieve these goals, projects should minimize brightness and light trespass, monitor color temperature, and focus lighting on significant features.<sup>17</sup> Minimizing brightness while highlighting unique architectural details will conserve energy, reduce trespass, and enhance dark skies. To define and enhance the after-dark streetscape, consideration should be given to low-brightness building façade lighting as an alternative to brighter street lights.

### C. Public Spaces

Municipal and utility company modifications to sidewalks, streets, and street furniture are subject to the jurisdiction of the Cambridge Historical Commission. Review will be undertaken with consideration to the appropriateness of such materials and structures as paving and curbing, light standards, traffic and parking structures and signs, and utility structures visible at or above grade from any public way. In practice the Commission has declined to address striping and temporary barriers such as flex posts for bicycle paths.

Proposals for public art installations, whether private donations or public projects, will be referred to the Cambridge Public Art Commission for a recommendation in accordance with established city policies.<sup>18</sup> For the purposes of conservation district review, three-dimensional artworks will be considered to be structures, and murals will be considered to be signs if they contain an explicit message. In general, such installations must also be found to be appropriate for their setting and for the district as a whole.

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<sup>17</sup> Color temperature is conventionally expressed in Kelvins, using the symbol K, a unit of measure for absolute temperature. Color temperatures over 5000 K are called "cool colors" (bluish), while lower color temperatures (2700–3000 K) are called "warm colors" (yellowish). In general, light temperature should exceed 3500K only in special conditions.

<sup>18</sup> See "City of Cambridge Art Gifts and Donations Policy", adopted May 17, 1999, and Chapter 2.114 of the City Code, "Public Development Arts Projects."



## V. Amended Description and Guidelines for Subdistricts

The 1986 Development Guidelines divided the Harvard Square Overlay District into six subdistricts based on architectural characteristics, historical development patterns, and modern usage trends. Subdistrict descriptions and goals were included in the 2000 Report as part of the guidelines for the Harvard Square conservation district and for continued administration of the Overlay District. The 2019 Study Committee supported a renewed emphasis on reviewing applications for alterations, demolition, and new construction in the context of the following restated subdistrict goals

Because Harvard Square is such a diverse environment, defining the context of subdistricts is important both in developing long-range planning goals and in making determinations of appropriateness for alterations to the physical environment. This study supports a finer division of the district into seven subdistricts:

- A. Harvard Square/Massachusetts Avenue
- B. Bow Street and Arrow Street/Putnam Square
- C. The Gold Coast
- D. Winthrop Square/JFK Street
- E. Eliot Square/Mt. Auburn Street
- F. Brattle Square
- G. Church Street

The subdistricts do not have precise boundaries, as the characteristics of neighboring subdistricts tend to overlap. In considering some sites, the guidelines for more than one subdistrict should be considered together and weighed according to the individual needs of the site.

A description of the unique qualities of each subdistrict and specific goals for each follows. The description is organized with a historical and physical description and is followed by a focused discussion on the treatment of public spaces and private sites. A site map accompanies each description. Specific goals for each subdistrict have been identified to help boards and applicants apply the general goals and guidelines of the larger district to the special needs and circumstances of a particular site. Revisions to this document include updating the discussions of private development sites, summarizing recent discussions for improvements of public spaces, expanding the discussion of site and architectural history, and reinforcing the recommendations for preservation of significant structures.



## Subdistrict A: Harvard Square/Massachusetts Avenue



Harvard Square subdistrict

Google Maps ©2019

### Description



Boundaries of the Conservation District (blue) and the Overlay District (red)

This subdistrict includes Harvard Square proper and the south side of Massachusetts Avenue as far as Quincy Square. The area marks the intersection of town and gown, with Harvard Yard on the north side of Massachusetts Avenue and mixed-use commercial, office, and residential structures on the south side. In the early years of settlement, the area was an open space north of the grid-patterned town, south of the Burial Ground, and adjacent to Harvard Yard. In the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century civic buildings appeared on the Square. For over 200 years, development in Harvard Square proper has been characterized by mixed uses. Residences, college buildings, meeting-houses, courthouses, and a market building were constructed around the Square in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Massachusetts Avenue from Dunster Street to Quincy Square was developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with mixed-use private dormitories and student clubs and continues to serve students with retail stores and services. The MBTA subway station reflects Harvard Square's long history as a transportation hub.



Harvard Square, with the Abbot Building (1909, center)

Three- to five-story structures built out to the sidewalk predominate on the south and west sides of Massachusetts Avenue at Harvard Square. These include the Cambridge Savings Bank, the Read Block, the Abbot Building, 1-8 Brattle Street, the Harvard Cooperative Society, College House, and the Harvard Square Kiosk. Of these, the Abbot Building (1909) pioneered the Georgian Revival Style that was recommended in 1913 by the Harvard Square Business Association as appropriate for a collegiate business center. Certain mid-twentieth-century structures, such as Holyoke Center and the Fleet Bank (Harvard Trust Company) facade, have attained their own significance. The mixed-use dormitories and clubs further east on Massachusetts Avenue are of great architectural and historic significance. The smaller scale buildings on the side streets down to Mt. Auburn Street vary in quality and significance but provide a valuable context for the grander architecture on the avenue and on the Gold Coast. Retention of the small retail storefronts that add vitality to the streetscape should be a high priority, along with returning bank storefronts to retail use.



Harvard Cooperative Society (1924), former Harvard Trust Co. (1956), College House (1832-74)

## Public Spaces

Public spaces in this area include the plaza around the Kiosk and the Harvard Station headhouse, Forbes Plaza at the Smith Campus Center, and sidewalks in various states of repair. Harvard Yard, a semi-public space, abuts the conservation district but is under the jurisdiction of the Old Cambridge Historic District.

The 2000 Study Committee Report recommended that “all publicly-accessible open spaces on private and public properties should be preserved. The public space in the center of Harvard Square should be well maintained for the general enjoyment and safety of its pedestrian users. The materials and design of the public space at the center of the Square can be used as a reference when designing future improvements to open spaces in the district.”



Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza

The plaza around the kiosk was designed by the MBTA in 1979-80 and completed in 1984. The design vocabulary – wire cut brick sidewalks, granite feature strips and bollards, and Washington-style light fixtures – was carried over to the west side of the Square and down Brattle and Eliot streets to Bennett Street. The sidewalks from Church Street to Bennett Street were rebuilt with clay pavers for enhanced accessibility about 2010. Forbes Plaza was reconstructed in 2017-18 pursuant to a Certificate of Appropriateness. The plaza around the headhouse and the kiosk itself are in the later stages of a redesign to provide greater public access to these public assets.

Private Sites



The Fairfax (1886), Porcellian Club 1890), and Hilliard’s Bookstore (1827)

As evidenced by the Read Block development (1997) and the recently-approved redevelopment of the Abbot Building, substantial development potential still exists in the heart of the Square and along Massachusetts Avenue. Rehabilitation of existing structures should be the highest priority; there are no “soft” sites in the subdistrict where demolition and new construction could be considered. The possibility of rooftop additions to existing buildings seems unlikely, but any such proposals should be handled with great care to preserve the massing of existing buildings. Even some modest buildings in the subdistrict exhibit architectural interest and should be treated with respect when considering alterations.



8 Holyoke Street (1927)

Historical photographs can often be valuable references for facade restoration or rehabilitation projects. The collections of the Historical Commission are a good starting point for research. The rehabilitation of the Read Block included restoration of the 1896 facade, renovation of the forward portions of the original structures, and construction of a new 3-story structure behind them. The renovated space accommodates both retail and office uses.



The Read Block, 1380-92 Massachusetts Avenue and 2-14 Kennedy Street



Storefronts restored by removal of later accretions, 1300-1310 Massachusetts Avenue

Retention of the small-scale retail environment with narrow storefronts and interesting signs should be encouraged in this subdistrict. Careful attention should be paid to materials, storefront design, and signage. The 1907 Art Nouveau storefront at 1304 Massachusetts Avenue by Coolidge & Carlson is an example of exceptional storefront design. The unique lines, transparency, and high-quality materials of this storefront can be used as an example of a creative, contemporary approach to retail design in the district. Not every new storefront design in the Square can or should aim to be this unique, but some demonstrate the timelessness of an exceptional design. Removal of incompatible materials and restoration of original elements, as at 1300-1310 Massachusetts Avenue, can reinforce traditional character while supporting commercial vitality.



Coes & Young storefront, 1304 Massachusetts Avenue (1907, Coolidge & Carlson, architects).

## Subdistrict B: Bow Street and Arrow Street/Putnam Square



Bow and Arrow Streets/Putnam Square Subdistrict

Google Maps ©2019

### Description

This subdistrict includes properties on Bow Street and Arrow Street and along the converging lines of Massachusetts Avenue and Mount Auburn Street from Quincy Square to Remington Street and the edge of Putnam Square. Putnam Square proper and the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Mount Auburn Street are in the Harvard Square Overlay District but are not within the boundaries of the Harvard Square Conservation District.

The subdistrict is characterized by a dizzying variety of building types, styles, and functions. St. Paul's and Old Cambridge Baptist churches overlook apartment buildings, tiny residences, and a massive former manufacturing facility, the former Reversible Collar factory. Wood-frame homes abut modern office buildings. Along Massachusetts Avenue most buildings include retail on the ground floor, but there are currently no retail uses along Mt. Auburn Street.



Boundaries of the Conservation District (blue) and the Overlay District (red)



Bow and Arrow Streets/Putnam Square Subdistrict

Google Maps ©2019

The tallest structures in this subdistrict are the campanile of St. Paul's Catholic Church, the spire of the Old Cambridge Baptist Church (in the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District), and the residential tower at 1105 Massachusetts Avenue. The locations of these towers correspond with the triangular boundaries of the subdistrict. The careful siting of the Old Cambridge Baptist Church at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Harvard Street allows the spire to be seen from several viewpoints, making it a prominent landmark in historic and contemporary photographs. The transition from Putnam Square to the residential scale of the Kerry Corner/Riverside neighborhood is evident along Mount Auburn Street.

Historically, this area included small residences, light industry, and churches. Though industries are no longer active, the former Reversible Collar factory at 8-20 Arrow Street and 21-27 Mount Auburn Street is still a dynamic structure that was adaptively re-used for retail and office space in the late 1960s, renovated through the federal tax act program in the mid-1980s, and restored again in the mid-2000s. The large mixed-use buildings in Putnam Square went up mostly in the mid-1970s, replacing one-story storefronts. Construction of the Sundance Residences at 1075 Massachusetts Avenue in 2011 (in the Overlay District, but not in the Conservation District) completed the modern build-out of Putnam Square.



## Public Spaces

The largest public space in this subdistrict is Quincy Square, which was redesigned and landscaped in 1997. The project's purpose was to enhance the area for pedestrians while maintaining vehicular access. This project was a particularly successful collaboration between a landscape architect (The Halvorson Company) and an artist (David Phillips). The ad-hoc Quincy Square Design Review Committee reviewed the design, in which plantings of trees, shrubs, perennials, ground covers, and grasses along with stone walls, boulders and sculptures replaced what had been a wide-open area of bare pavement. The design remains functional and attractive and constitutes a model for other projects to emulate.



Quincy Square

Google Maps ©2019

Putnam Square, a very busy traffic intersection, did not contain many amenities for pedestrians until 1998. The small, minimally-landscaped islands calm traffic and provide a pedestrian refuge but are not as lushly landscaped as Quincy Square. The publicly-owned gore at the corner of Arrow Street and Massachusetts Avenue was landscaped by the city in 1991 after an unsuccessful attempt by an abutting restaurant to privatize it. It receives minimal maintenance and represents an opportunity for enhancement.

Sidewalks throughout the subdistrict are a mixture of traditional brick and concrete, with accessible curb cuts patched in. Future sidewalk replacements should incorporate clay pavers for accessibility.

## Private Sites

The major development sites identified in the 1986 guidelines have since been developed. The Inn at Harvard replaced a former filling station in 1990 and an office building at Zero Arrow Street went up on an open site in 2005. The significant 1907 concrete garage at 1230 Massachusetts Avenue was redeveloped with two new stories above a restored original façade in 2002. An unanticipated development occurred in 2007 with the construction of the Veritas Hotel at 1131 Massachusetts Avenue. The design for this project, which was substantially a replica of an 1869 Mansard altered in 1893, conformed to few district guidelines, although it does support the eclectic nature of the subdistrict.



Veritas Hotel, 1131 Massachusetts Avenue

The Old Cambridge Baptist Church spire and St. Paul's bell tower are important landmarks with sightlines that should be respected by any new development. The development potential at St. Paul's Church was largely met in the late 1980s, with the construction of the new choir school.

Several clusters of low-rise frame and brick buildings represent opportunities for site accumulation and redevelopment that threaten the character of the subdistrict. Near the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Bow Street a group of small-scale frame and brick buildings represents a 140-year span of residential and commercial building construction in Harvard Square. The earliest buildings



12 Bow Street and 1208 Mass. Ave.

Google Maps

in the cluster, 12 Bow Street (ca. 1820) and 1208 Massachusetts Avenue (1842), are examples of residential buildings that were later converted to commercial uses. Other clusters occur at the intersection of Arrow Street and Massachusetts Avenue (two buildings) and at 1112-1134 Massachusetts Avenue (six buildings). Some buildings in the latter group have little or no significance, but any replacements should be carefully evaluated for compatibility with the eclectic character of the subdistrict. Here and elsewhere, some wood frame buildings have been covered with artificial siding, but their original character is easily recoverable.



1156-1174 Massachusetts Avenue



1112-1134 Massachusetts Avenue

Denser development should be confined to Putnam Square. The industrial character of the Reversible Collar complex should be protected. The quiet, residential character along Mount Auburn Street should be maintained, and the wood-frame structures there should be preserved. Development or adaptive re-use proposals should be sensitive to the fact that a transition from commercial to residential uses occurs in this subdistrict.



Reversible Collar complex, Arrow Street



12-30 Mt. Auburn Street

### Subdistrict C: The Gold Coast



The Gold Coast viewed from the south

Cambridge GIS, 2014



The Gold Coast viewed from the north

Cambridge GIS, 2014

### Description

The Gold Coast subdistrict includes Mount Auburn Street from Bow and DeWolfe streets west to Winthrop Park and the side streets north toward Massachusetts Avenue and south toward the River houses. This area was initially developed in the 1830s-60s as a residential neighborhood and reflects to a significant degree the layering of historical development trends in Harvard Square. The neighborhood also constitutes an important buffer between the commercial activity along Massachusetts Avenue and the institutional precinct of the River Houses.



Boundaries of the Conservation District (blue) and the Overlay District (red)

The Gold Coast designation reflects the private luxury dormitories and undergraduate clubs that were constructed during the last quarter of the nineteenth century for affluent undergraduates. Most of the private dormitories were acquired by Harvard University in the 1920s and incorporated into Adams House; others were converted to apartments. Some clubs were designed to accommodate commercial activities or were later altered for this purpose.



Phoenix-S.K. Club, 72 Mt. Auburn Street; Iroquois Club, 74 Mt. Auburn; Spee Club, 76 Mt. Auburn; Kappa Gamma Chi, 78 Mt. Auburn; Signet Society, 46 Dunster Street; and D.U. Club, 45 Dunster. Photo 1973.

Before the district was established many of the Harvard clubs donated preservation easements to the City, granting review of alterations to the Historical Commission.<sup>19</sup> Several former club buildings now belong to the university. Commercial activities are a mixture of restaurants and service establishments, but lack the intensity of Harvard or Brattle squares or JFK Street. A significant number of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century houses are interspersed between the dormitories, clubs, and institutional buildings, but almost all have been repurposed for other uses.

### Public Spaces

The triangular David Halberstam Park at the intersection of Mt. Auburn and Bow Streets was created in the early 2000s by enclosing a previously undifferentiated area of pavement in front of the Harvard Lampoon. Further alterations to the landscape and transportation plan should respect the historic street pattern. Street trees, which would be an important enhancement in this dense subdistrict, cannot be maintained in the vicinity of the Lampoon building. The adjacent open lot on Mt. Auburn Street in front of Lowell House owned by Harvard University provides the only expanse of green in the subdistrict.

Private courtyards in the Gold Coast subdistrict, though not open to the public, provide a welcome relief to the otherwise dense area. Property owners should be encouraged to preserve these spaces and upgrade their paving and landscaping materials. Free passage into the courtyard in front of the Apthorp House should be maintained so that this historically-important structure remains visible to the public.

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<sup>19</sup> Clubs are assessed as commercial enterprises, leading to ruinous valuations until the area was downzoned in the late 1990s. The restrictions remain in effect. The level of regulation in these instances follows the strictest measure.



Aphthorp House (1760), in the Randolph Hall courtyard.

### Private Sites

Though buildings in the Gold Coast are predominantly of masonry construction, several significant examples of wood frame construction remain. Among the most vulnerable may be 20 and 22 Holyoke Street; the Greek Revival house (once a student club, now offices) at 43-45 Mount Auburn Street; a long-unoccupied Greek Revival at 41 Winthrop Street and an adjoining vacant lot owned



43-45 Mt. Auburn St. (1846, addition 1928). 45-49 Mt. Auburn (1971, 1926) at left

by Harvard University; and a trio of houses at 69 and 71-77 Dunster Street and 17 South Street, also owned by the university. These and other wood-frame houses contribute greatly to the rich character of the subdistrict, and their preservation should be given a high priority. Alterations to the club buildings on the south side of Mount Auburn Street to enable commercial development should continue to be carefully regulated, and when commercial uses are abandoned (as at 76 Mt. Auburn Street in 2019) the structures should be restored to their original appearance. Restoration and renovation of existing storefronts along Mount Auburn Street are encouraged. Any new



41 Winthrop Street (1841), with construction trailer on adjacent lot

commercial development in this subdistrict would require a sensitive approach to architectural context and open space considerations.



South Street (behind Bryan Hall) and Dunster Street (right), with 60 JFK Street (1929), 21 South Street (1956), 17 South Street (1824), and 71-77 Dunster Street (1894) and 69 Dunster Street (1829). Cambridge GIS, 2014

Harvard's lot on Mount Auburn Street at the corner of Holyoke Place, its parking lot at 19 South Street, and its lot at 41 Winthrop Street, as well as the privately-owned one-story commercial buildings at 45½-49 Mount Auburn Street are the most obvious potential development sites to monitor. New construction on these sites should be carefully evaluated to ensure that the projects respect their immediate context in terms of materials, massing, and placement. For example, Rosovsky Hall, the Harvard Hillel Center at 56 Mount Auburn Street, was designed by architect Moshe Safdie in 1993 to complement the Fly Club and the Harvard Lampoon.



Rosovsky Hall, 60 Mt. Auburn Street

Safdie Architects



The Library Services building at 90 Mt. Auburn Street was the result of a development process that initially disregarded the context of the site, as described above. While a vast improvement over the original proposal, the height, bulk, and design of the building are not consistent with the goal of maintaining this subdistrict as a buffer zone between the commercial district and the River Houses.

## Subdistrict D: Winthrop Square/JFK Street



Winthrop Square/JFK Street subdistrict

Cambridge GIS 2014

### Description

John F. Kennedy Street is a primary entry to Harvard Square from Memorial Drive and Boston. The subdistrict includes the properties around Winthrop Square, nearby on Winthrop Street, and on JFK Street from Eliot Street to Harvard Square. At the center is Winthrop Square Park, an unbuilt house lot in the 1630 settlement of Newtowne that was a public marketplace in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; it was enclosed as a park in 1834. Buildings in the subdistrict represent an

eclectic mix of architecture that spans 200 years of Cambridge history. Almost all, including those originally built as residences, now have storefronts, and the district sustains a high level of commercial activity. Several buildings originated as undergraduate clubhouses, and to some extent the sub-district shares the urban character and development goals of the Gold Coast.

Two large buildings – the Galeria at 57 JFK and the Harvard Square Garage at the corner of Eliot Street – occupy sites that were cleared for filling stations in the 1920s and offered uncharacteristically generous lots for redevelopment later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Galeria (1974) was built in the late International Style as a pedestrian mall, but never matched the success of The Garage (1972), an adaptive reuse of a former parking garage, and has been remodeled with street-facing storefronts. The dark, recessed storefronts of the Harvard Square Garage have been less successful than was hoped, while the eclectic mélange of converted three-deckers opposite has continued to thrive as this character has disappeared elsewhere.



Winthrop Square Park, with the Harvard Square Parking Garage (1985), the Galeria (1974), the former Pi Eta Club (1908), the Chapman Heirs house (1868), and the Winthrop condominium (1997). CHC photo, 2014

The mixed-use redevelopment of the buildings facing Winthrop Square in 1995-97 was a model of restoration, adaptive reuse, and sensitive infill construction. The relocation of the Chapman Heirs' House to face Winthrop Square and the renovation of the former Pi Eta Club (Grendel's Den/Parsnip) at 91 Winthrop Street secured the setting of this important open space.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century wall that runs behind the properties on Winthrop, Eliot, and South Streets is a critically-important artifact of early development in Harvard Square and should be protected and exposed to public view in any future development.



Winthrop Street retaining wall, as seen between 8 and 10-14 Eliot Street, 1909

BERy Collection, CHC



Winthrop Street retaining wall (ca. 1800), behind 16 Eliot Street

CHC photo, 2015

## Public Spaces

Winthrop Square achieved its present form in 1985, when a ten-foot wide strip of JFK Street was returned to turf and grass, the pathways through the park were returned to an earlier configuration, and a new post-and-rail fence was installed along the perimeter. A public artwork, designed by Carlos Dorrien, stands at the center. The park is perhaps the most heavily used green space in Cambridge and requires constant attention from adjacent property owners and the Department of Public Works to maintain the lawn and remove trash. Despite the heavy use, no further expansion of pavement should be permitted. Proposals for additional features or structures that might clutter the small space or attract more visitors should be resisted.



Winthrop Square Park.

Photo 2014.



Winthrop Street as a shared street. (placeholder photo)

About 1990 the block of Winthrop Street between JFK Street and Eliot Square was reconstructed as a pedestrian precinct; passenger vehicles were excluded and deliveries were limited to morning hours. The project reduced traffic congestion on this narrow historic street, enhancing the pedestrian experience and making it a safer place. Most of JFK and Mt. Auburn streets were reconstructed with new sidewalks in 2015-2018, with no serious deficiencies remaining except at the corner of Brattle Street, where the sidewalk will be reconfigured as the Abbot Building is redeveloped.

## Private Sites



96 Winthrop (1846), 98 Winthrop (1806), and 106 Winthrop Street (c. 1790)

CHC photo 2019

There are no vacant lots in the subdistrict and few if any sites with obvious development potential if present buildings are preserved. The important 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century houses at 96, 98, and 106 Winthrop Street are underdeveloped but are largely protected as individual landmarks or through preservation restrictions. Further development of these sites should be sensitive to the limitations of the small, wood-frame houses. The three-deckers at 52-54 and 56 JFK Street could be vulnerable to redevelopment, but preservation of these wood frames should be among the highest priorities of the District. The Fox Club at the corner of Mt. Auburn Street offers a calming presence and could not be appropriately converted to retail use.

Storefront and signage designs vary widely along JFK Street. While the bold two-color striped siding on the triple-deckers at 52-56 JFK Street is valued as a product of its era and for its eccentricity, similar treatment of other wood-frame buildings in the Square should be carefully evaluated.

Aggressive signage can be noted throughout the subdistrict, from the eclectic collection seen on the JFK Street triple-deckers to the integral signage program developed for The Garage. New proposals for signage should follow the general design guidelines for the district, but it would not be out of character for signs in this subdistrict to be more dynamic than in the quieter subdistricts of the Square such as the Gold Coast.



52-54 and 56 J.F. Kennedy Street (1884, 1903), as resided ca. 1970

CHC photo, 2017

**Subdistrict E: Eliot Square and Mt. Auburn Street**



Eliot Square and Mt. Auburn St., looking west. Taubman Hall, Charles Square and University Place lie outside the district

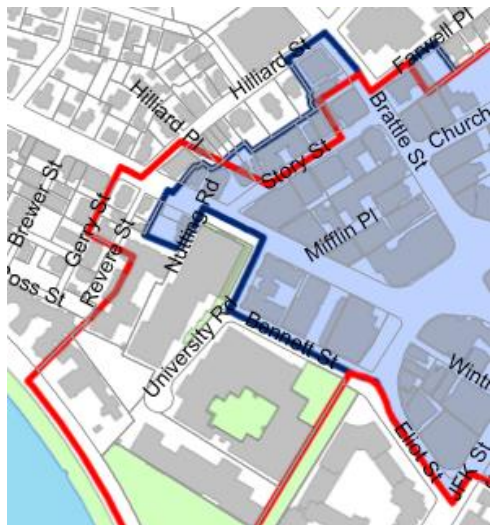


Eliot Square and Mt. Auburn Street from the north.

Cambridge GIS, 2014

## Description

Eliot Square (as the intersection of Mt. Auburn and Eliot streets is known) was created in 1809 when Mt. Auburn Street was extended across the old village and the William Brattle estate toward Watertown. This urban fringe area on the southwest corner of the village facing the Ox Marsh contained few healthful building sites. Except for a municipal office building on the corner of Mt. Auburn put up in 1875, it saw little development until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the street railway company began to build car barns and stables there. By 1912 the Boston Elevated Railway occupied over ten acres of land for transit purposes.



Boundaries of the Conservation District (blue) and the Overlay District (red)

The development potential of the southwest sector was widely recognized. In 1959 a city-owned parking lot was developed with a motel on stilts, and in the 1960s a bitter dispute over the proposed John F. Kennedy Presidential Library drew national attention to the area. In 1974 the site was divided between a public park, the Kennedy School of Government, and a private development that became Charles Square in 1984. The adjacent University Place and University Green projects occupied other former industrial sites about the same time.

Development pressures soon began to be felt in this somewhat neglected corner of the Square. Proposals to redevelop the Harvard Motor Inn and the three Robert Banker properties at 12, 14 and 16 Eliot Street were scuttled by neighborhood opposition, but in 1990 a fire destroyed the latter property, a three-decker, and it was replaced by a two story “placeholder,” as the owner put it. Belmont Hall at 121 Brattle Street (site of the popular Blue Parrot Restaurant) fell in 1987, to be replaced by an office building, and Harvard allowed The Craigie (also known as Craigie Arms), an apartment building on the corner of University Road, to deteriorate until it was finally repurposed as affordable housing in the 1990s. In 2013 the Historical Commission allowed the wood frame former Trinity Hall dormitory (most recently occupied by a Chili’s Restaurant) to be demolished for an office building in a deal that subsidized the restoration of the 1912 Conductor’s Building, the last remaining structure associated with the construction of the Cambridge Subway.

## Public Spaces

Public spaces in this subdistrict consist of sidewalks and the paved plazas created by reconfiguring streets after the construction of the Red Line Extension in 1979-83. An abandoned subway tunnel under Eliot Street creates some awkward grade changes masked by planters, but accessibility throughout most of the area is adequate. Deficient sidewalks between Bennett Street and JFK Street are to be rebuilt in 2019. The plaza in front of the Harvard Motor Inn offers an opportunity to improve a public space currently occupied as a bus stop.



## Private Sites



8 Eliot Street (ca. 1790); 8A Eliot (1989, Benjamin Thompson Associates, architects); 10 and 12-14 Eliot (1869); and 14A Eliot (1900).



10-14 Eliot Street (1869) and 14A Eliot Street (1900); both photos 1909



BERy collection, CHC

Potential development sites in this subdistrict include the remaining Banker properties at 12-14 and 14A Eliot Street, but these are wood frame buildings dating from 1869 and 1900 which, if restored, would contribute greatly to the character of the subdistrict.

The placeholder building at 16 Eliot was approved for a three-story rooftop addition in 2014, but the permits have lapsed. This site is flanked by the blank wall of the Harvard Square Garage and the three-story 14 Eliot Street and faces the Post-Modern style Taubman Hall, creating a complex context for any designer.



16 Eliot Street.

CHC photo, 2016



Harvard Square Hotel (1959, H.E. Davidson & Son, architects)

CHC photo, 2019

The Harvard Square Hotel represents a complex development opportunity for the owner, Harvard University. The site was originally a municipal building that was demolished in the 1930s, and the City retains ownership of the ground-level parking lot. The open deck over the parking lot presents as a dark void to pedestrians, and the hotel might be considered to have limited preservation value. Complete redevelopment of the site might present opportunities for a major enhancement of the site, but the bulk, massing, and ground floor uses should be carefully controlled so as not to duplicate the overbearing presence of One Brattle Square.

Perhaps the most vulnerable site in the subdistrict is the 14,000 sq. foot. property that contains 17 Story Street (1846) and 127-129 Mt. Auburn Street (1912). The house at 17 Story is a rare Regency Style house that is historically significant as the home late in life of Harriet Jacobs (1813-1897), author of the slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). The Jacobs house awkwardly shares the lot with a 1912 three-decker and suffers from years of deferred maintenance. It shares a C-2 residential zoning district with the west side of Story Street, which would allow much greater density and height than the present buildings.



127 Mt. Auburn Street (1912) and the Munroe-Jacobs Jacobs house, 17 Story Street (1846).

## Subdistrict F: Brattle Square



Brattle Street and Brattle Square from the south.



Brattle Street and Brattle Square from the north

Cambridge GIS, 2014

### Description

This subdistrict includes buildings along Brattle Street from Harvard Square through Brattle Square to Hilliard Street.

Brattle Street from Harvard Square to Brattle Square followed the Town Creek around the base of the drumlin on which Newtowne was settled and turned toward Watertown at the Town Spring. It was the main road west until the turnpike era, when Mount Auburn Street penetrated the village through the former Brattle estate. By 1840, it seemed that a neighborhood of homes would be built near the William Brattle mansion (42 Brattle Street), but the residential character of Brattle Square

changed when the Brattle House, a 106-room hotel, was constructed there in 1849. Brattle Square, Palmer Street, and Church Street became the favored locations for stables, blacksmiths, carriage shops, and saloons. The hotel soon failed and became the University Press printing plant. A filling station, a bank, and a department store occupied the site until 1990, when One Brattle Square was constructed.



Boundaries of the Conservation District (blue) and the Overlay District (red)

After World War I the Harvard Square shopping district expanded to include Brattle Square, where a new post office was built in 1919 and the Sage family put up a Georgian Revival-style market in 1926. George Dow assembled most of the remaining frontage on Brattle Street between Palmer and Church streets, which was occupied by a collection of storefronts and one substantial building at 11-25 Brattle Street. By 1941 the Dows had removed the upper stories of 17-25 Brattle Street and refaced the entire row with a cast-stone Art Moderne facade. These and other properties owned by the Dow-Stearns Trust, including 1-8 Brattle Street, 14 and 18 Brattle Street, and 5 J.F. Kennedy Street (the Abbot

Building) remained under the same management until 2015, when the Trust sold the Abbott Building and its neighbors. The former Corcoran's department store/Urban Outfitters building at 14 Brattle will be razed in 2019 and replaced with a new mixed-use building.



Dow-Stearns Block, 17-37 Brattle Street.

CHC photo, 2013.

In Brattle Square proper, the old Hadley building burned in 1972 and was replaced in 1974 with the Modernist New Hadley Building with recessed split-level storefronts, as encouraged by the zoning at that time. This awkward configuration would benefit from a complete re-working. Across Mt. Auburn Street, the Coolidge Bank Building of 1983 incorporated a recessed ground-floor arcade, but with city encouragement this gloomy feature was filled with storefronts in the 1990s.



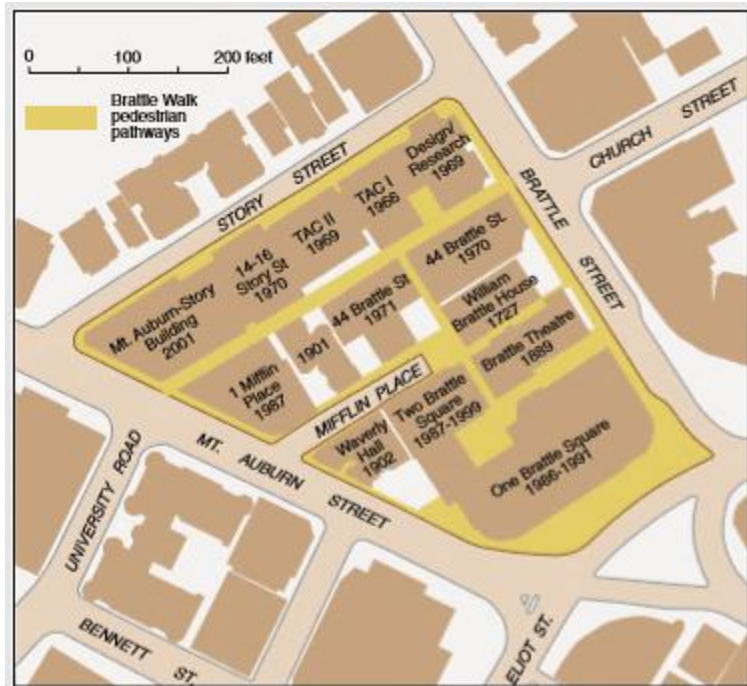
New Hadley Building, 28-36 Brattle Street (1974), and the Coolidge Bank Building, 104 Mt. Auburn Street (1983), as remodeled with arcade enclosed. CHC photos 2009.



One Brattle Square, 1990. CHC photo, 2013.

One Brattle Square replaced an Art Deco bank and a department store in 1990. This building was bitterly opposed (and long delayed) by the Harvard Square Defense Fund but remains an object lesson for the limitations of design review. Although the building is lower and steps back more aggressively than required by the zoning envelope, it still overwhelms the Square. More importantly, the multiple storefront

openings required by the Planning Board under its Special Permit review have been almost completely ignored by the owners, who have preferred to rent large floor plates rather than to the small retailers that inhabit the Dow-Stearns stores across the Square. This issue resurfaced during the CHC's review of the Read Block restoration in 2000 and again in 2016 with regard to the replacement of the Corcoran's/Urban Outfitters building. While the community expressed a strong preference for a ground floor that could be rented to multiple small tenants, the Commission could only require that entrances be provided in the design.



West of Brattle Square the stabilizing non-profit ownership of the William Brattle House and the careful stewardship of Brattle Hall, occupied by the Brattle Theater and a café, preserved those historic properties while almost the entire remainder of the block began to be transformed in the 1960s. Prior to redevelopment this was an area of wood frame houses. Beginning with the construction of an office building on Story Street for The Architects Collaborative in 1966, six different architecture firms put up office buildings for their own use on Story Street and Mifflin. These created the spine of a through-block pedestrian passageway, the Brattle Arcade, which evolved without a master plan of any sort. The

arcade was completed by the construction of a new post office in 2001 and became an important lesson for incrementalism (as opposed to massive redevelopment schemes like Holyoke Center) and enabling pedestrian connections.

The subdistrict is bounded in part by the apartment buildings on the west side of Story Street, which are in a residential zoning district and cannot be redeveloped for offices or retail. The Brattle Street frontage of this block is anchored by the historic Blacksmith House of the Cambridge Center for Adult Education, the scene of Longfellow's famous poem and formerly occupied by the Window Shop, established to support refugees from Nazi Germany.

### Public Spaces

In 1972 Brattle Street was narrowed to form a T intersection and to create the plaza and sidewalks in front of the Dow-Stearns block. The historic street pattern is still discernable by the strong visual effect of the curve of the buildings, which should be maintained in future. The terraced public space created by the awkward grade differences over the abandoned subway tunnel is buffer for pedestrians, and is now a vibrant part of the Square, providing space for street performances. Elsewhere in the subdistrict most sidewalks were rebuilt to ADA standards in 2010. The sidewalk at the Abbot Building will be upgraded when construction is completed.



Brattle Street looking west from Brattle Square

The abrupt introduction of separated bicycle lanes on Brattle Street in 2017 was accomplished without public input and no discussion of design alternatives. The flex poles and mid-street parking are an awkward solution to a serious transportation safety issue and should be revisited.

Mifflin Place, a dead-end off Mt. Auburn Street, is accessed by several branches of the through-block passageways but as presently designed is not friendly to pedestrians. Mifflin could be reimagined as a shared street.



### Private Sites

The site in this subdistrict most likely to see additional development is the Dow-Stearns block at 17-45½ Brattle Street, which changed hands in 2018. Preservation of the 1936-41 Moderne facades and the small shop fronts should be a high priority. Additional rooftop construction should be placed well back from the facades and should be recessive and deferential to the original design. Heights should not exceed that of the four-story Estes Building at 13-15 Brattle Street. A mid-block connection to Church Street might complement the subdistrict's public open spaces.





Dow-Stearns Block, 17-45 ½ Brattle Street; Estes Building at right

Cambridge GIS, 2014.

The north (or west) side of Story Street contains a large stucco apartment building and several small houses. It is important that these buildings be preserved because the street is a transition point from the mixed-use character of Harvard Square to the primarily-residential nature of the Half Crown Neighborhood Conservation District. As noted above, the siting of 17 Story Street should be respected.



Story Street, west side

## Subdistrict G: Church Street and Palmer Street



Church and Palmer Streets from the north



Church and Palmer Streets from the south

Cambridge GIS, 2014

### Description

This subdistrict includes both sides of Church and Palmer streets. Structures along the north side of Church Street from Massachusetts Avenue to the Church Street parking lot and the eastern half of Farwell Place have been protected by the Old Cambridge Historic District since 1964, but since 2000 have been administered for all practical purposes under the guidelines of the Harvard Square Conservation District. The sites of the greatest historical significance in this small subdistrict are the First Church Unitarian, the Burying Ground, the Torrey Hancock House/Cambridge School of Architecture building (53 Church Street), and the former police station at 31-33 Church Street.



Boundaries of the Conservation District (blue) and the Overlay District (red). Properties on the north side of Church Street and on Farwell Place (except Gutman Library) are in the Old Cambridge Historic District.

In the nineteenth century Palmer Street and Church Street were home to stables, blacksmiths, and carriage shops, and the outlet to Massachusetts Avenue was little more than an alley. This section was widened in 1926 at the expense of College House and 26 Church Street, which both received new north facades.

The former industrial character of the subdistrict has been successfully translated to other uses. The former carriage factory at 26 Church Street (1857) serves as the home of Club Passim. The former police station (1864) has been occupied by a coffee shop and a hair salon. Another carriage factory at 23 Church Street was cut down to one story in 1936 and remodeled with a significant Art Moderne façade, while a former auto garage, remodeled as a restaurant in 1947, was remodeled again in 2001 to expose

the lintel of the Cambridge 1 fire company that once occupied the site.

The Harvard Square Theater was built in 1925 with its lobby in a storefront in College House facing Massachusetts Avenue. The blank wall of the theater on Church Street was enlivened when the entrance was moved there in 1982, but activity on the street has suffered since the theater closed in 2012.

### Public Spaces

In the early 1960s a proposal to close Palmer Street was defeated by community opposition, and the street was paved with granite blocks and curbstones and brick sidewalks in 1964-67. The recessed storefront of the Coop Annex did little to enliven the street, and rising standards for accessibility led the city to rebuild it as a shared street with illuminated “Palmer Blocks” in 2005. This urban design improvement added interest to the narrow side street, but Palmer remains a work in progress – a useful pedestrian cut-through with little to interest or distract passersby. Sidewalks on the south side of Church Street were widened in the early 2000s but are still quite narrow on the north side.

### Private Sites

The Church Street parking lot is an obvious potential development site. Abutting the parking lot on the west is the 1827 Torrey Hancock house. The Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture addition to the Hancock house is an important site in American women's history; both structures are historically significant and should be preserved. Any new development on the parking lot site should emphasize retail storefronts, and the mass should be broken up to avoid a severe street presence. The architecture of a new building should take cues from the scale, massing, and setbacks of the historic structures on either side of the lot. Special consideration should be given to the site's relationship to the Old Burying Ground and the smaller-scale residences on Farwell Place.



The Church Street parking lot, the Torrey-Hancock house (1827), and the Cambridge School of Architecture (1928)

In contrast to most of Harvard Square, the three commercial buildings on the north side of Church Street are in a BA (business) zoning district, with a 1.0 FAR and a 35' height limit (or 1.75/85' for residential use). The buildings are historically significant and unlikely to face development pressure due to zoning constraints. The two-story 1920s mixed-use buildings at 22-32 (Border Café) and 54-66 (Sage Building) are in the BB district with a 4.0 FAR, and so might be seen as eligible to receive additional stories. The buildings themselves are of some architectural interest but also contain vitally important spaces for small shops and restaurants.



31-33 Church (1864), 27 Church (1922), and 23 Church (1894, altered 1936) in the Old Cambridge Historic District

A plan to replace the Harvard Square Theater with a new mixed-use building was announced in 2018. A proposal reviewed by the Cambridge Historical Commission in September 2018 entailed a five-story building with a cutting-edge terra-cotta façade containing embedded LED lamps with the ability to display moving images. Two movie theaters would occupy the basement, with retail on the ground floor and offices above. The proposal was generally seen as a positive development for Church Street and the Square as a whole. The Commission did not object to the advanced design but continued the hearing until the proponent could fabricate a sample of the façade to demonstrate the lighting concept.

The Harvard Square Theater site is also exposed to Palmer Street. While the property has a complicated relationship with its abutters, it offers the opportunity to enliven its frontage there. The recessed storefronts of the Coop Annex offer a greater opportunity to activate the street. The present arcade is dark and uninviting, and discourages window shopping. These storefronts could be built out to the building façade, affording the Coop more floor space and a much better exposure to pedestrians. Similar improvements were successfully accomplished at 9 Brattle Street (on the corner of Palmer) and 104 Mt. Auburn Street (see photo above).



26 Church Street and the rear of the Harvard Square Theater (left); recessed storefronts of the Coop Annex (right)

## VI. Recommendations of the Study Committee, including Amendments to the Order Establishing the District

In general, the Study Committee supports the work of the Cambridge Historical Commission in administering the Harvard Square Conservation District and reaffirms the purpose and utility of the district. Harvard Square is facing challenging circumstances in a high-value commercial real estate market and a troubled retail sector. An effective conservation district can support and encourage retailers and mitigate adverse tendencies in the development industry.

The Study Committee makes the following recommendations to the Historical Commission and the City Council:

- Update the goals and guidelines for the district through a City Council Order amending the original Order that established the District on December 18, 2000 (See Appendix C).
- Amend the Neighborhood Conservation District and Landmark Ordinance (Ch. 2.78, Art. III) to clarify jurisdiction over architectural lighting, broadly defined (See Appendix D).
- Amend the Harvard Square Overlay District so that the goals and guidelines for conservation district and zoning purposes remain identical.
- ~~Amend the Harvard Square Overlay District to clarify and possibly expand the role of the Harvard Square Advisory Committee.~~
- Amend Article 7.000 (Signs and Illumination) of the Zoning Ordinance to clarify jurisdiction over interior signs meant to be visible from outside the building (7.13.1 and 7.16.22.C) and the application of translucent or opaque film containing graphics or corporate colors on display windows (7.16.12).
- Initiate a new master planning process for Cambridge's major squares that will build on the recently completed Envision plan.

The Study Committee also makes these recommendation to the Historical Commission regarding the administration of the District:

- Pay special attention to proposed alterations to significant buildings
- Consult subdistrict characteristics in evaluating proposed alterations
- Refer to goals, secondary goals, and guidelines in making determinations, and cite them specifically in drafting motions to approve alterations.

Other recommendations include the following:

- The Historical Commission should engage more frequently with other city departments, including Community Development and the Department of Traffic, Parking & Transportation to advance its agenda in Harvard Square.



Appendices

- Appendix A. Original Order Establishing the Harvard Square Conservation District, Adopted December 18, 2000
- Appendix B. Excerpts from the Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission Meeting of March 2, 2017
- Appendix C. Proposed Amendment to “An Order Establishing the Harvard Square Conservation District,” adopted December 18, 2000
- Appendix D. Proposed Amendments to Ch. 2.78, Article III, Establishment of Neighborhood Conservation Districts and Protected Landmarks





Appendix A: Original Order Establishing the Harvard Square Conservation District, Adopted December 18, 2000

## **An Order Establishing the Harvard Square Conservation District**

There is hereby designated and established under the provisions of the Chapter 2.78, Article III of the City Code a neighborhood conservation district to be known as the Harvard Square Conservation District (the "District"), an area bounded as shown on the map entitled "Harvard Square Conservation District 2000," attached to this Order and incorporated into this Order in full. However, this Order shall not take effect until the effective time of an amendment to Section 11.50 of the Cambridge Zoning Code to create a Harvard Square Historic Overlay District.

### **I. Reasons for Designation**

Harvard Square is Cambridge's historic core and reflects the distinctive architectural, cultural, political, economic, and social history of the city. Founded as Newtowne in 1630 and intended to be the capital of Massachusetts, Cambridge was the first planned town in English North America. Harvard Square still retains its 17<sup>th</sup>-century street plan, but has evolved into a distinctive mixed-use community containing significant buildings of many periods and styles and characterized by its commercial and social vitality. Pressures for change threaten the District's diverse architectural character, which this measure seeks to preserve, conserve and protect from adverse environmental influences. The Order will accomplish this purpose by establishing a process for guiding changes to properties in the District while ensuring that additions and alterations to properties are compatible with the character of the District, by offering a forum for community dialogue about proposed changes to properties in the District, by providing technical assistance to District property owners on issues of conservation and preservation, and by fostering wider public appreciation of the District, and will thereby promote the public welfare by making the District a more attractive and desirable place in which to live, work, and visit.

### **II. District Established**

As authorized in Paragraph A, Section 2.78.160 of Article III of the City Code, the neighborhood conservation district hereby established shall be administered by the Cambridge Historical Commission. The District shall be known as the Harvard Square Conservation District.

### **III. Statement of Goals and Standards and Guidelines for Review**

The goal of the District as a whole and of this order is to guide change and encourage diversity in order to protect the distinctive characteristics of the District's buildings and public spaces, and to enhance the livability and vitality of the District for its residents and all Cambridge residents, students, visitors, and business people. The Historical Commission should seek to preserve and enhance the unique functional environment and visual form of the District; preserve its architecturally and historically significant structures and their settings, and encourage design compatible therewith; mitigate any adverse impact of new development on adjacent properties and areas; and discourage homogeneity by maintaining the present diversity of development and open space patterns and building scales and ages. The District must remain a pedestrian-friendly, accessible, human-scale,

mixed-use environment that complements nearby neighborhoods and maintains the history and traditions of its location.

The following secondary goals for the District are intended to provide general guidance to the Historical Commission in a wide variety of situations, and are not intended to be applied to every project that will come before it. They are statements of policy, not prescriptive measures that must be applied equally in each situation.

1. Preserve historically or architecturally significant buildings and structures as well as those that contribute to the distinctive visual character or historical significance of the District.
2. Sustain the vitality of the commercial environment by preserving architecturally-significant or original building fabric where it currently exists. When this is not possible, support creative, contemporary design for storefront alterations and additions.
3. Support creative, contemporary design for new construction that complements and contributes to its immediate neighbors and the character of the District. Recognize and respect creativity of design during the review process and mitigate the functional impacts of development on adjacent areas.
4. Build on and sustain the diversity of existing building form, scale and material. Preserve and encourage flowers, green yards and courtyards and small, free-standing and wood-frame buildings where that character prevails. Encourage streetwall buildings where that character has been set. Encourage ground-level, small-scale storefronts to preserve the vitality and character of the streets.
5. Expand the high quality public environment established in the heart of the District with attractive and compatible materials, lighting, and street furniture.
6. Expand the network of pedestrian walkways and paths wherever they can conveniently provide alternate routes through the District. Increase public access to alleys and interior spaces where appropriate, and upgrade paving and landscaping of such pathways and spaces. Enhance accessibility and safety for pedestrians throughout the District.
7. Encourage new residential projects in the District, especially in mixed-use buildings, and support existing residential uses.
8. Encourage projects that will maintain a wide diversity of uses serving the needs of surrounding neighborhoods, students, and visitors from around the world.
9. Encourage creative solutions to the District's parking and transportation issues, including the problem of on-street deliveries. Discourage loading docks, which do not generally contribute to the historic character of the street.

The foregoing goals also recite the standards for preservation and change within the District. In addition to the factors specified in Section 2.78.220, and subject to any specific provisions of this Order, in exercising its authority with respect to the District and in considering applications for

certificates of appropriateness, hardship, or nonapplicability, the Historical Commission shall be guided by the preceding general goal for the District as a whole and by such of the preceding secondary goals as it determines to be applicable to the project or situation before it. The Historical Commission shall also be guided by the standards and guidelines described in the “Final Report of the Harvard Square Neighborhood Conservation District Study Committee,” dated November 29, 2000, which after public hearing the Historical Commission may adopt as regulations and thereafter amend from time to time.

As permitted by Chapter 2.78.190.B, the Historical Commission may determine from time to time after public hearing that certain categories of exterior architectural features, structures, or signs may be altered without review by the Commission; provided, however, that every such alteration shall be determined by the Executive Director of the Historical Commission to conform to the regulations adopted by the Commission for the administration of the District.

#### **IV. Review Procedures**

The authority of the Historical Commission shall extend to the review of all construction, demolition, or alteration that affects exterior architectural features, other than color, within the District, except as otherwise provided in this Order. The determinations of the Commission shall be binding.

##### **A. Exclusions from Review**

As permitted by Ch. 2.78.190.B, the authority of the Historical Commission shall not extend to the following categories of structures or exterior architectural features and such structures or features may be constructed or altered without review by the Historical Commission.

- Storm doors and storm windows.
- Signs that conform to Section 7.000, “Signs and Illumination” of the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Cambridge, as the same may be amended with respect to Section 11.50, “Harvard Square Overlay District.”

##### **B. Certificates of Nonapplicability**

The following categories of alterations shall be issued a Certificate of Nonapplicability provided they conform to the applicable standards and guidelines of the District:

- Roof repairs and HVAC equipment not visible from a public way.
- Replacement windows pursuant to regulations that after public hearing the Historical Commission may adopt for this purpose.
- Alterations that the Executive Director of the Historical Commission determines do not alter, enclose, or extend further than the decorative or structural framework of the building or retail space originally intended to surround a storefront. The framework consists of such elements as piers, columns, cornerboards, quoins, cornices, and similar structural or decorative features.
- Storefront alterations that the Executive Director of the Historical Commission determines do not obscure, remove, relocate, or replace historic or original exterior

architectural features. Exterior architectural features include, but are not limited to, such features as brackets, window and door casings, fascia, hoods, bays, and window sash.

## **V. Protected Storefronts**

Notwithstanding the other provisions of this Order, all alterations to storefronts at the following addresses shall require review in accordance with Ch.2.78, Article III:

1304 Massachusetts Avenue  
1316 Massachusetts Avenue  
1320 Massachusetts Avenue  
30-30A Plympton Street

## **VI. Coordination with Other Agencies and Boards**

The Historical Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, Inspectional Services Department, and other City boards, agencies, and officials are directed to coordinate all review, hearing, permitting and other procedures relative to physical changes within the District to the extent practicable, consistent with their respective responsibilities.

## **VII. Public Notice**

In addition to the notice requirements in Ch. 2.78.230, applicants scheduled to appear before the Historical Commission in a public hearing shall place a public notification placard on the premises that are the subject of the application. Placards shall be posted not less than seven days prior to the meeting and shall be maintained in public view and legible condition until the Historical Commission's determination is filed with the City Clerk. Placards shall be obtained by the applicant from the Historical Commission and shall be located as indicated on a plan provided by the Historical Commission. Placards shall be securely mounted on the subject premises at the street line or within the property, but not more than 20 feet from the street line, so as to be legible to persons passing on the public street without the necessity of trespassing. Stolen, destroyed, or illegible placards shall be promptly replaced and placards shall be promptly removed after the filing of the Historical Commission's determination. Information to be placed by the applicant on the placard shall indicate the address of the property; the date, time, and place of the public hearing; the nature of the action requested; and the application case number.

## **VIII. Time Limit for Commission Action**

When taking action under the provisions of this Order and Sections 2.78.190, 2.78.200, 2.78.210, and 2.78.220 of Article III of Chapter 2.78, the Historical Commission shall make its determinations within forty-five days after the filing of a complete application for a certificate of appropriateness, non-applicability, or hardship, or within such further time as the applicant may in writing allow or the Historical Commission may determine in accordance with regulations that the Commission may adopt consistent with Section 2.78.230 of said Article III.

## **IX. Recommendation to City Council**

During the twelve-month period prior to the fifth anniversary of the effective date of this Order the Historical Commission shall hold a public hearing to discuss the effectiveness of the Harvard Square Conservation District and to make a recommendation to the City Council, based upon its findings following such public hearing, as to whether this Order should continue in effect, continue in effect with amendments, or be repealed. In the event that the City Council repeals this Order, except as the repealing order otherwise directs, both the Harvard Square Conservation District and the Harvard Square Historic Overlay District shall cease to be in effect, but all valid certificates, permits, orders and determinations of any City board, commission or agency issued prior to such cessation shall continue in effect.

In City Council December 18, 2000

Adopted by a yeas and nays vote:-

Yeas 9; Nays 0; Absent 0

Attest: D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk



Appendix B: Except from the Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission Meeting of March 2, 2017

**Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission**

March 2, 2017 - 795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge City Hall - 6:00 P.M.

Members present: William King, *Chair*; Bruce Irving, *Vice Chair*; Robert Crocker, Chandra Harrington, Jo Solet, *Members*; Joseph Ferrara, Susannah Tobin, *Alternates*

Members absent: William Barry, *Member*; Kyle Sheffield, *Alternate*

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, *Executive Director*; Sarah Burks, *Preservation Planner*

**Harvard Square Conservation District, by petition of registered voters.** Petition to initiate a study process to amend the terms of the Harvard Square Conservation District order.

Mr. Sullivan reported that the petition to amend the district order had been received on February 6, 2017 and verified by the Election Commission. The ordinance allows 10 registered voters to petition to initiate a study process for district designation, amendment, or rescission, or the Commission itself could initiate such as study on its own initiative.

Suzanne Blier of 5 Fuller Place presented on behalf of the petitioners. She indicated that after the 1-3 Brattle Street application was heard by the Commission some members of the public were still not satisfied that the door should be moved to face the center of the square. They decided there must be a better way to protect significant buildings in Harvard Square rather than petitioning for landmark study each time a change was proposed to a significant building. She studied other preservation ordinances, including that of San Francisco. The Harvard Square Conservation District guidelines were not restrictive enough and the protection was not as strong as in San Francisco. It was time to rethink the language in the district order. She said a study could consider additional application requirements such as night-time light studies and viewshed studies. It could require court reporting and posting of all plans online (referencing a plan by Prellwitz Chilinski Associates that was never submitted to the Historical Commission for consideration in Case 3678 that the public wished to see). A study could reconsider the boundaries of the district and the procedures for demolition of buildings in the district.

Nancy Gold of Weston read a letter from a preservation consultant in San Francisco. She was astonished at the Commission's decision not to study the Abbot building for landmark designation and its decision to allow the demolition of the Corcoran's building.



Abra Berkowitz of 253½ Broadway said it was worth having a study committee to have a full discussion of the options for the district. If the Commission would engage the petitioners, the petitioners could stop being so reactive and start being more proactive. She read from the historic preservation book *Keeping Time*. She called for greater transparency. Stores were closing all the time.

Pebble Gifford of 15 Hilliard Street said she had participated in the original district studies for Harvard Square. The existing district order allowed for too much leeway, and it should be tightened up to better protect and preserve buildings. She said the Commissioners were the custodians of the buildings in the city while the petitioners were lobbyists. She urged the Commission to focus on the criteria for appropriateness, not their own likes and dislikes. She cited a roof deck as an example.

Carole Perrault of 9 Dana Street spoke in favor of having a study process. Recent efforts for landmark studies proved the need for such a study. She cited recent projects as reason for wanting change including the Smith Campus Center, Kennedy School, the Science Center Plaza, 16-18 Eliot Street, Wordsworth building storefronts and signs, Abbot building “facadism,” the Corcoran building demolition, and the undetermined future of the Harvard Square Theatre. She said the petitioners and the Commission should work together collaboratively, otherwise the petitions would keep coming. The Commission could ask more from the developers.

Abhishek Syal of Our Harvard Square said he wanted a better understanding of the framework for historic preservation decisions. A study would be an opportunity to look at best practices used elsewhere. There was no harm to having a study and it could result in improvements.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street pointed to the fact that storefronts could be changed as of right in the district as something that she would like to see changed.

Michael Brandon of 27 Seven Pines Avenue spoke in favor of having a study. A tiered system of significance might be a good idea. There was a lot of development pressure on Harvard Square. The Commission was one of the first entities to use the NCD model at the municipal level. The city should continue to be forward thinking and see if any changes to the district order are needed. He recognized that it would require a lot of staff time and recommended a budget increase to assist in the project.

John DiGiovanni of Trinity Properties said he had been a member of the original study committees for Harvard Square. That process took 2½ years and 52 meetings to complete. He

referenced the five-year study report done for the district. A study shouldn't presume that there must be changes, but he could support a new review of the district. It should be undertaken with the same amount of care and thoughtfulness as the original study. The love everyone had for the Square should be embraced in the study.

Mr. King closed the public comment period.

Mr. Sullivan noted that some of the claims made in the petition could relate to the ongoing litigation in Superior Court and should not be discussed by the commissioners. He disputed the allegations in the appeal that the Commission had not acted appropriately or that he had sought to mislead people by describing its jurisdiction. He recommended the Commission initiate on its own a study process to evaluate and consider amendments to the district order and possibly to the enabling ordinance.

Mr. King recommended the following language for a motion,

That, without making any findings of concurrence or agreement with any of the premises in the various "WHEREAS" clauses or in the substance of the proposed revisions set forth in the "Petition to Amend the Harvard Square Conservation District Guidelines" dated January 31, 2017, but concurring that the conservation and preservation of Harvard Square may benefit from the study and discussion of the existing and possible alternative and/or additional guidelines and procedures, the Commission accepts the petitioners' request to initiate the process, and asks the City Manager to appoint a study committee, to consider possible amendments to the Order that established the Harvard Square Conservation District and possibly to the Neighborhood Conservation District enabling ordinance (Ch. 2.78, Art. III): it being understood that during the period of such study and until the City Council may amend such Order, the standards, criteria, and guidelines set forth in such Order and the current procedures of the Commission shall remain in effect with respect to the District.

He noted that only the appointed study committee could vote on recommendations to the Historical Commission and the City Council, but that all meetings would be open to the public and participation by all was encouraged.

Ms. Blier asked a point of fact about the procedures during the study period. She noted that the petition asked that during the study the Commission consider if buildings were significant or contributing that were before it. Mr. King explained his draft language on this point.

Mr. Irving said he would move the motion unless other members suggested changes. None were made, so he made the motion.

Dr. Solet asked if the original 2000 order required a review every five years. Mr. Sullivan replied that it only required one review at the five year mark in 2005. Mr. King pointed out that the City Council had ordered that the review be updated.

Ms. Harrington seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion passed 7-0.

Mr. King asked that the minutes reflect that members of other bodies other than the Historical Commission should think about ways to address citywide issues facing the community. He noted that the study committee would include three members or alternates of the Historical Commission and four additional appointees. He indicated that he would not take a role on the committee and urged his young colleagues to step forward. He then called for a recess. The meeting reconvened at 7:53 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks  
Preservation Planner

Appendix C. Proposed Amendment to “An Order Establishing the Harvard Square Conservation District,” adopted December 18, 2000

Pursuant to the recommendation of the Cambridge Historical Commission under the provisions of Chapter 2.78, Article III of the City Code, the Order Establishing the Harvard Square Conservation District, adopted by the City Council on December 18, 2000 is hereby amended as follows:

Article III, “Statement of Goals and Guidelines and Standards for Review,” is struck in its entirety and replaced by the following:

**III. Statement of Goals and Guidelines and Standards for Review**

The Goal of the District and of this Order is to protect the Harvard Square Conservation District’s distinctive physical and experiential characteristics and to enhance the livability and vitality of the District. The Historical Commission should seek to enhance the unique physical environment and visual form of the District; preserve its architecturally and historically significant structures and their settings; encourage creative design that contributes to the richness of its environment; mitigate character-diminishing impacts of new development; and discourage homogeneity by encouraging diversity of development and open space patterns and building scales and ages. The District must remain a pedestrian-friendly, accessible, human-scale, mixed-use environment that supports dynamic urban experiences, complements nearby neighborhoods, and respects the history and traditions of its location.

The following Secondary Goals for the District are intended to provide general guidance in a wide variety of situations, and are not intended to be applied to every project. They are statements of policy, not prescriptive measures that must be applied equally in each situation.

1. Significant Buildings. Preserve historically or architecturally significant buildings and structures as well as those that contribute to the distinctive visual character or historical significance of the District.
2. Sustain the vitality of the commercial environment. Sustain the vitality of the commercial environment while preserving architecturally-significant or original building fabric at street level and above. Encourage the restoration of missing features where these have been documented. Except for protected storefronts, encourage creative contemporary commercial design inside the restored framework of storefront openings. Encourage creative signage. Support below-grade commercial spaces where appropriate. Regardless of use, encourage architectural solutions that preserve storefront fabric, transparency, and utility.
3. Contemporary Design. Where context allows, support creative, contemporary design for new construction that complements the context of abutting buildings and enhances the character of the subdistrict. Recognize and respect well-reasoned contemporary design during the review process. Support innovative approaches to enhancing the unique character of Harvard Square while mitigating the detrimental impacts of development on proximate areas.
4. Diversity of Form. Build on and sustain the diversity of existing building form, scale

and material. Preserve and encourage appropriate green spaces, scale-appropriate open spaces, and new buildings that support the prevailing character of the subdistrict. Preserve the remaining wood frame buildings throughout the District. Maintain a consistent setback or streetwall condition where that character has been set. Support small-scale storefronts to preserve the vitality and character of the streetscape.

5. Public Environment. Create a high-quality public environment in the District with compatible materials, lighting, signage, and street furniture such as bollards, benches, moveable seating, and the like. Provide adequate facilities for trash and recycling and surfaces that can be cleaned and maintained. Encourage planted greenspaces and accommodate trees where possible.

6. Pedestrian Experience. Protect and enhance the pedestrian experience. Expand the network of pedestrian walkways and paths wherever they can conveniently provide alternate routes through the District. Increase public access to alleys and interior spaces where appropriate and upgrade the paving and landscaping of such spaces. Enhance accessibility and safety for pedestrians throughout the District.

7. Residential Development. Enhance the all-hours neighborhood quality of Harvard Square by supporting existing residential uses and encouraging additional residential units in mixed-use buildings.

8. Compatible Design. Encourage compatible design that supports a wide diversity of uses serving the needs of surrounding neighborhoods, students, workers and visitors from around the world.

9. Transportation. Encourage creative solutions to the District's transportation issues by providing balanced accommodations for through and local traffic, cyclists, and pedestrians. Promote smooth movement of traffic on through streets and seek creative design and management solutions for side streets where traffic volume and speeds can be regulated to give highest priority to pedestrians. Provide adequate bicycle parking throughout the District. Protect pedestrian safety and experience through careful design and placement of features such as loading docks, curb cuts, and receptacles for trash and recycling. Encourage replacement of surface parking lots with compatible new structures. Discourage provision of on-site parking for new construction.

10. Environmental Sustainability. Encourage environmentally sustainable development that takes into consideration the embodied energy of the existing built environment, material life cycles, passive design, energy conservation, and current standards for best energy conservation practices. Alterations to existing buildings that seek to promote energy conservation should be accomplished in a manner that respects character-defining materials and designs.

11. Architectural lighting. Architectural (building façade) lighting, streetscape lighting, and signage lighting, when allowed by a Certificate of Appropriateness, should reinforce definitive characteristics of historic and contemporary architecture as well as create high

quality 24-hour streetscapes. To achieve these goals, projects should minimize brightness, and light trespass, monitor light color (temperature Kelvin), and focus lighting on significant features.

The foregoing goals also recite the standards for preservation and change within the District. In addition to the factors specified in Section 2.78.220, and subject to any specific provisions of this Order, in exercising its authority with respect to the District and in considering applications for certificates of appropriateness, hardship, or nonapplicability, the Historical Commission shall be guided by the preceding general goal for the District as a whole and by such of the preceding secondary goals as it determines to be applicable to the project or situation before it.

The Historical Commission shall also be guided by the standards and guidelines described in the “Final Report of the Harvard Square Neighborhood Conservation District Study Committee,” dated November 29, 2000, as amended by the “Final Report of the 2017-19 Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee,” which after public hearing the Historical Commission may adopt as regulations and thereafter amend from time to time.

In addition, the Historical Commission and project proponents shall consider the goals and recommendations specific to each of the seven subdistricts that make up the Harvard Square Conservation District. The subdistrict goals and recommendations describe the physical and historical development of each area over time, identify notable buildings and spaces, and set forth preservation priorities and recommendations for each sub-area.

As permitted by Chapter 2.78.190.B, the Historical Commission may determine from time to time after public hearing that certain categories of exterior architectural features, structures, or signs may be altered without review by the Commission; provided, however, that every such alteration shall be determined by the Executive Director of the Historical Commission to conform to the regulations adopted by the Commission for the administration of the District.



Appendix D. Proposed Amendments to Ch. 2.78, Article III, Establishment of Neighborhood Conservation Districts and Protected Landmarks

Amend Ch. 2.78, Article III, Section 2.78.150 - Definitions for Article III in the following manner:

Delete the current paragraph A and substitute the following new definition:<sup>20</sup>

- A. "Exterior architectural features" means and includes such portion of the exterior of a structure as is open to view from a public street, way, park or body of water, including but not limited to the architectural style and general arrangement, ~~and~~ setting, and illumination thereof, the kind, material and texture of exterior building materials, and the type and style of windows, doors, lights, signs and other appurtenant exterior fixtures.

Add the following additional definition:

- I. "Architectural Lighting" means any manner of artificially and intentionally illuminating an exterior architectural feature or features for the purpose of enhancing the design and the human experience of the physical structure.

2.78.190 – Review Procedures

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<sup>20</sup> The amendments are shown as redlined edits for clarity. The format for submission to the City Council will differ.