



Cambridge Historical Commission

City Hall Annex, 57 Inman Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 02139. 617/349-4683, Fax 617/349-4669, TTY 617/492-0235



William B. King, *Chairman*, Allison M. Crump, *Vice Chairman*, Charles M. Sullivan, *Executive Director*.
Suzanne R. Green, Dorothy LeMessurier, Helen F. Moulton, Robert G. Neiley, Jo M. Solet, *Commission Members*.
M. Wyllis Bibbins, Jennifer Jones, Anthony C. Platt, *Alternates*.

June 19, 1996

Robert W. Healy, City Manager
City Hall
Cambridge, Mass. 02139

Re: Council Order #106
July 31, 1995

RECEIVED
96 JUN 20 PM 05
OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

Dear Mr. Healy:

Council Order #106 of July 31, 1995 directed the Historical Commission "to submit a plan . . . for a Harvard Square Historical District which would preserve and protect all remaining historical buildings in Harvard Square."

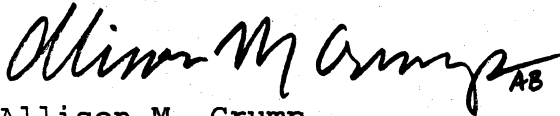
The Commission voted to assume the responsibilities of an historic district study committee under M.G.L. Ch. 40C and held an initial meeting on September 21. Since that time, the Commission has several times debated the complexities of historic preservation in Harvard Square, most often in the context of our ongoing review of landmark status for the Palandjian and Cambridge Savings Bank properties.

The possibilities for historic preservation in Harvard Square are complex, ranging from separate designation of individual buildings under local ordinances to enactment of an historic district under the General Laws. The advantages and drawbacks of each approach are shown in the attached outline. However, the Commission feels that the best foundation for historic preservation is a zoning code that corresponds to the public's expectations for development, and recommends that the adequacy of the Harvard Square Overlay Zone be analyzed in the light of recent experience.

Despite recent reports in the press, the Commission has not initiated any public discussion of these alternatives. While the Commission supports a study of historic preservation alternatives in Harvard Square and is inclined to favor the adoption of a Chapter 40C historic district there, it recognizes that the present staff does not have the capacity to undertake such a project. This effort will require a major commitment of time and resources, and additional staff are a necessity.

We recommend that you appoint an advisory committee representing all the various Harvard Square interests to assist the Commission in this matter. We expect that this committee will meet frequently beginning in September and until recommendations are transmitted to the Council in the Spring of 1997. However, we ask that you consider staff requirements before beginning the advisory process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Allison M. Crump". The signature is written in dark ink and includes a small "AB" monogram at the end.

Allison M. Crump
Vice Chair



Cambridge Historical Commission

City Hall Annex, 57 Inman Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 02139. 617/349-4683, Fax 617/349-4669, TTY 617/492-0235

William B. King, *Chairman*, Allison M. Crump, *Vice Chairman*, Charles M. Sullivan, *Executive Director*.

Suzanne R. Green, Dorothy LeMessurier, Helen F. Moulton, Robert G. Neiley, Jo M. Solet, *Commission Members*.

M. Wyllis Bibbins, Jennifer Jones, Anthony C. Platt, *Alternates*.

ALTERNATIVES FOR HISTORIC PROTECTION IN HARVARD SQUARE

I. Harvard Square: Existing Preservation Status

- 153 contributing properties are included in the Harvard Square National Register District.
- The Harvard Square Overlay District provides incentives to preserve contributing National Register properties.
- 35 Harvard-owned National Register properties are subject to a 1986 agreement requiring CHC review of changes.
- 11 properties are protected through preservation easements.
- 5 properties are designated Cambridge Landmarks.
- 4 properties are in the Old Cambridge Historic District.

II. Scope of Existing Authority

- The National Register does not regulate private property owner actions.
- Harvard Square Overlay District zoning encourages but does not mandate preservation or protection.
- Preservation restrictions and landmark designation regulate changes to individual buildings only.

III. Historic and Architectural Significance of Harvard Square

- Harvard Square forms the historic core of the original 17th-century settlement of Cambridge.
- Harvard Square's architecture reflects the themes of commercial and transportation development and University life over three centuries.
- Harvard Square contains significant architectural resources from every period of its history.

IV. Alternatives for Preserving and Protecting Harvard Square

- Historic District established under M.G.L. Ch. 40C:
 - the most widely-used form of protection for historic properties in Massachusetts.
 - amply supported in case law.
 - protects most publicly-visible exterior alterations.
 - exempts some routine categories from review.
 - option for administration by Harvard Square Historic District Commission allows local representation.
 - requires six City Council votes to adopt.
 - will require review of a 1986 commitment not to implement historic districts in Harvard Square.
 - will require Harvard consent to amend 1986 agreement.

- Neighborhood Conservation District established by City Council order under Ch. 2.78 of the City Code:
 - can establish advisory and/or binding review.
 - provides strong property owner role in commission membership.
 - requires five City Council votes to adopt.
 - no supporting case law.
 - will require review and amendment of 1986 commitments cited above.
- Landmark designation of selected structures:
 - can be accomplished under Ch. 40C (requires 6 City Council votes) or under the City Code (5 votes).
 - requires careful selection of properties.
 - time-consuming to implement.
 - provides only an incremental, not a comprehensive approach to protecting Harvard Square.
 - may require Harvard consent to amend 1986 agreement.
- Harvard Square Overlay District zoning amendment:
 - may reduce pressure for development.
 - can incorporate design review.
 - builds on the Harvard Square Advisory Committee.
 - requires 7 City Council votes if 20% of property owners object.

V. Implementation Time Frame

- An Historic District requires appointment of a study committee, preparation of a report, and 2/3 vote of City Council, with no time limit on the study period.
- A Neighborhood Conservation District requires a study committee, a report, and adoption by simple majority within one year.
- Buildings that are eligible as landmarks can be included within either a historic district or a neighborhood conservation district.
- Zoning amendments require a Planning Board report and City Council vote within 190 days.

VI. Cambridge Historical Commission Recommendations

The Commission recommends simultaneous pursuit of both an historic district under M.G.L. Ch. 40C and zoning amendments to reduce the development potential of properties in Harvard Square. A 40C historic district will provide strong, predictable, and legally-defensible protection for the area. A lower density of permitted development will serve to reduce some of the extraordinary pressure faced by Harvard Square.

Pursuit of any protective measures in Harvard Square is beyond the present capacity of the staff. These measures will require an extended effort to achieve consensus. Additional staff are a necessity for this effort.



EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
ROBERT W. HEALY
City Manager

RICHARD C. ROSSI
Deputy City Manager

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

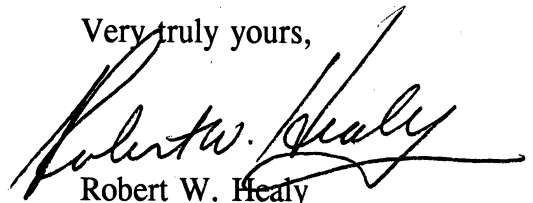
TEL. 349-4300
FAX. 349-4307

June 24, 1996

To The Honorable, The City Council:

With reference to Awaiting Report Item Number 1, regarding a plan for a Harvard Square Historical District which would preserve and protect all remaining historical buildings, please find attached a report from Allison Crump, Vice Chair of the Historical Commission.

Very truly yours,


Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/dls
enclosure

Consent Agenda #29

5-349

Relative to Awaiting Report Item
Number One, regarding a plan for a
Harvard Square Historical District
which would preserve and protect
all remaining historical buildings.

In City Council June 24, 1996

Placed on file