



HARVARD SQUARE VISION PLAN



MAY 2014

Prepared for
CITY OF CAMBRIDGE &
HARVARD SQUARE BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

Prepared by
PROJECT FOR PUBLIC SPACES



5:02
CAMBRIDGE SAVINGS BANK

CAMBRIDGE SAVINGS BANK

CAMBRIDGE VISITOR'S INFORMATION CENTER



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On September 17th, 2013 The City of Cambridge along with the Harvard Square Business Association and Harvard University co-sponsored a community placemaking workshop attended by over 75 individuals. The workshop was guided by Project for Public Spaces, a nonprofit planning, design and educational organization dedicated to helping communities transform public spaces into vital places that highlight local assets, spur rejuvenation and serve common needs. Local businesses, nearby and citywide residents, institutions, city departments including Community Development and the Police, and local non-profits such as Youth on Fire participated. The Workshop was

built on the foundation of prior city planning processes including the 2002 Harvard Square Improvement Project, which developed a master plan of improvements for Harvard Square focusing on public realm improvements to roadway and pedestrian infrastructure. The Project for Public Spaces described an improvement strategy that focuses on “lighter, quicker, cheaper” interventions that are lower risk and lower cost. The approach allows for coordinated experimentation to determine what works best to ‘jump start’ stakeholder visions into physical reality, allowing for a more nimble way of testing ideas, trying alternative approaches, and providing an iterative learning process to inform public improvements.

A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN VISION FOR
THE HEART OF
HARVARD
SQUARE

We are listening to you about what you want the “Heart of Harvard Square” (defined by the Sheldon Cohen Island with the Out of Town News kiosk) to be—what you love about it, and how you want to improve it to make it an even better place.

You have told us that you want to promote the district’s existing assets like its local businesses and institutions, as well as preserve the organic nature and essence that make this area so distinctive. You have also told us you want to strengthen Harvard Square’s identity as a vibrant commercial district, the home of Harvard University and a culturally and historically significant place.

Your vision for the Heart of Harvard Square is of a thriving civic square and world-renowned shopping, dining, cultural, and historic destination that continues to promote an authentic urban experience while encouraging the spontaneous interactions and improvisational activities that make, and have made, Harvard Square a unique and dynamic place.

VISIONCOLLAGE



HARVARD SQUARE





WELCOME STUDENTS!

HARVARD
TO TRAINS AND BUSES

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WHAT MAKES
A GREAT PLACE?

WHAT MAKES A GREAT PLACE?

A great public space is like a magnet for people. People go there not only because they must pass through on business, but because it is pleasant to be there. What can transform an otherwise ordinary square into a magnet for people?

In its 30 years studying what makes a good public place, Project for Public Spaces has found that four key attributes typically characterize a good public space. The first of these is Comfort and Image: users describe the space as “safe”, “clean”, “green”, “charming”, “attractive” and “historic”. There is comfortable seating; the space feels inviting and comfortably scaled; walking into and through the space is appealing.

The second feature of a good public space is a variety of Uses and Activities that make the

space interesting. Users describe the space as “fun”, “special”, “vital” and “real”. Food vending and other retail activities may go on in the space; celebrations occur; children play there.

A third attribute is Access and Linkage: that is, the space is visibly connected to other spaces, to transit facilities, to streets, to parking. The entrances and connections are inviting and can be understood at a glance, and the space is designed and located for convenience.

And last, a good public space has Sociability: the elderly sit and gossip; chess or other board games are ongoing activities; people meet acquaintances and stop to visit; there is a sense of ownership and pride in the place.

"It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished."

WILLIAM H. WHYTE



THE PLACE DIAGRAM

QUALITIES OF GREAT SQUARES



Piazza del Campo, Siena



Sheldon Cohen Island, Cambridge

THE INNER SQUARE & THE OUTER SQUARE

Visionary park planner Frederick Law Olmsted's idea of the "inner park" and the "outer park" is just as relevant today as it was over 100 years ago. The streets and sidewalks around a square greatly affect its accessibility and use, as do the buildings that surround it. Imagine a square fronted on each side by 15-foot blank walls — that is the worst-case scenario for the outer square. Then imagine that same square situated next to a public library: the library doors open right onto the square; people sit outside and read on the steps; maybe the children's reading room has an outdoor space right on the square, or even a bookstore and cafe. An active, welcoming outer square is essential to the well-being of the inner square. Active edge uses

- » Active edge uses
- » Gateways and entrances
- » Focal points inside

REACH OUT LIKE AN OCTOPUS

Just as important as the edge of a square is the way that streets, sidewalks and ground floors of adjacent buildings lead into it. Like the tentacles of an octopus extending into the surrounding neighborhood, the influence of a good square such as Union Square in New York starts at least a block away. Vehicles slow down, walking becomes more enjoyable, and pedestrian traffic increases. Elements within the square are visible from a distance, and the ground floor activity of buildings entices pedestrians to move toward the square.



Paris, France



Place de la République, Lyon



Strøget, Copenhagen

TRAFFIC, TRANSIT & PEDESTRIAN

To be successful, a square needs to be easy to get to. The best squares are always easily accessible by foot: Surrounding streets are narrow; crosswalks are well marked; lights are timed for pedestrians, not vehicles; traffic moves slowly; and transit stops are located nearby. A square surrounded by lanes of fast-moving traffic will be cut off from pedestrians and deprived of its most essential element: people.

- » Connected to adjacent areas
- » Range of transportation options
- » Vehicles do not dominate

ATTRACTIONS & DESTINATIONS

Any great square has a variety of smaller “places” within it to appeal to various people. These can include outdoor cafés, fountains, sculpture, or a bandshell for performances. These attractions don’t need to be big to make the square a success. In fact, some of the best civic squares have numerous small attractions such as a vendor cart or playground that, when put together, draw people throughout the day. We often use the idea of “The Power of 10” to set goals for destinations within a square. Creating ten good places, each with ten things to do, offers a full program for a successful square.

- » Choices of things to do
- » Triangulation opportunities
- » Clustered activity around destinations
- » 10 + Places

IDENTITY & IMAGE

Historically, squares were the center of communities, and they traditionally helped shape the identity of entire cities. Sometimes a fountain was used to give the square a strong image: Think of the majestic Trevi Fountain in Rome or the Swann Fountain in Philadelphia’s Logan Circle. The image of many squares was closely tied to the great civic buildings located nearby, such as cathedrals, city halls, or libraries. Today, creating a square that becomes the most significant place in a city—that gives identity to whole communities—is a huge challenge, but meeting this challenge is absolutely necessary if great civic squares are to return.

- » Showcases local assets, culture & civic identity
- » Contextual signage
- » Educational opportunities



Pioneer Courthouse Square, Portland



Sønder Boulevard, Copenhagen



Philadelphia Art Museum, Philadelphia

FLEXIBILITY IN DESIGN

The use of a square changes during the course of the day, week, and year. To respond to these natural fluctuations, flexibility needs to be built in. Instead of a permanent stage, for example, a retractable or temporary stage could be used. Likewise, it is important to have on-site storage for movable chairs, tables, umbrellas, and games so they can be used at a moment's notice.

- » Overlapping and changing uses
- » Form supports function
- » Experiments with low cost improvements

AMENITIES

A square should feature amenities that make it comfortable for people to use. A bench or waste receptacle in just the right location can make a big difference in how people choose to use a place. Lighting can strengthen a square's identity while highlighting specific activities, entrances, or pathways. Public art can be a great magnet for children of all ages to come together. Whether temporary or permanent, a good amenity will help establish a convivial setting for social interaction.

- » Comfortable places to sit
- » Attracts a cross-section of users
- » Source of local/regional civic pride & ownership

PLACE MANAGEMENT: CENTRAL TO SOLUTION

The best places are ones that people return to time and time again. The only way to achieve this is through a management plan that understands and promotes ways of keeping the square safe and lively. For example, a good manager understands existing and potential users and gears events to both types of people. Good managers become so familiar with the patterns of how people use the park that waste receptacles get emptied at just the right time and refreshment stands are open when people most want them. Good managers create a feeling of comfort and safety in a square, fixing and maintaining it so that people feel assured that someone is in charge.

Management presence through:

- » Security
- » Maintenance
- » Knowledgeable & accessible staff
- » Ongoing visible improvement efforts



Holiday Market, Bryant Park, New York



Paris Plage, Paris

SEASONAL STRATEGY

A successful square can't flourish with just one design or management strategy. Great squares such as Bryant Park, the plazas of Rockefeller Center, and Detroit's new Campus Martius change with the seasons. Skating rinks, outdoor cafés, markets, horticulture displays, art and sculpture help adapt our use of the space from one season to the next.

- » Flower Show, Skating Rink, Fashion Show,
- » Christmas Market, Play Equipment, Cultural Festival, etc.

DIVERSE FUNDING SOURCES

A well-managed square is generally beyond the scope of the average city parks or public works department, which is why partnerships have been established to operate most of the best squares in the United States. These partnerships seek to supplement what the city can provide with funding from diverse sources, including—but not limited to—rent from cafés, markets or other small commercial uses on the site; taxes on adjacent properties; film shoots; and benefit fundraisers.

- » Public support
- » Private sponsorship
- » Broad partnerships

PLACEMAKING PROCESS

How we got to where we are

PLACEMAKING IN ACTION AT HARVARD SQUARE

Placemaking involves looking at, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work and play in a particular space, to discover their needs, aspirations and vision for that place.

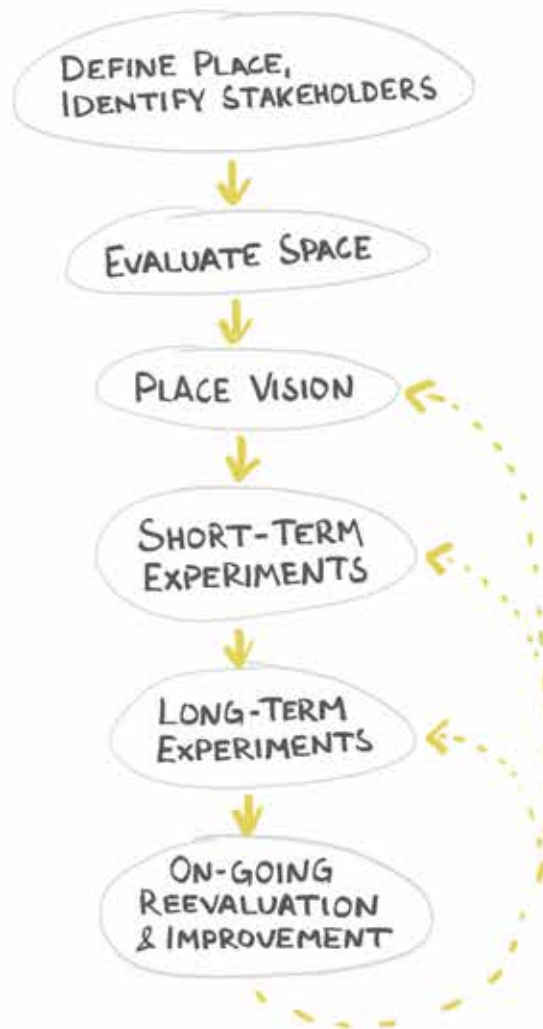
Placemaking is a place-based, community-driven approach to creating vital public spaces that build stronger communities.

Our approach to Placemaking is based on our belief that it is not enough to simply develop design ideas and elements to improve or develop a public space. Improvements need to reflect community values and needs. We believe that a public involvement process that defines and responds to community conditions and needs from the outset is one of the most critical factors in achieving a public space that is truly sensitive to its context.

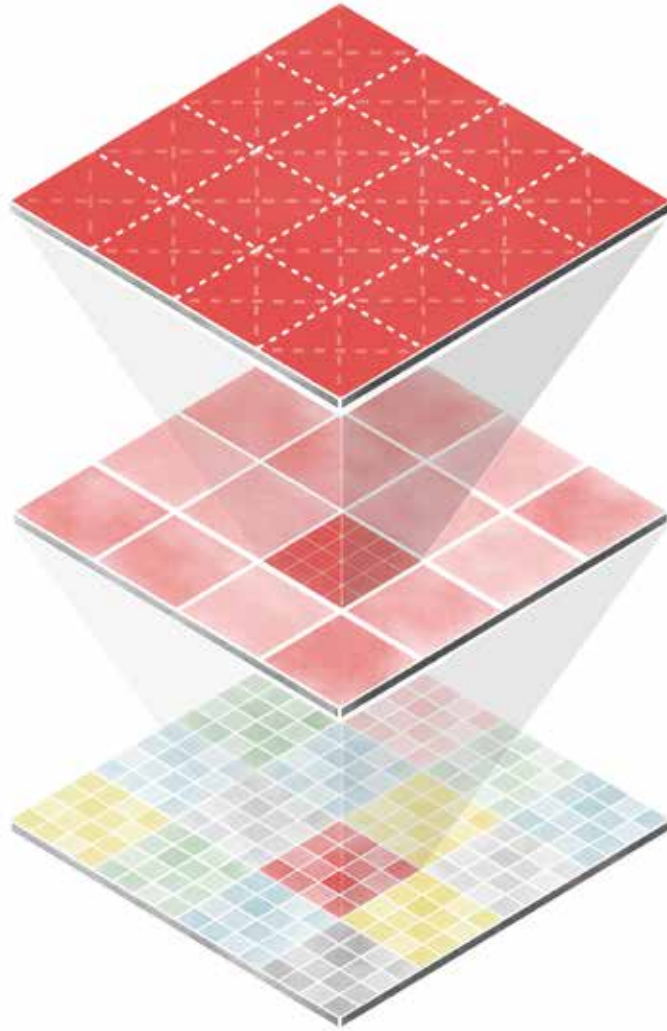
Placemaking must begin with a thorough understanding of the dynamics, desires, and conditions within a community. It involves looking at, listening to, and asking questions of the people in a community about their problems and aspirations.

We work with them to create a vision around the places they view as important to community life and to their daily experience; and we help them implement their ideas beginning with short term, often experimental improvements that can immediately bring benefits to public spaces and the people who use them.

PLACE / COMMUNITY DRIVEN APPROACH



THE POWER OF 10+



PLACE

10+ THINGS TO DO,
LAYERED TO CREATE SYNERGY

DESTINATION

10+ PLACES TO GO

CITY / REGION

10+ MAJOR DESTINATIONS

DEFINE PLACE & IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS POWER OF 10 AT HARVARD SQUARE

To be successful, cities need places. They need destinations that give an identity and image to their communities and that help attract new residents, businesses and investment, but they also need strong community places for people to go. A place might be a downtown square, a main street, a waterfront, a park, or a library. Cities of all sizes should have at least ten places or destinations where people want to be. What makes each destination successful is that it has sub places within it. For example, a park needs at least ten sub-places: a café, a children's play area, a place to bird-watch or to experience water, a place to sit, somewhere to meet friends, etc. Within each of the sub-places, there should be at least ten things to do. Cumulatively, these activities, places and destinations are what make

a great city. This is a big idea that PPS calls the "Power of 10".

With the right planning and management, Harvard Square has long been one of the ten great destinations in Cambridge. It should offer the places and activities that will continue to draw people to it on a daily basis. Using the Power of 10 concept as a framework, it then suggests that there are several different types of places that the square should have within it. The destinations within Harvard Square and the activities that enliven and define them create these special places. They will be the attractions that locals and visitors will return to, again and again, where friends will gather and where everyone will experience the unique qualities of a civic square in the heart of Harvard Square.



Legend

Place Performance Evaluation sites

EVALUATE PLACE PLACEMAKING WORKSHOP

In order to develop ideas for all the places at Harvard Square, PPS elicited programming and conceptual design ideas from local stakeholders, both in a workshop setting and in individual interviews and meetings.

In September 2013, PPS conducted a series of focus group meetings and interviews with key stakeholders representing local businesses, citywide residents, city staff and technical experts, Harvard University and local nonprofits like Youth on Fire in order to develop specific ideas.

Following the focus group meetings and interviews, PPS facilitated a community visioning Placemaking workshop to obtain input and ideas from the public. A broad representation of community members attended the workshop including immediate neighbors, area business

owners, elected officials, relevant city agency representatives, adjoining property owners, local community and interest groups.

During the Placemaking Workshop held on September 17th, 2013, PPS facilitated Place Performance Evaluations of each of the Power of 10 places within Harvard Square, where participants evaluated sites based on the four key attributes of a well-functioning place: Uses & Activities, Comfort & Image, Access & Linkages and Sociability. Workshop participants were also asked to come up with ideas for both short- and long-term improvements for each of the places.

The general ideas and input that came out of this community engagement process have inspired the vision and recommendations for Harvard Square.

NEAR TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

To be implemented in Spring 2014

We will take a “lighter, quicker, cheaper” approach to implementing your ideas for the types of activities and amenities you’d like to see at the Square. The following pages present your vision for the Heart of Harvard Square and outline the near term recommendations to help get us there. Working together, we can transform Harvard Square into true civic square and a regional destination.

NEAR TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

AMENITIES

There is a big opportunity, and an easily implementable improvement, for Harvard Square to feature amenities that would enhance the image of the Square while also making the place comfortable for people to use and spend time there. The Square should offer a variety of seating, especially movable seating, to support a range of activities such as eating, reading, people-watching or socializing.

The location of the amenities and how they are triangulated, or layered together with each other and the uses, are the secrets to creating a truly lively place. Workshop participants identified key places in the Square for different types of public space amenities based on what uses and activities they wanted to see happening there.



● *Soften hardscape with landscaping, planters, flowers and greenery*

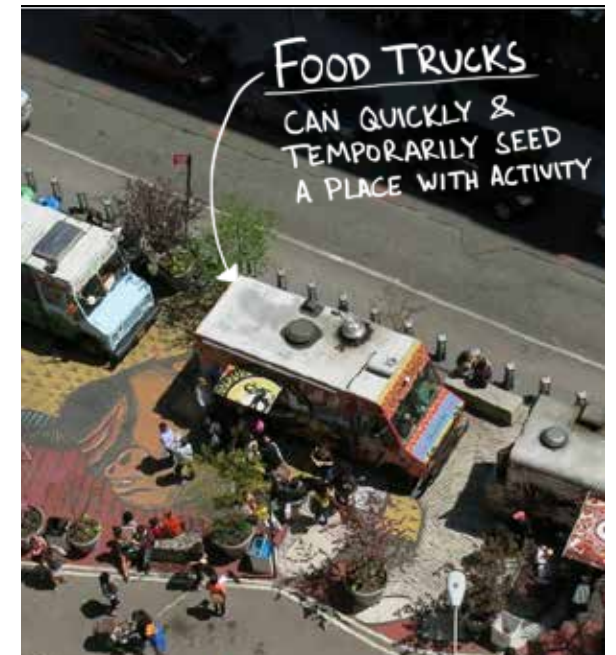
● *Bring in pop-up vendors to add more commercial uses*

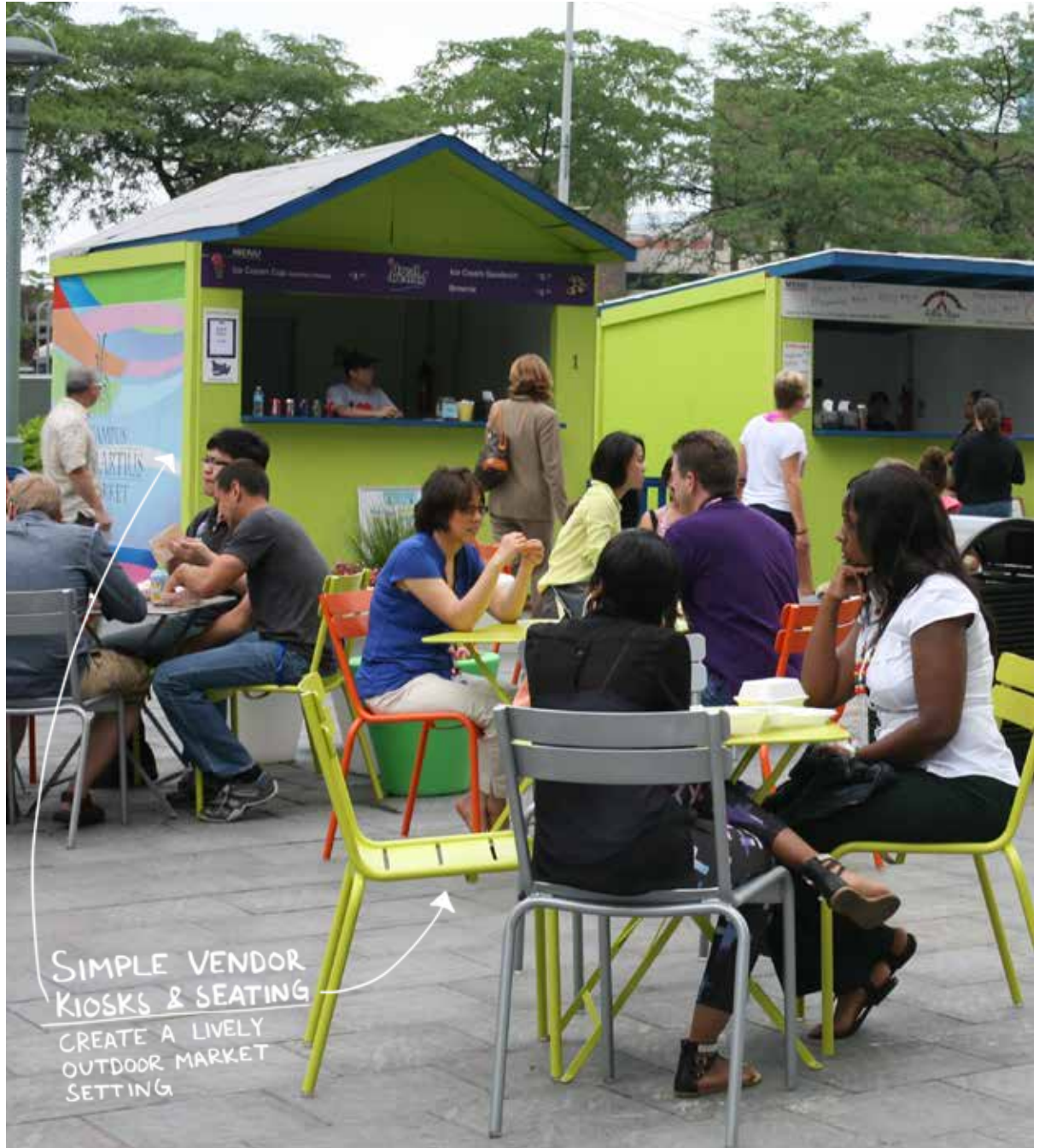
● *Add variety of lighting such as streetlights and string lights in trees*

● *Provide more trash and recycling bins and improve the maintenance of area*

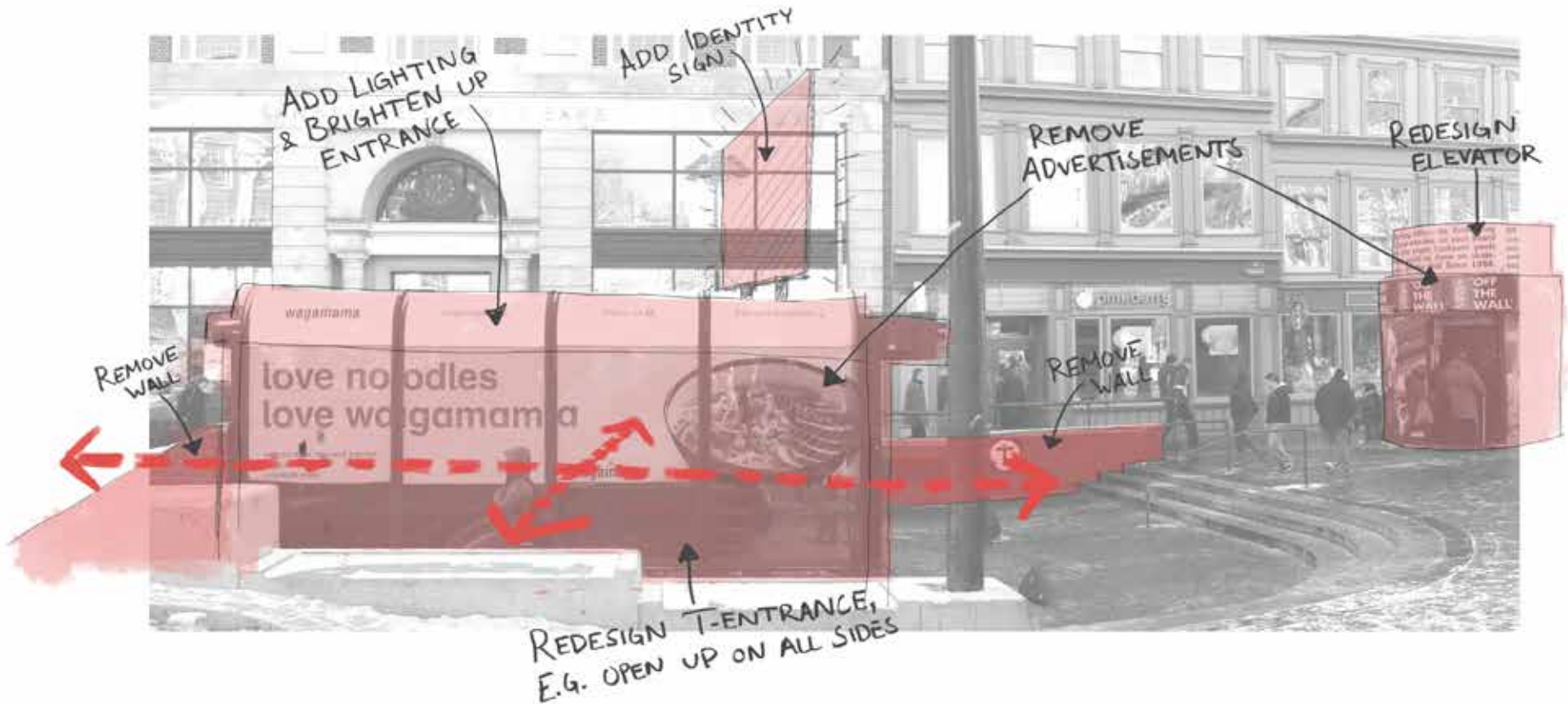
● *Locate different types of movable seating, tables and umbrellas in key places (e.g. around OOTN and Point, in the Pit, and in Forbes Plaza/Holyoke)*







SIMPLE VENDOR
KIOSKS & SEATING
CREATE A LIVELY
OUTDOOR MARKET
SETTING



NEAR TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

T-ENTRANCE & MBTA ELEVATOR

People expressed that the design of the Square is confusing because of all the different elements found there which do not relate to or complement each other. The large T-entrance shed, information booth, MBTA elevator and grading variances around the Pit do not function well or serve much of a purpose yet take up a lot of real estate at the Square and add to the visual confusion.

Participants suggested redesigning the T-entrance and elevator in a way that would open them up and make them less of a visual distraction. The goal is to redesign the Square so that it's a blank palette or stage on which activities, events and people interacting can take place rather than a space for design and objects to make their mark.

- Remove advertisements from T-entrance and elevator.
- Redesign T-entrance and elevator (e.g. open up T-entrance on all sides).

NEAR TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

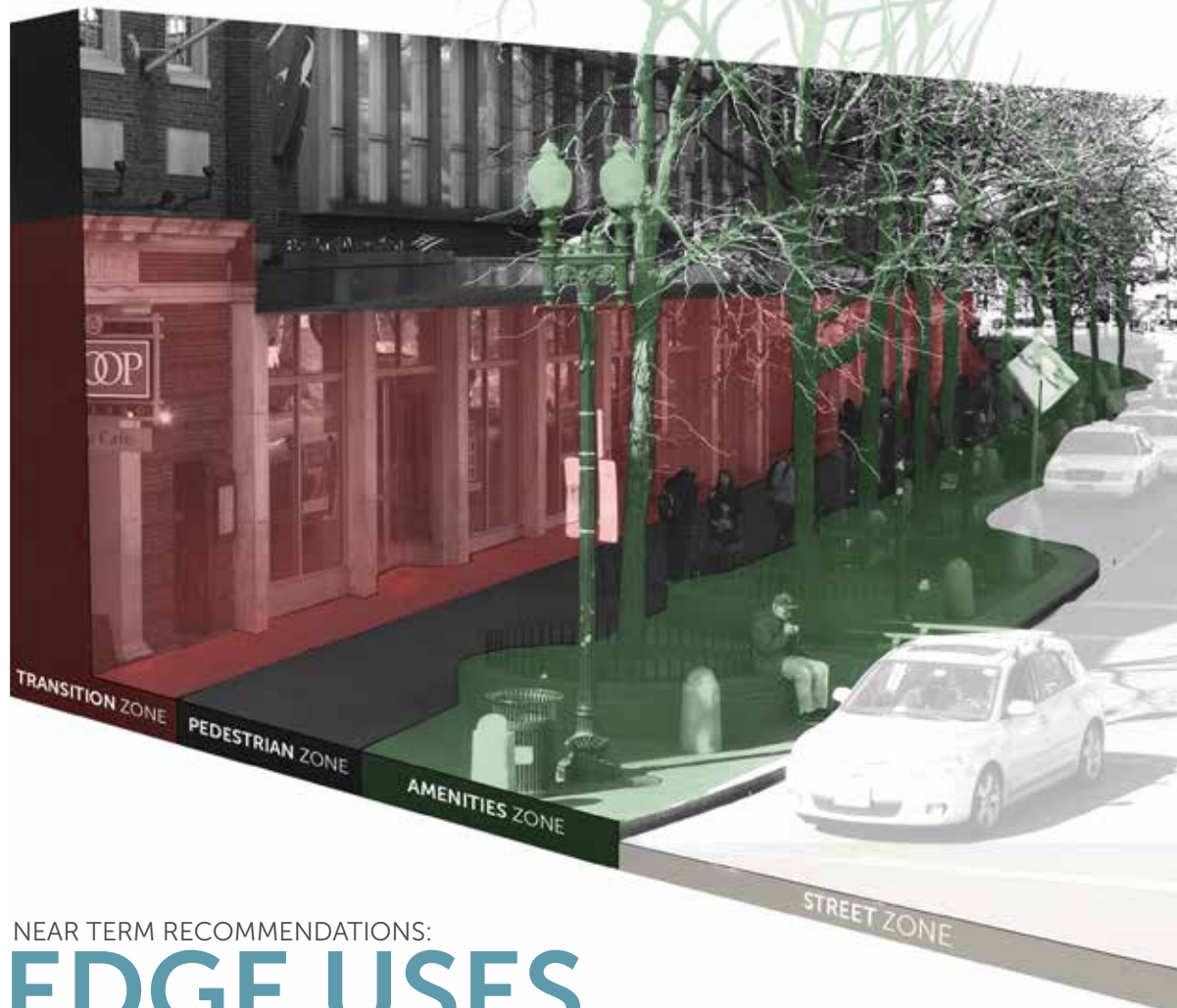
SIGNAGE & IDENTITY

One of the major issues facing Harvard Square is the lack of signage. Workshop participants felt that the lack of signage welcoming people to Harvard Square or highlighting the points of interest in the area left people wondering where they were and what to do to.

To create a stronger sense of place at the Square, informational and wayfinding signage welcoming people to Harvard Square and showing where the local businesses and institutions are located in the area can build a cohesive image and identity for Harvard Square as a shopping, dining, cultural, and historic destination.

- Add more informational signage and a 'Welcome to Harvard Square' sign to build the brand and identity of Harvard Square as a unique place and destination
- Highlight location of local businesses, Harvard University and other points of interest on wayfinding signage and maps
- Publicize the historic significance of local businesses and other places in the adjacent area (including the OOTN kiosk)





- *Open up the edges of existing businesses (e.g. Pinkberry and Starbucks) into the triangle*
- *Create better relationship between banks so that they relate more to the community and public realm*
- *Connect the inner square - Harvard Square triangle to the outer square to create synergy between the two*

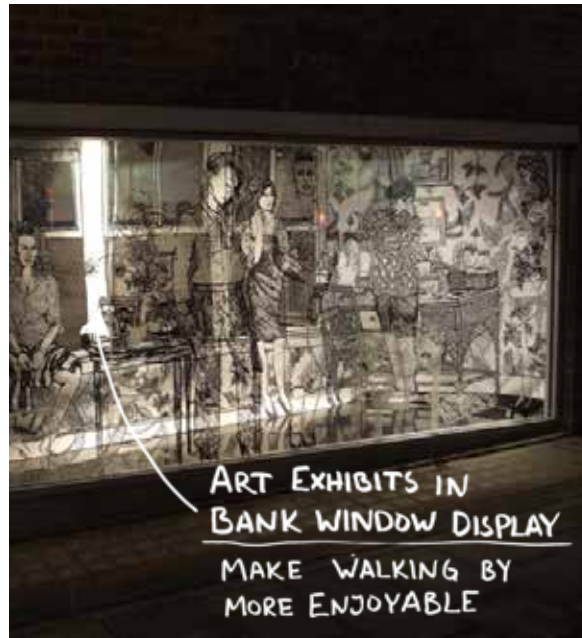
NEAR TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

EDGE USES

The streets, sidewalks and storefronts surrounding the Square need to be improved upon in order for Harvard Square to become a great civic square. Currently, the ground floors of the adjacent buildings such as the banks or the COOP do not engage with the outside. The storefronts need to be more porous and transparent so that they open up to showcase the products and activity happening inside.

The goal is to have the uses inside spill out onto the sidewalk and contribute to the street life. The local and historic stores at Harvard Square represent a huge opportunity for the Square to have active, enticing edge uses that will draw people in and through the district and square.



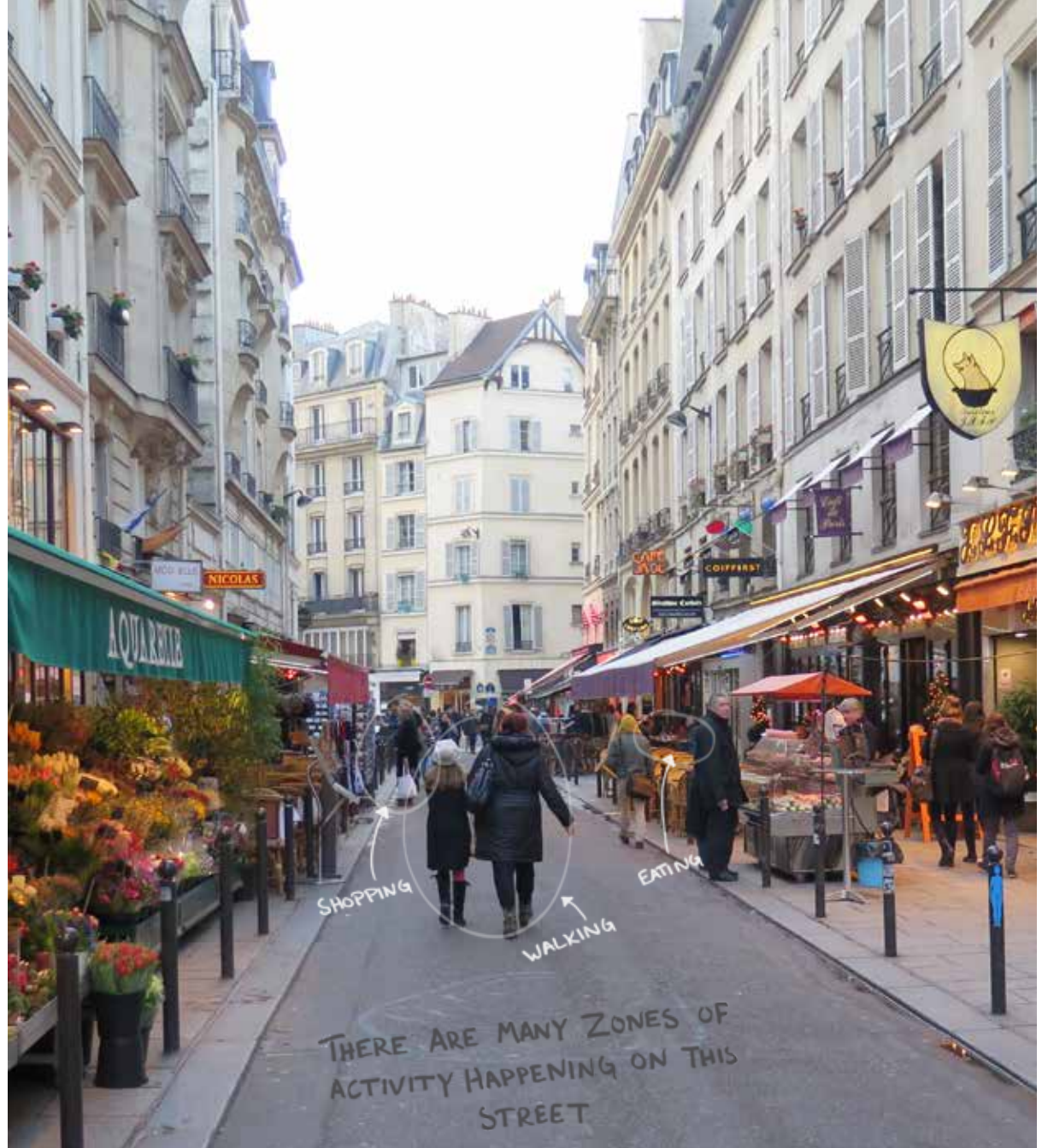


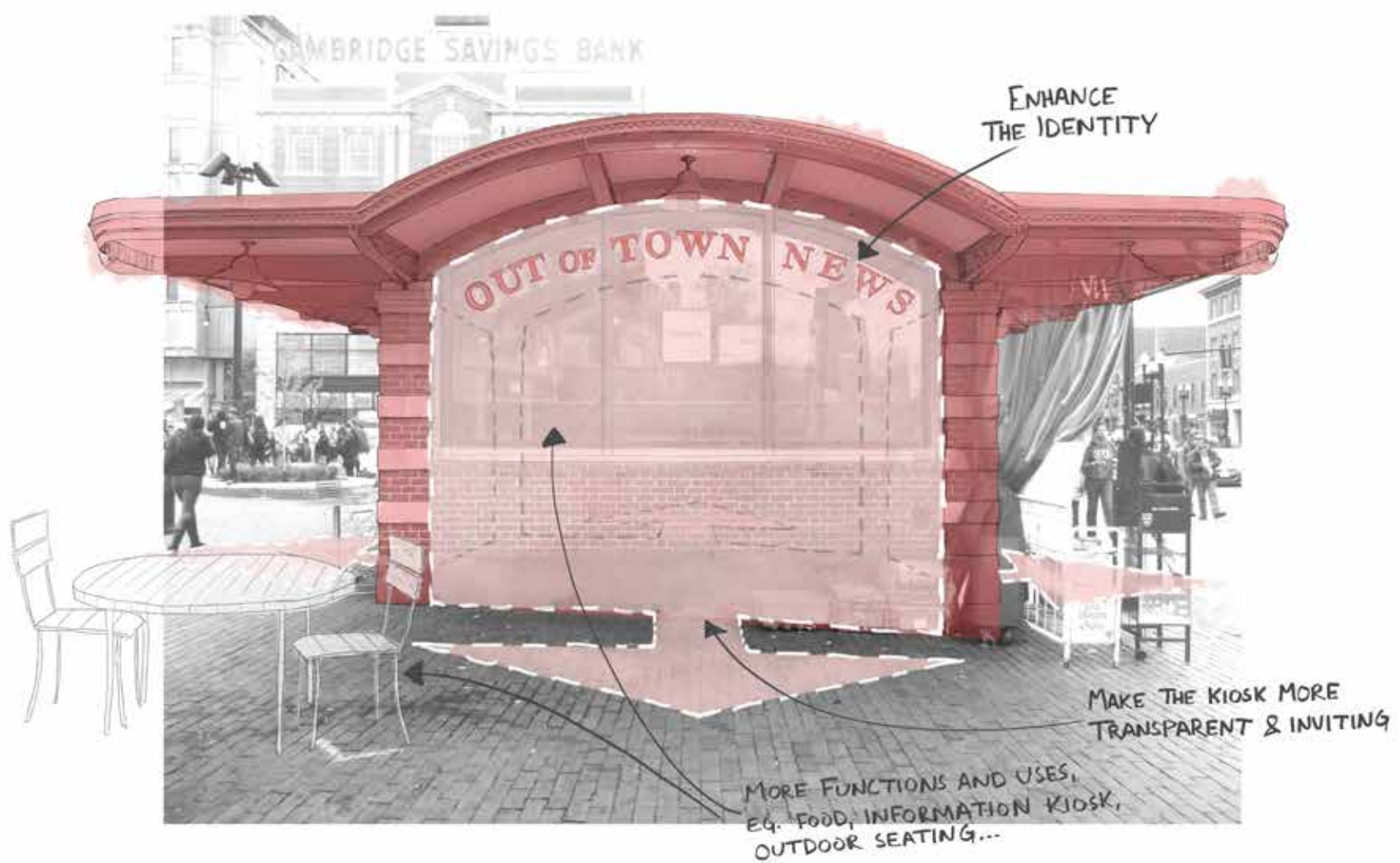


CAFÉ SEATING ON BOTH
SIDES OF THE WALKWAY
& FOOD COUNTER BRING THE
INSIDE OUT TO ACTIVATE
THE STREET



WINDOWS DISPLAYING BOOKS
& COMFORTABLE BENCHES
MAKE THE SIDEWALK OUTSIDE
THIS BOOKSTORE A VERY SOCIAL
GATHERING PLACE





NEAR TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

OUT OF TOWN NEWS KIOSK

The Out of Town News kiosk (OOTN) is an iconic newsstand and the most recognizable building in Harvard Square, but the kiosk does little in the way of serving as a beacon for the Square. The kiosk's major challenges are that it is very closed off to the Square and its single use as a newsstand does not encourage people to linger in the Square.

The bones of the OOTN kiosk are beautiful and simple improvements such as adding lighting would highlight the building and create a nice atmosphere in the evening. Another opportunity is to add a food use to transform the newsstand into a multifunctional kiosk with outdoor seating that will draw more people to use the square.

- *Open up kiosk on all sides to increase visibility*
- *Add more uses to kiosk such as food and/or information kiosk as well as outdoor seating*
- *Enhance the brand and identity*



OPEN KIOSKS
SERVING FOOD & DRINKS,
WITH SEATING NEARBY

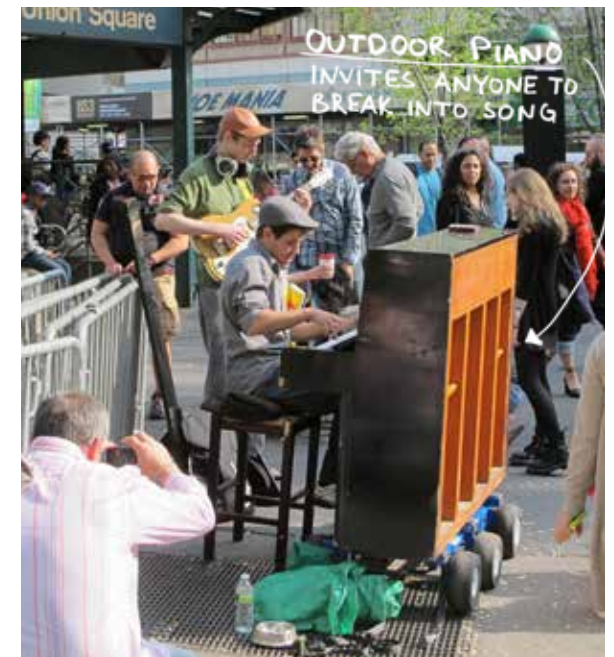
NEAR TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

PROGRAM & MANAGEMENT

Any great square has a variety of smaller “places” within it that offer a wide range of activities for men, women, people of different ages and cultures, and different times of day, week and year. Harvard Square should therefore provide a variety of activities, from browsing the newspaper while eating lunch to shopping, watching performances and attending civic events.

Opportunities for both spontaneous and planned activities should be clustered around the places and mini-destinations in the Square to create a critical mass of activity so many different people have a reason to be at the Square throughout the day and evening, and seasons.

- *Performances – both scheduled and spontaneous*
- *Fun lighting*
- *WiFi (already there but people don't know so put up sign)*
- *Art displays and exhibits*







PAINTED BIKE LANE

ART DISPLAYS & EXHIBITS

RECYCLING & TRASH RECEPTACLES

LOUNGE CHAIR FOR RELAXING

PLANTERS

UMBRELLAS, MOVABLE SEATING & TABLES

TRANSPARENT KIOSK WITH NEW USES
REMOVED AD FROM T-ENTRANCE & ELEVATOR



SIGNAGE THAT
BUILDS IDENTITY

BUSKERS &
PERFORMANCES

POP-UP VENDORS

VARIETY OF LIGHTING

INSIDE USES SPILLING
ON TO THE SIDEWALK

BENCHES AROUND TREES

Next steps

LONGER TERM
RECOMMENDATIONS

STREETS AS PLACES

If the goal is to transform Harvard Square into one of the world's most successful civic squares then we have to understand how people experience the square. From our outreach and community engagement we understand that people feel that there is an overwhelming sense of vehicle traffic surrounding the triangular area or the "heart of Harvard Square". For example, every group at the workshop raised the issues of traffic and recommended redesigning the streets so that space could be reclaimed for the Square and hence, the pedestrian. We agree. There are measures that can be taken in the medium term to rightsize the streets and make them work for the authentic urban experience we are trying to create at the Square.

In the next pages you will see two good examples of rightsizing, that clearly show that the positive outcomes make it worth the effort...

THE POTENTIAL AT HARVARD SQUARE

An aerial photograph of Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The image shows the intersection of Mass Ave, Dunster St, and JFK St/Brattle St. Several callout boxes are overlaid on the image, pointing to specific areas and providing proposed changes. The boxes are white with black text. The background is a high-contrast, black and white aerial view of the square, showing buildings, streets, and trees.

JFK ST / BRATTLE ST INTERSECTION

Reduce sense of overwhelming traffic by widening triangle

Close street more often for events

Consider alternative traffic solution to reduce heavy car presence

MASS AVE EAST SIDE OF TRIANGLE

Shift taxi stand and reclaim space for the triangle

Eliminate one traffic lane and add more space to triangle and/or sidewalk across from it

Add a separated, raised bike lane

FORBES PLAZA

Relocate or reposition Hubway and taxi stand in front of Forbes Plaza/Holyoke

DUNSTER ST

Close Dunster Street to connect the triangle and Forbes Plaza.

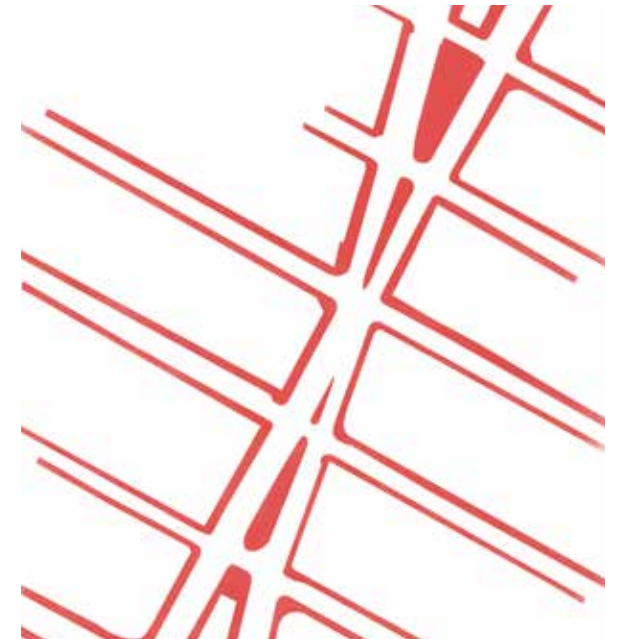
A RIGHT SIZING EXAMPLE:

TIMES SQUARE



TIMES SQUARE 2006

Times Square is situated at the junction of Broadway (which runs diagonally through the street grid creating irregular intersections) and 7th Ave in Manhattan, NY. Prior to 2006, Times Square was congested with vehicles that were forced to idle as Broadway converged with congested 7th Ave. At the same time, too many pedestrians were forced onto too little sidewalk, which resulted in an unpleasant working and shopping environment, and pedestrians unsafely walking on the roadbed.





TIMES SQUARE TODAY

Beginning in 2009, New York City made changes to the design of Broadway, the most dramatic of which was completely closing it to vehicle traffic at Times Square. Change came first in the form of temporary low-cost treatments and then more permanent designs followed once the benefits of the changes were confirmed. These changes created a simplified intersection and room for new pedestrian plazas, spaces furnished with public space amenities, and separated bike lanes. Times Square has since been transformed into a pedestrian friendly environment and a world-class public square.



A RIGHT SIZING EXAMPLE:

HARVARD SQUARE



HARVARD SQUARE 1969

The Harvard Square triangle used to be a traffic island at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue, Brattle Street, and John F. Kennedy Street. Space at the traffic island was taken up by the kiosk and headhouse for MBTA's newly extended Red Line leaving little to no room for civic life to unfold. Cars dominated Harvard Square and stunted its potential as a commercial center and civic gathering place.





HARVARD SQUARE TODAY

A new vision for Harvard Square was beginning to take shape in the 1970s - as a place for people. In response to these new expectations, extensive street and sidewalk improvements took place to create a new pedestrian-oriented environment from Holyoke St to Brattle Square. The island occupied by the kiosk was joined to the sidewalk in front of the Cambridge Savings Bank to make room for a new headhouse and plaza like what you see today.



The evolution of the Harvard Square is ongoing and these current placemaking efforts will bring about even more changes that will benefit the community and a renewed sense of place in both the short and long term.

*Now try to imagine
what Harvard Square used to be like.*

*Then think of
what the place is like today.*

*And finally, try to envision:
**what could Harvard Square
be like in the future?***



>>



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APPENDICES

ABOUT PROJECT FOR PUBLIC SPACES

Project for Public Spaces (PPS) is a nonprofit planning, educational and technical assistance organization dedicated to helping people create and sustain public spaces that build stronger communities. Our pioneering Placemaking approach helps citizens transform their public spaces into vital places that highlight local assets, spur rejuvenation and serve common needs.

PPS was founded in 1975 to expand on the work of William (Holly) Whyte, the author of *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*. Since then, we have completed projects in over 3000 communities in 42 countries and all 50 US states. Partnering with public and private organizations, federal, state and municipal agencies, business improvement districts, neighborhood associations and other civic groups, we improve communities by fostering successful public spaces.

In addition to leading projects in our

nine program areas, PPS also trains more than 10,000 people every year and reaches countless more through our websites and publications. PPS has become an internationally recognized center for resources, tools and inspiration about Placemaking.

Through research, conferences, and strategic partnerships, PPS promotes Placemaking as a transformative agenda to address some of the most pressing issues of our time. In its broadest application, Placemaking is a catalyst for building healthy, sustainable and economically viable cities of the future.

PLACE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

How to look at a “place”

Yogi Berra once said; “*You can see a lot just by observing.*” Over the past 37 years, PPS has applied this idea to its work in making urban public spaces function more effectively for people. By spending time in an area, observing how people use it and asking the people who are there what they like or don’t like, it is possible for just about anyone to experience firsthand how a place functions. This knowledge then becomes an important tool in determining how specific places can be improved.

The experience of looking at these spaces can actually be fun as well as educational - especially if structured to involve teams of people in a creative way. In St. Louis, Missouri, for example, the transit agency used this approach in planning new light rail stations. By looking at existing stations as well as interviewing transit riders on the

trains, community representatives and station planners found new insight into the positive and negative qualities of the existing stations which will aid them in their own planning efforts. They also found the experience entertaining!

What is a placemaking evaluation?

Place Performance Evaluation© is a place-oriented approach to community improvement. It asks participants to use common sense and intuition along with structured observation and interview skills. This allows them to very quickly see the good and bad qualities of a place, and suggest improvements, both short and long term. It ignites a creative process about how to make a place vital and great. The evaluation can be done by anyone who is observant, from a highly trained professional to a layperson. Equally dramatic results have been achieved by both groups.

Place Performance Evaluation can be done by a small planning team working individually, and it also makes an excellent workshop. By participating in this “game,” participants not only can get to know each other better but also can gain insight on ways to look at neighborhoods and the areas within them more holistically and to see their potential as “places” in communities.

Structuring the place performance evaluation

The exercise begins with a PowerPoint presentation of places that have good and bad qualities. After the presentation, small groups of 3-8 people spend the time in the designated area observing activities and informally interviewing people. During the site visit, participants fill out observation checklists designed by PPS, and answer questions about the space, and recommendations for improving it are solicited.

After the observations, the groups return for

a discussion in small groups of what each group found and to brainstorm ideas for programming and improvements while someone records notes on a flipchart. The groups come back together after working in small groups and a presenter from each group gives a 5-minute presentation describing their findings using slides of the observation areas for reference. Specific suggestions for improvement should be developed along with a plan of action appropriate to the location. A vision will begin to emerge of what the evaluated space can become; focusing on both small-scale improvements that can begin to take place almost immediately as well as longer-term improvements to be implemented over time.

