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JUN 30 2022

Petition for Designation of Landmarks

CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL
COMMISSION

We, the undersigned registered voters of the City of Cambridge, request the Cambridge Historical Commission to initiate the process of designating the public space named below as a Landmark under Chapter 2.78, Article III of the Code of the City of Cambridge.

Address:

The area we propose for landmark status designation is the public space surrounding the Harvard Square MBTA Station with these boundaries: the sidewalk thoroughfare extending from Massachusetts Avenue to Dunster street and running between Cambridge Savings Bank at 1374 Massachusetts Avenue and the Harvard MBTA Station makes the southern border, the curb of the sidewalk running along Dunster Street and Massachusetts Avenue makes the eastern border, a line running from the eastern border and intersecting the the southern face of the Harvard Square Kiosk and terminating at the curb of the eastern section of Massachusetts Avenue that leads into Brattle Street makes the Northern border, and the western border runs along the curb of the Brattle Street side of Massachusetts avenue between the Northern and Southern border. The features we are concerned to preserve are described below; we do not mean to include in this petition the Harvard Square Kiosk or the information/visitor center and the elevator structure west of the headhouse.

Significance of the proposed landmark:

The public space we propose to be designated as a landmark, referred to by local residents as "the Pit", was built in 1982. The primary distinctive features we are concerned to preserve include an angled brick surface that slopes down from the eastern side of the Harvard Square Station headhouse to the ground; two non-partitioned stone benches; a lower-elevation open space suitable for performances, rallies, informal congregation, and other events; two distinctive curved stone stairways; a straight-angled stairway; three cylindrical stone structures suitable for sitting; four black-painted metal handrails, and the station headhouse itself.

The Pit's historical and cultural significance is enormous and felt not just in Cambridge, but all over Massachusetts and farther. Throughout the late 1980s and '90s especially, the Pit was a destination for alienated youth throughout greater Boston, the suburbs, and other parts of New England. It was particularly popular as a spot to congregate for punks and unhoused adults and youths. Its physical features made it extremely well-suited to large informal gatherings, its proximity to businesses also made it a desirable place to congregate, while its proximity to the Harvard Red Line Station made it easier for youths and unhoused people, who are less likely to drive, to get to.

While the Pit is particularly known for being a destination for punks, its historical and cultural significance also lies in the fact that it was a place where people from very diverse socio-economic backgrounds congregated and mingled. In its heyday you could find unhoused people, poor and working-class youths, youths from wealthy families, as well as working-class adults all hanging out together for hours on end. The popular subcultures represented by those who frequented the Pit likewise were various: punks, metalheads, hippies, hip-hop heads, and others.

While its popularity as a hangout spot has diminished throughout the 2000s and 2010s, you can still see youths from various subcultures and individuals from our homeless community congregating there to this day.

As the demographic make-up of Cambridge has changed, there has been a push by our municipal government to remake public spaces to better suit the needs of tourists and gentrifiers and the many businesses that cater to them. The plaza in front of Holyoke Center has already been redeveloped in this way, and the Garage is yet another space slated for a similar transition. But of all the public and private spaces in Harvard Square that have already been destroyed or are slated for destruction, the Pit is arguably the most culturally and historically important (at least to a large portion of residents concerned with the preservation of this particular vein of local history) for its unique role as a place of congregation. This was not a historical coincidence, but stems from the way that its very physical features make it especially well-suited to friendly social mingling.

With its long, non-partitioned stone benches, sloped brick surface, long curved steps that can double as seats or a standing area, and its circular, inward facing orientation, the design of the historical Pit puts people in direct proximity with one another without delineated markers of separation in a way that uniquely supports informal social mingling. These same features also make the Pit an informal amphitheater suitable for public performances, gatherings, and rallies of all kinds. By contrast the current design proposed for the redeveloped Pit, with its level-ground and sea of separate tables and chairs, resembles the kind of character-less commercially-focused plaza that you might find in any suburban American mall. The separate tables and chairs are well-suited to the private consumption of recently purchased food from nearby businesses, but not the kind of social intermingling that so many features of the historical Pit support. In short the current Pit is a space whose physical characteristics promote social interaction and community building, while the currently proposed design is more geared toward private consumption.

The destruction of this community space and its conversion into one focused on consumption is in glaring contradiction to the history of the Pit, but, just as importantly, it is the loss of an invaluable resource as one of the last remaining public spaces of its kind in Harvard Square.

The Pit also represents a distinctive style of design indicative of public spaces built during the '80s, and while it is worth preserving as an example of this rapidly disappearing style, more than this, its actual physical characteristics are intimately tied to a particular and important vein of the history of the area and are themselves part of that history. And with the recent and planned redevelopment of so many public and private spaces connected to this history, the planned destruction of the Pit threatens to destroy all physical traces of it from Harvard Square. This would represent an incredible and irretrievable loss not just to Cambridge but the wider regional community.

Those supporting the redevelopment of the Pit argue that it needs to be redesigned to bring it into ADA compliance. While we share their concern and agree that the space should be made ADA compliant, we believe this could be done in a way that better preserves and honors the Pit's unique history than the current plan. Furthermore we believe that the Historical Commission will be able to provide invaluable guidance toward achieving this end, and that by working in partnership with the City and residents, a new design can be settled on that accomplishes both of these important goals.

For all these reasons, we, the undersigned, request that the Historical Commission initiate a Landmark Designation Study for the Pit and we urge the landmarking of this important historical site.

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Name (signed)

Name (printed)

Address

1. Mark A. White Mark A. White 45 Cherry St. ✓
2. Lydia Vickers LYDIA VICKERS " " ✓
- *3. Ben Simon Ben Simon 45 1/2 Cherry St. ✓
4. Gertude Goodman Gertude Goodman 1221 Cambridge St
Apr 708
Cambridge, MA 02139 ✓
5. Mason Gohl MASON GOHL 159 Elm street, Medford MA
02155
6. Maura Murr Maura Murr 159 Elm St. Medford MA
02155
7. Emily Sandler Emily Sandler 16 Magnolia Ave #2
Cambridge MA 02138 ✓
8. Deborah Belle Deborah Belle 27 Myrtle Ave.
Cambridge 02138 ✓
9. Joshua Piper Joshua Piper 25 Myrtle Ave. ✓
10. Robert Eckstut Robert Eckstut 251 Western Ave
Apt 1
(Robert Eckstut)

11. MM Hasley ERIN M HASLEY 764 Cambridge St. #1
12. Benjamin BENJAMIN SCHENKER 662 Green St #3 ✓
13. CR Rogers CR ROGERS 27 Lee St 02139
Apt. 2 ✓
14. Yolanda K. Kodrzycki Yolanda K. Kodrzycki 233 Brattle St ✓
15. William Clark 4 Hastings Sq. ✓
16. Jeff Goldinger Jeff Goldinger 93 Inman St. Cambridge ✓
17. Eric Fritz Eric Fritz 5 Ellsworth Ave #2 ✓
18. William Krasau William Krasau 7 Arlington St. ✓
19. RENA LEIB RENA LEIB 10 Arnold Circle ✓
20. Mark VanMiddlesworth Mark VanMiddlesworth 169 Upland rd. ✓
21. Graham Hastin Graham Hastin 52 Jay St. ✓
22. Elliott Maraniss Elliott Maraniss 18 Ware St ✓
23. Sam Brown Sam Brown 120 Rindge Avenue ✓
24. Derek McAdeo Derek McAdeo 368 Washington St
25. Caroline Clark Caroline Clark 4 Rindge Terrace
Cambridge MA 02140 ✓
26. Daniel Totten Daniel Totten 54 Bishop Allen Dr #2 ✓
27. Dorothy Gaydos Dorothy Gaydos 57 Cherry St. #1 ✓

28. Jan M. Dolan Murvihill 67 Bishop Allen Dr #2 ✓

29. Isabella Revett 67 Bishop Allen Dr #2 ✓

30. Susan M Bruce Susan M Bruce 285 Harvard St #211 ✓

31. Zachary Weiss 1550 Cambridge St, Apt. 1 ✓

32. Helen Vudler Helen Vudler 58 Trowbridge St, 02138 ✓

33. Peter Louber Peter Louber 66 Martin St 02138 ✓

34. Tom YOUNGREN 9 Ellery St. 02138 ✓

35. Nora Williams 285 Harvard St. 210 ✓

36. Olivia Paquette 123 Amory St # 2 ✓

37. JAMES M. MCCOY 136 VASSALL LN 02138 ✓

38. Peter Berkowitz 12 Ellery St 02138 ✓

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