



# CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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done  
01/07

Date: 12/23/2020  
To: Tanya L. Ford-Crump, Executive Director  
Election Commission  
From: Charles M. Sullivan, Executive Director  
Cambridge Historical Commission  
Re: Request for Verification of Registered Voters

As required by Chapter 2.78.180 of the Code of the City of Cambridge, the Historical Commission requests that the names on the attached petition be verified as being registered voters of the City of Cambridge. ONLY TEN NAMES NEED TO BE VERIFIED TO VALIDATE THE PETITION.

Please sign and return to the Historical Commission via interoffice mail.

Signatures checked by  Date 01/07/2020

# Landmark Petition for Lechmere Canal Park

December 15, 2020

To: The Cambridge Historical Commission  
Mr. Bruce A. Irwin, Chairman  
Mr. Charles M. Sullivan, Executive Director  
831 Massachusetts Avenue, 2nd Floor  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

## CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND SIGNIFICANCE

WHEREAS: Lechmere Canal Park is a professionally designed riverfront park recognized in Cambridge and Boston and even among national and international visitors [Its page on Google maps shows seven videos and 100+ photos, one with a Russian label]. It conveys an authentic historic character that creates a classic and harmonious visual style; and

WHEREAS: This location is a key example of a riverside park, conveying a distinctive style based on the 42-year-old East Cambridge Riverfront Plan (1978) which stated that "The buildings of East Cambridge constitute an excellent example of the vernacular architecture of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in its original setting." Wanting to establish an urban plan that blended with this historical character, City Council mandated that any part of the development around the canal "should complement and harmonize with adjacent land uses . . . with respect to . . . height, landscaping, and screening" [East Cambridge Riverfront Design Guidelines, 1985]; and

WHEREAS: The Park was designed by noted landscape architect Carole R. Johnson, still living at age 91. She believed in the social value of good design and the importance of the site's natural and cultural history. Among her other works are the following: President Johnson's Model Cities Program in Lowell, MA; campus projects at Boston College and Duke University; collaboration with scientists on brownfield remediation projects, e.g. Mystic River Reservation and upstate NY; Boston's Old Harbor Park; and JFK Memorial Park. She taught at Harvard's Graduate School of Design from 1966 to 1973; and

WHEREAS: Ms. Johnson followed the City's desire to maintain the historical character of the design by choosing structures that individually and together honor the City's mandate for vernacular architecture: such features as a classical gazebo or pavilion, traditional iron and wood benches, historical lamp posts, terra cotta runner's gravel, and beautiful brick paving, and

WHEREAS: Lechmere Canal Park is an example of a significant contribution by a significant woman. When Ms. Johnson started her practice, few women were working on urban design and planning issues. In 1982 she became a Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects, and in 1998 was the first American woman to receive the ASLA Medal [<https://tclf.org/landscapes/lechmere-canal-park>]. She officially retired in June 2016, and.

WHEREAS: The 7.5-acre linear park wraps both sides of the canal and connects with the Charles River walkway. The canal is edged with sunken gravel paths and bermed lawn panels, maximizing the sense of greenspace along its length. Weeping willows, sycamores, and red maples are planted at regular intervals alongside evergreen shrubs, ornamental grasses, and groundcovers. The canal terminates at a circular basin with a tall jet fountain at its center. The park has a secondary circulation network composed of a raised brick path which provides direct access to the surrounding buildings. The

seawall at the basin offers docking for light watercraft, and a small-stepped amphitheater and open air pavilion serve as orienting focal elements.

The pavilion has a six-sided roof and metal plaques in the pavement that interpret the industrial history of the canal. Wooden benches line the canal's pathways, while moveable tables and chairs provide seating in the retail areas, and stationary seating serves the residential area. The project also established urban design guidelines for private developers whose buildings edge the basin and canal [<https://tclf.org/landscapes/lechmere-canal-park>], and

WHEREAS: The park is inextricably linked to the history and culture of the Boston/Cambridge urban area and its transportation. The canal itself is a historic site. Built in 1895, it functioned as an active seaport for Boston Harbor until the Charles River Dam Bridge cut off access in 1910. The canal fell into disuse and the surrounding industrial area became blighted through the 20th century. In 1978, the city adopted the East Cambridge Riverfront plan in order to revitalize the neighborhood with commercial and residential development, and Ms. Johnson was hired to create the Lechmere Canal Park, and

WHEREAS: As a former port, the canal is inextricably linked to the days when Cambridge specialized in blue-collar industries that supported the working class, and

WHEREAS The area in which this park is situated is rapidly undergoing change that risks depriving Cambridge of one of the most beautiful and interesting examples of important and historic work, central to the Riverfront's identity, spirit of place, heritage, and cultural landscape; and

WHEREAS: The park is a vital and ongoing symbol of the Riverfront's environment of continual change and a key epicenter of this urban cultural landscape; and

WHEREAS: The builders and designers of Lechmere Canal Park and its environs consciously drew from local "context" and honored the City's mandate to create a riverfront setting with a historic character and built a park with classical furniture, unique balance, harmony and yet modern appeal. Nature dominates with trees and greenery and dozens of visiting wildlife.

## **DESIGNATIONS**

WHEREAS: The Cambridge City Council in 1983 enacted legislation designed to preserve and conserve buildings and sites of significance in Cambridge's history; and

## **CURRENT THREATS**

WHEREAS: At Planning Board on October 6, 2020, New England Development applied for a Special Permit to start work on the redevelopment of CambridgeSide mall [*via PBA364, based on approval of PUD-8 in late 2019*]. According to a CDD Staff Memo, the developer plans to **start redeveloping Lechmere Canal Park during this coming Spring, 2021** [*Memo to Cambridge Planning Board, p. 12-13, Sept. 28, 2020*]. Along with the park, they also plan to begin work on both the Sears and Macy's buildings.

Presentation materials show insertion into the City's park of a variety of non-harmonious features such as a stark contemporary steel and glass pavilion, only 50 feet away from the historic existing gazebo. With the gazebo so close, the new pavilion would be not only discordant, but also not needed. Other changes include replacing an iron railing with a plexiglass fence and replacing the terra cotta runners' gravel with light tan-colored boardwalk. Too, clunky seating is planned: 6-ft-high-backed benches, a boomerang shaped bench, and bed-sized 5' x 8' chaise lounges which could invite illicit behavior.

The plans also show the historic terra cotta brick paving replaced by grey and white hardscape. None of this is in keeping with the original Riverfront Plan. Lastly, breaking with the existing design for stationary furniture in the residential area, N.E.D.'s plan shows cheap-looking moveable tables and chairs in the "front yard" of the Thomas Graves Landing apartment building, and

WHEREAS: This N.E.D. design disregards the City's Cambridge Riverfront Plan's specific intention to retain a historical flavor with the vernacular architecture of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in its original setting, and.

WHEREAS The Park was designed by a notable female landscape architect, one who started her practice at a time when there were few women working on urban design and planning issues [<https://tclf.org/landscapes/lechmere-canal-park>]. A recent study at MIT noted that we have far too few monuments, sites, and streets in the city honoring women. Ms. Johnson is now in the sunset of her life. It would be a moving tribute to her and an inspiration to young people to add a statue of her sitting on one of the park benches. Even better than that would be to protect her noble design from the developer's hodgepodge of changes in style and materials, and

WHEREAS: The current park serves up nature to runners, bikers, and walkers who can enjoy wildlife on their way [gulls, ducks, geese, pigeons, all manner of small birds, as well as bunnies and squirrels]. It also serves as the front yard of a large residential building whose owners want to preserve their moderately quiet living conditions. Yet, N.E.D.'s plans emphasize large group entertainment activities such as movie watching, large group dining, apparently to draw traffic to their retail enterprises. We ardently believe that one goal of this publicly owned park was to serve as a place to commune with nature. We want to preserve it as a nature park, not the developer's commercial property, and

WHEREAS: In the East Cambridge Riverfront Plan (1978) and the City Council's "Guidelines" (1985), one of the key criteria for development of the park area, CambridgeSide, and surrounding buildings, was that designs reflect, amplify, and strengthen the established historical character of East Cambridge.

## **LANDMARK DESIGNATION**

WHEREAS: It would be a discredit to the city of Cambridge if we did not protect the integrity of the park's award-winning design and allowed the work of one of the few women landscape architects of her time to be effaced and eroded with the current plan described in the N.E.D. Special Permit filing, and

WHEREAS: Lechmere Canal Park's design, history, setting, and use make it worthy of preservation as a Cambridge Landmark; and

WHEREAS: Lechmere Canal Park is one of a select number of properties that is important not only for its aesthetic vibrance, but also to Cambridge's economic and working-class history, and

WHEREAS: Official landmark designation for Lechmere Canal Park would enable its unique qualities to be maintained for the benefit of all in Cambridge and Boston, as well as for visitors from around the U.S. and the world, and would "foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge" of its distinctive characteristics and significance; and

WHEREAS: Individually Landmarking this locally significant park is needed to ensure that public participation and review guidelines contribute to the historic and visual enhancement of Cambridge and its East Cambridge Riverfront appeal; and

WHEREAS: We cherish the urban design of the East Cambridge Riverfront Plan, including this park with its time-honored fixtures and its illustrious terra cotta and green, echoing Harvard Yard, the old Superior Courthouse and Bullfinch Square. We remind everyone that Lechmere Canal Park is a beautiful city park, not the property of any developer. It is a jewel of Cambridge.

WHEREAS: Notwithstanding the fact that the City of Cambridge has yet to afford official recognition and protected status of Lechmere Canal Park; so

THEREFORE, do we, the undersigned registered voters of the City of Cambridge, pursuant to Ordinance 1002, Article III, Section 180(D) of Chapter 2.78 of the Cambridge Municipal Code, hereby respectfully pray that the Cambridge Historical Commission initiate with all possible haste the process of designating the Lechmere Canal Park as a protected landmark of the City of Cambridge.

**[Addendum: Unbeknownst to this author at the time, Ms. Johnson died on December 11, 2020 -- the day the first draft of this petition was written.]**

# ENDORSEES

Printed Name

address

Zip

Signature

- ✓ 1. Martene Lundberg, 4 Canal Park, 602, Cambridge MA 02141 Martene H. Lundberg
- ✓ 2. Barbara Bailey, 4 Canal Park, Cambridge MA 02141 B. Bailey  
~~with sign~~ ~~4 Canal 412~~
- ✓ 3. William W. Doerr, 4 Canal Park, #512, Cambridge, MA WOODSON
- ✓ 4. MADÉLINE LAFARGE, 4 CANAL PARK, #611, CAMBRIDGE, MA Madelin La Farge
- ✓ 5. ANN WARD, 6 CANAL PK #409, CAMBRIDGE MA 02141
- ✓ 6. Pamela Putnam, 4 Canal Park PH11, Cambridge Pamela Putnam
- ✓ 7. MARIA WOODFORD, 6 CANAL PARK 503 Maria J. Woodford  
(MIA)
- N 8. Chris Heidrich, 4 Canal Park 705 Chris Heidrich
- ✓ 9. Jonathan Wood, 6 Canal Park, PH0 Jonathan Wood
- N 10. ALLAN ZENOWITZ, 6 Canal Park 502, Cambridge Allan Zenowitz
- ✓ 11. David Kim, 4 Canal Park 302, 02141 David Kim
- N 12. AIDA MARCUSSE, 4 CANAL PARK - Apt 702 - Aida Marcusse  
(marcuse)
- N 13. Rose L Blake
- ✓ 14. BETTY WSTONE, 6 CANAL PARK #605, 02141 Betty W Stone



**ENDORSEES**

Printed Name

address

Zip

Signature

V17. David W. Ellis    6 Canal Park    02141    David W. Ellis  
# 210  
Cambridge MA

N 18. Marion S. Ellis             Marion S. Ellis



**ENDORSEES**

Printed Name

address

Zip

Signature

✓ 19. Kathy Quick 10 Rogers St. 02142 Kathy Quick

✓ 20. Rafi Mohammed 10 Rogers St. 02142 Rafi Mohammed

**ENDORSEES**

Printed Name

address

Cambridge 02141

Signature

N 21. Christine Hamersley 4 Canal Park PH10 Cambridge

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