

Approved 3/7/13

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

January 17, 2013 – Meyer Gate, North side of Harvard Yard - 4:00 P.M.

Members present: William B. King, *Chair* and Bruce Irving, *Vice Chair*;
M. Wyllis Bibbins, Robert Crocker, Chandra Harrington, Jo M. Solet, *Members*
Shary Page Berg, Joseph Ferrara and Susannah Tobin, *Alternate Members*

Members absent: none

Staff present: Charles Sullivan, Sarah Burks

Public present: See attached list.

Chair William King called the meeting to order at 4:05 P.M. and made introductions.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Properties

Case 2806: Harvard Yard Fence, by President & Fellows of Harvard College. View mockup of four exhibition panels on the north side of the Harvard Yard fence, west of the Meyer Gate.

Mr. King explained that the purpose of the site visit was information gathering only. He would allow questions of fact, but comments should be held until the continued public hearing at 6:00 P.M. on February 7 at 806 Massachusetts Avenue. He encouraged people to view both sides of the sample panel installation.

Tanya Iatridis, Director of Harvard Planning and Property Management, described the site. She noted the progress of the overpass reconstruction and pointed out the skating rink being set up there. She noted that the sample panels were made of the actual materials for the final panels. They were not a cardboard mock up.

Lisa Hogarty, Harvard's Vice President for Campus Services, gave some background to the university's efforts to increase opportunities and facilities for the arts. President Faust had established a Task Force on the Arts to make recommendations. Student performance art was encouraged, as was visual art. The panels would provide an additional place for the exhibition of art.

Scott Bishop of STOSS Landscape Urbanism indicated the proposed location of the 19 panels. Five would be east of the Meyer gate and 14 to the west. They would be grouped in pairs between each pair of brick piers. The installation would be entirely reversible.

Jo Solet asked if the proponents would consider a smaller number of panels or other locations where the public views into the Yard would not be lost.

James Williamson of 1000 Jackson Place asked what Harvard meant by the term "common space" used on a banner on the overpass. Ms. Hogarty answered that the banner was intended to show what the plaza would look like when completed with benches and casual seating. She referred to a study that resulted in the Common Spaces initiative to bring together students, faculty, and staff in different spots on campus. Mr. Williamson noted that the student art could be very different in composition from the Rothko examples chosen on the samples.

Elizabeth Gombosi of 42 Irving Street and the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Association asked how often the panels would change. Ms. Hogarty answered that there would be two 12-week long exhibits each year.

Francis Donovan of 42 Irving Street asked if a museum would not be a better location for the billboards.

Maryann McMahon of 14 Highland Avenue and the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Association asked if there would be an explanatory panel to introduce the viewer to the exhibit. Ms. Hogarty said that could be done.

Chandra Harrington asked how old the gates were. Charles Sullivan answered that the fence and gates were completed in stages as gifts of different alumni classes. They began to be constructed in 1888 and were completed by 1930. Mr. Bibbins noted that they were designed by McKim, Meade and White.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street commented that the plaza was being treated like an outdoor living room. It was a public and private crossroad. She likened the proposal to a bulletin board around the John Harvard Statue.

Mr. Williamson asked how Harvard thought about the plaza space. As university space? A shared space? How would the exhibits relate to that vision? How would the exhibits be selected and by whom? Tom Lucey, of Harvard, indicated that the 1960s agreement between the City and Harvard was that Harvard would care for the space on the overpass but the public would retain an easement to the space. Ms. Hogarty said there would be a student-faculty committee to select proposals from students, faculty, or departments. Mr. Williamson suggested that proposals from neighborhood associations or the Cambridge Arts Council also be considered. Ms. Hogarty indicated that was a good idea.

Mr. King noted that the Commission considered materials, placement and size of signs, but not content. Mr. Donovan asked how that fit with the Commission's role to protect the character of the historic district. Mr. King noted that history is not static. The Commission should prevent things that are incongruous to the district. It was a collective decision of all the members. The site visit had been beneficial in being able to see the sample panels and hear the public's questions.

Dr. Solet asked if Harvard had considered how the panels would look from inside the yard. The reverse side was big, black, and blank. Ms. Iatridis replied that it had been considered and dorm residents had been consulted. It would not be dark or obtrusive. Dr. Solet asked if the back side of the panels could be lighter in color, and Mr. Bishop replied in the affirmative. Dr. Solet suggested considering fewer and different sized panels. They could be changed during the semester. Ms. Iatridis noted that 19 panels would be the maximum, not the minimum per exhibit. It could be less.

Joe Ferrara asked when the plaza would be completed. Mr. Bishop answered that it would be completed by commencement.

Ms. Meyer asked if other proportions had been considered for the panels. Would the aluminum on the iron fence cause discoloration? Mr. Bishop indicated other sizes and proportions had been considered. Chris Reed of STOSS said other proportions were considered but this was the one that worked best with the design of the fence. The two metals would not touch each other.

Mr. Irving moved to adjourn. Mr. Crocker seconded, and the motion passed unanimously at 4:39 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 1/17/13**

Erik Prince, STOSS	18 Loring St, Somerville, MA
Maryanne McMahon	14 Highland Ave (MCNA representative)
Elizabeth Gombosi	42 Irving St (MCNA representative)
Madeline Mehan	17 Quincy St
Kris Locke	Holyoke Center 738, 1350 Mass Ave
Scott Bishop	STOSS
Susan Viglione	100 Memorial Dr
Marilee Meyer	10 Dana St, #404
Heli Meltsner	74 Avon Hill St
Lisa Hogarty	1350 Mass Ave
John Sanzone	540 Memorial Dr
Chris Reed	STOSS
Vincent Lawrence Dixon	
Fritz Donovan	42 Irving St
Gary Hammer	1350 Mass Ave
Tanya Iatridis	1350 Mass Ave
James Williamson	1000 Jackson Pl

Town is Cambridge unless otherwise indicated.