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Statement of Hillel Stavis before The Cambridge City Council
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Thirty five years ago, with the help of an SBA loan, I started a bookstore in Harvard Square called WordsWorth. Eventually, that operation became synonymous with excellence in bookselling and became a famous venue for distinguished authors. Eventually, high rent and the shift in reading to the internet made WordsWorth not viable.

By happenstance, one of my neighbors was Margret Rey, one of Cambridge's most illustrious authors, who, along with her husband, Hans, created the world's most famous and beloved monkey, Curious George in the 1940's. The intriguing and delightfully illustrated books have been translated into scores of other languages and George and the Man in the Yellow Hat have even take their place as Christmas ornaments in the White House. Margret settled in Cambridge in the 1960's – her indomitable but affectionate personality became a fixture in Cambridge and to thousands of children for over 40 years until her passing in 1996.

A year before Margret's demise, my wife and I approached her and asked if she would be in favor of the world's first book and toy store dedicated to Curious George. She loved the idea and shared her vision for its design and purpose. She graciously consented to host the store's inauguration in the summer of 1995. For fifteen years, The Curious George Shop has delighted thousands of children and parents. As one of the few remaining family owned, independent retailers in Harvard Square, we have been committed to honoring the Reys' legacy by showcasing the curious world of George and his friends and by reaching out to schools through our reading programs and writing and art contests.

Sadly, as a result of a faltering economy and having lost our lease, George is in danger of becoming homeless. I believe that the loss of yet another independent business – especially one that contributes so much in terms of literacy and education – would be devastating to Cambridge. Many of our customers are tourists who tell us that they came to Harvard Square to visit the world's only Curious George store. In order to save Curious George, we are exploring the possibility of converting the business to a non-profit venture whose mission would be to continue and augment our early childhood reading programs in conjunction with Cambridge schools. We would also devote part of our space as a permanent exhibit honoring the genius of the Reys and their legacy. From the perspective of a viable business, a Cambridge landmark and as a valuable nonprofit, we hope that an angel contributor will step forward. Whatever you - as councilors - can do to preserve this wonderful institution would be magnificent and a service to the city and its children. With the return to financial liquidity, I believe we can secure a fair lease and continue for many years delighting children and fulfilling a valuable educational mission.