



## CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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January 6, 2010

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Charles Sullivan

Re: D-1187: 1063-1077 Massachusetts Avenue

An application to demolish the building at 1063-1077 Massachusetts Avenue was received on December 17. The applicant was notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for January 7, 2010.

### Site and Context

This property (which is known as 1075 Massachusetts Avenue) is located on the north side of the avenue at the corner of Trowbridge Street (see attached Assessors map). The structure is a one-story store building with cast-stone principal façades and brick elsewhere. The assessed value of the land is \$2,294,600, and the value of the building is \$1,116,800. The property sold for \$3.5 million in May 2009.

The structure is sited on a 8,946 square-foot lot (Map 134/Parcel 50) in a Business B zone. This district allows multi-family residential use with an FAR of 3.0 (or business, general retail, and office uses with an FAR of 2.75) and a height limit of 80 feet.

The site is within the Harvard Square Overlay District, as defined in the Zoning Code (Section 20.50ff), but it is outside the Harvard Square Historic Overlay District, which has the same boundary as the Harvard Square Conservation District, so the demolition ordinance (Ch. 2.78. Article II) applies. The additional flexibility and density granted to developments within the Harvard Square Historic Overlay District is not available to properties outside the district but still within the Harvard Square Overlay District.

The Harvard Square Overlay District is intended to

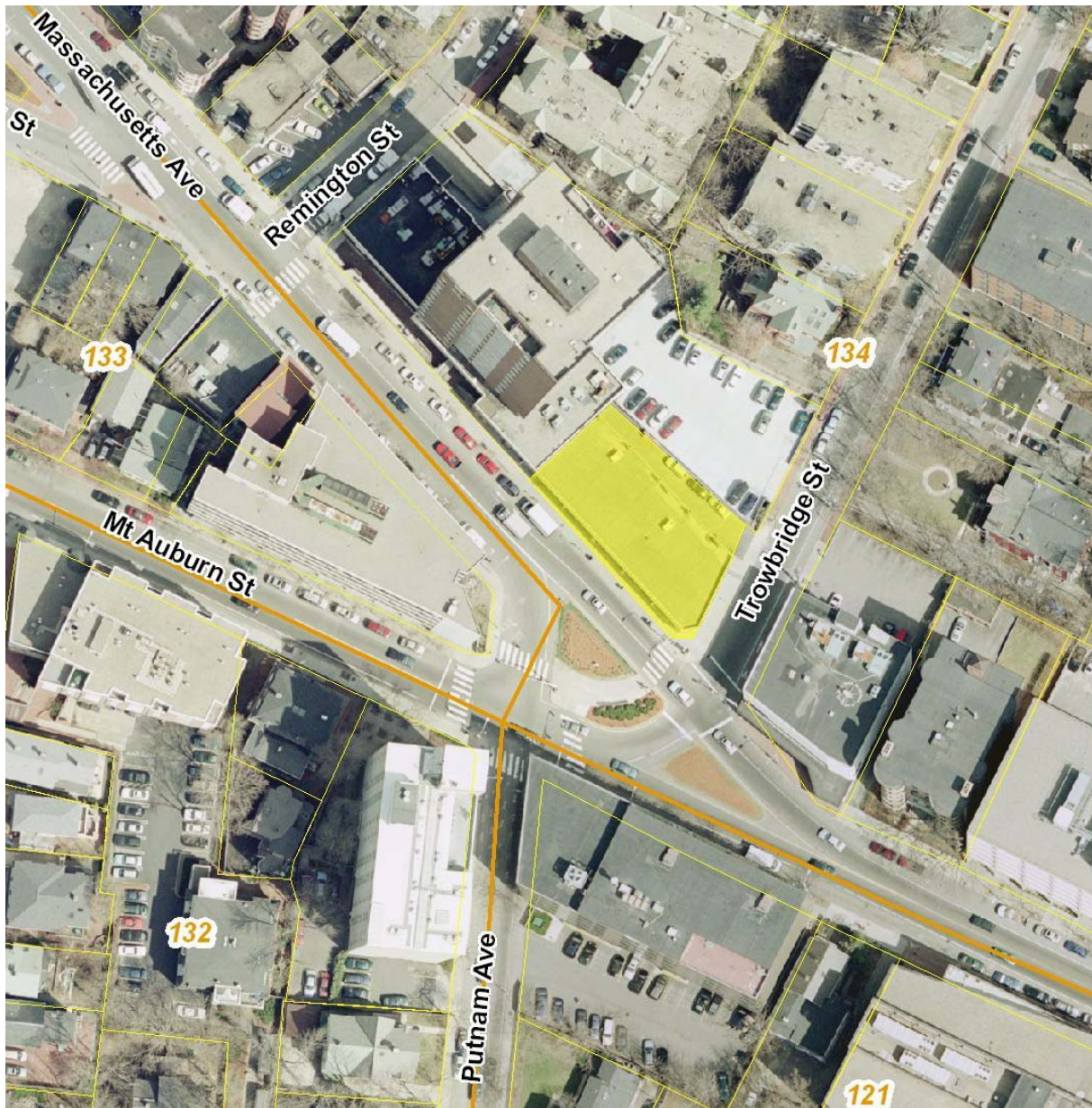
provide for more careful public scrutiny of development proposals that may alter the established urban form of the Harvard Square area. These regulations are intended to channel the extreme development pressures in ways which will preserve and enhance the unique functional environment and visual character of Harvard Square; to mitigate the functional impacts of new development on adjacent residential neighborhoods; to maintain the present diversity of development and open space patterns and building scales and ages; and to provide sufficient regulatory flexibility to advance the general purposes of this Section 20.52.

The project has been approved by the Harvard Square Advisory Committee, but has not yet been reviewed by the Planning Board. The committee found that the project conforms to the *Harvard Square Development Guidelines*, which were compiled from the *Guidelines for Development and Historic Preservation as contained in the Final Report of the Harvard Square Neighborhood Conservation District Study Committee*, dated November 29, 2000 and the *Harvard Square Development Guidelines*, 1986, but questioned the detailing of the proposed façade.

The building is located in Putnam Square, at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue, Mt. Auburn Street, Putnam Avenue, and Trowbridge Street. While Putnam and Trowbridge remain residential, for about the last one hundred years Mount Auburn Street and Massachusetts Avenue have been in transition, with various properties passing from single-family residential to low-density commercial and then to high-density, mixed-use retail, office, and residential uses. 1075 Massachusetts Avenue, which displaced a single-family house in 1925, is now the last low-density retail building in the vicinity, the others having been replaced with taller buildings beginning in the 1970s. The applicant proposes construct a five-story mixed-use residential building with retail on the ground floor.



**1075 Massachusetts Avenue (center); 1100 Massachusetts Avenue (left);  
1105 Massachusetts Avenue (rear); and 1045 Massachusetts Avenue (right).  
CHC photo, 2010**



**1063-1077 Massachusetts Avenue. Cambridge GIS image, 2003**

### Architectural Description

The building at 1075 Massachusetts Avenue is a one-story storefront designed by architects Silverman, Brown & Heenan in 1925. The building has an appealingly simple cast-stone façade with a rather severe Classical Revival cornice. There are few decorative elements apart from rosettes cast in the frieze above each pier and embossed mouldings around the storefront openings. The storefronts themselves were replaced in 1961-65; they are anodized aluminum, set at a shallow angle to the street. The rear wall along the service alley is brick.



**1175 Massachusetts Avenue. CHC photo, 2010.**

The architects, Silverman, Brown & Heenan, are best known as designers of apartment buildings in the period 1911-1929. David R. Silverman was born in Massachusetts about 1886. His parents, Moses and Rosa, emigrated from Poland and became American citizens in 1865. Of their seven children, the four oldest were, in 1910, an attorney (Samuel), an architect (Nathan), a civil engineer (Peter), and a draftsman (David). Nathan and David practiced as the Silverman Engineering Co. from 1911 to 1918, designing single-family houses, three-deckers, and small apartment buildings in Cambridge. David Silverman joined with Parker J. Brown and Edward Heenan in 1922 to form Silverman, Brown & Heenan, which was responsible for 14 projects – mainly brick apartment houses – between 1922 and 1928. Heenan then left the firm, which as Silverman & Brown built six more buildings in Cambridge in 1928-29. Silverman, a resident of Roxbury, had his office in Boston, and probably built many more buildings elsewhere than are listed in Cambridge.



**1075 Massachusetts Avenue entrance detail. CHC photo, 2010**

1075 Massachusetts Avenue represents a form that became ubiquitous in the period 1910-1930: the single story storefront, with a cast stone or brick façade containing from one to a dozen stores. Their rise can be traced to the spread of multi-family buildings along the major avenues after the opening of the Cambridge Subway in 1912. During this period a house on a large lot of land containing one or two families might be replaced by a building containing as many as 80 families, creating a huge demand for retail stores and services. In 1925 the *Cambridge Chronicle* noted that since 1914 developers had created more than 100 stores along Massachusetts Avenue from Cambridge Common to Beech Street.

### History

Massachusetts Avenue between Harvard Square and Central Square originated as a farm lane that ended in the marshes along the Charles River. After the construction of the West Boston Bridge in 1793, it was widened and straightened as it became a link in the region's highway system. The construction of the Cambridge Railroad, a horsecar line, in 1854 opened the area to suburban development, and for several decades the avenue was a prestigious residential address. The electrification of streetcar service in 1889 and the construction of the subway in 1909-12 supported more intense development, and gradually the large houses fell to stores, gas stations, and apartment buildings, especially on corner lots.

The first house at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Trowbridge Street was a Mansard built on a 16,000 sf lot for Rev. David G. Haskins in 1863. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Putnam Square was beginning to attract commercial uses, and by 1916 only two of the five corners were occupied solely as residences. The 1962 zoning code removed height limits and encouraged greater density, allowing construction of the 11-story 2 Mt. Auburn Street in 1970 and the 14-story 1105 Massachusetts Avenue in 1972. More restrictive provisions allowed 1050 Massachusetts Avenue (5 stories) in 1973 and 1100 Massachusetts Avenue (five stories) in 1978. The Haskins house was razed in 1972 to provide access to the parking deck of 1105 Massachusetts Avenue.



**1075 Massachusetts Avenue in 1965. CHC photo.**

In 1925 Samuel Barovitz of Boston acquired the property, moved the 1863 house to the back yard facing Trowbridge Street, and retained Silverman, Brown & Heenan to design a six-unit

retail building that cost \$40,000 to erect. The initial occupants included Walter Messinger's pharmacy, which occupied the corner until about 1967, a restaurant, and three auto-related enterprises: a Hudson-Essex showroom, a used car dealer, and a U-Dryvit Auto Rental franchise. Other tenants over the years included a funeral home, a doughnut shop, a tire store, an office equipment store, and a beauty parlor. William Giarusso, the proprietor of Bowl & Board, a home furnishings retailer, rented the pharmacy space in 1967 and within about ten years occupied the entire building. The Bowl & Board chain expanded to include stores in Somerville, Brookline, Hingham, and Martha's Vineyard, but left this location in 2008. Other owners of 1075 Massachusetts Avenue have included Peter Borzackian, a neighborhood fruit dealer with a store nearby, and, beginning in 1961, John R. Sennott and his heirs.

### Significance and Recommendation

The structure at 1075 Massachusetts Avenue is associated with the broad social history of the City as a well-executed example of commercial infill construction following the First World War. The staff recommends that the structure be found significant for these reasons.

The staff further recommends that the Commission hear testimony from the owners and neighbors and review the plans for the replacement structure before making a further determination.