

FINAL LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT
Cambridge Gas-Light Company Building
719-727 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Mass. 02139



The Cambridge Gas-Light Company Building at 719-727 Massachusetts Avenue in Central Square, designed by Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge in 1912, is Cambridge's most important example of Renaissance-Revival architecture. It is also significant for its association with what was once the city's wealthiest and most important utility.

A designation study of the Gas-Light Building was initiated in response to a citizens' petition on September 2, 2021 to protect the exterior from the adverse effects of conversion to a hotel. The Historical Commission approved a Certificate of Appropriateness for the project, including a three-story rooftop addition, on March 3, 2022. The Planning Board issued a revised Special Permit in April 5, 2022. The proponents of the project are currently seeking a building permit.

Designation of the property by the City Council as a Cambridge Landmark will protect the entire premises, including the planned addition, from inappropriate alterations, and will guide future owners on appropriate alterations while respecting the distinct architectural and historic character of the landmark.

Charles Sullivan, Executive Director
Cambridge Historical Commission

February 3, 2023

Introduction

The Cambridge Gas-Light Company building at 727 Massachusetts Avenue has long been recognized as a significant example of the Renaissance-Revival Style and an anchor of Central Square's business district. The National Park Service designated it as a contributing building in the Central Square National Register District in 1990. CHC staff did not pursue local landmark protection at that time but chose instead to rely on voluntary compliance with historic preservation goals. Until a landmark designation study was initiated in September 2021 the building was not formally protected except by Cambridge's Demolition Delay Ordinance.

The Executive Director informed the Commission when the building changed hands in 2017 and of subsequent proposals for an addition. Given competing demands on staff time, the Director decided to continue relying on voluntary compliance. During this period the exterior of the building was cleaned and missing decorative ironwork was replaced.

In 2019 the owner announced plans to construct a three-story addition on the roof and convert the building to a hotel. CHC staff reviewed the plans in conjunction with Community Development Department staff and advised the Planning Board during their hearings in the spring of 2021.

On July 30, 2021, over 100 citizens submitted a petition requesting that the Commission initiate landmark designation studies of both the Cambridge Gas-Light Company Building and the Cambridgeport Savings Bank Building at 689 Massachusetts Avenue.

At a public hearing on September 2, 2021 the Commission heard expressions of concern about the proposed addition's effect on the building and on neighboring properties. The Commission voted to initiate a study of the Gas-Light building, with the effect that the property was immediately placed under landmark jurisdiction governing all publicly-visible exterior alterations for the succeeding twelve months.

The owners immediately filed an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as approved by the Planning Board. The Commission met on October 6 to review procedural issues involved in reviewing such an extensive project in the absence of a designation report and directed the staff to prepare goals and guidelines to support their review. The owner agreed to a continuance of the hearing, and after further hearings on November 4 and December 2 the staff report was accepted by the Commission on January 6, 2022.

The Commission then resumed the hearing on the proposed addition that had been continued since October 6. In February 2022 the owners submitted an amended application with a design that had been revised to reflect the guidelines adopted on January 6. On March 3, 2022 the Commission granted the requested Certificate of Appropriateness, which was issued on March 30 (see Appendix A). The proponents then returned to the Planning Board for approval of their amended design, which was granted on April 5, 2022 (PB-361).

Both the CHC and CPB approvals were granted on the condition of continuing staff review and approval by both boards of a sample panel demonstrating the appearance of exterior features of the addition. Staff review is continuing, but the sample panel has not been prepared as of this writing.

On September 23, 2022 the applicants requested a six-month extension of their Certificate of Appropriateness. In conformance with CHC policy, the chair granted an extension that is valid until March 30, 2023. In the absence of a compelling reason, such as a major alteration of the project or a cessation of permitting efforts, the chair may grant additional extensions at his or her discretion.

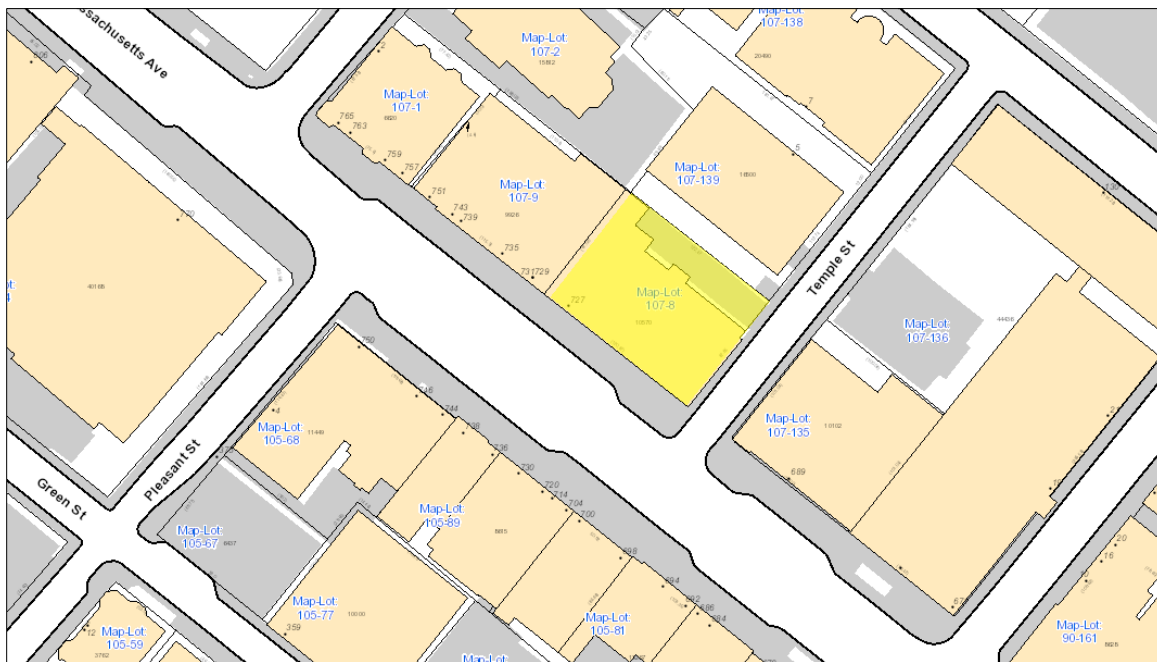
At a public hearing on February 2, 2023, the Commission voted unanimously to forward this report to the City Council with a positive recommendation for adoption of the designation order.

While the Commission's interim jurisdiction expired on September 2, 2022, the project design has not changed. The proposed designation of the Cambridge Gas-Light Company Building is in the form of a Council Order that may be adopted by a simple majority of five votes. The effect of the designation will be that no building permit may be issued, and no publicly visible exterior alterations may be made, without a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship, or Non-Applicability from the Cambridge Historical Commission.

I. Location and Zoning Considerations

The Cambridge Gas-Light Company building occupies a 10,570 square foot lot (107-8) on the west corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Temple Street.¹ The site is zoned Business B, which allows a height of 55' as of right, with the ability to increase to 80' upon issuance of a Special Permit by the Planning Board (as modified by the provisions of the Central Square Overlay District). A total FAR of 4.0 for residential and non-residential uses combined is also permitted upon issuance of a Special Permit by the Planning Board. With a gross floor area of 26,877 square feet and 10,570 square foot lot, the current FAR of the building is 2.54.

The hotel development required special permit relief from the Planning Board. The gross floor area of the proposed development is 41,781 sq. ft., which is less than the allowed 42,212. As approved, the project will increase from a FAR of 2.54 to 3.96, which falls within the allowed 4.0 FAR after issuance of a special permit. The proposed building will be 80'-0", which is the maximum allowed in the Central Square Overlay District.



727 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge Gas-Light Building. Cambridge GIS, Assessor's map

¹ The Assessing Department's address of 711 Massachusetts Avenue for this property does not reflect common practice and will not be used in this report.

Ownership and Occupancy

The Cambridge Electric Light Company, which had acquired the building from the Cambridge Gas-Light Company in a paper transaction in 1928, sold the building to the Rink Realty Company in 1969. When the Cambridge Historical Commission considered landmarking the building in 1990, Arnold Ginsberg, the trustee of Rink Realty, assured Commission's Executive Director that he had no plans to alter the building and would consult the staff on any proposed alterations.

Rink Realty sold the building in 2017 to Chevron Partners, investment group acting through a local entity, Gas Light Building LLC. Representatives of Chevron soon contacted the Commission concerning masonry restoration and architectural lighting, and CHC staff continued on the former advisory basis. In October 2018 the owners reached out again to discuss conceptual plans to convert the building to a hotel by adding three additional floors. The owners initiated the permitting process with CDD the following March, and in September 2019 presented plans to the Central Square Advisory Committee for a three-story rooftop addition to accommodate a 37-room hotel.

The Cambridge Gas-Light Company building is currently vacant except a Bank of America branch on the corner of Temple Street. The bank is expected to remain open during construction.

II. Area Description

The Central Square business district originated soon after the construction of the West Boston (now Longfellow) Bridge in 1793. While the actual bridgehead was at today's Kendall Square, the approach over Main Street required construction of a ¾-mile causeway to reach dry ground at Lafayette Square, where it met an ancient cart path that ran from Harvard Square toward the oyster banks on the Charles River shore. This intersection became the site of the first significant commercial development in Cambridgeport, consisting of inns, a hay scale, and other services for farmers on their way to Boston.

Another node soon developed at today's Central Square proper, where Prospect Street, laid out by the Middlesex County commissioners in 1804, met Magazine Street. The bridge proprietors laid out River Street in 1811 and Western Avenue in 1824. The oldest surviving building from this era is the 1814 William Dowse house at Prospect and Massachusetts Avenue.

Throughout the 19th century Massachusetts Avenue between Lafayette and Central Square developed into Cambridge's main commercial district. Stores and hotels in this era successfully competed with downtown Boston for local trade. Establishments such as the Manhattan Market (600-620 Massachusetts Avenue) and several department stores drew customers from nearby suburban towns.

Central Square became the administrative center of Cambridge after the Town Hall on Norfolk Street burned in 1834. The town took over the Cambridge Athenaeum building on Massachusetts Avenue at Pleasant Street, which continued as the City Hall until the completion of the present building in 1889. The Cambridge Mutual Insurance Company building was built at the same time in the same Richardson Romanesque style, shortly after the First Unitarian Church of Cambridgeport was moved from Lafayette Square to Inman Street in 1888. The influence of the City Beautiful movement on Central Square can be seen in the construction of the Cambridgeport Savings Bank building in 1904, the Cambridge Gas-Light Company in 1912, and the Cambridge Post Office in 1932.

The decision of the Boston Elevated Railway to locate the station of the Cambridge Subway at Prospect Street rather than Lafayette Square cemented the predominance of Central Square as the center of downtown Cambridge. The ten-story Central Square Building of 1926 was Cambridge's first – and for many years its only – high rise structure, but rapid transit access to downtown Boston weakened Cambridge establishments. During the Depression of the 1930s several buildings lost their upper floors because of the city's assessment policies. After a brief post-WWII boom retail stores began to fail in the 1950s. The 2,200-seat Central Square Theatre closed in 1962, and the business district began a slow decline that was only momentarily arrested by the construction of the New England Gas and Electric Association building on Prospect Street in 1960 and the 13-story Central Plaza building in 1967. Supported in part by the resurgence of Kendall Square, the business environment stabilized in the 1990s and saw significant investment with the construction of the 22-story Market Central residences in 2018-2020.

III. Architectural Description

The Cambridge Gas-Light Company building at 727 Massachusetts Avenue was built in 1912 to house the company's showrooms and offices. It was designed in the Renaissance Revival style by the firm of Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge. George F. Shepley, Charles H. Rutan, and Charles A. Coolidge had been draftsmen in the office of the famed architect, Henry Hobson Richardson; after Richardson's death in 1886, the three entered into a partnership to continue his work. The firm had one of the most significant architectural practices in 20th century America, and still exists today as Shepley Bulfinch.



727 Massachusetts Avenue, Staff photo, 2021.



727 Massachusetts Avenue, Photo ca.1914.

The rectangular, three-story structure is steel framed with brick masonry construction and a limestone ashlar façade. The building is seven bays wide on Massachusetts Avenue and three bays deep along Temple Street. At the ground floor, a two-story arcaded base represents traditional Italian loggia but with glazed openings that serve as storefronts. The half-round arches are supported on piers that extend to Tuscan pilasters to the sidewalk. The pilasters are flanked by engaged columns that sit atop a raised base. Wrought iron grilles cover the eastern- and westernmost bays on the Massachusetts Avenue façade. Reproductions of four original ornate wrought iron sconces were installed in 2018. The original main entrance to the building is set in the center bay on the main façade. Ornate bas-relief work is located within the spandrels flanking the central bay and include cartouches, garlands, and scrolls, calling attention to the main entry.



Entry detail, photo ca.1914

The upper story features much of the detailing and acts as a *piano nobile* set off by a string course between the first and second stories. Above the string course, the façade has a three-part organization with a paneled base, pilastered center section, and entablature above. The bays contain double-hung, one-over-one replacement window sash. Framing the windows, fluted pilasters with composite capitals are surmounted by alternating triangular and segmental pediments. Each bay is separated by a paneled pilaster with composite capitals. A tiered cornice meets the roofline with decorative, alternating diamond and marble medallions set into the frieze below. The two-story ground floor room, originally one continuous space, was long ago subdivided for two tenants.

While the Gas-Light building and the Cambridgeport Saving Bank buildings were built ten years apart, they complement each other architecturally and represent the most significant expression of the City Beautiful movement in Cambridge.

Adaptive Reuse as a Hotel



Proposed addition as presented in September 2019.

Finegold Alexander Architects

In 2019 the owners proposed to repurpose the Gas-Light building as a hotel, with a stair tower on the rear and a three-story addition at the back of the roof. The architects, Finegold Alexander, considered this massing preferable to a more zoning-compliant arrangement with the lower floors closer to the Massachusetts Avenue parapet.



Potential massing (left) and massing as approved (right).

Finegold Alexander Architects, Jan. 13, 2021

CHC staff did not object to the rooftop addition on principle but contested the proposed design on the grounds that it seemed to dominate the historic facades and that the “picture frame styling” of the fenestration inappropriately called attention to the new upper floors. CHC and CDD staff worked closely on a July 14, 2020 recommendation to the Planning Board, which contained the following analysis:

The “Central Square Development Guidelines” (1987) recommend that new construction be compatible with and sensitive to existing historic structures. “The Central Square Design Guidelines” (2013) recommend that, consistent with the Department of Interior’s “Guidelines for the Rehabilitating Historic Buildings,” additions to existing historic buildings be architecturally distinguished from them. Cambridge Historical Commission staff have advised CDD that, as a matter of principle, additions to historic buildings should be recessive, and especially so when the historic building is as significant as the Cambridge Gas and Light building. Staff appreciates the Applicant’s willingness to work collaboratively on the design but remains concerned that the appearance of the proposed addition seems to dominate the existing building. ...

CHC and CDD staff offer the following suggestions to avoid visually overwhelming the existing building:

- In accord with the “Central Square Development Guidelines” recommendation that color be appropriate to the historic character of the Square, consider “lightening up the box” by using a color and finish for the large angled panels at the 5th and 6th floors that are more in keeping with the existing building.
- Reducing the potential for visual competition between the new 5th and 6th floor element and the existing building, both of which currently read as unified rectilinear masses. Consider deemphasizing the color of the sunshades to reduce the strong horizontal banding on the 5th and 6th floor facades.
- Create a sense of delineation between the new 6 floor vertical element at the rear of the building and both the existing building and the 5th and 6th floor addition above it. This would help distinguish the new addition from the historic building and strengthen the sense that the new 5th and 6th floor element “floats” independently above the existing building.²

The Planning Board reviewed the proposal in July 2020 and raised additional issues. A revised application in October reduced the dimensions of the framing panels around the windows, muted

² See attached CDD memo to the Cambridge Planning Board, July 14, 2020

the colors, reduced rooftop mechanicals, and made other changes to meet zoning requirements not relevant to historic preservation review. CHC and CDD staff were present in all relevant discussions with the applicants.

In October 2020 the Board requested that the applicants restudy the massing of the addition in response to objections from residents of 5 Temple Place. The applicants responded that repositioning the massing closer to Massachusetts Avenue would require abandoning the proposed cantilever design that preserved the historic interior structure, and that a repositioned addition would inappropriately overwhelm the historic facades. CHC and CDD staff concurred in this analysis.

The Board discussed the design again on April 27th, 2021. The applicants presented a further revision that reduced the massing on the north elevation by introducing setbacks on the fifth and sixth floors. With these amendments, the Planning Board approved a Special Permit on June 15, 2021. Among other conditions, the Board required that CHC staff be consulted on “exterior materials, colors, façade alterations and restoration details”.³

As a result of the citizen’s’ petition the Cambridge Historical Commission gained interim jurisdiction over the permitting process in September 2021, and after adopting design guidelines for the project in January 2022 began to consider the proponent’s application for a Certificate of Appropriateness. At a hearing in February and March 2022 commissioners reviewed the new guidelines, which supported preservation of historic character and repair rather than replacement of significant architectural features. Additions should not radically change, obscure or destroy character-defining spaces, materials, features or finishes; should express understanding of the historic architectural character; should be clearly differentiated but compatible with the structure; should be considered in terms of their effect on the site context; and should cause the least possible loss of historic materials. The resulting project should appear as a harmonious whole.

In this context the commissioners discussed the massing, fenestration, colors and reflectivity of the façade materials, as well as the detailing of the rear addition. At a continued hearing in March 2022 the petitioners presented a revised design. The height of the addition was reduced by two feet. The window frames of the addition were reduced in size and their placement adjusted for symmetry. The louvers at the top of the windows had been made thinner and a single color of metal cladding simplified the visual quality of the addition. At the conclusion of the hearing the Commission voted unanimously to approve the design as revised, citing its conformance to standards 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 10a, 10b, 10c, 10d, 10e, 10f, and 10h as well as the design guidelines for alterations and additions.⁴ Approval of a color and material mockup was delegated to the Architects Committee at a future public meeting and additional construction details were delegated to staff.

³ Cambridge Planning Board Decision, PB-361, July 27, 2021

⁴ See pp. 16-20 below.



727 Massachusetts Avenue. Front elevation as approved by the Planning Board, June 2021



Front elevation as approved by the Cambridge Historical Commission, March 2022



South and east elevations as initially approved (left) and final version (right)



West elevation as initially approved (left) and final version (right)



East and north elevations as initially approved (left) and final version (right)

IV. History and Significance

The Cambridge Gas-Light Company building is architecturally significant as a high-style example of the Italian Renaissance Revival designed by the prominent Boston firm of Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge. The importance of the Cambridge Gas-Light Company as a public utility adds to the historical significance of the building, which represented the aspirations of a major employer and infrastructure-based company headquartered in the city.

The Cambridge Gas-Light Company was incorporated on March 15, 1852, to manufacture and market gas for street lighting. The first gas works was constructed on the Charles River at the foot of Ash Street. Illuminating gas in this period was produced by heating coal in a closed retort. The gas was stored under pressure in an inverted iron tank, called a gasholder, and distributed to customers through a network of buried pipes. The coal was brought by ship from Nova Scotia and Virginia direct to the company's wharf.

Service to the first customers began on January 17, 1853. The company prospered over the subsequent decades and built a new gasworks in 1871 on Third Street, just north of Kendall Square, at which point the original plant was closed. By 1905 the company operated 127 miles of mains radiating from a 160-acre facility on the Broad Canal and served 13,000 customers in Cambridge and Somerville. At this time gas was still the predominant source of residential lighting and was quickly becoming the most desired fuel for stoves and water heaters, easily supplanting coal and wood with its greater convenience and cleanliness. The Cambridge Gas-Light Company was the

City's largest taxpayer and employed 350 people. It was also immensely prosperous, having declared a 10% dividend every year since 1869.

The company's headquarters in Harvard Square on the second floor of a frame building at 1290 Massachusetts Avenue was small and no longer conformed to the company's self-image as a modern corporation. Construction of the new building in Central Square was important for the company, which sought a central location to better serve its patrons. The local owners of the firm considered themselves to be cultured and public spirited, and in hiring Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge they secured the services of one of the most celebrated architectural firms of the day. The headquarters they designed exhibited a refined design that reflected the highest ideals of the City Beautiful movement.



727 Massachusetts Avenue, with gas lamps, appliances and stoves on display in 1914. Stairs to the lower level are at right, and customer service windows are in the back corner. Corporate offices occupy the mezzanine.

One of the major functions of the building was to be a showcase for gas appliances, which the company had begun to sell in 1897. By 1912 it had sold about 12,000 stoves, water heaters, and other appliances, with great effect on the company's bottom line. The large open first floor was an elegant showroom for these displays. The company also gave cooking demonstrations in model kitchens.



Gas appliances, including water heaters, ovens, stoves and lamp on display in a gas-lit showroom, 1914.
All historic photos from the Cambridge Gas-Light Company Collection, CHC

Faced with competition from the Cambridge Electric Company, the Gas-Light Company heavily promoted residential gas lighting well into the 1920s. Gas lights with mantles rather than open flames were more efficient and gave a better quality light. Glass shades still needed frequent washing, however, and the convenience and improved quality of electric lights soon eliminated gas lighting in new construction (although some new houses were still plumbed and wired for both).

The Cambridge Gas-Light Company prospered in the electric age due to the widespread adoption of gas appliances and the use of gas in heavy industry. By 1925 it had 48,000 customers and was manufacturing five times as much gas as it had in 1900. While the Cambridge Electric Company, which was founded in 1886, had only 800 customers as late as 1900, it too found prosperity by exploiting the residential market, especially after WWI. In 1905 the company had 2,056 customers, but in 1925 it served 22,300 – still less than half as many as its older competitor.

Both utilities maintained their independence well into the period of consolidation that swept the industry in the early years of the century. In an effort to maintain control, in 1925 the board decided to offer shares in the company to customers and employees at \$55 each. This move backfired in April 1927 when 90% of the shareholders accepted an offer of \$105 a share from a holding company financed by New York investors, the Associated Gas & Electric System. Associated acquired control of the Cambridge Electric Company at the same time, and by the end of the year had taken over almost a dozen regional utility companies. These were spun off into the New England Gas and Electric Association (NEGEA), which took over the top floor of the Gas-Light building as its corporate headquarters.

NEGEA maintained the local identities of its utility companies but gradually combined management functions in Cambridge. In 1960 NEGEA hired Sert, Jackson & Gourley to design a new headquarters, making an architectural statement comparable to the Cambridge Gas-Light Company's decision to retain Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge in 1912. NEGEA's new 45,000 square foot



Cambridge Tribune, January 1, 1916



719-727 Massachusetts Avenue after the consolidation of the Gas-Light and Electric companies. Photo 1929

building on Bishop Allen Drive at Prospect Street employed the same design language as the firm's Holyoke Center at Harvard University.

NEGEA moved into its new building in 1961 and in 1969 sold 727 Massachusetts Avenue to the Rink Realty Company, from which the current owners purchased the property in 2017.⁵

V. Relationship of Property to Criteria

The purpose of landmark designation is described in Ch. 2.78.140 of the City Code, which was enacted in 1983:

... to preserve, conserve and protect the beauty and heritage of the City and to improve the quality of its environment through identification, conservation and maintenance of neighborhoods, sites and structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City; to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose; to foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge and appreciation of such neighborhoods, areas, or structures; and by furthering

⁵ NEGEA was renamed Commonwealth Energy System (Com/Energy) in 1981 and merged with other utilities to become NStar in 1999. In 2015 the parent company, Northeast Utilities, was renamed Eversource.

these purposes to promote the public welfare by making the city a more desirable place in which to live and work.

The enabling ordinance states:

The Historical Commission by majority vote may recommend for designation as a landmark any property within the City being or containing a place, structure, feature or object which it determines to be either (1) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth or (2) historically or architecturally significant (in terms of its period, style, method of construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures ... (Chapter 2.78.180.A)

The Cambridge Gas-Light Company building meets criterion (1) for its associations with the architectural, aesthetic and economic history of Cambridge, and criterion (2) as “architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of construction or association with a famous architect or builder).”

VII. Proposed Standards and Guidelines for Review of Alterations and Additions⁶

Under the neighborhood conservation district and landmark designation ordinance, Ch. 2.78, Art. III, the Historical Commission is charged with reviewing all construction, demolition or alterations that affects the exterior architectural features (other than color) of a designated landmark. This section of the report describes exterior architectural features that are among the characteristics that led to consideration of the property as a landmark. Except as the Order designating or amending the landmark may otherwise provide, the exterior architectural features described in this report should be preserved and/or enhanced in any proposed alteration or construction that affects those features of the landmark.

The Standards described below represent current best practices in historic preservation and are generally applicable to any designated property. The following Guidelines are to be consulted during consideration of applications for Certificates of Appropriateness for alterations to the landmark described in this report. The standards and guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive or comprehensive; the Commission must use its collective judgement in determining the appropriateness of any proposed project.

In this context the verb **should** indicates a recommended course of action; the verbs **shall or must** indicates those actions which are specifically required to preserve and protect significant architectural elements.

A. General Standards

Subject to review and approval of alterations to exterior architectural features under the terms of this report, the following standards shall apply:

1. The historic character of a property must be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property must be avoided.

⁶ This section was adopted by the Historical Commission on January 6, 2022.

2. Changes and additions to the landmark which have taken place over time are evidence of the history of the property and its context. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right and, if so, that significance should be recognized and respected.
3. Significant historic and architectural features of the landmark, including but not limited to those identified in this report, should be preserved if practicable in a manner consistent with these standards.
4. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement, the new feature must match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials.
5. The use of synthetic replacement materials is discouraged, except when substituted for perishable features exposed to the weather or when necessary to accommodate the effects of climate change.⁷
6. Chemical and/or physical treatments (such as sandblasting) must not be used in a manner that damages historic materials. The surface cleaning of structures must be undertaken using the gentlest means possible and the results should preserve the patina that characterizes the age of the structure. Applications of paint or masonry preservative solutions will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis; painting masonry surfaces will be considered only when there is documentary evidence that this treatment was used at some point in the history of the property.
7. Architectural (building façade) lighting, streetscape lighting, and signage lighting, when allowed by a Certificate of Appropriateness, should reinforce definitive characteristics of historic and contemporary architecture as well as create high quality 24-hour streetscapes. To achieve these goals, projects should minimize brightness, and light trespass, monitor light color (temperature Kelvin), and focus lighting on significant features.
8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project should be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures must be undertaken.
9. Alterations or additions that may be needed to assure the continued use of the historic structure or site or that expand the volume or footprint of the structure should not radically change, obscure or destroy character defining spaces, materials, features or finishes. New additions should be considered only after it has been determined that project requirements cannot be successfully met by altering non-character-defining interior spaces.
10. Additions should reflect an explicit understanding of the architectural character of the historic building and its context. Additions should be designed in a manner that makes clear what is historic and what is new, but should not arbitrarily impose contrasting materials, scales, or design vocabularies. Design of the new work may be contemporary or may reference design motifs from the historic building. Regardless of the design approach, the result should appear as a harmonious whole.

⁷ See *Cambridge Historical Commission Practices in Reviewing Synthetic Trim and Gutters*, June 26, 2018

- a. Additions should respect the essential form of the historic building and be clearly recessive or subsidiary to the original structure in location, massing, materials, finishes, and textures. Additions are best located at the rear and/or on an inconspicuous side of a historic building and limited in size and scale in relationship to the historic building.
 - b. Additions should be considered in terms of their effect on the context of the site. Additions can contribute variety and interest in complex urban environments but should not dominate or distract from significant nearby structures.
 - c. Additions should not compromise the historic aspects, architectural significance, or the distinct character of the landmark, neighborhood, and environment.
 - d. Additions should be clearly differentiated from the historic building but still compatible in terms of mass, materials, relationship of solids to voids, and color.
 - e. Additions should cause the least possible loss of historic materials so that character-defining features are not obscured, damaged, or destroyed.
 - f. Rooftop additions should be set well back from historic facades so that the historic structure retains its integrity of form and mass. Additional stories, when required for the new use, should be set back from the wall plane and be as inconspicuous as possible when viewed from the street. Designers should be cognizant of distant views and neighborhood context, and take advantage of existing parapets to conceal rooftop structures.
 - g. Additions such as balconies and greenhouses should be placed on non-character-defining elevations and limited in size and scale in relationship to the historic building.
 - h. Additions should be designed in such a way that if they were to be removed in the future the essential form and integrity of the landmark would be unimpaired.
11. New construction on a designated property shall conform to the guidelines for alterations, where applicable.
 12. Demolition of a designated structure can be allowed only as a last resort after all practicable measures have been taken to ensure preservation, or unless required to comply with requirements certified by a duly authorized public officer to be necessary for public safety because of an unsafe or dangerous condition.

B. Guidelines for Review of Alterations at 727 Massachusetts Avenue

1. Architectural Character

The Cambridge Gas-Light Company building is a Renaissance Revival structure characterized by a two-story loggia surmounted by a seven-bay façade bearing shallow pilasters with Corinthian capitals and double-hung windows with alternating pediments. A shallow cornice and parapet give the appearance of a flat roof. The ashlar limestone masonry is ornamented with elaborate carvings, and the openings at ground level contain much original ironwork. The massing, character, and details of the structure must be respected.

2. Site Development.

The current building footprint extends to the lot lines on the east, south, and west, leaving a narrow strip of land unencumbered on the north side of the building. The north and west façades of the structure display a functional character very different from the east and south facades. Subject to zoning constraints and the Certificate of Appropriateness process, new construction could be allowed even if it obscures or destroys the present north façade.

2. Alterations

All publicly-visible exterior alterations are subject to the Certificate of Appropriateness process.

a. Exterior surfaces

Exterior materials on the east and south facades must be preserved insofar as practicable. Special care must be taken to protect and maintain the limestone masonry. Repointing the mortar joints must maintain the strength, color and texture of the mortar and the size and profile of the joints. Cleaning must be carried out with minimum pressure and minimum concentrations, subject to on-site staff review and approval.

b. Fenestration

Most if not all historic window openings appear to retain their original windows and sash. Original sash should be evaluated for restoration and retrofitted with thermal glazing while maintaining operability if possible. Replacement windows, if allowed, should replicate historic patterns and details as closely as practicable while achieving energy efficiency goals.

c. Exterior features

The entrances at the east and west bays of the south façade retain original wrought- and cast-iron bars that extend up to the pilaster capitals. The central bay features a cast-iron door surround with a classical entablature. All other bays except one retain their original three-part fenestration and original knee-walls. These must be retained and restored or replicated.

Storefront systems at the Bank of America entrance and at the office entrance consist of modern aluminum components with a black finish. Replacement elements may be contemporary in nature, but historic elements should be retained when possible.

Four reproduction wrought-iron sconces were installed in 2018. These should be retained.

The pilasters on both sides of the center entrance bay and both sides of the pilaster on the south-east corner of the building bear incised bronze lettering denoting the original owner of the building, the Cambridge Gas-Light Company. These must be preserved and not covered with other signage.

d. Roof

The roof of the Gas-Light building contains several skylights and assorted mechanical equipment that are almost entirely concealed by a parapet. The only visible rooftop structures are an elevator override and a copper-clad penthouse over the main staircase. About half of this one-story structure appears above the parapet.

In general, rooftop HVAC equipment, if required, should be grouped to minimize visual intrusion. Solar panels should be mounted close to the roof so as to be screened by the parapet.

e. Accessibility

Accessibility at street-level entrances on Massachusetts Avenue and Temple Street may be achieved by removing a portion of the granite slab that creates a step up into the building. This

should be done in a way that does not disturb the knee walls of the entrances. Doors should be lengthened; jambs should remain in place.

f. Interior features

Although interior features are not subject to the jurisdiction of the Cambridge Historical Commission, the owner should be encouraged to preserve the vaulted two-story ground floor interior that recalls the original purpose of the building as a showcase for modern electric technology. Encourage photographic documentation when significant interior features will be lost.

g. Architectural lighting

Architectural lighting was installed before the initiation of the designation study. Alterations to the current installation should conform to the general standards for review.

h. Mural

The existing mural on the party wall of the west façade predates the initiation of the designation study. While application of paint over such a large surface can be deleterious to the long-term condition of the masonry, the mural may be protected under M.G.L. Chapter 231, Article 85S: Physical Alteration or Destruction of Fine Art. New construction on the abutting property would not be subject to review under a designation of this property. Designation of the property as a landmark will not entail the removal of the mural, which may be maintained in its current form at the discretion of the property owner.

3. Additions

The nature of the Cambridge Gas-Light Company building site is such that additions can only take place at the back of the site or on the roof. Landmark designation should not necessarily preclude adding new floors to the building, but any rooftop addition should conform to the standards for additions enumerated above. Evaluation of a proposed addition should consider the architectural character of the Gas-Light building and its immediate surroundings, including the similar massing of the Cambridgeport Savings Bank building at 689 Massachusetts Avenue, the low-rise storefronts immediately to the west, and the varying character and densities of structures on Massachusetts Avenue and Temple Street.

**Proposed Order Designating the Cambridge Gas-Light Company Building
at 719-727 Massachusetts Avenue as a Cambridge Landmark**

ORDERED,

That the Cambridge Gas-Light Company Building at 719-727 Massachusetts Avenue be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter 2.78, Article III, Section 2.78.180 of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on February 2, 2023. The premises so designated is defined as parcel 8 on assessor's map 107 and the structure thereon.

This designation is justified by the associations of the building with the architectural, aesthetic and economic history of Cambridge, and by its architectural significance as an example of the Renaissance Revival style designed by the firm of Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge.

The effect of this designation shall be that review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability shall be required before any construction activity can take place on the designated premises or any action can be taken affecting the appearance of the premises, that would in either case be visible from a public way. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the provisions of the Final Landmark Designation Report dated February 3, 2023 with respect to the designated premises, and by the applicable sections of Chapter 2.78, Article III, of the Cambridge Municipal Code.

This designation incorporates the Certificate of Appropriateness granted by the Cambridge Historical Commission on March 30, 2022 for renovation and construction of an addition as indicated on drawings by Finegold Alexander Architects titled "727 Massachusetts Avenue Cambridge Historical Commission" dated March 3, 2022.

Appendix A.**CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION**831 Massachusetts Avenue, 2nd Fl., Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

Telephone: 617 349 4683 Fax: 617 349 3116 TTY: 617 349 6112

E-mail: histcomm@cambridgema.gov URL: <http://www.cambridgema.gov/Historic>

Bruce A. Irving, *Chair*, Susannah Barton Tobin, *Vice Chair*; Charles M. Sullivan, *Executive Director*
 Joseph V. Ferrara, Chandra Harrington, Elizabeth Lyster, Caroline Shannon, Jo M. Solet, *Members*
 Gavin W. Kleespies, Paula A. Paris, Kyle Sheffield, *Alternates*

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

Property: **711-727 Massachusetts Avenue**

Applicant: **Gas Light Building LLC**

Attention: **Marcel Safar, Manager**
Chevron Partners
100 Summer Street, Suite 1600
Boston, Mass. 02110

Sarah Rhatigan, Esq.
Trilogy Law Offices
12 Marshall Street
Boston, Mass. 02108

The Cambridge Historical Commission hereby certifies, pursuant to the Massachusetts Historic Districts Act (MGL Ch. 40C) and the Cambridge Historical Buildings and Landmarks Ordinance (Cambridge City Code, Ch. 2.78), that the work described below is not incongruous to the historic aspects or architectural character of the building or district:

1. Renovate the Cambridge Gas-Light Building while preserving significant exterior features such as the limestone façade, iron grillwork and replica lighting sconces.
2. Replace the windows with new insulated glazing, provide accessible entrances to the retail spaces, and remove rooftop mechanicals and chimney.
3. Construct an addition at the rear of the existing building and cantilever it over the roof.

Work is to be carried out as indicated on drawings by Finegold Alexander Architects titled "727 Massachusetts Avenue Cambridge Historical Commission" and dated March 3, 2022.

The Commission's decision to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness was based on the finding that the project design is in substantial conformance with the "Standards and Guidelines for Review of Alterations and Additions at the Cambridge Gas-Light Company Building" drafted for the preliminary landmark study report and approved at the Commission's January 6, 2021 meeting, as detailed below:

- Standard 1: The historic character of the property must be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property must be avoided.

Conclusion: The proposed project retains and preserves the historic character of the property.

- Standard 2: Changes and additions to the landmark which have taken place over time are evidence of the history of the property and its context. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right and, if so, that significance should be recognized and respected.

Conclusion: The project recognizes and preserves certain changes that are evidence of the history of the building and its context in the Central Square neighborhood.

- Standard 3: Significant historic and architectural features of the landmark, including but not limited to those identified in this report, should be preserved if practicable in a manner consistent with these standards.

Conclusion: The proposal was designed so as to allow for the preservation of significant historic and architectural features of the exterior and the interior of the building.

- Standard 4: Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement, the new feature must match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials.

Conclusion: Where deteriorated architectural features exist, they will be repaired rather than replaced or replaced to match the design, color, texture and other visual qualities.

- Standard 9: Alterations or additions that may be needed to assure the continued use of the historic structure or site or that expand the volume or footprint of the structure should not radically change, obscure or destroy character defining spaces, materials, features or finishes. New additions should be considered only after it has been determined that project requirements cannot be successfully met by altering non-character-defining interior spaces.

Conclusion: The addition will not destroy character-defining spaces, materials, features or finishes. The project will assure the continued use of the structure, and the Commission concurred that the project requirements could not be successfully met by altering non-character-defining interior spaces.

- Standard 10: Additions should reflect an explicit understanding of the architectural character of the historic

building and its context. Additions should be designed in a manner that makes clear what is historic and what is new, but should not arbitrarily impose contrasting materials, scales, or design vocabularies. Design of the new work may be contemporary or may reference design motifs from the historic building. Regardless of the design approach, the result should appear as a harmonious whole.

Conclusion: The addition reflects an understanding of the architectural character of the building and is clearly differentiated from it.

- Standard 10a: Additions should respect the essential form of the historic building and be clearly recessive or subsidiary to the original structure in location, massing, materials, finishes, and textures. Additions are best located at the rear and/or on an inconspicuous side of a historic building and limited in size and scale in relationship to the historic building

Conclusion: The addition respects the essential form of the historic building and is recessive to the historic building by way of its siting at the rear of the building and the setbacks of the upper stories.

- Standard 10b: Additions should be considered in terms of their effect on the context of the site. Additions can contribute variety and interest in complex urban environments but should not dominate or distract from significant nearby structures.

Conclusion: The addition as currently proposed will not dominate or distract from significant nearby structures.

- Standard 10c: Additions should not compromise the historic aspects, architectural significance, or the distinct character of the landmark, neighborhood, and environment

Conclusion: The addition as proposed will not compromise the historic aspects, architectural significance or distinct character of the landmark, neighborhood or environment.

- Standard 10d: Additions should be clearly differentiated from the historic building but still compatible in terms of mass, materials, relationship of solids to voids, and color.

Conclusion: The addition will be clearly differentiated from but compatible with the historic building.

- Standard 10e. Additions should cause the least possible loss of historic materials so that character-defining features are not obscured, damaged, or destroyed.

Conclusion: The addition will have negligible effect on historic materials.

- Standard 10f: Rooftop additions should be set well back from historic facades so that the historic structure retains its integrity of form and mass. Additional stories, when required for the new use, should be set back from the wall plane and be as inconspicuous as possible when viewed from the street. Designers should be cognizant of distant views and neighborhood context and take advantage of existing parapets to conceal rooftop structures.

Conclusion: The setback of the addition will allow the historic structure to retain its integrity of form and mass.

- Standard 10h: Additions should be designed in such a way that if they were to be removed in the future the essential form and integrity of the landmark would be unimpaired.

Conclusion: The addition has been designed in such a way that the essential form and integrity of the landmark would be unimpaired if it were to be removed.

Approval was granted with the following conditions:

1. Approval of the mock-up of façade materials is delegated to the Architects Committee at a future public meeting; and
2. Approval of construction details and materials is delegated to staff of the Historical Commission.

All improvements shall be carried out as shown on the plans and specifications submitted by the applicant, except as modified above. Approved plans and specifications are incorporated by reference into this certificate.

This certificate is granted upon the condition that the work authorized herein is commenced within six months after the date of issue. If the work authorized by this certificate is not commenced within six months after the date of issue, or if such work is suspended in significant part for a period of one year after the time the work is commenced, then this certificate shall expire and be of no further effect; provided that, for cause, one or more extensions of time, for periods not exceeding six months each, may be allowed in writing by the Chair.

Case Number: **4669**

Date of Certificate: **March 30, 2022**

Attest: A true and correct copy of decision filed with the offices of the City Clerk and the Cambridge Historical Commission

on March 30, 2022.

By Bruce A. Irving//SLB, Chair.

Twenty days have elapsed since the filing of this decision.

No appeal has been filed _____. Appeal has been filed _____.

Date _____, City Clerk