

September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**Reference: An HCD for Downtown Cambridge: What Problems are we trying to Solve?**

Dear Mayor McGarry and Cambridge City Council,

Collectively the undersigned have an investment interest of over 500 million dollars in downtown Cambridge and continue to be the strongest group of individuals focused on the economic development and heritage aspects of our great City. Without us there is no heritage strategy unless public money fills this void. We are currently doing the heavy lifting. We are collectively opposed to the proposed Heritage District and below is why. Our passion for the downtown and our continuing investment in the core will be severely jeopardized should Council vote yes on this unnecessary initiative.

As business and property owners in the core area, we are committed to our downtown and want to make sure that it is the best that it can be. We are also the ones who are most affected by something like an HCD. This onerous new set of regulations is not what our core area needs. We feel that the Mayor and City Council have done a remarkable job over the years of managing and protecting our considerable heritage assets. We do not need to take this drastic step to preserve our downtown. In fact, an HCD is one of the last things that Downtown Cambridge needs.

What is most important to our community is to ensure that our core area continues to attract new residents, visitors, shoppers and investors. As business and property owners, we have invested blood, sweat, tears, and literally hundreds of millions of dollars over the past few decades to build our businesses and to maintain and develop our properties. A Heritage Conservation District will devalue our buildings and businesses, raise our expenses, make it more difficult for us to renovate, maintain and redevelop our properties, and it will repel new investors.

Everyone in Cambridge truly values our downtown. We are blessed with an abundance of natural and built heritage. As business and property owners in the core area, no one appreciates this more than us. Cambridge residents may be concerned about what the future may bring, but if the past is any example, we can be proud of our efforts. Unlike many cities, much of our heritage is intact, and we have treated it well. We have shown in projects like our City Hall, the School of Architecture, the Design Exchange and the Gaslight District, that we value our heritage but also know how to look to the future. We can be very proud of the fact that we have had confidence in our community and have not acted rashly and in fear.

Our biggest problem in Downtown Cambridge is not the loss of our heritage buildings. We have taken care to preserve our heritage in the past and there is no reason to believe that this will change.

If we truly want to improve our downtown, we have a lot of other issues to focus on. The biggest problems in our core area include homelessness, housing affordability, poverty, unemployment and substance use. Instead of making it more difficult for us to run our businesses and maintain our properties, let's focus on economic development. There are no problems in our downtown that more people can't help solve. We need new residents, jobs, shoppers and visitors. With more people comes more activity and investment, as well as economic and social health. More people can also bring more tax revenue which can fund new programs for the homeless, for substance treatment, and for affordable housing.

There are some who believe that the business and property owners in Downtown Cambridge are not interested in heritage. There are those that fear what the future will bring and want to lock down development and preserve the past at any cost. Their hope is that a Heritage Conservation District will provide a simple fix and prevent future heartbreak.

The truth is that an HCD can do more harm than good. The HCD currently in place on Main Street has arguably prevented this area from thriving and being properly maintained. Only the good will and deep pockets of thoughtful property owners have prevented this remarkable stretch of buildings from severe deterioration. An HCD can be successful, but only in much smaller, much more homogenous areas, together with a fully informed and enthusiastic group of property owners. This is not the situation in Downtown Cambridge.

Much of the core area shown in the proposed HCD needs investment not more regulation. We have some truly wonderful buildings in the downtown but we also have some areas that urgently need attention. An HCD will make it more difficult to transform these areas into healthy parts of our community.

A blanket set of additional regulations across our downtown will be counterproductive and harmful. We need to continue to do the hard work of partnering with business and property owners in the core to create the right kinds of development. The City of Cambridge needs flexibility to allow for creativity. An HCD will reduce that flexibility.

City Council should not be looking at how big an HCD we need, or whether the Downtown Cambridge HCD should cover most of downtown, or the whole of downtown. It should be asking if we need a downtown HCD at all and whether or not a core area HCD is a good idea or not. We don't believe it is. And City Council should be examining exactly who these regulations serve. A small group of heritage activists, no matter how well meaning, should not be dictating the future health of our downtown. As business and property owners, we have a stake in our core area like no others. Downtown Cambridge is too important to be placed in the hands of a small special interest group.

Change is difficult. There are no simple solutions. Making healthy, livable cities is enormously complicated.

Council has done a great job over the years in sustaining and preserving our downtown. As property owners and business owners we share your commitment to the City. The undersigned represent hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in our great community. As downtown business and property owners we understand the core area and what it will take to preserve the past and create a healthy future. Please believe us when we say that the regulations of a Heritage Conservation District will not make the downtown a better place. Working together, we can help Downtown Cambridge reach its potential. Please reject the imposition of an HCD. Please continue to work with us to forge our way forward.

Sincerely yours,

- Downtown Cambridge Building Owners Group

Hereby signed by the following groups members;

HIP Developments Inc – Scott Higgins  
Central Views Investment Groups – Omar Kaake  
Milestone Marketing – Terry Polyak  
Martin Simmons Architects – Patrick Simmons  
Pearle Hospitality - Aaron Ciancone  
Greentown Developments Corp. - David Opie  
Rego Realty – Cliff Rego  
Concept Development Group Inc.- Steve Schwartzentruber  
Corner Stone Furniture - Danielle Benning  
Pinnacle Capital Partners – Mike Panayi  
Markland Property Management - John Blanchard  
Robert White  
Sy Williams  
Eugene Chan  
Rock Solid Flooring - Levon Saghdjian  
Phidon Pens - Baldeep Duggal  
Crossroads Business Centre Corp – Tim Sittler  
Thirteen Food & Beverage – Matthew Rolleman