



The Harvard Square
Business Association

Taking Care Of The Square

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March 19, 2025

Mr. Gerald Chan

Morningside Technology

1188 Centre Street

Newton Center, MA 02459

Dear Gerald,

As the executive director of the business association, I am compelled and duty-bound to represent everyone in Harvard Square and that includes you. To that end, I am truly concerned that you may not be fully aware of the negative impact of your building on Church Street. It is not an overstatement to share that nearly every day, I am asked about its status.

As a leader in business and scientific research, as well as your personal and professional commitment to Harvard Square and the University --- it is through your property acquisitions that your belief in the value and importance of the Square is unmistakably demonstrated.

Though your real estate preservation efforts have been recognized by the Cambridge Historical Commission, most notably for 40 Bow Street, as well as, 115 Mount Auburn and 39 JFK, the jewel in the crown of your holdings --- the home of the Harvard Square Theatre, remains neglected and empty to this day.

It seems incompatible to many, myself included, that since acquiring the theatre in 2014, you subsequently purchased six additional Harvard Square properties while this asset sits fallow. Although the building is not noted for its beauty or architectural significance, it is treasured for its historical and cultural impact.

According to Cambridge History (formerly the Cambridge Historical Society):

"The Harvard Square Theatre, originally the University Theatre, opened in 1926, with an original entrance on Mass. Ave. The theater could seat 1640 people, and had wicker chairs and a velvet curtain displaying George Washington commanding the continental army on Cambridge common. While it was always a movie theatre, it also held live performances, including magic shows, vaudeville, and rock concerts. Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Iggy Pop, David Bowie, Hall and Oats, the Clash, and Bruce Springsteen all played at the University Theatre.

In fact, Bruce Springsteen got his start at the theatre. After opening for Bonnie Rait in 1974, music critic John Landau wrote, 'I saw rock and roll's future and its name is Bruce Springsteen.' The theatre also hosted the first Rocky Horror stage show in the country, which was played by the full body cast."

While the theatre officially closed in July of 2012, this coming August will mark the 11th year that it has been left vacant under your watch.

We are acutely aware that during 2020-2023, we were all deeply involved in managing life during the pandemic. This is precisely the time one could expect to be working on developing plans to bring this critical asset back to life.

As we approach the 100th anniversary of this beloved and iconic building, we appeal to your sense of decency, love for community, appreciation of art & culture, leadership as a business owner, your solidarity with those who loathe urban blight and deplore the deterioration of public art.

As you must know, the renowned artwork of Beatrice Sargent is prominently showcased and currently deteriorating on the front of the building. The mural was dedicated in 1999 and serves as a memorial to twelve women activists who died of cancer. It honors their work and those still fighting the environmental causes of this insidious disease. Your devotion to cancer research is well known. Surely, you cannot stand by and let the condition of this mural worsen.

Gerald, this once-thriving, now desolate and ignored section of Church Street is unsafe and a blight to our district. When it was operational, on average 1000 people a day visited the theatre. The loss of this entertainment use has had and continues to have an enormous daily adverse impact on the entire district.

We implore you to reestablish the theater in time for its 100th anniversary. Take your investment to your community a step further by leading the restoration of the movie theater and reactivating live performances.

Let's work together to celebrate the theatre's historic importance, resume its reputation as a cultural destination, repair its cherished mural and restore its value as an economic driver to our district. Imagine celebrating the 100th with your neighbors as the restoration begins!

The Harvard Square Business Association is committed to assist you every step of the way in this vital undertaking.

Most sincerely,



Denise Jillson

Executive Director