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**Protected Landmark Petition: 116 Brookline (EMF Building)**

CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

June 18, 2018

To: The Cambridge Historical Commission  
Mr Bruce A. Irwin, Chairman  
Mr. Charles M. Sullivan, Executive Director  
831 Massachusetts Avenue, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND SIGNIFICANCE

WHEREAS: 116 Brookline St. (also known as the EMF Building and as 120 Brookline St. and 110-120 Brookline St.) is widely recognized as a key example of vernacular warehouse style once broadly seen in Central Square and other neighborhoods in Cambridge, conveying a distinctive and authentic eclectic style from multiple additions and renovations over time since its 1921 construction that individually and together create a harmonious and distinctive visual style; and

WHEREAS: The area in which this building is situated is rapidly undergoing change that risks depriving Cambridge of one of the most interesting of such important and historic work- and industrial- related structures to Central Square's identity, spirit of place, heritage, and cultural landscape; and

WHEREAS: 116 Brookline St. is inextricably linked to the history and culture of Central Square, and indeed the working class history of Cambridge itself; and

WHEREAS: 116 Brookline St. is a vital and ongoing symbol of Central Square's environment of continual change and a key epicenter of this urban cultural landscape; and

WHEREAS: The builders and redesigners of 116 Brookline St. consciously drew from local "context" and honored the brick and other materials to create a structure of unique balance, harmony and modernist appeal within the façades of the various building sections; and

WHEREAS: 116 Brookline St. was a one-time motor factory, with "Electrical Supplies," emblazoned on its signage and the bright orange letters EMF in electrified font, referencing the term "Electromotive Force" consistent with a factory that made motors from the days when Cambridge specialized in blue-collar industries that supported the working class; and

WHEREAS: From "1893 through 1989, some sources claim that Massachusetts produced more cars at its assembly plants in Cambridge, Somerville, Springfield, and Framingham than did Detroit [among these] Pontiac GTOs, Packards, Rolls- Royces, GMs, Fords, and many lesser-known brands" (Doug Brown "Cars in Cambridge (Cambridge Historical Society); and

WHEREAS "The Ford Motor Company opened its cutting-edge Cambridge Assembly factory at the corner of Brookline Street and Memorial Drive in 1913. It was the first vertically integrated assembly line in the world, with cars, including the famous Model T, moving through an assembly process spanning five stories" (Doug Brown "Cars in Cambridge (Cambridge Historical Society); and

WHEREAS "MIT's Sloan Automotive Lab, founded at MIT in 1929 by Professor

Charles Fayette "Fay" Taylor, builds on this legacy, with a plan to become the premiere automotive research lab in the world (producing more than 600 scientific publications. (source: Doug Brown "Cars In Cambridge" (Cambridge Historical Society); and

WHEREAS "The very first license plate in America, Massachusetts "1," was issued on September 1, 1903, to Brookline's Frederick Tudor, a descendant of Cambridge ice baron Frederic Tudor." (Doug Brown "Cars in Cambridge (Cambridge Historical Society) -linking 116 Brookline St. at once to national automobile movement, Brookline Street and Cambridge legacy; and

WHEREAS "To support this burgeoning auto industry "the city had a healthy auto parts industry as well. A survey of period business directories finds companies making springs, running boards, auto accessories, electrical equipment, and rubber goods. The Blake Spark Plug Company manufactured its revolutionary Quick Detachable Spark Plug at a factory at 101 Concord Avenue, now the site of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics on Observatory Hill. The Prest-O-Lite Company, producer of the first truly effective automobile headlight, built an acetylene plant in West Cambridge in 1920 to provide fuel for its products. Prest-O-Lite was eventually folded into the Union Carbide Corporation, and the site at Fresh Pond was redeveloped in 1962 into the Fresh Pond Mall, the ultimate expression of mid-20th-century, car-centric urban design." (source: Doug Brown "Cars in Cambridge" (Cambridge Historical Society); and

WHEREAS Too much of this history is being lost or forgotten and some "... have worried about Cambridge losing that blue-collar edge, because the blue-collar is where you get your grit. It may not always be pretty, but it is certainly tough with a can-do spirit, and much needed in crucial moments. I have also worried about Cambridge losing its "edge" in general. An edge created by the colorful, creative types who live life outside the parameters of a shiny new Cambridge built on "bio-this," "techy-that," and copious hipster endeavors" (Kristina Kehrer "EMF Radio -- An Oasis of Cool and Tradition in Cambridge on [www.neighbormedia.org](http://www.neighbormedia.org)) and;

WHEREAS 116 (120) Brookline is located in close proximity to 130 Brookline Street a building of historic significance that was recently renovated in part with an interest in enhancing "... the nearby innovation district while preserving an historic building and facilitating collaborations between MIT and industry partners. historical significance, and the Institute successfully restored and re-used many of its existing elements" and;

WHEREAS 116 Brookline St has until recently been "leased by Des Desmond, who created the Sound Museum Complex a warehouse full of practice spaces where bands can play loud. He was also a member of local performance-art band the Bentmen, who prided themselves on "A sonic and visual assault on the senses....EMF is also the home to local record label Curve of the Earth Records, and it is from here that WEMF broadcasts, creates podcasts, and recorded bands. (Kristina Kehrer "EMF Radio -- An Oasis of Cool and Tradition in Cambridge on [www.neighbormedia.org](http://www.neighbormedia.org)) and;

## DESIGNATIONS

WHEREAS: The Cambridge City Council in 1983 enacted legislation designed to preserve and conserve buildings and sites of significance in Cambridge's history; and

## CURRENT THREATS

WHEREAS: 116 Brookline St. was recently sold to a commercial real estate firm, under the business name of Ledgemoor LLC managed by Trinity Property Management, and it is not clear what will happen to this "... three-story brick building [that]...takes up nearly a block in a neighborhood now teeming with condominiums, the last vestige of industry in a city where real estate is at a premium." (Amelia Mason "Uproar Over Closing Of EMF Building Prompts Cambridge To Seek Solutions To Artist Displacement" April 2, 2018. [WBUR.Org](http://WBUR.Org)); and

WHEREAS Following a period of intense public concern, the building has closed "leaving some 200 musicians and artists without work spaces and several businesses, including the New Alliance recording studio, without a home."

WHEREAS: "Preservation" is one of two key additional threads that ran through the Committee's discussions about Central Square in drafting the 2013 Central Square Development Report recommendations, that "...seek to encourage sustainable development through environmental standards and historic preservation....;" and

WHEREAS: In the Central Square Zoning ordinance approved unanimously by City Council in February 2017 based on the city's K2C2 Planning Study in 2012, one of the key criteria included for formula business modifications is "The extent to which the design of the proposal reflects, amplifies, and strengthens the established historical character of existing buildings and store fronts in Central Square."

WHEREAS: Cambridge citizens have complained publicly about the potential homogenization of architecture and use

LANDMARK DESIGNATIONS

WHEREAS: 116 Brookline St's design, history, setting, and use make it worthy of preservation as a Cambridge Landmark; and

WHEREAS: 116 Brookline St. is one of a select number of properties that is important not only to Cambridge's economic and working class history but also its artistic vibrance and indeed to Cambridge as a whole; and

WHEREAS: Protecting 116 Brookline St. with local landmark status will enable its unique qualities to be maintained for the benefit of all Cambridge; and


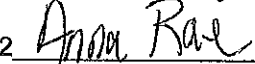
WHEREAS: Official landmark designation would "foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge" of its distinctive characteristics and significance; and

WHEREAS: Individually Landmarking this locally significant structure is needed to ensure that public participation and review guidelines contribute to the historic and visual enhancement of Central Square for future generations ; and

WHEREAS: Notwithstanding the fact that the City of Cambridge has yet to afford official recognition and protected status of the 116 Brookline St.; so

THEREFORE do we, the undersigned registered voters of the City of Cambridge, pursuant to Ordinance 1002, Article III, Section 180(D) of Chapter 2.78 of the Cambridge Municipal Code, hereby respectfully pray that the Cambridge Historical Commission initiate with all possible haste the process of designating the Abbot Building as a protected landmark of the City of Cambridge.

**ENDORSEES**

Printed Name Signature	Address	Zip
1 STEPHEN ONDERICK 	67 BRISTOL STREET	02141
2 Anna Rae 	118 Norfolk St, 3	02139

- Jonathan Glancy 118 Norfolk St #3 02139
- 3 ~~Dr. J~~  
MASON GULL
- 4 ~~Mason Gull~~ 158 Brookline #3 02139  
Molly Hess
- 5 ~~Molly Hess~~ 158 Brookline St. #3 02139  
Ben Simon
- 6 ~~Ben Simon~~ 67 Bishop Allen Dr. #2 02139  
Natalie Sharp
- 7 ~~Natalie Sharp~~ 148 Berkshire St #6 02141  
Mark VanMiddlesworth 148 Berkshire St #6 02141
- 8 ~~Mark VanMiddlesworth~~  
ANASTASIA KLOTF 375 CAROLINE MORGAN AVE. 02141
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- 10 ~~Alexandra Klutz~~  
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