



AFTER THE FIRE

JANUARY 18, 2008

THE LATEST NEWS



RECAP: A seven-alarm fire swept through historic downtown Cambridge January 15, causing more than \$1.5 million in damage and virtually wiping out the building at 444-448 Race Street. Two antique stores—Shorebid Antiques and Wm. G. Willikers—were destroyed, and smoke and water damage affected two neighboring buildings, the Salvation Army store and the old McCrory's building at 450 Race, where a developer had recently invested \$2.5 million. The occupied apartments in the upper levels of 450 Race were evacuated; the Red Cross provided help to the 12 residents.

THE LATEST:

- To protect the adjacent building at 450 Race, a 10-day temporary restraining order was issued January 16 to halt possible demolition of the storefront of the building that burned.
- Cambridge resident Brett Summers of NOVO Development, which owns 450 Race, is seeking to purchase the 444-448 Race property from the building owner, who lives in Florida.
- With the mayor's support, Cambridge Main Street applied for Preservation Maryland Heritage funds January 17. To expedite the shoring up of the building, Main Street is contracting structural engineers Baker, Ingram & Associates to design a system that will ensure public safety and the preservation of the facade.

WHAT WE'RE DOING

Public rally is Jan. 23

What: Cambridge Cares Rally

When: Noon, Wednesday, January 23

Where: 400 block of Race Street, Cambridge

Why: Cambridge Main Street is planning this event to bring everyone—residents, local and state officials, and anyone who wants to show support—together to show that. . .

- We care about the people. Let's thank the heroes who reached out to help and show support for the people affected by the fire.
- We care about Cambridge's history—and its future. Let's recover and continue downtown's momentum!

More info: Call Liddy Garcia-Buñuel at 443.521.7560.



Revitalization efforts now more important than ever

The fire on Race Street was a setback to downtown revitalization efforts spearheaded by Cambridge Main Street—but the momentum will continue. With recent openings of the French restaurant Bistro Poplar and the art/furniture gallery Maris Elaine, Cambridge is still moving ahead, and Cambridge Main Street is full of hope for the future. "We're bowed but not broken," said Dave Harp, president of the Cambridge Main Street board. "This is a tragedy now, but we'll move beyond this. We're in this for the long haul."

And despite some smoke and water damage to its office at 450 Race Street, Cambridge Main Street is open for business. Executive director Liddy Garcia-Buñuel will be working temporarily from office space donated by Hodes, Pessin & Katz; you can reach her at office@cambridgemainstreet.com or 443.521.7560.

IN GRATITUDE

THANKS TO OUR HEROES:

A huge thanks goes out to the heroes—the hundreds of firefighters, police officers, and other emergency personnel who stopped the fire from spreading and kept everyone safe; and the individuals and organizations who provided all kinds of help.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

PARTICIPATE:

Come to the public rally January 23 (see above) and show your support.

DONATE:

Cambridge Main Street has established a fund to help recover from the fire. Mail your check, made out to Cambridge Main Street (write "Fire Restoration Fund" in the memo line) to 450 Race Street, Suite 206, Cambridge, MD 21613. Also, Maris Elaine Gallery will donate a commission on any sales this weekend to the fund.

GET INVOLVED:

Cambridge Main Street needs your help now more than ever. Let's keep the momentum going! E-mail office@cambridgemainstreet.com or call 443.521.7560 to volunteer.

Looking ahead to Cambridge's future

The three-story, brick building that burned at 444–448 Race Street has added beauty and elegance to the streetscape for close to a century, and its businesses, Shorebid and Willikers, have played an important part in downtown's recent revitalization. The building's roof and interior are now gone, but the storefront, or facade, still stands. While public safety is the first priority, the facade should, if possible, be saved and incorporated into future construction. Cambridge Main Street, along with others including Preservation Maryland, Maryland Historical Trust, Department of Housing and Community Development, and Maryland Department of Planning, are aggressively exploring ways to do this.

Why is it important to try and save this facade?

Historic architecture is one of downtown Cambridge's most distinguishing features. The building that burned is listed on the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties (see details to the right). Classic buildings like this one are what help draw visitors and residents back to downtown Cambridge. If the facade was demolished unnecessarily, it would forever change the look of downtown. A new building in that spot could be constructed, but without the original facade, it may be difficult to achieve the architectural continuity.

As Cambridge Mayor C.L. Rippons told WBOC-TV 16, "We don't believe it's in the best interest of the city to leave a void there, so we will be working any way we can to work with the present owners to make sure to bring back the character and richness of the Cambridge city character down there."

Is it possible to save the building facade?

Structural engineers who inspected the property report that the first and second floors are structurally sound; the third floor less so because there's no roof. To both ensure public safety and preserve the facade, engineers are designing a stabilization plan. Such stabilization can save the facade so that it can be incorporated into a new structure. Other small towns that have experienced serious fires, such as Annapolis and Easton, have successfully taken this approach—and maintained the integrity of their downtown streetscapes.

What is Cambridge Main Street's role in this?

As a program of the National Historic Trust, Cambridge Main Street believes that historic preservation is key to economic development. So when a tragedy like this happens, we urge everyone to look beyond the short-term losses and consider the long term. How would downtown Cambridge look a decade from now if that facade was lost forever? While the building behind it can (and we hope, will) be rebuilt, the original facade can never be replaced.



HISTORIC PROPERTIES:

The building at 444–448 Race Street that was gutted by fire is listed on the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties, which calls it a "significant example of early 20th century commercial architecture" that is of "greater architectural interest than the stark buildings on this block constructed or renovated later in the 20th century." The building, which once housed Western Auto and Stelens, was likely designed by J. Benjamin Brown, who's thought to also be responsible for the old McCrory's building at 450 Race and the old Phillips Hardware building across the street.



AN INTEGRAL PART OF DOWNTOWN CAMBRIDGE:

The building gutted by the January 15 fire have provided a beautiful backdrop for downtown since the early 1900s until recent times, including last summer, when Taste of Cambridge, downtown Cambridge's biggest event, drew thousands from across the state and the country. The building housed Shorebid Antiques, which Karen Fishell and Kevin Davidson opened six years ago, and Wm. G. Willikers, which Dennis Napolitan opened three years ago.

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER: This update is brought to you by Cambridge Main Street, a 501c3 organization dedicated to revitalizing downtown Cambridge. Contact Liddy Garcia-Buñuel, Executive Director, at office@cambridgemainstreet.com or 443.521.7560.