

Cambridge- Holmes Building



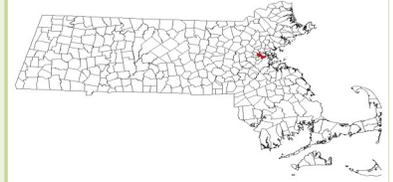
Site Details: Mixed Use Building,
128,000 sq ft.

Zoning: Special Permits

Funding: City, Private Developer

Date(s): 1997-2001

Goals: Revitalize Central Square; Provide Active Ground Floor Retail; Maintain Cultural and Income Diversity



Background

Central Square in Cambridge was an area that had suffered from disinvestment. In the mid 1950s the threat of the highway bulldozing through the area drove many business owners away. In 1987, a Central Square Action Plan was put together to address the declining state of the retail presence. This action plan included steps to create people-oriented spaces and to preserve cultural diversity throughout the process of strengthening the retail base of the square. The Holmes Building, which began construction in 1997, was consistent with the ideas laid out in this action plan. It is a 6 story building that opened in 2001 with ground floor retail, parking and 72 apartment units, 11 of which are affordable.



View from the Front of the Holmes Building

Site Development

The Holmes Building was completed in 2001 with some of the historical façade of the older building incorporated into the design. The building is 128,000 sf and includes 4,000 sf of useable open space as well as 36 biking spaces and underground parking for residents. The first floor is retail, second floor is office space, and the rest of the building is residential. The Cambridge Inclusionary Housing Ordinance required an affordable housing component to the Holmes Building as well. At this time, the affordable housing resulted in a 30% density bonus for the development.



Central MBTA Red Line Stop located adjacent to the Holmes Building

Development Process

As part of the development process, developer Holmes Realty Trust had to go through a special permit process. The first level of review was the citizen advisory committee. After this the Planning Board had to review the plan for its consistency with both the Central Square Action Plan as well as the Central Square Development Guidelines, also developed in the late 1980s. In the conditions for the special permits the developer was encouraged to include a MBTA pass subsidy program as well as a work of art for the public's benefit. The building also had to include 5 separately leased retail spaces. There was some controversy over the development because the old buildings that stood on site included some interesting and unique retail shops such as politically oriented bookstores, some old clothing stores and greasy spoon restaurants.

Many of the public meetings that were held in regards to the development included theatrical and volatile performances by residents who were worried that the Holmes Building would introduce a type of commercial gentrification and take away from the unique diversity of Central Square. The intense public response and comment contributed to the shape and design of the building and, in the end, the project has had a positive impact, both visually improving the site and providing more customers to frequent the retail establishments in Central Square.

Holmes Building and MetroFuture Goals

Transportation Choices

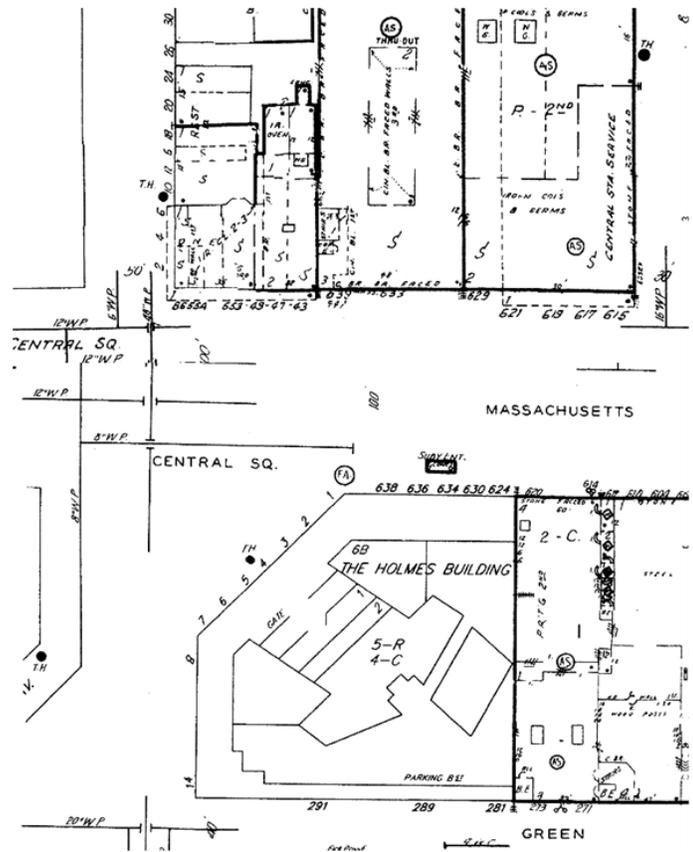
The Holmes Building is located adjacent to the Central Square Red Line MBTA stop and also has access to many bus routes.



Site of the Holmes Building Before Development
Source: Charles M. Sullivan photograph, Cambridge Historical Commission



Site of Holmes Building After Development
Source: Rekha Murthy



Map of the Holmes Building in Central Square
Source: Sanborn Maps

Housing Choices

Out of the 72 units that are part of the Holmes Building, 11 or about 15% of them are affordable. This was an important aspect of the development's consistency with the Central Square Action Plan. Fostering mixed income housing in the square was seen as an important goal.

Community Vitality

The development also ties in nicely with a public art installation that was built on the same corner before the Holmes Building was planned. The artwork is called "Multicultural Manifestoes" by Ritsuko Taho and includes seven cylinders ranging in height that are etched with the dreams of the many different people who live in Central Square. The dreams were collected through outreach to citizen groups and the distribution of boxes throughout the Central Square area. The place is a spot where people from many diverse backgrounds can feel comfortable sitting and enjoying the outdoors and art together.

Contact Information

For more information about the Holmes Building, contact Stuart Dash, Director of Community Planning, Cambridge at sdash@cambridgema.gov

"When building mixed use developments, always take a close look at parking requirements and consider a reduction based on how close your development is to transit. You want to build in transit oriented locations where this is possible" -Stuart Dash, Director of Community Planning, Cambridge