Letter from the Executive Committee

2022 was a year of growth and transition for the Central Square BID. With the peak of the pandemic behind us, we welcomed a new Executive Director and mobilized around a plan to bolster our award-winning placekeeping work.

As the new Executive Director of the BID, Luis Cotto added to the organization’s signature cultural programming, “activating the edges” to include the eastern and western edges of our district as sites for sound and expression. Busking, a pre-pandemic hallmark of Central, is back in large part to his efforts. His work also included supporting the events of other organizations like the Dance Complex and Cambridge Carnival.

He continued Michael’s work with us, the BID’s Executive Committee, to identify and institute a significant increase in pay to our incredible ambassadors. They are the foundation of the organization. On behalf of all of us, we thank Luis for his effort during his 2022 tenure.

It is with great pride that we share with you our annual report, a veritable highlight reel of what our team was able to accomplish this year. Of course, a printed booklet does it no justice. Take a walk down Mass. Ave. on a Friday evening to see it for yourself.

To continued partnership in 2023,

The Central Square BID Executive Committee
2022 Board of Directors

Christina Abele
IDEO

Police Commissioner
Christine Elow
Cambridge Police Department

George Metzger
HMFH Architects

Stuart Pratt
Hunneman

Patrick Rowe
MITIMCo

Patrick Barrett
CSQ Realty

Peter DiMuro
Dance Complex

Jackie Levine
Central Square Florist

Morris Naggar
3MJ Realty

Cheryl Watson
Gallucio & Watson, LLP

Kenneth Barron
CARU Associates

Josh Gerber
1369 Coffee

Geeta Pradhan
Cambridge Community Foundation

Rev. Dr. Ellis I. Washington
Saint Paul AME Church

Michael Monestime
Morningside

Tony Clark
My Brother’s Keeper

Shauna Reyburn
Vialé

Sean Hope
Yamba Market

Jay Kiely
BioMed Realty

Mark Orent
Leader Bank

Delphene Mooney
On The Rise

Our Team

Luis Cotto
Executive Director

Nina Berg
Creative Director

Brian Wright
Director of Operations

Erik Sarno
General Manager; Special Events

David Miller
Controller, David Miller CPA.

Danielle Williams
Community Outreach

Malene Council
Community Outreach

Treg M.
Operations Manager

Tyron T.
Administrative Assistant

Francis J.
Team Lead

Huseyn Y.
Team Lead

Daryn D.
Safety Team Lead

James M.
Mario A.

Aron H.
Justa C.

Tyron R.
Team Lead

James L.
Shaina C.

Annual Report 2022

Central Square Business Improvement District
New to the Neighborhood

District-wide, new businesses continue to choose Central’s Cultural District as their home. Join us in welcoming the below businesses to the Square:

Mahogany Expression
ILOVEFGC
Re.Nu By Carola
Ninawa Zero-Waste Clothes
Cini Coffee
Strong Black Girl
The Journey Within
Freney’s Creations
Rebel Genius
The Power Within
Mumu’s Pilziz
Tokens of Light
Black Label
Divine Beauty
Sewpreme Seams
Jules’ On-The-Go Jamaican Food

Ambassadors In Action

Stats from January 2022 - December 1, 2022

- 2,859 Stickers Removed
- 1,858 Big Bellys Cleaned
- 2,012 Pedestrians Assisted
- 4,479 Block Faces Cleaned
- 1,265 Feces Cleaned Up
- 1,116 Graffiti Power Washed
- 4,786 Weeds Removed
- 26,774 Needles Picked Up
- 36,036 Nips Collected
- 15,559 PPE Collected

5,438 BAGS of Trash Removed from District
Keep up with the heart of Central Square

@centralsqBID
January 2022

Inauguration at Starlight Square

2022 started quickly, as the team rallied in below freezing temperatures to produce the City of Cambridge City Council’s 32nd inauguration at Starlight Square. We were proud to host the newest Council, their families, and friends at the safest—still—community venue in the city.

Cambridge Convenes at Starlight for the MLK Day of Service

For the citywide MLK Day of Service organized by Many Helping Hands, the YWCA, and My Brother’s Keeper, the Cambridge community convened at Starlight, kicking off a walk through the Port neighborhood that asked participants to consider their own role in perpetuating racial inequality. Young leaders from My Brother’s Keeper led the program and were interviewed on local TV about the initiative.

The Boston Globe

Front Page News!
Our Outreach Team in the Boston Globe

Central Square received more positive press when the BID’s proactive approach to direct outreach was the focus of a Boston Globe feature in February. Journalists and photographers shadowed our team for a day and saw for themselves the realities of the Square.
February 2022

The CSBID Welcomes New Executive Director, Luis Cotto

Amidst February snowstorms, we welcomed Luis Cotto as the new Executive Director. During his tenure at the BID, Luis added to the organization’s signature cultural programming, “activating the edges,” as he called it to include Lafayette Square and the Post Office as new sites for sound and expression. Busking, a pre-pandemic hallmark of Central, is back in large part to his efforts.

Photo by Leonardo March

Ambassadors Enter Snow Mode

The team went into Snow Mode, clearing walkways and bike lanes for two major snow events in February. Weather emergencies are one instance where the BID Ambassador team’s strengths are on display district-wide.
March 2022

BID Team Receives Larry Burke Community Policing Award

Both the Outreach and Ambassador teams were recognized by the Cambridge Police Department as an outstanding community partner. This trophy, a source of pride for the entire team, lives in the Ambassador’s office now.

Celebrating Team Wins...

Part of our model is to provide opportunity for folks now and then support them in their next move. Dante is one Ambassador who worked with us for a year and a half, and then graduated onto his next employment opportunity after passing his CDL exam. In March, we took time to celebrate his success—and Erik’s bday!
Danielle and Malene took it upon themselves to celebrate International Women’s Day with their friends in the Square. With some collaboration from local businesses, they created gift bags and distributed them to the women they work with.

And All Women in the Square!

Councillor Simmons’ Women’s Month Gallery

Councillor Simmons also celebrated Women’s Month in the Square. We collaborated with her office and the Cambridge Arts Council to install a series of photographs in vacant storefronts to highlight the community contributions of Cambridge women. We loved that of the women featured, Ms. Key, was Malene’s elementary school teacher.

Delivery! Outreach Team Distributes Pumas to Families and Friends

In 2022, one of the Outreach team’s major functions was to receive and distribute essential goods to neighbors in need. After establishing relationships at Patagonia and Puma, among other businesses, they connected their inventory with students, families, and neighbors in the Square. Sometimes the generosity of donors was overwhelming, like on this day when they received 22 boxes from Puma!
Our Spring 2022 preparation included a new challenge: ensuring the longevity of Graffiti Alley. We learned that decades of accumulated paint posed a structural issue to the wall below. By collaborating with both the property and business owner, our team was able to facilitate the installation of a new surface that protects the building and preserves Central's most iconic cultural landmark. It only took a few weeks for the entire surface to be newly covered in color.

We also took care to touch up the existing public art pieces in the Square. Pictured here, Jesus Manuel refreshes his piece from our 2020 Speak Your Piece campaign.

Spring Cleaning Throughout the Square

In April of every year, the team marshals all resources to prepare for spring, our busiest season. From landscaping and bike racks to a refresh of our district-wide campaign, the Ambassadors ensured Central put its best foot forward as the seasons changed.

Long Live Graffiti Alley!

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Farewell and Thank You to Classic Graphx

This year, one of Central’s longest-running businesses, Classic Graphx, closed. Owned by Anne Shuhler for over three decades, Classic Graphx epitomized Central’s inclusive identity. For years, we’ve gone to make copies, print our annual report, buy paper, etc, always seeing neighbors working with Anne and her staff to complete a variety of essential, day-to-day tasks. We’ll miss the service they provided and the spirit they upheld.
Starlight Opens for Season Three

In May, all of our offseason planning comes to fruition. With great pride and excitement, the team reopened Starlight Square for its third season on May 17th. The first month was largely dedicated to the talents of Cambridge Rindge and Latin. In the first few weeks, we hosted the CRLS Habesha Club’s Youth Multicultural Night, the CRLS World Jazz Ensemble, and the CRLS Media Arts Film Festival.

Year 33 of the Central Square Farmer’s Market

Coinciding with the reopening of Starlight was the Farmers Market, which continued to shine in its new, expanded footprint at Starlight and on Norfolk Street. This year, a little music was added to the program, making the al fresco shopping experience even more enjoyable.

19 Entrepreneurs Open Their Doors at Popportunity

Popportunity, the economic development initiative incubated at the BID, is now its own 501c3. In two years, Popportunity participants have generated over $200,000 in revenue. This year, the Lot 5 footprint supported 38 entrepreneurs, primarily women- and POC-owned, Cambridge-based businesses. The team also piloted a Mass Ave expansion; was awarded $150,000 in ARPA funding; and is exploring a collaboration with MITIMCo for an indoor expansion.
This year, the team turned the “edges” of the Square into sites for informal programming, spinning up Sounds of the Square, a Latin jazz series, and stipending buskers to add a soundtrack to people’s evening commute in the spring and summer.

June 2022

CRLS Juniors Celebrate Prom Under the Stars

One of the most joyous nights in Central is prom. For the last two years, we have happily hosted one of the hallmarks of high school. This year, the junior class came to Starlight, dressed to the nines. As we’ve said repeatedly, that Starlight is a place young people want to be is validation enough that we are doing something right.

Bridgeside Cypher Rocks the Mic

Led by Jillian Giardin and Aaron King, the Cambridge Hip Hop Collective’s Bridgeside Cypher is consistently one of Starlight’s most popular events. This year, they put on two showcases, both capped off by their open-mic cypher. Our young friend, Jahzara stepped up this year, winning the crowd over with her rendition of Nas’ “I Can.”

Black Joy Takes Center Stage

Annual celebrations, like Juneteenth, have found a home in Central thanks to the work of organizers like Backyard Arts and Cambridge Families of Color Coalition. This year, Black Joy was their theme, powerfully embodied in the performances by young Cantabrigians throughout the afternoon event.
Central Square Convenes for Our Annual Board Meeting

Every year in July, the BID Board and staff host an open annual meeting. This year, we celebrated many anniversaries of businesses in the Square, welcomed new ones, and voted in a selection of new Board members. We’re fortunate to have Tony Clark, Shauna Reyburn, Sean Hope, Jay Kiely, Mark Orent, and Delphene Mooney on our Board now. Their expertise spans educational equity, hospitality, cannabis, real estate, and social service.

Mayor Siddiqui and Boston Bollywood Bring the City to Their Feet

Another highlight of the Starlight season is Mayor Siddiqui’s Bollywood event. Henna tattoos, samosas, lively performances, and a group dance class bring residents from across the city to the heart of Central.

This is How We Roll!

Starlight, like the chameleon that it is, transformed into a skating rink twice this season thanks to the organization of Lara Jardullo of Laraland. Her evening skate party is always DJed by three Cambridge legends, Nomadik, Mo, and X, who set the mood with throwbacks the whole family can move and groove to.

Photo by Nick Minieri
Staying Cool in the Summer

August brought a historic heat wave to the East Coast. Two weeks of sustained record temperatures necessitated that our Ambassadors and Outreach team take to the streets to help Central beat the heat. It remained a priority for us until the heat wave broke.

Game Night Under the Stars

Our very own Malene Council switched roles from bartender to host for “40 for the Culture,” an adult game night at Starlight, complete with adult beverages.

Other August programming highlights included the Cambridge Community Development Department’s Black Business Month networking event and CCTV’s Summer Media Institute End-of-Summer film screening.

Activating The Edges

Throughout the summer, we experimented with pop-up music sets on the Post Office steps, in front of Graffiti Alley, and in Lafayette Square, giving a platform to musicians, DJs, and producers to capture the ear of passersby in Central’s myriad of public spaces. Supporting the return of busking after the permitting hiatus during the pandemic reminded us how lively the Square can be and how music can signal to people that they’re moving through a creative and expressive place.
Celebrating Peter Valentine

In August, our dear friend Peter Valentine returned to the cosmos. At his family’s request, our team and his friends produced his memorial. It was a beautiful, colorful sendoff.
September 2022

North America’s Top Transportation Planners Visit Central

All of our collective efforts since starting the BID have put Central on the map. Through Brooke McKenna and the City’s Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department, we led two NACTO (an internationally attended conference) groups through Central, highlighting our pandemic-inspired, placekeeping work — from Starlight and Popportunity to the patios and public art.

The Hip Hop Transformation Takes the Mic

From May - October, Cambridge kids took the stage at Starlight. From prom to the Cambridge Community Center’s THHT’s annual showcase, it has become a place for the next generation to shine.

Cause for Celebration! Cambridge Carnival and the Dance Complex Take to the Streets!

The summer concluded with the beloved Cambridge Carnival and the Dance Complex’s 30th anniversary celebration. Both demonstrated how much fun we can all have when the streets become places for people.
After five months of Starlight programming, the team celebrated another successful year in the books. Some facts about Starlight that we’re extremely proud of include:

- Starlight hosted 83 events this season
- Starlight created job opportunities for a team of 13 people. The majority of our staff are born and raised in Cambridge. The majority of our staff are women. The majority of our staff are people of color.
- Starlight staffed three Cambridge teens this season.
- The BID paid $85,550 in event stipends to local artists, performers, and community organizations.

CCF Salutes

The Cambridge Community Foundation turned Starlight into a carnival for CCF Salutes, the Community Foundation’s annual celebration of the non-profit community. Complete with circus performers, a 360 photo booth, tarot and tattoos, a magician, and freestyling-MC, they uplifted the culture of service that Cambridge is known for.

If you haven’t yet, check out their Imagined in Cambridge Social Innovation Award winners: Everybody Gotta Eat, Space for Black Exuberance, Historically Black College and University (HBCU) Tour and Expo, The Mental Health Access Program, and CommuniTEA with our Elders.

Rindge Reunion

With the support of the Mayor’s Office and fellow former alum, La Fabrica owner, Dennis Benzan, we brought the annual Rindge reunion event to Central. To the cuts of iconic DJ, Tony Touch, alums across generations enjoyed a night in the Square before the Thanksgiving holiday.

Photo Credit: Jeffrey Blackwell
Central Square Celebrates the World Cup

As we’ve become known to do, we turned another event inside out and made it public: the World Cup final. We revived Starlight for another epic match, collaborating with 1369, Naco Taco, Phoenix Landing, and our footy fanatic friends at Flagg to create a memorable morning, free and open to all.
One of the most special parts of Central Square are the family-owned businesses that become part of your life over the years, and in the case of these two, decades. Both Mary Chung and Simeon’s Fine Tailoring will close at the end of 2022, as they both start a much deserved retirement after years of indulging our scallion pancake and dan dan noodle cravings and keeping us looking sharp. Our sincere thanks to them for being part of our lives and our community for so long.

We’ll miss you!
Thank You to Our Partners!