



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Cambridge Community Development Department

From: Central Square Advisory Committee

Date: March 22, 2022

Re: **Market Central Retail Plan**

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Overview

The Central Square Advisory Committee ("CSAC") met on Wednesday, March 2, 2022 to discuss the Retail Plan prepared by Market Central for their development at 425 Massachusetts Avenue. CSAC members present were Saffana Anwar, Chris Fort, Melissa Greene, Esther Hanig, Tahir Kapoor, Michael Monestime, Chris Sol Gully, and Robert Winters. Several members of the Market Central Retail Advisory Committee were also present, including Patrick Barrett, Jason Weeks, and Christina DiLisio on behalf of the Community Development Department (CDD) Economic Development Division.

Plan Description

As part of their zoning and special permit conditions, the developer of Market Central is required to submit a Retail Plan for encouraging local, independent retail and active street-level uses to CDD. Among other things, the Plan must include a proposal for a seasonal public market. The developer is also required to convene a Retail Advisory Committee, which provides input on tenant selection and programming.

Committee Comments

Members of the CSAC and the Retail Advisory Committee engaged in a robust discussion with the developer representatives, Bob Flack and Dave Downing, about the vision for retail businesses at Market Central. Members of both committees expressed a desire to have a bustling retail center with regular programming that activates nearby public and private spaces. They encouraged the developer representatives to think of the whole site from the parking lot through the arcade to Jill Brown-Rhone Park as one connected space and a community asset.

Many members were disappointed by the number of empty storefronts, especially along Columbia Street. They noted that all the spaces fronting Massachusetts Avenue are leased to restaurants and urged the developer representatives to diversify the types of businesses that they leased to. Committee members also raised the importance of serving residents in the Port and prioritizing businesses that are independently owned and operated.

Members of both committees expressed a variety of opinions about the proposed public market concept. Some members encouraged the developer representatives to focus on activating the vacant storefronts through pop-up events, while others preferred the idea of hosting a market in the parking lot behind the buildings. One Retail Advisory Committee member noted that closing Columbia Street for such an event would block the loading zone used by the hotel and restaurants in that area.

Committee members supported a market concept that focused on the arts, as opposed to food-related retail, since there are already so many restaurants in the area. They noted that the Cambridge Arts Council is a willing partner that would help connect the developer representatives to artists and arts organizations that are looking for gallery, performance, or storage space. Members also suggested hosting live arts performances in the park and activating the vacant retail spaces along Columbia Street.

While all committee members would like to see more business, events, and activity at Market Central, they encouraged the developer representatives to be intentional about putting together a public market, rather than simply satisfy a requirement. Committee members were appreciative that the developer has committed to fund these initiatives and noted that the Central Square Business Improvement District could be a programming, though not a funding, partner.

At the end of the discussion, CSAC members agreed to forward this report to CDD. Members of the Retail Advisory Committee expressed a desire for that group to have a clear path forward and actionable next steps.

Respectfully submitted for the Committee,

Sarah Scott

Sarah Scott

Associate Zoning Planner

Community Development Department