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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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**IRAM FAROOQ**

*Assistant City Manager for  
Community Development*

**SANDRA CLARKE**

*Deputy Director  
Chief of Administration*

To: Board of Zoning Appeal

From: Harvard Square Advisory Committee

Date: July 17, 2024

Re: **5 JFK Street (SoBol) – Positive Recommendation**

## Overview

The Harvard Square Advisory Committee (the “Committee”) met on Wednesday, July 17, 2024 to discuss a special permit application for a SoBol location at 5 JFK Street. The meeting was conducted pursuant to the provisions of Section 20.50 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance in advance of the applicant’s hearing for a special permit from the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA). Committee members present were Allison Crosbie, Lauren Curry, Jemel Derbali, John DiGiovanni, Kari Kuelzer, Alexandra Offiong, Matt Simitis (Chair), and Nicola Williams. Absent were Frank Kramer and Steven Ng. After discussion, John DiGiovanni moved and Lauren Curry seconded the motion to forward a report to the BZA with a positive recommendation. Eight (8) members present voting in favor and none (0) against.

## Proposal Description

The Applicant is proposing a formula business quick service food establishment in an approximately 776 square foot retail space on the ground floor of 5 JFK Street (the Abbot building) in Harvard Square. SoBol is a fast casual restaurant selling smoothie bowls. The Applicant is expected to take over the space occupied by Tiger Sugar, a bubble tea and boba store. Fast Order/Quick-Service Food Establishments in the Harvard Square Overlay District require a special permit from the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA) if they are considered a Formula Business. SoBol is a nationwide franchise chain with approximately 68 locations that qualifies as a Formula Business. HSAC has reviewed the application and prepared this recommendation to be submitted to the BZA.

Presenting for the project were Sagar Patel and Meet Patel. Also presenting for the project was Attorney James Rafferty.

The applicant highlighted the need for their business in the area and cited the lack of quick service food options and potential for job creation. Plumbing and electrical are already in place, and mostly cosmetic changes are proposed. Anticipated rush time is during lunch and foot traffic is likely the main mode of arrival.

## Public Comments

No public comment.

## Committee Comments

The Committee was generally very supportive of the proposal. Member comments focused on finding ways to make the business more sustainable and visible to the community with improved signage and seating. Members were concerned that the location is challenging, with a lack of window transparency and a recessed entryway.

Recommendations were made to encourage engagement with the street by brightening up the interior and signage within the historical guidelines, by including ample seating, and by ensuring that there is transparency along the façade windows. An emphasis was also placed on utilizing biodegradable materials.

**Recommendation**

The Committee voted to recommend that the application be approved by the BZA and to transmit the above summary of comments:

Respectfully submitted for the Committee,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mason Wells". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Mason Wells**

Community Development Department