



To: Board of Zoning Appeal
From: Harvard Square Advisory Committee
Date: November 19, 2025
Re: **1 Brattle Square (Chicha San Chen) – Positive Recommendation**

Overview

The Harvard Square Advisory Committee (the “Committee”) met on Wednesday, November 19, 2025, to discuss a special permit application for a Chicha San Chen tea shop proposed for 1 Brattle Square. 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 Charles Bonney, Allison Crosbie, John DiGiovanni, Kari Kuelzer, Alexandra Offiong (Chair), Matt Simitis, and Nicola Williams. Absent were Henry Grabar, Ryan Clinesmith Montalvo, and Ivy Moylan. After discussion, John DiGiovanni moved and Nicola Williams seconded the motion to forward a report to the BZA with a positive recommendation for the Special Permit, as well as encouragement for after hours lighting along the store perimeter and windows, longer hours (especially in the morning), outdoor seating and an associated trash receptacle, and additional exterior signage. Seven (7) 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 1,225 square foot retail space on the ground floor of 1 Brattle Square in Harvard Square. Chicha San Chen is a beverage store specializing in tea. 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. Chicha San Chen is an international franchise chain that qualifies as a Formula Business. HSAC reviewed the application and prepared this recommendation to be submitted to the BZA. Presenting for the project were Attorney James Rafferty, the business owner, and the project architect. The owner highlighted that this was his second tea store, specializing in fresh fruit tea, brewed daily. The store is proposed to operate from 11 am to 9 pm seven days a week, with no food served, only tea and toppings. The floor plan includes 18 seats, with two seating areas. The store plans to rely on pickup business, with tea individually brewed in about 5 minutes.

Melissa Peters | Assistant City Manager for Community Development
Sandra Clarke | Chief of Administration & Operations

Public Comments

Denise Jillson, Executive Director of the Harvard Square Business Association, expressed support for the project and highlighted the positive impact of the property management company's efforts in creating smaller vibrant spaces along this frontage.

A commentor who identified themselves as Luke asked whether the building has an elevator. The building does, but this space does not, as it is not needed for this ground floor location.

Recommendation

In their discussion, the Committee members emphasized the creation of an active storefront that contributes to the liveliness of the streetscape. The Committee members emphasized that they thought this is a great addition for enlivening the area, and that they would encourage lighting along the perimeter and towards the windows to be on after hours. They encouraged the applicant to request longer hours and as many hours as this applicant comfortably feels works for them. The members would encourage outdoor seating, and if they do so, to put a trash receptacle that they empty daily. Members also generally thought that signage is a good thing to identify the store, whether it is on the windows or somewhere on the awning.

The Committee voted to forward a positive recommendation on the sign as presented.

Respectfully submitted for the Committee,



Mason Wells
Community Development Department

Melissa Peters | Acting Assistant City Manager for Community Development
Sandra Clarke | Chief of Administration & Operations