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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: August 10, 2022

Re: Special Permit **PB #381, 544-550 Massachusetts Avenue**

**IRAM FAROOQ**  
Assistant City Manager for  
Community Development

**SANDRA CLARKE**  
Deputy Director  
Chief of Administration

**KHALIL MOGASSABI**  
Deputy Director  
Chief of Planning

## Overview

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Submission Type:	Special Permit Application
Applicant:	Central Square Redevelopment LLC
Zoning District(s):	Business B (BB); Central Square Overlay District
Proposal Summary:	Construct a residential addition of 27 dwelling units to the existing commercial building footprint
Special Permits Requested:	Exclusion of basement GFA from total GFA calculation (2.000); Additional height in Central Square Sq. Overlay (20.304.2.2(a)); Additional FAR for residential uses (20.304.3); FAR Exemption for Rooftop Spaces (20.304.3.6); Waiver of yard setback requirements (20.304.4.1); Waiver of private open space requirements (20.304.4.2); and Waiver of parking and loading requirements (20.304.63(b))
Other City Permits Needed:	Variance for lot area per dwelling unit from BZA
Planning Board Action:	Grant or deny requested special permits
Memo Contents:	CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report; Central Square Advisory Committee Report
Other Staff Reports:	Department of Public Works (DPW), in separate document

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<b>Requested Special Permits</b>	<b>Required Planning Board Findings</b> <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Central Square Overlay District: Standards for Issuance of Special Permits (Section 20.305)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposed development is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Central Square Action Plan:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ encourage responsible and orderly development;</li> <li>○ strengthen the retail base to more completely serve the needs of the neighborhoods;</li> <li>○ preserve the Square’s cultural diversity;</li> <li>○ create active people oriented spaces;</li> <li>○ improve the physical, and visual environment;</li> <li>○ provide retail establishments that serve people of diverse economic and social groups who live in the surrounding neighborhoods.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Building and site designs are consistent with “Urban Design Plan for Central Square” as outlined in the “Central Square Action Plan” and the “Central Square Development Guidelines” (see summary on following pages).</li> <li>• Building and site designs adequately screen the parking provided and are sensitive to the contributing buildings in the vicinity.</li> <li>• No National Register or contributing building is demolished or so altered as to terminate or preclude its designation (either now or within the past 5 years).</li> </ul>
Central Square Overlay District: Building height up to 80 feet and combined residential and non-residential FAR up to 4.00 (Sections 20.304.2 & 20.304.3)	<i>Central Square Overlay District findings set forth above</i>
Central Square Overlay District: Waiver of setback and open space requirements (Sections 20.304.4.1 & 20.304.4.2)	<i>Central Square Overlay District findings set forth above</i>
Central Square Overlay District: Exemption of rooftop spaces from calculation of Gross Floor Area (GFA) in Central Square Overlay District (Section 20.304.3.6)	The rooftop spaces are located and designed to minimize impacts on neighboring uses, including but not limited to light trespass, noise or other nuisance, and may place further requirements or conditions on the design or operational aspects of rooftop space, including but not limited to hours of operation, range of activities permitted, signage and lighting fixtures, visual screening devices, sound mitigation, and other measures to ensure ongoing compliance with the findings.

Requested Special Permits	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Central Square Overlay District: Reduction of parking and loading requirement (Sections 20.304.6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total development authorized on the site is reduced to 90% of the maximum permitted on the lot or a cash contribution is made to the Central Square Improvement Fund in an amount equal to fifty (50) percent of the cost of construction of the parking spaces not provided.</li> <li>• Subject lot is sufficiently small in size as to contribute to a development pattern of diverse, small scale, new structures and the retention of existing structures.</li> <li>• Exemption from parking and loading requirements will result in a building design that is more appropriate to its location and the fabric of its neighborhood.</li> </ul> <p><i>Other Central Square Overlay District findings set forth above</i></p>
Special Permit for exemption of basement area in the calculation of Gross Floor Area (GFA)	The uses occupying such exempted GFA support the character of the neighborhood or district in which the applicable lot is located.
General Special Permit Criteria (Section 10.43)	<p>Special permits will be normally granted if the zoning requirements are met, unless it is found not to be in the public interest due to one of the criteria enumerated in Section 10.43:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or</li> <li>(b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or</li> <li>(c) the continued operation of or the development of adjacent uses as permitted in the Zoning Ordinance would be adversely affected by the nature of the proposed use, or</li> <li>(d) nuisance or hazard would be created to the detriment of the health, safety and/or welfare of the occupant of the proposed use or the citizens of the City, or</li> <li>(e) for other reasons, the proposed use would impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district, or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of this Ordinance, and</li> <li>(f) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.</li> </ul>



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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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## Zoning & Development Staff Report

Date: August 10, 2022  
Case: PB-381  
Location: 544-550 Massachusetts Avenue

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### Revised Proposal Overview

On August 31, 2021, the Planning Board (“the Board”) held a public hearing on an application by Central Square Redevelopment LLC (“the Applicant”) to redevelop the property at 544-550 Massachusetts Avenue by constructing a residential addition to an existing commercial building. The addition would maintain the current building footprint, adding three stories to the three-story building. With the proposed addition, the building would total 18,988 square feet and be 66.5 feet in height.

The applicant is seeking several special permits through the Central Square Overlay District, in addition to a special permit to exempt the basement Gross Floor Area (GFA) from the total GFA calculation. They are also in the process of seeking a variance from the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA) for Lot Area per Dwelling Unit, since the project proposes 27 units, but only 20 are allowed as-of-right. That case was continued by the BZA in order for the Planning Board to conduct its review.

At the public hearing, the Board provided various comments and suggestions for refinement before continuing the hearing to a future date. Since that time, the Applicant’s team has met with staff from the Community Development Department (CDD) to further discuss the set of issues raised by staff and the Board at the August 31, 2021 hearing. The Applicant has since provided a revised application (“the Application”) that includes updated plans and a summary of the effort they have made to address the points raised by the Board and staff.

### Key Revisions

The Application does not significantly change the uses or dimensions of the initial proposal. Instead, it responds to Board and staff comments through a series of smaller tweaks. The Applicant addresses these changes in the overview of Volume I of the revised materials dated July 6, 2022 and in the various revised materials. Revisions to the building and site design are discussed further in the Urban Design Report from CDD staff.

### GFA

The Application includes revised GFA figures as shown on the Dimensional Form. The total GFA of the project has been reduced from 20,082 to 18,988 square feet. Not calculated in this figure is the GFA for three areas that the Applicant proposes to exempt. The Applicant is seeking special permits to exempt

3,334 square feet of GFA in the basement and 503 square feet on the rooftop. The Applicant is also using an as-of-right exemption for the small retail shop on the ground story that totals 1,079 square feet.

#### FAR

The applicant is seeking several special permits under Section 20.304.3 of the Zoning Ordinance related to FAR. The revised GFA figures provided in the Application clarify that the FAR permitted for non-residential uses does not exceed the maximum FAR allowed for these uses in the base zoning district. In this case, the maximum allowed FAR is 5.20; the Applicant proposes an FAR of 4.32. The Application also shows that the proposed FAR of all non-residential uses does not exceed the proposed FAR of all residential uses on the lot. In this case, the FAR of non-residential uses is 0.50 and the FAR of residential uses is 3.83. The applicant is also seeking a special permit from the Planning Board to exempt the GFA of open-air spaces on the roof of the buildings from the FAR calculation. In granting this special permit, the Planning Board must find that the proposed rooftop spaces have been located and designed to minimize impacts on neighboring uses. The zoning authorizes the Planning Board to place further requirements or conditions on the design or operational aspects of these spaces. This is discussed further in the Urban Design Report.

#### Building Height

The Applicant is seeking a special permit under Section 20.304.2 of the Zoning Ordinance to increase the building height above 60'. The height has been reduced from 69'6" to 66'6" and the Application shows how the upper portions of the building meet the setback requirement for granting this special permit. This is discussed further in the Urban Design Report.

#### Setbacks and Open Space

The Applicant is also seeking special permits to waive the setback and open space requirements under Section 20.304.4. The Application clarifies that there is no setback on any side of the building and that there is no open space proposed at ground level.

#### Housing

The Application has been revised to provide 27 dwelling units, instead of the 29 that were initially proposed. This was done in response to Planning Board and staff recommendations to include one-bedroom units in the mix, since they are preferred by tenants in the Inclusionary Housing program. The project now includes four one-bedroom units and 23 studios ranging in size from 367 square feet to 616 square feet. Before issuance of a building permit, CDD's Housing staff will determine what units will be made permanently affordable to comply with the Inclusionary Housing requirements, which will be codified in a covenant recorded with the property deed.

The Zoning Ordinance sets specific standards for the location of units that satisfy the Inclusionary Housing requirement as well as pricing, resident selection, and other details. For example, the revised plans show that the four large, one-bedroom units are located in the back of the building next to the elevator and the stairs, with windows fronting the restaurant mechanical equipment. Under the Inclusionary Housing requirements, staff would have to determine if this condition is similar to the market-rate units. This is also discussed further in the Urban Design Report.

Historic Preservation

The property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is a contributing building per section 20.303.3 of the Zoning Ordinance. In issuing any special permits authorized by the Central Square Overlay District, the special permit granting authority must find that no National Register or contributing building is demolished or so altered as to terminate or preclude its designation as a National Register or contributing building. According to the Executive Director of the Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC), the proposed addition would not in principle alter the contributing status of the building in the Central Square National Register District. However, there are aspects of the design that could be more compatible with the architecture of the existing building and its surroundings. CHC staff recommends that the Planning Board delegate further review to CDD's urban design staff, with the participation of CHC staff.

Infrastructure

The Department of Public Works (DPW) submitted a memo to the Planning Board on August 18, 2021 for the first hearing on this project. The memo, which is attached here, includes comments related to stormwater management, sidewalk replacement, and street trees. DPW would respectfully refer the Board and Applicant to review the initial comments on the projects, as they remain relevant to the proposed modifications to the initial plan.

**Outstanding Considerations**

Basement GFA

The Applicant is seeking a special permit under Article 2.000 to exempt the basement GFA from the total GFA calculation. In granting the special permit, the Planning Board must find that the uses occupying the space support the character of the neighborhood or zoning district in which the building is located. The proposal for the basement includes a laundry room, community room, and bicycle parking for residents of the building as well as storage for the restaurant use.

The community room is approximately 130 square feet, which is small for a meeting space. As discussed in the attached report, members of the Central Square Advisory Committee asked that the community room be designed to be appropriate for the types of groups and gatherings that will use it. Suggestions have included nonprofit meeting space, music practice room, and other arts uses. The Applicant has expressed a willingness to work with the Central Square Business Improvement District and other community-serving organizations to program the space. However, the Applicant has not provided details on how the space will be used, such as hours of availability, access, and booking.

If the Board decides that granting the special permit to exempt basement GFA should be conditioned on a particular public benefit, details of that condition (such as permitted uses and operational standards) should be explicitly recorded in the Planning Board decision.

Parking and Loading

The Applicant is seeking to waive parking and loading requirements per Section 20.304.6 by reducing the total development on the site to 90% of the maximum allowed, in which case it would not be required to make a contribution to the Central Square Improvement Fund. In this case, 90% of the development potential of the site is 20,550. The Application shows that the total GFA of the project will be 18,988

square feet if the requested GFA exemptions are granted by the Planning Board, which is under the 90% threshold. However, if the Board does not grant the special permit to exempt the basement GFA, the total GFA of the project will be 22,322 square feet, which is over the 90% threshold. It is unclear from the Application how the GFA of the roof deck factors into these calculations.

This project does not trigger the requirement for a Transportation Impact Study (TIS). Central Square is a transit-oriented area with access to sustainable transportation options such as the MBTA Red Line, MBTA buses, EZRide M2 shuttle bus, carshare vehicles (e.g., Zipcars), walking, and traveling by bike, including Bluebikes. The City's Municipal Green Street parking garage may not be able to accommodate residents at this project because it has a waiting list, but there is a commercial parking garage at 55 Franklin Street which is about a five-minute walk from the Project.

While mitigation is not required as a condition of the special permit to waive or reduce the required amount of off-street parking, the Applicant has committed to Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures to encourage residents to use sustainable modes of travel instead of owning a car, including 50% of the funding on an ongoing basis to those residents who purchase monthly MBTA passes. Implementing TDM measures are one way to satisfy the general special permit criterion in Section 10.43 that special permits should not be granted if the project would be a detriment to the public interest because "traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character." If the Board and the applicant agree to implement such a program, the following is a typical residential TDM package that staff would recommend incorporating into the conditions of the special permit:

- To establish the habit of using mass transit, offer each adult member of each household (up to two) upon move-in will be offered a Charlie Card loaded with a bus/subway pass paid at 100% of the cost of the pass for two consecutive months. For condominiums, this benefit will apply to original condominium owners only. For apartments, this benefit will end after two months for the household after using the program and begins anew upon unit turnover.
- Offer each adult member of each household (up to two) upon move in a one-year Gold-Level Bluebikes membership. This benefit will end after one year for the household and begins anew upon turnover.
- Provide bicycle parking without a charge to users, along with air pumps and other bike repair tools near bicycle parking areas.
- Designate a Transportation Coordinator to manage TDM programs for the site, and to coordinate with the city and local Transportation Management Associations and oversee the marketing and promotion of transportation options to all residents at the site in a variety of ways:
  - Posting information in a prominent location in the building and on the Project's website, social media, and property newsletters.
  - Responding to individual requests for information in person and via phone and email.
  - Provide one new resident packet of transportation information to all units upon move-in. Transportation information packets may be purchased from the Community Development Department.

- Either install a real-time multi-modal display screen in a permanent and central location for residents to show arrival times and availability for nearby buses, trains, shuttles, Bluebikes, and carshare vehicles, etc. or establish a transportation information center located in an area that is central, visible, and convenient and equally accessible to all residents. An information center shall feature information on:
  - Available pedestrian and bicycle facilities in the vicinity of the Project site.
  - MBTA maps, schedules, and fares.
  - Bluebikes regional bikeshare system.
  - Carsharing.
  - Ride-matching; and,
  - Other pertinent transportation information.

### Bicycle Parking

The Application has been revised to account for the long-term bicycle parking required for all uses on the site and now includes a bicycle parking plan. The plans show one long-term bicycle parking space that can accommodate tandem bicycles or bicycles with trailers; however, two are required by zoning. The plans also include dimensions for the primary access route to the long-term bicycle parking. It appears that the hallway of the residential lobby is only 3'8" wide when it must be at least 5' wide per the zoning. The Application is also still missing the grade of the primary access route from the public right-of-way to the Bicycle Parking Spaces and the interior dimensions of the elevator.

Because the project has no setbacks and no location on its property to provide short-term bike parking spaces the applicant has requested to contribute to the City's Public Bike Fund in lieu of providing short-term racks on its property. The Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP+T) supports this and recommends the project contribute to two bike racks (i.e., four bike spaces) for a total of \$1,600 (i.e., \$800/rack). The Applicant should also consider providing a bike pump and bike repair tools in the bike storage room.

### **Special Permit Conditions**

If the Board decides to grant the special permit, the following list summarizes the general categories of conditions recommended for this development based on the requested special permits:

1. Approved Development: Authorized development would need to conform with the submitted application materials. An Approved Dimensional Form would be attached as an Appendix.
2. Permitted Uses: The special permit would authorize ground story retail use with multifamily residential use on the upper stories. In the future, uses that are allowed by zoning but not authorized by the special permit would require Planning Board approval, and uses that are limited by the Zoning Ordinance (e.g., requiring a separate special permit from the Planning Board or BZA) would need to seek the necessary relief.
3. Design Review: CDD staff would review and approve design details at the construction documents phase, prior to issuance of a building permit, to certify that the plans conform to the



Planning Board's approval. Board members may cite specific areas of focus for detailed review, based on the Urban Design Report and Board discussion.

4. Transportation and Infrastructure: Work being done on City property would be subject to review and approval by appropriate City departments, including DPW, TP+T and CDD. If agreed to by the Board and Applicant, staff would recommend additional conditions to implement residential TDM programs.
5. Housing: Development will be subject to Inclusionary Housing requirements, which will be certified by the CDD Housing staff at the building permit and certificate of occupancy stages.
6. Construction Management Program: Per Section 18.20, staff would recommend a Construction Management Program be provided and approved by TP+T, DPW, and other applicable City departments before issuance of a building permit. This program would also include a community outreach program designating a point of contact to provide information to the public during the construction process and notification panels posted on the site with project information.



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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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## Urban Design Staff Report

Date: August 10, 2022

Case: PB-381

Location: 544-550 Massachusetts Avenue

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### Overview

The revised design is similar in size and internal layout to the design reviewed in the Board's first hearing on August 31, 2021. As before, it preserves and restores the existing building's three floor façade facing Massachusetts Avenue. Above, the three new floors are distinguished from the existing building by materials and setbacks, but related by the window alignments. The building uses remain the same: ground floor retail with five floors of residential above. A roof terrace and mechanical units occupy the roof. Long-term bicycle parking and a small community room are located in the basement.

### Planning Board Comments

The Planning Board's comments and questions in the first hearing included:

- Cambridge needs more housing, And infill projects and taller buildings on Mass Avenue, such as this one, are important ways of fulfilling this need.
- The proposed general massing of the building and its height is fine.
- There was strong criticism of the proposed facades, including of the windows and the exterior materials.
- The building should complement Central Square, not create such a dramatic contrast with the existing character.
- A suggestion to step back the top floor and slope its façade – creating a mansard effect.
- A suggestion to consider using a brick-like color on the fourth and fifth floors.
- A suggestion to use the spaces in the rear of the building - facing the rear light well and kitchen mechanical equipment - for commercial uses instead of residential.
- The Z-shaped residential units are awkward.
- A suggestion to combine studio units on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> floors to make four one-bedroom units. This would help address the City's Inclusionary Housing program's preference for larger units.
- The project will block the windows of the adjoining Dance Building, how will this be resolved?
- Has the applicant tried ending the tenancy of the existing tenants? (The applicant replied that they did, but did not succeed.)
- Has there been any structural analysis?

### Urban Design Comments

Since the first hearing, the applicant has had several meetings with staff, and has incorporated numerous suggestions into the revised proposal. The revised design addresses many of the issues raised by the Board in the first hearing and advances the design in other ways.

- Most of the residential units remain studios, but four one-bedroom units have been created, slightly reducing the total number of units from 29 to 27.
- The façade has been redesigned, including the creation of a mansard roof shape with dormers at the sixth floor. The proportions and arrangement of windows in the new floors have been revised to better relate to the existing fenestration.
- The number of façade materials has been reduced, which helps make the addition less prominent.
- The retail storefront has been refined in coordination with the Cambridge Historical Commission, including the restoration of the burgundy-colored glass panels at the piers and above the storefront openings.
- The layout of the long-term bicycle storage room, and the route to it, have been more clearly illustrated.

Potential areas of further focus include:

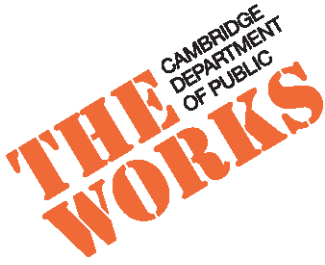
- Details of the façade:
  - The treatment of the existing parapet above the existing cornice at the fourth-floor level, and the three-dimensional relationship of the fourth-floor windows to the parapet.
  - Balcony railings and the rooftop trellis.
  - Repair and restoration of the existing brick facade, and ground floor façade, in collaboration with the Cambridge Historical Commission.
- Façade materials, in particular consideration of materials other than Exterior Insulation and Finish System (EIFS), especially on the Mass Avenue façade.
- Façade colors, including the possibility of giving the Mass Avenue façade of the fourth and fifth floors a color that is similar to the existing brick façade.
- The design of the Community Room to maximize its suitability for a range of functions, potentially including such uses as meetings, music practice, and arts.
- The relationship between the second-floor rear units and the roof of the first-floor kitchen and its mechanical equipment, as the unit windows and the views from them appear to be compromised.
- The location of the one-bedroom units. As the City's Inclusionary Housing program prefers one-bedroom units over studios, the location of these units in the building, their views, and their quality will be significant.

**Continuing Review:**

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends as conditions for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

1. Review of all new exterior materials: color, texture, and details.
2. Review of a materials mock-up by city staff and the Planning Board prior to any exterior materials being ordered, and coordination of the mockup's location with city staff.
3. Review of the proportions and mullion patterns and sections of the new windows.
4. Review by the Cambridge Historical Commission as well as the Community Development Department of:

- Restoration/repair/alterations to the existing façade, including masonry repair and window replacement, the roof level and second floor level cornices, the detailed design of the ground floor facade and retail shopfronts, the residential entrance, the gate for the alley, and any adjustments that may be needed for accessibility.
  - Preservation of, or repairs to, the existing signage if that is undertaken.
5. Review of the rooftop trellis's design and materials.
  6. Review of any exterior lighting.
  7. Review of existing and proposed mechanical equipment and its visual and acoustical screening.
  8. Collaboration with the Cambridge Arts Council regarding the proposed mural.
  9. Review of the long-term bicycle storage room and the route to it.
  10. Location of trash and recycling storage for both residents and retail tenants, and the route to where it will be picked up.
  11. Design of rooftop deck, trellis, and railing.



City of Cambridge  
Department of Public Works

*Owen O'Riordan, Commissioner*

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Voice: 617 349 4800

TDD: 617 499 9924

August 18, 2021

TO: Planning Board

FROM: Katherine F. Watkins  
City Engineer

**RE: 544-550 Massachusetts Ave: Application for Special Permit**

We are in receipt of the Special Permit Application materials, dated July 20, 2021 for the redevelopment of the site known as 544-550 Massachusetts Ave. We have reviewed the materials and have presented below some comments related to the interests of the Department of Public Works.

**Stormwater Management:**

Under the City Land Disturbance Regulations due to the project requiring a Special Permit from the Planning Board, the Applicant will need to obtain a Stormwater Control Permit from the Department of Public Works. The permit requirements cover the design standards and long term operation and maintenance of a management system for the project site, as well as the construction phase erosion and sedimentation control plans. The permit requirements also include the standard to mitigate the stormwater runoff from the site from the proposed 25-year storm to a rate below the pre-redevelopment 2-year storm event.

The Application acknowledges the Stormwater Control Permit, but does not provide any indication as to how the Standards will be achieved for the project. We respectfully request that the Applicant provide additional information on the how the project will meet the Standards as redevelopment project in dense parts of the City may encounter challenges as they look to meet the Permit requirements.

**Public Infrastructure:**


- The Owner of this parcel worked with the DPW to abandon a vault under the public sidewalk along the building frontage. The sidewalk has been temporarily patched with asphalt to allow for this project to be constructed. Upon completion of the construction, the DPW will work with the Applicant to replace the sidewalk to the current standards for the district. Mitigation for work in the roadway will be reviewed and evaluated as the plans are progressed and impacts are realized.

- There are no significant trees located on the project parcel but there are Street Trees along the Mass Ave frontage of the site. The project should look to preserve and protect these trees for the long term and shall confirm that anticipated construction practices will not impact the vitality of these Street Trees.

A thorough review of the development at submission of a building permit and during design and construction will be required by the DPW .

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns related to the comments provided above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Katherine Watkins", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Katherine F. Watkins, P.E.  
City Engineer



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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Planning Board and Board of Zoning Appeal

From: Central Square Advisory Committee

Date: June 30, 2022

Re: **544 Massachusetts Avenue (PB-381)**

**IRAM FAROOQ**

Assistant City Manager for  
Community Development

**SANDRA CLARKE**

Deputy Director  
Chief of Administration

**KHALIL MOGASSABI**

Deputy Director  
Chief of Planning

## Overview

The Central Square Advisory Committee (the "Committee") met on Wednesday, June 1, 2022 to discuss the special permit application by Central Square Redevelopment LLC for 544 Massachusetts Avenue. The meeting was conducted pursuant to the provisions of Section 20.300 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance in advance of the applicant's request for several special permits from the Planning Board as well as a variance from the Board of Zoning Appeal. Committee members present were Joel Altstein, Saffana Anwar, Chris Fort, Esther Hanig, and Robert Winters. After discussion, the Committee decided to forward a report to both boards with a positive recommendation.

## Proposal Description

The applicant, Central Square Redevelopment LLC, proposes to renovate the existing building and construct a vertical addition. The proposal would result in a six-story building with 27 apartments and retail use at the ground story. No off-street parking is proposed.

## Committee Comments

Members of the Committee thought that this was a good project and agreed that there was a need for studio and one-bedroom housing units in Central Square. They were also supportive of the applicant's request to waive the parking requirement and not provide any off-street parking for residents.

Committee members noted that providing a community room that could be used by community groups as a meeting space would be a benefit to Central Square. They suggested that the applicant work with an organization such as Third Sector New England to determine an adequate size for the community room and help program its use.

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Respectfully submitted for the Committee,

*Sarah Scott*

**Sarah Scott**

Associate Zoning Planner  
Community Development Department