



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

# PLANNING BOARD

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CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139  
OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

## NOTICE OF DECISION

Case Number:	389
Address:	625 Massachusetts Avenue
Zoning:	Business B District / Central Square Overlay District
Applicant:	625 Massachusetts Avenue Fitness Group LLC 320 Yonkers Ave Yonkers, NY 10701
Owner:	625 Mass Ave Owner, LLC c/o Lincoln Property Company 53 State Street Boston, MA 02109
Application Date:	April 7, 2022
Date of Planning Board Public Hearing:	May 3, 2022
Date of Planning Board Decision:	May 3, 2022
Date of Filing Planning Board Decision:	June 15, 2022
Application:	Operate a Formula Business Fitness Center occupying 16,823 square feet on the first floor and basement area of the existing building.
Decision:	GRANTED with conditions.

Appeals, if any, shall be made pursuant to Section 17 of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40A, and shall be filed within twenty (20) days after filing of the above referenced decision with the City Clerk. Copies of the complete decision and final plans, if applicable, are on file with the Community Development Department and the City Clerk.

Authorized Representative of the Planning Board: Swaathi Joseph

For further information concerning this decision, please contact Swaathi Joseph at 617-349-4668, or [sjoseph@cambridgema.gov](mailto:sjoseph@cambridgema.gov).

## **DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED**

### Application Documents and Supporting Material

1. Special Permit Application submitted on 4/7/2022, containing *inter alia*, Special Permit Cover Sheet, Dimensional Form, Ownership Certificate, Fee Schedule, Project Narrative, Zoning Analysis, and Community Outreach Summary, plan set prepared by architect Daniel K. Mullin dated 9/10/2021, and signage plans prepared by Universal Signs & Service dated 1/10/2022.
2. Presentation slides shown to the Planning Board on 5/3/2022.

### City of Cambridge Documents

3. Memorandum to the Planning Board from Community Development Department (CDD) staff, dated 04/26/2022.

### Other Documents

4. Letter to the Planning Board from the Central Square Advisory Committee, dated 3/2/2022.

## APPLICATION SUMMARY

The proposal is to open a Fitness Center establishment previously occupied by Boston Sports Club at 625 Massachusetts Avenue, consisting of approximately 17,000 square feet of gross floor area. While this use is allowed as-of-right by the Zoning Ordinance, it is a Formula Business and therefore requires a special permit from the Planning Board before the use is established. The Applicant is proposing new signage and awnings for entrances on Massachusetts Avenue and Essex Street, but otherwise is proposing no exterior changes to the building.

## FINDINGS

After review of the Application Documents and other documents submitted to the Planning Board, testimony given at the public hearing, and review and consideration of the applicable requirements and criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance with regard to the relief being sought, the Planning Board makes the following Findings:

1. Special Permit for Formula Business in the Central Square Overlay District (Section 20.304.5.4).

*A Formula Business as defined in this Ordinance may be established in the Central Square Overlay District only after the issuance of a special permit from the Planning Board. In reviewing an application the Planning Board shall take the following into consideration:*

- a. The extent to which the design of the proposal reflects, amplifies, and strengthens the established historical character of existing buildings and store fronts in Central Square.*
- b. The extent to which the particulars of the building or storefront design is varied from the formula or standard design of the chain in order to reflect the unique character and conditions of Central Square generally or the specific location in particular.*
- c. The extent to which the standard elements of the enterprise as they define it as a Formula Business are modified to respect and provide unique expressions of Central Square history and traditions as well as innovation in physical design and marketing that will distinguish the Central Square location from other locations of the Formula Business.*

The Board finds that the proposal is unique to Central Square and distinguished from other Planet Fitness locations, as demonstrated in the graphic materials and presentation from the Applicant. The signage does not include the Planet Fitness logo, as utilized in its typical branding, and the overall signage is well below the maximum square feet of signage permitted by Article 7 of the Zoning Ordinance. Further, a high degree of visual transparency is maintained, which is consistent with the urban design objectives for Central Square.

2. General Criteria for Issuance of a Special Permit (Section 10.43)

The Planning Board finds that the project meets the General Criteria for Issuance of a Special Permit, as set forth below.

*10.43 Criteria. Special permits will normally be granted where specific provisions of this Ordinance are met, except when particulars of the location or use, not generally true of the district or of the uses permitted in it, would cause granting of such permit to be to the detriment of the public interest because:*

*(a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or ...*

Upon granting of the requested special permits, it appears that the requirements of the Ordinance will be met.

*(b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or ...*

The previous use of the space was also a fitness center, and no expansion of the floor area devoted to such a use will occur with the proposal. Therefore, no additional traffic is expected as a result of this Application.

*(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 ...*

The proposed use is a permitted use in the zoning district and will not adversely affect adjacent uses that exist or are anticipated in the future.

*(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 ...*

The proposed use will not create nuisance or hazard, and all development activity will adhere to applicable health and safety regulations.

*(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 ...*

The proposed retail use complies with the permitted uses in the district and will not impair the integrity of Central Square.

*(f) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.*

The proposed façade design maintains a high degree of transparency, and the proposed signage is located above the storefront windows along existing signage bands of the building, which is consistent with the City's Urban Design Objectives.

## **DECISION**

Based on a review of the Application Documents, testimony given at the public hearing, and the above Findings, the Planning Board hereby GRANTS the requested Special Permit subject to the following conditions and limitations. Hereinafter, for purposes of this Decision, the Permittee shall mean the Applicant for the requested Special Permit.

1. All use, building construction, and site plan development shall be in substantial conformance with the Application Documents and other supporting materials submitted to the Planning Board, except as modified by the additional Conditions of this Special Permit Decision. The project plans hereby approved by the Planning Board are the plan set by architect Daniel K. Mullin dated 9/10/2021, and signage plans prepared by Universal Signs & Service dated 1/10/2022. Appendix I summarizes the dimensional features of the project as approved.
2. This Special Permit shall be valid only for the Permittee to operate a Formula Business Fitness Center establishment at the location depicted in the Application Documents. Any other Formula Business seeking to operate at the proposed location, or any proposal by the Permittee to operate a Formula Business at another location, shall require a new special permit from the Planning Board.
3. The project shall be subject to continuing design review by the Community Development Department (“CDD”). Before issuance of each Building Permit for the project, CDD shall certify to the Superintendent of Buildings that the final plans submitted to secure the Building Permit are consistent with and meet all conditions of this Decision. As part of CDD’s administrative review of the project, and prior to any certification to the Superintendent of Buildings, CDD may present any design changes made subsequent to this Decision to the Planning Board for its review and comment.
4. The Permittee shall address the following comments through the continuing design review process set forth above. Each of the below items shall be subject to CDD review and approval of the final design details prior to issuance of a Building Permit:
  - a. All exterior signage and awning details, including exact height and placement. To the extent possible, subject to CDD approval, new signage shall be centered over the storefront and the proposed black awning color on Massachusetts Avenue shall be aligned with the Fitness Center storefront, retaining the existing red color for portions of the awning over the adjacent storefront, to achieve a two-tone awning effect.
  - b. All exterior lighting details, including mitigating any potential light spill associated with the proposed uplighting, particularly on Essex Street.

Voting in the affirmative to grant the requested Special Permits were Planning Board Members Louis Bacci, Jr., Steven Cohen, Catherine Preston Connolly, Mary Flynn, Hugh Russell, Tom Sieniewicz, and Associate Member Ashley Tan, appointed by the Chair to act on the case, constituting at least two thirds of the members of the Board.

For the Planning Board,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Catherine Preston Connolly".

Catherine Preston Connolly, Chair

A copy of this decision PB-389 shall be filed with the Office of the City Clerk. Appeals, if any, shall be made pursuant to Section 17, Chapter 40A, Massachusetts General Laws, and shall be filed within twenty (20) days after the date of such filing in the Office of the City Clerk.

ATTEST: A true and correct copy of the above decision has been filed on June 15, 2022 with the Office of the City Clerk, by Swaathi Joseph, duly authorized representative of the Planning Board. All plans referred to in the decision have been filed with the City Clerk on said date.

Twenty days have elapsed since the above decision was filed in the office of the City Clerk and:  
\_\_\_\_\_ no appeal has been filed; or

\_\_\_\_\_ an appeal has been filed within such twenty days.

The person exercising rights under a duly appealed special permit does so at risk that a court will reverse the permit and that any construction performed under the permit may be ordered undone. This certification shall in no event terminate or shorten the tolling, during the pendency of any appeals, of the periods provided under the second paragraph of G.L. c. 40A, §6.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_, City Clerk

Appeal has been dismissed or denied.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_, City Clerk

**Appendix I: Approved Dimensional Chart**

	Existing	Allowed or Required	Proposed	Permitted
Lot Area (sq ft)	25,567	N/A	25,567	No Change
Lot Width (ft)	89.4	N/A	89.4	No Change
Total GFA (sq ft)	16,823	16,823	16,823	No Change
Residential Base	N/A	N/A	N/A	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Non-Residential Base	16,823	16,823	16,823	
Inclusionary Bonus	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Total FAR	3.0	3.0	No Change	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Residential Base	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Non-Residential Base	3.0	3.0	No Change	
Inclusionary Bonus	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Total Dwelling Units	0	0	0	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Base Units	0	0	0	
Inclusionary Bonus Units	0	0	0	
Base Lot Area / Unit (sq ft)	0	0	0	
Total Lot Area / Unit (sq ft)	0	0	0	
Height (ft)	21.2	55	No Change	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Front Setbacks (ft)	0	0	0	
Side Setback (ft)	0	0	0	
Side Setback (ft)	0	0	0	
Rear Setback (ft)	0	0	0	
Open Space (% of Lot Area)	35%	35%	No Change	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Private Open Space	0	0	0	
Permeable Open Space	0	0	0	
Off-Street Parking Spaces	23	23	No Change	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Long-Term Bicycle Parking	0	0	No Change	
Short-Term Bicycle Parking	18	18	No Change	
Loading Bays	1	1	No Change	

There are no changes to the existing building with regard to its dimensional characteristics as a result of this Special Permit application. The approved formula business shall occupy an existing space of approximately 16,823 square feet on the ground story and basement level of the existing building in conformance with the Application Documents.