



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: February 4, 2025

Re: Special Permit **PB-406, 675 Massachusetts Avenue (Jersey Mike's)**

Overview

Submission Type:	Special Permit Application
Applicant:	Resurgence Investment, LLC d/b/a Jersey Mike's
Zoning District(s):	Business B; Central Square Overlay District
Proposal Summary:	Operate a Formula Business, occupying approximately 1,224 square feet on the first floor of the existing building.
Special Permits Requested:	Formula Business (20.304.5(4))
Other City Permits Needed:	n/a
Planning Board Action:	Grant or deny requested special permits.
Memo Contents:	CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report
Other Staff Reports:	n/a

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Zoning Section	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Central Square Overlay District: Formula Business Special Permit (20.304.5(4))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The design reflects, amplifies and strengthens the established historical character of existing buildings and storefronts in Central Square. • 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. • Standard elements of the enterprise defining 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.
Central Square Overlay District: Criteria for Issuance of Special Permits (Section 20.305)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed development is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Central Square Action Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ encourage responsible and orderly development; ○ strengthen the retail base to more completely serve the needs of the neighborhoods; ○ preserve the Square's cultural diversity; ○ create active people oriented spaces; ○ improve the physical, and visual environment; ○ provide retail establishments that serve people of diverse economic and social groups who live in the surrounding neighborhoods. • 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." • Building and site designs adequately screen the parking provided and are sensitive to the contributing buildings in the vicinity. • 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).
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> <p>(a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or</p>

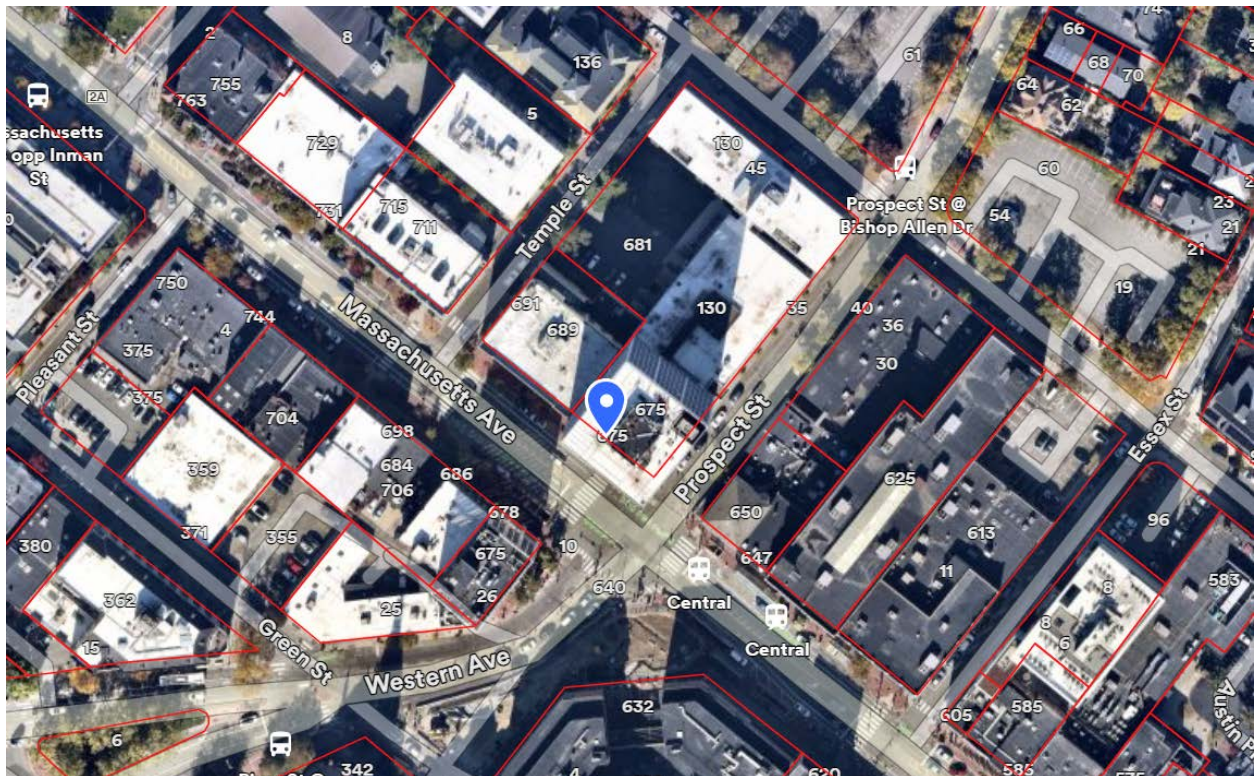
Zoning Section	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">(b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or(c) the continued 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(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(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(f) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.

Zoning & Development Staff Report

Neighborhood/Area: Central Square

Development Patterns: Located at the heart of Central Square, 675 Mass Ave is in an active area with many ground-level storefronts and heavy foot traffic. This building is not historic in nature, but its unique character is defined by its loggia space, with open access to a mix of retail and consumer service uses. The location is well suited to an active people-oriented space, connecting to many nearby features.

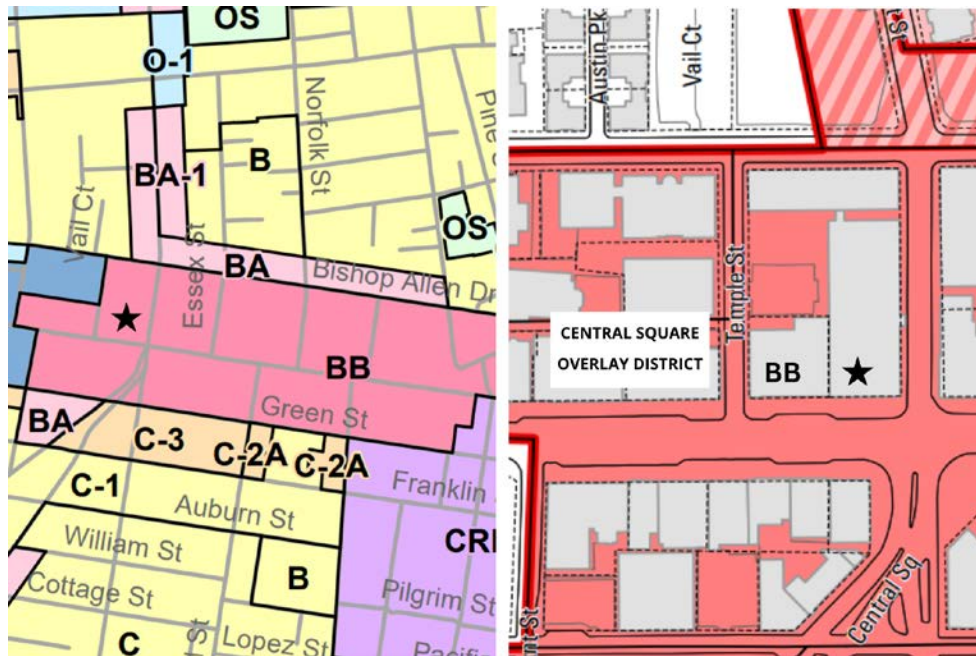
Nearby Features: This site is located adjacent to the Central Square T stop and a block to the East has a stop for the Route 1 MBTA bus and a Bluebikes station. Along the street are several communal open spaces which provide seating.



Aerial Context Map showing 675 Massachusetts Avenue. Source: Nearmap, 2024.

Site Zoning

General description: The base zoning for the site is Business B (BB). Business B allows a wide range of typical neighborhood business uses, as well as office and residential uses. The district development standards allow higher-density development, with maximum heights up to 80 feet and floor-area ratios (FAR) up to 3.00. The site is also in the Central Square Overlay District, which modifies base zoning provisions both as-of-right and by special permit.



Zoning Map (left) and Overlay Map (right). (Source: City of Cambridge)

Development Plans and Guidelines

- [Central Square Overlay District](#). The Central Square Overlay District (CSOD) was created in 1989 following a planning study that established development goals and guidelines for the area; it was most recently amended in 2017. There are a variety of plans and guidelines focused on Central Square, including the [Central Square Planning Study - C2 \(2013\)](#), the [Central Square Action Plan](#), and the [Central Square Development Guidelines](#). Overall, these documents envision a Central Square with a strong retail base made up of local, independent retailers; an active arts community; vibrant public spaces; new development that is compatible with the existing historic character of the square; and a diverse range of housing types.
- [Formula Business](#). The definition of “Formula Business” was added to the Zoning Ordinance as part of the 2017 amendments to the CSOD. The Zoning Ordinance requires that a special permit be obtained prior to a Formula Business use being located within the CSOD.

Current Proposal

Overview

The applicant, Resurgence Investments LLC, proposes to open a Jersey Mike's at 675 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Proposed Restaurant will occupy approximately 1,224 square feet on the first floor of the premises and will replace a T-Mobile which previously occupied this retail unit. Jersey Mike's has over 3,000 locations across the US, which operate as a Quick-Service Food Establishment, a type of Retail or Consumer Service Establishment.

As part of the build-out, the applicant proposes to redesign the existing interior of the premises and plans to utilize a variant of its standard color scheme, signage and logo which can be differentiated from many other Jersey Mike's locations across the country. There are no changes proposed to the building envelope and/or footprint, nor will there be any front-facing window treatments. The exterior of the restaurant will also contain a small outdoor patio under the existing loggia space with up to twelve seats to accommodate patrons, and Jersey Mike's will further beautify the outdoor space utilizing colorful seating arrangements and planter boxes.



Signs proposed: Wall sign

Special Permits

A Formula Business requires a Planning Board special permit. The special permit for a Formula Business applies to the entity itself rather than an overall use category. Therefore, if an existing Formula Business is replaced by a different Formula Business, a new special permit is required.

Cambridge zoning defines a Formula Business as an individual Retail or Consumer Service establishment that is required by virtue of a contract, franchise agreement, ownership or other similar legal obligation to conform or substantially conform to a set of common design and operating features that serve to identify the establishment as one of a group of establishments for business, marketing and public relations purposes. Specifically, an establishment shall be considered a Formula Business if it shares at least two (2) of the following three (3) characteristics with ten (10) or more other establishments in Massachusetts or within twenty (20) or more other establishments:

1. Trademark, service mark or logo, defined as a word, phrase, symbol, or design or combination thereof that identifies and distinguishes the source of the goods or services from others;
2. Standardized building architecture including but not limited to façade design and signage;
3. Standardized color scheme used throughout the exterior of the establishment, including color associated with signs and logos.

As a result of sharing a trademark, logo, and standardized color scheme with ten (10) or more other establishments in Massachusetts, Jersey Mike's is seeking a Special Permit to operate a Formula Business in Cambridge's Business B Zoning District and Central Square Overlay District.

The criteria for granting a Formula Business special permit in the Central Square Overlay District focus on the extent to which the proposal is unique to Central Square and reflects, amplifies, and strengthens the established historical character of existing buildings and storefronts in Central Square.

The proposed use is moving into an existing building, and the installation of the horizontal business signage is the only alteration to the exterior of the building. Therefore, the design of the signage is the main focus of the Board's review.

Advisory Review

Central Square Advisory Committee (CSAC) Review and Comment

On December 4, 2024, pursuant to the provisions of Section 20.50 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance, the Central Square Advisory Committee reviewed and commented on this project in advance of the Applicant's request for a Formula Business special permit from the Planning Board. No public comments were received by CSAC. CSAC members were supportive of the proposed retail use and raised no major concerns. The proposal to CSAC included updated versions of the proposed signage, with which the Committee expressed no concerns. The monochromatic wall sign is consistent with other establishments seen in Central Square. The Committee voted to forward a report to the Planning Board with a positive recommendation. CSAC members agreed the proposed use would be a positive addition to Central Square, noting that the proposed location has been vacant for a significant amount of time.

Community Engagement

According to the Applicant's community engagement summary, a virtual meeting was held via Zoom and in-person at the retail location on November 25, 2024. The applicant noted that no members of the public attended either meeting. Standard notice was provided by the Applicant to abutters.

Zoning Comments

The proposed use is consistent with the uses that are allowed and encouraged in the Central Square Overlay District, and the proposed changes to the building and site are minimal and typical of similar establishments in Central Square. The signage will need to be reviewed in more detail for compliance with Article 7.000, but otherwise the proposal appears to comply with applicable zoning requirements.

Special Permit Conditions

The conditions summarized below are recommended to be included if the Planning Board votes to approve the special permit. These conditions are meant to ensure consistency with zoning requirements and apply the standard process for continuing staff review.

1. **Approved Use:** The special permit would specifically authorize Jersey Mike's as the approved Formula Business use at this location. The Board's approval of this Formula Business would not be transferrable to a different entity or use.
2. **Continuing 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.

Appendix - Zoning Text Excerpts

Special Permit for Establishing a Formula Business in Central Square Overlay District

- 20.305.5(4)** Formula Business District. 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.

Issuance of Special Permit in Central Square Overlay District

20.305 *Standards for Issuance of Special Permits.* In addition to the general standards for the issuance of a special permit found in Section 10.40 of the Zoning Ordinance, the special permit granting authority shall in addition make the following findings:

1. The proposed development is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Central Square Action Plan:
 - Encourage responsible and orderly development;
 - Strengthen the retail base to more completely serve the needs of the neighborhoods;
 - Preserve the Square's cultural diversity;
 - Create active people oriented spaces;
 - Improve the physical, and visual environment;
 - Provide retail establishments that serve people of diverse economic and social groups who live in the surrounding neighborhoods;
 - Encourage the development of new mixed income housing; and
 - Promote compatible retail adjacent to residential uses.
2. The 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";
3. The building and site designs adequately screen the parking provided and are sensitive to the contributing buildings in the vicinity;
4. 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; and
5. No National Register or contributing building has been demolished or altered so as to terminate or preclude its designation within the five (5) years preceding the application.

General Criteria for Issuance of a Special Permit

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

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

19.30 Citywide Urban Design Objectives [SUMMARIZED]

Objective	Indicators
New projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition to lower-scale neighborhoods • Consistency with established streetscape • Compatibility with adjacent uses • Consideration of nearby historic buildings
Development should be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, with a positive relationship to its surroundings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhabited ground floor spaces • Discouraged ground-floor parking • Windows on ground floor • Orienting entries to pedestrian pathways • Safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian access
The building and site design should mitigate adverse environmental impacts of a development upon its neighbors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location/impact of mechanical equipment • Location/impact of loading and trash handling • Stormwater management • Shadow impacts • Retaining walls, if provided • Building scale and wall treatment • Outdoor lighting • Tree protection (requires plan approved by City Arborist)
Projects should not overburden the City infrastructure services, including neighborhood roads, city water supply system, and sewer system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water-conserving plumbing, stormwater management • Capacity/condition of water and wastewater service • Efficient design (LEED standards)
New construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional use focused on existing campuses • Mixed-use development (including retail) encouraged where allowed • Preservation of historic structures and environment • Provision of space for start-up companies, manufacturing activities
Expansion of the inventory of housing in the city is encouraged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing as a component of large, multi-building development • Affordable units exceeding zoning requirements, targeting units for middle-income families
Enhancement and expansion of open space amenities in the city should be incorporated into new development in the city.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicly beneficial open space provided in large-parcel commercial development • Enhance/expand existing open space, complement existing pedestrian/bicycle networks • Provide wider range of activities

Urban Design Staff Report

Urban Design Comments

675 Mass Ave is located at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Prospect Street, a prominent intersection of Central Square. The building is immediately adjacent to an MBTA subway entrance and is near bus stops for several bus lines. It has a recessed loggia on its Massachusetts Avenue façade, delineated from the sidewalk by the building's structural columns.

Jersey Mike's is proposed in the western portion of the building's ground floor, a space with a fully glazed storefront that looks onto the loggia. The project includes the interior fit-out of the retail space, provisions for outdoor dining in the loggia, and the business's signage. The proposed ground floor active use and outdoor dining will be welcome additions to Central Square.

In response to staff comments in preliminary meetings, the applicant has rearranged interior furnishings to minimize their visual impact on the glazed storefront and revised the design of the business's signage. The project refrains from applying signage or other elements to the glazing.

The proposed outdoor dining area will improve the pedestrian experience along Massachusetts Avenue by bringing the retail presence out to the edge of the public sidewalk. The project proposes colorful seating and low planters in the line of the building's structural columns to separate the seating area from the sidewalk.

The loggia is somewhat unwelcoming at present. Staff would like to suggest that further efforts be made to transform it into an inviting space. In contrast to the busy sidewalk, the outdoor dining area could become a more distinct and sheltered place from which to view life on the street and sidewalk. Lighting and furniture with a stronger presence could be considered, and the possibility of strengthening the relationship of the interior retail space to the public sidewalk by coordinating the colors and furnishings used on the interior with those of the outdoor dining area, i.e.: capitalizing on the fully glazed storefront to suggest that loggia and the interior are, in a sense, a single space. In addition, some form of art installation – possibly treating the loggia's western end wall or its ceiling – could be considered to further enhance the loggia. Taller planters with open supporting bases could be considered. In addition, the project will be an opportunity to improve the loggia's existing ceiling-mounted lighting, which appears to be in slight disarray.

In accord with the Formula Business District Ordinance, the proposed signage differs from Jersey Mike's corporate standard. The proposed design follows a staff recommendation to use separate letters, mounted on the façade above the portico's opening, rather than a single unified sign hanging inside it. Note that in the application package, the design of the signage appears to be slightly different in the various drawings. The version shown in the photomontage seems preferable.

Continuing Review

The following are additional recommendations for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

- Proposed signage details. Details of the proposed outdoor seating furniture.
- The design of the planters.
- Potential additional enhancement of the loggia by art or other elements.
- The design of the cabinetry that meets the exterior glazing at the western end of the shopfront.