



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date:	January 3, 2017
Subject:	Central Square Restoration Zoning Petition (Sater, et al.)
Recommendation:	The Planning Board recommends ADOPTION, with some minor modifications.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On November 29, 2016, the Board held a public hearing on the Central Square Restoration Zoning Petition. George Metzger and Patrick Barrett presented on behalf of the petitioners, and many interested members of the public appeared to comment.

The Board is generally supportive of the petition and its goals of enlivening Central Square, producing additional housing and turning around the current “stagnation” in development. The Board appreciates that the petition follows the recommendations of the “C2” study and Red Ribbon Commission undertaken by the City in recent years. The Board also appreciates that this petition was developed through a thoughtful, inclusive community process and reflects a compromise among different groups with varying opinions. As a result, the petition does not address some issues that might be more controversial, particularly allowed building heights. While the Board believes this is a topic that will need to be addressed at some point in the future if significant new housing development is desired, nonetheless the Board believes that the current petition is a positive step that could help tilt the balance toward creating additional housing and retail in some circumstances.

The Board discussed the key provisions of the petition and is in favor of the proposed amendments to the current Central Square Overlay District, including increasing the allowed residential FAR to 4.0 (by special permit outside the Business B district), exempting from FAR outdoor spaces and small-scale retail establishments, allowing bar and nightclub entrances on side streets by special permit, limiting bank frontage, removing the “cap” on fast order food establishments, and allowing private open space requirements to be modified by special permit in addition to setback requirements, which can be modified under current zoning. The Board also supports the introduction of “formula business” requirements. While some commenters suggested that stricter requirements should be included, the Board notes that some local businesses might fall under the “formula” definition, and in some cases formula businesses can provide benefits to the community that other businesses do not. The Board believes that the proposed special permit review is a good way to ensure that such new businesses would fit with the desired character of Central Square without being overly restrictive.

The Board offers only the following considerations for change:

- **Parking:** The petition suggests higher parking ratios for non-residential uses and lower parking ratios for residential uses than the recommendations of the C2 study. Though it was suggested that such an approach might help to incentivize housing over commercial use, the Board believes it is preferable to set parking requirements based on the City's transportation policies and objectives and not as a strategy to attempt to influence land use decisions. While the Board's current preference is to implement the parking recommendations from the C2 study, this topic could also be studied further by the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department to determine if any of the recommendations should be revisited based on any new understanding of transportation patterns in the area. The Board is otherwise supportive of the proposed provisions to allow parking off-site and to allow a reduction of required parking by special permit in exchange for an in-lieu-of fee to the City for public improvements.
- **Rooftop Open Spaces:** In allowing a special permit to exempt rooftop spaces from FAR, the Board recommends explicitly including "lighting" as one of the listed aspects of the design that may be restricted when issuing the special permit. This was suggested by commenters at the hearing.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H Theodore Cohen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

H Theodore Cohen, Chair.