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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: April 4, 2023

Re: Special Permit **PB-395, 425 Massachusetts Avenue (Crumbly Cookies)**  
(continued from 2/28/2023)

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## Overview

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Submission Type:	Special Permit Application
Applicant:	Commonwealth Specialty Baking C, LLC
Zoning District(s):	Business B; Central Square Overlay District
Proposal Summary:	Operate a Formula Business bakery occupying approximately 1500 square feet in 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"> <li>• The design reflects, amplifies and strengthens the established historical character of existing buildings and storefronts in Central Square.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>
Central Square Overlay District: Criteria for Issuance of Special Permits (Section 20.300)	<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.”</li> <li>• Building and site designs adequately screen the parking provided and are sensitive to the contributing buildings in the vicinity.</li> </ul> <p>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).</p>

<b>Zoning Section</b>	<b>Required Planning Board Findings</b> <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
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>

## **Revised Proposal**

### ***Overview***

At the initial hearing on February 28<sup>th</sup>, Planning Board members raised substantive concerns with transparency and ground floor activation along the location's side alleyway. Members specifically noted that the activation of the ground floor space would need to be consistent with the broader planning objectives for Central Square. Following this discussion, the applicant met with City staff to review alternative floor plans to better balance their stated need for confidentiality within specific kitchen storage areas with the required activation of pedestrian space in Central Square.

Revisions include:

- Moving the front counter/kitchen area to run along the exterior alleyway.
- Rearranging the line and ordering station so that customers making orders will now face the corner window overlooking the alleyway.
- The portion of the alleyway windows at the back of the business will now include frosted etched vinyl. This will provide screening for two large refrigerators and a sink that are being moved to accommodate the proposed kitchen reorganization.

## **Zoning Comments**

### ***Key Revisions***

Criteria for the issuance of Formula Business and Central Square Overlay District Special Permits include strengthening the established character storefronts in Central Square, creating active people oriented spaces, and consistency with the Central Square Development Guidelines. In line with these criteria, the proposed revisions improve the project's transparency and activation of pedestrian spaces.

As noted in the previous zoning memo on this case, 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 the uses proposed in the application. Specifically, the permitted use would be Retail Bakery (Section 4.35r). The Board's approval of this Formula Business would not be transferrable to a different use.
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.

## **Design Comments**

The treatment of the windows along the alleyway is much improved and provides the visual permeability and ground floor animation that Board members requested. The interior layout has been adjusted, which results in additional portions of the storefront windows remaining transparent. Approximately 65% of the alleyway glazing will be transparent. The façade design does still incorporate the pink wave print; however, it is now proposed to be translucent (etched frosted vinyl) as opposed to opaque, which helps provide a sense of depth and activity. Additionally, the wave print will only be

applied to the lower portions of the glass, which is a clever way to provide the necessary screening and privacy, but still allow for light and activity to be present within the alleyway.

It is noted that there appears to be a discrepancy between the plan and the signage layout (Sheet 03/07) in terms of application of the window vinyl. Staff requests that the window vinyl closest to Mass Ave (the righthand end of the wave print) be either removed or lowered to counter height.

### **Continuing Review**

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

- Review of any new exterior lighting.
- Review of all exterior signage and window graphics.