

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

IRAM FAROOQ
Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

SANDRA CLARKE
Deputy Director
Chief of Administration

KHALIL MOGASSABI
Deputy Director
Chief of Planning

To: City of Cambridge Planning Board
City of Cambridge Board of Zoning Appeals
From: Central Square Advisory Committee
Date: 6/21/2021
Re:

The Central Square Advisory Committee (the "Committee") met on Tuesday, May 25, 2020 to discuss a Special Permit application for 48 Pearl St. The committee also received updates on the Community Planning Division's Public Space Lab. Additionally, the potential temporary closure of Mass Ave on weeknight evenings during the summer months for pedestrian use was discussed.

This meeting was conducted pursuant to the provisions of Section 20.300 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance. The Committee is appointed by the City Manager to undertake all large project reviews of variances and special permits for activities within the Central Square Overlay District (the "District"), and to monitor the progress of the Central Square Non-Zoning Recommendations of the 2013 K2C2 Study (the "Study"). The meeting was held remotely via Zoom.

* * *

The meeting minutes from the Committee meeting are summarized below. Public comment was taken after each topic was discussed by committee members.

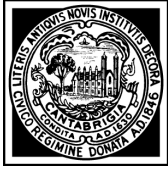
- A. **Special Permit for 48 Pearl St** - The owners at 48 Pearl Street propose to renovate the existing structure as follows:
- Expand the existing connector between the main single-family row-house and garage towards Franklin street and increase its height to allow access to the basement, first floor, and garage from the connector structure.
 - Replace the existing head-house on the roof, which houses the access stair to the roof deck, with a new head-house in order to construct a safer access stair. No changes to the roof deck are proposed. The replacement head-house will be in a similar location as the existing one. The owners wish to keep the use of the structure as a single-family residence.

The following Special Permits are being sought.

- I. Expansion of connector within side yard setback per Section 20.304.4
- II. Replacement of head-house within side yard setback per Section 20.304.4
- III. Height of replacement head-house per Section 20.304.2
- IV. Reduced open space per Section 20.304.4

The project architect, Frank Shirley, presented the project to the Committee, which supported the project without reservations. Some Committee members asked questions about notifications to the abutters and community input. The project architect and applicants mentioned that they had reached out to the abutters, who

344 Broadway
Cambridge, MA 02139
Voice: 617 349-4600
Fax: 617 349-4669
TTY: 617 349-4621
www.cambridgema.gov



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

IRAM FAROOQ
*Assistant City Manager for
Community Development*

SANDRA CLARKE
*Deputy Director
Chief of Administration*

KHALIL MOGASSABI
*Deputy Director
Chief of Planning*

supported the project. The applicant also held a pre-application community meeting as required by the Planning Board Rules; two people attended the community meeting. The Committee felt that the project does not affect adjacent neighbors, nor does it interfere with the public realm and pedestrian views. The members of the Committee unanimously supported the project.

One question that was brought up by Committee members asked, “why are they reviewing projects of this scale.” They feel that adjustments that are so minor should go straight to the Planning Board or the Board of Zoning Appeals. It was questioned, whether or not, there should be a threshold or evaluation criteria that allows people to bypass the Central Square Advisory Committee (CSAC). The members were reminded that the role of the CSAC is to review all zoning petitions that seek a special permit or variance that are within the Central Square Overlay District. This would require a change to the zoning ordinance and criteria would need to be developed to determine when a case may or may not come before the committee.

- B. **Community Planning Division (CDD) Public Space Lab Update** - The Community Planning Division is in the process of creating the Public Space Lab, an initiative to cultivate inclusive and participatory public spaces that support authentic community life, using a spirit of partnership and experimentation. With community support, The Lab will develop temporary spatial interventions in the City’s commercial squares and corridors for gathering, performing, playing, and relaxing, among other uses. This meeting will provide an update on the initiatives of the Public Space Lab and their relevance to Central Square. The staff presented different ideas for small public parks or parklets, as well as activities for street closures or plazas that are underutilized.

Feedback from committee on pilot project ideas for Central Square

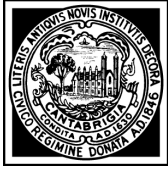
There is a sense from members of the committee that parklets may be underwhelming in Central Square and that spaces should build off preexisting activity of the sidewalks. There are deep sidewalks that offer room for public space that incorporates seating.

These areas, including public space like Lafayette Square and a deep sidewalk in front of the Salvation Army could host food trucks or food vendors, as well.

In discussions about temporary uses for public spaces, the committee also deliberated the City Council Policy Order to report on the potential closing of Mass Ave on Friday and Saturday evenings from 7pm-1am for the Summer. The closure would include the stretch of Mass Ave from Prospect St to Sidney St.

Michael Monestime made note that the order came from the Council and was not a request of the business community. While there is support to activate Mass Ave and provide ways to generate activity for the public and for business owners, there are a lot of complicated logistics to consider for this sort of undertaking. The committee noted the following:

- What about opening up to vendors from central flea or food trucks for cuisines that don't exist.
- Need to have proper funding to produce something like this.



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

IRAM FAROOQ
*Assistant City Manager for
Community Development*

SANDRA CLARKE
*Deputy Director
Chief of Administration*

KHALIL MOGASSABI
*Deputy Director
Chief of Planning*

- Need to do it in a smart fashion. Every week seems like it might be too often. The frequency may cause it to lose its appeal. Once a month or every other week perhaps?
- Would prefer to hear from folks from the business community and the BID first rather than letting things loose.

Robert Winters discussed additional considerations for spatial activation, such as looking at the sidewalks in Central Square where the action is and stated that there is room for more activity. He questioned the added value of adding more space considering what has been done to date.

Esther Hanig supports the idea of the street closure for public access but wondered where the funding for something like this will come from. As a lower cost alternative, Tahir Kapoor mentioned that it doesn't necessarily need to have robust programming. It might be worth testing and seeing how people use it. It could simply be a space for pedestrians. If you consider different hours, it could also be a space for families to walk on a weekend.

Michael Monestime suggested that this could also be a project for a side street so it's not a major logistical disruption. A lot of the short side streets are opportunities too like the farmer's market. Shutting down those streets is worth exploring since they are less impactful. Melissa Greene supported this approach, as well.

Tahir Kapoor asked about additional space being allocated for restaurants and perhaps a beer garden similar to the Esplanade. Michael Monestime concurred that music and food are easy ways to draw people.

Lastly, Esther Hanig brought up the idea of tapping into universities and institutional partnerships for public space installations in commercial squares, such as Central. Robert Winters feels that if the City provides space for organizations like MIT media lab to do something will they just take the opportunity to do it.

Committee Consensus

The Committee agrees that Central Square presents several opportunities for activating public spaces that might be different scales, programs and degrees of investment with the intention of amplifying public life in the square. The Committee feels that there are many underutilized spaces in the square and that even small temporary interventions like additional parklets, public seating, food vendors and street activities could provide critical public space for residents and visitors alike. Much of the conversation around public space was focused on the City Council suggesting that the City looks into the possibility of closing Mass Ave on weekend nights (Fri and Sat from 7pm-1am). While the committee likes the idea in concept there are a number of logistical issues that would have to be worked out. Also, there is the sense that there is other space to be activated, as well.