



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: City of Cambridge Planning Board
From: Central Square Advisory Committee
Date: October 29, 2018
Re: Amazon Pickup Points, LLC. – 624 Mass Ave

The Central Square Advisory Committee (the “Committee”) met on Wednesday, October 24, 2018 to review and comments on the Amazon Pickup Points, LLC. (the “Applicant”) proposal to operate as a Formula Business in the Central Square Overlay District (the “District”) at 624 Massachusetts Avenue. This meeting was conducted pursuant to the provisions outlined in 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, and to monitor the progress of the Central Square Non-Zoning Recommendations of the 2013 K2C2 Study (the “Study”).

Shortly after receiving its Certificate of Occupancy, the Building Commissioner informed the applicant that the use of its standardized signage on the exterior of the building and the use of its trademark logo (smile) and corporate color in the interior of the space, triggered two of the three characteristics contained within the definition of a Formula Business:

1. **trademark, service mark or logo, defined as a work, phrase, symbol or design or combination thereof that identifies and distinguishes the course 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**

The applicant seeks a Special Permit to install its standardized signage on the exterior of the building and to use the corporate color in certain areas of the interior of the premises. The proposal also involves the placement of its “smile” logo in certain locations within the interior of the premises.

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Consistent with the Study, the Committee’s questions and comments generally focused on enriching the District’s public realm, by prioritizing people, then spaces, then buildings. A key principle of formula business regulations is to regulate the design characteristics of a use, a building, or a site, and designs that might be considered “generic” in ways that impact the character of a district. The Committee’s concerns were how a given use, building, or site contributes to or takes away from the public realm and life on the streets.

Currently, the Applicant’s operations at 624 Mass Ave brings activity into Central Square and Carl Barron Plaza, with approximately 150 individuals picking up packages and approximately 300 returning packages, per day (the latter includes non-Cambridge residents). But, in addition to **activity** in a space, there’s much to be desired pertaining to **interactivity** in space. While the formula business regulation, as it now stands, creates an opportunity and an incentive for business/property owners to work with community members to address concerns and tailor a

proposal to meet the community's expectations, there is no language that regulates, or sets expectations for, how a proposed use interfaces with people and the public realm.

Additional comments from the Committee are as follows:

- Even though there tend to be strong reactions against corporate entities in Central Square, they are providing active uses and helping move people in and through the Square. There have always been chains in Central Square. A healthy retail district does well to have chains. Until smaller retailers come in, it's good to have as much movement and activity throughout this area.
- I'm personally against the formula business regulation, even though I understand the argument for it. I think we should encourage a market-driven approach to retail. There's a tendency for us to cling to history in a way that may not benefit everyone. At the end of the day, everyone uses these amenities, so everyone stands to gain in one way or another.
- The formula business regulations monitor uses that are considered "generic", but maybe part of the conversation should be not allowing uses that "kill" the Square after a certain time. What happens after 5pm? I would agree that, in addition to "active uses", we should also encourage uses that are "interactive".

The following are comments made by member(s) of the public in attendance:

- There is a commercial bus shelter right in front of this location which is right now used more as an advertising opportunity than anything else. As part of the River Street Reconstruction Project, and the reimagining and redesign of Carl Barron Plaza, I'm hoping that Amazon may, perhaps, be a partner in conceptualizing and/or providing a non-commercial bus shelter to better enhance the pedestrian experience.
- The idea that someone can go into the space for something modest, other than pick-up/return, would also add to the pedestrian experience. This can be something as simple as a coffee shop.
- The concern that I have about formula business regulations, is the impact of corporate branding when it gets past a certain point. I think a more modest expression of advertisement or corporate branding – both at the individual, site level and collectively, across the District – would be more consistent with what we have discussed, regarding character and a more traditional retail experience.

While there are differences of opinions amongst Committee members on formula business regulations, on both its intent and application, those who were present spoke in favor of the Applicant's proposal to operate as a Formula Business at 624 Massachusetts Avenue.

Committee Members Present

- Joel Altstein
- Melissa Greene
- Esther Hanig
- Tahir Kapoor
- Robert Winters

Committee Members Absent

- Michael Monestime
- Christopher Sol Gully

Guests

- James Rafferty, *Attorney, Adams & Rafferty*
- John Bojas, *Site Manager, Amazon Pickup Points, LLC.*

submitted on behalf of the Committee,

Wendell Joseph, *Neighborhood Planner*
Community Development Department