

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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Community Development

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Chief of Administration

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To: City of Cambridge Planning Board
City of Cambridge Board of Zoning Appeals
From: Central Square Advisory Committee
Date: 8/21/20
Re:

The Central Square Advisory Committee (the "Committee") met on Wednesday, August 19, 2020 to discuss the social and economic impact of COVID-19 on the life and vitality of Central Square, and to review the current meeting schedule, committee structure, and committee interests. There were no projects for review this month.

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

Topic 1: Central Square Non-Zoning Discussion (6:02pm)

- **Question:** What can be relayed to the CDD from the committee about COVID response? How can this committee address the issue?
 - The Central Square BID is very useful to address the issues that COVID has presented for Central Square including the Hi Neighbor campaign and Starlight Square. The BID is doing more than what the city or community could do on its own. The committee expressed support for the idea of finding time for a Committee check-in with the BID. Feedback is still valuable to the BID and a closer relationship could be formed between the BID and the CSAC.
- **Question:** Has there been a relationship between CSAC and the BID?
 - There has been no historic relationship because the BID is new, and has been thrown in the middle of COVID, so we will have to build a relationship.
 - Joel Altstein asked if there any coordination between CSAC and the Central Sq Businessperson Association? Apparently the CSqBA is less active than it was. BID occupies that role now.
 - There was a general concern about the fate of small businesses in the square after the string of restaurant/bar closings. What will happen when a further string of closings inevitably happens and who will replace them in the future? It could be an opportunity for some investors but runs the risk of Central Square losing its identity as a cultural resource and place for independent businesses. Robert Winters feels that the City is doing all that it can to assist businesses and tenants, but it may not be enough in these circumstances.

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Public Comment (6:25pm)

James Williamson (JW)

- JW explained that he has been out in the Sq most nights over last 5mo.



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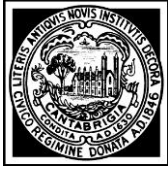
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- James knows someone who was stabbed in the Sq recently. The notes in the “addendum” recount the incident in more detail.
- JW concerned about the withdrawal of the police in the Sq. Sees the incident described above as an example. He would like to see more police presence and response to personal safety, especially at night.
- It was suggested by a member of the committee that this type of concern can be addressed by the Police Review and Advisory Board. The committee is grateful that they have been made aware of it.
- A committee member suggested that this is an opportunity to get a police contact that the committee can interact with in these sort of instances.
- Robert Winters, a committee member mentioned that there was a group (Central Sq Safety and Infra Group) that was meeting before COVID. People from DPW and CPD. That group hasn’t been meeting since the pandemic began, but the incident JW describes would be perfect for that group as an issue to reconvene about. RW will try to get that committee to meet again.

Topic 2: Central Square Advisory Committee Update (6:50)

- **Question:** What are the interests of the CSAC beyond the required project review
 - Committee members mentioned that in the past when there weren’t projects prior staff would lead discussions on focal areas. Placemaking for example. There was a period when there weren’t many proposals, so there would be infrequent meetings. Discussions were had with CDD leadership to include more discussions about development-related topics such as urban design etc. The committee appreciates the regularity of meeting monthly even if there are not applicants. We may be on the precipice of development so good to keep momentum.
 - Some members feel that the committee needs to be known more. People should understand the committee and the public should know who we are and what we do. It would be positive to be recognized in a more formal way.
 - There was the suggestion from a committee member that the committee could help facilitate some community meetings. It could be an optional offer for developers for example.
- **Question:** What would the committee like the schedule to be going forward if there are not cases to review every month?
 - The monthly meetings are a good idea. Keep the regularity.
 - There is no preference over 2nd or 4th Tuesdays. The tentative scheduling is the fourth Tuesday of every month.
- Next meeting – 9/22 (tentatively)
 - If possible, the committee would like to get an update from the Central Square BID about its response to COVID-19 and how it is impacting the square’s vitality and economy.
 - Staff will bring up the public safety committee idea to CDD leadership. Robert Winters has agreed to bring up with formal contacts.
 - Staff will attempt to arrange a presentation about the River St project for the Committee.
- Additional comments/questions
 - Robert Winters would like to hear about Mass and Main. About City’s big storm drain project.



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- Robert Winters – there are no limits on the distancing between EE-cannabis shops. What are the rules? Anything to be done about how many there are so close to each other?

Finished (7:04)

Addendum

Comments submitted by member of the public James Williamson via the Zoom Q&A [incomplete]

Two weeks ago this past Monday evening on August 3, at approximately 7:30 p.m., someone I've known reasonably well for several years who lives in Central Square was stabbed while sitting at a bench in front of Rodney's. He had inadvertently sat down next to an apparently abandoned bag which it turned out contained unopened bottles of beer and was first accosted and then violently attacked by a total stranger. Members of the CPD arrived and were informed by more than one person [cont...]
[cont.] that the assailant was "walking down the sidewalk." The police at the scene reportedly did nothing to pursue or apprehend the assailant. The victim was taken by ambulance to Mass General, where he received stitches. He had apparently succeeded in partially blocking the knife blow and, as a result, a second wound to his side was not especially deep. Needless to say, however, contrary to the perhaps overly optimistic characterization of this incident by the police [cont.]

Committee Member Tahir Kapoor comments submitted to Drew Kane on 8/19/20

Tahir would like to express support for closing more streets to cars for pedestrian/bike traffic. He likes the shared streets that have been set up, but does not believe it is sufficient or even that successful at deterring vehicle traffic, and permanently closing streets would allow more space for pedestrians and also potentially expanded outdoor business space.

Committee Members Present

- Robert Winters
- Joel Altstein
- Melissa Greene

Submitted on behalf of the Committee,
Drew Kane, Land Use Planner
Community Development Department