

City Council: Application #3 - 12 of 24 signs @ 30 Brattle St. - 4/27/14 Meeting

Carol O'Hare <cbo1066@gmail.com>

Sun 4/26/2015 3:39 PM

City Clerk Agenda

To: City Council <CityCouncil@CambridgeMA.GOV>;

Cc: Rossi, Rich <rrossi@cambridgema.gov>; Lopez, Donna <dlopez@cambridgema.gov>;

📎 2 attachments (42 KB)

Zoning-30BrattleStSignVariance-PlanningBdDisapprovalRecommendationToBZA150225.doc; Zoning-30Brattle-HarvardSqAdvCommitteeToBZA150225.doc;

Dear Mayor Maher, Vice Mayor Benzan and City Councillors:

Alert! These applicants will (if permitted) install a hodgepodge or jumble of **24 signs of every type** and style on their 30 Brattle St. retail building, including the 10 projecting banner-signs for which they will seek City Council approval tomorrow, 4/27. Their 24 signs would significantly exceed zoning limits.

How many signs does a person need to find a retail business? Even just these **10 projecting, promotional banner-signs** would establish yet another new precedent for Harvard Square and the City beyond and further distract the local and visiting public from our historic City's built environment. Harvard Square is not a carnival site or a boring suburban mall that needs hyping up. The fact that banners flutter in the wind makes them more (not less) distracting than fixed signs intended to identify the location of businesses for pedestrians and others from street level.

10 (+ 12 more) Proposed Signs:

- **Citizens Bank: 5 projecting banner-signs**, 1 illuminated wall sign, 3 other wall signs, 2 illuminated bank logos, 5 green sign-panels;
- **Leather World – 3 projecting banner-signs**, 2 illuminated signs;
- **Bob Slate Stationer - 2 projecting banner-signs**, 2 illuminated signs.

Planning Board's 2/25/15 recommendation to Zoning Board concluded that the proposed 24 signs are "chaotic and inconsistent":

"The Board acknowledges that designing useful signage for this building is difficult given its curved shape and relatively dark façade. However, the Board believes that there can and should be a better designed sign plan for this building and does not recommend approving the signage plan currently proposed.

The Harvard Square Design Guidelines promote novelty and interesting design, but this proposal results in chaotic and inconsistent signage. In particular, the amount of signage and green color allocated to the bank space seems disproportionate."

Is a zoning variance required for 24 signs or not? City says: Yes > No > Yes!

1st ISD Determination: **Yes**

2nd ISD Determination: **No**

3rd Determination (per City personnel from several depts., including City Solicitor): **Yes**

Zoning Hearing continued again to this Thurs., April 30, 2015 – BZA #6009-2015, to allow up to 525 Sq. Ft. of signage for 3 retail tenants in 24 signs, panels and banners.

Again, I urge you to consider the totality of this applicants' sign scheme and heed the Planning Board's recommendation that the applicants should start from scratch by redesigning their "chaotic and inconsistent" proposed excessive signage.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Carol O'Hare

Cc: Donna Lopez, City Clerk, for filing with the Official Record

Others, as listed in above

For your further information: Chronology/Summary of Proceedings and Reviews from March 2012 to Date

- **CDD**: In 2012 & 2014, the 6 existing tenant signs on this building were certified by as zoning-compliant by the Community Development Dept.
- **CHC**: On 12/4/14, the Cambridge Historical Commission approved 18 more tenant signs (most for Citizens) at that location. The Historical Commission has jurisdiction because the property is in the Harvard Square Neighborhood Conservation District.
- **ISD**: In Dec. 2014/Jan. 2015, the Tenants filed for zoning variance(s) to permit 18 additional signs of various types, most for Citizens.
- **Planning Board**: On 2/24/15, the Planning Board reviewed the Tenants signage plan and requested variances, as presented by CDD personnel, and recommended that the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA) disapprove the Tenant's proposed signage plan. *See Attachment #2,*
- **BZA**: On 2/26/15, the day of the scheduled BZA hearing, Citizens wrote to the BZA requesting a continuance of their hearing because the City's Inspectional Services Department wants to discuss further "whether this [variance] application properly is before the Board [of Zoning Appeal]."
- **HSAC**: On 2/25 or 2/26, CDD's Liza Paden Emailed the BZA her summary of the differing opinions of the resident-, business- and institutional-members of the Harvard Square Advisory Committee about the Tenants' proposed signage plan. (Correction for the record: I am not on the HSAC, nor am I on the Citizen's Design Review Group for Harvard Square referred to in Ms. Paden's Summary. *See Attachment #2.*)
- **BZA**: On 2/26/15, the BZA OK'd the requested continuance pending ISD's "further discussion about whether this application properly is before the Board."
- **BZA**: The at least twice continued hearing is now scheduled for this Thurs., 4/30/15 at 7 p.m.

The Planning Board review the proposed signage at its Tues., 2/24/15 meeting.

AGENDA

GENERAL BUSINESS

Board of Zoning Appeal

6009 – 2015 – 30 Brattle Street, sign variance for a variety of wall signs greater than the total amount of signage allowed, higher than allowed and more projecting signs than allowed.

Resulting recommendation of Planning Board to Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA)

February 25, 2015

To: The Board of Zoning Appeal

From: The Planning Board

RE: Case 6009- 2015 – 30 Brattle Street

The Planning Board reviewed the BZA sign variance proposed for 30 Brattle Street and forwards the following comments.

The Board acknowledges that designing useful signage for this building is difficult given its curved shape and relatively dark façade. However, the Board believes that there can and should be a better designed sign plan for this building and does not recommend approving the signage plan currently proposed.

The Harvard Square Design Guidelines promote novelty and interesting design, but this proposal results in chaotic and inconsistent signage. In particular, the amount of signage and green color allocated to the bank space seems disproportionate.

Harvard Square Advisory Committee

**c/o Cambridge Community Development Department
344 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02139
617/349-4647**

February 25, 2015

To: The Board of Zoning Appeal

From: Liza Paden on behalf of the Harvard Square Advisory Committee

RE: BZA#6009-2015 – 30 Brattle Street

Unfortunately, due to recent events, the Harvard Square Advisory Committee was unable to convene to discuss the sign variance case. I distributed the BZA variance application electronically and collected a number of comments below.

John P. DiGiovanni, Trinity Property Management, Sheldon Cohen

I think this application is worthy of support because the signage plan successfully addresses the two level retail in this building in a thoughtful manner. The signage is appropriately scaled and the projecting signs focus on the pedestrians from the multiple visual vantage points. I understand there was significant collaboration amongst the retailers which resulted in this thoughtful design and I completely support this application.

Frank Kramer

Due to its location and shape, this is a difficult building to sign adequately for visitors and customers to find their intended destination. There are business occupants on two levels, so the signing ordinance should apply to each level separately. I believe that this plan addresses these issues and I'm in favor of this proposal.

Pebble Gifford for the Citizen's Design Review Group for Harvard Square: Carole Perrault, Marilee Meyer, Jane Thompson, Kenneth Taylor, James Williams, Costanza Eggers Kari Kuelzer, and Carol O'Hare

The retail tenants in 30 Brattle St. do themselves a great disservice by loading up the facade of their building with so much visual clutter (a total of 350.5 sq. ft. of signage). It is a well designed building that makes a distinguished termination to Brattle St. If well displayed, the windows provide a quick glance of the retail nature of the store.

It is Citizen's concern about its new location partially on a lower level that is driving this request for additional signage. This concern is based on the wrong premise. Their problem is the large number of competing banks in Harvard Sq. that were there long before Citizens. (see link below showing number and location of other banks).

<https://www.google.com/maps/search/location+of+banks+in+and+near+Harvard/@42.3729132,-71.1181085,17z>

Citizens believes that all the extra signage they put on the building will combat the competition. This is very unrealistic.

At the CHC hearing that I attended, Citizen's lawyer argued that the location of the 30 Brattle St. at the intersection of Brattle and Eliot St. was confusing for potential bank clients because it wasn't clear exactly where the bank was located. We felt that this was a weak argument, because the situation could be improved by a simple street sign on the corner that showed Eliot St. went one way, and Brattle went the other, and in lieu of all the signage, how about big red (or green) "30" in a prominent place on the building.

Finally, the most egregious exterior display is the treatment of the ATM's: first, its appearance is one of a 50+ sq. ft. billboard set within the facade; all the other building openings appear black whereas this one is florescent green that can be seen as far away as Story St. as one approaches the Square; finally, there are two bright, internally-lit logos (much too bright) above the ATM's, and halo lighting around the perimeter of each ATM and the night drop; In addition to all this, there is a not so subtle attempt to create the logo in a lighter shade of green in the background of the night drop.

Because of the BZA's recent inclination to allow variances for signage that far exceed the requirements of Article 7 of the Zoning Ordinance, the Planning Board's recommendation to the BZA is very important. Harvard Square is within a Conservation District and sensitivity to its historic character should be demonstrated in all issues of design. This is one of those instances, so we request that you temper accordingly Citizen's Bank's application for so much excessive signage.

Respectfully submitted by,

Pebble Gifford for the Citizen's Design Review Group for Harvard Square

Carole Perrault, Marilee Meyer, Jane Thompson, Kenneth Taylor, James Williams, Costanza Eggers Kari Kuelzer, and Carol O'Hare