

To: City Council
Fr.: Carol O'Hare, 172 Magazine St.
Re: Citizens Bank/Leather World/Bob Slate Stationers' Application for Approval of
10 projecting banner/signs at 30 Brattle
Date: May 4, 2015 @ City Council Meeting

Commercial signage is a quality of life issue, just like noise and smells are. All can excessively intrude into our lives and will, if permitted, overwhelm. The question is: How much is enough? And, why do these tenants need vastly more than enough of every type of sign?

1. If all signs are approved, Citizens/LeatherWorld/BobSlateStationers would end with 24 signs!
 - 6 existing wall signs
 - 10 new, projecting banner-signs (**City Council approval & BZA variance required**), 2' x 6'.
 - 8 new wall-signs (BZA variance required)
2. Zoning permits 145 sq. ft. of signage. The tenants existing 6 signs (including signs use 139 sq. ft. that.) The tenants are also applying for a massive zoning variance to permit **519 sq. ft.**, 167 of which would be lit. That's 3.6 more than our Zoning permits.
3. Yes, the Historical Commission, by vote of 4 to 3 (with the longtime Chairman voting no) inexplicably approved the tenants' sign scheme without any real discussion at their approval meeting.
By contrast, the Planning Board reviewed this proposed signage and recommended that the BZA disapprove the "circus" of signs (as Chairman Cohen described the proposal).

"The [Planning] 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."

And, ISD's zoning personnel certainly did not approve the signs, signs despite what is written in your Agenda. Indeed, ISD has most recently determined, after some confusion and input from the Law Dept., that the signs would violate our Zoning Ordinance. Their BZA zoning variance hearing has now been continued for the 4th time to May 28, this time because they didn't properly post notice of the 3rd hearing.

4. The applicants say banners present a "softer" look, but 10 12 sq. ft. banners flapping in the wind + 14 other signs is over-the-top & totally distracting. And, what happens when other retail establishment seeks approval for the same type of signage. Katy bar the door!
5. This is classic over-reaching for more and more signage. If you allow these 10 banner-signs here, you can bet that that the Me-Too-ers it will want the same and the sign circus will spread throughout the Square and then to other retail locations.
6. Colleen Clark, a Cambridgeport resident, captured the feelings of many: "I think [Citizens' and the 2 other retailers'] putting a stick in the eye of the public process is inexcusable. They must realize they have no good case. Can't the city of Cambridge tell them they're abusing the process and the citizens who care and that the answer to their requests therefore is NO! It's costing the city money and trying to wear the opposition down. Enough is enough!!!"
7. GPS works just fine: Citizens Bank Cambridge. And, what about good street-signs at the Brattle/Mt. Auburn?

Since the Building Identification Sign Amendment was a very hot topic in 2010, the Planning Board has become much more tuned in to signage issues throughout the City. I urge you to consider the totality of these applicants' proposed 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.

City Council: 10 of 24 projecting banner-signs - Citizens/LeatherWorld/BobSlate @ 30 Brattle St. - 5/4/15 Meeting

Carol O'Hare <cbo1066@gmail.com>

Sat 5/2/2015 10:58 AM

City Clerk Agenda

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

Importance: High

📎 3 attachments (89 KB)

Zoning-30BrattleStSignVariance-PlanningBdDisapprovalRecommendationToBZA150225.doc; Zoning-30Brattle-HarvardSqAdvCommitteeToBZA150225.doc; Zoning-30BrattleStSignVariance-PetitionToPlanningBd(150224)&BZA(150226)-NamesAsOf150223+1Name.doc;

Dear Mayor Maher, Vice Mayor Benzan and City Councillors:

Supplement to my 4/26 Email, copy below, re 4/27/15 Charter Righted Application #3 for 10 Projecting Banner-Signs at 30 Brattle St. (in addition to 14 other signs):

1. Last Thurs., the BZA continued for the 4th time Citizens/LeatherWorld/BobSlate's zoning-variance hearing because the petitioners failed to post the legally required notice of that hearing. In fact, ISD (perhaps with Law Dept. advice) are now requiring that this continued BZA hearing be re-advertised in the [Chronicle](#).
2. This building's Brattle St. abutters and neighbors are commercial and office users who may not care about this proposed signage. **But**, the Harvard Sq. area is everyone's turf – Cambridge residents, our near and distant neighbors and tourists. Please spare us all from this proposed sign carnival. If approved, it will surely set another precedent for other commercial enterprises in Harvard Sq. and beyond, leading to "Signs, Signs, Everywhere a Sign."
3. 22 residents (see Attachment #3) + others who have written and spoken to you oppose this proposed hodgepodge of signs.

As always, thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Carol O'Hare

172 Magazine St.

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

Others, as listed above

From: Carol O'Hare [mailto:cbo1066@gmail.com]

Sent: Sunday, April 26, 2015 3:39 PM

To: Cambridge City Council

Cc: Richard Rossi; Donna Lopez

Subject: City Council: Application #3 – 12 [correction - 10] of 24 signs @ 30 Brattle St. - 4/27/14 Meeting

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

To: Cambridge Planning Board and Board of Zoning Appeal

Re: **30 Brattle St., Zoning Variances for 24 Signs - Citizens, Leather World & Bob Slate Stationer , BZA Case No. BZA-006009-2015**
Planning Board, Tues., 2/24/15; Board of Zoning Appeal, Thurs., 2/26/15

We, the undersigned Cambridge residents, believe (i) that the existing signage on this building identifies its 3 tenants very well now and (ii) that there is no “substantial hardship” or any other justification for any zoning variance for the vastly excessive signage being sought. We, therefore, urge you to deny approval for these signs that would set a new precedent for filling our environment with more unnecessary and distracting advertising.

Printed Name	Signature (S) Email “Signature” (ES)	Street Address	Phone & Email (not required)	Date
Jane Beal	ES	117 Fresh Pond Pkwy., Cambridge, 02138	beal.jane@gmail.com (617) 308-3651	2/21/15
Gaby Whitehouse	ES	655 Concord Ave., #704, Cambridge, 02138	ggwhitehouse@comcast.net	2/21/15
Hazel Arnett	ES	10 Rogers St., Cambridge, 02142		2/21/15
Mairi Staples	ES	145 Concord Ave., Cambridge, 02138		2/22/15
Rajiv Manglani	ES	15 Valentine St., Cambridge, 02139		2/22/15
David Levitt	ES	14 Notre Dame Ave., Cambridge, 02140		2/22/15
Don R. Lipsitt	ES “Cambridge will soon look like Times Square or the Ginza in Tokyo.”	83 Cambridge Pkwy., Cambridge, 02142		2/23/15
Walter McDonald	ES	172 Magazine St., Cambridge, 02139	waltermcdonald40@gmail.com	2/23/15
Thane DeWitt	ES	10 Rogers St., Unit 415, Cambridge, 02142		2/23/15
+ 13 more residents signed this petition	S – to be faxed to Liza Paden, 2/23/15	02138, 02139, 02140 & 02141		2/22/15