



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: June 7, 2017

Subject: Zoning Petition Regarding Rooftop Spaces in the Harvard Square Overlay District

Recommendation: The Planning Board does NOT RECOMMEND adoption.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On April 18, 2017, the Planning Board held a public hearing on this City Council zoning petition, which would amend Section 20.50 of the Zoning Ordinance to allow rooftop spaces that are otherwise included as gross floor area (GFA) on a lot to be exempted from GFA calculations by special permit from the Planning Board in the Business B portion of the Harvard Square Overlay District. The Board received briefing material from CDD staff and heard testimony from members of the public.

Based on a review of the petition and testimony received, the Board does not believe it necessary or worthwhile to make the proposed zoning change at this time. The key objective of the petition appears to be to allow restaurants and similar retail facilities greater flexibility to use rooftop space. However, such space already is typically excluded from GFA when it is located at the third floor or below. Therefore the Board does not believe the proposed change would facilitate such use, except possibly in rare cases where a restaurant or similar retail use is located on the upper floors of a building that already has met or exceeded its allowed GFA.

Several members of the Board expressed the view that the retail environment in Harvard Square deserves attention, and that support for bars and restaurants – and outdoor dining in particular – may be a key component to keeping the area active and lively, given the uncertain future of traditional retail. However, the Board believes that a more comprehensive examination of Harvard Square's zoning needs, including community discussion, should be undertaken before implementing a single limited zoning change.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

H Theodore Cohen, Chair.