



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: June 19, 2019

Subject: New Street Overlay District Zoning Petition

Recommendation: The Planning Board does NOT RECOMMEND adoption.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On June 4, 2019, the Planning Board held a public hearing on this petition by Self Storage Group LLC, to amend the Zoning Map of the City of Cambridge by creating a new overlay zoning district entitled New Street Overlay District and to amend Article 20.000 of the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Cambridge by creating a Section entitled "20.900 New Street Overlay District." The Board heard testimony from six members of the public, including some residents living near the affected area who raised concerns about the petition.

The proposed overlay district is within the Industry A-1 (IA-1) base zoning district near Danehy Park in Neighborhood 9 and would encompass two parcels, 22-48 New Street and 52 New Street, the latter parcel owned by the petitioner and currently used for various non-residential uses. The petition would create "self storage facility" as a listed use in Article 4.000 of the Zoning Ordinance and would allow in the proposed overlay district, by special permit by the Planning Board, increased FAR (from 1.25 to 3.00) and height (from 45 feet to 65 feet) for a self storage facility. Criteria for special permit approval would include the creation of 8,000 square feet of affordable housing, enhancements and benefits to the use of Danehy Park, sustainability elements of the building, and affordable short-term storage for low income households. The petition would also change the dimensional requirements for residential uses, including increasing the maximum FAR (from 1.50 to 3.00) and maximum height (from 45 feet to 65 feet) and reducing the lot area per dwelling unit (from 700 square feet to 300 square feet) and parking requirements (from one space per unit to 0.75 or 0.5 space per unit) in order to incentivize housing development.

Following deliberation, the Board voted to recommend not to adopt this petition. Overall, the Board is not opposed to self-storage uses, but does not see a good planning rationale why a self-storage building should be allowed to so greatly exceed the normal limitations of the zoning district on these two particular parcels. It may be beneficial to more clearly define and regulate self-storage as a distinct use in the Zoning Ordinance, and the Petitioner has described how self-storage can be a good complementary use to residences. If that is the case, then standards and criteria to regulate self-storage development should be established not just for this one site but for other similarly zoned lots throughout the city as well.

Moreover, the Board is concerned that a commercial building of the proposed scale, bulk, and volume would be too large for this particular district, which has been undergoing a transition from commercial to residential character in recent years. The proposed 65-foot height would have significant visual impacts from Danehy Park as well as from other vantage points, and the impact would be exacerbated by the “blank wall” character of a self-storage facility that would isolate that section of the park and would have impacts from other vantage points as well.

The Board appreciates the proposed addition of affordable housing, which helps to make the project fit better with the evolving character of the district, but does not resolve all of the Planning Board’s concerns and raises additional potential concerns regarding safety for tenants in such a hybrid building. The petition suggests that the adjacent site could also be developed to a higher-density residential use, which might further mitigate the impact, but such development would not be certain under the current proposal and would still raise concerns about the overall size of the total development. The Board is also sympathetic to the community’s desire to retain the gym on the site and appreciates the Petitioner’s commitment to include such a use, though the reduction in size would be significant, and it is unwise to make zoning decisions based on a specific retail establishment that may or may not remain under any zoning scenario.

The Board expressed additional concerns about the specific language of the petition. If the Board were in favor of the proposal in concept, it would be advisable to make a more careful review of the language for clarity and consistency.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,



Catherine Preston Connolly, Chair.