



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: October 1, 2019

Subject: Article 19 Zoning Petition

Recommendation: The Planning Board does NOT RECOMMEND adoption.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On September 17, 2019, the Planning Board (the “Board”) held a public hearing on a City Council zoning petition (the “Petition”) to amend Article 19.000 of the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Cambridge to consider the utility and infrastructure impacts of large development projects that require a Project Review Special Permit. There was no presentation on behalf of the petitioner, but the Board received information and heard testimony from City Engineer Kathy Watkins, Community Development Department staff, Eversource community relations representative Annemarie Walsh, and three members of the public.

The proposed amendment seeks to add language to Section 19.20 that would require applicants for a Project Review Special Permit to account for the utility infrastructure needs of their projects, specifically electricity and gas. It proposes four changes: adding an Electric Service Infrastructure Narrative to existing Section 19.24; adding a Gas Service Infrastructure Narrative to existing Section 19.24; editing the Urban Design Findings requirement in existing Section 19.25.2; and adding a Utility Impact Findings clause to a new Section 19.25.3. The Petition suggests that adding these requirements will ensure that new development does not exceed the capacity of the City’s electrical and gas infrastructure. Specifically, the Petition would require the Planning Board, in granting a special permit, to find that “the project would not cause undue adverse impacts on the residents and the environment by requiring extensive additional utility infrastructure to be added to the city, including electrical, gas, sewer, stormwater and any other utility service.”

Following deliberation, the Board voted to recommend that City Council not adopt this Petition. Overall, the Board is not opposed to Project Review Special Permit applicants providing information about a project’s energy needs (e.g., electric and gas demand), but the Board does not believe that it would be in the Board’s purview to make findings with regard to infrastructure that is managed by state-regulated public utilities over which neither the City nor the developer have control. The Board also was concerned that its members do not have the expertise necessary to evaluate the information required by the Petition and was therefore hesitant to require it.

Moreover, the Board was concerned that the language in the Petition would preclude development projects from building or improving infrastructure as mitigation for their impacts, including to City infrastructure such as water and sewer. Improvements to City-managed infrastructure are typically implemented through new development, which is one of the key practical benefits of the Project Review Special Permit process. The Board believes that developers should continue to be able to mitigate the impacts of their projects by improving utility infrastructure and does not want to hamper this.

The Board concluded that it may be helpful for development applicants to provide information about the projected energy demands of their own projects. The Board recognizes a need to understand how individual projects impact the overall energy system but affirms that its role is to evaluate individual projects at the building and site scale. Since the design of a building is impacted by its anticipated energy load, the Board is interested in identifying opportunities for developers to work with utility providers earlier in the project review process so that the on-site utility needs of the project can be anticipated and factored into the design. Gathering this information may also be helpful to assess cumulative impacts on the systems; however, Board members cautioned that any data provided to the Board should be provided with enough context that it will aid the Board in making project-specific findings.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H Theodore Cohen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and prominent.

H Theodore Cohen, Vice-Chair.