



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: September 1, 2022

Subject: Accessory Parking Requirements Zoning Petition

Recommendation: The Planning Board does NOT RECOMMEND adoption.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On August 16, 2022, the Planning Board (the “Board”) held a public hearing to discuss a Zoning Petition by the City Council to amend section 6.36, entitled “Schedule of Parking and Loading Requirements,” of Article 6.000, entitled “Off Street Parking and Loading Requirements and Nighttime Curfew on Large Commercial Through Trucks,” of the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Cambridge by inserting text that reads “Minimum accessory parking required for all uses shall be 0 parking spaces” and by inserting the numeral “0” in place of all current accessory parking requirements for all uses in all zoning districts. The Board heard a presentation from Councillor Zondervan and comments from Councillor McGovern, and received written materials from staff in the City’s Community Development Department (CDD).

Following the presentation, public comment, and discussion among Board members, the Planning Board voted to transmit an unfavorable recommendation on this Petition to the City Council. Board members had a wide range of views on the concept, but expressed a shared concern that more information and study is necessary to more fully understand the potential effects of this zoning change.

The following is a list of comments made by Board members during the discussion:

- Several Board members acknowledged that attitudes around parking largely depend on people’s individual travel habits and preferences. Some noted that the City does not require other types of amenities, and questioned whether it is in the public interest to require parking and whether it is fair given that 30-40% of residents do not own a car.
- Many Board members were unconvinced that not requiring parking would have a meaningful impact on overall housing costs, because demand for housing in Cambridge tends to be high regardless of parking availability. However, it was noted that there could be other benefits to not requiring parking, such as allowing space for more housing units and green space.
- A primary concern was the potential impact in neighborhoods that already have little off-street parking and very high demand for on-street parking, particularly in the eastern half of the city. In those areas, additional development with less off-street parking could result

in increased competition for on-street parking, affecting existing residents who rely on that parking. A specific concern was additional stress on longtime residents who are feeling displaced by economic pressures.

- Board members suggested that the City could consider more nuanced approaches. For example, changes could be focused on areas that are closer to transit, or areas where there is less demand for on-street parking. Another suggestion was to remove requirements in smaller cases – such as when small numbers of housing units are created – but require more scrutiny of larger developments, where there might be greater impact because there is more likely to be a greater total parking demand.
- There was interest in hearing more about other cities that have made similar changes and what the results have been. However, there was some concern about comparing these examples to Cambridge, because Cambridge has particularly dense, historic patterns of development with relatively little off-street parking to begin with. Many of the communities that have stopped requiring parking are less densely developed and have more off-street parking as an existing condition.
- There was also interest in seeing the results of the parking study being undertaken to review the City’s parking regulations more holistically and make recommendations after hearing community input. This study may not answer every question, but it will be helpful when moving forward to have as much information as possible.
- Several Board members noted that the zoning text needs clarification, including a thorough review of other sections of the Zoning Ordinance that may be affected. For example, the intent expressed by Councillors that the change would not affect parking maximums should be resolved and made clear in the text. Potential ambiguity with other sections of zoning, such as the requirements for reduced parking under the Affordable Housing Overlay and special permit provisions related to parking, should also be addressed. The text should also clearly state how existing required accessory parking will be treated and whether owners can eliminate those spaces in favor of other land uses, such as new buildable area or open space.

The Planning Board voted with 7 members in favor transmitting the above recommendation. One member was absent.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

Catherine Preston Connolly

Catherine Preston Connolly, Chair.