

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date:	March 15, 2016
Subject:	Peter L. Cohen, et al., Zoning Petition
Recommendation:	The Planning Board does NOT RECOMMEND adoption, but recommends that the issue be incorporated into a broader study.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On March 8, 2016, the Planning Board held a public hearing on the petition by Peter L. Cohen, et al., to amend the Zoning Ordinance by placing restrictions on the location of above-ground garages on certain types of lots in Residence B zoning districts. The Board heard testimony from the Petitioner and from one affected property owner.

The Board appreciates that the Petitioner has brought this issue forward. There was a consensus among Board members that parking garages should not dominate the frontage of residential lots, and that it may indeed be appropriate to further reasonably regulate where parking garages may go in new development. However, since there already are many requirements and physical constraints on development in lower-scale residential neighborhoods, the scope of further regulations on garages in those neighborhoods needs careful review and analysis prior to implementation. Moreover, the Board believes that the issue of parking garage location would be better addressed through a broader study of garage frontage in all of the city's residential neighborhoods.


Specifically, the Board believes that the scope of the petition is unnecessarily limited. As noted, the impact of parking garages on the public realm is a concern for all residential lots, not just those with the particular existing conditions enumerated in the zoning proposal. Board members also cited examples of parking garages that have raised urban design concerns in other types of development projects, including townhouses, multifamily, commercial and mixed-use buildings. Furthermore, Board members noted that other methods of providing parking, such as on-grade lots and underground structures that require ramping, may also have negative design impacts. Conversely, in some cases, a parking garage at the front of a lot may be designed in a way that is consistent with the neighborhood character and the city's urban design goals. The Petitioner's own presentation showed an example of a garage that does not diminish the character of the neighborhood, despite being located toward the front of a residential lot.

Additionally, the Board generally does not favor zoning petitions that are proposed in response to one particular lot or development project; and despite the Petitioner's stated belief to the contrary, this petition might have an unintended impact on a recently granted special permit that

apparently provided the impetus for this petition. At the hearing, Board members and an affected property owner questioned whether the petition could be considered reverse spot zoning.

Since regulations for structured parking can have a significant influence on many other aspects of built form and urban design, the issue of parking location may be best studied as part of the Envision Cambridge citywide planning process. While the issue could be studied and addressed by the Planning Board and CDD staff through a process with a more limited scope, it may be difficult to develop solutions that could be implemented independently of other recommendations that may emerge from the Envision Cambridge process.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,



H Theodore Cohen, Chair.