

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date:	January 17, 2018
Subject:	Kroon, et al., Harvard Square Zoning Petition
Recommendation:	The Planning Board recommends ADOPTION OF PARTS of the petition, and recommends that some parts be studied further.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

The Planning Board held a public hearing of this petition on November 14, 2017. After hearing a presentation from the petitioners and public comment, reviewing written materials provided by Community Development Department staff, and having some general discussion, the Board continued the hearing to January 2, 2018 in order to consider the issues in more detail and to allow additional opportunity for public comment. At that meeting, the Board voted to make the following recommendation.

The Board wholeheartedly endorses the goals expressed by the petitioners. It is important to help ensure the retail vibrancy of Harvard Square, especially given the changing nature of retail both in Cambridge and elsewhere. At a high level, the Board supports taking measures to support local businesses and to promote a healthy retail ecosystem. The challenge is to determine what set of zoning tools will truly advance that goal, and the petitioners have put forward an attractive and well thought out set of options.

With regard to the eight specific changes proposed in the petition (referring to the revised petition text provided at the January 2 hearing), the Board recommends the following actions:

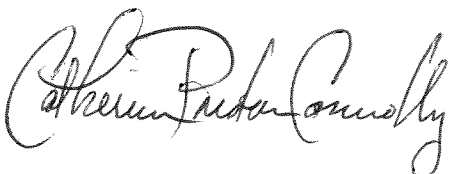
- Review Criteria (additions to Section 20.53.2): The Board recommends **ADOPTION**.
- Harvard Square Advisory Committee (amendments to Section 20.54.1): The Board recommends **ADOPTION**, with the change that the committee should consist of thirteen (13) members by increasing the number of retail business representatives but not decreasing the number of commercial property owner representatives.
- Required Residential Use Above 60 Feet (amendments to Section 20.54.2): The Board recommends further study. The current allowance, by special permit, of heights above 60 feet is intended to allow flexibility to promote historic preservation and open space. Employing it as a residential incentive could complicate these objectives. Also, because the allowed density is lower for residential use than for commercial use (unlike in other

parts of the city), the additional height might not provide an adequate incentive, but could create uncertainty around the city's desired development outcomes.

- Use of Parking Contributions (amendments to Section 20.54.4): The Board recommends **ADOPTION**, with the small change that “transit solutions” be amended to “transportation solutions,” to allow use of funds more broadly for pedestrian/bicycle improvements as well as other transportation-related measures such as mitigation of construction impacts on local businesses.
- Formula Business Regulations (new Section 20.56): The Board recommends **ADOPTION**; however, the Board agrees with concerns raised regarding the overlapping jurisdiction for sign review that could be created between the Planning Board and the Historical Commission, which can currently approve signs that deviate from some of the normal signage requirements in Article 7.000 of the Zoning Ordinance.
- Small Store Regulations (new Section 20.57): The Board agrees with the objectives but recommends further review of the detailed mechanics, given the uncertainty of how such a requirement might play out in a variety of situations. At the least, allowing modification by special permit may provide a “relief valve” to address situations where strict application of the requirement is infeasible or results in an undesirable outcome.
- Limitations on Bank and Other Office Frontage (new Section 20.58): The Board recommends **ADOPTION**, with possible further review of the appropriate limitation on frontage length. It is helpful in this case that there is a special permit provision to provide relief where it may be needed.
- Below-Grade GFA Exemption (new Section 20.59): The Board recommends **ADOPTION**, as this is a logical extension of current provisions in the Zoning Ordinance.

While the Board finds the recommended zoning changes to be favorable, there is a general concern that they may not be as effective in achieving the stated goals as some community members might hope. These measures should continue to be evaluated in the future, along with other zoning and non-zoning policy options, such as those outlined in the city's Retail Strategy completed last year.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,



Catherine Preston Connolly, Vice Chair.