



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: May 14, 2019

Subject: Ware Street Innovation Space Overlay District Zoning Petition

Recommendation: The Planning Board does NOT RECOMMEND adoption.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On April 30, 2019, the Planning Board held a public hearing on this petition by Verizon New England, Inc., to amend the Zoning Map of the City of Cambridge by creating a new overlay zoning district entitled Ware Street Innovation Space Overlay District and to amend Article 20.000 of the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Cambridge by creating a Section entitled "Ware Street Innovation Space Overlay District." The Board heard testimony from six members of the public, who were predominantly residents living near the affected area who spoke in opposition to the petition.

The proposed overlay district is within the Residence C-1 base zoning district in Mid-Cambridge and would encompass 10 Ware Street, a parcel owned by the petitioner and used as a telephone exchange facility since 1932, according to the petitioner. The intent of the proposal is to allow, by special permit by the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA), a portion of the existing non-conforming building to be used as "Innovation Space," a type of commercial workspace that is leased to small companies and individuals for short term lease durations and provides some common facilities and resources. Such a use is currently operating on the site, and was granted a time-limited use variance by the BZA in October, 2018, permitting up to 10,000 square feet for general office and research and development uses. The variance was limited to a period of two years, according to the BZA decision, "in order to allow the petitioner to come up with other solutions or have the area rezoned in a fashion that would allow them to continue to do what they were doing or to allow them to move to another location."

Following deliberation, the Board voted to recommend this petition not be adopted. The Board found that creating allowances for this type of workspace in a residential zoning district would be inconsistent with the City's comprehensive planning efforts to date, which are focused on creating housing in residential areas. The Board also found that the petition, as proposed, would grant overly broad latitude to the BZA in approving changes to uses and other requirements by special permit, and suggested that the variance process may be more suitable for addressing the unique conditions of this site within the broader residential district. If the petition is advanced, the Board suggests looking carefully at the zoning language to make sure it is as narrowly construed as possible, with strict requirements and limitations.

The Board also considered testimony from residents regarding the impacts of the existing telephone exchange building, such as noise, lighting, and traffic, that have been an ongoing challenge to mitigate. The Board was not convinced that enabling a new commercial use on the site would improve those existing conditions, and the new use might further exacerbate the concerns of residents. Again, if the petition advances, the Board would suggest that greater attention be given to improving both the existing and proposed uses on the site so they are more compatible with the residential character of the area. The Board also suggested considering ways in which the proposed use might better benefit the community, such as programs benefitting the high school since it is located nearby.

Finally, the Board heard concerns that were raised regarding whether this proposal might be deemed spot zoning. The Board did not express an opinion on this matter, but suggests that the City Council seek guidance from the City Solicitor if the petition is advanced.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H Theodore Cohen', written over a horizontal line.

H Theodore Cohen, Vice Chair.