



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: December 21, 2022

Subject: Callender, et al., Zoning Petition

Recommendation: The Planning Board does NOT RECOMMEND adoption.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On December 20, 2022, the Planning Board (the “Board”) held a public hearing to discuss a Zoning Petition by Duane Callender, et al., to amend Article 2 and Article 4 of the Zoning Ordinance (the “Petition”). The Petition would create a new definition for “Technical office for research and development, laboratory & research facility” (4.34(f) in the Table of Use Regulations) and prohibit said use in all office and business zoning districts, with exceptions for certain special districts and overlay districts and subject to additional considerations. The Board heard a presentation from Duane Callender, Lee Farris, and Kavish Gandhi, representing the petitioners, 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 generally agreed with the petitioners’ goal to promote new housing development. Board members also recognized the issue that commercial lab development may outcompete other land uses in the City, such as housing. However, Board members agreed that this Petition takes too blunt an approach to addressing this issue, and that a more nuanced approach that incorporates more study and more input from stakeholders would be preferable.

Board members acknowledged that there are many different types of lab facilities throughout Cambridge, and that commercial research and development generates distinct benefits for the City, such as jobs, tax revenue, and contributions to affordable housing development through requirements such as incentive zoning. Some Board members emphasized that labs have been an important part of the City’s identity and ethos, and that research done in Cambridge labs addresses many global problems. New restrictions on lab uses could potentially have the deleterious effect of stifling innovation and harming smaller property owners. Board members also remarked that lab development and housing development are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and there may be other ways to regulate the specific differences between labs and other types of commercial development.

While some Board members noted that certain areas of the City may benefit from protections from large-scale lab development, Board members agreed that the Petition was not structured properly to achieve the outcomes desired. The majority of Board members agreed that the best way to proceed would be to engage in a collaborative planning process involving the Petitioners, property owners, businesses, City staff, City Council, and other stakeholders before advancing this initiative. One Board member agreed that more work should be done but suggested that it could be done by amending this Petition within the current timeframe for consideration.

The Planning Board voted with 6 members in favor of transmitting the above recommendation, and one member voting against. One member was absent.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary T. Flynn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "M" and "F".

Mary Flynn, Vice Chair.