



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: April 26, 2023

Subject: Michael Monestime et. al. Zoning Petition

Recommendation: The Planning Board makes the following report with no positive or negative recommendation.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On April 25, 2023, the Planning Board (the “Board”) held a public hearing to discuss a Zoning Petition by Michael Monestime, et. al. (the “Proponent”), to amend the use regulations in the Central Square Overlay District such that *Outdoor Retail or Consumer Service Establishment, not otherwise defined* be a special permit granted by the Planning Board rather than the Board of Zoning Appeal; and that *Outdoor Entertainment and Recreation Facility* be a permitted use within the Business B District of the Central Square Overlay.

The Board heard a presentation from Michael Monestime and received written materials prior to the hearing 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 forward this report to the City Council without making a positive or negative recommendation.

Board members generally supported the goals of the Petition to create opportunities within the Central Square Overlay District for more cultural and artistic programming, which Board members felt have gradually become scarcer throughout the City over time. While the Petition is not strictly limited to the municipal lot hosting Starlight Square, the Board expressed that the benefits that Starlight Square and similar types of events bring to the City are significant.

Board members sympathized with the testimony from neighbors about the observed adverse impacts of living near Starlight Square. Board members believe these impacts are real and serious and may disproportionately affect residents in affordable housing developments who do not possess the resources to be able to modify their homes to be more sound resilient, or have the ability to relocate. Board members also recognized that Cambridge is an urban City, and that living proximate to activity hubs like Central Square will always involve some level of noise and other elements of regular city life. Board members encouraged the proponents of Starlight Square to continue to work to reduce potential noise impacts and collaborate with nearby residents. The Board also suggested that if this is an activity that the City supports, then the City should take a more active role in helping to identify and mitigate its potential impacts.

The Board expressed concern about the Petition review process to date, noting that the Petition is not limited to Starlight Square and that a more robust planning effort should be undertaken to better understand the potential impacts of allowing certain types of outdoor recreation uses by-right within the Central Square Overlay District. Board members noted that a district-wide zoning change may not be the appropriate way of addressing an issue around a singular event or permit application, and that proper zoning should follow a more holistic planning approach.

The Planning Board voted with seven members in favor of transmitting the above report. 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, flowing style.

Mary Flynn, Chair.