



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: October 6, 2025

Subject: Bakal, et al., Zoning Petition

Recommendation: The Planning Board does NOT RECOMMEND adoption.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On September 30, 2025, the Planning Board (the “Board”) held a public hearing to discuss a Zoning Petition by Martin Bakal, et al., a group of at least 10 people registered to vote in Cambridge (the “Petitioners”), to amend Article 4.000 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance (the “Petition”). The Petition would add “paved way greater than 10’ wide” to the Table of Use Regulations (Section 4.30) as a prohibited use in Open Space districts and a permitted use in all other districts, and would add a footnote (Section 4.40) with further stipulations for what constitutes a “paved way” and stating that the area of paved ways in contiguous Open Space Districts “shall not be increased by more than 2% of the total of said contiguous area within a two-year period.”

The Board heard a presentation from representatives of the Petitioners and comments from members of the public. In advance, Board members had received a memo from Community Development Department (CDD) staff and additional written comments from members of the public. Following discussion with the Petitioners and City staff and deliberating on the Petition, the Planning Board voted to transmit an unfavorable recommendation on the Petition.

Board members expressed general support for the goals raised by the Petitioners of encouraging more tree planting in parks and addressing issues around motorized vehicle use in parks. However, the Board agreed that this Petition is not an appropriate means to address these concerns. The following issues were raised by Board members:

- The proposed amendments essentially constrain how the City can design and program its own parks, which inhibits the City’s ability to make decisions on a case-by-case basis through neighborhood planning, community process, and discussion of tradeoffs that weigh the input and concerns of many constituents. The proposal would limit the flexibility, adaptability, and creativity of the design process, taking away choices for the city and community to consider.
- The specific amendments proposed are confusing within the context of zoning and will likely lead to ambiguity and potential unintended consequences. Some examples that were discussed include the question of whether play courts would be included or excluded from the proposed definition of “paved way,” which includes “courts” among

many other areas listed in the description of a “way,” and how the provision limiting the expansion of paved ways to no more than 2% within a two-year period would be interpreted or applied by the City in practice when implementing park improvements. Some specific ambiguity could be resolved through clarifying amendments, but the core concern for Board members is the incompatibility of applying broad land use regulations to decisions that are better addressed through other City processes.

- Focusing on the width of paved ways does not seem to directly address the central goals voiced by the Petitioners of encouraging tree planting and regulating motorized vehicle use. Board members expressed doubts about whether limiting paved areas would result in more tree plantings or less motorized vehicle use. Some comments from the public also expressed support for permeable paving, which does not seem to be supported by the Petition because it would explicitly limit the use of both permeable and impermeable paving. Board members did express interest in hearing more from the City at a future time about the implementation of the Urban Forest Master Plan and how concerns about motorized vehicles are being addressed.

The Planning Board voted 5-0 in favor of transmitting the above report, with two Planning Board members absent.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary T. Flynn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mary" and last name "Flynn" clearly legible.

Mary Flynn, Chair.