



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: October 27, 2025

Subject: Cambridge Street Zoning Petition

Recommendation: The Planning Board RECOMMENDS adoption.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On October 21, 2025, the Planning Board (the “Board”) held a public hearing to discuss a Zoning Petition (the “Petition”) by the City Council to amend the Cambridge Zoning Map and Ordinance in Articles 3.000, 17.000, and 19.000 with the intent of establishing four new base zoning districts for the Cambridge Street corridor in order to:

- (1) encourage patterns of development consistent with the vision of the *Our Cambridge Street Planning Study (2023)*;
- (2) allow up to 8 stories of residential uses along the length of the corridor;
- (3) incentivize active non-residential uses on the ground floor;
- (4) establish building and site design standards to achieve urban design goals; and
- (5) allow additional residential height of up to 10 stories in parts of Inman Square, up to 12 stories in the Webster Ave/Windsor Street area, and up to 15 stories in the Lechmere area.

Hearing Process

The Board first heard a presentation from staff in the City’s Community Development Department (CDD) on a separate zoning petition related to Massachusetts Avenue, followed by a presentation from City staff on this Cambridge Street zoning petition. The Board then received public comment on both petitions and discussed both petitions together. These separate proposals were reviewed and discussed at the same hearing session because they share similar content and organization. Following a discussion with City staff and deliberating on the petitions, the Planning Board voted to transmit favorable recommendations on both petitions. This report covers the discussion specifically related to the Cambridge Street petition.

Report and Comments

Overall, Board members were strongly supportive of the Petition’s goals of prioritizing housing development and active ground story uses, and establishing standards to encourage good building and site design. Board members appreciated that the Petition advances the recommendations and goals of the *Our Cambridge Street Planning Study*, which involved

extensive community engagement, as well as the *Envision Cambridge* process that recommended identifying areas that could support greater housing growth to address the city's needs.

Board members voiced support for the following aspects of the Petition:

- Allowing up to 8 stories of residential uses along the corridor, 10 stories in Inman Square, 12 stories in the Webster/Windsor area, and 15 stories in Lechmere. Board members agreed that major mixed-use corridors and squares are appropriate areas for the proposed height and densities.
- Using residential height increases to incentivize the provision of active ground story uses.
- Including some office uses such as medical offices, accountants' offices, and insurance offices in the definition of "Active Uses," but specifically excluding general office uses, banks, and labs.

Board members raised general concerns for some aspects of the Petition as summarized below:

- Open Space. Some Board members expressed concern about the lack of open space requirements for buildings 6 stories or less, emphasizing the importance of encouraging additional landscaping and tree planting in new development. One Board member suggested open space requirements could be based on the length of street frontage, rather than the height of the building, to encourage more meaningful breaks in long facades. Some Board members suggested all required open space should be accessible to the public in the form of parks, plazas, or expanded sidewalk area.
- Active Uses. Planning Board members agreed that requiring retail uses in all new developments may be problematic. Some Board members expressed concern that new ground story non-residential spaces would be geared more towards large retail chains instead of small local businesses. Those Board members suggested City staff look into ways to encourage smaller Active Use spaces in the zoning petition.
- Height Incentives. Though Board members agreed in the principle of allowing additional residential height in exchange for Active Uses on the ground floor, some Board members questioned whether the differences in heights proposed are enough to incentivize those desired uses. Those Board members suggested a 6-story residential-only building may be more economical than an 8-story mixed-use building, especially on smaller lots. That could lead to a net loss of active ground floor uses.

The Planning Board voted 7-0 in favor of transmitting the above report.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mary T. Flynn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Flynn, Chair.