



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: February 4, 2026

Subject: Institutional Use Zoning Petition

Recommendation: The Planning Board recommends ADOPTION.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On January 27, 2026, the Planning Board (the "Board") held a public hearing to discuss a Zoning Petition (the "Petition") by the City Council to amend Section 4.50 of the Zoning Ordinance in order to permit the use of land for the following purposes as-of-right in all zoning districts: religious purposes; educational purposes on land owned or leased by the Commonwealth or any of its agencies, subdivisions or bodies politic or by a religious sect or denomination, or by a nonprofit educational corporation; and a child care center, school-aged child care program, family child care home, or large family child care home as defined in Section 1A of Chapter 15D of Massachusetts General Laws.

The Board first heard a presentation on the Petition from staff in the City's Community Development Department (CDD). The Board heard public comment, asked questions of City staff, and deliberated on the Petition. After deliberation, the Board voted to send a favorable recommendation to the City Council.

Board members supported the proposed changes, which are intended to make the Zoning Ordinance consistent with state law regarding regulation of certain religious and educational uses. Board members acknowledged that special legislation still authorizes Cambridge to regulate those uses in districts that restrict residential density. Since residential density restrictions have been removed citywide, Cambridge can no longer regulate those institutional uses, and the proposed changes are needed to provide clarity. However, the zoning continues to reference the special legislation, and the option remains to rezone districts in a way that would allow those uses to be regulated if needed in the future.

Board members suggested looking again at the wording of Section 4.51 and considering if it could be clarified by adding "if applicable" where referencing Cambridge's special legislation. Board members also asked if it could be made clearer that the Institutional Use Regulations only apply in Residence C-1 districts.

Finally, Board members acknowledged that institutional planning issues may deserve some further attention in relation to city planning goals. The *Envision Cambridge* comprehensive plan sets out goals for educational uses, including concentrating institutional growth within existing campus boundaries and providing housing for affiliates. During the annual Town Gown

reporting process, Board members have had the opportunity to hear from Cambridge's educational institutions and discuss these planning issues with their representatives. Although not part of this Petition, future consideration could be given to zoning strategies that would advance these and other goals related to institutional uses.

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

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom Sieniewicz", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tom Sieniewicz, Chair.