



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date:	June 15, 2026
Subject:	Cambridge Street Active Use Zoning Petition
Recommendation:	The Planning Board provides the following report with comments and no positive or negative recommendation.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On June 2, 2026, 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 Article 17.000 with the intent of strengthening active use requirements on Cambridge Street and requiring a special permit for Formula Businesses.

Hearing Process

The Board first heard a presentation on a separate zoning petition related to active uses on Massachusetts Avenue from staff in the City’s Community Development Department (CDD), followed by public comment and Planning Board discussion on that petition. After that, the Planning Board heard a presentation on this Cambridge Street Active Use petition from CDD staff, followed by public comment and Planning Board discussion on the second petition.

Since both petitions share similar content, the Planning Board postponed final votes on both petitions until after deliberations on the Cambridge Street petition had concluded. Following discussions with City staff, the Planning Board voted to transmit reports on both petitions with the following comments and no recommendation. This report covers the discussion specifically related to the Cambridge Street Active Use zoning petition.

Report and Comments

Overall, Board members were supportive of the Petition’s goal to support active ground story uses along Cambridge Street, consistent with the goals and recommendations of the *Our Cambridge Street Study*. However, Board members were wary of overburdening residential development with additional requirements, which could negate efforts to meet the City’s housing goals on the corridor. The Planning Board agreed that stronger active use requirements could be appropriate on Cambridge Street, given its significant concentration of existing active uses, but cautioned against implementing too strong of a standard. The Planning Board chose not to make a positive or negative recommendation on the petition due to these fundamental concerns. Instead, the Board offered the following comments, providing recommendations for improvements to the petition.

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

- Allowing minor modifications to the amount and/or location of required active uses by Planning Board special permit. Additional flexibility is appropriate to allow for special circumstances where the intent of the requirement could be achieved in alternative ways.
- Applying active use requirements only to lots abutting a Primary Street. The *Our Cambridge Street Study* envisioned mixed-use activity concentrating along the main streets. Active uses should not be encouraged on side streets within the district that are more residential in nature.
- Rezoning areas that front Monsignor O'Brien Highway but not Cambridge Street to the previous Business A district. The Board agreed this part of the district is distinct from the rest of Cambridge Street and that some of the standards intended for the Cambridge Street corridor should not be equally applied in this area.
- Requiring a special permit for Formula Businesses. Planning Board members agreed this special permit may not discourage formula businesses from opening, but appreciated the opportunity to review façade design and signage of new uses and make recommendations for improvement.

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

- The Planning Board agreed with strengthening active use requirements throughout Cambridge Street but agreed that a 3-story threshold was too low to trigger active use requirements. Given the critical need for housing, Board members were more comfortable requiring active uses in developments greater than 4 stories. Some Board members suggested exploring standards that would discourage long stretches of non-active use in otherwise residential developments.

The Planning Board voted 6-0 in favor of transmitting the above report.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,



Tom Sieniewicz, Chair.