



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: June 15, 2026

Subject: Massachusetts Avenue 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 North Massachusetts Avenue.

Hearing Process

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

Report and Comments

Overall, Board members were supportive of the Petition’s goal to support active ground story uses along Massachusetts Avenue, consistent with the goals and recommendations of the *Mass Ave Planning Study*. However, Board members took a more nuanced view of where different strategies would best support that goal. The Planning Board agreed that stronger active use requirements could be appropriate in areas that are more densely developed with concentrations of existing active uses, such as Porter Square and the areas to the south. However, Board members agreed that the area north of Porter Square is different in nature, and that housing density should be prioritized to provide stronger economic support for active uses and promote the city’s housing goals. 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:

- Requiring active ground story uses in developments exceeding 4 stories in Porter Square and south of Porter.
- 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 *Mass Ave Planning 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.

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

- The Planning Board opposed introducing additional active use requirements north of Porter Square and agreed that section of the corridor should remain in the MAS-12 district. Although there are several existing ground story establishments in this part of Massachusetts Avenue, there is less retail and less development in general than other parts of the corridor. Board members expressed the view that incentivizing additional residential density is the best way to support existing and future active uses, rather than introducing a potentially burdensome requirement for new development.
- If the proposed active use requirements are implemented, particularly in the area north of Porter Square, Board members suggested there should be an exception for smaller projects in order to enable housing development on smaller lots with less street frontage. Exceptions could be based on a maximum length of frontage or amount of floor area, subject to further study to determine the exact approach.

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

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,



Tom Sieniewicz, Chair.