

The City of Cambridge is seeking members to serve on the Planning Board. All Cambridge residents are invited to apply.

What is the Planning Board?

The Planning Board is a group of Cambridge residents that makes recommendations and decisions about urban development on behalf of the City of Cambridge. The Planning Board has seven full members and two associate members. All members can participate in Planning Board discussions.

Who can apply to join the Planning Board?

Anyone who lives in Cambridge can be on the Planning Board. You don't need to be a homeowner.

The City is committed to advancing a culture of antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion. All board and commission members in Cambridge must have the ability to work and interact effectively with individuals and groups with a variety of identities, cultures, backgrounds, and ideologies. Women, Black, Indigenous and other people of color, veterans, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and persons with disabilities are encouraged to apply.

The members are appointed by the City Manager, and then approved by the City Council. Members generally serve a 5-year term.

What is the role of the Planning Board?

The Planning Board meets regularly in a public forum to discuss the City's urban planning objectives, and apply them in the following ways:

- Reviewing major urban development proposals. Some development proposals need special permits, and the Planning Board has responsibility for granting them and putting conditions on their approval. Some proposals need advisory review, and the Planning Board gives feedback on the design. The Planning Board reviews about 15-20 development proposals each year.
- Reviewing proposed amendments to the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance, which sets rules for urban development, and making recommendations to the City Council. The Planning Board reviews about 5-10 proposed zoning amendments each year.
- Making recommendations to the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA) on some cases. The BZA is a different board that grants some special permits and variances.
- Discussing other city planning efforts.

What kind of skills and abilities do you need to effectively serve on the Planning Board?

No specific professional background is needed to serve on the Planning Board. Because a big part of the Planning Board's role is reviewing building plans and designs, it is important to have a strong interest and enthusiasm for urban design and how it shapes the community. Successful members of the Planning Board will be able to:

- Engage in a constructive discussion of urban planning topics, including urban design, transportation, housing, infrastructure planning, public space, and other topics
- Listen to people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives and consider different points of view
- Visit and learn about different parts of Cambridge, and bring experience from other cities that members have visited, lived in, or learned about
- Ask critical questions and make sure to get clear answers
- Work toward constructive solutions to complex problems
- Collaborate and build consensus with a group of people

- Learn about and understand the laws related to planning and zoning
- Make reasonable decisions on behalf of the City that follow those laws

We strongly suggest that people who are interested in the Planning Board attend or watch a Planning Board meeting. Visit www.cambridgema.gov/planningboard to learn about upcoming meetings and link to video of past meetings.

What training and support is available for Planning Board members?

By state law, all members need to complete training in ethics and conflict-of-interest laws. The City's Law Department also provides training and assistance to Planning Board members on legal issues.

The Planning Board is supported by professional planning staff in the Community Development Department, with added support from Department of Transportation, Department of Public Works, and others. Staff give written reports to Planning Board members on cases that are before them, and can talk with individual Planning Board members if they have questions.

Staff may develop training on other topics that are relevant to the Planning Board's work and may direct Planning Board members to training offered by outside organizations.

How much of a time commitment is the Planning Board?

The Planning Board usually meets 2-3 times each month on Tuesday evenings at 6:30 p.m. Meetings can last up to 3-4 hours. Members are expected to attend most meetings.

The Massachusetts Open Meeting Law usually requires meetings to be in person. However, the Planning Board has been meeting remotely under the temporary Open Meeting Law provisions established during the COVID-19 pandemic. For remote meetings, Planning Board members will need to have a computer or other device with an internet connection, camera, and microphone that can support video conferencing. It is also helpful to have a private place to attend remote meetings without distractions. Some meetings are expected to be in-person again later in 2026.

Members can expect to spend about 2-4 hours before each meeting reviewing materials such as plans and documents, which are sent to members about 5 days before each meeting. Some members find it helpful to visit sites that they are reviewing in person, but it is not required.

Do Planning Board members get compensated for their time?

Planning Board members will get \$6,000 per year as a stipend. This stipend is meant to offset the annual out-of-pocket costs that members might need to pay to make it possible to serve on the Planning Board, such as child care, transportation, and other expenses.

How can I apply?

People interested in being considered should apply by using the City's online application system at www.cambridgema.gov/apply and selecting "Planning Board" in the list of Current Vacancies. You can also get a paper application in the City Manager's Office at Cambridge City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Avenue.

You should provide a cover letter to explain why you are interested in being on the Planning Board, and a résumé or summary of applicable experience. Experience can include both professional and volunteer work.

The deadline for submitting applications is Sep 21.

If you have questions, contact Swaathi Joseph in the Community Development Department at 617-349-4668 or sjoseph@cambridgema.gov or visit www.cambridgema.gov/planningboard.