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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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IRAM FAROOQ  
Acting Assistant City  
Manager for Community  
Development

To: Planning Board  
From: Stephanie Groll, PTDM Officer  
Jeff Roberts, Land Use and Zoning Planner  
Date: May 27, 2015  
Re: **Carsharing Zoning Petition**

**Background**

The City Council has referred a zoning petition that would incorporate provisions for carsharing into Article 6.000, the parking section of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance. While the petition is being advanced by the Council, this is a subject on which staff has devoted a great deal of thought and attention over the past several years. Staff were involved in the drafting of the petition language.

Carsharing is a system that gives people access to a car that they can drive for short periods of time without the cost and responsibility of owning one. Carsharing is usually facilitated by a membership-based organization, such as Zipcar or Enterprise Carshare (which are companies that own and manage their own fleets of cars) or RelayRides (which allows people to put their own cars into a pool to be used by neighbors). Different types of cars are made conveniently available to members, who reserve cars by the hour or day using an online or phone-based system. License verification and insurance are part of membership, and there is no need to enter into a new contract with each rental, nor is there a need to pick up keys or meet a sales representative in person for any reason. Cars are usually distributed throughout the city rather than clustered in large lots like a traditional rental car agency.

A previous zoning petition on carsharing was considered in 2009, but was ultimately not adopted. Since that time, staff has continued to study carsharing as it fits into the city's overall planning and has conducted community outreach to gather additional input from residents.

This report covers the following two main topics:

- Carsharing in the context of City planning goals
- Zoning issues with carsharing and explanation of petition

Staff will also discuss these topics at the Board's hearing on June 2.

## **Carsharing in the Context of City Planning Goals**

### Transportation Planning Goals

The City of Cambridge has formally committed, through policies and actions, to increasing the use of bicycles, walking, and public transit as sustainable forms of transportation. The City has undertaken a number of initiatives through the 1992 Vehicle Trip Reduction Ordinance, the 1998 Parking and Transportation Demand Management (PTDM) Ordinance, the 1993 and 2007 Growth Policy Documents, and 2002 Climate Protection Action Plan to encourage people to shift their travel choices. These initiatives include significant investment in transportation infrastructure for sustainable modes of transportation and the adoption of a regulatory requirement that projects that create new parking must offer transportation incentives to reduce employee commuting (Cambridge Climate Protection Action Committee Interim Recommendations, 2009).

The tangible success of Cambridge's transportation programs can be measured in the shift to sustainable commutes by residents and workers. In 2000, 42% of workers commuted by sustainable modes, and in 2010-2012, that number increased to 49% (U.S. Census, 2000, and 2010-2012 American Community Survey).

The next big mechanism for continuing this mode shift trend is reducing resident car ownership, which has the added benefit of reducing competition for resident parking spaces. The introduction of carsharing services in Cambridge (Zipcar was founded in Cambridge in 2000) has been accompanied by declining trends in private car ownership. U.S. Census figures show that the number of vehicles owned by Cambridge households has declined 2% between 2000 and 2010, after four decades of double-digit increases and despite a 6% increase in the population during that timeframe. The number of households owning zero cars has also increased, from 27% (according to the 2000 Census) to 31% (according to the 2011-2013 American Community Survey). Data from the City's Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department show that between 2003 and 2014, the total number of resident parking permits has decreased by 6%. Carsharing has also enabled workers coming to Cambridge from outside the city to commute sustainably while still being able to use a car for errands during the day.

At the national scale, research done at UC Berkeley (see [UC Berkeley Transportation Sustainability Research Center](#)) illuminates the habits of carsharing members and the benefits of carsharing services to communities.

1. Members don't commute by car to work: they overwhelmingly walk, bike or take transit.
2. After joining a carsharing service, people increase their walk, bike, and transit trips.
3. They also sell their cars or delay purchasing one in the first place—every carsharing vehicle added to the network takes 9 to 13 privately owned cars off the road.

The reason for these shifts in behavior is that carsharing changes the economics of driving. Driving a private car has a big upfront cost (buying the car) but a relatively small cost for each individual trip. In contrast, carsharing membership is inexpensive, but members pay for each individual trip. When carsharing is available, people can sell their car (or forego purchasing one) while still having access to a car when they need one. However, because carsharing members have to consider the cost every time

they drive, they are more likely to switch to walking, biking, and transit unless a car is absolutely necessary for the trip.

Carsharing also helps to serve broader city goals of equitable mobility and sustainable development. Vehicle ownership varies dramatically for different types of households, with renters, low-income households, seniors, and those living near transit tending to own fewer cars. Millennials in particular are choosing to live car-free or car-light — a nationwide trend that is particularly significant for Cambridge, where the median age is 30. In addition, parking is expensive to create, which can contribute to higher housing development costs that are reflected in higher housing costs for residents.

#### Community Outreach and Feedback

Between September, 2014, and January, 2015, city staff attended neighborhood group meetings to talk about people’s experience and opinions about carsharing across the city. The groups attended included: Porter Square Neighbors Association, Riverside Neighborhood Association, Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association, Area 4 Neighborhood Coalition, East Cambridge Planning Team, Fresh Pond Residents Alliance, Association of Cambridge Neighborhoods, North Cambridge Stabilization Committee, and Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association.

We received a wide range of comments at the neighborhood group discussions, ranging from people who plan to go car-free when their car dies because carsharing is available, to people asking for more carsharing cars near their houses. The majority of comments at community meetings were made in support of expanding carsharing in Cambridge, especially in residential areas. The following is a representative selection of some typical comments.

- “Can you please put carshare on-street in residential areas? That would be useful.”
- “When my car dies, I won’t get another. I’ll do carsharing and use cabs.”
- “We want more carshare available because sometimes you can’t get one when you want – like on a pretty fall weekend day. I feel like the more the better.”
- “I use a truck when I need it and don’t want to own it.”
- “With a two-car driveway, we keep thinking about getting a car, but we have been putting it off because of carsharing options.”
- “We know so many people who are car-free even with kids.”
- “Make existing Zipcars legal. They’re obviously not bothering anyone.”
- “Some percentage of new housing should be required to put in carshare spaces.”

There were also concerns raised at some of the meetings, mostly regarding whether allowing carsharing cars in residential areas would make it harder for people to find a place to park their private cars. The following is a selection of the most common comments.

- “Will allowing carsharing vehicles to park on residential property make it harder for me to find on-street parking?”

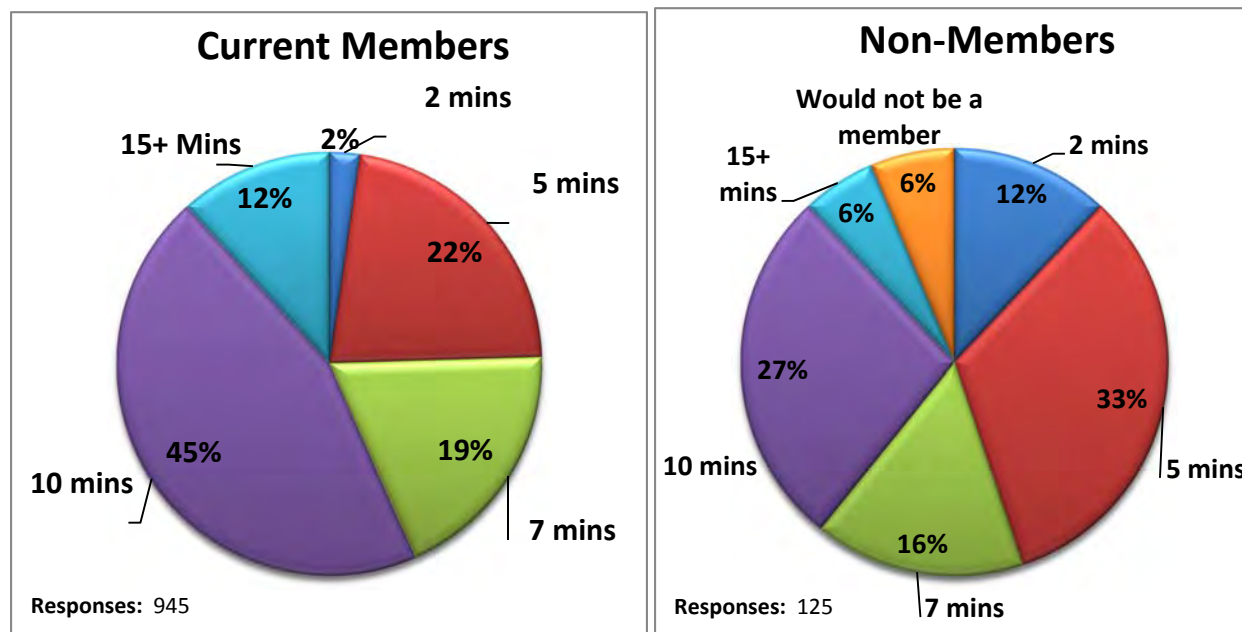
- “Will landlords raise parking fees, pushing more cars onto the street?”
- “Will people rent out their driveways and then park their own cars on the street?”

To gather additional feedback, staff also offered an online questionnaire, open for three months ending in February, 2015, which was completed by 1,070 Cambridge residents. Here’s a summary of the results.

- 88% were current carsharing members
- 59% had no car in their household and 34% had one car
- People of all ages filled out the survey
- 82% had no kids
- 85 percent of residents said, “Yes. I want carsharing to be available in private off-street parking spaces in residential areas,” 11 percent said, “Maybe,” 4 percent said, “No.”
- Of the people who said, “Maybe,” 35 percent would want carsharing spaces in residential areas if they are well-lit, accessible, safe, or marked with clear signs. Twelve percent would want it if the spaces were conveniently located close to home.
- The neighborhoods with the most respondents were Mid-Cambridge, Cambridgeport, North Cambridge and East Cambridge.
- In the general comment box, 66% of Cambridge residents either mentioned their general support for carsharing, or said the service makes it possible to live without owning a car, or want more carshare cars available.

One interesting finding was that people who are current carsharing members would be willing to walk farther for a carshare car than people who are not members. This could suggest that placing carsharing cars closer to people’s homes might encourage more people to use carsharing.

### What is the farthest you would walk to use a carshare vehicle?



## **Carsharing and Zoning Regulations**

### Issues in Current Zoning

The Zoning Ordinance currently regulates various types of land uses, including parking, but does not contain clear definitions or regulations for carsharing. The introduction of carsharing has therefore been problematic and unpredictable because it is not clear how carsharing should be classified. In recent years, the City has taken the approach of classifying carsharing as a principal commercial use, similar to a traditional rental car agency, which is not allowed in residential districts as well as many commercial districts. While demand for carsharing in Cambridge has continued to grow, the lack of clear regulations has impeded the ability for carsharing services to grow and adapt.

### Proposed Approach in Petition

Some communities have taken the approach of explicitly defining carsharing as a principal use and regulating where that use is allowed or prohibited using conventional zoning. The Cambridge zoning proposal considered in 2009 also took that approach. The current zoning proposal takes a different approach by classifying carsharing as an accessory function to existing or new parking facilities. There are a few reasons for this new approach.

Carsharing is still an evolving system that has changed even over the past five years. In 2009, carsharing was still largely undefined, and Chapter 90 of the Massachusetts General Laws now includes a clear definition (which is the basis for the definitions in the proposed zoning). Moreover, new companies have entered the market and new types of services have been introduced, such as one-way trips. Because the system is continually evolving, it is preferable to have regulations that are flexible.

Classifying carsharing as a principal use would mean that each time a carsharing vehicle is parked in a particular space, that space is changed from a parking use to a carsharing use. Even when the use is allowed, unanticipated zoning complications frequently arise in situations of a change of use because many lots in Cambridge have existing non-conformities that can be triggered when the use is changed. This could be an issue not just when a carsharing vehicle is located in a particular space, but also when a carsharing vehicle is removed from that space and the space reverts back to normal parking. Carsharing vehicles may be moved from one location to another on a fairly regular basis, possibly creating new issues each time they are moved.

Classifying carsharing as an accessory function of parking has the benefit of greater flexibility and less chance of unanticipated conflicts. Appropriate regulations and limitations can still be imposed and changed over time as needed, but parking facilities will remain parking facilities and not changed to a different use category. Moreover, the purpose and function of carsharing is to provide a convenient alternative to owning and parking private passenger cars, and treating it like private parking – with limitations – reflects that purpose.

### Specific Zoning Provisions

The general limitations in the proposed zoning (see proposed Section 6.24.3) are primarily meant to ensure that parking spaces authorized for carsharing are legally established and available for active use

by users of the service. Using a parking space for carsharing would not allow activities such as storage of unused cars, repairs, office functions or other activities more typically associated with a commercial facility. Parking spaces used for carsharing would also need to be authorized by all owners with an interest in the property (such as condo associations, where applicable) and would need to be registered with the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department. Signage is not discussed in the petition, but may be worthy of consideration to ensure that reasonable signage is allowed to designate which spaces are used for carsharing without allowing excessive signage that could be construed as advertising.

The specific limitations (see proposed Sections 6.24.4 and 6.24.5) establish the extent to which principal use or accessory parking facilities can be used for carsharing.

- *Principal Use Parking (e.g., Commercial Garages and Pay Lots):*

The proposal sets no limitations on carsharing in authorized principal use parking facilities, which already allow commercial parking functions with few limitations. Most of those facilities tend to be used for commuter parking, and converting them to carsharing would not be in conflict with the City's overall transportation goals.

- *Accessory Parking for Non-Residential Uses:*

The proposal also does not limit carsharing in parking spaces that are accessory to non-residential uses, which would include parking lots for office employees, retail customers or institutional parking for colleges and universities. While some parking for employees and customers with private cars should be maintained, property owners and the private market are better suited to regulate the balance between carsharing and private parking based on the particulars of the use.

- *Accessory Parking For Residential Uses:*

More limitations are placed on parking facilities that are accessory to residential uses. While residents are likely to benefit the most from carsharing services, and growth in carsharing is expected to continue the trend of lower private car ownership and less demand for parking, there is also a concern that limiting the availability of off-street parking for residents with private cars might cause some residents to choose less expensive on-street parking options. At the large scale, any such impact will be counterbalanced by the reduced parking demand enabled by carsharing availability, but issues could potentially arise in specific locations.

As currently proposed, carsharing vehicles would be limited to no more than 30% of the parking spaces in an accessory residential parking facility, or two spaces, whichever is greater. Carsharing vehicles would be prohibited from single-family residential lots. The Planning Board could authorize more carsharing spaces by special permit. The intent is to allow a reasonable number of carsharing vehicles to serve residents of an area but not to allow large residential parking facilities to be converted wholesale to carsharing. In addition, the private market would provide some natural controls, because the number of carsharing vehicles needed to serve a particular area will be less than the number of parking spaces needed to serve residents with private vehicles, and carsharing services are unlikely to rent more parking spaces than needed to serve that area.