



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date:	January 3, 2017
Subject:	Zoning Amendments to Article 19.000 Related to Lighting in Project Review
Recommendation:	The Planning Board recommends ADOPTION with suggested modifications.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On November 1, 2016, the Board heard a presentation of the proposed municipal Outdoor Lighting Ordinance as well as proposed amendments to Article 19.000 of the Zoning Ordinance, which provides standards for the review of significant development projects. The Board's recommendation relates only to the proposed zoning amendments, since review of other municipal ordinances is not within the Board's purview.

The proposed zoning amendments would specifically call out façade, landscape and rooftop lighting as elements of the Planning Board's review of projects that are required to seek a special permit (which generally includes developments of at least 50,000 square feet of Gross Floor Area, as well as some smaller developments). While this review currently includes a broad range of design considerations, the Board believes that making these specific references would provide a valuable tool in our project review toolkit, and that it would provide clearer notice to developers that light trespass and light pollution are key public concerns that will be addressed in the review of new development.

Another part of the proposed zoning amendments would add provisions to the Building and Site Plan Requirements in Section 19.50, which are applied administratively to projects of 25,000 square feet or more that do not automatically require a special permit from the Planning Board. A developer may choose to seek a special permit in order to waive any of the requirements of Section 19.50, but developers are not expected to do so, and typically do not choose to undergo a special permit approval process if none is required. (Board members also understand that the provisions of a municipal Outdoor Lighting Ordinance, if ordained as currently proposed, would place additional restrictions on any new lighting and could not be modified or waived by the Planning Board.)

While the Board is generally supportive of the proposed changes to Section 19.50, there is some concern about the provision disallowing any lighting above the roof of a building, absent a special permit. There may be functional reasons why lighting above a rooftop is needed, such as for patios or decks, or for upper levels of parking garages, as opposed to lighting that is meant

only to serve a decorative purpose or to increase the visibility of the building. Rather than a complete prohibition, the Board believes it would be better to specify the allowed purposes of such “functional lighting” and incorporate standards to prevent light trespass, light pollution or other nuisance. The alternative is that projects that would otherwise not require special permits would have to appear before the Planning Board for a waiver, which is not necessarily in the public’s interest since the purpose of Section 19.50 is to provide clear design standards that can be applied administratively without requiring discretionary review. A special permit would still be required for those instances where it is appropriate or desirable to allow decorative or visibility purpose lighting above a rooftop, subject to the terms of an Outdoor Lighting Ordinance.

Therefore, the Board recommends that if the City Council advances these proposed zoning changes, then the Council should ask staff to develop alternative language to the proposed Section 19.511 with clearer standards for non-decorative lighting above the roof of a building, specifying the uses for which such lighting could be allowed (e.g., usable open space, parking) and standards for its design (e.g., shielding, directing away from abutting properties).

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. Theodore Cohen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "H" and a long, sweeping underline.

H Theodore Cohen, Chair.