



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date:	April 5, 2022
Subject:	Alewife Overlay Development Zoning Petition
Recommendation:	The Planning Board RECOMMENDS adoption, with additional considerations.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On March 8, 2022, the Planning Board (the “Board”) held a public hearing to discuss a Zoning Petition by the City Council to amend Section 20.90 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance to temporarily prohibit office and laboratory uses listed in Table 4.34 in Alewife Overlay Districts 1-6 until December 31st, 2023, or “...until such time as new Alewife District zoning is ordained by the Cambridge City Council, whichever shall be sooner” (the “Petition”). The Board heard a presentation from Councillor Carlone and Councillor Nolan, representing the petitioners, and received written materials from staff in the City’s Community Development Department (CDD).

Following the presentation, public comment, and discussion among Board members, the Planning Board voted to transmit a favorable recommendation on this Petition to the City Council, with some additional comments. The Board was generally supportive of the concept of a pause in development in the Alewife districts for the purpose of developing appropriate zoning. Many Board members expressed that it should be done urgently and with speed, and that a shorter one-year prohibition may be more appropriate given the recent completion of the Envision Alewife Planning study in 2019 and the general availability of existing urban design and zoning analysis. The Petition should additionally clarify that the prohibition is intended for all “new” office and laboratory development, as it might be read to also impact existing buildings and uses.

Some Board members questioned whether the pause should be a true moratorium applicable to all new development, and not limited to specific use categories. That approach might be more fair and might help lend a sense of urgency to implementing final zoning. However, other Board members noted that such a change could require readvertising the Petition and holding additional hearings, which would take more time.

Board members encouraged additional input from the Law Department on the issue described above as well as the following questions:

- Because it is written to temporarily prohibit all office and laboratory uses, how would the Petition impact existing office or laboratory uses that might propose modifications, as

well as buildings or uses that have received a special permit or building permit but not a certificate of occupancy?

- Are there limitations on the length of a temporary use prohibition, and can it later be extended? Some Board members expressed concerns that the prohibition might be extended beyond the specified timeframe if there is no resolution on final zoning.
- The Petition only affects one group of uses, and additional “carve-outs” were suggested during the public hearing that might make exceptions for development meeting certain criteria. How could such “carve-outs” affect the enforceability of the Petition?
- If this Petition impacts property values, potentially benefitting some property owners over others, does this raise specific concerns over the legal defensibility of the Petition?

The Planning Board voted with 6 members in favor of transmitting the above recommendation. One member voted “present,” and two members were absent.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

Catherine Preston Connolly

Catherine Preston Connolly, Chair.