



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date:	May 17, 2022
Subject:	Emissions Accounting Zoning Petition
Recommendation:	The Planning Board RECOMMENDS ADOPTION, with additional comments.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On March 29, 2022, the Planning Board (the “Board”) held a public hearing to discuss a Zoning Petition by the City Council to amend Article 22.000 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance to require applicants of most Green Building Projects to provide, as part of their compliance with the Net Zero Narrative in Section 22.25.1(c)2, an accounting of greenhouse gas emissions generated by construction, expected annual emissions generated by routine building operations, lifetime expected emissions until the year 2050, and total expected emissions (the “Petition”). This accounting would be estimated and provided for informational purposes only. As proposed, the requirements would not apply to any residential buildings that include affordable units, and the Petition identifies specific types of emissions that shall and shall not be included in each of these calculations. The Board heard a presentation from Councillor Zondervan and Councillor Carlone, 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.

Board members agreed that it is important for developers and designers to think about greenhouse gas emissions at the early stages of a project, and it will be helpful to make projections of greenhouse gas emissions available to the Planning Board and the public during a project’s review. Board members also remarked that there is a relatively new awareness of “embodied” greenhouse gas emissions in building materials, which has been identified through the City’s Net Zero planning efforts as a contributor to total emissions that should be studied.

The Board offered the following additional comments:


- Most Planning Board members agreed that because the intent of the Petition is to provide accurate information at the early design stage, it would be preferable to make the requirement applicable to all projects subject to Green Building Requirements, instead of excluding certain residential developments.

- Most Planning Board members also agreed that for the information to be most useful, the fullest possible accounting of greenhouse gas emissions should be undertaken, not necessarily excluding features such as renewable energy systems, electric vehicle infrastructure, and landscaping. Although such features may provide a positive environmental benefit, the embodied emissions for the whole project should be included to the extent practicable to provide a full picture of the project's net impacts.

Board members recommended that City staff provide a detailed review of the Petition text, and suggest any modifications that would improve its clarity and application.

The Planning Board voted with seven members in favor of transmitting the above recommendation. Two members were absent.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary T. Flynn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "M".

Mary Flynn, Vice Chair.