



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: May 29, 2024

Subject: Ronayne, et al., Zoning Petition

Recommendation: The Planning Board makes comments with no recommendation.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On May 21, 2024, the Planning Board (the "Board") held a public hearing to discuss a Zoning Petition by Joseph S. Ronayne, et. al., (the "Petitioners") to amend Articles 4.000, 5.000, and 8.000 of the Zoning Ordinance with the intent to "allow multifamily residential uses across the city and eliminate footnotes that further restrict residential development within fully residential districts and to bring Res A and B uses in line with existing Res C uses" (the "Petition").

The Board received written materials before the hearing from Community Development Department (CDD) staff, heard a presentation from Joseph Ronayne representing the Petitioners, heard public comment, and asked clarifying questions of the Petitioners and CDD staff. After discussion among Board members, the Board voted unanimously to send the following comments to the City Council with no positive or negative recommendation.

All Board members favored removing exclusionary restrictions in zoning and allowing multifamily housing citywide. Board members expressed pride in the Cambridge community for its shared value of housing equity. It was noted that this issue has been under discussion for some time, and the Petition proposes a moderate approach that would achieve the underlying goal quickly. Some Board members found this straightforward approach appealing, at least as a symbolic gesture. Board members also appreciated that the Petition addresses accessory apartments and elderly-oriented congregate housing in addition to multifamily housing.

However, Board members expressed concern that the Petition might not be going far enough in some areas, and raised some issues for further study. The following issues were identified:

- The Petition does not address setbacks and open space, which can impact the feasibility of housing even if density is increased. Some Board members were concerned that those constraints might not result in that much additional housing. Board members generally expressed a desire to study setback and open space requirements, to ensure that they create meaningful opportunities for multifamily housing while also addressing the importance of open space and tree canopy. Board members were also interested in more study of the likely physical outcomes of the proposed changes.
- Some Board members suggested that further increases in height or density may be considered. It was noted that housing in some neighborhoods of the city tends to have

existing densities somewhat higher than 1.00 FAR. Some Board members also commented that additional height might be necessary to make it possible to build substantial amounts of new multifamily housing.

- Several Board members raised the issue of affordability, noting that an important part of the City's housing policy has been to create new housing that includes affordable units. Although many people are optimistic that more housing will help mitigate housing costs more broadly, some Board members were not convinced that this approach would result in affordable housing given the already high costs of market-rate housing. Moreover, some of the areas most affected by the Petition are among the more expensive in Cambridge, and further increases land values could impact opportunities to build affordable housing under the Affordable Housing Overlay. Board members expressed an interest in further study of how this proposed change would impact the ability to address affordable housing. Some Board members also suggested that other, non-zoning actions at the state or local levels may be required along with zoning to address housing affordability.

Ultimately, Board members chose not to transmit a positive or negative recommendation, citing the following process concerns:

- The issues raised above likely cannot be resolved in the context of the current Petition. If the Petition were amended to address issues such as setbacks, open space, density, height, and affordability, those amendments would likely be beyond the scope of the advertised Petition, which would need to be refiled and advertised for further hearings before adoption could be considered.
- Separately from this Petition, the City Council's Housing Committee has been engaged in discussions around this topic. Board members agreed that it would be preferable to coalesce around one cohesive plan led by policymakers rather than engaging in separate, parallel processes. The Board encourages the Housing Committee to act expeditiously after considering the relevant issues, and to consider policies and ordinances in addition to zoning. Board members would appreciate an opportunity to learn more about the Housing Committee's work as it continues.

The Planning Board voted 6-0 in favor of transmitting the above report.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,



Tom Sieniewicz, Vice Chair.