

**MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL
ORDINANCE COMMITTEE
Tuesday, July 21, 2026**

ORDINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Councillor McGovern, Chair
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler, Chair
Councillor Al-Zubi
Vice Mayor Azeem
Councillor Flaherty
Councillor Nolan
Councillor Simmons
Councillor Zusy
Mayor Siddiqui

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council's Ordinance Committee was held on Tuesday, July 21, 2026. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025 adopted by Massachusetts General Court and approved by the Governor, the City is authorized to use remote participation. This public meeting was hybrid, allowing participation in person, in the Sullivan Chamber, 2nd Floor, City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA and by remote participation via Zoom.

At the request of the Co-Chair, Interim City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Vice Mayor Azeem – Present/Remote
Councillor Flaherty – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Nolan – Absent*
Councillor Simmons – Absent*
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Zusy – Absent*
Mayor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Present – 6, Absent – 3. Quorum established.

*Councillor Nolan was present in the Sullivan Chamber at 3:05p.m.

*Councillor Simmons was present and remote at 3:06p.m., then in the Sullivan Chamber at 3:11p.m.

*Councillor Zusy was present in the Sullivan Chamber at 3:04p.m.

Co-Chair Sobrinho-Wheeler offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was on a Zoning Petition by Douglas P. Brown, et al., to amend the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance in Articles 2.000, 5.000, 6.000, 11.000, and 19.000 with the intent of amending height, setback, and open space requirements, adding step back and building depth and width requirements, and adding minimum off-street parking requirements for residential uses in Residence C-1 districts, including the Affordable Housing Overlay, as well as reducing the Project Review Special Permit threshold from 75,000 to 20,000 square feet for residential uses in Residence C-1 districts, among other changes. Present at the meeting was Melissa Peters, Assistant City

Manager for the Community Development Department (CDD), Jen Caira, Deputy Chief of Planning, Evan Spetrini, Senior Manager for Zoning and Development, ReBeca Mapure, Associate Zoning Planner, and Megan Bayer, City Solicitor. The Petitioner, Doug Brown, was present via Zoom.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Doug Brown who gave a presentation titled “Zoning Amendments to Promote Sensible Neighborhood Development.” The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Melissa Peters who offered brief opening remarks. Evan Spetrini provided a summary of CDD’s memo relative to the proposed amendments (Attachment A). Also included in the Agenda Packet was a report from the Planning Board on the Petition.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler opened public comment.

Young Kim, 17 Norris Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Carolyn Fuller, 12 Douglass Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Bill McAvinney, 12 Douglass Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Carl Nagy-Koechlin, 52 Carruth Street, spoke in opposition to the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Margaret Donnelly Moran, 362 Green Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Suzanne Blier, 5 Fuller Place, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Joe Adiletta, 68 Walker Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Sara Barcan, 280 Franklin Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Carol Lynn Alpert, 99 Cushing Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Marilee Meyer, 10 Dana Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Susan Kale, 5 Foch Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

David Hattis, 393 Broadway, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Susan Schlesinger, 34 Glenwood Avenue, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Helen Walker, 43 Linnaean Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

David Halperin, 14 Valentine Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Lee Farris, 269 Norfolk Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Neheet Trivedi, 41 Magoun Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Karen Brushett, 51 Cushing Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Jessica Sheehan, Plymouth Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Justin Saif, East Cambridge, MA, spoke in opposition to the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Patrick Barrett spoke in opposition to the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Heather Hoffman, 213 Hurley Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke in support of the proposed amendments in the Doug Brown et al. Petition.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor McGovern who made a motion to close public comment.

Interim City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Flaherty – Yes

Councillor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Simmons – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Siddiqui – Yes

Yes – 9. Motion passed.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Zusy who shared concerns related to the Planning Board's review and recommendation of the Brown Petition. Councillor Zusy raised concerns related to the increase in demolitions, the loss of trees, impact in neighborhoods, safety issues, and how the current language in the Multifamily Housing (MFH) Ordinance encourages luxury development, not affordable housing. Councillor Zusy shared her support for the Brown Petition, noting that it provides improvements through setbacks, stepbacks, open space, parking, and design review.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who pointed out that MFH was a big policy change within the city that should have continued public discussion for future amendments. The Vice Mayor added that the City Council has spent a significant amount of time discussing issues and concerns, such as parking and permitting, among others, and supports having those continued conversations. Vice Mayor Azeem shared that he was in opposition to the Brown Petition and the proposed changes to the Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO), adding that it could impact state funding and delay or prevent affordable housing projects. Vice Mayor Azeem moved to forward the Doug Brown et al. Petition to the full City Council with a negative recommendation. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler shared the Committee would have further discussion and return to the motion after others had the chance to speak.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who shared that she echoes everything that the Vice Mayor said.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Flaherty who emphasized that the housing challenges in Cambridge should be looked at as a broader regional issue. Councillor Flaherty highlighted the difference between affordable housing, affordability, and MFH. He pointed out that the current MFH Ordinance is encouraging developers to replace naturally occurring affordable housing and displacing middle-income residents and not helping with affordability. Councillor Flaherty shared his support for recommendations within the Brown Petition, such as changes to open space, setbacks, and design review, but shared concerns about moving the Petition forward because it may impact future City Council amendments to MFH. Councillor Flaherty urged the City Council to consider making thoughtful changes that keep neighborhood character and create affordability that would better help the community and families.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Nolan who noted that the Petition brought forward important concerns to consider related to demolition, the loss of naturally occurring affordable housing, open space, and neighborhood impacts. Councillor Nolan agreed with Vice Mayor Azeem regarding the potential impacts to the AHO. Councillor Nolan also agreed with having continued conversations related to MFH and future amendments and recommendations from CDD. Councillor Nolan asked if a negative vote on the Petition would prevent the City Council from considering future zoning amendments as well as more information related to naturally affordable housing and demolition. Megan Bayer provided a detailed overview of state zoning laws and the impact of negative action taken by the City Council. Megan Bayer added

that it would not prevent consideration of substantially different amendments. Melissa Peters shared that the City has seen an increase in demolition and applications since the adoption of MFH. Melissa Peters explained that a small amount of building permits have been issued because the permitting and design process takes time, adding that it is still too early to fully evaluate the Ordinance's long-term impacts. Melissa Peters pointed out that increased housing development was an intended outcome of the Ordinance. Councillor Nolan shared that she would support moving the Petition forward with a negative recommendation.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Mayor Siddiqui who made a motion to extend the meeting to 5:15p.m.

Interim City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Flaherty – Yes

Councillor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Simmons – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Siddiqui – Yes

Yes – 9. Motion passed.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Mayor Siddiqui who shared that she would also like to understand more about the concerns raised regarding the loss of naturally occurring affordable housing. Mayor Siddiqui agreed with previous Committee Members related to the proposed changes impacting the AHO and would not support the Petition. Mayor Siddiqui shared it is important for the City Council to continue to work on amendments that are already being discussed and considered regarding MFH before taking on new recommendations. Mayor Siddiqui added that she agreed that the Petition brought forward important issues that can be discussed in the future.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor McGovern who asked for clarification regarding how the data was determined that many of the demolished units were naturally occurring affordable housing, referenced on the presentation slide titled “A Case Study of 85 Current Projects”. Doug Brown responded and provided an overview of the data and how it was analyzed, adding that the demolished properties were older buildings that provided affordable housing and were replaced with market-rate developments that do not provide affordable units. Doug Brown shared concerns related to the displacement of existing tenants, adding that smaller projects are limiting the number of new affordable units that can be created. Councillor McGovern acknowledged the concerns raised by the Petitioner and agreed with previous speakers that concerns related to unit sizes, parking, demolitions, and permitting should continue to be discussed through review of the MFH Ordinance. Councillor McGovern also agreed with the concerns raised related to impacts to the AHO, emphasizing that it is an important affordable housing resource. Councillor McGovern shared he supported moving forward with a negative recommendation.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler reviewed the process of how the Committee can move forward with the Petition.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who made a motion to forward the Doug Brown et al. Petition to the full City Council with a negative recommendation.

Interim City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Flaherty – No

Councillor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Simmons – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Zusy – No

Mayor Siddiqui – Yes

Yes – 7, No – 2. Motion passed.

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler recognized Councillor Simmons who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Interim City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Flaherty – Yes

Councillor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Simmons – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Siddiqui – Yes

Yes – 9. Motion passed.

The Ordinance Committee adjourned at approximately 5:10p.m.

Attachment A – Memo from CDD

Attachment B – Communications from the public

Attachment C – SIGNED Planning Board Report Doug Brown 20260720

Clerk's Note: The City of Cambridge/22 City View records every City Council meeting and every City Council Committee meeting. The video for this meeting can be viewed at:

[Jul 21, 2026 Ordinance Committee - Cambridge, MA](#)



CDD
Community
Development



To: Cambridge Planning Board

From: Community Development Department (CDD) Staff

Date: July 8, 2026

Re: **Brown, et al. Zoning Petition**

Overview

Petitioner: Douglas Brown, et al. (group of 10 or more registered voters), represented by Douglas P. Brown

Zoning Articles: 2.000, 5.000, 6.000, 11.000, and 19.000, Sections 5.22.1, 5.28.25, 5.40, 6.31, 6.35.1, 6.44, 11.207.5.2.1, 11.207.5.2.3, 11.207.5.2.4, 11.207.6.1, 19.23, and Table 5.1

Petition Summary: Amend height, setback, and open space requirements, introduce step-back and building depth and width requirements, and reinstate off-street parking minimums for some residential uses in Residence C-1 districts, including the Affordable Housing Overlay, as well as reducing the Project Review Special Permit threshold from 75,000 to 20,000 square feet for residential uses in Residence C-1 districts, among other changes that would impact religious uses in C-1 districts and AHO citywide.

Planning Board Action: Recommendation to City Council.

Memo Contents: Summary of the proposed zoning, background information on the topic of the Petition, and considerations and comments from staff.

CDD Staff Report

The stated intent of the petition is of “promoting sensible neighborhood development by adjusting height, setbacks, parking, open space, and design review requirements.”

Summary of Proposed Changes

The table below summarizes the changes proposed by the petitioners, highlighting applicability in C-1 Zoning Districts, the AHO, and citywide.

Subject	Current Zoning	Proposed Zoning
Maximum height for residential uses and AHO in C-1	- Base height is 4 stories / 45 ft - Increase up to 6 stories / 74 ft if: a) Inclusionary housing applies b) Lot area $\geq$ 5,000 sq ft - AHO in C-1 – 9 stories / 100 ft	- Base height is 4 stories / 45 ft - Increase up to 6 stories / 74 ft if: a) Inclusionary housing applies b) Lot area $\geq$ 5,000 sq ft c) All abutters exceed 3 stories - AHO in C-1 – 6 stories / 74 ft
Minimum setbacks for residential & religious uses in C-1 and AHO citywide	- Side or Rear min. 5 ft - Side yard reduction allowed if total of two sides $\geq$ 10 ft and there’s no existing abutting building within 10 ft - AHO citywide – Side no min. - Rear min. 5 ft	- Side or Rear min. 10 ft - Side yard reduction to 5 ft allowed if total of two sides $\geq$ 15 ft and there’s no existing abutting building within 10 ft - AHO citywide - Side min. 10 ft (can be reduced per above) - Rear min. 5 ft (no change)
Minimum step-backs for residential & religious uses in C-1 and AHO citywide	No requirements	5 ft side and rear step-back per floor above 3rd story
Maximum lot depth and width for residential and religious uses in C-1 and AHO citywide	No limitations on façades based on lot depth or width	60% of lot depth for side façades 80% of lot width for rear façade
Minimum Parking in C-1, including AHO	0 spaces per unit - Reduction allowed by BZA special permit (retained from prior zoning)	0.5 space per dwelling unit for buildings with 4+units - Reduction still allowed, but affordable housing not included as a basis for reduction

Open Space (OS) citywide, including AHO	• Private OS may include at-grade space or balconies/decks, with min. dimensions • Publicly Beneficial OS may include open-air or covered areas like loggias/arcades • AHO exempt from Private OS dimensional limitations • Waivers for non-residential to residential conversions by-right	• Private OS must be at grade, cannot include balconies/decks • Private and Publicly Beneficial OS redefined to be a “portion of a lot” and exclude “portion of a structure” • Waivers for non-residential to residential conversions by Planning Board special permit
Project Review Special Permit	• 75,000 sf for residential uses citywide (except AHO)	• 20,000 sf for residential uses in C-1 (except AHO)

Effects of the Petition

Several provisions within the petition may have major substantive implications for residential building feasibility, mainly for AHO and inclusionary projects.

In general, the petition would bring the AHO development standards significantly closer to those of the base zoning. The reduction of maximum AHO height in C-1 districts from nine to six stories, new parking requirements, and the changes to setback and open space requirements, combined with the introduction of a new step-back, lot depth, and lot width requirements that would apply citywide, including within designated AHO corridors and squares, remove most of the current incentives for 100% affordability. There are currently 3 AHO projects in the pipeline located in C-1 districts that could potentially be impacted by this amendment. If passed, such projects may require redesigning, additional review, and adjustments to funding and timelines. Other proposed changes that would apply to AHO projects citywide could impact any AHO units in the pipeline without building permits.

Another large impact would be on inclusionary development. Reintroducing parking requirements would substantially impact feasibility. Requiring that abutters exceed three stories for inclusionary projects to qualify for the 6-story height allowance would severely limit opportunities for 6-story development since buildings that are 4 stories or more are less common in C-1 districts and “all abutters” would need to meet that standard. Additional limits on open space, lot depth and width, and step-back requirements compound the setback requirements in ways that would make 6-story inclusionary development even less feasible, especially on lots closer to the 5,000 sf threshold within C-1 districts. Most inclusionary housing proposals exceed 20,000 sf and would therefore become subject to special permits with risk of appeal instead of the current advisory review process. Threat of appeal would likely dissuade most if not all of these proposals from advancing. There are several inclusionary housing projects that have been through different advisory review stages that might need to significantly adjust their design, funding, and schedules.

The petition’s full components are outlined below.

Reintroducing Off-Street Parking Minimum

The City eliminated minimum off-street parking requirements for all uses in all districts in 2019. This petition proposes reinstating a parking minimum of 0.5 space per dwelling unit for developments with four

or more units in C-1 districts, including AHO projects. The petition also eliminates the existing special permit mechanism that allows income-restricted housing to reduce required parking when it threatens feasibility. Because parking spaces, required or not, when provided, must comply with location and dimensional requirements in the zoning, reintroducing a minimum parking requirement may substantially increase the number of residential projects requiring a BZA special permit or variance to satisfy both parking quantity and location constraints. This provision could create a significant barrier for both AHO and inclusionary projects that have been relying on parking flexibility to provide zero to limited parking options.

Changing Inclusionary Height Standards

The petition introduces a new provision requiring that all abutters to the property exceed three stories for an inclusionary housing project to qualify for the six-story height allowance. This criterion may be difficult to interpret and implement as clarification is needed regarding what constitutes an abutter and whether it applies to all structures on abutting lots, including accessory structures. The number of lots over 5,000 sf in C-1 districts that would meet this additional standard is not currently known, and the requirement would significantly limit the number of projects able to utilize the inclusionary height provision.

Introducing Upper-Story Step-backs, Lot Depth and Lot Width

The proposed limits of 60% of lot depth for side façades and 80% of lot width for rear façades compound setbacks and create a significant reduction in buildable mass. The requirement for a 5 ft side and rear step-back above the third story will further reduce the floor plates of upper-stories and may produce tapered building forms since the step-back is not measured from the property line but from an already reduced floor below. The combination of increased setbacks, step-backs and façade depth/width limits may preclude a viable sixth-story floor plate and substantially limit fifth-story depth and width, mainly for smaller lots. Additional clarification may be necessary on how the lot width provision would apply only to rear facades and not to front facades.

Changing Project Review Threshold

The petition proposes reducing the threshold for Project Review Special Permit for residential developments in C-1 districts from 75,000 sf to 20,000 sf of Gross Floor Area. Under existing zoning, most residential projects in C-1 are permitted through different advisory review processes and do not require a special permit. Lowering the threshold in C-1 could subject a substantial portion of ongoing and future inclusionary multifamily development to more extensive special permit review requirements.

Modifying Open Space

The petition proposes several changes to the definitions and dimensional requirements for Open Space that would be applicable citywide, including limitations on what may qualify as Publicly Beneficial or Private Open Space. Under current zoning, balconies, decks, and roof areas may qualify as Private Open Space, and Publicly Beneficial Open Space may include open-air or covered areas like loggias and arcades. Multifamily buildings often rely on these spaces above grade to provide usable open areas for residents. The petition removes balconies and decks allowances, restricting Private and Public Open Space to portions of a lot at grade. In combination with the petition's proposed setback and façade-depth/width requirements, the open space revisions could further constrain the layout of buildings, circulation areas, and exacerbate the disproportionate access to usable outdoor space for residents of multifamily buildings. For conversion from non-residential to residential use, amendments to Section 5.28.2 to require a Planning

Board special permit might complicate scenarios where conversions would otherwise be feasible as-of-right.

Council Discussions on Residential Zoning and Development

The City Council's Housing Committee and Neighborhood and Long-Term Planning Committee have been meeting to discuss the effects of the 2025 Multifamily Zoning Amendments since early in 2026. On June 8, 2026, the Council adopted a policy order requesting findings, options, and recommendations regarding potential zoning amendments. On June 25, 2026, CDD presented an overview of possible zoning changes that could be considered by Council, which will be discussed further in future meetings.

CDD's findings show that there has been substantial interest in new multifamily housing development since the Multifamily Zoning Amendments. Many new multifamily projects are advancing in neighborhoods which previously had little to no housing growth. There also continues to be a strong pipeline of all-affordable development advancing through the AHO. These early findings are consistent with the intent of the amendments, but long-term trends would take time to determine. Therefore, CDD would not recommend additional major zoning amendments until there has been more time to understand the emerging patterns of development.

The potential changes presented by CDD are intended to preserve the core elements of the 2025 amendments: enabling multifamily housing equitably throughout the city, as-of-right permitting, simple and flexible development standards, and incentives for inclusionary housing development. Potential changes mostly have to do with specific issues around site design, particularly how setbacks and open space relate to standards that need to be met in zoning and other requirements including tree protection and stormwater regulations. CDD also discussed possible approaches to concerns that have been raised about the sizes of new units and neighbor information. CDD did not suggest changes to the AHO, which would continue to allow more flexibility than base zoning.

Erwin, Nicole

Attachment B

From: Young Kim <ycknorris@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, July 21, 2026 4:00 PM
To: McGovern, Marc; Sobrinho-Wheeler, Jivan; Siddiqui, Sumbul; Azeem, Burhan; Al-Zubi, Ayah; Flaherty, Timothy; Nolan, Patricia; Simmons, Denise; Zusy, Catherine; City Clerk
Cc: Huang, Yi-An
Subject: Re: Recommendation: Defer Further MFH Zoning Amendments; Strengthen Interim Implementation Oversight

Co-Chairs McGovern and Sobrinho-Wheeler, and Members of the Ordinance Committee:

For your reference, below are the oral comments I delivered during today's hearing on the Brown Petition.

Because public comment was limited to two minutes, I was unable to cover my full prepared remarks. During my testimony, I also made an extemporaneous comment regarding the difficulty of evaluating one set of MFH zoning amendments while another set is reportedly being developed. I have polished that thought slightly below for clarity while preserving the substance of what I intended to convey.

Young Kim, 17 Norris Street

Thank you, Mr. Brown, for your efforts and an excellent presentation. I couldn't agree more with the principles you've outlined.

However, I respectfully recommend that the Committee **defer further MFH zoning amendments, including the Brown Petition, while immediately improving implementation oversight.**

How can the Committee fairly evaluate Mr. Brown's proposed amendments when it doesn't yet know what additional MFH amendments CDD is developing? The minutes or report from the last Housing and Neighborhood & Long-Term Planning Joint Committee meeting are not yet available.

I agree with the Planning Board that now is not the time for additional piecemeal zoning amendments. But delaying legislative changes should not delay correcting implementation problems that are already affecting neighborhoods.

Cambridge is enacting multiple major zoning initiatives in a piecemeal manner. The MFH Ordinance, Affordable Housing Overlay, Mass Ave Corridor, Cambridge Street Corridor, and other major zoning initiatives should be **planned, implemented, monitored, and evaluated as one cohesive system—not as separate ordinances. Parking and community engagement are just two examples of issues that should be addressed holistically across all zoning pathways, rather than separately for each ordinance.**

At the same time, the City should immediately strengthen **Article 19 Staff Advisory Review, Footnote 37 Neighborhood Meeting procedures, demolition oversight, hazardous-material protection, public**

notification, interdepartmental coordination, and establish one authoritative redevelopment project record.

I also recommend a temporary moratorium on demolition involving potential hazardous-material exposure until ISD completes a comprehensive review of its oversight procedures. The recent experiences at **30 Dudley Street** and **110 Reed Street** demonstrate why this is necessary.

My recommendation is simple: defer further piecemeal zoning amendments for now, but improve implementation oversight immediately.

Thank you.

On Tue, Jul 21, 2026 at 1:21 PM Young Kim <ycknorris@gmail.com> wrote:

Co-Chairs McGovern and Sobrinho-Wheeler, and Members of the Ordinance Committee:

I respectfully submit the following comments and recommendations regarding the Brown Zoning Petition currently before you for consideration.

The fundamental question before the Committee is not whether individual provisions of the MFH Ordinance should be amended. The question is whether the City has acquired sufficient experience, reliable data, and an adequate understanding of how the existing ordinance is functioning as an integrated legislative and implementation system. In my opinion, it has not.

Recommendations

1. Decline to adopt the Brown Petition in its present form.
2. Direct CDD to conduct a comprehensive review of the MFH Ordinance as an integrated legislative and implementation system before proposing additional amendments.
3. Immediately correct administrative deficiencies that do not require zoning amendments, including Article 19 implementation, Footnote 37 procedures, demolition oversight, public notification, interdepartmental coordination, and creation of one authoritative redevelopment project record.
4. Recommend a temporary moratorium on demolition involving structures with potential hazardous-material exposure—including both complete building demolition and substantial interior demolition—until ISD's hazardous-material oversight has been comprehensively reviewed.

Why

The Planning Board unanimously recommended against adopting the Brown Petition at this time and instead supported allowing the ordinance to continue while redevelopment trends are monitored and any future amendments are considered through a comprehensive process. I agree with that recommendation. However, postponing legislative changes should not postpone correcting implementation failures that are already affecting neighborhoods.

Legislative vs Administrative Reform

The City should pursue two parallel paths.

First, conduct a comprehensive review of Cambridge's evolving zoning framework as an integrated legislative system. Cambridge is enacting multiple major zoning initiatives in a piecemeal manner. Rather than implementing and evaluating each initiative independently, these zoning changes—including the Multifamily Housing (MFH) Ordinance, Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO), Mass Ave Corridor, Cambridge Street Corridor, and other major zoning amendments—should be planned, implemented, monitored, and evaluated as one cohesive and integrated system.

These initiatives are not independent. They collectively shape housing production, neighborhood character, transportation, infrastructure, demolition, environmental sustainability, historic preservation, public facilities, and community engagement. Evaluating them individually risks overlooking cumulative impacts, unintended consequences, and conflicting objectives. Before additional major zoning amendments are adopted, the City should understand how these initiatives interact and perform as a unified legislative framework.

Second, immediately improve administrative implementation that does not require amendments to the Zoning Ordinance. This includes strengthening Article 19 Staff Advisory Review, Footnote 37 Neighborhood Meeting procedures, demolition oversight, hazardous-material protection, public notification, enforcement, transparency, interdepartmental coordination, and establishing one authoritative redevelopment project record.

By pursuing these two parallel paths, Cambridge can avoid premature piecemeal legislative amendments while immediately addressing implementation deficiencies that are already affecting neighborhoods, public confidence, and public safety.

Hazardous-Material Oversight

The experiences at 30 Dudley Street and 110 Reed Street demonstrate that hazardous-material concerns can arise during both complete building demolition and substantial interior demolition. Before additional demolition permits involving potential hazardous-material exposure are issued, the City should complete a comprehensive review of ISD policies, inspection procedures, interdepartmental coordination, public notification, and criteria for resuming work after a stop-work order.

Conclusion

The appropriate response is neither immediate piecemeal zoning amendment nor inaction. The Committee should defer legislative changes until the ordinance has been comprehensively evaluated while acting immediately to improve implementation, protect public health, strengthen oversight, and restore public confidence.

Respectfully yours,

Young Kim

Norris Street

Erwin, Nicole

From: Clara Fraden <cfraden@cambridge-housing.org>
Sent: Monday, July 13, 2026 4:59 PM
To: City Council; City Clerk
Cc: Matthew Pike; Margaret Moran; Joe Bednar
Subject: Fw: Planning Board - July 14, 2026 - Written comments
Attachments: Cambridge_Planning-Dept_Comments_2026-07-14.pdf

Hello City Councillors,

Please find the Cambridge Housing Authority's comments on the proposed Brown Petition for the Planning Board tomorrow evening attached. I want to make sure the City Council receives the comments, as well. We have urged the Planning Board to give the petition a negative recommendation, and I urge you all to vote it down at the summer council meeting. Our testimony details the devastating impacts the petition would have had on past projects and the similar negative impacts the petition will have on CHA's pipeline of affordable homes in Cambridge if passed.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or if CHA can help walk through some of the impacts in more detail.

All the best,
Clara


Cambridge Housing Authority
Clara Fraden
Chief Executive Officer
(617) 520-6228
www.cambridge-housing.org
[CHA's Impact in 2025](#)



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From: Matthew Pike <mpike@cambridge-housing.org>
Sent: Monday, July 13, 2026 4:48 PM
To: Planning Board Comment <Planningboardcomment@Cambridgema.gov>
Cc: Clara Fraden <cfraden@cambridge-housing.org>
Subject: RE: Planning Board - July 14, 2026 - Written comments

Please find Cambridge Housing Authority's comments to the Planning Board regarding the Brown et. al. Petition to amend the Zoning Ordinance on the agenda for tomorrow's meeting.

Thank you.



Matthew Pike

Director of Strategic Initiatives

617-520-6345

www.cambridge-housing.org

[CHA's Impact in 2025](#)



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From: Planning Board Comment <Planningboardcomment@Cambridgema.gov>

Sent: Monday, July 13, 2026 4:35 PM

To: Matthew Pike <mpike@cambridge-housing.org>

Subject: RE: Planning Board - July 14, 2026 - Written comments

****CAUTION: This email is from outside CHA****

No worries Matthew. We'll plan to forward your comment to the Board if you can send it by 5 pm today.

Sincerely,

Swaathi Joseph

Zoning Project Planner, Zoning and Development

sjoseph@cambridgema.gov | 617-349-4668

Pronouns: she series

City of Cambridge | Community Development Department

344 Broadway, Third Floor

Cambridge, MA 02139

www.cambridgema.gov/cdd

From: Matthew Pike <mpike@cambridge-housing.org>

Sent: Monday, July 13, 2026 4:29 PM

To: Planning Board Comment <Planningboardcomment@Cambridgema.gov>

Subject: RE: Planning Board - July 14, 2026 - Written comments

I apologize, Ms. Joseph, for not including "Ms." in my previous message. So sorry!

Best,

Matthew



Matthew Pike

Director of Strategic Initiatives

617-520-6345

www.cambridge-housing.org

[CHA's Impact in 2025](#)



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From: Planning Board Comment <Planningboardcomment@Cambridgema.gov>

Sent: Monday, July 13, 2026 1:52 PM

To: Matthew Pike <mpike@cambridge-housing.org>

Subject: FW: Planning Board - July 14, 2026 - Written comments

****CAUTION: This email is from outside CHA****

Matthew,

You can email comments by 5:00 P.M. today to planningboardcomment@cambridgema.gov.

Sincerely,

Swaathi Joseph

Zoning Project Planner, Zoning and Development

sjoseph@cambridgema.gov | 617-349-4668

Pronouns: she series

City of Cambridge | Community Development Department

344 Broadway, Third Floor

Cambridge, MA 02139

www.cambridgema.gov/cdd

From: City Clerk <cityclerk@Cambridgema.gov>

Sent: Monday, July 13, 2026 1:20 PM

To: Planning Board Comment <Planningboardcomment@Cambridgema.gov>

Subject: FW: Planning Board - July 14, 2026 - Written comments

Your request has been forwarded to the Planning Board.

Lori Perez

City Clerk's office

From: Matthew Pike <mpike@cambridge-housing.org>

Sent: Monday, July 13, 2026 12:54 PM

To: City Clerk <cityclerk@Cambridgema.gov>

Subject: Planning Board - July 14, 2026 - Written comments

Good afternoon,

I'm hoping you might provide me with instructions for submitting written comments or testimony regarding the proposed petition to amend the Zoning Ordinance submitted on June 3rd, 2026.

Cambridge Housing Authority would like to provide comments. I understand there is a deadline of 5:00 p.m. today.

Could you please provide the correct email address for submission, if it is something other than this one? Are there any additional requirements or restrictions to consider?

Thanks so much,
Matthew Pike



Matthew Pike
Director of Strategic Initiatives
617-520-6345
www.cambridge-housing.org
[CHA's Impact in 2025](#)



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July 13, 2026

City of Cambridge
Community Development Department
344 Broadway, Third Floor
Cambridge, MA 02139

Sent via email to planningboardcomment@cambridgema.gov

To Whom It May Concern:

The Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) is writing in strong opposition to the Brown et. al. Zoning Petition, which if passed, would eviscerate the carefully considered and effectively implemented Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO).

The AHO was born of the City's and the public's shared deep concern and desire to increase housing affordability in Cambridge. The amendments to the AHO proposed in the Brown Petition would dramatically revise the AHO's height, setback, parking, open space and design review requirements. This would not just turn back the clock on the very opportunities the AHO has created and diminish the AHO's effectiveness moving forward. Rather than meeting its stated goal of "promoting sensible neighborhood development," the Brown Petition would seriously and detrimentally impact the creation of thoughtfully designed and affordable housing in Cambridge.

The CHA has completed the AHO Planning Board process on three projects:

- 1) Corcoran Park Phase 1 is finishing design and will start the permitting process this fall for a January 2027 construction start.
- 2) Jefferson Park Federal is in construction and residents will start moving in this fall.
- 3) 116 Norfolk was completed in 2025 and is fully occupied.

In addition, the Brown Petition's proposed changes to the AHO would be incompatible with several CHA redevelopments now in the early planning stages, including parcels CHA recently purchased with the support of the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust. The practical effect would be significant: modest increases in affordable units on existing CHA sites would become far more difficult, and meaningful new affordable housing on newly acquired parcels could become impossible.

In the interest of time, we'd like to focus our comments on Corcoran Park and 116 Norfolk. Please find further details on how the proposed Brown Petition impacts CHA projects attached for reference.

Corcoran Park Phase 1 would lose at least 12 of 67 homes (18% decrease)

After a comprehensive planning process with residents and neighbors that spanned over two years, CHA presented Corcoran Park Phase 1 to the Planning Board in late 2025. The proposed design more than doubles the number of homes on the parcel from 29 to 67 apartments for families. The Board largely praised the plan for balancing resident and neighborhood concerns with a contextual design, however, other members provided strong feedback that our proposal didn't increase density enough and urged CHA to build higher and create additional affordable homes on the site. The proposed Brown Amendment would take the property in the opposite direction, decreasing the maximum allowed density by at least 12 affordable homes given the requirements of 60% lot-depth setbacks and step backs for four-story buildings.

116 Norfolk would lose at least 36 of 62 homes (58% decrease)

CHA similarly completed a comprehensive resident and neighborhood design process for the revitalization of 116 Norfolk as part of the AHO process. The design included a complete restoration of the historic former convent there and new addition built over an existing parking lot onsite, replacing 37 Single-Room-Occupancy units with 62 studio apartments for individuals transitioning out of homelessness and temporary shelters set up during the pandemic. The project has been celebrated for its thoughtful design and preservation of open space (44% private open space). 116 Norfolk received a Preservation Award from the Cambridge Historic Commission this year, as well. Under the proposed petition, none of the new addition could have been built given the required 0.5 parking ratio. At best, Cambridge would have lost 36 deeply-affordable homes and at worst, this life-changing resource for Cambridge residents would not have been possible altogether given financing constraints.

Cambridge residents make clear what is at stake. Before moving into 116 Norfolk, Christina was sleeping outdoors, carrying her belongings in a backpack, and struggling to stay safe and stable. Her new apartment gave her more than shelter — it gave her rest, safety, dignity and the ability to begin rebuilding her life. These are the real human consequences of zoning changes that make projects like 116 Norfolk impossible.

CHA strongly urges a negative recommendation

In sum, the Brown Petition would significantly weaken the AHO, one of Cambridge's most important tools for creating affordable housing. It would reduce the number of homes CHA can build, jeopardize thoughtful projects shaped through years of resident and neighborhood engagement and make it harder to create the kinds of deeply affordable and supportive housing that change people's lives. CHA strongly urges the Planning Board to give this petition a negative recommendation.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/ **Clara Fraden**
Chief Executive Officer
Cambridge Housing Authority
cfraden@cambridge-housing.org



IMPACT ANALYSIS ATTACHMENT

Corcoran Park phase 1 Major Impacts to site and building plans and unit count.

- Parking is slightly below 0.5 minimum, but adding compact spaces could fix this.
- Building A length would have to be reduced to meet 60% length requirement.
- Additional 4th-floor step-backs will be required, reducing units or bedroom count further.
- No height issues
- Private open space calcs will be reduced, but we exceed minimum by 1.5x, so I don't think this is an issue
- Loss of at least 12 units

Note: Building permit required in fall 2026 for closing

Columbus Ave - Major Impacts – parking, setbacks and open space.

- No parking planned. 3 spaces would be required.
- Setbacks would need to be increased.
- Open space requirement would not be met.
- No height issue.
- Loss of at least 3 units

Jefferson Park - Major Impact. Building footprints would need to be reduced.

- Parking exceeds proposed 0.5 minimum (0.52)
- No setback issues
- Step-back requirement at 4th floor would require loss of 20,000sf
- No height issues
- Private open space at JP was only 30.95%, and if it had been subject to the dimensional requirements of 5.22 (15'x15' minimum dimensions), we would not have met the 30% open space requirement. For instance, the 8' wide ~8,600sf planted buffer between the road and the cemetery would not count towards private open space. This would also exclude all of the planting beds in front of buildings, strips of permeable pavers, etc.
- Loss of at least 25 units

116 Norfolk - Major Impacts.

- 0.5 parking ratio would require 31 parking spaces. 0 parking spaces provided.
- No setback issues
- 60% length would require major reduction in overall building footprint.
- No height issues
- 44% private open space likely provides enough of a buffer for any reduction in calculation based on 5.22 dimensional requirements.
- Loss of 36-62 units

Weaver- Major Impacts - Parking, setbacks, and open space would not comply for either option.

- Parking option (0.36) does not meet threshold.
- Setbacks would have to be reduced 5' on one side, and 4th & 5th stories would require additional set backs.
- Not compatible with 60% and 80% length requirements
- No height issue
- Planned 30% at-grade (no parking option) would not be adequate after reduction by 5.22 dimensional requirements. The "parking option" open space would be further reduced because the roof deck would not count towards open space calculation.

Erwin, Nicole

From: Carl Nagy-Koechlin <carlnagy-koechlin@justastart.org>
Sent: Sunday, July 12, 2026 11:32 AM
To: Planning Board Comment
Cc: City Clerk
Subject: Brown et. al. Zoning Petition
Attachments: Impact of AHO Petition on JAS projects - New St., Broadway-Brookline 6.25.26.docx

Dear Planning Board,

I am writing on behalf of Just A Start to provide comments in opposition to the Brown, et al Zoning Petition. With this email, I am including an analysis (attached) our real estate development staff has done on the impact the petition would have - or would have had - on 2 Just A Start projects: our recently completed 52 New Street project and our proposed Broadway/Windsor-Brookline St. project. As you will see from the attached, the Brown petition would, at a minimum, substantially reduce the number of affordable apartments we could develop at each project and would drive up per unit costs - to an extent that it may render these projects and projects like them infeasible altogether.

The Affordable Housing Overlay, in Just A Start's view, has been tremendously successful. It has been instrumental in the development of several well-designed, high quality affordable housing developments, with many more in the pipeline. The Planning Board review requirements in the AHO have been instrumental in the quality of the projects developed under the AHO. Many of these various projects would not have happened without the AHO in its current form. I can say that for certain with a number of Just A Start's completed and pending projects.

The adage "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" applies here. While the intentions of the petitioners may be laudable - presumably to tinker with the AHO to mitigate its perceived downsides - the petition would, in practice, gut the AHO. As the analysis provided here indicates, instituting parking requirements, increasing setbacks and step backs, reducing heights, and changing open space requirements would substantially curtail the City's efforts to support the development of affordable housing.

For these reasons, I urge the Planning Planning board to oppose the Brown petition and allow the AHO to continue to support the development of more projects like our 52 New Street project and the others that are in the pipeline.

Thanks.

Carl Nagy-Koechlin

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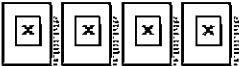
Carl Nagy-Koechlin | Executive Director
He/Him/His



430 Rindge Ave, Suite #301
Cambridge, MA 02140

Cell: (617) 939-4578
Direct Line: (617) 918-7503
Main Line (617) 494-0444
www.justastart.org

Connect with us on:



Potential Effects of Zoning Changes on Two Just A Start Projects – 6/25/26

52 New Street:

52 New Street is a recently completed development with 106 affordable homes next to Danehy Park. The amendments and policy orders under consideration would not allow the project to be built in its current design and would reduce the project size by as many as 50 apartments.

The redesign of the project would have to accommodate the following changes:

- Linking building height to right of way would eliminate the 6th floor
- Required stepbacks above the 4th floor would eliminate several thousand square feet of apartments
- Increased side, front and rear setbacks at ground level would remove several thousand square feet of the building
- Limiting building to 80% of lot width would shrink the project significantly
- Requiring green open space at grade rather than permeable open space would eliminate the resident courtyard.
- One parking space per unit after 4 units would be infeasible given the site dimensions

More details on each of these can be found below:

BUILDING HEIGHT:

- **Council Policy Order:**
 - Explore possibility of relating building height to width of right of way; 6-story buildings only on major thoroughfares, not narrow residential streets. Consider right of way widths of 55' and greater.
- **52 New Street Comparison:**
 - New Street (the street itself) would be far too narrow to meet this requirement, making the project infeasible.
 - It would also prevent 6-story buildings across much of Cambridge. From a quick Google Maps check, Mass Ave is approximately 55 feet wide in Harvard Square. There are many streets narrower than that that have existing 6-story buildings (George Close, Squirrel Brand, most recent market developments near Alewife).

SETBACKS:

- **Brown Petition:**
 - Side and Rear setbacks increased from 5 feet to 10 feet in C-1 districts.
 - All districts: Above the 3rd story above grade, side walls and rear walls shall step back an additional 5 feet per floor from the primary wall plane of the floors below.
 - No structure shall extend for more than 60% of lot depth or more than 80% of lot width.

- **52 New Street Comparison:**
 - o The Brown petition would impose significant restrictions on 52 New Street's 4th, 5th, and 6th floors. They would need to incorporate an additional 15-foot setback, which would eliminate approximately 15 apartments from the project
 - o The 60% lot depth requirement would also significantly limit how many units could be provided at 52 New Street. This requirement is especially limiting on rectangular sites like 52 New Street (and 141 Rindge Ave.), and many Cambridge parcels historically based on former farm allotments.
- **Council Policy Order:**
 - o Require front, side, and rear setbacks totaling at least 35 feet, with at least one side setback of no less than 10 feet.
- **52 New Street Comparison:**
 - o 52 New Street could not be built in its current form under the Council's proposed policy order. This would eliminate between 15 and 30 apartments from the project.
 - o 52 New Street's setbacks total 28 feet. The rear setback is 10 feet, but both side setbacks are 7.5 feet. Front setback is only 3 feet.

OPEN SPACE:

- **Brown Petition:**
 - o Balconies and roof areas would no longer count as open space towards meeting City requirements. All open space must be at grade.
- **52 New Street Comparison:**
 - o 52 New Street's zoning district, Industrial A-1, does not have an open space ratio, but the minimum ratio in C-1 districts is 30%.
 - o At 52 New Street, 3,133 sf of open space is provided above the ground story, including multiple roof terraces with plantings and relaxation space for residents. The project is at 41% open space. If the roof areas were not counted, the open space ratio would still be 33%.
 - o See table below or in AHO submission.
- **Council Policy Order:**
 - o 30% open space should be green open space at grade. Green roofs and balconies should not qualify as part of green open space, nor should permeable pavers.
- **52 New Street Comparison:**
 - o The majority of 52 New Street's open space is provided through a permeable courtyard area, so if permeable open space was removed from the open space ratio and the target was 30% then a complete redesign of the building would be required.
 - o See table below or in AHO submission.

52 New Street Open Space numbers from AHO submission:

Lot Area (sf):	43,745
Open Space %	41%
Total Open Space:	17,775
Private Open Space:	9,919
Permeable Open Space:	10,091
Open Space Above Grade:	3,133

PARKING:

- **Council Policy Order:**
 - o Require one off-street parking space for each unit above 4 units in any new construction in any district.
- **52 New Street Comparison:**
 - o The proposed Council policy order would have a significant impact on 52 New Street and would require a complete redesign of the building. This would eliminate between 30 and 50 apartments to comply with this requirement. The project is already stretched to accommodate its current parking spaces, the bike parking room, a large interior transformer room, the main lobby, and green space on the ground level. Even if the commercial space were removed entirely, it is doubtful whether 106 parking spaces could be built on the site while meeting other program requirements. Multi-level parking would be very expensive and threaten the project's financial feasibility.

BUILDING WALL LENGTH:

- **Brown Petition:**
 - o Not applicable
- **Council Policy Order:**
 - o "Max building wall length 25-40' long side setback line (length to be studied). Building wall longer than 25-40' to set back an additional 5' to allow for privacy, light, new plantings, etc."
- **52 New Street Comparison:**
 - o Many of the 52 New Street building's walls exceed 40 feet in order to accommodate a building on the long and narrow site. Requiring additional setbacks for these walls would harm project feasibility by making it very difficult to fit any kind of building on the site. This change would eliminate approximately 15 apartments.
 - o The "building length along street" line of the AHO submission is 90 feet, although the façade is broken up into smaller walls.
 - o This setback requirement based on wall length is fairly short and would also likely affect many single-family homes and triple-deckers in Cambridge.

Brookline & Broadway Project

The Brookline/Broadway project is a two-site affordable housing development near Central Square that will create 30 affordable apartments. Based on our initial review, the proposed zoning amendments and policy orders would require a significant redesign of both buildings and could reduce the project by approximately 11 affordable units.

Some of the main impacts include:

- The proposed height restrictions (going back to right of way) would eliminate the 5th floor at Brookline and the 5th and 6th floors at Broadway.
- Upper floor setbacks above the 3rd floor would reduce the floor area on the upper levels, resulting in the loss of several hundred square feet of residential space.
- Increased front, side, and rear setbacks would reduce the building footprint at ground level and require redesign of the unit layouts.
- Requiring 0.5 parking spaces per unit would make both projects difficult to develop due to the small site sizes and the high cost of building parking instead of housing.

More detailed information is provided below.

1. Height & Stories Above Grade

Brookline – Under the current Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO), the project is allowed to be up to 6 stories. Our current design is 5 stories.

Under the proposed amendment, we would no longer be able to build 5 stories because none of the adjacent buildings (abutters) are more than 3 stories tall. This would eliminate three or four apartments from the project.

Broadway – This is currently designed as a 6-story affordable housing project, which complies with the current AHO. It would no longer comply with the proposed amendment because the surrounding buildings do not meet the new height requirement. This would eliminate 8 apartments from the project.

2. Setback Changes

Neither project would comply with the proposed setback requirements.

The larger setbacks would make both buildings narrower, reducing the floor area on every level. In addition, floors above the third story would have to step back an additional 5 feet, making the upper floors even smaller and reducing the amount of usable space.

Broadway – The current design would be approximately 10 feet short of the proposed side setback requirements. To comply, the building footprint would need to be reduced, potentially losing between 300 and 600 square feet, or one unit per floor.

Brookline – The building would likely need to shift about 2 to 3 feet away from the Brookline Street property line. This would require redesigning the unit layouts and reducing the floor area on every floor.

3. Parking Changes

Neither 37 Brookline nor 240 Broadway currently includes resident parking. However, because both projects are located in a Residence C-1 district, the proposed amendment would require 0.5 parking spaces per dwelling unit. This would require adding approximately 7 parking spaces at the Brookline site and Approximately 8 for the Broadway project.

These parking requirements would make both projects much more difficult and costly to build.

For **Brookline**, we would likely have to reduce the building footprint to add surface parking, reducing the project by 4 apartments.

At Broadway adding required parking could still reduce the building footprint and the total number of units by 8 apartments.

Erwin, Nicole

From: Carl Nagy-Koechlin <carlnagy-koechlin@justastart.org>
Sent: Sunday, July 12, 2026 11:35 AM
To: Flaherty, Timothy; McGovern, Marc; Simmons, Denise; Siddiqui, Sumbul; Ayah Al-Zubi; Sobrinho-Wheeler, Jivan; Zusy, Catherine; Nolan, Patricia; Burhan Azeem
Cc: City Clerk; Huang, Yi-An; Cotter, Chris; Peters, Melissa
Subject: Opposition to Brown petition
Attachments: Impact of AHO Petition on JAS projects - New St., Broadway-Brookline 6.25.26.docx

Dear Cambridge City Council members

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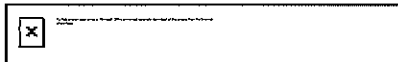
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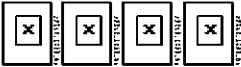
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Brookline – Under the current Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO), the project is allowed to be up to 6 stories. Our current design is 5 stories.

Under the proposed amendment, we would no longer be able to build 5 stories because none of the adjacent buildings (abutters) are more than 3 stories tall. This would eliminate three or four apartments from the project.

Broadway – This is currently designed as a 6-story affordable housing project, which complies with the current AHO. It would no longer comply with the proposed amendment because the surrounding buildings do not meet the new height requirement. This would eliminate 8 apartments from the project.

2. Setback Changes

Neither project would comply with the proposed setback requirements.

The larger setbacks would make both buildings narrower, reducing the floor area on every level. In addition, floors above the third story would have to step back an additional 5 feet, making the upper floors even smaller and reducing the amount of usable space.

Broadway – The current design would be approximately 10 feet short of the proposed side setback requirements. To comply, the building footprint would need to be reduced, potentially losing between 300 and 600 square feet, or one unit per floor.

Brookline – The building would likely need to shift about 2 to 3 feet away from the Brookline Street property line. This would require redesigning the unit layouts and reducing the floor area on every floor.

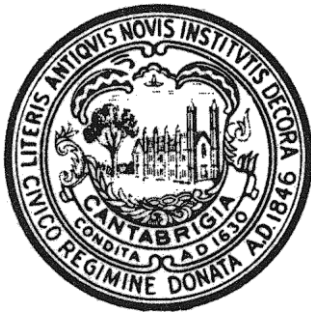
3. Parking Changes

Neither 37 Brookline nor 240 Broadway currently includes resident parking. However, because both projects are located in a Residence C-1 district, the proposed amendment would require 0.5 parking spaces per dwelling unit. This would require adding approximately 7 parking spaces at the Brookline site and Approximately 8 for the Broadway project.

These parking requirements would make both projects much more difficult and costly to build.

For **Brookline**, we would likely have to reduce the building footprint to add surface parking, reducing the project by 4 apartments.

At Broadway adding required parking could still reduce the building footprint and the total number of units by 8 apartments.



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

P L A N N I N G B O A R D

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: July 20, 2026

Subject: Doug Brown, et al., Zoning Petition

Recommendation: The Planning Board does not recommend adoption.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On July 14, 2026, the Planning Board (the “Board”) held a public hearing to discuss a Zoning Petition (the “Petition”) by Douglas P. Brown, et al., a group of at least 10 people registered to vote in Cambridge (the “Petitioner”), to amend the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance in Articles 2.000, 5.000, 6.000, 11.000, and 19.000 with the intent of amending height, setback, and open space requirements, adding step back and building depth and width requirements, and adding minimum off-street parking requirements for residential uses in Residence C-1 districts, including the Affordable Housing Overlay, as well as reducing the Project Review Special Permit threshold from 75,000 to 20,000 square feet for residential uses in Residence C-1 districts, among other changes.

Hearing Process

The Board heard a presentation from the Petitioner, followed by public comments and Planning Board discussion on the Petition. A written memorandum was provided in advance by Community Development Department (CDD) staff in addition to written comments from members of the public. After deliberating, the Planning Board voted to recommend that the Petition not be adopted and to provide the following report to the City Council.

Report and Comments

Board members expressed thanks to the Petitioner for preparing a thoughtful proposal, for listening to the community and for presenting ideas that have engendered meaningful discussion.

Board members agreed that this does not seem to be the right time to make drastic changes to the zoning that was adopted relatively recently and is only beginning to show results. Recent zoning amendments, including the Affordable Housing Overlay and Multifamily Zoning Amendments, were adopted to address a housing supply crisis that continues to persist. The changes proposed in the Petition appear very restrictive, and

materials provided by CDD staff and affordable housing developers indicate that they would likely have dramatic impacts on current and future housing proposals and would set back progress that has been made.

Board members were not opposed to considering changes to the zoning over time. There was support for letting housing development play out under the current zoning while CDD monitors trends and engages in continued discussion with the City Council and Planning Board. If changes are considered, they should be undertaken through a comprehensive process while thinking carefully about the implications. Board members also encouraged more nuance in accounting for different scenarios and conditions. The prior zoning amendments involved extensive study, public input, and discussion over long periods of time before changes were adopted, and Board members expressed concern about making sudden reactive changes.

Some Board members took note of the Petitioner's comments regarding the way in which demolition has proceeded in some cases. Board members encouraged the City Council to consider this issue but noted that demolition is not directly regulated by zoning.

The Planning Board voted 5-0 in favor of transmitting the above report. Two Planning Board members were absent.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,



Tom Sieniewicz, Chair.



2026 JUN -3 PM 2: 24

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
CAMBRIDGE CITY HALL, 795 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, MASSACHUSETTS
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

TO THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE:

Douglas P. Brown hereby petitions the City Council of the City of Cambridge to amend the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Cambridge, as amended, as follows:

- ☐ Amend the Zoning Map in the area(s) set forth in the attached text description(s) and map(s) by
- ☐ changing the base Zoning District(s) from _____ to a new zoning designation(s) of _____
 - ☐ creating a new Overlay Zoning District(s) entitled _____
 - ☐ deleting or amending the boundaries of the current Overlay Zoning District(s) entitled _____

- ☒ Amend the text of the Zoning Ordinance as set forth in the attached text by
- ☐ inserting a new Article(s) and/or section(s) numbered and entitled _____
 - ☐ deleting the current Article(s) and/or section(s) numbered and entitled _____

☒ amending the current Article(s) and/or section(s) numbered and entitled Articles 2, 5, 6, 11, + 19
with the intent of promoting sensible neighborhood development by adjusting height, setback, parking, open space, and design review requirements.

Contact Person: Doug Brown
Street Address: 35 Standish Street, Cambridge
Telephone Number: 617-699-1326
E-mail Address: douglas-p-brown@yahoo.com

Attach the following materials:

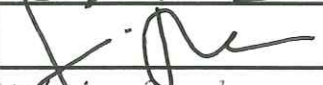
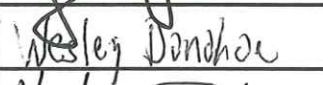
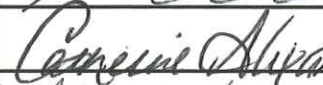
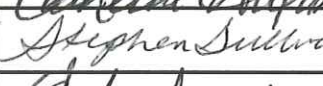
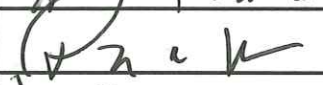
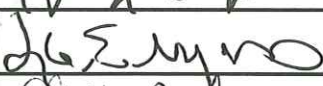
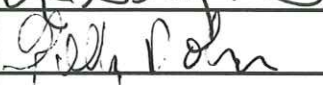
- ☒ Signatures of 10 or more Cambridge residents registered to vote in Cambridge (if applicable – see attached page template)
- ☐ Map Amendments: a map and text description describing the exact boundaries of the area to be rezoned
- ☒ Text Amendments: a document providing the exact wording of all inserted, deleted, or amended sections (also provide in a word processing format to cityclerk@cambridgema.gov)

FOR CITY CLERK USE ONLY – Zoning Petition Number: _____

Submission Date: _____

Petition to Amend the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Cambridge with the intent of:

promoting sensible neighborhood development by adjusting
height, setback, parking, open space, and design review requirements.

	Signature	Name	Address	Date
1		Douglas P Brown	35 Standish Street	6/3/26
2		JOSEPH RONAYNE	279 HURON AVE	6/3/26
3		Wesley Donahoe	269 Upland Rd	6/3/26
4		VICTORIA SUTTON	54 BUCKINGHAM ST	6/3/26
5		Carroll Magill	1 Waterman Rd	6/3/26
6		Helena Taylor	141 Coolidge Hill	6/3/26
7		Kiril Alexandrov	406 Franklin St.	6/3/26
8		Catherine Alexandrov	406 Franklin St.	6/3/26
9		Stephen Sullivan	141 Coolidge Hill	6/3/26
10		Stefan Alexandrov	406 Franklin St.	6/3/26
11		DANIEL VLOCK	50 BUCKINGHAM	6/3/26
12		Joyce Myers	50 Buckingham St	6/3/26
13		Kelly Deane	233 Upland Rd St.	6/3/26
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				
20				

Zoning Amendments **to Promote Sensible Neighborhood Development** Submitted by Doug Brown on June 3rd, 2026

I. HEIGHT & STORIES ABOVE GRADE CHANGES

Within Article 5.40-Footnotes to the Table of Dimensional Requirements, make the following addition:

(2) The height of buildings or portions of buildings used as Residences or Religious Purposes Uses may exceed the base height limit, up to a maximum of 6 stories above grade and 74 feet above grade, if all of the following criteria are met:

(a) The building or portions of the building used as Residences complies with the Inclusionary Housing Requirements in Section 11.203 of this Zoning Ordinance, regardless of whether it exceeds the size threshold requiring compliance; and

(b) The area of the lot on which the building is located is not less than 5,000 square feet; **and**

(c) All abutters to the property exceed three (3) stories above grade.

Within Article 11.207.5.2.1-Building Height and Stories Above Grade, make the following changes:

(a) Where the District Dimensional Standards set forth a maximum residential building height of less than seventy-five (75) feet, an AHO Project shall contain no more than **nine (9)-six (6)** Stories Above Grade and shall have a maximum height of **one hundred (100)-seventy-four (74)** feet, as measured from existing Grade.

II. SETBACK CHANGES

Within Table 5-1-Table of District Dimensional Requirements, make the following change:

District	All Uses	Residential Uses (Section 4.31 a-j.) & Religious Purposes Uses (Section 4.33.a)				Non-Residential Uses (Section 4.30 except 4.31 a-j. & 4.33.a)				
	1. Min. Open Space Ratio (5.22)	2. Max. Stories Above Grade (5.23)	3. Max. Building Height in feet (5.23)	4. Min. Front Yard Setback in feet (5.24)	5. Min. Side or Rear Yard Setback in feet (5.24)	6. Max. Building Height in feet (5.23)	7. Min. Front Yard Setback in feet (5.24)	8. Min. Side Yard Setback in feet (5.24)	9. Min. Rear Yard Setback in feet (5.24)	10. Max. FAR (5.25)
5.31 Residence Districts										
Res. C-1	30% ⁽¹⁾	4 ⁽²⁾⁽³⁷⁾	45 ⁽²⁾⁽³⁷⁾	10 ⁽³⁾	5 10 ^{(4) (38)} (39)	35	H+L ⁽⁵⁾ 4	H+L ⁽¹⁴⁾⁽¹⁵⁾ 5	H+L ⁽⁷⁾ 4	0.75

Within Article 5.40-Footnotes to the Table of Dimensional Requirements, make the following changes:

(4) The required side or rear yard setback may be reduced in either of the ways described below:

(b) The required setback for one side yard of a lot may be reduced **to five (5) feet** if the setbacks for two opposite side yards of the lot sum to at least **10 fifteen (15) feet**, and if no portion of a building is closer than 10 feet to the exterior wall of an existing building on an abutting lot.

(38) Above the third (3rd) story above grade, side walls and rear walls shall step back an additional five (5) feet per floor from the primary wall plane of the floors below.

(39) To prevent walling off abutting homes and yards, no structure shall extend for more than 60% of the lot depth, as measured along the full length of its side façade, or more than 80% of the lot width, as measured along the full width of its rear façade.

Within Article 11.207.5.2.3-Yard Setbacks, make the following changes:

(a) For the purpose of this Section, the applicable District Dimensional Standards shall not include yard setback requirements based on a formula calculation as provided in Section 5.24.4 of the Zoning Ordinance, but shall include non-derived minimum yard setback requirements set forth in **Article 5.000** or other Sections of this Zoning Ordinance.

(c) Side Yards. An AHO Project shall have **no-a** minimum side yard setback **of ten (10) feet**. **The required setback for one side yard of a lot may be reduced to five (5) feet if the setbacks for two opposite side yards of the lot sum to at least fifteen (15) feet, and if no portion of a building is closer than ten (10) feet to the exterior wall of an existing building on an abutting lot. Above the third (3rd) story above grade, side walls and rear walls shall step back an additional five (5) feet per floor from the primary wall plane of the floors below. To prevent walling off abutting homes and yards, no structure shall extend for more than 60% of the lot depth, as measured along the full length of its side façade, or more than 80% of the lot width, as measured along the full width of its rear façade.**

III. PARKING CHANGES

Within Article 6.31 Required Amount of Parking, make the following changes:

6.31 Required Amount of Parking. Off street parking facilities shall be allowed for each use of a lot or structure in the amount specified in the schedule of parking requirements contained in Subsection 6.36. Said schedule specifies the maximum amount of accessory off street parking allowed for each type of land use listed in "Table of Use Regulations" in this Ordinance. The maximum amount of allowed parking is also based on the intensity of development permitted in the district in which the use is located. Notwithstanding any other provision in this Zoning Ordinance, the minimum accessory parking required for all uses shall be zero (0) parking spaces, including in all overlay districts, **except that in the Residence C-1 District, all structures containing 4 or more dwelling units shall provide a minimum of 0.5 spaces of accessory parking per dwelling unit.**

Within Article 6.35.1-Reduction of Required Parking, delete the following passage:

~~(6) The provision of required parking for developments containing affordable housing units, and especially for developments employing the increased FAR and Dwelling unit density provisions of Section 11.200, will increase the cost of the development, will require variance relief from other zoning requirements applicable to the development because of limitations of space on the lot, or will significantly diminish the environmental quality for all residents of the development.~~ For a project seeking a reduction in required off-street parking for residential uses, a Parking Analysis shall be required as part of the Special Permit Application as set forth in Section 6.35.3.

Within Article 6.44-Layout of Off Street Parking Facilities, make the following addition:

6.44.1 Setbacks for on grade open parking facilities shall be provided as follows:

(c) No on grade open parking space shall be located within a required front yard setback. **A variance from the Board of Zoning Appeal is required to modify this requirement.**

Within Article 11.207.6.1-Required Off-Street Accessory Parking, delete the following passage:

~~(a) There shall be no required minimum number of off-street parking spaces for an AHO Project except to the extent necessary to conform to other applicable laws, codes, or regulations.~~

IV. OPEN SPACE CHANGES

Within Article 2.000-Definitions, make the following changes:

Open Space, Publicly Beneficial. A portion of **a structure**, a lot or other area of land associated with and adjacent to a building or group of buildings in relation to which it serves to provide light and air, or scenic, recreation, pedestrian amenity or similar purposes.

Open Space, Private. The part or parts of a lot **or structure** which are reserved for the use of occupants of a building which is used wholly, or in part, for residential purposes. This space shall have minimum dimensions as prescribed in the Ordinance, shall exclude parking areas, driveways, **balconies, roof areas**, and walkways, and shall be open and unobstructed to the sky.

Within Article 5.22.1-Private Open Space, make the following changes:

5.22.1 Private Open Space. Private Open Space shall be open and unobstructed to the sky, except that up to fifty (50) percent of the total Private Open Space may be Shaded Area. Trees, plantings, arbors, fences, flagpoles, sculpture, fountains and recreational and drying apparatus and similar objects shall not be considered obstructions when located within a private open space. Objects or structures intended exclusively for bicycle parking, designed and located in accordance with Section [6.100](#), which may be uncovered, partially covered or fully enclosed, shall not be considered obstructions provided that such objects or structures are not used for motor vehicle parking, general storage or any other use, and further provided that any such structure exceeding six feet (6') in height conforms to the requirements for an accessory building in Section 4.21. Beehives and apiaries

conforming to the Standards for Urban Agriculture in [Article 23.000](#) of this Zoning Ordinance shall not be considered obstructions provided that they are no more than six (6) feet in height. Structures or features that are necessary for a building to comply with the Flood Resilience Standards in Section [22.80](#), such as stairs, ramps, or window wells, shall not be considered obstructions. **To the extent permitted in this Ordinance, Balconies and roof areas may also shall not** be considered as Private Open Space. Private Open Space shall include areas that are shared by all building occupants or available to occupants of separately tenanted areas of a building, such as dwelling units. Private Open Space may include either hardscaped or permeable areas but may not have a slope greater than ten percent (10%). Private Open Space must meet the following other dimensional characteristics:

a. If located at grade, Private Open Space must have both a width and a length of at least fifteen (15) feet and may be shared by all occupants of a building or divided into areas that are accessed separately.

b. If located above grade, such as balconies, decks, and roofs of garages and buildings, and shared by all occupants of a building, Private Open Space must have both a width and a length of at least six (6) feet and have a minimum area of seventy-two (72) square feet.

c. If located above grade or partially below grade and accessible to separately tenanted spaces, such as balconies and decks or lower-level patios, Private Open Space must have a width and length of at least three (3) feet and have a minimum area of twenty (20) square feet.

Within Article 5.28.25-Open Space Requirements, make the following additions:

The open space requirement shall be that required in the district in which the structure is located, except as modified herein.

Upon issuance of a special permit by the Planning Board, the dimensional and locational limitations for Private open space set forth in Section 5.22 shall not apply, **and** any combination of at-grade private open space and decks and balconies at other levels shall be permitted as shall walks intended for non vehicular use. However, in every case where those requirements of Section 5.22 waived by this Paragraph (a) are not met, all portions of the surface of the lot shall be Green Area as defined in [Article 2.000](#) that are (1) not covered by the building or (2) devoted to the minimum area necessary to provide at grade, conforming parking spaces and the minimum necessary circulation and driveways for no more than one parking space per dwelling unit. The amount of Private open space required may be reduced upon issuance of a special permit by the Planning Board should the Board find that full compliance cannot reasonably be expected given the existing development of the lot and the provision of parking necessary to serve the dwelling units. However, where open space requirements are not met, the Applicant shall explore the use of portions of the interior of the building to provide recreational opportunities not possible on the exterior.

Within Article 5.40-Footnotes to the Table of Dimensional Requirements, delete the following passage:

- (1) At least fifty percent (50%) of the required Open Space in a Residence C-1 district shall meet all of the requirements of Section 5.22.1. In the case of a permitted non-residential use, the standards set forth in Section 5.22.1 shall be met for at least fifty percent (50%) of the required Open Space regardless of whether it meets the definition of Private Open Space. At least fifty percent (50%) of the required Open Space shall meet the definition of Permeable Open Space

~~and shall not be subject to the dimensional limitations of Section 5.22.1 as applied to Private Open Space.~~

Within Article 11.207.5.2.4- Open Space, delete the following passage:

The Open Space requirements set forth in the District Dimensional Standards shall apply except as set forth below:

~~(e) Private Open Space shall not be subject to the dimensional limitations set forth in Section 5.22.1 of this Zoning Ordinance, paragraphs a. through c., but shall exclude parking and driveways for automobiles.~~

V. PROJECT REVIEW CHANGES

Within Article 19.23, Table 1-Thresholds for Required Traffic Study by Land Use Type, make the following addition:

<u>Land Use Category</u>	<u>Threshold</u>
Standard Threshold: All Land Uses Set forth in Tables 4.30 and 4.56 except as enumerated below.	50,000 sf
Residences: All uses in Section 4.31, a—j	75,000 sf (20,000 sf in Residence C-1 District)

