



CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

Patricia Nolan
City Councillor

To: The Cambridge City Council
Date: September 10, 2026
Subject: Reconsideration of Alcohol License Home Rule Policy Order

To the Honorable Mayor, the City Council:

On August 5, 2026 I informed Clerk Crane of my intention to move reconsideration of the vote taken on August 3, 2026, adopting Policy Order 2026 #140 ([POR 2026-140](#)), a policy order requesting the Law Department and the Licensing Commission to draft and submit a Home Rule Petition to request an additional alcoholic beverage license for Ferro's Food Town at 336 Rindge Avenue. I am providing this memo to the City Council in anticipation of a reconsideration vote on September 14, 2026 to provide rationale and context for the vote.

After initially voting in favor of the policy order, I filed for reconsideration in order to get answers to a few questions that came up after the meeting and to do some outreach to the community, City staff, and other stakeholders. I believe the policy order warrants some discussion, and I hope that we consider this issue with a broader perspective. The issues/questions to consider include the specifics of the order, the home rule petition approach, and the economic development and equity impacts of additional state-issued licenses being requested through the Cambridge City Council.

I reached out to business associations, local small business owners, and other stakeholders about the implications of this kind of decision. There are some questions that would be good to ask of City staff before finalizing the vote on this policy order which is why I hope we support reconsideration to allow for that discussion.

Questions (primarily for the License Commission and the Law Department):

- The City of Cambridge is allowed by state law to issue 24 All Alcohol Licenses and 24 Malt and Wine Licenses. When was the last time an All Alcohol License became available for application by the general public? How often do you get inquiries from business owners or potential business owners about the availability of All Alcohol Licenses? And do we know if other entities would like to be able to apply to the City for the issuance of a permit rather than buying from another license holder?

- In recent years the [City of Boston has received permission](#) to issue additional All Alcohol Licenses by requesting non-transferable and area specific licenses to be issued by the Boston Licensing Board through a clear application process with consideration for equity issues like underserved neighborhoods, diverse small business owners, and important citywide initiatives like reserving licenses for community spaces, including non-profits, small theaters, and outdoor spaces. Instead of having this one specific named licensee, would the City of Cambridge be better served by requesting a number of additional non-transferrable All Alcohol Licenses that could be applied for in an equitable manner?
- Has Cambridge ever filed a home rule petition in support of an individual business or an individual location? If not, are there any consequences to opening up precedent to this kind of request?
- This home rule petition allows the All Alcohol License to be transferable “in the event the business is displaced.” The definition of displacement seems vague and includes the line: “circumstances beyond the control of the licensee.” What is your opinion on the practicality of this provision? Is there a more clearly defined definition of displacement or any other transfer restrictions that would be important to include?
- It seems that if anyone, including this potential licensee, is granted a Special Legislation All Alcohol License, which may have monetary value, that it must be non-transferable to any other person for any amount of money, or be surrendered.

I hope the Council will vote for reconsideration in order to more fully discuss the policy order and have the benefit of City staff input on these questions.

Sincerely,

Patty Nolan
City Councillor