



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

CMA 2025 #266
IN CITY COUNCIL
October 27, 2025

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Please find attached communication from Melissa Peters, Assistant City Manager for Community Development, relative to Policy Order Item Number 2025 #107, regarding a request to support an exploratory process – potentially including stakeholder engagement, legal and technical assessments, and community outreach – to evaluate the creation of a Business Improvement District in Porter Square.

Very truly yours,

Yi-An Huang
City Manager





To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager

From: Melissa Peters, Assistant City Manager for Community Development

Date: October 27, 2025

Re: Policy Order 25-107 dated August 4, 2025, regarding allocating funds to support the feasibility of the creation of a Business Improvement District in Porter Square.

In spring 2025, CDD completed the Mass. Ave Planning Study (MAPS), which included a wide range of strategies to improve the Mass. Ave corridor from Cambridge Common to Alewife Brook Parkway. One recommendation from the study was to explore the feasibility of creating a business association or Business Improvement District (BID). We are pleased to report to Council that we will begin work on this recommendation this fiscal year.

In June 2025, CDD's Economic Opportunity and Development (EOD) Division applied to the state's Community One Stop Program for two financial opportunities – the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) and the Massachusetts Vacant Storefront Program. On September 30, we were notified by the state we were awarded both grants.

The MDI Program connects communities with consultants who provide expertise in areas such as assessing the feasibility of forming business associations, business improvement districts (BID), and other similar groups. We applied for this grant to study the feasibility of a North Mass Ave/Porter Square business organization. The grant award provides the City with up to \$30,000 in consultant services, which are contracted and paid for by MDI.

The Massachusetts Vacant Storefront Program was created to aid municipalities in their efforts to revitalize commercial areas by encouraging the occupancy of long-term vacant storefronts. Through this program, Cambridge now has access to \$50,000 worth of dedicated, refundable tax credits to incentivize businesses to occupy vacant storefronts. While the city must apply for the credit, the tax credit goes directly to the business that has occupied a vacant storefront. This program is available citywide.

Melissa Peters | Assistant City Manager for Community Development
Sandra Clarke | Chief of Administration & Operations

Next Steps

Once the state agreements are in place, staff plan to market the new Vacant Storefront Tax Credit and connect with the consultant chosen by MDI for the North Mass. Ave. business association or BID study. We look forward to working with the state, Council, and the community on these efforts.

Melissa Peters | Acting Assistant City Manager for Community Development
Sandra Clarke | Chief of Administration & Operations

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