



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

April 28, 2009

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Subject: Planning Board recommendation on the Lesley University zoning petition to extend the boundaries of the Business C zoning district in Porter Square and create a new Lesley Porter Overlay District.

Recommendation: The Planning Board enthusiastically recommends adoption of the zoning change proposed in the Petition. The Petition will facilitate the relocation of the Art Institute of Boston to Porter Square as part of the Lesley University campus and create a new Lesley Porter Overlay District. In addition, the relocated Art Institute of Boston and an expanded Lesley University academic presence will provide new opportunities to enhance the Porter Square community bringing more arts and cultural activities to this urban neighborhood.

Discussion: The Petition helps create a more predictable scenario for development on several key properties in the Porter Square area. Development of these properties as planned provides the potential to further enhance the area as an appropriately-scaled, lively retail district with a significant arts presence.

Lesley University's campus planning process has been very neighborhood-oriented, open and transparent. There have been ongoing and thorough discussions between the University, neighborhood residents, and the City through a Working Group that was established by the City Manager in late 2006, to deal with the anticipated growth of Lesley University in Cambridge, and a need to balance that expansion with protecting the neighborhood character of Porter Square. The Planning Board feels that it is appropriate to restore some of the FAR that was lost through downzoning on the Porter Exchange lot several decades ago, which will allow for additional educational space within the Overlay District.

The Planning Board appreciates the benefits of preserving the former North Prospect Church building and Lesley University's proposed efforts to preserve the structure while incorporating the relocated Art Institute of Boston on the site. The parcel is adjacent to a Business C district and is part of the only section of Massachusetts Avenue in the area

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that is zoned Residence B, which has among the lowest heights and FAR allowed in the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance. However, the site is not likely to be used for a single or two-family house that could be developed under the current zoning. The Board supports the extension of the BC district boundaries to include this parcel regardless of whether Lesley University's plans for the site move forward as anticipated.

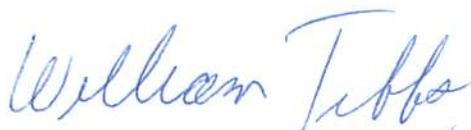
There is the potential that immediate abutters will be impacted by the loss of the private open space associated with the Church building and unobstructed views associated with the existing parking lots; therefore, the open space and setback requirements in the Petition warrant particular consideration. The Planning Board feels that it is appropriate for the petition to outline specific open space and transition criteria for a Special Permit.

In addition, the potential development of the two university-owned parking lots, located west of Massachusetts Avenue, with ground floor retail would be a significant improvement to the streetscape along the Avenue in that location.

The Planning Board feels that the Petition deals with parking in the Overlay District in a suitable manner based on the availability of nearby public transit; through the potential for more efficient use of existing parking facilities located throughout the Lesley University campus; and recognizing that reduced parking is often used as a tool to help ease traffic impacts. Parking concerns will be discussed in greater depth as specific projects are proposed and permitted within the Overlay District.

Many of the questions raised regarding the Petition concerned setbacks, height, parking, and other impacts on abutters and could be addressed during the Special Permit process.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,



William Tibbs, Chair

