



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: November 18, 2015

Subject: Barrett, et al. Zoning Petition

Recommendation: The Planning Board recommends further study.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

The Barrett, et al., Zoning Petition proposes two distinct sets of changes to the Zoning Ordinance. One set of changes would expand the allowances for accessory apartments into both single-family and two-family homes in all zoning districts and eliminate the current requirement for off street parking spaces for such apartments. The other set of changes would amend the definition of Gross Floor Area to exclude spaces in the basements or cellars of buildings.

The Planning Board held a public hearing on this petition on October 27, 2015. Following presentations from the petitioner, testimony from the public, comments from Community Development Department staff and discussion among Board members, we offer the following comments:

1. The Board believes that this is a thoughtful zoning proposal and finds that several aspects of the proposal have merit, particularly related to the need to consider more flexible and efficient use of existing housing stock in order to accommodate sustainable growth and provide housing options for diverse household types. The issues raised by the proposal are worthy of serious consideration by the City.
2. Nevertheless, the specific provisions in the proposal would have significant and far-ranging implications that might result in unintended consequences. For instance, encouraging greater residential use of basement space might result in more space that is susceptible to flooding hazards, a recurring problem throughout Cambridge that will be exacerbated by the effects of climate change. Other considerations are the potential change in neighborhood character if accessory apartments are added to single-family and two-family homes throughout the city, and the impact of such apartments on parking in the different neighborhoods. Further, the proposed changes to the Gross Floor Area definition would fundamentally change the way in which development is regulated for all buildings in the city.
3. Given the broad potential impacts of the proposed changes, it may be preferable to consider these issues as part of the comprehensive citywide planning process that is to begin soon. This planning process would provide an opportunity to look at these specific issues within a

larger context of citywide planning objectives, and may provide opportunities for more systematic approaches to development controls rather than piecemeal changes.

4. Because the citywide planning process will occur over the next few years, if the Council prefers to advance this proposal more expeditiously, the Planning Board and staff would need to devote focused time and resources to consider the full range of impacts that might result. In that case, the Board believes it would be sensible to study the two parts of the proposal separately, especially since the proposal related to accessory apartments is somewhat more limited in scope than the changes to the Gross Floor Area definition, which would have more far-reaching impact on the use of dimensional controls to regulate buildings.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,



H Theodore Cohen, Chair.